



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MATERNAL ANXIETY, PARENTAL
REARING STYLE, CHILD ATTACHMENT AND SEPARATION ANXIETY
DISORDER AMONG FIRST GRADERS IN BUSHEHR CITY, IRAN**

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DISORDER AMONG FIRST GRADERS IN BUSHEHR CITY, IRAN**

By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2009



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MATERNAL ANXIETY, PARENTAL REARING STYLE, CHILD ATTACHMENT AND SEPARATION ANXIETY DISORDER AMONG FIRST GRADERS IN BUSHEHR CITY, IRAN

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September 2009

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between maternal anxiety and separation anxiety disorder (SAD) in children. The assumption in this study was that perceived parental rearing style and child attachment types would mediate the relationship between maternal anxiety and SAD. One-hundred-and-twenty first graders and their mothers in Iran participated in this study. This study measured four dimensions of perceived parental rearing style, which include parental warmth, parental overprotection, parental rejection, and parental anxiety, as well as three types of child attachment, which comprise secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment. Three theories (Bowlby, 1969; Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Parker, 1979) used in this study, discussed two main assumptions. First, anxious mothers controlled their children more. Due to the inability to use new experiences and new situations for adaptation, parental anxiety/overprotection, may in turn become ingrained during childhood. Second, children with insecure attachment may not be able to use



identification effectively as a defense, necessitating the greater use of other more immature defenses to guard against distress.

In order to complete the questionnaires, each child was interviewed one by one in a private classroom. The children's responses were recorded by the interviewer. The mothers were also asked to complete the instruments related their levels of anxiety and parental rearing style. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test, chi-square, correlation, effect size and mediation analyses.

The findings indicated that 35% of the children showed SAD symptoms and 36% of the mothers indicated recent psychological distress. The results showed significant relationships between maternal anxiety and SAD, parental rearing styles and child attachment types. In addition, there were significant relationships between parental rearing styles as well as child attachment types with SAD. The findings revealed that 37% of the children perceived their mothers as warm parents, 31% as anxious parents, 29% as overprotective parents and 3% as a rejecting parent. With regard to the child attachment types, the result showed a majority of the children (57%) were classified as secure, 15% avoidant and 28% classified as ambivalent. The comparison analyses showed the children with and without SAD symptoms differed significantly on all three types of child attachment as well as four dimensions of parental rearing styles. Further, the mediation analyses suggested that the parental anxiety, parental overprotection, as well as avoidant and ambivalent attachment partially mediated in the relationship between maternal anxiety and SAD in children.

This finding suggested that besides the main parental rearing and child attachment, parent anxiety level may play an important role in the development of high anxiety levels in children. Additionally, these findings lend support to established theories that parental warmth is particularly important in environments characterized by high control acting as a protective factor and reducing child anxiety. These results allow for treatment strategies at the maternal, child, family, or school levels. Future research can extend these initial results to help obtain a broader and more in depth picture of these complex relationships.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**HUBUNGAN DI ANTARA KEBIMBANGAN KEIBUAN, GAYA
PENJAGAAN KEIBUBAAPAN, PERAPATAN KANAK-KANAK DAN
KECELARUAN KEBIMBANGAN PERPISAHAN (SAD) DI KALANGAN
KANAK-KANAK GRED SATU DI BANDAR BUSHEHR, IRAN**

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Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan di antara kebimbangan keibuan dan kecelaruan kebimbangan perpisahan (SAD) di kalangan kanak-kanak. Andaian dalam kajian ini adalah di mana gaya penjagaan keibubapaan dan jenis perapatan kanak-kanak akan mempengaruhi hubungan di antara kebimbangan keibuan dan SAD. Seramai 120 kanak-kanak gred satu dan ibu mereka di Iran turut terlibat dalam kajian ini. Kajian ini mengukur empat dimensi anggapan gaya penjagaan keibubapaan, iaitu kemesraan keibubapaan, perlindungan terlampau keibubapaan, penolakan keibubapaan, kerisauan keibubapaan, serta tiga jenis perapatan kanak-kanak, iaitu perapatan yang selamat, mengelak dan ambivalen. Tiga teori (Bowlby, 1969; Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Parker, 1979) yang digunakan dalam kajian ini membincangkan dua andaian utama. Pertama, ibu yang bimbang akan lebih mengawal anak mereka. Disebabkan oleh

