THE CONTRIBUTION OF SEPARATION ANXIETY TO THE EMERGENCE OF SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIOR AMONG FIRST-YEAR PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract:
        This study seeks to reveal the extent to which separation anxiety contributes to the emergence of school refusal behavior, as well as to identify the levels of both separation anxiety and school refusal behavior among first-year primary school pupils. The clinical method was adopted, relying on case study, observation, interview, the Separation Anxiety Test by Aida and Al-Samiri Najah (2009), and the School Refusal Scale for children and parents, translated and standardized for the Arab context by researcher Hana Mazael Al-Dhahabi (2017). These tools were applied to three cases of first-year primary school pupils aged six years. The results concluded the following:
- Separation anxiety contributes to the emergence of school refusal behavior.
- A higher level of separation anxiety leads to a higher level of school refusal behavior.

Keywords: Separation anxiety, school refusal behavior, fear of school, unauthorized absenteeism.

Introduction:

The problem of children refusing to go to school has preoccupied researchers and psychotherapists across all fields concerned with children and adolescents since this phenomenon first emerged as a subject of study among scholars in the 1930s. At that time, all forms of continuous school absence were considered truancy until the 1940s, when the term evolved to its current meaning: the child's fear of school, distinguished from truancy, separation anxiety from the attachment figure (the mother), or legitimate school absence (Al-Asimi, 2007, p. 36).

The seriousness of this problem is evident in that it is not limited to a particular age stage but may occur at any age and at any point in the student's educational journey. This highlights the severity of the issue and, consequently, the importance of addressing it seriously by identifying the underlying causes as a first step and working toward prevention as much as possible within the school environment (Bani Ahmed, 2013, p. 05).

Fears are usually more frequent in early childhood due to the child's limited ability to perceive the external world and understand its events, which is a natural matter. Examples include fear of animals, fear of the dark, and fear of strangers. These fears quickly fade away with some guidance, care, and counseling. However, some fears may appear during middle childhood in a manner that differs in form, type, severity, and persistence. Such fears are often

linked to new situations the child encounters, such as school as a new environment. Al-Asimi (2007, p. 21) indicates that the most widespread fear in middle childhood is fear of school or refusal to attend it, which may appear upon the child's first enrollment or later after attending for some time.

Children often express this fear through difficulty in regularly attending school, which can be observed in behaviors such as protest, refusal, defiance, crying, or at times making unconvincing excuses when forced to go. This protest is frequently accompanied by intense emotional and affective disturbances that may lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or vomiting. Broadwin considers fear and anxiety to be the main distinguishing features of the problem of prolonged school absence.

Johnson et al. (1941) clarified that the first use of the term *"school phobia"* was to describe children who experience excessive anxiety (beyond the normal limit) when attending school, due to the presence of separation anxiety in the child (Bani Ahmed, 2013, p. 6).

In the same context, Patterson indicated that most of those who studied cases of school phobia agree that the stimulus which triggers anxiety reactions or responses in the child does not originate from the school itself, but rather lies, to some extent, in situations reflecting the effect of the child's separation from his parents, especially the mother (Shafik, 2020, p. 57).

1- Problematic

The child's transition from the family to school is considered a critical stage in both the child's life and the lives of those around him. This transition requires proper preparation beforehand to ensure his adjustment to new experiences. The family plays a major role in preparing for this shift to the school environment, providing the child with concepts and skills that enable him to be psychologically and socially ready for temporary separation from home. However, when the family fails to fulfill this role, the child suffers from a common problem in schools—separation anxiety—which is characterized by anxiety related to separation from the mother, in addition to excessive fear. This condition affects approximately 4–10% of children and may persist into adolescence (Jouda & Abdelhalim, 2023, p. 220).

This issue is largely due to the child's lack of a sense of security away from the family, resulting from overprotection, dependence on adults, and the parents' excessive expression of fear for the child. When the child enters school for the first time, he feels he is entering a new place without his family members, who provide him with security and reassurance. This leads to symptoms of separation anxiety from the family, which are often followed by school refusal. The consequences of separation anxiety among children are considered highly serious, as they may eventually result in academic failure, social withdrawal, and exposure to emotional episodes and psychosomatic symptoms that reflect the child's refusal to attend school, as well as manifestations of poor personal and social adjustment (Rabie, 2012, p. 712).

