

Parental Anxiety and Child Separation Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Overprotective Parenting

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the mediating role of overprotective parenting in the relationship between parental anxiety and child separation anxiety.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive correlational design was employed, with a sample of 410 parent-child dyads recruited from schools in Mexico using cluster random sampling. Participants included parents of children aged 7 to 12 years. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure parental anxiety, overprotective parenting, and child separation anxiety. Data analysis was conducted in two stages: Pearson correlation analysis using SPSS-27 to assess bivariate associations, and structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS-21 to test the hypothesized mediation model. Model fit was evaluated with multiple indices, including χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA.

Findings: Correlation analyses showed that parental anxiety was significantly associated with both overprotective parenting ($r = .48, p = .001$) and child separation anxiety ($r = .42, p = .002$), while overprotective parenting was strongly related to child separation anxiety ($r = .51, p < .001$). SEM results indicated that the hypothesized model demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2 = 146.28, df = 84, \chi^2/df = 1.74, GFI = .94, AGFI = .91, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .041$). Path analysis revealed that parental anxiety significantly predicted overprotective parenting ($\beta = .46, p < .001$) and directly predicted child separation anxiety ($\beta = .25, p = .004$). Overprotective parenting significantly mediated the relationship, with an indirect effect of parental anxiety on child separation anxiety ($\beta = .22, p = .002$).

Conclusion: The findings highlight overprotective parenting as a critical mechanism through which parental anxiety contributes to child separation anxiety. Interventions aimed at reducing parental overprotection and addressing parental anxiety may serve as effective strategies for preventing and alleviating separation anxiety in children.

Keywords: Parental anxiety; child separation anxiety; overprotective parenting; mediation; structural equation modeling

1. Introduction

Anxiety disorders in children and adolescents represent one of the most prevalent categories of psychological difficulties, often beginning in early development and persisting into adulthood if left untreated. Among the most common forms of childhood anxiety is separation anxiety disorder, which is characterized by excessive distress in anticipation of or during separation from primary caregivers. A substantial body of research has highlighted the intergenerational transmission of anxiety, with parental anxiety and maladaptive parenting practices playing crucial roles in shaping child outcomes (Viswanath, 2025; Yaffe, 2025). Within this context, overprotective parenting has been conceptualized as a central mechanism through which parental anxiety fosters vulnerability in children, thereby increasing their likelihood of developing anxiety symptoms, including separation anxiety (Buss et al., 2021; Petegem et al., 2021).

Parental anxiety, whether generalized, trait-like, or separation-specific, is a well-documented predictor of child emotional problems. Parents who struggle with anxiety tend to engage in maladaptive cognitive, behavioral, and relational patterns that shape the child's developmental environment (Meyer et al., 2021; Yaffe, 2021). Evidence demonstrates that anxious parents are more likely to exhibit heightened vigilance, catastrophic interpretations of threat, and avoidance behaviors, all of which can undermine a child's sense of autonomy and security (Jones et al., 2022). For example, studies reveal that maternal anxiety interacts with physiological regulatory processes such as respiratory sinus arrhythmia, amplifying the likelihood of overprotective parenting behaviors that inadvertently communicate danger to the child (Jones et al., 2022). Similarly, prenatal maternal anxiety has been shown to predict both overprotective parenting and behavioral inhibition in infants, which together contribute to heightened risk for later anxiety (Mudra et al., 2022).

Parental anxiety not only affects child outcomes indirectly through parenting but also exerts direct effects on children's emotional well-being. Children of anxious parents report significantly higher levels of social, generalized, and separation anxiety than their peers (Elfström, 2025; Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). Research further indicates that parents' generalized and separation-specific anxieties directly increase early adolescents' vulnerability to anxiety disorders, with overparenting serving as a mediating pathway (Yaffe, 2025). These findings highlight the need to

examine parental anxiety and overprotective parenting not as isolated factors but as interrelated constructs shaping child mental health trajectories.

