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# The Longitudinal Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status, Child Separation Anxiety Symptoms, and School Achievement in 1st Grade

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# THE LONGITUDINAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, CHILD SEPARATION ANXIETY SYMPTOMS, AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT IN 1ST GRADE

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aims to add more clarity to the literature and raise awareness of the complex relationship between separation anxiety, school performance and socioeconomic status

Specifically, two research questions will be examined:

1) Does separation anxiety disorder (SAD) in kindergarten predict lower levels of school performance in first grade, after controlling for child gender and parent characteristics

2) Does child's gender moderate the link between SAD and school performance, controlling for parent characteristics

## HYPOTHESES

- 1) A negative relationship between separation anxiety in kindergarten and school performance in first grade
- 2) Also, according to the past literature on gender differences and school performance, we hypothesize gender would moderate SAD and school performance such that the relationship will be worse for boys

## CONCLUSION

Child separation anxiety is negatively associated with reading fluency and math fluency, even after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic variables



Separation anxiety is a significant factor in predicting academic outcomes in young children



Child's gender does not moderate the relationship between separation anxiety and reading fluency, nor does it predict math fluency



Further research is needed to explore additional moderators that may impact these relationships, such as cultural background and race



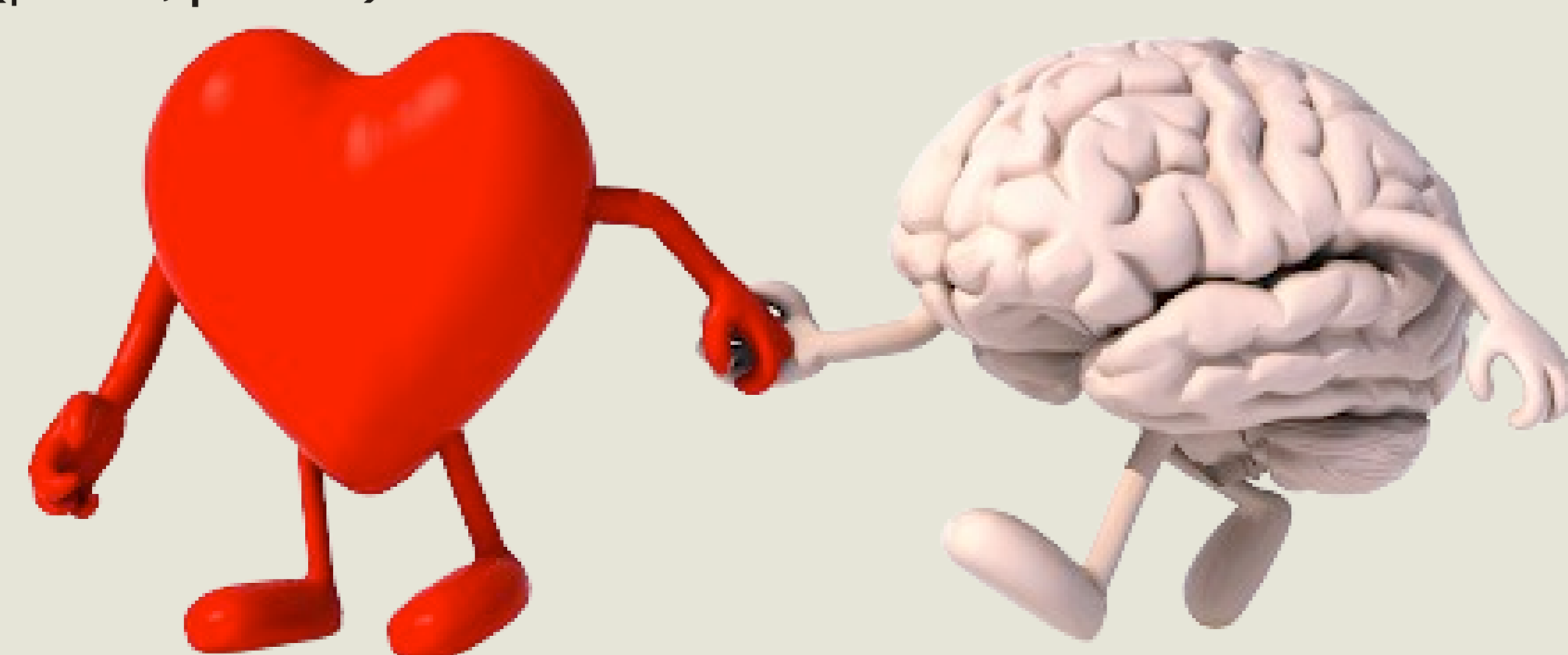
## METHODOLOGY

Data came from the Early Growth and Development Study

- 361 adoptive triads, consisting of 361 adopted children, 361 pairs of adoptive parents, 359 biological mothers, and 114 biological fathers
- Child data came from the kindergarten (age 6) and 1st grade (age 7) waves
- Separation anxiety was measured with the Eley Child Anxiety Scale (Eley et al., 2003)
- The Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) was used to measure children's school achievement by assessing reading and math fluency in 1st grade
- The Conger Family Financial Stress Scale (Conger et al., 1992) was used to assess perceived financial stress

## RESULTS

- Hierarchical regressions to investigate the relationship between SAD and school achievement. Overall model was significant ( $R^2 = .073$ ,  $F(6, 229) = 2.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ).
- SAD significantly predicted school achievement, with a negative relationship to both reading fluency ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and math fluency ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while controlling for SES and perceived financial stress. Gender did not moderate SAD on math or reading fluency, but there was a direct effect whereby girls exhibited greater reading fluency than boys ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p = .05$ ).



## LIMITATIONS

- Our sample was limited to a specific region and demographic, which may affect the generalizability of our findings
- Self-reported data for variables like perceived family financial stress may introduce biases and inaccuracies
- Only two time point assessments make it challenging to test causal associations



## IMPLICATIONS

Findings indicate that SAD in kindergarten may be a significant risk factor for lower school achievement in 1st grade. This suggests that the early relationships between the parent and the child may have an influence on school outcomes, regardless of parent SES, financial stress, and child gender.

The implications for policies are twofold:

- provide support for parents and caregivers to strengthen early relationships with their children
- schools should implement strategies to address SAD, providing a nurturing environment that fosters success and well-being for all students. Investing in such strategies ensures positive outcomes, enabling every child to thrive