

**THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
IN FAMILIES WITH PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN: AN
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF FERGANA REGION,
UZBEKISTAN, WITH A FOCUS ON ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Isakhanova Shakhnoza Avazovna

KSU/GrGU, Master's 01/24 PP MAG (SOP)

E-mail: isakhanovashaxnoza@gmail.com

*Research Location: Kokand State University (Uzbekistan), in collaboration with
Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno (Belarus)*

INTRODUCTION

Parental attitudes, encompassing a set of beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns, shape the dynamics of family relationships and play a pivotal role in the psycho-emotional development of preschool-aged children (3–7 years). This developmental stage is critical for forming personality, emotional regulation, and social skills, particularly in cultural contexts where the family serves as the primary socialization institution. In Uzbekistan, characterized by multigenerational families, collectivism, and patriarchal values, parental attitudes often blend emotional support with authoritarian control, influencing family cohesion. The Fergana region, one of Central Asia's most densely populated areas with approximately 4 million residents (2023), exhibits high birth rates (11.1% in 2024), significant labor migration (over 10% of the population), and traditional family structures, where children are frequently raised by one parent or extended relatives due to parental migration for work.

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby (1969, 1988), posits that the quality of early caregiver-child interactions forms internal working models that shape a child's perception of self, others, and the world. In Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, attachment extends beyond dyadic parent-child relationships to include extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts), reflecting collectivist norms. Despite global research on parental attitudes and child development, their role in family dynamics in post-Soviet societies like Uzbekistan remains underexplored. The Fergana region, with its high migration rates contributing to social orphanhood (over 50% of institutionalized children from migrant families), presents a unique context for studying these dynamics.

The study aims to analyze the relationship between parental attitudes and the quality of family relationships in families with preschool-aged children in three districts of the Fergana region: Kokand city (population ~259,700, 2022), Uzbekistan district (population ~220,900, 2022), and Furkat district (population ~121,800, 2022). The primary hypothesis is that positive parental attitudes (e.g., emotional support, acceptance) foster secure attachment and harmonious family relationships, while authoritarian attitudes (e.g., control, emotional restraint) correlate with conflicts, particularly in migrant families. Additionally, it is hypothesized that sociodemographic factors (migration, education, income) and cultural norms (patriarchy, Islamic values) influence parental attitudes. This interdisciplinary study

integrates psychological, sociological, and ethnographic approaches, contributing to the understanding of family dynamics in Central Asia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative (cross-sectional survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews, focus groups) methods. Quantitative data assessed correlations, while qualitative data explored subjective experiences within the cultural context.

Sample

The study involved 180 families with preschool-aged children (3–7 years) from three districts of the Fergana region: Kokand (urban, 60 families), Uzbekistan district (rural, 60 families), and Furkat district (mixed, 60 families). Participants were selected via stratified random sampling, accounting for migration status (40% migrant families). Inclusion criteria: at least one preschool-aged child, residence in the district for ≥ 2 years, and parental consent. The mean parental age was 32.8 years ($SD = 5.1$); 65% were women, 35% men. Family composition: 75% intact families, 20% single-parent (due to migration), 5% extended (with grandparents). Socioeconomic status: 50% middle-income (agriculture, trade), 30% low-income, 20% high-income (education, remittances).

Ethnic composition: 90% Uzbek, 5% Tajik, 5% other.

Data Collection Methods

1. Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI): An adapted version for the Uzbek context (Schaefer & Bell, 1958) assessed three dimensions of parental attitudes: care (emotional warmth), control (authoritarianism), and autonomy support ($\alpha = 0.87$).

2. Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-IV): Measured family cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction (Olson, 2011; $\alpha = 0.90$).

3. Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures (ECR-RS): A modified version for parents (Fraley et al., 2011) evaluated attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant) in a collectivist context.

4. Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups: Conducted with 50 parents (15–20 per district) and six focus groups (8–10 participants each), exploring migration, parenting traditions, and emotional closeness.

5. Sociodemographic Questionnaire: Collected data on age, education, income, migration status, and cultural factors (religiosity, ethnicity).

