

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

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ABSTRACT

Separation anxiety is one of the most commonly occurring forms of anxiety across the age groups. Although it is a healthy emotion to experience, it could lead to the development of separation anxiety disorder if not kept in check. The separation anxiety disorder may have a substantial influence on people of all ages and stages of life, leading to a large amount of damage in those who suffer from it. Let alone humans, even pets may suffer from separation anxiety. The purpose of this paper is to offer a thorough review of the research that has previously been conducted on separation anxiety, with a particular emphasis on the epidemiology, etiology, evaluation, and therapy of the illness. According to epidemiological research, separation anxiety is a common condition, with a lifetime prevalence rate of 7% among adults and up to 15% among children. Furthermore, the lifetime prevalence rate is highest among adults. Etiological research has found a variety of elements, including both genetic and environmental aspects that play a role in the development of separation anxiety. Examining the neurological processes that cause separation anxiety is one of the prospective paths that might be pursued in the course of future study. Additionally, there is a need to examine the influence that cultural and environmental variables have on the experience of separation anxiety, as well as a need to create preventative techniques that might reduce the likelihood of having this disease.

Keywords: *Separation Anxiety, Separation Anxiety Disorder, Adults, Children, Pets*

Aristotle rightly said “man is a social animal”, and we as human beings have only evolved to prove him right with the passage of time. This is a widely accepted notion for various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology etc. It is our innate tendency to build relationships and establish communities. These relationships fulfil their inherent needs for communication, connection as well as companionship, contributing to a crucial part of their identity and wellbeing. This social interaction also provides us, a sense of security, safety and belongingness. Families, tribes, villages, cities, and nations are just a few of the different social institutions that humans have created throughout history. These organizations give people a sense of identification, security, and belonging. Also, social contacts are very important in determining our attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

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Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

Living in groups provided many benefits, including protection, access to resources, the ability to reproduce and pass on genes to future generations, and this is why, from an evolutionary perspective, humans have evolved to be social beings.

Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have studied this idea in great detail and emphasized the significance of social interaction in human growth and wellbeing. For instance, it has been discovered that social support significantly affects both physical and mental health outcomes, and social isolation and loneliness have been associated with poor health outcomes.

As a byproduct of forming relationships, humans also sometimes end up getting emotionally attached; to people, animals or maybe even things. British psychologist, Bowlby defined attachment as "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings."

"Attachment theory is a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and the many forms of emotional distress and disturbance, which include anxiety, anger, and depression, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise." (Bowlby, 2015)

Bowlby's attachment theory explains how attachment develops between infants and their care givers and how this attachment affects later development and relationships. It was first proposed by John Bowlby and later developed by Mary Ainsworth and others. This theory proposes that infants bond with their primary care giver, usually the mother, through a process of frequent physical contact, soothing responses, and consistent caregiving. The child's sense of security and trust in their care giver serve as the foundation for this attachment.

Humans continue to form attachments with other people as they mature and change, including their family members, friends, romantic partners, and even pets. Mutual trust and support, emotional ties, and shared experiences all contribute to the development of these attachments. Attachment is significant because it can crucially affect one's mental and emotional health.

But when relationships end or a loved one passes away, attachment can also result in grief and feelings of loss. Although attachment is a complicated and occasionally challenging aspect of human emotions, it is also a quintessential component of what makes us human.

Sometimes when relationships are on the verge of breaking or when a loved one passes away, individuals left behind may feel anxious specifically due to the process of separation. This state so experienced, maybe termed as separation anxiety. Even infants, upon separation from their caregiver may experience separation anxiety. "Separation anxiety refers to excessive fear or worry about separation from home or an attachment figure." (Psychology today, 2021) Pets, like humans, can also suffer from separation anxiety. Separation anxiety in pets is a behavioral condition that arises when an animal gets separated from its human parent or primary caretaker and becomes anxious and exhibits behavioral changes.

When talking about separation anxiety, the two major works which hold primary importance are the attachment theory by John Bowlby and the separation theory by Robert Firestone.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

Merriam-Webster defines separation anxiety as “a form of anxiety experienced by a young child and caused by separation from a significant nurturant figure and typically a parent or from familiar surroundings.”

A strong sense of attachment is a prerequisite to experience the suffering that separation causes. Thus, the foundation of separation anxiety lies in attachment. “The cause of fear and anxiety is attachment. It makes us yearn for the object of attachment and fear separation from it. The moment we become detached from material objects, we become fearless. The devotees are not only free from attachment; they also are in harmony with the will of God. Hence, they experience neither fear nor anxiety.” (Bhagavad Gita, chapter 12)

Hence, the importance of attachment theory cannot be overlooked, when discussing separation anxiety.

