

## The Influence of Parental Attachment toward Early Childhood Children's Separation Anxiety

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### Abstract

Most preschool children show incapacibilities of overcoming anxieties so that they have negative emotions while parting with an intimate figure. This research examined parental attachment toward early childhood children's parting anxieties. The research population consisted of 793 participants aged 5-6 years old. The sampling technique was purposive sampling. It involved 185 early childhood children (87 boys and 98 girls). The data were collected through a questionnaire. The data technique used the Parental-Child Attachment-Child Survey questionnaire to measure parental attachment to children. Separation anxiety in early childhood was measured using the Children's Separation Anxiety Disorders (CSAS) questionnaire. Each question item was read by the researcher to facilitate the children. The applied analysis was a simple linear regression. It was to analyze the parental attachment toward children's separation anxiety. The result shows  $F_{\text{count}} = 15.26 < F_{\text{table}} = 3.045$  with a Sig value  $0.000 < 0.05$ . It means high parental attachment lowered children's separation anxiety at schools. This child-parent intimacy supported adaptive social quality in a peer group. It also provided a positive foundation for their further development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is an unpleasant, uncertain, anxious, and unclear feeling about what will happen. Tamisa (2016:125) argues that anxiety is entailed by a specific physical reaction in which will be repeated on an individual. The anxious reaction of children is caused by parting, losing, having a physical injury, or feeling pain (Tamsuri et al., 2010). Lim (2015) also explains that anxiety frequently appears in 6-12-year-old children. It is frequently caused by parting, feeling not being loved, lacking attention, and having no parental supports.

Pepito & Montalbo (2019) divide anxiety aspects of children into three aspects. The first is physical aspect reflected on children's physical conditions, such as trembling hands and having difficulties in speaking. Secondly, a cognitive aspect that is indicated by having difficulties to concentrate, feeling not confident to handle problems, and being afraid to be unable to solve problems. The third deals with the behavioural aspect. It is shown by anxious behaviours that make such children avoid, attach, and shocked.

Such anxiety felt by children while parting with an intimate figure is a normal state for them. It is since these children have specific needs to remain closer to the intimate figures. If this anxiety develops time by time, it will put them in disadvantages later in their adulthood life (Milrod et al., 2013).

Anxiety is a normal feeling felt by children, and it is temporal. Children should ideally have a low anxiety level. It includes when they are left by their parents. Such anxiety type, caused by parting, usually has analytic depression nature. Ideally, separation anxiety of children lasts from their toddler until preschool periods (A' diilah & Imran, 2016).

The facts show several children still have difficulties in managing their anxieties. In several cases, preschool-aged children showed that they could not manage their anxieties for the first time joining the first school year period. Thus, negative emotion appears while parting with intimate figures.

Negative emotion is triggered due to anxieties, such as crying while screaming, kicking surrounding objects, and hurting surrounding adults who try to calm him down (Carpenter et al., 2014). Children with separation anxiety symptoms have aggressiveness or anger toward their parents or any conditions that make them parted from their parents.

Bigdeli (2010) argues that children's cognition in such anxiety state makes them worried, breathless, and nervous. Thus, they influence their memories and learning processes. Mendez et al. (2014) argue that separation anxiety of early childhood children is controlled by three inter-correlated dimensions. The first component is the cognitive dimension. It is about internal anxiety of the children. They might think something bad would happen to them or to their parents. Second, the psychophysiological dimension that deals with the feeling of difficulties due to pressures from exaggerating negative activities of children. The third dimension is behavioural or opposition. It is defined as the reluctance be left by their parents or away from their houses.

Anxiety is caused by unhealthy parental attachment. Parents are safe and comfortable subjects for children. Maina et al. (2016), Brumariu et al. (2012) also state that separation anxiety of children is disproportional anxious reactions toward a parting condition. It is mostly caused by parental attachment. Pozzi et al. (2014) also argue that separation anxiety is an individual's fear to engage with an intimate parting figure.

Anxiety is caused by exaggerating and unhealthy parental attachment. These make children more defensive and impede their classroom learning participation (Hasanah, 2013). According to Sari et al. (2018), parental attachment is an interaction between parents and children. They are realized into compassion, attitude, and responses of parenting and children's necessities. This interaction lasts for a long time. It even continues in later hoods and develops intimacy patters on children.

Children with positive attachment or intimacy are indicated by three aspects. They are high communication between children and parents, high trust, and low alienation (Thornberry et al., 1991). It is supported by Armsden & Greenberg (1987). They explain that self-attachment consists of three dimensions: trust, communication, and alienation.

Children-parents' attachments have important roles in children's developments. They need compassion, response, and positive attitudes from their parents. Parents' positive behaviours allow children to develop and establish positive personalities. However, negative attachment of parents experienced by their children will interrupt children's development and their personality developments (Kerns & Brumariu, 2014).