Overprotective parenting is defined as excessive regulation, control, and intrusion into children's activities, often motivated by parental concerns for safety or anxiety about potential harm (Elfström & Åhlén, 2024). This style limits children's opportunities for independent exploration, coping skill development, and exposure to normative stressors, thereby reinforcing avoidance and dependency (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). Overprotection has been associated with both heightened child anxiety and poor emotional regulation capacities (Chung, 2021; Mathijs et al., 2023). The intergenerational framework suggests that anxious parents often perceive the environment as more threatening than it objectively is, prompting protective behaviors that inadvertently convey to the child that the world is unsafe (Cristal-Lilov et al., 2021).

Recent psychometric advances have supported the reliable assessment of overprotective parenting through validated tools, such as the Parental Overprotection Measure, which allows researchers to quantify the construct and its associations with child outcomes (Elfström & Åhlén, 2024). Empirical findings demonstrate that overprotection mediates the link between parental psychopathology and child anxiety, including separation anxiety, thereby solidifying its role as a critical mechanism in developmental psychopathology models (Meyer et al., 2021; Petegem et al., 2021). Moreover, research shows that overprotective parenting not only affects child anxiety directly but also undermines children's academic adjustment and coping with evaluative stressors, further amplifying psychosocial risk (Li et al., 2025; Wang & Yu, 2024).

Separation anxiety disorder, though developmentally normative in early childhood, becomes maladaptive when excessive and impairing. It has been linked to parental factors such as attachment insecurity, overprotective caregiving, and parents' own separation-related anxieties (Jreisat, 2023; Yaffe, 2025). For example, studies of divorced families show that separation anxiety can mediate the relationship between psychological distress and sleep difficulties among parents denied custody, illustrating how disrupted family contexts exacerbate child vulnerabilities (Marwa et al., 2024). Similarly, maternal overprotection has been found to predict both reduced social competence and elevated anxiety in young children, underscoring the downstream impact of parenting behaviors (Chung, 2021).

Evidence further shows that children with separation anxiety often present with comorbid difficulties such as insomnia, poor school performance, and interpersonal avoidance (Marwa et al., 2024; Yıldız & Sak, 2024). Parenting behaviors play a decisive role in these outcomes: parental styles marked by high control and low warmth have been strongly associated with both separation and academic anxieties (Li et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2024). Importantly, interventions targeting parenting—particularly strategies aimed at reducing overprotection—have been shown to buffer against the onset of separation anxiety and related disorders (Åhlén et al., 2022).

Parenting styles are multifaceted, spanning dimensions of warmth, control, responsiveness, and autonomy granting. Overprotective parenting is often embedded within broader parenting styles that influence the development of perfectionism, social anxiety, and related difficulties (Aygün & Akbağ, 2025; Yang et al., 2025). For instance, authoritarian or control-heavy parenting has been found to predict adolescent anxiety both directly and indirectly, mediated by maladaptive coping strategies (Yang et al., 2025). Similarly, parenting styles characterized by rigidity or high parental expectations exacerbate educational anxieties among children, especially when coupled with pressures of extracurricular tutoring and competitive environments (Yin et al., 2024).

Cross-cultural research underscores the universality of these dynamics. Studies in Western and Asian contexts demonstrate consistent patterns whereby overprotective parenting exacerbates child anxiety symptoms, though cultural nuances shape the intensity and manifestation of these effects (Aaron et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2019). For example, research among Turkish and Korean families indicates that overprotective attitudes among mothers of adolescents are strongly associated with maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies, which in turn elevate separation anxiety (Büge & Koç, 2024; ◯ & Hee-Hwa, 2024).

The relationship between parental anxiety, overprotective parenting, and child separation anxiety is complex, involving mediating and moderating mechanisms. Emotional regulation difficulties, perfectionism, attachment patterns, and perceived control are frequently implicated as intervening variables (Mathijs et al., 2023; Nanie & Widyorini, 2023; Sahota et al., 2024). For instance, adolescents who perceive themselves as having low control over their environment show stronger associations between parental overprotection and anxiety (Nanie & Widyorini,

2023). Similarly, perfectionism has been identified as a mediator between family upbringing and test anxiety among college students (Wang & Yu, 2024).