Attachment Theory-

Originally developed by John Bowlby, a British psychologist, this theory seeks to understand the acute despair experienced by infants when separated from their caregivers, which usually is the mother. “Bowlby observed that separated infants would go to extraordinary lengths (e.g., crying, clinging, frantically searching) to prevent separation from their parents or to re-establish proximity to a missing parent.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018). Bowlby noted that these expressions are common to a wide variety of mammalian species and posited that these behaviors may serve an evolutionary purpose. At the time of Bowlby's initial writings; psychoanalytic scholars believed that these expressions were manifestations of immature defence mechanisms that were working to repress emotional pain.

“Bowlby postulated that these attachment behaviors, such as crying and searching, were adaptive responses to separation from a primary attachment figure--someone who provides support, protection, and care. Because human infants, like other mammalian infants, cannot feed or protect themselves, they are dependent upon the care and protection of "older and wiser" adults.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018). Bowlby discussed how infants with better proximity to the parent figure through attachment styles, could easily survive to reproductive age. He also established a motivation system, known as attachment behavioral system, which stated that natural selection was responsible for regulating proximity with the attachment figure.

The attachment behavior system becomes an integral concept here, as it establishes the link between ethological models of human development and modern theories on emotion regulation and personality. The primary question this system poses is that – “Is the attachment figure nearby, accessible, and attentive? If the child perceives the answer to this question to be "yes," he or she feels loved, secure, and confident, and, behaviorally, is likely to explore his or her environment, play with others, and be sociable. If, however, the child perceives the answer to this question to be "no," the child experiences anxiety and, behaviorally, is likely to exhibit attachment behaviors ranging from simple visual searching on the low extreme to active following and vocal signalling on the other.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018). The child may continue to exhibit the same behavior until reunited with the attachment figure to achieve the desirable level of mental or physical proximity. The child may stop behaving cranky or clingy in case of extreme fatigue. This usually occurs when the separation period is prolonged and the child suffers intense distress.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

Bowlby, in his theory identified how majority of infants would normally behave in situations of separation, but also accepted that there might be individual differences in the behavioral patterns of infants. It was his colleague, Mary Ainsworth, who designed the laboratory paradigm known as 'The strange situation' to study the individual differences in the parent-child attachment system. For this experiment, 12 months old infants along with their parents were introduced to a laboratory setting, where they were systematically separated and reunited with each other.

The results suggested that 60% of the infants behaved the way Bowlby's normative theory assumed. The infant turned upset when separated from the parent and was easily comforted upon reunion. Infants showcasing this type of behavior were termed 'secure'. Another class of children, about 20%, displayed extreme despair when the parent left the room. They were not easily soothed upon reunion and had conflicting behaviors. As much as they wanted the parent to comfort them, at the same time they had the desire to punish them for leaving. These were termed as the 'anxious-resistant' children. The third category of infants was known as 'avoidant'- and constituted about 20% of the total. They were not at all displeased about the separation and upon reunion with the parent, actively avoided contact and turned their attention someplace else.

Ainsworth's work was significant for the following reasons-

- It was the first study to empirically represent how the attachment behavior functions in secure as well as frightening conditions.
- It established the empirical taxonomy of individual differences in the attachment patterns of infants. It identified at least 3 patterns of infant behavior, namely, anxious-resistant, anxious-avoidant and those who were secure.
- It showed how infant-parent relation in the home setting during the first year, and these individual differences were correlated.

“Children who appear secure in the strange situation, for example, tend to have parents who are responsive to their needs. Children who appear insecure in the strange situation (i.e., anxious-resistant or avoidant) often have parents who are insensitive to their needs, or inconsistent or rejecting in the care they provide. In the years that have followed, a number of researchers have demonstrated links between early parental sensitivity and responsiveness and attachment security.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018)

Adult Romantic Relationships-

Although Bowlby's major focus was to explore the infant-caregiver relationship, he did believe that attachment is an experience that continues from the cradle to the grave. After his initial study, many researchers gained interest in exploring how attachment processes functioned in adulthood.

Hazan and Shaver, in 1987, for the first time tried to study Bowlby's theory with the lens of adult romantic relationships. “According to Hazan and Shaver, the emotional bond that develops between adult romantic partners is partly a function of the same motivational system--the caregivers.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018). They identified certain similarities between the two relationships. These similarities were as follows-

- Both of them feel safe when the other is around and responsive
- Both get involved in close, intimate, physical contact

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

- Both feel insecure when the other one is not accessible
- Both of them share their discoveries with each other
- Both play with one another's facial features and exhibit a mutual fascination and preoccupation with one another
- Both are involved in "baby talk"

“On the basis of these parallels, Hazan and Shaver argued that adult romantic relationships, like infant-caregiver relationships, are attachments, and that romantic love is a property of the attachment behavioral system, as well as the motivational systems that give rise to caregiving and sexuality.” (R. Chris Fraley, 2018)

The idea that adult romantic relationships may be based upon attachment relationships, has given rise to three major connotations; which are-

