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The Attachment Relationship and Effects of Parent-Child Separation on School Adjustment

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Abstract: *The attachment relationships developed by children towards their parents in the first years of life will be the stage on which all manifestations and physiological, emotional, cognitive functioning, social experiences, language development, acquisition of a sense of self and world will take place. These bonds create psychological structures that provide individuals with lifelong adaptive capacities, security, and confidence in relation to the attachment figure -the representative adult (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992; Groh et al., 2017). Childhood is the setting in which emotional stability, the security offered by the presence of the adult, provides the premises for personality development. The temporary separation of children from their parents who choose to emigrate produces psycho-affective, social and educational imbalances. Our study investigated the relationship between parental attachment style and adaptive difficulties in the educational environment of children left at home after parental emigration. Statistical results indicate that school adjustment of children with emigrating parents is statistically significantly predicted by attachment style.*

Keywords: *attachment, parental emigration, school adjustment, children left at home.*

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Introduction

In the first years of life, strong affective bonds are created between the child and his parents that strengthen the development of the subsequent personality. These relationships, called attachment relationships, will represent the stage on which all the manifestations and good physiological, emotional, cognitive functioning, social experiences, language development, etc. gaining meaning about yourself and the world. Man, a social being, seeks the closeness of his neighbour in the face of challenges and stressful situations. The development of the human personality, complex and long process, conditions the evolution of the individual and his bio-psycho-social adaptation. The attachment relationships they develop in childhood, first with parents, are predictors of social behaviours in adult life. If these attachment bonds are disrupted, interrupted in childhood for various reasons that separate the child from the parents, the affective bonds being weakened, the child's optimal development, implicitly his school and social adaptation as a future adult, is affected.

Parental emigration is a global context in which more and more families are involved, for economic reasons, choosing to live separately, in different countries, leading a transnational existence. This fact, even if it is agreed by the family members involved and generated by financial, professional, or personal fulfilment reasons, leads in many situations to imbalances in the structure and functionality of the family. Children who remain at home, beyond the material and financial benefits that emigrants' parents provide, are emotionally affected by the lack of affection, supervision, the need for presence and exercise of parental roles, causing them social, school imbalances.

The attachment

Bowlby (2011) defines attachment as "the selective preferential affective relationship that is established with one or more reference persons."

In the relationship with the representative adult, the child is relational anchored to it, the attachment expressing itself "as a lasting bond of love and security, as a strong source of comfort and emotional balance, as a prototype for the future relationships in the life of the individual" (Golu, 2010, p. 73). John Bowlby, a prominent figure who had intense concerns about the impact of family relationships on the formation and development of children's personality, developed theories of parent-child attachment for a

long time (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Other researchers have reviewed the implications of attachment in other age groups (infant to adult) (Ainsworth et al., 1978, 2015; Main et al., 1985), The attachment bond creating psychological structures that provide lifelong individuals with adaptive capacities, safety, confidence by reference to the attachment figure – the representative adult (Bretherton, 1992; Groh et al., 2017; Van Ijzendoom, 1989).

The role of the child-parent attachment relationship in the formation of adaptive behaviours

The need for attachment is the necessity of the human being; it is innate, and its purpose is adaptation (Moţăţăianu, 2016). Adler (2019) speaks of the feeling of social communion, its appearance and evolution being dependent on experiences, experiences from childhood. The attachment does not refer only to the bond between the infant/toddler and his mother, strengthened by the feeding activity, but describes the bonds that the child has, forms, and retains in the following periods, until the adult stage. The quality of the adult leaves an imprint on the child and his further development will have the characteristics of the family reference. Attachment theories are continued by other important researchers (Cowan et al., 1996) who explained that the tendency to create emotional bonds with others is fundamental in adaptive processes, begins at very early age and continues into childhood, adolescence, until adulthood. When relationships with the family do not exist or are suddenly interrupted, the parental pattern is sought in almost all the relationships the child has in search of protection, support. Affective deficiencies will lead to deviant behaviour because, based on poor relationships with the mother from childhood, the child will not develop properly his relationships with others. The primary role of the mother, beyond the physical care of the child, is to determine and teach the child to be fit for human collaboration and solidarity (Adler, 1995).

