



**A Review Study on the role of Helicopter Parenting in competitive societies and its effect
on Children's Autonomy and Self-Esteem**

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Abstract

The current research explores the phenomenon of helicopter parenting within the competitive societal context of India, examining its impact on children's autonomy and self-esteem. Utilizing a theoretical framework grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, and Social Comparison Theory, the study highlights how overprotective parenting practices, driven by intense societal and parental expectations, can stifle children's independence and contribute to identity confusion, diminished self-efficacy, and reliance on external validation. The analysis revealed that while helicopter parenting may stem from a desire to ensure success and well-being, it often leads to adverse psychological outcomes for children, particularly in environments where academic and career achievements are heavily emphasized. To address this issue, the research recommends a balanced approach to parenting that supports autonomy while providing appropriate guidance. Strategies such as fostering open

communication, trust-building, and gradual independence granting are suggested to help parents and educators mitigate the negative effects of helicopter parenting.

Keywords: *Helicopter parenting, autonomy, self-esteem, India, competitive societies, parental anxiety, child development.*

Introduction

In contemporary discourse, the term ‘helicopter parents’ has gained widespread recognition, symbolizing the extreme forms of parental overprotectiveness. This phenomenon is often observed when parents accompany their teenage children to university interviews, engage directly with tutors about academic progress, or even intervene in their child’s job applications and workplace matters. Children rely on their parents for nearly all aspects of their development, including decision-making, emotional regulation, and relationship-building.

The parent-child relationship plays a crucial role in shaping a child’s internal self-representation, which influences their self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and overall personality development. These internal representations are significantly impacted by parenting dimensions such as support and control, which help children navigate daily stressors and make routine decisions (Sood & Buchanan, 2024). The concept of helicopter parenting was first introduced by Haim Ginott in 1966 in his book "Parents & Teenagers," where the author likened the behavior of overly watchful parents to a helicopter hovering over their children.

Despite its controversial nature, this parenting style gained significant attention among psychologists only decades later. Various terms, such as lawnmower, bulldozer, and cosseting, have also been used to describe similar behaviors. Helicopter parenting has emerged as a distinct parenting style that is evident across different ages and cultures. Although recent years

have seen an increasing focus on research into over-parenting or helicopter parenting, the body of research remains relatively underdeveloped, particularly in the context of the Indian population. The limited studies available, such as one conducted with 145 university students in India, indicate that helicopter parenting is more prevalent among students living with their parents compared to those in hostels (Kukreja & Chauhan, 2016).

The early 20th century witnessed the emergence of another parenting approach, referred to as "overinvolved or helicopter" parenting. This style is often driven by parental anxieties, regrets, and concerns about their child's vulnerabilities, which are further shaped by sociocultural beliefs and gender roles. Helicopter parenting is characterized by hyper-involvement, problem-solving on behalf of the child, and a directive approach, all of which can have significant consequences for the child's development. While some research suggests that this parenting style may enhance young adults' satisfaction during college, there is also substantial evidence linking it to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and difficulties with self-regulation and coping. Theories such as self-determination and the circumplex model provide frameworks for understanding the impact of helicopter parenting, offering avenues for further research and early intervention strategies to mitigate its potential negative effects (Srivastav & Mathur, 2020).

Thus, the findings from this research can influence educational policies by underscoring the importance of creating environments that nurture children's growth and self-reliance. Moreover, understanding the dynamics of helicopter parenting can aid in promoting psychological well-being, ensuring children develop the skills necessary to succeed in high-pressure situations. This research also provides a basis for designing programs and interventions that foster healthier parent-child relationships, ultimately benefiting both families and society.