Wampler & Downs (2010) found positive attachments between children and parents decreased behavioural problems and mischiefs. This research analyzed the issues of parental attachment toward separation anxiety of children's first day schools.

**METHODS**

The applied method was quantitative with the associative or clausal approach. It had a purpose to find out the correlation between parental attachments toward separation anxieties of children. The research population consisted of 793 participants aged 5-6 years old. The sampling technique was purposive sampling. It involved 185 early childhood children (87 boys and 98 girls).

The data were collected by Parental-Child Attachment Survey questionnaire, developed by Thornberry et al. (1991). A questionnaire of Children's Separation Anxiety Disorders (CSAS) developed by Mendez et al. (2014) was used to measure the children's separation anxiety. The parental attachment instrument obtained a coefficient score of  $\alpha = 0.874$ . On the other hand, the CSAS obtained a coefficient score of  $\alpha = 0.925$ .

The data were analyzed by simple regressive analysis technique before applying classical assumption test. The questionnaire was filled by the assistance of the researcher. The researcher assisted to read aloud the questionnaire items because the subjects were early childhood children. The data collection was done once the research obtained the parents' consents and agreed by the children. The research procedures were begun by providing a quiet room. The participants were then called one by one and asked with several structured questions. It was started by a demographic question about the names and the ages.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The anxiety levels of the children at Genuksari Pertiwi Kindergarten, Semarang, could be seen from three-dimension. They were cognitive, psychophysiological, and behavioural or opposition dimensions. The average descriptive analysis result and the deviation standard of separation anxiety and parental attachment are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Analysis

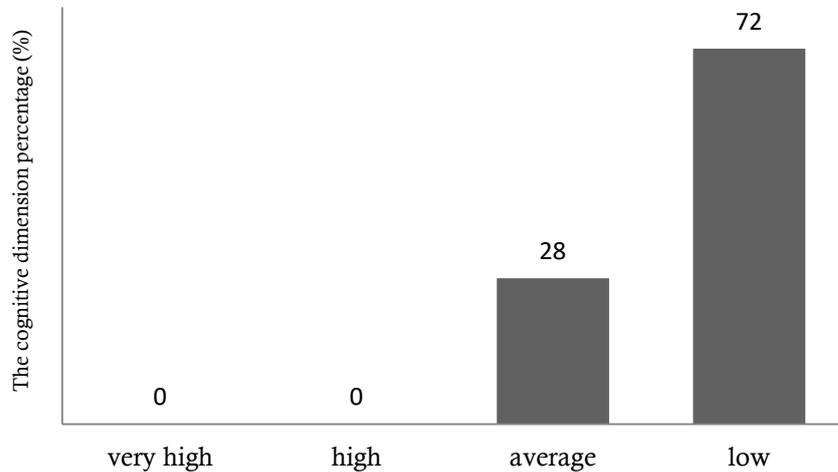
Variable	N	Mean	SD
Separation Anxiety	185	60.864	4.862
Parental Attachment	185	75.50	8.462

Table 1 shows the mean and deviation standard of separation anxiety (M= 60, 864; SD=4,862). The mean and deviation standard of parental attachment are M= 75,50; SD= 8,462. The descriptive statistics results show higher

mean than the deviation standard. It represents excellent data distribution.

Then, the data about anxiety level based on the cognitive dimension of the children were anxious that something bad could happen on

themselves or other attached objects while parting shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 is a chart of anxiety level within a cognitive dimension on the children.

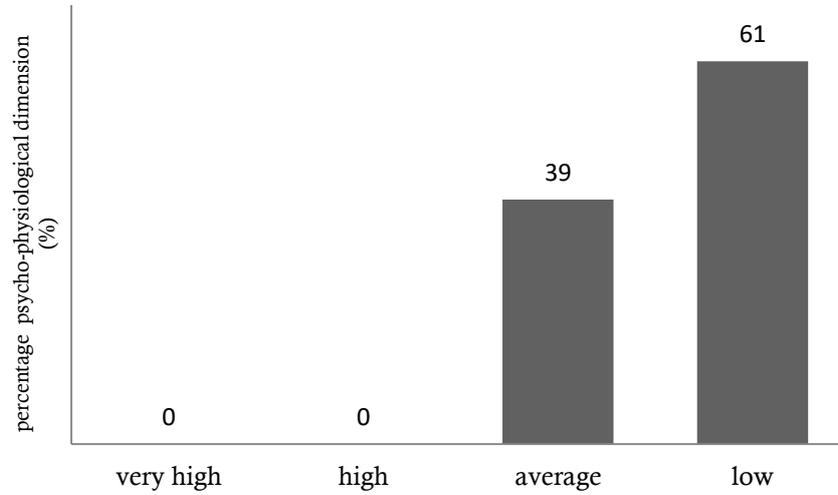


**Figure 1.** Cognitive Dimension Anxiety Level of the Children

Based on the Figure 1, the cognitive dimension anxiety level of the children is in a low category with a percentage of 71%. The cognitive dimension percentage is deficient, with a percentage of 28%. Meanwhile, there are none of the students categorized high or extremely high in this dimension. This means that most children experience low anxiety when the child starts schooling. Children feel confident when they part with the sticky figure, namely parents. According to Mian (2014), the factors that influence anxiety in pre-school children are the family environment, namely the first environment known to the subject, the family environment plays an important role in shaping

