



Prevalence of Separation Anxiety Among Kindergarten Learners in Cuyapo East and West Districts

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Abstract – *Kindergarten is a critical year where children's experiences nurture positive approaches to learning and prepare children for the more rigorous academic expectations of the primary grades. However, children at this age are also the most vulnerable to experience separation anxiety especially when starting to go school. This study aimed to determine the prevalence of separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils of East and West Districts in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija during the second quarter of Calendar Year 2018. A descriptive method of research using survey questionnaire was utilized in the study. Results revealed that separation anxiety among kindergarten learners are sometimes prevalent. Further, results also revealed that profile variables Parent's occupation and Birth orders have a significant effect on the prevalence of anxiety among kindergarten learners. Furthermore, 'refusal to go to school' is the most serious problems being encountered on kindergarten learners who experience separation anxiety as perceived by their teachers. Moreover, management of separation anxiety among kindergarten learners using the proposed intervention program is one of the recommendations given in the study.*

Keywords – *Kindergarten Learners, Prevalence, Separation Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, it is pretty normal children feel fearful saying goodbye whenever they get separated from parents. After all children got used to be with their parents since birth. Separation anxiety is a normal phase of child's development (Good, 2013). Anxious feelings are normal and expected in children returning to school. This transition can be really stressful and disruptive. They might cling, cry, withdraw or become irritable or angry. Therefore, consistency in attending to their needs should be considered to prevent learners from having temper tantrums when school starts (Daview, 2014) especially kindergarten pupils.

According to the 2010 National Statistics Office (NSO), mental health illnesses are the third most common forms of morbidity for Filipinos. Other mental health disorders in the list are depression and separation anxiety disorder. It is now known that not only adults of all ages suffer from separation anxiety, but almost 45% of lifetime separation anxiety first manifests in adulthood. Based on research over the last 20 years, the fifth diagnostics and statistical manual (DSM-5) has broadened the range of adult anxiety disorders to include separation anxiety especially among children in the Philippines.

The Republic Act 10157 or the Kindergarten Education Law made kindergarten the compulsory and

mandatory entry stage to basic education. Section 2 of this Act provides that all five-year old children shall be given equal opportunities for Kindergarten Education to effectively promote their physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, including values formation so they will be ready for school. Various researches support that this is the period of greatest growth and development, when the brain develops most rapidly and almost at its fullest. It is also the stage when self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. Support system of the children should therefore be guided to facilitate explorations of our young learners in an engaging and creative curriculum that is developmentally appropriate which immerse them in meaningful experiences. Provision of varied play-based activities lead them to becoming emergent literates and helps them to naturally acquire the competencies to develop holistically. They are able to understand the world by exploring their environment as they are encouraged to create and discover, that eventually leads them to becoming willing risk takers and ready to tackle formal school works.

The Department of Education (DepEd) having been a strong advocate of early childhood education has implemented various programs for preschoolers for decades now. The Department further strengthens this through the inclusion of kindergarten in the K to 12 basic education curriculum in the country. DepEd believes



Kindergarten is a transition stage between informal literacy and formal literacy. This is the period of greatest growth and development, when the brain develops most rapidly, almost at its fullest. It is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. Children at this stage should be immersed with activities, games, and plays to naturally acquire the skills/competencies appropriate for their holistic development as emergent literates and be ready for formal school.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), kindergarten is a critical year where children's experiences nurture positive approaches to learning and prepare children for the more rigorous academic expectations of the primary grades (NAEYC, 2009). Therefore, kindergarten teachers should guide the learners using an engaging and creative curriculum that is developmentally appropriate.

Thus beginning at an early age the child must be cared for and given all the opportunities to address current developmental needs and prepare him/her for lifelong learning. Kindergarten classrooms, therefore, should be multi-level because kindergarteners will differ in their development in each domain. The following are situations that a kindergarten teacher should put to mind: (1). every classroom is a multi-level classroom; (2) every teacher is a multi-level facilitator; (3) every learner is unique; (4) every learner has particular intelligence or intelligences; (5) every learner has his/her own learning styles; and (6) every learner has his/her own particular need (Lopez, 2014).