Aspects of the types of child-parent attachment

The types of attachment children develop in their relationships with their mothers foreshadow the quality of the relationships they will have in the future, in childhood, adolescence and in adult life are studied, stated and explained by researchers (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Schaffer, 1996): avoided attachment is characteristic of children who are anxious but do not show their anger, frustration, so as not to upset the person they feel emotionally connected to; a secure attachment will help children balance emotionally,

develop autonomy, self-confidence and develop their skills; An insecure, insecure, ambivalent attachment causes children to withdraw, to be often sad, timorous, crying; a disorganized type of insecure attachment may present a risk of behavioural disorder, insecurity leading to insecurity, fear and anxiety, disorganization, aggression, anger.

A secure attachment helps the child to master his forces, to better control his reactions, to calm himself in tense moments. Insecure attachment, the one who is responsible for sudden changes in behaviour, unpredictable attitudes, is caused by physical neglect, emotional abuse, separation from parents, traumatic experiences that he or the mother has gone through, frequent changes in the environment (home) or addictions of parents (alcohol, drugs). The affective bonds created in childhood support the emotional, cognitive, and social development of the child, the process of social adaptation. The rigors of the instructive-educational act, as a socio-educational process, require the human being additional adaptive efforts.

The educational process involves, in addition to the actors in the educational scene, material, informational, time and space resources, a system of relationships that are built, shaped and define the school space. Therefore, the school adaptation must be viewed from a multidimensional and multi-rhythmic perspective, which involves social adaptation to norms, regulations, work schedule, space. The relational context has its characteristic aspects to which the child will tend to align (relationships with teachers, relationships with peers) constantly looking for new behaviours or adjusting the pre-existing ones.

Psychological adaptation of the child requires learning and will be a decisive aspect in the school adaptation, consisting of in how it will manage to cope with instructive and educational challenges; on this accommodation and balance through learning depend on self-esteem, the role it assigns to itself in the group, the role that is perceived by the group, its school results. The primary relationship in the family space will serve as a foundation in school adaptation and will continue to positively influence it if it does not contradict the new norms.

Effects of parental migration on children left at home.

As regards the situation of children staying home with one of their parents or other caregivers, there have been numerous problems that have affected their lives, mentally, physically, health or relational-affective. Numerous studies have brought to the attention of specialists and the public the diversity of problems faced by children left behind or left at home after the migration of the workforce. The safety of the lives of these children has

been threatened, often becoming victims of physical, psychological, sexual abuse, or forced to work (Givaudan & Pick, 2013; Nistor & Secară, 2020). It is often mentioned, in the results of the research carried out, the feeling of abandonment experienced by the children of emigrants after the (temporary) separation from their parents, a feeling that is accentuating and produces negative consequences especially when the phenomenon of migration takes place during the period of psycho-physical-social development, when the stability of the environment should prevail. A separation longer than six months is traumatic, with immediate but also late implications for the child's mental development and social integration (Ciofu, 1998). The departure of one of the parents from the complex space of the family is painful for the child and takes on dramatic aspects when both parents choose to emigrate. An emotionally affected parent loses sight of the child's emotional well-being, concerned with satisfying all other needs and needs. There is a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities in the family. Children are involved in several household tasks, taking over the responsibilities of parents.

The rights of the child regulate and draw clear lines toward the protection of minors: The right to life, to growth and development, to family, to supervision, to education, to medical services, to play. The lack of parental supervision translates the reality of these children into a difficult situation, diminishing the control, appreciation, support of parents at critical, difficult times, especially in school or relationships that some of them fail to manage. From the category of children with one or both immigrant parents there were also situations of violence, aggression, offenses, or reprehensible deeds.