An indigenous viewpoint

Carolyn Ditch, head of the Centre for the Treatment of Anxiety Disorder, has articulated that helicopter parenting is a growing trend where parents excessively monitor every aspect of their child's development, stifling their independence. Despite its outward appearance of care, this destructive parenting style has been shown to produce various behavioral and psychological issues in adolescents and should be abandoned immediately (Ganaprakasam et al., 2018). In competitive societies like India, where educational attainment is closely linked to socio-economic status and cultural values, helicopter parenting has become increasingly common. Indian parents often face immense pressure to secure their children's success in a highly competitive environment, leading to a parenting approach that is heavily involved and protective (Sood & Buchanan, 2024).

In today's intensely competitive world, students encounter various academic challenges, including exam stress, disengagement from classes, and difficulties in understanding subjects. Examination stress contributes to mental imbalances among adolescents, potentially leading to low self-esteem. Adolescents often grapple with questions about their future and face intrapersonal and interpersonal issues related to vocation, education, health, family, and society. In such a high-pressure environment, children can feel crushed by the weight of expectations and competition. While it is a child's responsibility to fulfill their parents' dreams, parents must avoid imposing their anxieties and desires on their children. Rather than acting as supportive figures, parents may inadvertently burden their children with their own aspirations, leading to an increase in suicide rates among adolescents. Rightly stated by Shobi and Mumthas (2019), "the over-involvement of parents in their children's education can sometimes have negative effects on the child's development, potentially leading to mental health issues".

Thus, the present investigation is an exploratory work and thus keeping in mind the current scenario, the focus is on the holistic development of the child, which requires a supportive home environment and a healthy parent-child relationship.

Research Objectives

- a) Analyze helicopter parenting's impact on children's autonomy and self-esteem in competitive Indian environments.
- b) Investigate the prevalence of helicopter parenting, focusing on cultural, social, and economic factors.
- c) Examine the effects on children's decision-making skills and increased dependence on parents.
- d) Explore how parental anxiety and expectations influence children's self-esteem.
- e) Assess the role of Indian cultural values in shaping helicopter parenting and its psychological impact on children.
- f) Apply theories like Self-Determination Theory and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Social Comparison Theory to suggest balanced parenting strategies.
- g) Propose interventions that support autonomy and self-esteem in children within competitive societies.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory

The theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), focuses on how social and environmental factors influence three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are crucial for optimal functioning and psychological well-being. Helicopter parenting involves excessive involvement and control in children's lives, often to shield them from failure or harm. This style limits children's independence and self-regulation. Helicopter parenting directly undermines the need for autonomy as per SDT. Constant parental monitoring and intervention hinder independent decision-making, stifling

psychological growth and fostering dependency. The autonomy deprivation resulting from helicopter parenting can lead to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of competence. Children may struggle with self-esteem, believing they are incapable of managing challenges independently. The effects of helicopter parenting on autonomy vary across cultures. In collectivist societies like India, where family obligations and academic success are paramount, these effects may be intensified (Wang, Pomerantz & Chen, 2007).

Psychosocial Development Theory

Erikson's (1950) theory highlights the importance of social relationships and experiences in shaping individual development. It emphasizes that development is a continuous process influenced by personal choices and environmental factors. Each stage builds upon the outcomes of the previous one, making the resolution of conflicts at each stage crucial for healthy development. Drawing on findings from Marcia (1980), Kroger (2006), and Sokol (2009), Erikson's stages can be applied to understand the impact of helicopter parenting. Overprotection and excessive control can inhibit the development of autonomy, identity, and relationships, ultimately impacting overall well-being. This analysis underscores the importance of balanced parenting approaches that support children in resolving psychosocial conflicts at each stage of development.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Festinger (1954), posits that individuals naturally seek to evaluate their own worth by comparing themselves with others. In competitive environments like India, where academic and societal success hold significant value, Social Comparison Theory offers a framework for understanding the rise of helicopter parenting. This societal pressure often drives parents to become overly involved in their children's lives, contributing to the phenomenon of helicopter parenting (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Social Comparison Theory suggests that a child's self-esteem is closely tied to their perceived success

relative to others. Helicopter parenting can heighten this by establishing high expectations and encouraging constant comparisons. Depending on whether children meet these expectations, their self-esteem may either be bolstered or diminished (Chou & Chi, 2000).