Usually, the child overcomes these fears after spending a few days at school. However, the situation may escalate and take the form of a psychological disorder with hidden and serious effects, referred to as **school refusal**, which occurs when the child fails to overcome these fears and the situation becomes more complicated, turning into a pathological condition that may persist until adolescence. According to Inglés et al. (2018), a child suffering from this disorder experiences severe distress and anxiety at the thought of going to school, which may lead to psychological vulnerability and an inability to activate the skills that support psychological and social adjustment. Similarly, Ajurriaguerra (2016) described those children as showing resistance to the idea of going to school for unreasonable reasons, and this refusal manifests in strong and

acute responses that may escalate to panic attacks. Kearney (2008) also noted that the term *school refusal* refers to chronic absenteeism from school rooted in anxiety, which often results from separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, or social anxiety.

Separation anxiety is often considered responsible for school refusal, as reflected in the theoretical literature addressing the causes of separation anxiety, which typically manifests in a child's desire to stay at home and anxiety about being separated from one or both parents. King et al. (1995) found that children who refuse school are children suffering from anxiety, with estimates suggesting that nearly 75% of children diagnosed with separation anxiety also experience school refusal. This hinders their ability to attend school, consequently weakening or reducing their academic performance, and leading to peer isolation, which particularly affects emotional development. Similarly, Egger et al. (2003) demonstrated a statistically significant positive correlation between separation anxiety and school refusal, showing that the higher the level of school refusal, the greater the psychological disturbances in the child.

Nasser (2017) reported elevated indicators of separation anxiety among children enrolled in kindergarten, revealing that many children lagged in attending school, experienced weak or declining academic performance, and tended to isolate themselves from peers. The study also revealed statistically significant differences in separation anxiety among children according to gender, in favor of females (Alazzam & Aljarah, 2024, p. 33).

In the same context, Aljarah (2018) aimed to examine the relationship between school refusal and separation anxiety among a sample of first-grade elementary students aged 5–6 years. The results showed that separation anxiety accounted for 23% of school refusal and was a stronger predictor of school refusal (Alsharafi, 2021, p. 352).

Given the noticeable increase in the number of children who suffer from refusal and fear of school, this phenomenon has become a significant problem and a major cause of loss of learning motivation, accompanied by personal, familial, and social consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate this disorder by attempting to understand it, identify its signs, and, based on this, formulate and define the problem of the current study through the following research questions:

- Does separation anxiety contribute to the emergence of school refusal behavior?
- Does a higher level of separation anxiety lead to an increase in school refusal behavior?

2. Research Hypotheses

- Separation anxiety contributes to the emergence of school refusal behavior.
- A higher level of separation anxiety leads to a higher level of school refusal behavior.

3. Research Objectives

The main objective of any study is to verify the validity of the proposed hypotheses or otherwise. Accordingly, the present study aims to:

- Investigate the extent to which separation anxiety contributes to the emergence of school refusal behavior.
- Identify the level of separation anxiety among students refusing to attend school.
- Identify the level of school refusal behavior among first-year primary school pupils.

4. Significance of the Study

The importance of the present study lies in the nature of the topic addressed, as it combines separation anxiety with the problem of school refusal experienced by some pupils in primary education. This issue may persist throughout different developmental and educational stages if it is not identified and addressed early.

The significance of this study also derives from the nature of the sample, which consists of first-year primary school pupils who have not received sufficient attention within the Algerian context.

- The findings of this study will contribute to the effective planning of treatment and intervention programs that help reduce separation anxiety, thereby eliminating the problem of school refusal.
- In addition, this study enriches the psychological literature with a new clinical investigation that may be useful for future research, given the scarcity of studies that have examined these variables together in a clinical framework within the Algerian environment, to the best of our knowledge.

5. Operational Definitions
5.1. Separation Anxiety:
Excessive and persistent anxiety expressed as fear of possible separation from one of the parents, most often the mother, accompanied by physiological, emotional, and behavioral changes. It affects the child's social, academic, and psychological relationships. In this study, it is assessed through the responses of first-year primary school pupils on the Separation Anxiety Scale applied in the research.