- If adult romantic relationships are attachment relationships, individual differences in attachment patterns similar to those of infant-caregiver relationship should be seen here. Some adults, for example, may be expected to be secure in their relationships--to be confident that their partners will stand by them in times of need, and to be open to relying on others and having others rely on them. Other adults, on the other hand, might be insecure with their relationships. Some insecure adults, for example, may be anxious-resistant: they fear that others will not love them completely, and they become easily frustrated or angry when their attachment needs are not met. Some may be avoidant: they may appear to be disinterested in close relationships and may prefer not to be overly dependent on others or to have others overly dependent on them.
- Adult love relationships, if they are attachment connections, should function similarly to infant-caregiver interactions. In simpler terms, the same factors that foster inquiry in children (having a caregiver available) ought to motivate exploration in adults (being able to have a caregiving partner accessible). Adults should look for features in romantic relationships that make attachment figures "desirable" to infants (responsiveness, availability). In a summary, attachment differences should have the same influence on relational and personal functioning in adulthood as they do in infancy.
- If adult romantic relationships are attachment relationships, the level of security or insecurity an adult has with his or her adult relationship should be a fragmentary reflection of their childhood experiences with their caregiver. Bowlby believed that a child's mental representations or working models (i.e., expectations, beliefs, "rules" or "scripts" for behaving and thinking) about relationships are shaped by his or her experiences with the caregiver. A secure child, for example, believes that others are going to be there for them due to their previous experiences having led them to believe so. Once a child has such expectations, he or she will attempt to seek out interpersonal interactions that are aligned with those expectations and will view others in a way that is colored by those beliefs. This type of process, according to Bowlby, should promote continuity in attachment patterns over the life course, though a person's attachment pattern may change if their relational experiences are inconsistent with what they expect. In short, if adult relationships are attachment relationships, children who are secure as children could grow up to be secure in their romantic relationships as well. On the other hand, people who are secure in their adult relationships with their parents are more likely to form stable connections with new partners.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

Bowlby, in his book Attachment theory, Separation anxiety and mourning talked about 8 important features of the attachment theory. These are listed below-

- **Specificity-** Attachment behavior is usually directed towards one or a few specific individuals in a clear order of preference. The mother is the most important figure in the lives of the vast majority of children followed by the father, or perhaps the grandmother, next in order.
- **Duration-** An attachment lasts for a long time, generally for the majority of the life cycle. Although early attachments may attenuate and be supplemented by new ones during adolescence—and in some cases replaced by them—early attachments are not easily abandoned and frequently persist.
- **Engagement of emotion-** Many of the most intense emotions occur during the formation, maintenance, disruption, and renewal of attachment relationships, hence the term affectional bonds. In the language of subjective experience, the formation of a bond is described as falling in love, the maintenance of a bond as loving someone, and the loss of a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, the threat of loss causes anxiety, and actual loss causes sorrow; each of these situations is likely to cause anger. The unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy. Because intense emotion is frequently a reflection of the state of a person's affectional bonds, the psychology and psychopathology of intense emotion. Emotion is discovered to be a large part of the psychology and psychopathology of affectional bonds.
- **Ontogeny-** The great majority of human newborns exhibit attachment behavior to a chosen figure throughout their initial nine months of life. Initially, an extensive variety of stimuli trigger a social response; but, throughout the second trimester of pregnancy, their stimulation is confined to stimuli produced by one or a few known persons. The more social connection a newborn has with a specific individual, the more probable he is to get bonded to that person and choose that figure above all others from that point forward. As a child is more likely to react fearfully to a stranger soon after six months, and particularly after nine months, acquiring attachment to an unfamiliar individual becomes more challenging, especially after the first year. If a child is not allowed to develop an attachment prior to the age of two, he/she might never create an affinity for the familiar or worry of the strange, two basic reactions that have attracted little focus in human psychology but play an important role in attachment development. The required level for attachment behavior activation stays low until towards the end of the third year; it then steadily rises in healthy development.
- **Learning-** Whereas learning to discriminate the familiar from the unexpected is a key stage in the formation of attachment, Experimental psychologists' standard incentives and punishments have just a minor role. Despite continuous punishments from the attachment figure, a connection can emerge.
- **Organization-** Attachment behavior is first mediated by reactions that are organised along very simple lines. By the end of the first year, it is increasingly mediated by sophisticated behavioural systems organised cybernetically and including figurative models of surroundings and self. Certain circumstances activate or deactivate these systems. Strangeness, hunger, exhaustion, and anything that makes a youngster nervous are all activation situations. The sight or sound of the mother is a terminating condition: when attachment behavior is substantially stimulated, termination may necessitate touching or clinging to her and/or being hugged by her. If the mother is

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

around or her whereabouts can be determined, a kid ceases demonstrating attachment behavior and rather explores his surroundings.