a child's personality, from birth to adulthood. A positive family life will provide the basic features of forming a good child's personality. It meant most of the children had lower anxieties in their first year school period. They felt better and confident while being left by the attached figures for them, their parents.

Then, to find out the anxiety level from psychophysiological dimension, Figure 2 is provided. It could be seen that the anxiety level within this dimension is low. It was due to low stress due to activities done by the children. This Figure 2 presents the anxiety level data within the psychophysiological dimension of the children.

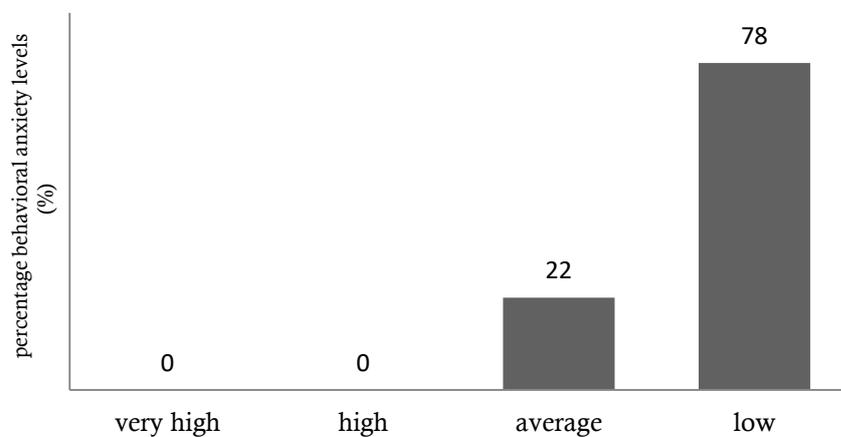


**Figure 2.** Psychophysiological Dimension Anxiety Level of the Children

Based on the Figure 2, the psychophysiological dimension anxiety level of the children is in a low category with a percentage of 61%. The psychophysiological dimension percentage is deficient, with a percentage of 39%. Meanwhile, there is no student categorized with high or extremely high categories. It shows a lower stressed feeling of the children while being left by their parents due to appropriate parenting. Pacholec et al. (2013) found the correlation between parents and their modified parental

practices allowed children to manage their separation anxiety. When parents provide proper care, feelings of stress and fear do not occur. Children will have self-confidence.

Figure 3 explains the children's anxiety levels data within a behavioural dimension. In this dimension, the children had bravery when they were left by their parents and were far from their houses. Figure 3 is presented in a chart of children's anxiety levels data within a behavioural dimension.



**Figure 3.** Behavioural Dimension Anxiety Level of the Children

Based on the Figure 3, the behavioural dimension level of the children is in a low category with a percentage of 78 %. The behavioural dimension percentage is deficient, with a percentage of 22%. Meanwhile, there is no student categorized with high or extremely high categories. It showed most children did not feel anxious while parting from their parents. According to Godoy (2013) the most important influence in overcoming anxiety is the

assessment of parents towards children. Parents must give confidence and motivation to children so that children have confidence in themselves

The description results of the children's parental attachment could be seen from three dimensions: trust, communication, and alienation. Table 2 explains the parental attachment of Genuksari Pertiwi Kindergarten children in Semarang.

**Table 2.** The Attachment Dimension Percentage(%)

Dimension	low	less	high	Very high
Trust	0.5	31.5	67.9	0.0
Communication	0.5	30.4	69.0	0.0
Alienation	41.80	58.20	0.0	0.0

Note: 90 boys and 92 females

Table 2 shows most Genuksari Pertiwi children had high trust (67.9%). It meant they really trusted their parents and had an intimate relationship with their parents. The parents provided all children's necessities. Then, the communication aspect was categorized high, with a percentage of 69%. It showed the children were involved in parents' activities so they were comfortable and thought their parents were great.

On the other hand, the alienation score was in a low category with a percentage of 58%.

It showed there were transparent relationships between parents and children. They were also proud of their parents. Thus, they did not hide any complaints, any intentions, or anything to their parents.