ketidakupayaan menggunakan pengalaman baru dan situasi baru untuk menyesuaikan diri, perlindungan terlampau atau kebimbangan keibubapaan akan menjadi sebatian pada zaman kanak-kanak. Kedua, kanak-kanak yang mempunyai perapatan yang tidak selamat mungkin tidak dapat menggunakan identifikasi sebagai pertahanan secara efektif. Oleh yang demikian, mereka akan lebih menggunakan pertahanan lain yang kurang matang untuk melawan kesedihan.

Setiap kanak-kanak ditemubual seorang demi seorang di dalam bilik darjah persendirian bagi melengkapkan soal selidik kajian. Setiap tindak balas telah dirakam oleh penemubual. Para ibu juga diminta untuk melengkapkan instrumen berkaitan dengan tahap kebimbangan mereka dan gaya penjagaan keibubapaan. Keputusan dianalisis menggunakan statistik diskriptif, ujian-t, chi-square, korelasi, kesan saiz dan analisis mediasi.

Terdapat 35% kanak-kanak yang menunjuk simptom SAD manakala 36% ibu menunjukkan distres psikologikal yang semasa. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan di antara kebimbangan keibuan dan SAD, gaya penjagaan keibubapaan dan juga jenis perapatan kanak-kanak. Tambahan pula terdapat juga hubungan yang signifikan di antara gaya penjagaan keibubapaan dan juga jenis perapatan kanak-kanak dengan SAD. Hasil kajian menunjukkan 37% kanak-kanak menganggapkan ibu mereka sebagai mesra, 31% sebagai bimbang, 29% sebagai terlalu melindungi dan 3% sebagai menolak. Dari segi perapatan kanak-kanak, kebanyakan kanak-kanak (57%) diklasifikasi sebagai yakin, 15% sebagai pengelak dan 28% sebagai ambivalen. Analisis perbandingan menunjukkan kanak-

kanak yang ada atau tiada simptom SAD berbeza secara signifikan dari segi ketiga-tiga jenis perapatan kanak-kanak serta empat dimensi gaya penjagaan keibubapaan. Selanjutnya, analisis mediasi mencadangkan bahawa kebimbangan keibubapaan, perlindungan terlampau keibubapaan, pengelakkan dan juga jenis perapatan ambivalen separa menjadi pengantaraan di dalam perhubungan di antara kebimbangan keibuan dan SAD dalam kanak-kanak.

Hasil menunjukkan bahawa selain daripada gaya penjagaan keibubapaan dan jenis perapatan kanak-kanak, ibu-bapa yang bimbang memainkan peranan penting di dalam pembentukan tahap kebimbangan yang tinggi dalam kanak-kanak. Keputusan ini membantukan dalam perancangan rawatan pada peringkat ibu bapa, kanak-kanak, keluarga, atau peringkat sekolah. Kajian pada masa akan datang boleh memperkembangkan lagi hasil penemuan tersebut untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang lebih meluas dan lebih mendalam terhadap hubungan yang kompleks ini.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on September 11th 2009 to conduct the final examination of **Sakineh Mofrad** on her thesis entitled “**Relationships Between Maternal anxiety, Parental rearing style, Child attachment and Separation Anxiety Disorder Among First Graders in Bushehr City, Iran.**” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the PhD.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

SAKINEH MOFRD

Date: 10 December 2009



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SAD	Separation Anxiety Disorder
FBA	Fear Of Being Alone
FAB	Fear Of Abandonment
FPI	Fear Of Physical Illness
WCE	Worry About Calamitous Events
FCE	Frequency Of Calamitous Events
SSI	Safety Signal Index
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
GFI	Goodness Of Fit
AGFI	Goodness Of Fit Index
NFI	Nor-med Fit Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error Of Approximation
SAAS	Separation Anxiety Assessment Scale
EMBU	The Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppforstran
GHQ	General Health Questionnaire
CAI	Child Attachment Interview



