

Separation Anxiety, Parenting Style, and Level of Dependency Among Children of Migrant Workers in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

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Publication Date: May 12, 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.20135192](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20135192)

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency among children of migrant workers at UPHSL Jonelta Campus, drawing on Bowlby's Attachment Theory, Baumrind's Parenting Style Theory, and Bornstein's Interpersonal Dependency Theory.

Using a descriptive-correlational design and non-standardized instruments, levels of separation anxiety, parenting styles, and dependency were measured across emotional, behavioral, social, and cognitive dimensions.

Results showed that separation anxiety was consistently present, with emotional distress most pronounced; authoritative parenting was the most practiced style; and dependency was evident across domains, with emotional dependency dominant. Statistical analyses revealed that permissive parenting strongly correlated with heightened behavioral and cognitive separation anxiety, while authoritative parenting showed weaker associations. Higher separation anxiety was significantly linked to greater dependency, particularly between behavioral responses and emotional dependency ($r = 0.657$) and cognitive manifestations and emotional dependency ($r = 0.682$). Permissive parenting also had the strongest relationship with emotional dependency ($r = 0.541$).

These findings underscore the interrelated nature of separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency, highlighting the need for interventions that foster authoritative parenting, strengthen emotional bonds, and provide coping strategies. The study contributes to developmental psychology by addressing gaps in migration-related family research and offers practical implications for parents, educators, counselors, and policymakers in designing culturally adaptive support systems.

Keywords: *separation anxiety, parenting style, level of dependency, migrant workers*

INTRODUCTION



Labor migration has become a defining global phenomenon, driven largely by economic necessity. While it provides financial stability for families, it often results in prolonged parental absence, leaving children vulnerable to emotional and psychological challenges. Among these, separation anxiety is particularly salient, as disrupted attachment bonds heighten children's susceptibility to distress and diminished psychosocial well-being (Liu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

In the Philippine context, labor migration is a widespread strategy for economic advancement. However, the absence of parents creates emotional gaps within families, with children frequently placed under the care of relatives or alternative caregivers. Studies indicate that the quality of caregiving and emotional support significantly influences the degree of separation anxiety experienced by these children (Aghebati et al., 2021).

Parenting style is a critical determinant of children's adjustment in such circumstances. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structure, fosters resilience and emotional security, whereas authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful styles may exacerbate anxiety and maladjustment (Riany et al., 2022; Miranda et al., 2020).

Dependency, defined as reliance on others for emotional, social, and cognitive support, is another key factor. For children of migrant workers, dependency often intensifies due to the absence of primary attachment figures, shaping coping mechanisms and developmental trajectories.

This study is grounded in Bowlby's Attachment Theory, Baumrind's Parenting Style Theory, and Bornstein's Interpersonal Dependency Theory. While prior research has examined these constructs independently, limited studies have explored their interrelationships within the Philippine setting. Thus, this research aims to determine the relationship between separation anxiety, parenting style, and level of dependency among children of migrant workers in UPHSL Jonelta Campus.

METHODS

A descriptive-correlational design was employed to examine the relationships among separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency.

Participants: The study involved 50 junior high school students at UPHSL Jonelta Campus, all children of migrant workers. Inclusion criteria and parental consent guided participant selection.

Instruments: Non-standardized questionnaires measured:

- Separation anxiety (emotional, behavioral, cognitive dimensions)
- Parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, neglectful)
- Dependency (emotional, social, cognitive domains)

Responses were rated using a four-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Procedure: Data collection included securing institutional permission, distributing questionnaires, and gathering responses during the academic year 2025–2026.

Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics (mean) determined variable levels.
- Pearson correlation coefficient (r) tested relationships among variables.
- Hypotheses were evaluated at a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

Table 1. Level of Separation Anxiety among children of migrant workers in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretations</i>
1. <i>Emotional Response</i>	3.25	Anxious
2. <i>Behavioral Response</i>	3.07	Anxious
3. <i>Cognitive Manifestations</i>	3.02	Anxious
<i>Overall Weighted Mean</i>	3.11	Anxious

The findings show that respondents generally experience an anxious level of separation anxiety (WM = 3.11, SD = 0.484), with emotional responses being the most prominent. Children of migrant workers often report sadness, distress, and loneliness during parental absence, while behavioral responses include avoidance, clinginess, and reassurance-seeking, reflecting their need for support. Although cognitive manifestations ranked lowest, they still indicate persistent worries and difficulty concentrating. Overall, separation anxiety appears multidimensional, affecting emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects. This aligns with previous studies (Estrada & Rabara, 2024; Jiao et al., 2020; Mohammad et al., 2020), which highlight emotional distress as central, alongside observable behaviors and cognitive disruptions associated with separation anxiety.