5.2. School Refusal:
A condition characterized by repeated absenteeism from school, difficulty going to school, or difficulty remaining in school or in the classroom throughout the day. This refusal is usually accompanied by anxiety, emotional distress, unexplained somatic complaints, and irrational fears related to school. In this study, it is assessed through the score obtained by the child on the *Kearney & Silverman* School Refusal Assessment Scale used in the current research.

6. Tools and Method
6.1. Method:
The clinical method was adopted, as it is the most appropriate for an in-depth and detailed study of individual cases and is suitable for achieving the objectives of this study.

6.2. Study Boundaries:
The study included the following boundaries:

A. Temporal boundaries: Conducted during October 2025.

B. Spatial boundaries: Carried out in some primary schools in Saïda Province (Algeria).

C. Human boundaries: The sample consisted of three cases, each aged six years, all of whom suffered from school refusal.

6.3. Study Instruments and Their Psychometric Properties
To achieve the objectives of this study, the following instruments were used:

First: Separation Anxiety Scale

This scale was developed by Saleh Aida and Al-SumairiNajah (2009). It consists of 42 items, rated on a three-point scale: high (3), medium (2), and low (1). Since the scale contains 42 items, the total score ranges from 42 to 126. Construct validity and reliability were assessed using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.88, while Cronbach's alpha was 0.94, indicating high internal consistency.

In the study conducted by Imanbint Ail bin Rashid Al-Farsi (2018), seven items were removed from the scale. The scale's validity and internal consistency were confirmed, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.82. Consequently, the current study used the revised scale containing 35 items, with total scores ranging from 35 to 105.

Psychometric Properties of the Separation Anxiety Scale in the Algerian Context

Researchers Amrouch and Maouch calculated the psychometric properties of the Separation Anxiety Scale in Algeria in their study titled "Separation Anxiety and Its Relationship with Addiction to Electronic Games among Primary School Students." Based on their results, the current study adopted the psychometric properties as applied in the Algerian context.

a. Extreme Groups Validity

This was verified by selecting one-third of the total sample, equivalent to 30 students. Ten students with the lowest scores and ten students with the highest scores on the scale were included. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 1: Extremes Comparison Validity for the Separation Anxiety Scale

Variable	Indicator	Number	F	Sig	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	T	Sig
Separation Anxiety	Lowest	10	0.13	0.72	53.20	4.96	18	-9.56	0.000
	Highest	10			74.30	4.90			

It can be observed from the data in the table on discriminant validity between the two groups that there is a statistically significant difference in the level of separation anxiety between the lowest and highest groups, with a calculated T-value of -9.56, which is significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the scale is considered valid.

b. Reliability Using Cronbach's Alpha:

Cronbach's alpha formula was used for the total scale score (35 items) with a sample of 30 participants, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.80. This high value indicates that the scale is reliable (Amrouch&Maouch, 2025, p. 645).

Second: School Refusal Scale for Children and Parents (SRAS-P/C):

1.Definition:

The original version of this scale was developed by Kearney & Silverman (1993). It was translated and standardized for the Arabic context by HanaaMazal Al-Dhahabi (2017). The researcher translated the original version into Arabic with the assistance of an English language specialist to ensure literal translation and preserve all main and detailed concepts. The translation was then reviewed by several specialists in English and Arabic to ensure accuracy, validity, and precision.

2. Scoring of the Scale:

Participants are asked to respond to the scale items by choosing one of the six available options, as follows:

- **Never** (أبداً) in the original scale, weighted **0**.
- **Seldom** (نادراً) in the original scale, weighted **1**.
- **Sometimes** (بعض الأحيان) in the original scale, weighted **2**.
- **Usually** (عادة) in the original scale, weighted **3**.
- **Almost Always** (دائماً تقريب) in the original scale, weighted **4**.
- **Always** (دائماً) in the original scale, weighted **5**.

One option from the original English version, "Half the Time", was removed because there is no precise equivalent in commonly used Arabic.