A Comprehensive Perspective

By integrating SDT, Erikson's theory, and Social Comparison Theory, a comprehensive understanding of the effects of helicopter parenting emerges. SDT explains how excessive parental control diminishes autonomy and competence, leading to lower self-esteem. Erikson's theory adds to this by showing how helicopter parenting disrupts essential stages of psychosocial development. Social Comparison Theory further clarifies how external pressures and comparisons can exacerbate the negative impact on self-esteem. Both SDT and Erikson's theory emphasize the importance of autonomy and competence in psychological growth. Helicopter parenting disrupts these aspects, leading to challenges in identity formation and self-worth, ultimately lowering self-esteem. The negative impact of helicopter parenting on autonomy and self-esteem is compounded by social comparisons. Children subjected to excessive control may be more susceptible to external validation and societal pressures, which can further damage their self-esteem and self-concept.

Example of Theoretical Integration

A child raised under helicopter parenting may experience limited opportunities to make independent decisions (as per SDT) and struggle with resolving developmental crises (as per Erikson). This lack of autonomy might lead to a dependence on external validation and comparisons with peers (as per Social Comparison Theory), thereby further diminishing self-esteem. This integrated approach illustrates the profound influence of helicopter parenting on children's psychological development in a competitive society.

Prevalence

Helicopter parenting is a global phenomenon observed across various cultures,

including the United States, China, and India. Despite cultural variations, it retains universal characteristics, such as overprotection, high parental involvement, and elevated expectations for children (Kwon et al., 2017). Children subjected to such parenting often face significant challenges transitioning to adulthood (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014).

In Canada, Ungar (2009) explored the cultural aspects of helicopter parenting and its impact on children's resilience. The findings revealed that overprotective parenting stifles the development of autonomy and resilience, leaving children with diminished self-esteem and decision-making capabilities. Similarly, studies conducted in the United States highlighted its adverse effects on mental health. LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) found that excessive parental involvement correlates with heightened anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem among college students. Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) reported that helicopter parenting diminishes self-worth and problem-solving skills while fostering dependency. Furthermore, Segrin et al. (2013) and Schiffrin et al. (2014) linked this parenting style to lower autonomy, increased depression, and reduced life satisfaction.

In India, while adolescents may not explicitly label such behaviours as helicopter parenting, the consequences are equally profound. Sood and Singh (2021) noted that overprotective parenting often hampers children's decision-making abilities, fostering dependency, neuroticism, and ineffective coping strategies. These behaviors, though well-meaning, restrict social, emotional, and physical development. Research by Ganaprakasam et al. (2018) underscored the importance of balanced parenting, advocating for approaches that integrate warmth with discipline to promote independence.

The intense academic and competitive pressures in India exacerbate helicopter parenting's impact. According to Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015), parental expectations often stem from societal demands and personal aspirations, leading to undue pressure on children to excel academically. This pressure is amplified by factors like high unemployment rates and the competitive race for prestigious educational institutions. Such environments contribute to

mental health challenges, particularly among secondary school students, who may experience emotional distress and breakdowns during critical examination periods.

Analysis

This analysis is derived from a comprehensive review of various books, review articles, and research papers referenced throughout the course of this research.