Maternal ambivalence toward overprotective parenting adds another layer of complexity. Mothers who oscillate between protectiveness and autonomy granting may inadvertently confuse children, undermining their ability to develop stable coping strategies (Kiel et al., 2025). Additionally, temperament factors such as behavioral inhibition and harm avoidance amplify the impact of parental overprotection on child anxiety (Bahtiyar-Saygan & Berument, 2022; Buss et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies confirm that these transactional dynamics between parent and child characteristics operate bidirectionally, with anxious children eliciting greater parental protectiveness, which then reinforces child anxiety (Buss et al., 2021).

Given the robust evidence linking parental anxiety and overprotective parenting to child separation anxiety, prevention and intervention strategies increasingly target family dynamics. Brief parent training programs designed to reduce anxiety-promoting parenting behaviors have demonstrated promising results in lowering risk for child anxiety disorders (Åhlén et al., 2022). Similarly, systematic reviews emphasize the importance of parental involvement in interventions for children with inhibited temperaments, highlighting parenting as a moderator of risk trajectories (Aaron et al., 2024).

Family-based interventions also show efficacy in altering overprotective patterns. For example, parent-child interaction therapy and cognitive-behavioral approaches have been adapted to address the mediating role of overprotection in children with separation anxiety disorder (Kianoosh et al., 2023). Broader family systems models underscore that parental overprotection must be addressed not in isolation but in the context of co-parenting relationships and overall family functioning (Petegem et al., 2021). Moreover, prevention efforts in populations with specific vulnerabilities—such as children of parents with congenital heart disease—highlight the long-term benefits of promoting healthier parenting practices (Houchi, 2023).

Despite the growing literature on parental anxiety, overprotective parenting, and child anxiety, several gaps remain. First, most existing research has focused on Western samples, with fewer studies examining these dynamics in diverse cultural contexts. Second, while the mediating role of overprotective parenting has been supported, few studies have simultaneously considered both parental generalized and separation-specific anxieties in relation to child

separation anxiety. Third, although psychometric tools to assess overprotection have been developed and validated, their application in large-scale correlational and structural modeling designs remains limited (Elfström & Åhlén, 2024).

The present study addresses these gaps by investigating the mediating role of overprotective parenting in the relationship between parental anxiety and child separation anxiety.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationship between parental anxiety, overprotective parenting, and child separation anxiety, with a focus on the mediating role of overprotective parenting. The study population consisted of parents and their children living in Mexico. Based on the Morgan and Krejcie table for determining sample size, a total of 410 participants were recruited, which was considered sufficient to ensure statistical power and representativeness of the target population. Participants were selected through cluster random sampling from schools in urban districts. Inclusion criteria required parents to have a child between 7 and 12 years of age, with both parent and child willing to participate. Exclusion criteria included any parent or child with a diagnosed developmental disorder that could interfere with reliable self-reporting.

2.2. Measures

The dependent variable, child separation anxiety, can be measured using the Separation Anxiety subscale of the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) developed by Birmaher and colleagues in 1997. This subscale consists of 8 items that specifically assess symptoms of separation anxiety, such as excessive distress when anticipating or experiencing separation from caregivers. Responses are rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not true or hardly ever true”) to 2 (“very true or often true”), with higher scores indicating greater severity of separation anxiety. The SCARED and its subscales have consistently demonstrated good internal consistency, test–retest reliability, and construct validity across multiple studies in both clinical and non-clinical populations, making it one of the most widely used child anxiety assessment tools.

Parental anxiety can be assessed using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), developed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene in 1983. The STAI is a self-report instrument composed of 40 items divided into two subscales: State Anxiety (20 items), which measures transient situational anxiety, and Trait Anxiety (20 items), which measures the general tendency to perceive situations as threatening and experience anxiety across time. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 20 to 80 for each subscale, where higher scores indicate higher anxiety. The STAI has been extensively validated in diverse populations, and numerous studies have confirmed its high internal consistency, acceptable test–retest reliability, and strong construct validity, making it a standard measure for parental anxiety in clinical and research settings.