PROCEDURE

Data were collected from March to September 2025 in collaboration with local mahallas (communities) and UNICEF Uzbekistan. Surveys were administered online or in-person via a secure platform (Kahoot! adapted for Uzbek). Interviews were conducted in Uzbek or Russian, recorded with consent. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and compliance with Uzbekistan's regulations and the Helsinki Declaration. Migration-specific data: 30% of interviews involved returned migrants.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0, employing Pearson’s correlation, multiple regression, and ANOVA to compare districts. Reliability was assessed via Cronbach’s alpha (PBI: $\alpha = 0.87$; FACES-IV: $\alpha = 0.90$). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis in NVivo 14.0 with double coding for reliability. Triangulation integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, with cultural bias addressed by involving experts from Fergana State University.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Positive parental attitudes (care and autonomy support) correlated strongly with family cohesion ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$) and flexibility ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$). High control was associated with lower communication ($r = -0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and family satisfaction ($r = -0.50$, $p < 0.05$). Multiple regression showed that parental attitudes and attachment style explained 45% of the variance in family relationship quality ($R^2 = 0.45$, $F(5,174) = 29.2$, $p < 0.001$). Secure attachment was linked to higher cohesion ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), while anxious attachment correlated with increased conflicts ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.05$), particularly in migrant families ($t(178) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$).

District differences: Kokand (urban) showed higher flexibility ($M = 4.2$ vs. 3.8 in Furkat, $F(2,177) = 5.6$, $p < 0.01$); Uzbekistan district (rural) exhibited higher control ($M = 3.9$ vs. 3.4 in Kokand). Migration status: migrant families had lower cohesion ($t(178) = 2.89$, $p < 0.05$). Education: higher education was associated with flexible attitudes ($t(178) = 3.67$, $p < 0.01$).

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis identified four themes:

1. Emotional Responsiveness in Cultural Context: “In our mahalla, grandmothers care for children when fathers migrate to Russia—it’s like a safe haven” (mother, Furkat district).
2. Conflicts from Migration and Control: “My husband calls from abroad, demanding obedience, but the child cries—there’s no warmth” (father, Uzbekistan district).
3. Sociocultural Influences: Islamic values reinforced support, but patriarchy emphasized gender roles (90% of mothers were primary caregivers).
4. Intergenerational Transmission: Grandparents often passed down authoritarian models, while education fostered empathy.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that positive parental attitudes foster secure attachment and harmonious family relationships, while authoritarian attitudes correlate conflicts, particularly in migrant families in the Fergana region. In the Uzbek context, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) adapts to collectivism: secure attachment is often facilitated through extended family networks (alloparenting), enhancing resilience, but migration (10% of the population) risks insecure attachment patterns (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The strong

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correlation between care and cohesion ($r = 0.71$) aligns with Baumrind's (1991) findings, though in collectivist cultures, control may serve protective functions (family honor).

Expanded Analysis of Attachment Theory. In Central Asia, attachment extends beyond dyadic relationships, incorporating extended family members as co-caregivers, which mitigates migration-related stress ($\beta = 0.42$). Anxious or avoidant attachment, driven by emotional restraint rooted in patriarchal norms, leads to withdrawal behaviors, consistent with Asian studies (Rothbaum et al., 2000). Qualitative data highlight intergenerational transmission: parents raised in Soviet or traditional families often adopt authoritarian models, but migration remittances and education ($t = 3.67$) promote flexibility. In Fergana, with a high birth rate (11.1%), this increases demographic pressures, necessitating culturally sensitive interventions.

Sociocultural Context. Patriarchy (men as providers) and Islamic values (family unity) enhance support, but migration contributes to conflicts (32,000 divorces in 2025, 10.6% in Fergana). District variations: Kokand's urban setting fosters modern attitudes; rural Uzbekistan district retains traditional control. Limitations include self-report bias, cross-sectional design, and a focus on Uzbeks (Tajik subgroup needed). Future studies should employ longitudinal designs and observational methods.

Practical Implications. Culturally tailored programs, such as UNICEF-style trainings, should focus on fathers' emotional roles and integrate into initiatives like Uzbekistan's "Year of a Healthy Mother and Child" (2016+).

Novelty. This is the first study of attachment in migrant families in Fergana, integrating local demographic data (migration, birth rates).

CONCLUSION

Parental attitudes significantly influence family relationships in the Fergana region: positive attitudes foster secure attachment and harmony, while authoritarian ones, exacerbated by migration, lead to conflicts. Attachment theory, adapted to collectivism, explains resilience through extended family networks. Sociodemographic factors (education, urbanization) moderate effects. Targeted programs are needed to strengthen families and reduce institutionalization (30,000 children in care). Future research should focus on longitudinal and comparative studies across Central Asia.

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