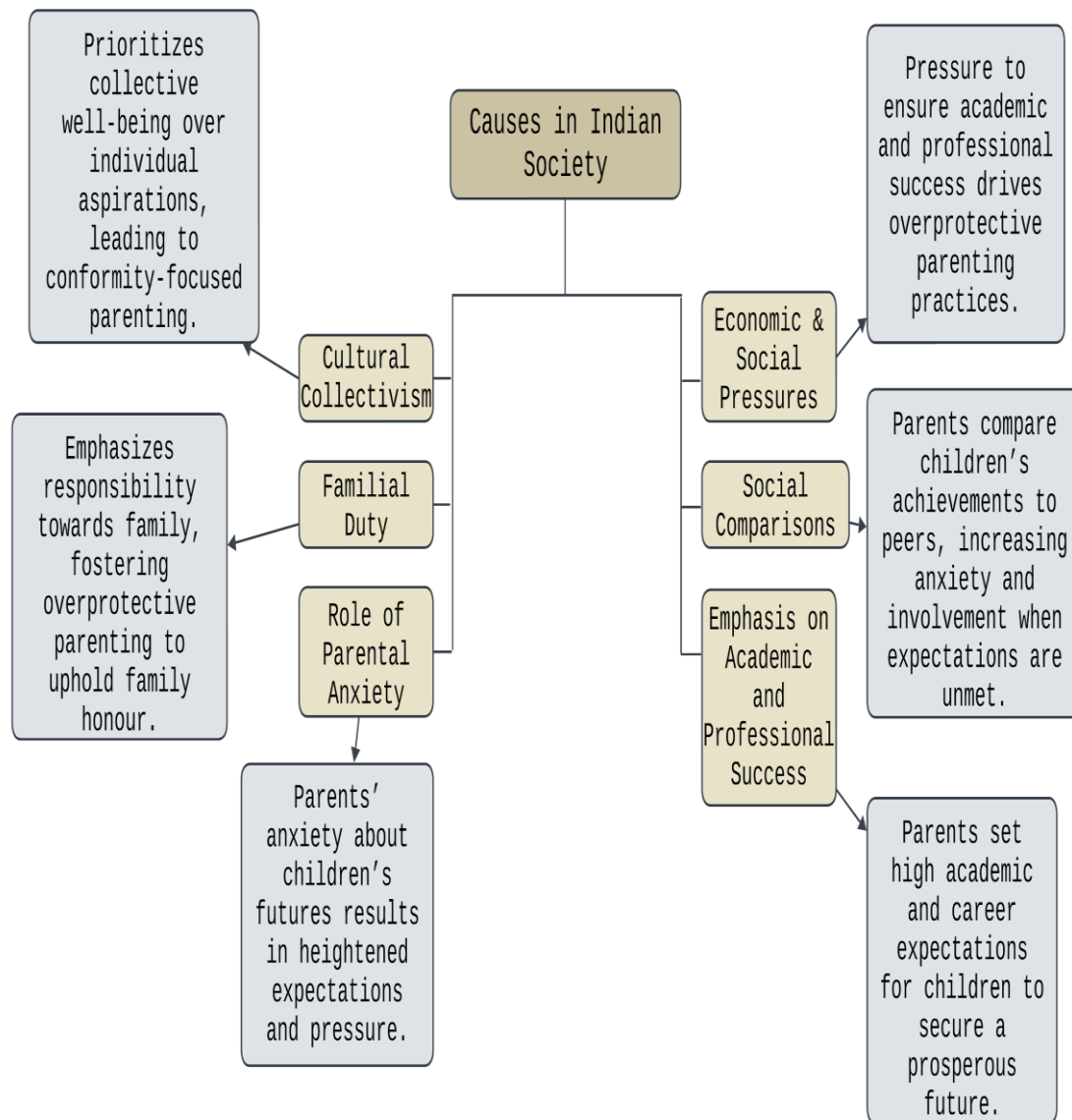


Figure 1: Illustrates the primary causes of helicopter parenting

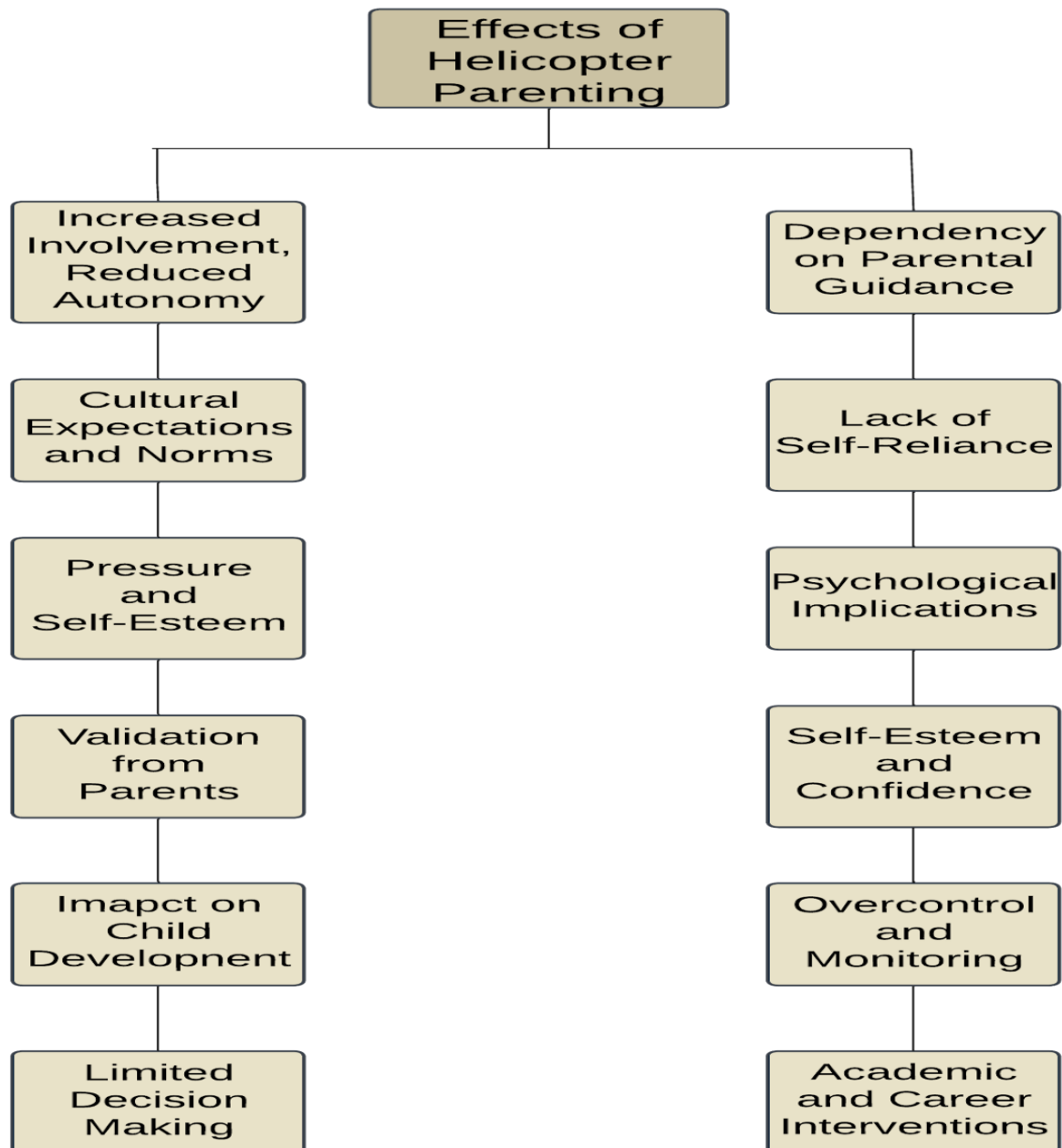


Figure 2: *Depicts the effects of helicopter parenting on children's autonomy, self-esteem, and overall development.*

Overprotective parenting, fueled by parental anxiety and high expectations, profoundly impacts children's self-esteem. The internalization of these pressures, combined with the restriction of opportunities for independent decision-making, can lead to performance-based self-worth, diminished self-confidence, and heightened emotional stress. To foster healthy

development, it is crucial for parents to cultivate supportive practices that balance high expectations with nurturing environments. By encouraging autonomy and self-acceptance, parents can help their children develop resilience and a stable sense of self, ultimately preparing them to navigate the complexities of adulthood successfully.