Methodology

We conducted research on the effects of parental emigration on the school adaptation of children left at home. Our research complies with all ethical norms (participants have been informed about the research and have given their informed consent; no personal data is collected). The approval of the Research Ethics Commission of the University of Bucharest was obtained for the conduct of this study. Each subject was informed about the study conducted and we obtained the informed consent of the children's parents or guardians/legal representatives. They were not interfered with no personal data was collected. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

As research tools were used:

• Child attachment style identification questionnaire ASQ (9-18 years old) author Muris, P., Meesters, C., van Melick, M., & Zwambag, L. Finzi. Children are given three variants that describe feelings and perceptions they

may have about relationships with their fellow children. They have only one option to choose, the one that suits them best. Based on attachment theory and the ideas of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, the questionnaire identifies one of three attachment styles: Safe, avoidant, ambivalent.

• Skills and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ-Rom) for students

This questionnaire is a tool for screening the behaviour and emotions of children and adolescents. It consists of 25 items divided into five subscales (5 items in each subscale), as follows:

A) emotional subscale (symptoms)
(B) the subscale of conduct issues
(c) the subscale of hyperactivity/attention deficit
D) the subscale of problems that arise in relation to equals
(E) the subscale of prosocial behaviour

Methods

The sample was conducted on a voluntary basis, with 280 children with at least one immigrant parent participating in the study. There was no intervention on the children, the research is not experimental but a fact-finding one. The children are from urban and rural areas, from Braila, Galați, Suceava, Ialomița counties, Ilfov, the ages of children are between 9 and 14 years old, being students in primary and secondary school.

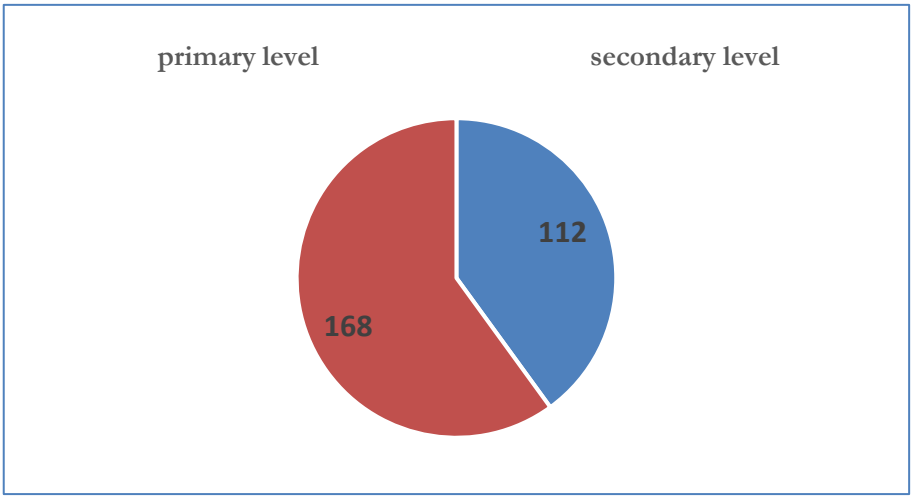


Figure 1. Subjects by level of education
Source: Author's own conception

The students in the sample of subjects are from rural (64.3%) and urban (35.7%). From the analysis carried out on national statistics, emigration is stronger in rural people, primarily because of the possibility of accessing jobs.

