Proceedings of ICILLP 2025 Symposium: Property Law and Blockchain Applications in International Law and Legal Policy
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

The Formation Factors and Influences of Separation Anxiety Among Students in the Secondary Education Stage

Zijing Xia

Alcanta International College, Guozhou, China
fionaxia1016@gamil.com

Abstract. The separation anxiety of students in secondary education has been widely studied, but the current research focuses on medical mitigation methods, and there are still deficiencies in the exploration of the group-specific intervention and the role of schools and teachers. This paper analyzes the core performance, influence, causes, and mitigation of separation anxiety of students in Secondary Education (12-18 years old). This paper concludes that the separation anxiety of this group is caused by individual personality (high neuroticism, dependent personality, etc.) and external factors (improper family education, environmental changes, etc.), which will damage students' physical and mental health, learning efficiency, and interpersonal relationships, but it can be alleviated through individual adjustment and external help. Based on this, this paper proposes that students can alleviate anxiety by learning self-care skills and breathing regulation, and schools and teachers can provide external support by optimizing facilities, establishing a partner assistance system, and relaxing the restrictions on family ties.

Keywords: Separation Anxiety, Influencing Factors, Mitigation Methods

1. Introduction

Separation anxiety, as its name implies, is the emotional and psychological anxiety caused by being separated from a familiar person or thing. DSM-IV defines separation anxiety disorder as the excessive anxiety that damages the ability to behave when leaving parents or home. In its standard, it believes that when children's anxiety lasts for more than four weeks and affects daily life or recreational activities, such as school, they may suffer from separation anxiety disorder [1]. Mendlowicz, M. v.,&Stein, M. B. clearly pointed out the general effect of anxiety on the quality of life, as well as the symptoms of different anxiety disorders and the improvement effect of drugs on the quality of life of patients with anxiety. Breaking the traditional thinking that 'anxiety disorder is a benign disease', using experimental data confirmed that it is a serious disease that leads to social dysfunction and a heavy economic burden. From the perspective of current trends, most researchers focus on the use of drugs, psychologists, and other medical methods to alleviate anxiety symptoms, but there is still room for expansion in view of the specificity of student groups - especially in dealing with separation anxiety, schools and teachers should play a key role. As a common psychological problem of students, separation anxiety can easily affect students' adaptation to the environment and emotional health. Therefore, schools, teachers, and parents should pay attention to

© 2025 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

students' psychological environment problems, and regard separation anxiety as one of the psychological problems that needs attention. The theme of this article is to study the causes and influence of separation anxiety of students in secondary education.

2. The core performance and influence of separation anxiety

2.1. Typical characterization

Students in secondary education generally refer to junior high school students and senior high school students aged 12 to 18. At this stage, students will usually leave their familiar environment in different situations, such as early promotion, early promotion or due to parents' work. This situation will lead to teenagers' inappropriate or even excessive behavior and anxiety, and fear [2]. Specifically, children who are crying and depressed may become silent because of the new environment. When they want to separate from people they know, such as family members and former school friends, and join a strange environment, they will have a huge sense of anxiety. For example, they worry that they will never see their former friends again, worry about the health of their relatives after leaving home, and worry that they will not be able to maintain a new friendship. Such anxiety will make students deliberately avoid social occasions, and it is difficult to establish and maintain new relationships. This is because separation anxiety makes them more sensitive to their character and surroundings. Such students will cry alone, resist school, lose sleep, lose appetite, and even be depressed. Long-term insomnia, dreaminess, and loss of appetite will reduce the immune system of the body and cause some physical discomfort, such as abdominal pain, dizziness, vomiting, and other phenomena [3].