The mediating variable, overprotective parenting, can be measured using the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) developed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown in 1979. The PBI is a 25-item self-report questionnaire designed to retrospectively assess parental rearing styles along two primary dimensions: Care (12 items) and Overprotection/Control (13 items). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“very unlike”) to 3 (“very like”), with higher scores on the Overprotection dimension indicating higher levels of parental overcontrol and intrusive behaviors. The PBI has been translated into multiple languages and widely applied in clinical and community research, demonstrating strong psychometric properties including high internal consistency, test–retest reliability, and factorial validity. Its Overprotection subscale is considered a standard and reliable tool for capturing the construct of overprotective parenting.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were computed for all demographic and study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated using SPSS version 27 to examine the bivariate associations between parental anxiety, overprotective parenting, and child separation anxiety. Second, to test the hypothesized mediational model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS version 21. The adequacy of the model fit was evaluated with multiple indices including the Chi-square/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root

Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 410 participants, 252 were mothers (61.5%) and 158 were fathers (38.5%). The average age of the parents was 36.74 years ($SD = 5.82$), with 119 parents (29.0%) falling in the 25–30 age group, 141 parents (34.4%) in the

31–35 range, and 150 parents (36.6%) above 36 years. Regarding children, 202 were girls (49.3%) and 208 were boys (50.7%). In terms of education, 86 parents (21.0%) had completed secondary school, 179 parents (43.7%) held a bachelor's degree, and 145 parents (35.3%) reported postgraduate education. These distributions highlight that the sample was moderately diverse in gender, age, and education.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for study variables ($N = 410$)

Variable	M	SD
Parental Anxiety	46.38	9.27
Overprotective Parenting	32.74	7.86
Child Separation Anxiety	27.91	6.42

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables. The mean score for parental anxiety was 46.38 ($SD = 9.27$), suggesting a moderate level of anxiety among parents in the sample. Overprotective parenting behaviors had a mean score of 32.74 ($SD = 7.86$), indicating variability in the degree of parental overcontrol. Child separation anxiety showed a mean score of 27.91 ($SD = 6.42$), reflecting elevated symptoms across the participating children.

Prior to conducting correlation and SEM analyses, the necessary statistical assumptions were examined. Normality was confirmed through skewness (ranging from -0.47 to

0.62) and kurtosis values (ranging from -0.81 to 0.74), all of which were within the acceptable range of -2 to $+2$. Linearity was assessed using scatterplots, which indicated linear trends between variables. Multicollinearity was examined with variance inflation factor (VIF) values between 1.12 and 1.37 and tolerance values above 0.74, suggesting no significant multicollinearity. Homoscedasticity was supported by Levene's test results, which were non-significant (p values ranging from .124 to .218). These results confirmed that all assumptions for correlation and SEM analyses were adequately met.

Table 2

Pearson correlations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Parental Anxiety	—	.48** ($p = .001$)	.42** ($p = .002$)
2. Overprotective Parenting	.48** ($p = .001$)	—	.51** ($p < .001$)
3. Child Separation Anxiety	.42** ($p = .002$)	.51** ($p < .001$)	—

As shown in Table 2, parental anxiety was significantly correlated with overprotective parenting ($r = .48$, $p = .001$) and with child separation anxiety ($r = .42$, $p = .002$). Overprotective parenting also demonstrated a strong

positive correlation with child separation anxiety ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). These results provide initial support for the proposed mediational framework.

Table 3

Fit indices for the structural equation model

Index	Value	Recommended Cutoff
χ^2	146.28	—
df	84	—
χ^2/df	1.74	< 3.00

GFI	.94	≥ .90
AGFI	.91	≥ .90
CFI	.96	≥ .95
TLI	.95	≥ .95
RMSEA	.041	≤ .06

Table 3 shows the model fit indices for the hypothesized structural equation model. The chi-square value was 146.28 with 84 degrees of freedom, yielding a χ^2/df ratio of 1.74, which indicates good fit. Additional indices, including GFI

= .94, AGFI = .91, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, and RMSEA = .041, all met or exceeded conventional cutoff criteria, supporting the adequacy of the proposed model.