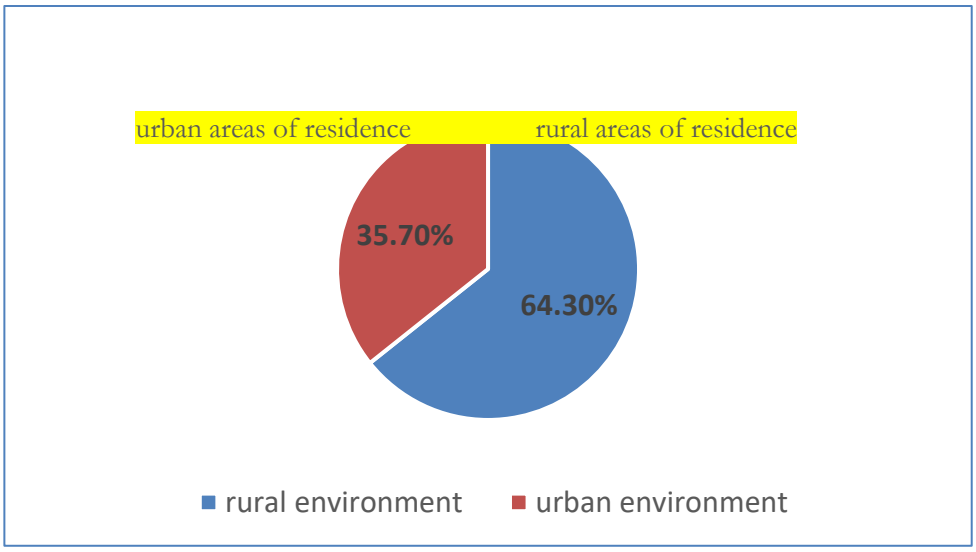


Figure 2. Subjects by residence environment
Source: Author's own conception

In the sample of subjects, we have children with one immigrant parent (mother or father) and both immigrant parents, as follows:

Distribution according to the type of immigrant parent

mother left 28%
father left 67%
both parents leave 15%

Source: Author's own conception

Distribution of subjects by county:

Brăila	**35.8%**
Caraş Severin	9,15%
Galaţi	28,4%
Giurgiu	7.9%
Neamţ	11,3%
Suceava	7,45%

Source: Author's own conception
Statistical tests: regression analysis; the difference between groups

Results

Data analysis procedure

Regarding statistical analysis procedures, the Jamovi tool (The Jamovi Project, 2019) was used to obtain general descriptive information about the sample. We also ran the operations required for moderation, correlation, and ANOVA tests, using the "med mod", "regression" and "ANOVA" packages. In addition to using SEM (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson& Tatham, 2006) to test the hypotheses, we used bootstrap method, which aims to estimate the properties of some variables by reference to a simulated sample (n = 10000) based on the properties of the distribution, following the recommendations of the literature (Hayes, 2013).

Assumptions centered on attachment style:

H1: Children with a secure attachment style to their parents are better adapted to school (compared to the other 2 attachment styles)

H2: The age of separation from the parent is associated with the child's adaptive difficulties in school.

Variables:

~ Independent variables: Style of attachment; The age of the child when the migration/separation from the parent occurred.

Dependent variables: Adaptive difficulties of the child; Degree of adaptation

Descriptive statistics for research variables

The effect of attachment style (i.e., securing, avoiding or ambivalent on children's coping difficulties) was examined further. Table 1 provides descriptive information on these variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics - the average and standard deviation for attachment styles

	attachment style	N	Media	SD	SE
school adaptation	ambivalent	65	11.02	8.48	1.052
	secure	105	13.84	8.84	0.863
	avoidant	70	9.51	7.35	0.879

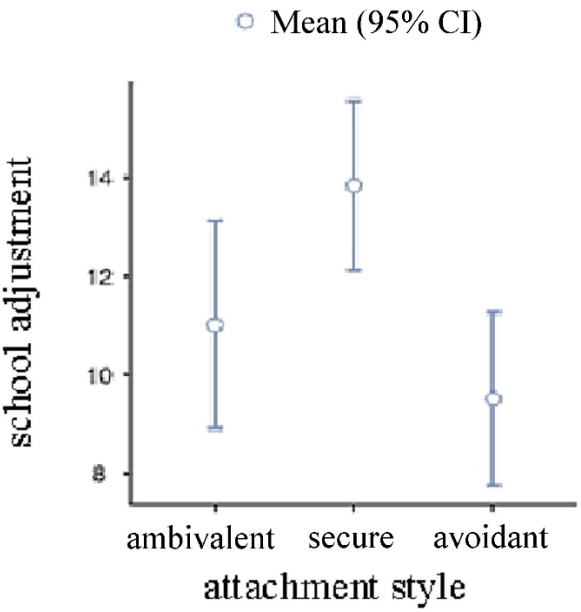
Source: Author's own conception

The secure attachment style recorded the highest average (M = 13.84; SD = 8.84), while the avoidant attachment style has the lowest average (M = 9.51; SD = 7.35).