According to the available options and their weights, the total score for the scale ranges from 0 to 120. By analyzing this score into five categories based on the available options, the classification shown in the following table is obtained:

Table 2: Raw Scores and Levels of School Refusal Scale

Raw Scores	School Refusal Levels
0-24	No school refusal behavior
25-48	Low level of school refusal behavior
49-72	Moderate level of school refusal behavior
73-96	High level of school refusal behavior
97-120	Very high level of school refusal behavior

The child's total score is calculated by summing the score obtained from the School Refusal Scale for Children and the score obtained from the Parent-Directed School Refusal Scale, then dividing the sum by 2. If the parent-directed scale is administered separately to the mother and the father, the three scores are summed and divided by 3, according to the following formula:

$$SRAS\_T = (SRAS\_Child + SRAS\_Mother + SRAS\_Father) / 3$$

3. Conceptual dimensions of the scale:

The main dimensions measured by the scale consist of four primary functions, as outlined by Kearney & Silverman (1993). These functions enhance the emergence of school refusal behavior and are as follows:

3.1. Avoidance of school-related stimuli that evoke general negative emotions:

These items concern negative feelings toward school, such as depression and sadness associated with school, thoughts about school, feelings of fear, anxiety, and sadness at school, enjoyment of non-school-related activities during holidays, school-related emotions and their connection to resistance to attending school, and comparison of the child's school-related feelings with those of other children toward the same school.

3.2. Avoidance of aversive social and/or evaluative situations at school:

These items address the child staying away from school because it is difficult to interact with other children, feeling embarrassed in the presence of others, not knowing or having friends at school, the ease of making new friends, and the extent to which the child avoids people at school more than other children of the same age.

3.3. Pursuit of attention from significant others:

These items reflect the child's or parents' perception of the child's desire to stay at home to remain with parents, thinking about parents while at school, preference for learning with parents at home rather than with the teacher at school, and the desire to stay with family more than other children of the same age.

3.4. Pursuit of tangible reinforcement outside the school environment:

These items assess the extent to which the child engages in play and enjoyment during weekly or summer holidays, interacts with others outside school hours, spends time with friends or favored individuals during holidays, the link between school refusal and the child's desire to play and enjoy activities outside school, whether the child accepts going to school if allowed to

do preferred activities afterward, and whether the child engages in preferred activities outside school more than other children of the same age.

Table 03: Key Aspects of the School Refusal Scale

Item Numbers	School Refusal Scale Domains	Domain Order
1-5-9-13-17-21	Function of avoiding school-related stimuli that elicit general negative emotions	1
2-6-10-14-18-22	Function of escaping from disliked social and/or evaluative situations at school	2
3-7-11-15-19	Function of avoiding school-related stimuli that elicit general negative emotions	3
4-8-12-16-20-24	Function of seeking tangible reinforcement outside the school environment	4

The total score for each function ranges from 0 to 30. A score between 0 and 6 indicates the absence of the functional determinants measured by the items; 7–12 indicates a low level of the function measured; 13–18 indicates a moderate level; 19–24 indicates a high level; and 25–30 indicates a very high level of the function measured by the items.

4. Psychometric Properties in the Algerian Context:

The researcher, Senoussi Abdelrahman (2023, p. 133), calculated the psychometric properties of the School Refusal Scale in the Algerian context in his dissertation entitled "Psychological Intervention for School Refusal Behavior among Primary School Students: A Field Study in Tlemcen Province." Accordingly, these properties were adopted as they are validated in the Algerian context.

4.1 Validity:

a. **Internal consistency validity:**

This was verified by calculating the correlation coefficients between the score of each item and the total score, as well as between the items and the total scale score, and between the scale domains represented by the four functions of school refusal behavior. All correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

b. **Discriminant validity using extreme group comparison:**

To assess the scale's validity, the researcher arranged the total scores of the exploratory sample in ascending order and selected the lowest 27% of scores, which included 16 individuals, as well as the highest 27% of scores, which also included 16 individuals with the highest scores. A comparison was conducted between the two groups using the independent samples T-test after calculating the mean scores of both groups, as shown in the following table:

Table 04: Means of the highest and lowest groups according to the results of the School Refusal Scale application.

Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Number of Participants	Group
47.25	12.487	16	Lowest Group
99.44	2.449	16	Highest Groupe

Table 05: Results of the Differences Between the Highest and Lowest Groups According to the School Refusal Scale Results on the Exploratory Sample

Confidence Interval		T-test to calculate the differences between two independent groups			Levene's Test for Variance and Homogeneity		
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Statistical Significance	Degrees of Freedom	T Value	Sig (Statistical Significance)	F Value	
UpperValue	LowerValue						
-45.690	-58.685	0.0000	30	-16.405	0.0000	71.587	Assuming Homogeneity
-45.449	-58.926	0.0000	16.152	-16.405			Not Assuming Homogeneity

According to Levene's test for homogeneity between the two groups, the F coefficient for variance is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, we take the T-test values between the two groups under the condition of non-homogeneity.

From the table, we observe that the T-test value between the lower group and the upper group of the sample, under the condition of non-homogeneity, is (-16.405). This value is statistically significant at the 0.01 level with 30 degrees of freedom, in favor of the upper group.

Hence, the scale demonstrates a good level of discriminant validity between the sample individuals in terms of the trait measured by the scale.

2.4- Reliability: It was calculated through:

a- Reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient:** After calculating Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency, the researcher obtained a value of 0.955 (95%), which indicates a very high and good reliability coefficient.

b- Reliability using the Split-Half method:** The correlation coefficient between the first half and the second half was 0.932, and after correction using the Guttman formula, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.964. This is illustrated in the following table:

Table (06): Calculation of the reliability of the School Rejection Scale using the Split-Half method

0.9160	Value	First part
12[a]	Number of items	
0.9060	Value	Second part
12[b]	Number of items	
24	Number of items	
0.9640	Correction of the Correlation Coefficient using Guttman Formula	
Items of the first part: Items 01 to 12 Items of the second part: Items 13 to 24		

(Snousawi, 2023, p.134)

In this study, interviews, observation, and reviewing the medical files of the cases were also relied upon.

7- Presentation of Results:

1.7- Case Presentation:

First Case:

The case "Tim," a 6-year-old boy, enrolled in the first year of primary school, is the only child in the family. His mother is 26 years old, a housewife, while his father is a 35-year-old trader with an average social and economic status. The parents are separated, and the child lives with his mother.

Through interviews with the mother, she stated that "Tim" is very attached to her and never leaves her side. He clings to her every morning and prefers to stay with her and learn at home rather than go to school. He accompanies her everywhere she goes, and sometimes follows her from room to room while she is doing household chores — something she allows. Often, she even tries to keep him at home for companionship and out of fear that something might happen to him at school.

The teacher, on the other hand, mentioned that "Tim" is frequently absent from school, shows little attention in class, refuses to integrate into the school environment, and resists being

there. He often complains of illness, frequent headaches, and stomachaches while in class, accompanied by persistent crying, which negatively affects his relationship with the teacher, as she becomes frustrated with his behavior and punishes him.

Meanwhile, "Tim" stated that he feels body fatigue when his mother is away, experiences shortness of breath, and suffers from anxiety and intense fear of his mother leaving or something bad happening to her. He also mentioned that he always sleeps beside her and fears sleeping alone away from her.

2.7- Presentation of the Results of Applying the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales:

By applying the two scales, the results obtained are presented in the following table:

Table (07): Results of the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales for the First Case

	Total Score	Level
Separation Anxiety	**74**	High
School Refusal	**76**	High

The total score obtained after applying the Separation Anxiety Scale to the case "Tim" was (74). According to the correction key of this scale, it corresponds to a high level of separation anxiety in the case.

Similarly, the total score obtained after applying the School Refusal Scale to the case was (76). Based on the correction key, it also corresponds to a high level of school refusal.

What reinforces this school refusal behavior is the presence of high levels in the dimensions of avoiding school-related stimuli, escaping from social situations within the school environment, seeking parental and caregiver attention at home, and striving for tangible reinforcement outside the school setting.

Khawlais a 6-year-old girl in the first year of primary school, the first-born among her siblings. She lives with her parents and brother. The family's living standard is average: her father is a 49-year-old employee, and her mother is a 36-year-old housewife.

Interviews with the mother revealed that the child is strongly attached to her and cannot stay away from her. If separation occurs, she expresses her refusal through crying and screaming. This insecure attachment appeared after the mother became ill and was hospitalized for a month. Upon her return, the mother noticed the child's intense fear of separation and her repeated questions about the possibility of being left again, along with persistent insistence on sleeping in the same bed with her mother because she fears sleeping alone. Since that time, she has refused to attend school, especially as the separation episode happened just two weeks after starting. This refusal is accompanied by stomach pain, nausea, and headaches.

