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Helicopter Parenting and Psychological Well-being among Indian and United States Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Parents play an important role in a child's life. Parents' style of raising their children can largely determine a child's overall development. In addition to the various parenting styles such as authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles (Baumrind, 1966), helicopter parenting has become a common parenting style for raising children. Helicopter parenting is a parenting style that involves parents who are potentially over-involved in their child's lives (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Parents have high expectations about providing their children the best resources possible to make their life easier and often get over-involved in this process. Parents who adopt this type of parenting style often believe that it can help their children to flourish in life. Psychological well-being describes the important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life (Diener et al., 2010). This research aims to study the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and United States of America (USA) adolescents. A sample of Indian and US adolescents (n=60) ranging from 16-21 years were chosen for this study. The adolescent's perception of their parent's helicopter parenting behaviour was measured using Helicopter Parenting Instrument and the adolescent's psychological well-being was measured using the Flourishing Scale. The study results indicated no significant relationship between perceived helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.

Keywords— Adolescents, Helicopter parenting, psychological well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing and never-ending debate on nature versus nurture has always kept researchers on toes to find new theories and models to understand the factors that influence an individual's behaviour. One such factor that has been studied frequently includes the parental factors through gene mapping, adoption studies, shared environment studies, etc. The term parenting has been receiving greater attention in the present day. Parents worldwide have begun to understand the importance of effective parenting to raise their children. The process of supporting a child's physical, psychological and intellectual development from infancy to adulthood is known as parenting or child-rearing (Brooks, 2012). The type of parenting that children receive during their childhood and adolescents influences their developmental competencies during their adulthood. The parent-child relationship impacts various developmental areas of the child such as academic achievement, emotional regulation, social interaction, and relationships. Oftentimes parents indulge in over-parenting which is otherwise known as helicopter parenting. The term helicopter parenting was first coined by Cline & Fay, (1990) in their parenting book series called "Parenting with love and logic".

Helicopter parents hover over their children to shelter them from stress, resolve their problems and offer constant support and affirmation (Hirsch & Goldberger, 2010). Helicopter parenting can influence an individual's psychological well-being in various ways. "Psychological well-being describes the important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life" (Diener et al., 2010). It is assumed by the parents that constant support, encouragement, and supervision from their side help the children to effectively solve the problem. However, this also raises the question of whether the presence and contribution of parents in every situation could hinder the child's creativity, decision-making skills, and autonomy. Various researches are revealing both the positive and negative effects of helicopter parenting on adolescents' well-being. However, in the Indian context, there are very limited research studies based on this topic. Thus, this research aims to study the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being in adolescents by comparing Indian and United States adolescents.

By reviewing existing pieces of literature on helicopter parenting and psychological well-being, it can be inferred that various researcher have suggested that too much parental involvement may result in negative child outcomes. However, some studies also revealed mixed findings of both positive and negative outcomes.

Schiffirin et al., (2014) conducted a study on the effects of helicopter parenting on college students' well-being and the study concluded that Students who reported having parents with higher levels of helicopter parenting and over-controlling parents reported significantly higher levels of depression and less satisfaction with life. Odenweller et al., (2014) examined the relationship between helicopter parenting and millennials' personal and interpersonal problems. The required data were collected from 268 millennials about their parents' helicopter parenting, parenting style, family communication pattern, interpersonal dependency, and coping ability. The results of the study revealed that there exists a positive relationship between helicopter parenting and authoritarian parenting style and conformity. Millennials exposed to high levels of helicopter parenting reported neurotic tendencies, ineffective coping abilities, and increased dependency.

College students with highly involved parents scored lower grades than students with lesser involvement (Shoup et al.,2009) and also experienced lower self-esteem (Rutherford, 2011). Helicopter parenting is related to low self-efficacy, withdrawal from peers, and lack of trust among peers (Ingen et al., 2015). Increased level of narcissism, anxiety, alienation and lower self-worth was also related to helicopter parenting (Klick & Mitchell,2016).

Various forms of anxiety disorders such as separation anxiety, social anxiety, panic disorder, were more prevalent among young adults who experienced overparenting (Rosseau & Scharf,2015). Helicopter parents who are constantly working round the clock to improve their child's academic performance, intelligence and emphasizes instilling perfectionism in their children increase the probability of the child developing anxiety disorders during adolescents and young adulthood. (Locke et al.,2016; Schiffirin & Liss.,2017)

Another study found that parents of college students who were reported of being overly involved in their children's lives had children with lower levels of satisfaction with their family (Sergin et al.,2012). A study conducted by (LeMoyné & Buchanan, 2011) on helicopter parenting and its effects on well-being indicated that College students who reported that their parents were over-involved and controlling in their lives had lower psychological well-being and were more likely to take medications for depression and anxiety.

Another study also suggested that children of over-involved or over-controlling parents may feel less competent and less able to manage life and its stressors (Bronson & Merryman, 2009). A study on helicopter parenting and psychological consequences among adolescents by (Ganaprakasam et al., 2018) showed that helicopter parenting triggered disruption on adolescent's mental health and was associated negatively with self-efficacy for learning.