- Parental behavior- Attachment behavior is complemented by parental caregiving behavior. Furthermore, not only do the vast majority of parents respond to their children's needs, but when a youngster deviates, one of his parents generally intervenes to reestablish mutual contact. A parent gives their child a feeling of security by offering him with a "secure" basis that allows him to explore. When a parent misses to fulfil his or her responsibilities, a kid gets concerned and, in some situations, furious.
- Biological function- Attachment behavior occurs in almost all bird and mammal young, and it persists in a number of species into and throughout adulthood. Although there are many differences between species, the rule is that an immature animal must remain close to a preferred adult, almost always the mother. Since it is most unlikely that such behavior has no survival value, the question arises what that may be. Bowlby contends that the most likely function of attachment behavior is protection, primarily from predators.

Attachment styles-

As per John Bowlby, "one's relationship with their parents during childhood has an overarching influence on their social, intimate relationships and even relationships at work in the future."

This means one's early relationships with their caregivers lay a foundation for how they will form all other relationships in adulthood.

There are 4 basic styles of attachment, which are-

1. Anxious/Preoccupied
2. Avoidant/Dismissive
3. Disorganized/Fearful-avoidant
4. Secured attachment

1. Anxious/Preoccupied-

Adults with this attachment style may experience extreme anxiety even at the thought of being alone. Just the idea of their partner's absence can cause severe distress to them. Such adults may suffer from negative self-image, but are likely to have a positive view of others. They frequently seek approval, validation, support and responsiveness from their partner. They are often haunted by the idea that they are the only ones invested in their relationship and their partner is not as invested as they are. They may experience extreme fear of abandonment, thinking that their loved ones may leave them. The attention, support and care from the partner become very important here to deal with the anxiety. The absence of support and intimacy, on the other hand, can cause the anxious / preoccupied type to become more clingy and demanding, over-involved with the relationship, and desperate for love.

2. Avoidant/Dismissive-

The dismissive / avoidant type of personality typically perceives themselves as 'lone wolves': strong, autonomous, and self-sufficient; not necessarily in terms of physical interaction, but rather on emotional grounds. They have a strong sense of self-worth and a good self-image. They do not believe that they need a relationship to be whole. They would rather not be dependent on others or have others rely on them. They are not looking for societal

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

acceptance. Adults with this attachment pattern generally shun emotional connection. They are also prone to disguising or repressing their sentiments when presented with an emotionally intense circumstance.

3. Disorganized/Fearful-avoidant-

The disorganized type shows shaky and hazy behavior in their social ties. Their partner and their relationship are typically the source of both desire and concern for people with this attachment pattern. Fearful-avoidant people need connection and closeness, yet they struggle to trust and rely on others. Given that they are frightened of being hurt, they battle to effectively control their emotions and avoid strong emotional attachments.

4. Secured attachment-

The above three attachment styles display insecure attachments. This attachment style on the other hand, as the name suggests is a secured one. An adult with this attachment style is comfortable dealing with their emotions and expressing their emotional vulnerability. Such adults are congenial with the idea of dependency on their partners and their partners too can rely upon them for the same. Truthfulness, tolerance, and affection are the fundamental components of such relationships. Adults with secure attachment type flourish in their relationships but also do not fear being alone. They do not rely on their partners' responsiveness or approval, and they have a positive attitude towards themselves and others. The next section of this paper focuses upon the analysis of few of the preexisting works and discusses separation anxiety as a disorder in depth.

Separation Theory-

Firestone's separation anxiety hypothesis is a psychological concept that elucidates the human dread of experiencing loneliness or detachment from an important someone or objects. The separation anxiety hypothesis was suggested by Firestone. It's possible that being alone, or being separated from a person or thing that's vital to you, is what's causing this anxiety. According to Firestone, the fear of being rejected or abandoned is the root cause of separation anxiety, and this fear develops as a consequence of early experiences in which an individual's emotional needs go unsatisfied.

According to the theory put up by Firestone, separation anxiety is a major emotional reaction that may lead to persons being reliant on the safety and comfort offered by other people. A person who is dependent on others may, as a result of this dependency, develop an undesirable fear of solitude or an inability to set appropriate boundaries in their interpersonal ties, both of which may be detrimental to their mental health.

As per the theory put out by Firestone, the origin of the fear of being abandoned may usually be traced back to painful or emotionally negligent circumstances that a person was exposed to during their formative years. The aforementioned events have the potential to provoke a feeling of emotional instability in individuals, which may continue into adulthood. As a result, people may continue to sustain relationships that are harmful or injurious to their well-being as a result of these feelings. This phenomenon has the capacity to provoke actions that have the potential to be harmful not just to individuals but also to society as a whole.

Participating in psychotherapy and engaging in some self-reflection is something that Dr. Firestone advocates for locating and resolving any underlying mental health problems that may be contributing to feelings of separation anxiety. In addition, the author places a strong

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

emphasis on cultivating a mentality of self-worth and developing the ability to create appropriate boundaries within personal interactions as two of the most important skills to acquire.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Separation anxiety disorder in adults-

Separation anxiety is classified as a disorder when it is severe, persistent, and interferes with daily functioning. An individual is diagnosed with separation anxiety disorder when they experience excessive and disproportionate levels of anxiety when separated from an attachment figure or a place that provides security, such as their home.

Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is usually associated with children, but research indicates that it can affect adults as well. This medical condition can have a profound effect on an individual's daily life, as well as on work, social, and family relationships. Adult separation anxiety disorder is a relatively unexplored area, with little known about the underlying causes and management of this condition. The purpose of this literature review is to deliver a comprehensive overview of current knowledge about separation anxiety disorder in adults.

Separation anxiety disorder can be defined as a persistent and excessive fear of being separated from a specific attachment figure, which leads to substantial suffering and limitations in social, occupational, as well as other areas of functioning. Adults with the disorder may have excessive concern about being separated from loved ones, experience anxiety or distress when separated from them, and avoid instances that may result in separation. Panic attacks, physical symptoms, and irrational fears of harm or danger to oneself or loved ones can all be symptoms of separation anxiety disorder.

Due to a lack of research, the prevalence of separation anxiety disorder in adults is undetermined. According to studies, the disorder has been fairly widespread, with a lifetime prevalence ranging from 4% to 15%. Females are more likely to suffer from the disorder than males, and it frequently occurs along with other anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder.

Other psychological illnesses, such as other anxiety disorders, depression, and substance use disorders, commonly co-occur with separation anxiety disorder. According to one study, almost fifty percent of adults with separation anxiety disorder had a minimum of one other anxiety disorder, and almost a third had a comorbid mood disorder.

Although the specific causes of separation anxiety disorder in adults are unidentified, multiple factors may contribute to the disorder's development. A history of separation anxiety disorder as a child increases one's likelihood of developing the disorder as an adult. Genetic predisposition, environmental stressors, and traits of personality such as neuroticism and attachment insecurity are also contributory factors.

An extensive clinical evaluation, which includes a physical exam and a psychological assessment, is typically used to diagnose separation anxiety disorder in adults. Interviews with the patient, relatives, or close companions may be conducted in order to learn about the individual's symptoms, history, and family background. Separation anxiety disorder is diagnosed using the DSM-5 criteria, which include excessive anxiety or worry about

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

separation, avoidance of separation-related situations, and significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning. (DSM-V)

Separation anxiety, on the other hand, may be considered a pathological condition when it becomes severe and persistent. In such cases, underpinning psychological or psychiatric conditions may play a role in its development. Adult separation anxiety may have the following pathological causes:

5. Childhood trauma- Neglect, assault, or a separation from parents or caregivers during childhood may elevate the possibility of developing SAD later in life.
6. Insecure Attachment- Avoidant or ambivalent attachment styles, for example, can boost the likelihood of developing separation anxiety in adulthood.
7. Other anxiety disorders- Individuals suffering from other anxiety disorders, such as panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder, may be more at risk for separation anxiety.
8. Medical conditions- Thyroid issues, heart disease, and neurological disorders, for example, can all influence the occurrence of separation anxiety.
9. Substance use disorders- Alcoholism and benzodiazepine dependence, in particular, can elevate the chances of separation anxiety.

Considering it is possible for separation anxiety to be caused by a confluence of biologic, environmental, and psychological variables, tracing its etiological roots may be a challenging and time-consuming endeavour.

According to the findings of certain research, those who have a genetic tendency for anxiety disorders or have a genealogy of anxiety disorders in their families may be more likely to develop separation anxiety. In addition, catastrophic events such as the death of a loved one or being abused are also potential factors in the emergence of separation anxiety.

In addition, psychological issues such as insecurity, poor self-esteem, and reliance may also be contributors to the onset of separation anxiety. Those who have in the past been subjected to thoughts of abandonment or rejection may have a heightened dread of being parted from loved ones, which may lead to feelings of worry and discomfort in the individual.

It is essential to keep in mind that the symptoms of separation anxiety may vary greatly from person to person, which may necessitate using a variety of therapeutic modalities. The development of an efficient treatment strategy for separation anxiety may be facilitated by seeking the assistance of a trained expert, such as a therapist or a physician, who can assist in determining the factors that contribute to the condition.

It is important to note that adult separation anxiety disorder can be crippling, disrupting with routine tasks and social interactions. Depending on the level of severity of the symptoms and the underlying causes, treatment options consist of therapy, medication, and modifications to one's lifestyle.

Adults with separation anxiety disorder may benefit from a combination of psychotherapy, medication, and self-help strategies. CBT is frequently recommended as the initial course of therapy for the disorder because it has clinically been shown to produce highly effective results in managing the symptoms. CBT usually entails recognizing and confronting negative thoughts and beliefs about separation anxiety, as well as learning ways to cope to deal with

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

anxiety and stress. Medications such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or benzodiazepines may also help with the symptoms of separation anxiety disorder.

Self-help measures like relaxation techniques, physical activity, and exposure therapy can also help in dealing with separation anxiety disorder to some extent. Exposure therapy entails gradually introducing the individual to conditions or stimuli which induce anxiety and fear, enabling them to gradually build tolerance and resilience.