However, children experience separation anxiety as they start schooling and as they start separating themselves from their parents. Children go through feelings of separation anxiety for different reasons, but on a basic level, they believe their survival is dependent on having a primary caregiver close by. Toddlers are also still too young to understand the concept of time. Leaving them in a room for a few minutes or with a babysitter or at day care for a few hours feel like the same amount of time for them. So instead of sneaking off, which a toddler can interpret as leaving forever, be sure to say adieu, but keep the parting simple and short. Try to convey that the time apart is temporary and is not a cause for alarm. Also, *Goodman-Wilson* (2013) disclosed that anxiety can be a sign of the child's increasing autonomy, they have their own opinion on the situation -- that Mom shouldn't leave -- and want to exert control.

Many teachers in the Division claimed that the very evident observation among learners when they are sent to school especially during first day, tantrums manifest in them and a strong indication of separation anxiety prevails. It is within these reasons why the researcher intends to determine the separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils in Cuyapo Districts to have the full awareness, understanding and knowledge as regards reasons, motives and causes of this feeling of anxiety so that interventions will immediately be extended once kindergarten pupils show emotional condition like this.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally, this study aimed to determine the prevalence of separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils of East and West Districts in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija during the second quarter of Calendar Year 2018. Specifically, the following specific objectives were determined in the study: (1) Profile of the kindergarten pupils in terms of their: (a) age; (b) sex; (c) parents' highest educational background; (d) parents' occupation; and (e) birth order? (2) Frequency of prevalence of separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils as assessed by the teachers along (a) inferiority complex; (b) self-esteem; (c) focus on school activities; (d) socialization; and (e) feeling of belongingness?, (3) Significant difference in the frequency of prevalence of separation anxiety across profile variables, (4) Problems encountered by the kindergarten pupils with separation anxiety as perceived by their teachers, and (5) Formulation of intervention program/s designed to minimize the prevalence of separation anxiety of the kindergarten pupils?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized the descriptive method of research to determine the prevalence of separation anxiety of the kindergarten pupils of East and West Districts in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija along inferiority complex, self-esteem, focus on school activities, socialization and feeling of belongingness. An Adopted-Survey questionnaire was used as the data gathering instrument of the study, which is later administered to the 103 Kindergarten Pupils coming from East and West Districts of Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija sampled from the total population using Slovin's formula.

Prior to the administration of the survey questionnaires to the sampled Kindergarten Pupils, the researcher asked for permission from the Public Schools

District Supervisor (PSDS) and school heads, upon approval the administration occurs. The gathered data were consolidated and analyzed. Frequency counts and percentage were used as the main statistical tool for the identification of the profile of the respondents. While Average Weighted Mean was utilized to determine the prevalence of separation anxiety of kindergarten pupils. Then, T-test was used to determine the significant difference in the frequency of prevalence of separation anxiety across profile variables of the kindergarten pupils of East and West Districts in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered and analyzed, the following are evident:

1. On the Profile of the Kindergarten Students

- a. In terms of Age, majority of the respondents belong to the age range of 5 years and above (75.7%), while the rest are aged 4 years old and below.
- b. In terms of Sex, the data showed an almost equal distribution of sex among the respondents of the study because there are 52 male learners (50.5%) and 51 female learners (49.5%).
- c. In terms of Parent's Highest Educational Background, majority of the mothers of the learners are high school graduate (71.8%) while others are college graduates (14.6%) and elementary graduates (13.6%). Likewise, majority of the learners' fathers are high school graduates (67%) while others are elementary graduates (13.6%), college degree holders (12.6 %), master's degree holders (1.0%) and doctorate degree holders (5.8%).
- d. In terms of Parent's Occupation, majority of the mothers are housewives (71.8%) followed by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) (16.5%), Saleslady (8.7%), Government Employee (1.9%) and working in the field academe (1.0%). While majority of the learners' fathers are farmers (53.4%) followed by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) (10.7%), tricycle drivers (22.3%), Government Employees (11.7%) and teachers (1.9%).
- e. In terms of Birth Order, majority of the respondents are first-born babies (54.4%) while the rest are second-born babies (24.3%), third-born babies (13.6%) fourth-born babies (5.8%) and fifth born babies (1.9%). **Kindergarten**

Prevalence of Separation Anxiety of the Kindergarten Students

Table 1. Prevalence of Separation Anxiety of the Kindergarten Students

Indicators of the Separation Anxiety	AWM	DE
Inferiority Complex	2.86	Sometimes
Self-Esteem	2.97	Sometimes
On Focus on School Activities	3.00	Sometimes
On Socialization	3.04	Sometimes
On Feeling of Belongingness	3.04	Sometimes
Overall Weighted Mean	2.98	Sometimes

Table 1 shows that generally the Kindergarten learners of the East and West District of Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija had sometimes prevalence of separation anxiety with a weighted mean of 2.98 as assessed by their teachers.