2.2. Main impacts

2.2.1. Impact on individual life and abilities

Separation anxiety is not limited to expressing simple crying, but can also generate various types of anxiety disorders. Long-term exposure to anxiety can affect various aspects of the body, such as decreased immune system ability, which can harm human health. Research has shown that 80% of students with separation anxiety experience multidimensional functional decline and decreased happiness. Severe anxiety may cause physical symptoms such as sleep disorders, nervous tension, hand tremors, palpitations, etc., which can affect students' psychological state and prevent them from enjoying life. Secondly, the efficiency of learning is reduced, and anxiety can distract students' attention, which may cause them to be unable to concentrate in class and even unable to keep up with the teacher's teaching speed. Some students may resist going to school due to anxiety caused by the new environment, resulting in a large number of absences, truancy, and even voluntarily wishing to give up their studies. Patients with separation anxiety disorder (whether children or adults) may experience extreme pain when separated from their loved ones. Children may refuse to sleep alone or leave home, while adults may rely on family companionship to go out, disrupting the normal pace of family life [4]. In Mendlowicz's study, it was mentioned that the lifetime prevalence of anxiety in the population is 1.5%. 35% of this population consider their health status to be average on the health self-assessment form, while 38% consider their emotional depression and low psychological condition to be similar to those of patients with severe depression [5]. Psychological anxiety can affect students' sleep, as too many things spinning in their minds can lead to insomnia, frequent dreaming, or easy awakening. At the same time, it can also affect appetite, with most students in a

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

bad mood experiencing loss of appetite or, conversely, overeating. Either of them poses a great threat to students' physical health. Over the long term, the physical condition of anxious students is bound to deteriorate daily, and may even lead to diseases of the immune or nervous system.

2.2.2. Impact on psychology and interpersonal relationships

First, separation anxiety can trigger students' social avoidance tendency. Serious anxiety will lead to a decrease in the frequency of students' active participation in social activities, which is specifically manifested in taking the initiative to deliberately stay away from social occasions. According to the research, through the social avoidance and distress scale (SAD) test, it is found that although there is little difference between students who avoid social interaction due to anxiety and those who do not, from the overall social logic, students affected by anxiety will worry about social occasions, so they will deliberately reduce active social communication, such as avoiding collective activities, refusing to have in-depth communication with other students, resulting in less opportunities for interpersonal exercise and communication. Secondly, it belongs to the psychological level. When the communication between students and people decreases, it will magnify the sense of loneliness. Anxious people are eager to obtain good social relations in the new environment, but they are afraid to participate in social occasions due to the influence of anxiety and form a contradictory state. The gap between ideal and reality leads to the loneliness rate of anxious people being much higher than that of non-anxious people. In an experiment by UCLA, the score difference of the loneliness scale was statistically expressed ($p<0.01$). It is undeniable that there is a significant relationship between anxiety and depression. Anxious students under social pressure are prone to having negative psychology. In the self-rating Depression Scale (SDS), the score of students with social anxiety is higher than that of non-anxious students ($p<0.05$). The depressed mood will make the students who are already affected by anxiety withdraw more from social occasions, weaken their social ability a little, and form a vicious circle of "anxiety, depression, social withdrawal". Finally, the cognitive level. Students who have been in anxiety for a long time will be very sensitive to the evaluation of strangers around them. The fear of negation scale (FNE) shows that students with anxiety generally score higher than non-anxiety students ($p<0.01$). These students will presuppose other people's negative comments in their minds, such as a joke. Anxious students may mistakenly think that they are dissatisfied with themselves. This social bias will further damage their social confidence, and over time will make them more sensitive in later social occasions, hoping that they will be cautious in their words and deeds, which will seriously hinder their communication with normal people [6].

3. Analysis of the causes of separation anxiety

3.1. Individual reasons

Separation anxiety is related to an individual's natural personality to a certain extent, which will affect children's perception and coping ability in the separation scene. The most common is high neuroticism, which is often referred to as emotional instability. This kind of children's regulation of their own emotions is relatively weak, and it is often easy to understand separation as a potential danger, which leads to excessive worry, and the emotional fluctuations in the face of separation will be relatively large. The second is the introverted and dependent personality group. Such children are usually used to getting a sense of security of intimacy and dependence from familiar family and friends. Therefore, facing the strange environment after separation alone will feel helpless because of the lack of security. The main problem of this group comes from a lack of confidence. After

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

leaving their comfort zone, they will face the anxiety of facing difficulties alone. Then there are highly sensitive people. These children are good at observing subtle things, which means that they are more likely to catch the signals of separation. For example, before leaving home, their parents are packing their bags or mentioning the time of separation. Highly sensitive children will have a stronger reaction, and it is difficult to adapt to the new environment quickly. This is because the strangeness of the environment brought about by separation will be stronger, leading to longer anxiety time. The over-dependent personality will form an absolute cognition that "it is only happy to stay with my mother". Such children are usually used to denying the help of themselves or other environmental resources, and will have the separation anxiety of "losing the only one" after they are separated from their closest people.