To conclude with, adult separation anxiety disorder is a serious mental health condition that can have a significant impact on an individual's daily life and functioning. While the disorder has received little attention, research indicates that it is relatively common and frequently co-occurs with other anxiety disorders. Several treatment options, such as psychotherapy, medication, and self-help strategies, are available to help manage symptoms and improve quality of life.

2) Separation anxiety disorder in children-

Separation anxiety is frequently observed in young kids, specifically those aged 8 to 14 months. It is defined by a child's unwillingness or reluctance to separate from their primary caregiver, such as a parent or grandparent, and can cause significant distress for both the child and the caregiver.

While most children grow out of this sort of anxiety by the point they are ready for elementary school, for some, it persists. Separation anxiety affects about 3% of children throughout elementary school. Interestingly, the percentage rises during adolescence: approximately 8% of teens aged 13 and up suffer from separation anxiety.

The genesis of separation anxiety varies greatly depending on a child's age and development. Young kids are typically self-centred; they are concerned about their needs not being satisfied if their primary caregiver is unavailable. Teens are frequently more concerned about outside forces - violence, accidents, etc. - that may permanently separate them from their parent/caregiver.

Various causes that lead to the occurrence of separation anxiety in children are listed below-

- Attachment style- children with an insecure style of attachment are at a higher risk of developing separation anxiety.
- Environmental factors- a history of stressful or traumatic events in a child's life can also contribute to the development of separation anxiety. These events may include death of a loved one, the divorce of their parents, bullying etc.
- Genetic factors- it is also likely for children with a specific gene to develop this disorder as it passes down the blood line.
- Temperament- children with an anxious, shy or sensitive nature are at the higher risk of developing separation anxiety.
- Parenting style- parents with an overprotective or inconsistent parenting style may contribute to being the cause of their children's separation anxiety.
- Cultural factors- some cultures are more prone to developing anxiety as compared to other cultures. Children belonging to such cultures maybe at a higher risk of developing separation anxiety.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

- Social factors- children who have difficulty making friends or socializing, may experience isolation and could eventually develop separation anxiety.

There is a high chance that children with separation anxiety may start exhibiting symptoms. Although each child shows different symptoms, there are a few common symptoms. These may include-

- Refusing to attend school or child care.
- Fear of being alone or being abandoned.
- Nightmares or trouble sleeping alone.
- When separation is imminent, ailments such as headaches or stomach aches can arise.
- In the absence of caregivers, extreme crying, screaming or clinging may prevail.

The symptoms of separation anxiety disorder, often known as SAD, include an abnormally high level of worry and dread when it comes to being separated from a person or a location. It is a prevalent anxiety illness that is identified in youngsters, and it often impacts the children's ability to function emotionally, socially, academically, and within their families. A variety of therapeutic strategies, including as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT), and medication, have been established in the past for the treatment of seasonal affective disorder (SAD). In this evaluation of the relevant research, we will investigate the efficacy of the aforementioned treatment options for SAD in children.

The kind of therapy known as cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT, has been the subject of the most study and is the preferred therapy for SAD in children. Exposure treatment, cognitive restructuring, and social skills instruction are just few of the components that make up cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). The goal of exposure therapy is to diminish a kid's anxious reaction to separation by methodically and gradually exposing the youngster to scenarios in which they are separated from a parent or caregiver. Children benefit from cognitive restructuring because it enables them to recognize and confront their negative cognitions and substitute them with beliefs that are more positive and grounded in reality. Children benefit from instruction in social skills, which helps them develop such abilities and improves how well they are able to interact with adults and other children.

Piqueras and colleagues (2017) conducted a randomized controlled experiment to assess the efficacy of CBT in group settings for the treatment of SAD in children. They discovered that cognitive behavioral therapy was more successful than the control group in alleviating feelings of anxiety and enhancing functional impairment. In a different randomized controlled experiment, Sakolsky and colleagues (2013) evaluated the efficacy of CBT to that of medication in the treatment of SAD in children. They discovered that both treatments were successful in lowering anxiety symptoms, but cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) was more effective in reducing functional impairment and increasing treatment satisfaction.

Another method for treating SAD in children is called parent-child interaction therapy, or PCIT for short. This therapy places an emphasis on enhancing the quality of the connection between the parent and kid. PCIT entails providing parents with guidance on how to effectively communicate with and encourage their kid via the use of positive reinforcement in order to forge a connection that is robust and encouraging. PCIT was shown to be helpful in lowering feelings of anxiety and boosting mother sensitivity and responsiveness, according to

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

the findings of a randomized controlled experiment carried out by Hudson and colleagues (2016).

As a therapy for seasonal affective disorder in children, pharmacotherapy has also been used. Anxiety disorders are often treated with medications known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs for short. According to the findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Walkup and colleagues (2008), SSRIs were beneficial in lowering anxiety symptoms in children diagnosed with SAD; however, the effect sizes of these medications were modest. In addition, SSRIs have the potential to have undesirable effects in youngsters, such as restlessness and irritability.