Testing the attachment style variable in relation to the school adaptation of children

To see if the attachment style is related to children's school adaptation, the ANOVA statistical test was used. The model is statistically significant with F (2, 146) = 6.30, p<.001, predicting 22% of the variance. Therefore, the variable school adaptation of children is statistically significantly predicted by the attachment style (β = .13, p<.001).

Figure 2 visually illustrates the environments and differences between groups, at the level of the attachment style.



Source: Author's own conception

Figure 3. Differences between children's school adjustment and attachment style.

Testing the relationship between the age of separation from the parent and the adaptive difficulties of children in the school environment. To see if the age of separation can predict children's adjustment difficulties in the school environment, as well as their relationship, linear regression was used. The model is statistically significant with F (9, 230) = 10.6, p<.001,

predicting 29% of the variance. Therefore, the variable children's adjustment difficulties are statistically significantly predicted by the age of separation from the parent (β = .11, p<.001).

Table 2. Regression analysis between the age of separation and adaptive difficulties of children

Independent variable	the age of separation	
	β	R^2
Adaptive difficulties of the child	.11	.29***

Note. *p < .05; ** p < .01

Source: Author's own conception
Assumptions centered on the gender of parents and children.

Descriptive statistics for research variables

In Table 4, the standard averages and deviations for the research variables can be observed, as well as the association coefficient between them. A significant positive association was observed between the variable predictor duration of migration and two of the criteria variables, namely school adaptation (r = -.13, p <.01), and absenteeism (r = -.17, p < .01), but statistically insignificant in school results (r = -.08, p > .05).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations between research variables

		M	SD	1	2	3	4
1	age of separation	8.8	2.46	-			
2	school results	21.8	8.63	-.08	-		
3	absenteeism	11.3	8.55	-.17**	.77**	-	
4	School adaptation	11.8	8.51	-.13*	.68**	.82**	-

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01

Source: Author's own conception

Testing the gender of the departed parent in relation to children's school results, absenteeism rate and school adaptation

To see if the gender of the departed parent is related to (1) children's school adaptation, (2) absenteeism, and (3) children's school results, The ANOVA statistical test was used. Table 5 provides descriptive information on these variables.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics - mean and standard deviation by gender of the immigrant parent.

	gender of the departed parent	N	Media	SD	SE
School adaptation	father	123	12.02	8.46	0.76
	mother	76	11.08	8.97	1.02
	both parents	41	10.07	7.85	1.22
absenteeism	father	123	11.03	8.28	0.74
	mother	76	11.07	9.11	1.04
	both parents	41	10.07	8.45	1.31
school results	father	123	22.02	8.37	0.75
	mother	76	21.04	8.98	1.03
	both parents	41	21.02	8.89	1.38

Source: Author's own conception

It can be observed that in the case of (1) the child's school adjustment, the group averages were higher when the father is away (M = 12.02; SD = 8.46) and the lowest when both parents are away (M = 10.07; SD = 7.85).

When it comes to (2) absenteeism, the averages of the group in which the mother is away were the highest (M = 11.07; SD = 9.11), and the lowest when both parents are away (M = 10.07; SD = 8.45).

In terms of (3) school results, the highest averages were when the father is away (M = 22.02; SD = 8.37), while the group in which both parents are away recorded the lowest averages (M = 21.02; SD = 8.89).

Overall, the model is not statistically significant in any of the cases, namely (1) children's school adaptation (F (2, 108) = 5.22, p = .595), (2) absenteeism (F (2, 104) = 0.17, p = .838), nor (3) school results (F (2, 103) = .291, p = .748).

Figures 4.5 and 6 visually illustrate the differences between the groups, at the level of the gender of the departed parent.