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Separation Anxiety is relatively normal and healthy process and a basic human disposition (Spencer, 2006). The term refers to child or parent concerns regarding the loss or absence of significant others in one's life (Cartwright-Hatton, McNicol, & Doubleday, 2006). When looking at separation anxiety in children, attention primarily focuses on children's anxiety of separation from their mother, although, separation from any central attachment figure can produce distress. At times; normal childhood separation anxiety may become excessive, and disruptive in a child's life. That is referred to as Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD), a childhood anxiety disorder recognized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM). SAD is excessive anxiety or distress concerning separation from home or a primary caregiver, typically mother (First & Tasman, 2004).

In general, anxiety is a serious condition that can have negative consequences in a number of domains, including academic and interpersonal functioning (Cartwright-Hatton et al., 2006). Children with SAD may be at risk for school avoidance or failure and they may also have impaired social interactions. Anxiety during childhood has been found to be fairly stable. Frequently, children who have one anxiety disorder have another co-occurring anxiety disorder (Ford, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2003; Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2006).



Studies (Bogels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; Caron, Weiss, Harris, & Carton, 2006) indicate that, although genetic factors contribute to the etiology of anxiety disorders, other variables may account for the development of anxiety is environmental factors, such as stressful events, early interaction of parent-child, parental behavior and the pathology of parent influence on children's separation anxiety. These studies suggest that separation anxiety develops from an interaction of factors that include genetic vulnerabilities to experience anxiety, temperamental and biological vulnerabilities, stressful transition events (like beginning school), negative parenting, insecure attachment relationships, and negative family experiences.

Similarly, research on anxiety suggests that early experiences that foster a sense of diminished control over the environment may contribute to a vulnerability to develop anxiety (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998). In study by Wood (2006) among clinical children, parental intrusiveness was specifically linked with separation anxiety disorder. Also, the positive relation between maternal anxiety and anxiety in children had been found in studies (Bayer, Sanson, & Hemphill, 2006; Roelofs, Cor-ter-Huurn, Bamelis, & Muris, 2006). These studies showed when mother less warm and also, granted less autonomy in their interaction with their children, led the children to developing anxiety disorders. In study by Peleg, Halaby, & Whaby (2006) there is positive relation between mother's and children's separation anxiety. Lower differentiations in the mothers were associated with higher levels of anxiety in children.

Costa & Weems (2005), proposed a model of association between maternal and child anxiety. The model posits that maternal anxious attachment beliefs was an important

component, which mediated the association between maternal and child anxiety. An anxious mother-child relationship is established where maternal anxiety is related to maternal anxious attachment beliefs. This finding is consistent with research on parenting and attachment which has consistently shown that children with perceived negative parenting and early insecure attachment relations are significantly more likely to develop psychopathology, including both emotional and behavioral problems.

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many particular behavior influences on the development of the child. Most studies that examined the relationship between parental rearing behaviors and childhood anxiety have been focused on four parental behaviors which include: warmth, control, rejection, and anxious behaviors. Parental anxious/ over-control was conceptualized as a pattern of behavior for the regulation of children's activity. Parents with this behavior assumed limited the development of their children's autonomy and personal competence and this leads them to the perception of the environment as been uncontrollable (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998).

The review on linkage between parenting behavior and negativity of parenting (absence of warmth) had been shown in studies (Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003). Most researches that have shown the evidence for the role of parenting in the development of anxiety disorders were administered with adult populations. And only a few studies have dealt with the relationship between parenting and anxiety disorders in children (Bayer et al., 2006; Muris, Meesters, & Brakel, 2003; Muris, Merckelbach, Kindt, Bogels, Dreesen et al., 2001).