In conclusion, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal cognitive therapy (PCIT) are useful therapies for seasonal affective disorder (SAD) in children, but medication may be regarded a treatment option of secondary choice. However, the most effective method of therapy for treating SAD in children may vary depending on the child's particular requirements, preferences, and treatment objectives. Additional study is required to determine the most effective method of therapy and to investigate the myriad of variables that are connected with treatment results.

3) Separation Anxiety Disorder in pets

Pets often struggle with a behavior problem known as separation anxiety, which manifests as sadness or worry if the animal is parted from its owner or left alone for an extended period of time. Dogs, cats, and maybe even other kinds of animals have been seen exhibiting this behavior. Persistent barking or meowing, aggressive behavior, urinating or defecating in unsuitable locations, pacing, panting, or attempts to escape may all be symptoms of separation anxiety in animals.

Pets that are prone to developing separation anxiety often have a deep bond to their owners, and as a result, they experience feelings of tension and worry if they are separated from their owners physically. Anxiety over being apart from a loved one may be brought on by a number of different things, such as a shift in the daily routine, relocating to a new residence, or having other members of the household move.

Pets may develop separation anxiety due to various factors. Some of these reasons could be-

- Attachment- When separated from their owner or caregiver, pets who have a strong bond with them may become anxious. This can happen if a pet's ownership has changed or if their daily routine has suddenly changed.
- Trauma or neglect- Animals who have been abused, neglected, or traumatized may be more prone to exhibiting separation anxiety. This is especially true for animals whose habitat or routine has been frequently disrupted.
- Lack of socializing- When away from their owner or primary caregiver, animals that have not been properly socialized or have had confined interaction with other people or animals may become anxious.
- Genetics- The literature suggests that separation anxiety in pets may have a genetic component. Separation anxiety may be more common among specific breeds or individual animals.
- Environmental factors- Changes in a pet's living conditions, such as relocation or a change in routine, can cause separation anxiety.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

It is crucial to consult with a veterinarian or animal behaviourist to design a treatment plan in order to successfully manage separation anxiety in your pet. This may include the use of medicine, specific teaching methods, or adjustments to the animal's surroundings in order to make it feel less anxious and more at ease. The owner may also attempt to apply tactics to progressively desensitize their pet to having to be left alone, such as practicing brief intervals of separation and gradually extending the duration of time away from the pet. This may help the pet become less anxious about being left alone.

The majority of pets that suffer from separation anxiety are capable of learning to feel more at ease and safe when left alone if they are properly managed and trained.

DISCUSSION

Several factors have been found in existing studies that may have an impact on the emergence and recurrence of separation anxiety disorder in adults, children and pets. According to one study, those with separation anxiety disorder exhibited greater levels of neuroticism, anxiety sensitivity, and negative affectivity than healthy controls. Individuals with these personality qualities may be more prone to experience anxiety and concern in reaction to separation.

Other research has looked into the function of insecure attachment in the emergence of separation anxiety disorder. Attachment insecurity is a childhood cycle of insecure attachment marked by anxiety or aversion in relationships with main caregivers. According to one study, adults with separation anxiety disorder exhibited higher degrees of attachment anxiety as well as avoidance, indicating that early experiences with insecure attachment may enhance sensitivity to the illness.

Recent study has also looked into the possibility of cognitive biases playing a role in the emergence and maintenance of separation anxiety disorder. According to one study, people with the illness have a predisposition towards negative emotional input, viewing ambiguous events as more dangerous or unpleasant than healthy people. Another study discovered that people experiencing separation anxiety disorder had a tendency to pay attention to threat-related information, implying that they are hyper vigilant for possible hazards associated to separation.

Treatment investigation has also discovered a number of beneficial therapies for adults suffering with separation anxiety disorder. In one study, CBT, which included exposure treatment and cognitive restructuring, was found to be beneficial in lowering indicators of separation anxiety disorder in an adult sample. Another study discovered that group treatment concentrating on interpersonal interactions and attachment difficulties was beneficial in lowering disorder symptoms in an assortment of college pupils.

Overall, present evidence emphasizes the need for more study on adult separation anxiety disorder, including its origins, risk variables, and effective therapies. Understanding the disorder's underlying causes might help design tailored and effective therapies for people suffering from separation anxiety.

To summarise, in pets, separation anxiety is a prevalent behavioural condition that requires therapy. Separation anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors, including a lack of socialisation, a history of desertion, or a rapid shift in habit. It's critical to recognise that

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

separation anxiety is a genuine anxiety illness, not the consequence of defiance or a lack of training.

Pet owners may treat their pets with separation anxiety by employing approaches such as progressive desensitisation, environmental enrichment, counterconditioning, and, in severe situations, medication.

Separation anxiety in dogs must be addressed since it may cause great suffering to the pet and create a difficult scenario for the owner. Pet owners may assist their pets learn to manage and be secure when left alone by recognising the root causes and signs of separation anxiety and utilising suitable therapy.