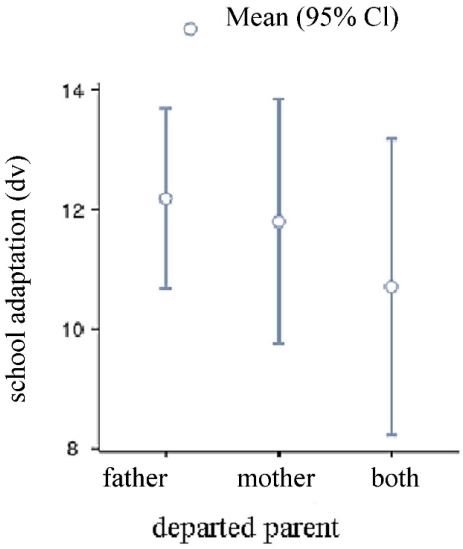


Figure 4. Differences between the degree of school adaptation of children when it comes to the gender of the departed parent.
Source: Author's own conception

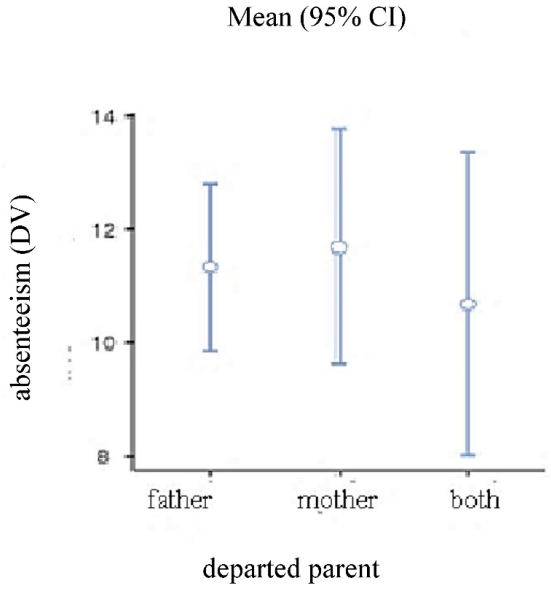


Figure 5. The difference between the degree of absenteeism when it comes to the gender of the departed parent.

Source: Author's own conception

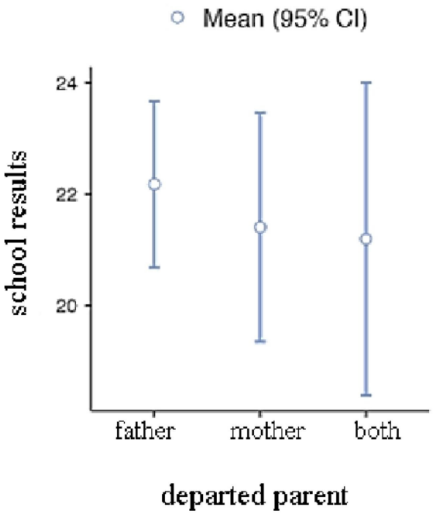


Figure 6. Differences in school results when it comes to the gender of the departed parent.
Source: Author's own conception

Study limits

As a research involving children whose parents are abroad, we encountered many difficulties in finding subjects. In many situations, parents have refused to declare their spouses leaving because this has multiple legal implications. For this reason, the number of subjects is small, which can be considered a limitation of the research in terms of representativeness on a larger scale.

Discussions

Our study looked at the extent to which parental emigration influences children's school adaptation, with covariables moderating attachment type and gender. Analysing the results, we can say that the role of affective bonds between children and parents is an important factor in their socio-emotional balance, favouring or inhibiting (in lack) their school adaptation: The variable school adaptation of children is statistically significantly predicted by the attachment style ($\beta = .13$, $p<.001$).

The age at which separation occurs is important because in young childhood the need for emotional expression, physical closeness is greater,

children failing at young ages to manage the emotions generated by the lack of parents: the variable children's adjustment difficulties is statistically significantly predicted by the age of separation from the parent ($\beta = .11$, $p<.001$).

The longer the separation from the immigrant parent, the weaker the direct emotional and relational support, the child suffering from parental lack. Everyday moments, school events, particular events that the child experiences in the prolonged absence of parents lead to problems that make their adaptive school journey difficult, they end up absent or even leaving school. Parental emigration is not statistically significantly associated with school results, with remittances many students being supported in learning: there is a significant positive association between the variable predictor duration of migration and two of the criteria variables, namely school adaptation ($r = -.13$, $p <.01$), and absenteeism ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), but statistically insignificant in school results ($r = -.08$, $p > .05$).

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