3.2. External causes

The anxiety caused by leaving one's close friends may be due to the doting of parents. Improper family education methods, such as excessive doting or severe punishment of children, may undermine the child's sense of security, leading him to be more tolerant than his peers in the face of separation and prone to separation anxiety. For example, when students and their parents are at home, they are used to having someone take care of their daily life, from parents' reminders during meals to subconsciously seeking parents' help for any problem. These things help them form a dependent personality unconsciously. Such students will feel helpless, confused, or depressed when they join a strange environment. When they encounter problems again but do not know how to solve them, they will hope to return to their parents, so that they miss their families and feel anxious about the new environment. Secondly, attachment is also one of the common factors. This kind of situation often occurs in their native families. For example, the attachment relationship between parents is unstable. Parents may not care for and love their children enough, leading to their desire for closer relationships. Therefore, puppy love often becomes the result of this situation. When they face the breakup of puppy love, they will be very painful. This is because they think that the hard-won care and love will be pulled away from their anxiety. In addition to these factors, environmental changes are also an inevitable cause. According to the study of Bogels, from childhood, the separation anxiety group has shown a difference from other anxiety groups. When answering open-ended questions, children in the separation anxiety group may have cognitive disorders from the perspective of too high a prediction of danger and too low an ability to deal with danger [7]. It is clearly pointed out in the paper that the core factor of anxiety is the negative events in life, including two types. The first is called recent threatening events. Through the measurement of the Threatening Experience Inventory (lte-q), the researcher found that separation anxiety is more likely to occur after suddenly experiencing separation events such as the death of relatives and the breakdown of parents' marriage. Secondly, people with historical trauma, such as students who have been abused in childhood, or who have experienced campus bullying in the old school, are more likely to have anxiety in the new and unfamiliar environment. In fact, ruminant thinking is the most critical core factor. Ruminant thinking refers to such people's habitual recall of negative events in their lives. If there is no rumination, the possibility of negative events producing anxiety will be reduced by three times [8].

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

4. Suggestions for relieving separation anxiety

4.1. Individual adjustment suggestions

Separation anxiety is not an unsolvable problem, and individual students can alleviate it by actively regulating their psychological state, cognition, and other behaviors. Firstly, students can try to learn some self-care skills to get rid of excessive dependence on their parents. For example, organizing your backpack, setting an alarm to wake up, and making a list of daily necessities students need to bring each week in advance, students can summarize them one by one. When students can take care of their lives well, students will have less anxiety about leaving their families. For middle school students, finding meaning in separation is not about forcibly comforting oneself, but about seeing the implicit value behind separation from a growth perspective. Students need to turn their resistance to being forced to separate into a driving force for active growth. Secondly, it is important to learn how to regulate breathing. Anxious students can use the most common slow-paced abdominal breathing technique, which is deep breathing, to regulate their emotions. Students can take slow-paced breaths at a rate of 10 times per minute, focusing their attention on breathing by feeling the abdominal undulations and gas exchange during breathing. Thirdly, the attention transfer method [9]. Students can alleviate anxiety by shifting their attention. For example, cultivating a new interest or hobby, allowing students to do what they love, can relax their mood and find confidence and a sense of accomplishment from what they love. This method can distract anxious students' attention, allowing them to devote a portion of their energy to things outside of anxiety, while also exercising their thinking abilities. Helping students find confidence in their interests and hobbies can greatly alleviate their separation anxiety.

4.2. Suggestions for external environmental assistance

The main methods of external environmental assistance should include providing auxiliary equipment, social support, and scene optimization. Its core is to create an external condition that is safe, controllable, and soothing, which includes optimization of facilities. Schools can build some low-disturbance relaxation spaces to provide students who are not accustomed to the new environment and want to be alone. Arrange specialized psychological teachers to provide psychological counseling for students, or hold lectures on understanding and how to deal with separation anxiety, and invite experts to explain to students and parents. Secondly, teachers should help students adapt to environments that are prone to separation anxiety, such as transferring schools or staying on campus [10]. For example, setting up a partner assistance system in the class, allowing students who are familiar with the school to play a guiding role, guiding new students to familiarize themselves with the campus environment, and better integrate into the friendships of classmates. For the anxiety of separation in enrollment, teachers can appropriately relax the restrictions on family ties, such as allowing students to have brief conversations with their parents using communication devices at fixed times, avoiding sudden emotional interruptions, and giving students more buffer time. At the same time, an 'emotional exit' can be set up in the classroom space, where stress-relieving toys can be placed, sticky notes can be provided, and students can be encouraged to express and face their emotions.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LD29013

