



IS PARENTAL ATTACHMENT TRANSFORMING PARENTS TO HELICOPTER PARENTS?

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ABSTRACT

Helicopter parenting also termed as "lawnmower parenting", "cossetting parenting", or "bulldoze parenting", refers to a style of parents who are over focused on their children. They typically take too much responsibility for their children's experiences, successes and failures. Parental attachment refers to the quality of infant-parent or primary care giver relation, which is a powerful predictor of a child's later social and emotional outcome. The present investigation aims to study the relationship between helicopter parenting and parental attachment of undergraduate females in age group of 17-20 years. A sample of 100 females was taken from different colleges of Tricity. For this purpose, Helicopter parenting scale (Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012) and Parental attachment Questionnaire (M. Kenny, 1985) were administered to the sample. Correlation was used for the statistical analysis. The results will be discussed as per the implications.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION:

A helicopter parent or a cossetter is a parent who pays extremely close attention to a child's experiences and problems, particularly at educational institutions. It is an overprotective style of child rearing in which the mother or father is over involved in child's life, inhibiting child's sense of independence. Helicopter parents are so named because, like helicopters, they hover overhead, they do not stay long, and then they leave, only to return. Helicopter parenting comprises of three concepts- when parents do for their kids what they can do by themselves, when parents do for kids what they can almost do for themselves, when parenting behaviour is motivated by their¹.

WHO IS A HELICOPTER PARENT?

The parents of high school or college-aged students who do tasks their child is capable of doing alone. In toddlerhood, a helicopter parent might constantly shadow the child, limiting the alone time and always directing his behavior². A parent ensuring a child has a certain teacher, selecting the child's friends and activities, or providing disproportionate assistance for homework and school projects during elementary school is also termed as a cossetter³.

The common triggers which can lead to the development of helicopter parents can be^{4,5}:

- Fear of dire consequences, low grades, not getting a certain job can appear disastrous to a parent, especially if it seems it could be avoided with parental involvement.
- Feelings of anxiety, financial worries, the job market can push parents toward taking more control over their child's life in an attempt to protect them.
- Adults who felt unloved, neglected, or ignored as children can overcompensate with their own children leading to excessive attention and monitoring.
- Peer pressure from other parents leads to over involvement of parents to compensate the guilt of being called bad parents.

Many helicopter parents start off with good intentions. But, once parenting becomes governed by fear and decisions based on what might happen, instead of strengthening the child potential, parents tend to weaken their confidence, self-esteem, coping skills, competence in dealing with the stresses of life, increased anxiety, development of a sense of entitlement due to parental expectations^{6,7}.

Other metaphorical expressions of helicopter or overprotective parents are⁸:

- **Curling Parents:** parents frantically clearing the path for their

children so that they may reach their goal unhindered.

- **Lawnmower Parents:** a parent forcefully clearing an easy-to-walk-down line leaving behind a smooth path with no obstacles.
- **Blackhawk Parents (aggressive attack):** parents that will do whatever it takes to ensure a favourable position for their children.

According to the Self Determination theory⁹, the 3 innate needs for healthy development are- basic need for autonomy, basic need to be confident in one's abilities and accomplishments, basic need to feel they are loved and cared for. Higher the accomplishment of these needs, higher will be the level of satisfaction¹⁰. As a parent, being too involved in a child's life can undermine the 3 basic needs, leading to a higher degree of depression and anxiety as well as a lower general satisfaction with life, leading to lack of confidence, efforts to solve their problems and competence¹¹. One of the studies support that Toddlers who are given space to explore and interact with their surroundings on their own have a better relationship with their parents¹². It concludes that the parents should be available for the child, but let them take the lead¹³.

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT

Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space¹⁴. Attachment is characterized by behaviours like seeking proximity with the attachment figure, responding sensitively to the child's needs, and importance of the child's relationship with their caregiver¹⁵.

The term parental attachment denotes the emotional bonds between primary caretakers and their children. Bowlby defined attachment as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings'^{16,17}.

The Behavioural theory of attachment suggests that attachment is a set of learned behaviours, which was shown to underestimate the child's bond with their mother¹⁸. The child becomes attached to the mother because she fed the infant^{19,20,21}. On the other hand, the Evolutionary theory of attachment suggests that children are biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others for survival. The determinant of attachment is not food, but care and responsiveness.

A child would initially form only one primary attachment (monotropy) for exploring the world. There is a critical period for developing an attachment (about 0-5 years), as caregiver provides safety and security for the infant²². The child may suffer irreversible

developmental consequences if an effective attachment has not developed during this period. The attachment relationship acts as a prototype for all future social relationships. Infants have a universal need to seek close proximity with their caregiver when under stress or threatened²³.

AIM: To study the relationship between Helicopter parenting and parental attachment of undergraduate females.

HYPOTHESES:

1. It is expected that helicopter parenting would be negatively related with parental attachment.
2. It is expected that there would be high tendency of helicopter parenting in the maternal parental figure.

METHODOLOGY:

The current investigation is designed to study the relationship between helicopter parenting and parental attachment of the undergraduate college going females.

SAMPLE:

A sample of 100 females with in the age range of 17-20 years was taken from different colleges of the Tricity to study the relationship.