Table 2. Experienced Parenting Style among children of migrant workers in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretations</i>
1. <i>Authoritative Parenting</i>	3.23	Practiced
2. <i>Authoritarian Parenting</i>	3.18	Practiced
3. <i>Permissive Parenting</i>	2.98	Practiced
4. <i>Neglectful/Uninvolved Parenting</i>	2.80	Practiced
<i>Overall Weighted Mean</i>	3.05	Practiced

The results indicate that parenting styles among children of migrant workers are generally practiced (WM = 3.05, SD = 0.408), with authoritative parenting as the most dominant. This style is characterized by warmth, guidance, and balanced discipline, supporting emotional stability and coping. Authoritarian parenting, marked by strict control and obedience, was also evident but may limit autonomy, while permissive and neglectful styles were moderately experienced, reflecting leniency, reduced discipline, or minimal involvement that can affect self-regulation and emotional security. Overall, these findings suggest that although children are exposed to varied parenting approaches, authoritative parenting serves as a key stabilizing influence. This aligns with prior studies (Sarab et al., 2025; Maccoby & Martin, 2022; Jiao et al., 2020), which highlight the benefits of authoritative parenting and the potential risks associated with less structured or uninvolved styles.

Table 3. Level of Dependency among children of migrant workers in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretations</i>
1. <i>Emotional Dependency</i>	2.86	Dependent
2. <i>Social Dependency</i>	2.70	Dependent
3. <i>Cognitive Dependency</i>	2.75	Dependent
<i>Overall Weighted Mean</i>	2.77	Dependent

The findings indicate that dependency among children of migrant workers is generally present ($WM = 2.77$, $SD = 0.668$), with emotional dependency as the most dominant. This suggests that children often rely on others for emotional support, alongside observable social and cognitive reliance. Parental absence and inconsistent caregiving appear to contribute to this multidimensional dependency, shaping how children relate, decide, and cope. These results are consistent with prior studies (Gagelonia et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024; Martinez & Huang, 2024), which link migrant family contexts to increased emotional insecurity and reliance on external support. Overall, the findings highlight the need for interventions that strengthen emotional resilience, autonomy, and independent decision-making among these children.

Table 4. Relationship among the Children of Migrant Workers Level of Separation Anxiety and Experienced Parenting Style in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

<i>Separation Anxiety</i>	<i>Parenting Styles</i>			
	Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Neglectful
<i>Emotional response</i>	$r=0.517^{**}$	$r=0.316^{**}$	$r=0.533^{**}$	$r=0.470^{**}$
	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.005$	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$
<i>Behavioral response</i>	$r =0.575^{**}$	$r =0.429^{**}$	$r=0.694^{**}$	$r=0.460^{**}$
	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
	Correlation $p=0.000^*$	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$
<i>Cognitive manifestation</i>	$r=0.476^{**}$	$r=0.448^{**}$	$r=0.694^{**}$	$r=0.552^{**}$
	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$	Correlation $p=0.000$

***Significant @0.01; *Significant @0.05*

The findings reveal a significant relationship between separation anxiety and parenting styles among children of migrant workers, with anxiety manifesting across emotional, behavioral, and cognitive domains. Permissive parenting showed the strongest association, particularly with behavioral and cognitive symptoms, suggesting that lack of structure intensifies anxiety. Authoritarian and neglectful styles demonstrated moderate relationships, indicating that rigid control and inconsistent caregiving contribute to insecurity. In contrast, authoritative parenting showed the weakest correlation, highlighting its protective role in promoting emotional stability

and resilience. Overall, children exposed to less structured or uninvolved parenting are more vulnerable to separation anxiety, while authoritative parenting serves as a stabilizing influence. These results are consistent with previous studies (Yang, 2025; Kwan et al., 2023; Amoroso et al., 2023; Magantor, 2024), which emphasize the critical role of parenting style in shaping children’s emotional, behavioral, and cognitive adjustment.

Table 5. Relationship among the Children of Migrant Workers Level of Separation Anxiety and Level of Dependency in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

<i>Separation Anxiety</i>	<i>Level of Dependency</i>		
	Emotional Dependency	Social Dependency	Cognitive Dependency
<i>Emotional response</i>	r=0.498**	r=0.452**	r=0.430**
	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000	p=0.005	p=0.000
<i>Behavioral response</i>	r =0.657**	r =0.548**	r=0.537**
	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000*	p=0.000	p=0.000
<i>Cognitive manifestation</i>	r=0.682**	r=0.550**	r=0.581**
	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000	p=0.000	p=0.000

**Significant @0.01; *Significant @0.05

The results indicate a significant relationship between separation anxiety and dependency among children of migrant workers, with the strongest associations found in behavioral and cognitive domains. This suggests that children experiencing higher separation anxiety tend to exhibit greater emotional and cognitive reliance, expressed through anxious behaviors and persistent worries. Moderate relationships were also observed between emotional responses and social dependency, indicating reliance on others for support and validation. Overall, the findings confirm that separation anxiety is multidimensional and closely linked to varying forms of dependency, particularly behavioral and cognitive. These results are consistent with prior studies (Chen & Li, 2024; Santos & Villanueva, 2023; Park & Kim, 2025), which highlight how parental

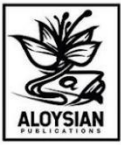
absence and limited caregiver interaction contribute to increased dependency among children of migrant workers.