5. Conclusion

This article focuses on the issue of separation anxiety among students in the secondary education stage (12-18 years old), and conducts a systematic study on this group's separation anxiety in the context of current research that mainly focuses on medical relief methods, group-specific interventions for students, and insufficient exploration of the role of school teachers. The typical manifestations of separation anxiety are clearly defined in the text, including excessive anxiety caused by environmental changes such as crying, social avoidance, and physiological discomfort (insomnia, abdominal pain, etc.). The impact of separation anxiety includes individual life, including health impairment, decreased learning efficiency, and psychological interpersonal factors such as social avoidance and increased loneliness, which can easily form a vicious cycle of social withdrawal. Relevant scale tests show significant differences.

The causes and individual level of separation anxiety are related to high neuroticism, dependent personality, and high sensitivity traits, while the external level involves improper family education (overindulgence or severe punishment), unstable attachment to the original family, environmental changes (loss of loved ones, campus bullying), and rumination (amplifying the impact of negative events). In response to these issues, this article proposes mitigation suggestions: individuals can improve by learning self-care skills, abdominal breathing regulation, and cultivating interest to shift attention; In terms of external environment, schools need to optimize facilities (build relaxation spaces, set up emotional corners), conduct psychological lectures, and teachers can implement a partner assistance system and relax restrictions on family ties to help students adapt. In summary, this study clearly shows that separation anxiety among students in the secondary education stage is caused by both individual and external factors, and can be alleviated through various methods. This research provides valuable insights into the mental health of students and suggests that further studies could focus on the long-term effects of intervention methods and personalized strategies.

References

[1] Shang, Y. (2014). Case Analysis of Separation Anxiety in Children. Advances in Psychology, 4, 997.
[2] Zhu, G. (2025). Treatment of Separation Anxiety Disorder in Adolescents. Adolescent Health, 23(1), 31.
[3] Zhang, R., Liu, K., and Han, X. (2024). Separation Anxiety Disorder from a Psychoanalytic Perspective and Individual Counseling: A Case Study of the Film "Deep Sea". Advances in Education, 14, 344.
[4] Siddhant, M., Sharad, K., Ajay, D., Lakhera, G., & Nandal, N. (2023). Impact of Anxiety Disorders on Daily Functioning of an Individual–in Terms of Family, Social Life, School, and Work. Journal for ReAttach Therapy and Developmental Diversities, 6(4s), 56-63.
[5] Mendlowicz, M. V., & Stein, M. B. (2000). Quality of life in individuals with anxiety disorders. American Journal of Psychiatry, 157(5), 669-682.
[6] Peng, C., Deng, P., Ma, H., Chen, B., Hu, Q., and Zhou, H. (2004). Preliminary Study on the Characteristics of Social Anxiety in Middle and High School Students. Doctoral dissertation.
[7] Wang, L. J., Yang, W. B. & Yang, B. J. (2008). A Review of Research on Separation Anxiety. Early Childhood Education, (04), 28-33.
[8] Kinderman, P., Tai, S., Pontin, E., Schwannauer, M., Jarman, I., & Lisboa, P. (2015). Causal and mediating factors for anxiety, depression, and well-being. The British Journal of Psychiatry, 206(6), 456-460.
[9] Yu-Rong Yu, Chun-Ying Han, and Qiang Xing. (2017). The Impact of Different Emotional Regulation Approaches on Attention Shift and Stability in Junior High School Students. Journal of Psychological Techniques and Applications, 5(1), 12-18.
[10] Haynes, A. C., Lywood, A., Crowe, E. M., Fielding, J. L., Rossiter, J. M., & Kent, C. (2022). A calming hug: Design and validation of a tactile aid to ease anxiety. Plos One, 17(3), e0259838.