The next step involved the classical assumption test, consisting of a normality test. The researcher also used regression test to examine the influence of parental attachment to children's anxiety levels at the first school year. The regression test results are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The Attachment Regression Test toward Anxiety

Model	R	R square	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	.284	.081	1	337.325	15.957	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual			182	21.140		
Total			183			

**Note:** R = the multiple correlative coefficient value; R-Sq = R squared/determination coefficient; MSE = Mean Square Error; F = the tested model score; df = degree of freedom; Significant degree.

Table 3 shows the influence of attachment and anxiety. It is proven by the R score, .284. It meant there was a correlation between child attachment and separation anxiety. The R square's score based on the table is .081. It meant the influence of child attachment toward the separation anxiety was 8.1%. Thus, the remaining percentage, 91.9%, was influenced by

other external variables of this research. The F count score is 15.957. The  $F_{table}$  score is 3.045, with a significant level of 5%. The  $F_{count}$  score is greater than  $F_{table}$  on a significant level of 5% ( $15.25 > 3.045$ ). Thus, parental attachment influenced the lower children's anxiety level at school.

There was an influence between child attachments toward children's anxiety levels to begin schooling. This anxiety had positive attachment indicated by high communication and trust and low alienation aspects. High attachment lowered children's anxiety as indicated by lower cognitive, behavioural, and psychophysiological dimensions.

This finding is supported by Van et al. (2014) and Verissimo et al. (2014). They found that maternal attachment to children influenced positively toward lower anxiety levels. Thus, it influenced the children's social development. Positive attachment toward children seemed more socially involved and emphasized on

contributive social, emotional, and cognitive skills toward peer-acceptance at schools. On the other hand, child attachment with mother and high alienation between them would trigger aggressiveness of the children (Moss et al., 2007; Gault-sherman, 2012).

Children with positive attachments had better trust. It is a crucial matter for them to develop secure attachments to their mothers. Low empathy children and lack acknowledgement on other people were correlated to the lower parental trust during the children's childhood (Cortazar & Herreros, 2010).

An excellent communication quality between a mother and a child extremely influences maternal attachment realization Thomson-Hollands, 2014). High alienation was not something good for mother-child attachment. It could be caused by the mother's business such as additional and external tasks (for example, becoming an active organizational member) so that she had limited time for her child. It might also be due to the mother's business to take care of the households (Hardani et al., 2017).

Maternal attachment to children supported social adaptation in an early childhood peer group. It could provide a positive foundation and became the influential factor of children's socialization development (Kochanska et al., 2009). Confident children toward environmental acceptance would consider a

secure attachment with their attached figures. They also developed a trust not only for their mothers but also their surroundings. Early childhood period is a critical period to develop trust.

If it fails to be developed, then a distrust will occur. This feeling, trust, is a foundation of healthy social-emotional development for the next stage (Kochanska & Kim 2012). Trust will be developed in a predictable nurturing environment for children. Children could predict that a nurturing figure should be stable and could create an enjoyable and comfortable atmosphere. Thus, they could feel being accepted and loved. Therefore, children need mothers as nurturing figures, especially to create a strong bond (*bonding*). According to Corwin (2012), positive attachment cycle is the existence of attached figures as the basis of exploration encouragement. It will influence children's social skills.

Anapратиwi et al. (2013) also found a correlation of attachment between children and mothers toward the children's socialization skills. Children with positive attachment had better socialization skills. Children with high trust and lower anxiety would easily develop friendly relationships toward parents or other children. When children had trusted, they would have healthy social relationships and could easily adapt to the environment. They believed in such a secure and comfortable environment (Shahidul & Karim, 2015). Meanwhile, children with lower attachment influenced the denial of anxiety. Thus, it led to lower socialization skills.

They would be afraid and alert to any potential threats even when they did not exist. With so much directed energy for protection, they would have lesser energies to develop their interest and to learn. Thus, it would be difficult to be directed or guided (Hoeve et al., 2012). These children would have high alienation feeling and mistrust or suspicion. They seemed like capricious persons and afraid of any intimacy. It might turn to distrust upon other people's loyalty or preparedness. They would also be afraid if they were left by their parents (Helmi, 1999).

Thus, attachment obviously influenced children's anxiety. Children with high attachment had lower anxiety. Therefore, they had excellent personal trust or trust for other people and their surroundings. On the other hand, children with low attachment had high anxiety. It turned into an anxious and stressed feeling. Thus, it affected children's tantrums, so they had difficulties to socializes with their surroundings.

## CONCLUSION

There was a positive correlation between attachment and anxiety of the children. It led to a lower state of children's anxiety. High attached children had positive social skills. Children would have excellent personal trust or trust for other people and their surroundings. Meanwhile, children with lower attachment had high anxiety. It would affect their anxious and stressed feelings. Thus, children would have difficulties to socialize with their environments. Therefore, parents should provide a positive child-mother nurturing pattern.

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