Table 4

Total, direct, and indirect effects between variables

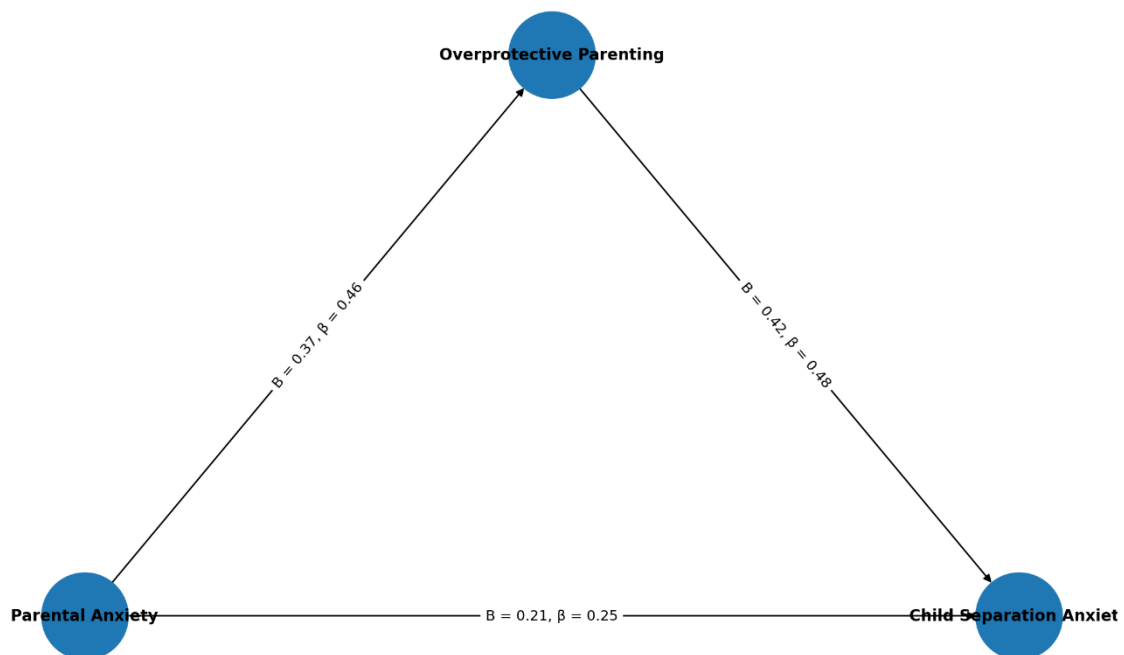
Path	b	S.E.	β	p
Parental Anxiety → Overprotective Parenting (direct)	0.37	0.08	.46	< .001
Overprotective Parenting → Child Separation Anxiety (direct)	0.42	0.09	.48	< .001
Parental Anxiety → Child Separation Anxiety (direct)	0.21	0.07	.25	.004
Parental Anxiety → Child Separation Anxiety (indirect via Overprotective Parenting)	0.16	0.05	.22	.002
Parental Anxiety → Child Separation Anxiety (total)	0.37	0.08	.47	< .001

Table 4 presents the path coefficients derived from the structural model. Parental anxiety was a significant predictor of overprotective parenting ($b = 0.37$, $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$). Overprotective parenting, in turn, significantly predicted child separation anxiety ($b = 0.42$, $\beta = .48$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of parental anxiety on child separation anxiety

remained significant ($b = 0.21$, $\beta = .25$, $p = .004$), but an additional indirect effect through overprotective parenting was also observed ($b = 0.16$, $\beta = .22$, $p = .002$). The total effect of parental anxiety on child separation anxiety was strong and significant ($b = 0.37$, $\beta = .47$, $p < .001$), confirming the mediating role of overprotective parenting.