In contrast to the various negative outcomes of parental over-involvement, few research studies indicate that parental over-involvement or over-parenting can result in the healthy development of a child. Research on the Impact of helicopter parents on college students revealed that Students with highly involved parents reported significantly high quality of relationship, engagement, and satisfaction in college. In addition, college students with highly involved parents reported greater personal competence and increased personal and social development and general education. (Shoup et al. 2009). High levels of maternal involvement have been associated with more prosocial behaviors and hope among adolescents (Day & Padilla-Walker 2009). Grolnick & Ryan (1989) suggested that children with over-involved parents tend to have positive social outcomes and fewer behavioural problems.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aim

To study the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.

2.2 Objectives

1. To determine the differences in the level of helicopter parenting among Indian and US adolescents.
2. To determine the differences in the level of psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.
3. To determine the gender differences in the level of helicopter parenting and psychological well-being.

2.3 Hypothesis

H₀₁: There will be no significant relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.

H₀₂: There will be no significant difference in the level of helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.

H₀₃: There will be no gender difference in the level of helicopter parenting and psychological well-being.

2.4 Research design

Ex-post facto research design was adopted to conduct the study in which an online survey questionnaire was administered to a sample of people and the responses obtained for the survey was statistically analysed.

2.5 Sample

A sample of 60 adolescents (n=60), 30 Indian adolescents and 30 United States (US) adolescents ranging from 16-21 years were included for the study.

2.6 Procedure

Convenient sampling method was used in this study. The online form was circulated to both Indian and US adolescents. The participants were instructed to read each statement carefully and select an option which was appropriate to them. The participants were assured that the responses will be kept confidential and anonymity will be maintained. All samples were included in the study. The collected data was statistically analysed by using MS Excel with mean analysis, Pearson’s correlation coefficient and test of significance (t test).

2.7 Tools Used

- 1. Helicopter Parenting Instrument:** The level of helicopter parenting was assessed using the Helicopter Parenting Instrument (HPI) developed by (Odenweller et al.,2014). The HPI is comprised of 15 items assessing the adolescents’ perceived helicopter parenting experiences. Participants indicated whether they very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7) with each statement in regards to the HPI. Reliability of the HPI has been reported at .78. A higher score indicates greater perceived helicopter parenting and vice-versa.
- 2. The Flourishing Scale:** The level of psychological well-being was measured using the Flourishing Scale developed by (Diener et al., 2009). The flourishing scale comprised of 8 items assessing the respondent’s self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. Participants indicated whether they strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) on each statement. A high score represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths. A higher score indicates greater psychological well-being and vice-versa.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: shows the mean scores for helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents

| Variables | Mean scores | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | Indian adolescents N=30 (M) | Interpretation | US adolescents N=30 (M) | Interpretation | Overall (n=60) | Interpretation |
| Helicopter parenting | 70.73 | High | 42.2 | Low | 56.56 | Below |
| Psychological well-being | 42.6 | Above average | 46.1 | Above average | 44.3 | Above average |

The highest possible score on helicopter parenting instrument (HPI) is 105 and the lowest possible score is 15. On data analysis, it is observed that the highest raw score in the group for helicopter parenting is 90 and the lowest raw score is 26. Thereby the group mean established is 58. Therefore, any raw score falling above the group mean of 58 has high levels of helicopter parenting and any score falling below the group mean has low levels of helicopter parenting. The mean of total raw score for helicopter parenting is 56.56, which is below the group mean, this signifies a below average perceived helicopter parenting. For Indian adolescents the mean score obtained is 70.73 which indicates high level of perceived helicopter parenting whereas for US adolescents the mean score obtained is 42.2 which indicates low level of helicopter parenting.

The highest possible score on the flourishing scale is 56 and the lowest possible score is 8. On data analysis, it is observed that the highest raw score in the group for psychological well-being is 56 and the lowest raw score is 26. Thereby the group mean established is 40.5. Therefore, any raw score falling above the group mean of 40.5 has high levels of psychological well-being and any score falling below the group mean value has low levels of psychological well-being. The overall mean score for psychological well-being is 44.3, which is above the group mean, this signifies an above average psychological well-being. For Indian adolescents the mean score obtained is 42.6 which indicates above average psychological well-being and for US adolescents the mean score obtained is 46.1 which also indicates above average psychological well-being.