Advantages of current research on separation anxiety disorder in adults include:

The corpus of research that is now being conducted has uncovered a number of different elements that have the potential to contribute to the development and maintenance of separation anxiety disorder in adults. Attachment insecurity, cognitive biases, and personality characteristics are all elements that fall under this category. Understanding these risk factors may help in the development of solutions that are more targeted and effective for those who are coping with the disease.

Through study, it has been shown that therapies for people who suffer from separation anxiety disorder are helpful. Among the methods that have been shown to be effective, cognitive-behavioral therapy and group therapy that focuses on interpersonal interactions and attachment problems have been proven to be two of the most effective options. The aforementioned data has the ability to provide direction for treatment approaches and improve outcomes for those who are afflicted with the illness.

The body of work that is now being conducted has kicked off an inquiry of the experiences of people from a range of different demographic categories who have separation anxiety disorder. These people include older people and people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The current research has the potential to improve our understanding of the condition across a variety of cultures and to make it easier to create treatments that are more sensitive to these communities' unique cultural norms and values.

Disadvantages of current research on separation anxiety disorder in adults include:

One of the shortcomings of the existing research on separation anxiety disorder in adults is that it suffers from a number of methodological shortcomings.

Inadequate study: Despite the growing interest in the illness, there is still a shortage of research on separation anxiety disorder, particularly in the adult population. This is especially problematic since the disorder is so prevalent. Because of this occurrence, it is difficult to get an all-encompassing understanding of the disorder's origin, the characteristics that predispose individuals to developing it, and the therapies that are effective in treating it.

Since there is no widespread agreement on the subject, the diagnostic criteria for separation anxiety disorder in adults continue to be a contentious issue of discussion among academics and clinicians. A lack of consistency in research methodologies may make it difficult to compare the findings of one study to those of another, which can in turn lead to discrepancies in the diagnosis and treatment of a particular ailment.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

Due to the small sample sizes used in many of the research on separation anxiety disorder in adults, it may be difficult to generalize the findings, and it may also be difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the data.

The study that is being done now on the effectiveness of therapies for separation anxiety disorder is quite promising. On the other hand, there is a paucity of study on the long-term effects of this disease in adult populations. It is essential to have a solid understanding of the chronicity of the condition as well as the consequences it has had as a result over a period of time.

Future scope of research-

While there has been little study on separation anxiety disorder in adults, there is rising interest in the illness and a need for additional research to better understand its origins, risk factors, and efficient treatments. Future studies should look at the effectiveness of various psychotherapy and pharmacological therapies for the disease, as well as the influence of early therapy and preventive methods. Furthermore, study should look at the involvement of genetics, environment, and other potential risk factors in the appearance of separation anxiety disorder in adulthood.

Separation anxiety is a complicated and varied illness that affects people of all ages. Here are a few proposals for further study in this area:

- **Neurological mechanisms-** Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and electroencephalography (EEG) are some of the neuroimaging methods that have the potential to assist researchers in identifying areas and circuits of the brain that are involved in separation anxiety. The occurrence may be traced back to neurobiological causes as the source of its origin. In addition, animal models are used in scientific research in order to investigate the molecular and genetic pathways that cause the illness. This might possibly lead to the creation of novel pharmacological treatments.
- **Developmental factors-** The examination of developmental variables may entail longitudinal research that examines the emergence, duration, and resolution of separation anxiety across several cohorts, including children, adolescents, and adults. This may be part of the investigation of developmental factors. Studies examining the factors that have an effect on a person's level of development could benefit from this kind of inquiry. The exploration of environmental variables, including as parenting styles and early-life stress, in connection to the development of separation anxiety might be a promising field of research. This area of research should be explored further.
- **Cultural and contextual factors-** An important aspect of research is the analysis of cultural and environmental elements in their respective contexts. It contains studies on the role of cultural views and values on help-seeking behaviors for separation anxiety, as well as the impact of contextual variables such as socioeconomic position and family structure on the experience of separation anxiety. In addition, it looks at the influence of cultural beliefs and values on the experience of separation anxiety.
- **Treatment efficacy-** At the current time, one of the most active areas of study is focused on the development of effective therapies for separation anxiety. Investigation into the efficacy of many therapeutic techniques, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), medication, and treatments focused on mindfulness, has

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

the potential to improve the quality of treatment provided to persons who suffer from separation anxiety.

- **Prevention-** For the purpose of preventing separation anxiety in children and adolescents, preventative approaches may include doing research on methods that try to reduce the likelihood of experiencing such anxiety. This can include the creation of programs that are based on schools as well as interventions for families. In addition, academic research may investigate the efficacy of preventative interventions for people who are prone to experiencing separation anxiety. This includes those who have a genetic predisposition to the condition as well as people who have been exposed to traumatic experiences when they were in the formative years of their lives.

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Separation Anxiety Disorder: Reviewing the Causes, Risk Factors, and Effective Treatments across the Lifespan

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Conflict of Interest

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