Figure 1

Model with Beta Coefficients



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study confirmed that parental anxiety was significantly associated with child separation anxiety and that overprotective parenting mediated this relationship. These results provide robust support for intergenerational models of anxiety transmission, highlighting the role of parenting behaviors in linking parent and child vulnerabilities. The use of both correlational analyses and structural equation modeling provided evidence not only of direct associations but also of the explanatory mechanisms by which parental anxiety manifests in child outcomes. The present findings extend prior work and contribute to the growing literature on the mediational role of overprotective parenting in child anxiety trajectories.

The first key result was that parental anxiety was positively correlated with child separation anxiety. This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating that anxious parents often pass on maladaptive coping patterns and heightened threat appraisals to their children (Viswanath, 2025; Yaffe, 2025). Children of anxious parents are exposed to environments where vigilance, avoidance, and catastrophic thinking are modeled, making them more vulnerable to developing separation-related fears (Meyer et al., 2021; Yaffe, 2021). The results also resonate with research showing that maternal anxiety interacts with physiological and contextual factors, such as maternal respiratory sinus arrhythmia, to amplify protective behaviors and increase child anxiety (Jones et al., 2022). Similarly, prenatal maternal anxiety has been documented as a precursor to heightened behavioral inhibition and later anxiety symptoms through parenting pathways (Mudra et al., 2022).

Another important finding was the significant mediating effect of overprotective parenting. This suggests that parental anxiety alone is not sufficient to explain child separation anxiety; rather, its influence is transmitted through parenting practices characterized by excessive control, intrusion, and limited autonomy granting. This supports the view that overprotective parenting is not simply a consequence of child anxiety but an independent mechanism that bridges parental psychopathology and child outcomes (Buss et al., 2021; Petegem et al., 2021). Our findings parallel those of prior studies demonstrating that overprotective behaviors communicate environmental threat, inhibit skill acquisition, and promote avoidance, thereby intensifying child anxiety (Elfström & Åhlén, 2024; Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022).

The significance of overprotective parenting as a mediator in this study is consistent with evidence from diverse contexts. For instance, adolescents perceiving overprotective parents report elevated social anxiety, mediated by difficulties in emotion regulation (Mathijs et al., 2023). Similarly, maladaptive emotion regulation and perfectionism have been identified as pathways through which parenting styles influence child anxiety (Wang & Yu, 2024; Yin et al., 2024). Our results also resonate with cross-cultural evidence: in Chinese samples, overprotective parenting was strongly related to academic anxiety, while in Turkish and Korean contexts, overprotection was linked with interpersonal distortions and separation anxiety (Büge & Koç, 2024; Li et al., 2025; ㄱ & Hee-Hwa, 2024). Taken together, these findings reinforce the cross-cultural universality of overprotection as a risk factor for child anxiety, despite cultural variations in its expression.

This study also adds to the literature by highlighting separation anxiety as a specific domain of vulnerability. Previous research has shown that separation anxiety mediates associations between parental distress and outcomes such as insomnia or poor social competence (Chung, 2021; Marwa et al., 2024). Our findings are consistent with these, demonstrating that separation anxiety in children is not merely an isolated symptom but part of a broader cascade of maladaptive outcomes linked to parenting. Moreover, studies have documented associations between parental overprotection and comorbid difficulties such as insomnia and loneliness (Kianoosh et al., 2023; Marwa et al., 2024), which suggests that the effects observed in the present study may extend beyond separation anxiety into other domains of functioning.

Our results also converge with systematic reviews emphasizing the moderating and mediating roles of parenting in child anxiety. Reviews of inhibited temperament show that parenting can either buffer or amplify child anxiety trajectories (Aaron et al., 2024; Bahtiyar-Saygan & Berument, 2022). The present findings support this by showing that even in the presence of parental anxiety, child outcomes are strongly influenced by whether parents adopt overprotective strategies. Parenting styles more broadly—such as authoritarian, permissive, or democratic—interact with parental anxiety to shape adolescent well-being (Aygün & Akbağ, 2025; Yang et al., 2025; Yıldız & Sak, 2024). Within this broader typology, overprotection emerges as one of the most consistently maladaptive dimensions, especially in predicting separation-related anxiety (Elfström, 2025).