DISCUSSION

Implications for Interventions and Support Systems

Enhancing Parental Education and Training

Workshops and Seminars: Designing and implementing workshops tailored for parents can educate them about the potential adverse effects of helicopter parenting on their children's autonomy and self-esteem. These workshops should offer practical strategies to encourage independence in children, such as allowing them to make age-appropriate decisions and learn from their experiences. For instance, parents could engage in role-playing exercises that help them practise stepping back and enabling their children to tackle challenges independently.

Parenting Programs: Comprehensive parenting programs can provide continuous support and resources for parents. These programs should offer personalised guidance on adopting a balanced parenting style that nurtures children's developmental needs while offering appropriate direction. Practical components could include one-on-one counselling, group discussions on parenting challenges, and resource materials on effective parenting methods.

Promoting Autonomy-Focused Parenting Approaches

Encouraging Independent Learning: To foster autonomy, parents can be encouraged to create environments that support independent learning. This involves setting up spaces where children can explore, experiment, and solve problems with minimal parental intervention. Techniques might include creating designated areas for self-directed projects and allowing

children to set and pursue their goals with little oversight.

Gradual Release of Responsibility: Implementing a strategy of gradually releasing responsibility can help children build self-confidence and independence. Parents can begin by assigning small, manageable tasks and progressively increase responsibility as the child demonstrates readiness. This approach aids in developing decision-making skills and a sense of competence while ensuring appropriate support.

Addressing Cultural and Societal Pressures

Community Engagement: Engaging with community leaders and institutions to tackle societal pressures contributing to helicopter parenting can be beneficial. This could involve community forums, awareness campaigns, and public discussions on the effects of competitive environments on parenting practices. By fostering dialogue, communities can work towards reducing the stigma associated with less controlling parenting styles.

Cultural Sensitivity Training: Offering cultural sensitivity training for educators and mental health professionals can enhance their ability to support families facing high societal expectations. Training should focus on understanding cultural nuances and developing strategies that respect these contexts while promoting healthier parenting practices.

Developing Support Systems for Children

Counselling and Mentoring Services: Establishing counselling and mentoring programs tailored for children can help them navigate the pressures associated with helicopter parenting. These services should provide emotional support, guidance on building self-esteem, and strategies for managing academic and social stress. Programs could include individual counselling, group therapy, and mentorship opportunities with role models who offer positive reinforcement and advice.

Peer Support Groups: Creating peer support groups for children experiencing similar pressures can offer a valuable support network. These groups can provide a space for sharing experiences, discussing coping strategies, and offering mutual encouragement. Facilitated by trained professionals, these groups can help children feel less isolated and more empowered in their personal development.

Integrating Parent-Child Communication Strategies

Open Dialogue Initiatives: Promoting open communication between parents and children can help align expectations and reduce conflicts. Initiatives might include training sessions on effective communication techniques, family meetings to discuss goals and concerns, and workshops on active listening skills. Open dialogue can help parents better understand their children's perspectives and adjust their approaches accordingly.

Feedback Mechanisms: Implementing feedback mechanisms that allow parents to reflect on their parenting styles and receive constructive feedback can be valuable. These could include self-assessment tools, input from educators, or participation in parenting forums. Receiving feedback can help parents make informed adjustments to better support their children's needs.

Conclusion

Recommendations

To mitigate the negative impacts of helicopter parenting, it is crucial for parents and educators to adopt a balanced approach that nurtures both protection and autonomy. By fostering environments where children can develop independence, make decisions, and build self-confidence, parents, educators, and policymakers can contribute to the overall well-being of children in competitive societies. Balanced approaches not only help children succeed academically but also enhance their emotional and psychological resilience.

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