Table 6. Relationship among the Children of Migrant Workers Experienced Parenting Style and Level of Dependency in UPHSL Jonelta Campus

Parenting Styles	Level of Dependency		
	Emotional Dependency	Social Dependency	Cognitive Dependency
<i>Authoritative Parenting</i>	r=0.410**	r=0.256**	r=0.292**
	Moderate	Low	Low
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000	p=0.024	p=0.009
<i>Authoritarian Parenting</i>	r =0.399**	r =0.456**	r=0.479**
	Low	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000*	p=0.000	p=0.000
<i>Permissive Parenting</i>	r=0.541**	r=0.550**	r=0.494**
	High	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
	p=0.000	p=0.000	p=0.000
<i>Neglectful Parenting</i>	r=0.477**	r=0.540**	r=0.562**
	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlate
	p=0.000	p=0.000	p=0.000

**Significant @0.01; *Significant @0.05

The findings reveal a significant relationship between parenting styles and dependency among children of migrant workers. Strong associations were observed between neglectful parenting and cognitive dependency, as well as permissive parenting with emotional and social dependency, indicating that inconsistent or lenient caregiving increases reliance on others for support and decision-making. Authoritarian parenting showed moderate links to social and cognitive dependency, reflecting reliance on control and external rules. In contrast, authoritative parenting demonstrated the weakest correlations, highlighting its protective role in promoting



independence. Overall, the results suggest that permissive and neglectful styles heighten dependency, while authoritative parenting helps reduce it. These findings are supported by prior studies (Hendrowati et al., 2023; Abenir, 2023), which emphasize the role of balanced parenting in fostering resilience and autonomy.

Children of migrant workers consistently exhibited separation anxiety, with emotional distress emerging as the most pronounced dimension.

Parenting practices were moderately observed, with authoritative parenting identified as the most prevalent style. This suggests caregivers generally balanced warmth and control.

Dependency was consistently present across emotional, social, and cognitive domains, with emotional dependency being the most dominant.

Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships:

- Permissive parenting style was strongly associated with separation anxiety, particularly in behavioral and cognitive dimensions.
- Authoritative parenting showed weaker associations, suggesting a protective effect.
- Separation anxiety was significantly related to dependency, with behavioral responses strongly correlated with emotional dependency ($r = 0.657$) and cognitive manifestations with emotional dependency ($r = 0.682$).
- Permissive parenting style demonstrated the strongest relationship with emotional dependency ($r = 0.541$).

Overall, findings indicate that separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency are significantly interconnected.

DISCUSSION

The results affirm that separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency are interrelated constructs shaping the developmental outcomes of children of migrant workers.

Consistent with Attachment Theory, heightened emotional distress reflects the impact of disrupted parent-child bonds. The absence of primary caregivers fosters insecurity, leading to increased anxiety and reliance on others.

The prevalence of authoritative parenting suggests caregivers attempt to provide supportive environments. However, the significant association between permissive parenting and elevated anxiety and dependency underscores the risks of insufficient boundaries, aligning with Baumrind's framework on maladaptive outcomes.

The strong correlation between separation anxiety and dependency supports Bornstein's Interpersonal Dependency Theory, which posits that individuals experiencing distress are more likely to seek external reassurance.



These findings highlight the importance of caregiving quality in mitigating the psychological costs of parental migration. While economic benefits are evident, the emotional consequences for children must be addressed through targeted interventions.

This study contributes to developmental psychology by offering empirical evidence on the interconnectedness of separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency in the Philippine context, filling a notable gap in local literature.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that:

- Children of migrant workers experience notable levels of separation anxiety, particularly emotional distress.
- Authoritative parenting is the most common style but does not fully eliminate anxiety.
- Dependency is consistently present, with emotional dependency most pronounced.
- Significant relationships exist among separation anxiety, parenting style, and dependency.
- Parental absence, caregiving style, and reliance on others collectively shape developmental outcomes

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. Parents and caregivers should adopt authoritative practices that balance warmth with structure.
2. Schools and counselors should implement programs on emotional regulation and coping strategies.
3. Initiatives that sustain parent-child communication across distance should be prioritized.
4. Future research should expand sample sizes and explore additional variables to strengthen findings.

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