The mediating model supported by this study also has strong theoretical grounding in family systems and developmental psychopathology frameworks. According to these perspectives, child anxiety must be understood within reciprocal parent–child transactions, where parental overprotection is both a cause and consequence of child distress (Buss et al., 2021; Petegem et al., 2021). Our findings suggest that parental anxiety creates an environment conducive to overprotection, which then fosters child separation anxiety, completing a transactional cycle that reinforces maladaptive outcomes.

Finally, the present findings align with intervention research demonstrating the effectiveness of parent-focused programs in reducing child anxiety risk. For instance, brief parent training interventions designed to reduce overprotection have been shown to buffer against child anxiety onset (Åhlén et al., 2022). By identifying overprotection as a mediator, our study provides additional justification for targeting this parenting dimension in preventive programs.

A broader integration of the literature highlights several converging themes. First, parental anxiety emerges as a robust predictor of child anxiety across contexts, with evidence extending from Western populations to Asian and Middle Eastern samples (Fernandes et al., 2022; Houchi, 2023; Wong et al., 2019). Second, overprotective parenting consistently functions as a mechanism through which parental traits shape child outcomes, whether in relation to social, separation, or academic anxieties (Elfström & Åhlén, 2024; Nanie & Widyorini, 2023; Yin et al., 2024). Third, cultural, familial, and temperamental moderators complicate these dynamics, highlighting that while the pathways are universal, their expression is context-dependent (Kiel et al., 2025; Yaffe, 2024).

For example, maternal ambivalence regarding overprotective practices has been linked to greater anxiety outcomes, suggesting that inconsistency in parenting may exacerbate risk (Kiel et al., 2025). Additionally, gender differences in parenting effects have been documented, with parental variables interacting differently for boys and girls in predicting social anxiety (Fernandes et al., 2022). Cognitive and emotional mediators, including perceived control, maladaptive regulation strategies, and perfectionism, further elaborate the mechanisms at play (Nanie & Widyorini, 2023; Wang & Yu, 2024; ◯ & Hee-Hwa, 2024). Our findings therefore reinforce the multifaceted and transactional nature of the parental anxiety–child anxiety link, while underscoring the centrality

of overprotection as a target for both theoretical and clinical models.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the strengths of this study, several limitations warrant attention. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Although the findings are consistent with theoretical models positing mediation, longitudinal research is needed to establish the temporal sequence of parental anxiety, overprotection, and child separation anxiety. Second, reliance on self-report measures may have introduced bias, as parental and child perceptions of anxiety and parenting may differ from objective observations. Third, although the sample size was robust and based on established sampling tables, the study was conducted within a Mexican context, which may limit generalizability to other cultural populations. Cross-cultural replications are necessary to examine the extent to which these findings apply across diverse parenting norms. Finally, while the model included parental anxiety and overprotection, other potential variables such as child temperament, attachment security, and peer influences were not measured, leaving the model necessarily partial.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to clarify the developmental pathways linking parental anxiety, overprotection, and child separation anxiety. Multi-informant and observational methods would strengthen the validity of findings by triangulating reports from parents, children, and independent raters. Cross-cultural comparative studies are also needed to examine cultural moderators, as norms surrounding parenting and autonomy may influence the expression of overprotective behaviors and their impact on child anxiety. Additionally, future studies could explore resilience factors, such as parental warmth or child coping skills, that buffer against the negative effects of parental anxiety and overprotection. Expanding the scope of research to include biological and physiological markers, such as cortisol reactivity or neural correlates of anxiety, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational transmission processes.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of addressing parental anxiety in clinical interventions targeting child separation anxiety. Parent-focused psychoeducation and therapy can reduce overprotective tendencies by enhancing awareness of how such behaviors reinforce child anxiety. Integrating parenting modules into child-focused interventions can improve

outcomes by addressing both sides of the parent–child dynamic. Preventive programs in schools and communities should also include components that teach parents strategies for promoting autonomy and resilience in children. At a policy level, initiatives that support parental mental health services and parenting training can have long-term benefits in reducing the intergenerational transmission of anxiety.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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