Another factor which has an important role in childhood anxiety is attachment. The attachment system is one of the major bio-behavioral systems that serves to motivate human infants and is a functional throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969). An attachment figure is a source of protection for the infant. Infants show attachment behavior (e.g., crying, approaching, reaching) in order to maintain proximity to the attachment figure. The effective attachment figure is who responds to the child by providing consistent and sensitive responses that comfort the infant (Cassidy, 1999).

According to Bowlby (1969) daily interactions with attachment figures contribute to the formation of internal “working model of attachment” about self and the world. Working model of attachment is expected to play an important role in shaping how people behave in their relationships, how they construe their social world in new situation. He proposed that when the child is separated from the caregiver, the child will exhibit attachment behavior and thus elicit protective behaviors from their caregiver. A caregiver that is responsive and sensitive to the child’s needs leads to confidence and a feeling of security in the child. These children are called securely attached children. Insecurely attached children do not experience responsiveness and sensitivity from their caregiver, and do not trust that a caretaker will protect them. They may experience chronic vigilance and anxiety, which may set the stage for the development of an anxiety disorder. Insecure attachment in children and their parents seems associated with children anxiety (Brown & Whiteside, 2008).

A review by Hudson & Rapee (2001) on the relation between child’s attachments with parents, suggest that father-child attachment particularly related to social anxiety disorders in children and mother-child attachment was primarily provides the

model for a one to one relationship, and specifically related to separation anxiety in children. It is supposed that secure mother-child attachment will protect against the development of separation anxiety disorder in children (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). Connell and Goodman (2002), in their meta-analysis, suggest that maternal parenting variables are more strongly related to childhood psychopathology as well as internalizing and externalizing symptoms. In line with the above, the current study considers the relationship between mother and child.

It is clear, that the factor of family environment such as interaction between parent and child play an important role in the development of anxiety in children, but, yet little attention has been paid to examine the relative contributions of these factors in the development of specific anxiety symptom. Also, little attention has been paid to the interrelations among these sets of variables in the young child. This study is an attempt to understand how separation anxiety develops in children. Although, many dimensions of families are potentially important to children's anxiety development, this study focuses primarily on the relationship between maternal anxiety, perceived parental rearing styles and child attachment types with separation anxiety disorder in children.

Problem statement

Children experiencing SAD display extreme distress upon separation from their parent or other primary caregivers (Cartwright-Hatton et al., 2006). SAD often becomes problematic for families during elementary school, although it can also occur in older or younger children. The child appears fearful because he or she thinks something horrible will happen to them or their parents' while they are apart (First &

Tasman, 2004). The past researchers have not generally indicated specific associations between child and maternal well-being, but rather a non specific link between parent and child psychopathology in general. A study by Ghanizadeh, Khajavian, & Ashkani (2006) showed that major depression and separation anxiety disorder were the most common psychiatric disorders in children and adolescent. Also, there has been no published epidemiological survey for child and adolescent mental disorders in Iran. The unpublished researches indicate that the rate of child and adolescent mental disorders approximately was very close to rates of disturbances reported by developed countries (Nejatisafa, Mohammadi, Sharifi, Goodarzi, Izadian et al., 2006).

As noted earlier, attachment and parenting play a role in the development of anxiety in children. As the children are growing, early attachment and parental rearing behavior can shape the children and lead them toward mental health or illness. Also, anxiety in mothers may disturb mother-child relationship and influence on both parental rearing and attachment. Previous studies (Bayer et al., 2006; Brwon & Whiteside, 2008; Chorpita & Barlow, 1998) have demonstrated an association between parenting or attachment and anxiety in general; however, few studies have examined specific anxiety disorder. Also, available research on maternal anxiety and separation anxiety in children is limited, particularly, of concern to anxious mothers as the main factor for this disorder. For a given anxiety disorder, there are multiple pathways, such as family relationship, parenting, and early interaction between mother-child, familial anxiety, and a single risk factor cannot be universally accounted. A few attempts have been made to examine how these different influences may interact or complement each other in a child's development of