From the child's own account, it became clear that she is unsocial, dislikes school, and is constantly fearful, as she stated: "I am afraid of losing my mother," and "I am afraid something bad will happen to her."

The teacher confirmed that she often observed the child resisting entering school every morning. She clings to her mother's clothes, who always accompanies her, and refuses to let go or enter the classroom. This forces the mother to hit her and push her inside by force. With her continuous crying and screaming, the teacher resorts to punishing her, and sometimes asks the mother to stay for a while with the child.

3.7- Presentation of the Results of Applying the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales:

By applying the two scales, the results obtained are shown in the following table:

Table (08): Results of the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales for the Second Case

	Total Score	Level
Separation Anxiety	**87**	High
School Refusal	**106**	Very High

The total score obtained after applying the Separation Anxiety Scale to the case was (87). According to the correction key of this scale, it corresponds to a high level of separation anxiety in the child.

The total score obtained after applying the School Refusal Scale to the case was (106). Based on the correction key, it corresponds to a very high level of school refusal. What reinforces this refusal behavior is the presence of high scores in the dimensions of avoiding school-related stimuli, escaping from social situations in the school environment, and seeking parental or caregiver attention at home, while the dimension of seeking tangible reinforcement outside the school environment recorded a moderate level.

Third Case:

"Hajar" is a 6-year-old girl in the first year of primary school, the first-born among her siblings. She lives with her parents and twin brothers. The family's living standard is average: her father, 49 years old, works as a carpenter, while her 43-year-old mother works as an administrative assistant.

In interviews with the mother to collect information about the case, she stated that "Hajar" is a spoiled child with a strong attachment to her mother. She follows her everywhere, fears losing her, and is so attached that she still sleeps in the same bed with her at this age. She is afraid to go to the bathroom alone at night and fears being deprived of her mother's affection and care. She had been the only child for years, receiving all the love and indulgence of her parents, until the birth of her twin brothers, who took her place and her parents' attention.

The mother also reported that "Hajar" is afraid of going to school. Every morning she expresses this fear by crying constantly and preferring to stay home and study instead. She often claims to be ill, unlike during holidays when she shows no symptoms.

Her teacher stated that "Hajar" is withdrawn, avoids participation, and does not interact with classmates. She cannot adapt to the school environment, repeatedly asks when the lesson will end and when her mother will come to pick her up, and is frequently absent. She feels secure only in her mother's presence.

When asked about her refusal to attend school, "Hajar" explained that she fears her mother may get sick or something bad may happen to her in her absence. She feels unhappy when away from her and cries whenever she imagines being separated.

4.7- Presentation of the Results of Applying the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales:

By applying the two scales, the results obtained are presented in the following table:

Table (09): Results of the Separation Anxiety and School Refusal Scales for the Third Case

	Total Score	Level
Separation Anxiety	**77**	High
School Refusal	**74**	High

The total score obtained after applying the Separation Anxiety Scale to the case was (77). According to the correction key of this scale, it corresponds to a high level of separation anxiety in the child. The total score obtained after applying the School Refusal Scale to the case was (74). What reinforces the school refusal behavior is the high scores recorded in the dimensions of avoiding school-related stimuli, escaping from social situations within the school environment, and seeking the attention of parents and caregivers at home, in addition to the dimension of seeking tangible reinforcement outside the school environment.

8. Discussion of the Results
8.1 First Hypothesis:
Separation anxiety contributes to the emergence of school refusal.

After reviewing the study cases and relying on observation and interviews with parents and teachers, it became clear that the three cases suffer from separation anxiety, which in turn contributed to the emergence of school refusal behavior. This may be due to the fact that entering school is a new experience for the child, who is suddenly expected to face it alone after becoming accustomed to the presence of his mother.

Home represents the safe environment where the child is the center of attention, but upon entering school, he finds himself in a wide, unfamiliar world. As a result, he feels fear and anxiety about being away from his parents, especially the mother, the source of love and security. This indicates that the child's separation from his mother can hinder the gradual transition from home to school, negatively affecting his acceptance of it and leading to refusal of the school environment and all that relates to it.