TEST AND TOOLS:

For this purpose, the following tests are administered to the sample:

- a) Helicopter parenting scale (Padilla Walker and Nelson, 2012)²⁴
- b) Parental Attachment Questionnaire (M. Keneddy, 1985)^{25,26}

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

For both the variables of the investigation, arithmetic mean and correlation is calculated. The correlation is applied to find if there are any relationship between the 2 variables, that is, helicopter parenting and parental attachment among undergraduate females with in the age range of 17-20 years. The data is depicted in a tabular manner and the results are discussed further.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Shows correlation between Helicopter parenting (father and mother) and parental attachment of undergraduate females.

And Correlation between Helicopter Parenting (Fathers) and Parental Attachment	0.0416
Correlation between Helicopter Parenting (Mothers) and Parental Attachment	0.1224

At df = 98

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of the investigation was to study the relationship between Helicopter parenting and parental attachment among the undergraduate females in the age range of 17-20 years.

The first hypothesis was that helicopter parenting would be negatively related with parental attachment. The correlation for both the parents i.e. father and mother came out to be 0.0416 and 0.1224, which is not significant. So Hypothesis 1 is rejected. Though the research findings support the hypothesis, the variation in the results may be due to the smaller sample.

A study investigating the link between parenting, attachment and adjustment to college and emotional adjustment of students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, found significant links between hovering parents, attachment security and psychological adjustment²⁷. A Parental attachment, self-esteem, and antisocial behaviour study found that insecure parental attachment was associated with higher levels of self-reported involvement in antisocial behaviors and lower levels of self-esteem²⁸.

Despite the relevance of parental attachment support and engagement in a child's life, in recent years, perceptions of highly-involved parents have shifted from supportive to over-intrusive or

helicopter parents constantly hovering over child in areas of decision making, academic studies, and social relationships²⁹. Excessive parental involvement hinders learning and development^{30,31}.

Perceived level of attachment has been found to have the potential to influence the child's behaviour positively, in terms of academic achievements and motivation and negatively on alcohol consumption, abuse, unethical practices etc^{32,33}. Loosening of helicopter parenting and parent-child attachment in family ties are a must for the growth of self esteem, independence and self realisation^{33,34}.

The second hypotheses was that there would be high tendency of helicopter parenting in the maternal parental figure. The correlation between the father and mother in terms of helicopter parenting came out to be 0.4123, which is significant and thus, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

One of the studies concludes that girls are typically helicoptered by the maternal parental figure³⁵. Another study found that 13% of female participants had helicoptered parents compared to only 5% of males, with mothers being principal hovering parents³⁶. 86% of first year female college students reported being in frequent contact with their mothers, while 71% of boys communicated frequently with their fathers³⁷.

Overparenting is positively associated with various maladaptive personality traits such as entitlement and narcissism and negatively associated with adaptive traits such as self-efficacy^{38,39}. A study found that helicopter parenting was a negative and significant predictor of emerging adult well-being, operationalized as a composite of autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance⁴⁰.

CONCLUSION:

Helicopter parenting limits the opportunities for emerging adults to develop skills needed for becoming self-reliant adults, reporting significantly higher levels of depression and less satisfaction in life, low self worth, increased tendency to engage in risky behaviours^{41,42}. A 2014 study found that children with highly structured childhood and lack of executive opportunities, lack the ability to determine goal directed actions⁴³.

Research Findings suggest that helicopter parenting not only affect children's emotional and social development, but might also impact their physical health. A research study concluded that the negative effects of helicoptering tend to make the children unhealthily, dependent, vulnerable, self-conscious, anxious, impulsive, not open to new ideas and actions⁴⁴. Other studies found that overprotective parenting might be related to problems like attention disorders, weight issues, resistance to disease, slow or underdeveloped cognitive and motor skills, and a lack of empathy which could lead to natural deficit disorder. A positive relation has been found between over-parenting and depression and anxiety in college students, expressed by taking medication⁴⁵.

Helicopter parenting also has positive effects, keeping in mind the fine line between involved parents and over-involved ones. Studies show a positive correlation between parents' engagement in their child's education and better grades, higher test scores, less substance abuse, and better higher education outcomes for instance⁴⁶. Another study concluded positive findings on over-parenting, as students with helicopter parents were more engaged in learning and reported greater satisfaction with their colleges. Despite slightly lower grades, they tended to have more social interactions, more involvement in active learning and collaborative learning, more often than their peers⁴⁷. Though involved parents affect kids in a positive way, over-involved parents are a different story.

A parent can love and care for their children without inhibiting their

ability to learn important life skills, letting children struggle, allowing them to be disappointed, and when failure occurs, helping them to work through it⁴⁸. The parents should **learn to accept that child's work won't always be perfect and should encourage them to fight their own battles, learn to take risks and let consequences stand, learn to leave them alone when required**. The trick is to recognize when these instincts kick in and to intentionally back off to let children learn to take care of themselves. Because, no matter how much the parent wants to, they really can't protect them all the time. Might as well equip them to protect themselves the best they can⁴⁹. Allow children to practice making independent decisions, not always providing input, praise or judgements, induce a sense of responsibility, resist fixing it or doing it for them, let them make mistakes as a natural step in self-discovery and independence, communicate with children, as non-judgemental listening and talking can be therapeutic in itself, parents must prepare children to handle risks, empower them to discover their true self⁵⁰.

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