Table 2: Shows the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian adolescents.

| | Mean | SD | r- value | p-value |
|--------------------------|-------|------|----------|---------|
| Helicopter parenting | 70.73 | 9.89 | 0.1220 | .5207 |
| Psychological well-being | 42.2 | 7.21 | | |

Correlation is not significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3: shows the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among US adolescents.

| | Mean | SD | r- value | p-value |
|--------------------------|------|------|----------|---------|
| Helicopter parenting | 42.2 | 9.58 | 0.0417 | .826 |
| Psychological well-being | 46.1 | 5.55 | | |

Correlation is not significant at the 0.05 level

From table 2 and 3, it can be inferred that there exists no significant relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents. This implies that the presence of perceived helicopter parenting by adolescents does not influence their psychological well-being. An excerpt from Anne frank’s book the diary of a young girl in which she says “Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands” (Anne,1997). This quote could be related to the findings of the current study. The results of the study are inconsistent with majority of the existing literature. The existing literature sheds light on either the negative outcomes of helicopter parenting or the mixed findings of both negative and positive outcomes due to helicopter parenting (Odenweller,2014; Schiffrin,2014; Shoup,2009). Therefore hypothesis (H₀₁) is accepted.

Table 4: shows the difference in the level of helicopter parenting among Indian and US adolescents.

| Variable | Sample (60) | Mean | SD | t | p |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------|------|--------|----------------|
| Helicopter parenting | Indian adolescents (30) | 70.73 | 9.89 | 11.263 | 0.0001* |
| | US adolescents (30) | 42.2 | 9.58 | | |

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 5: Shows the difference in the level of psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents.

| Variable | Sample (60) | Mean | SD | t | P |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------|------|-------|---------------|
| Psychological well-being | Indian adolescents (30) | 42.2 | 7.21 | 2.125 | .0189* |
| | US adolescents (30) | 46.1 | 5.55 | | |

*Significant at the 0.05 level

From table 4 and 5, it can be inferred that there exists significant difference in the level of helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents. Indian adolescents have high level of perceived helicopter parenting as compared to the level of perceived helicopter parenting among US adolescents. A study conducted by (Barnhart et al.,2012) revealed that Indian college students perceived parents demonstrating permissive parenting style i.e., parents allowing their children to take up responsibilities and regulate their own behaviours to be more effective whereas US students considered parents demonstrating authoritative or authoritarian parenting style to be more effective. However, the socialization goals being interdependence and obedience in Asian culture, authoritarian parenting is more common among Asian culture whereas the goals of western culture being independence and autonomy, authoritative parenting is more common in western culture (keller & otto,2009). Therefore, this could possibly be one of the reason due to which overparenting or helicopter parenting is more common among India than compared to US. Similarly, US adolescents have high level of psychological well-being than compared to the level of psychological well-being among Indian adolescents. This could possibly be due to greater level of freedom and autonomy that adolescents in US experience in terms of decision making and parental control. Therefore, hypothesis (H₀₂) is rejected.

Table 6: Shows the gender difference in the level of helicopter parenting among male and female adolescents.

| Variable | Sample (30) | Mean | SD | t | p |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| Helicopter parenting | Male | 53.290 | 16.47 | 1.864 | .06715 |
| | Female | 61.419 | 17.83 | | |

Not significant at the 0.05 level

Table 7: Shows the gender difference in the level of psychological well-being among male and female.

| Variables | Sample (30) | Mean | SD | t | p |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Psychological well-being | Male | 42.95 | 6.874 | 1.749 | .0852 |
| | Female | 45.95 | 6.170 | | |

Not significant at the 0.05 level

From table 6 and 7, it can be inferred that there exists no significant difference in the level of perceived helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among male and female adolescents. This indicates that there exists no gender difference in the level of perceived helicopter parenting and psychological well-being. The findings of gender difference on psychological well-being are consistent with other studies which also points out no gender difference on psychological well-being between male and female (Salleh & Mustafa,2016; Waghmare,2016). Therefore, hypothesis (H₀₃) is accepted.

4. CONCLUSIONS

From the study it can be inferred that there is no relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents. Further we found that, there is no difference in the level of perceived helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among Indian and US adolescents in which the level of perceived helicopter parenting is higher in Indian adolescents and level of psychological well-being is higher in US adolescents. High level of perceived helicopter parenting in Indian adolescents could be possibly due to the collectivistic nature of people in India, where decisions are taken based on the approval of parents and parents actively take interest in their child's life which may hinder the child's autonomy. The implicit rules and culture of a particular region could determine the levels of helicopter parenting. There is no gender difference in the level of perceived helicopter parenting and psychological well-being among male and female adolescents.

5. IMPLICATIONS

By determining the level of perceived helicopter parenting and its relationship with psychological well-being, it is possible for the counsellor to teach parents effective parenting strategies and educating well-intentioned parents about supporting children's independence and autonomy in which the parents can still be there for their children. It is important for the parents to explain their helicopter parenting actions to their children for better emotional and psychological well-being.

6. LIMITATIONS

- The sample size taken for the study is small.
- Only a specific age group under the developmental stage of adolescence have been considered for this research from both Indian and US population.

- Majority of the Indian participants were belonging to Southern part of India (Chennai city in Tamil Nadu) and participants from other states of India were not considered hence the outcome may vary from the participants of different states.
- Majority of the United States participants were belonging to California and participants from other states of United States were not considered.

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