This observation was evident in the study cases and was also confirmed by Woolman (1985), who emphasized that the fear of separation from the mother or the belief that staying at home prevents harm from occurring to parents are factors that contribute to school refusal.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of Thabet (2002), Egger et al. (2003), Kearney (2007), Nasser (2017), and Al-Jarrah& Al-Azzam (2024), all of whom confirmed that separation anxiety contributes to school refusal and serves as a primary predictor of this phenomenon. This result is also in agreement with the study of Biswas&Sahoo (2023), which considered separation anxiety one of the most common and prominent psychological disorders among children refusing school (Al-Jarrah& Al-Azzam, 2024, p.46).

8.2 Second Hypothesis:
Higher levels of separation anxiety lead to higher levels of school refusal.

The results showed high levels of separation anxiety among the study cases, which is considered one of the most common disorders in childhood. Bowlby(Bowlby) indicated that separation anxiety begins and intensifies when the family environment is disturbed, such as divorce or separation (as in the case of the child Tim), or when the mother leaves her child for long periods during the early years of life without adequate care, for example, due to work or

illness (as in the case of Khawla's mother). This leads the child to believe that if the mother leaves, she may not return. Consequently, the child clings to her, suffers from intense anxiety and distress in her absence, cries excessively, attaches strongly to the mother, refuses to let go, avoids going to school, resists sleeping alone, and frequently complains of physical ailments (Malal&Kebdani, 2017, p.168), all of which were observed in the study cases.

Many studies, including the one by Khalil Leila (2007), confirmed that parenting methods contribute to the development of separation anxiety in childhood, particularly overprotection, which was considered an indicator of separation anxiety in children. This aligns with the findings of May (2014), which showed a correlational relationship between parental behavior, especially overprotection, and the appearance of separation anxiety symptoms in children, a pattern that was observed in the data analysis of the case "Hajar."

The results also showed a high level of school refusal behavior among first-year primary students. This may be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted one month after the beginning of the school year. At the start of school, when the child faces a completely new environment different from the home, their struggle begins, and the problem reaches its peak according to the theoretical literature. Kearney (2001) indicated that school refusal usually lasts for a short period (less than two weeks) and can be resolved without intervention when attending school and studying for the first time (Al-Jarrah& Al-Azzam, 2024). This contrasts with the cases observed in the study, especially in the absence of psychological support and proper preparation for the transition phase.

Moreover, the study cases suffer from high levels of separation anxiety, which further increased the intensity of school refusal behavior. Nuttall& Woods (2013) emphasized that school refusal behaviors combined with anxiety affect about 1–2% of school-aged children and are likely to peak between 5 and 6 years of age. Schafer (2011) also noted that 55% of children with school refusal behavior are either the youngest or the only child in the family. In another sample, 43.8% of school refusers or school escapees were either the youngest or the only child in the family (Abu Al-Hassan, 2018, p.140).

School refusal behavior in the study cases manifested in avoiding school-related stimuli, escaping from social situations, seeking attention from parents and caregivers at home, and seeking tangible reinforcement outside the school environment.

Conclusion:

The topic of separation anxiety among school-refusing students in primary education is a subject worthy of research and study due to its importance in the psychological and educational fields. School refusal leads to numerous psychological, social, and academic problems that affect the child in the future. Some indicators signal the aggravation of this problem, including frequent absences, physical complaints, refusal to get out of bed each morning, and resisting parents' attempts to take the child to school. Factors that contribute to and reinforce school refusal behavior include separation anxiety, overprotective parenting, family conflicts, and exposure to bullying. If school refusal is not identified and addressed early, it may persist into later stages, leading to academic failure and school dropout.

Recommendations:

Based on the above, several recommendations can be proposed:
- Conduct studies on school refusal behavior with larger samples across different age groups to uncover other underlying factors behind this problem.

- Provide support to help these children reduce their separation anxiety. Early intervention is crucial to prevent them from becoming overly dependent on adults and less independent in later stages. Guiding programs should be designed to help them complete developmental stages in a healthy way.
- Prepare children psychologically for school entry by informing them that school is a new environment different from home.
- Parents should adopt proper socialization practices to prevent the development of separation anxiety in the future.
- Allow children some degree of independence so they can explore the world and develop the ability to form relationships with their external environment.

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