Significant Difference in the Frequency of Prevalence of Separation Anxiety across Profile Variables of the Kindergarten Learners

T-test revealed no significant difference in the frequency of prevalence of separation anxiety across profile variables age, sex and parents' highest educational attainment while significant difference was found on profile variables parent's occupation and birth order. This means that parents' occupation and learner's birth order are the common profile variables that has a significant role and effect on the prevalence of separation anxiety among children. Further, it also implies that occupation of parents has a significant role as to how children are reared and how separation anxiety prevails among their children.

Furthermore, the results of the study coincides to the following related studies. First in terms of Parent's occupation, in the study of Koh (2018) in her article entitled, "Child Care Challenges: Separation Anxiety" stressed that dealing with separation anxiety can be harrowing for parents, as well as for babysitters and nannies. The wails and tears elicit guilt and anxiety, as parents worry their child's emotional state. However, the

feeling of anxiety exists because parents leave their children for their work, to the study of.

While in terms of Birth order, Pearson's (2011) study entitled, "Anxiety and Birth Order: Does Birth Order Play a Role in a Child's Anxiety Level?" found out that that the first-born child would have a higher level of total anxiety than a non-first born child. Further, he stressed that that females would have an overall higher level of anxiety than males. Likewise, in the study of Gates, et. al., (2012) entitled, "Birth Order And Its Relationship to Depression, Anxiety, and Self-Concept Test Scores in Children" found out that the first-born children scored significantly lower on depression than second-, third-, fourth-born, and youngest children. First born children showed significantly less trait anxiety than third-born children. First-born children also showed significantly higher levels of self-esteem than second-born and youngest children. Girls in this study showed significantly more trait anxiety than boys.

Problems Encountered by the Kindergarten Learners with Separation Anxiety as perceived by their teachers

Table 2. Problems Encountered by the Kindergarten Learners as assessed by their teachers

Problems Encountered by the Kindergarten Learners	Mean Rank	Rank
Refusal to go to school	2.97	1
Unrealistic and lasting worry that something bad will happen to them	4.50	2
Fear of being alone	4.93	3
Complaints of physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach aches on school days	5.18	4
Wetting of pant urination	5.23	5
Afraid of unfamiliar people and places	5.38	6
Feeling of nervousness when away from home or separated from a loved one	5.87	7
Absence of trust to teachers	5.87	8
Excessive clinginess to other close siblings or parents	6.14	9

Does not eat and take the snacks because of excessive anxiety 10
6.22

Problems encountered by the kindergarten learners with separation anxiety were highly serious as perceived by their teachers as supported by the overall weighted mean of 3.66.

Further, the very highly serious problem encountered was refusal to go to school as evidenced by the mean of 4.93. Also, unrealistic and lasting worry that something bad will happen to them was rated as very high serious problem as indicated by the mean of 4.93. Problems which were considered as highly serious are the following as arranged in descending means: Fear of being alone, (4.18); complaints of physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomachaches, on school days, (4.14) and wetting or pant urination (4.13). Also, the kindergarten learners do not trust their teachers as evidenced by the mean of 2.78.

Furthermore, the not at all serious problem encountered was that kindergarten learners do not eat and take the snacks because of excessive anxiety as evidenced by the mean of 1.50.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are derived: (1) The kindergarten learners vary in their profile variables; (2) Separation anxiety among learners is sometimes prevalent; (3) Age, sex and parents' highest educational background of the kindergarten learners do not differ along separation anxiety. However, their parents' occupation and birth order do; (4) Problems encountered by the kindergarten learners with separation anxiety were highly serious and (5) Intervention program is designed to minimize the prevalence of separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils.

On the bases of the conclusions formulated, the following recommendations are drawn: (1) The kindergarten learners should be; (2) Separation anxiety is just sometimes prevalent among kindergarten learners, this should still be given priority because this might lead to negativism and egocentrism among children; (3) It is quite good to note that the occupation of parents and birth order significantly differ in terms of separation anxiety among kindergarten learners, however, since parents are very significant along development of the children. Therefore, they should aim and desire to finish their studies to better lead their children and have the wider knowledge and understanding in terms of anxiety



management of children; (4) Problems are considered inevitable part of life. However, since the problems are assessed as highly serious, therefore, these should be given enough attention to make it just moderate or, if not, just slight and (5) The intervention program is perceived as affective. Therefore, it should be conducted among teachers of the kindergarten program.

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