**Helicopter parenting, from good intentions to poor outcomes. What parents needs to know?**

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**Abstract**

Background: A single child is precious for every parent. There is an increasing demand for children to perform and to excel in all aspects of their lives. Due to increased unemployment and less job opportunities, tough competition to get admission in good school and college and to get respectable job put every parent under constant stress. These circumstances lead to parents starting micromanagement of their children. This micromanagement can be harmful to the mental and emotional wellbeing of the child, and is especially seen in single-child parents. Objective: This study aimed to ascertain if parents of single child show behavior of helicopter parenting as compared to patents having more than one child. Methods: This is an open-ended observational study, wherein 100 families with single child and 50 families with more than one child were interviewed based on self-explanatory questionnaire methods. Results: We noted that 83% parents showed behavior of helicopter parenting, especially those who have single child as compared to those having more than one child. Conclusion: Based on our survey, we can conclude that parents of single child showed behavior of helicopter parenting as compared to patents having more than one child because only child is precious and center of attraction in the families especially in Indian culture. However, large studies are required to reach a definitive conclusion.

**Keywords:** Child care, excessive care, helicopter parenting, lawnmower parenting, overparenting

**Introduction**

The term “helicopter parent” was first used in Dr. Haim Ginott’s 1969 book titled Parents & Teenagers by teens who told that parents hovers over children just like a helicopter.¹ Later on, Foster Cline and Jim Fay coined the term “helicopter parent” in 1990.²

Helicopter parent also called as cosseting parent or over caring or lawnmower parent, are those parents who pay extremely close attention to the child in every aspect like their eating behavior, outdoor activities, child experiences and problems, child’s friends, and particularly in their studies. Such parents even keep a close watch on what the child wears, how he/she eats, how he spends his leisure time, etc. Helicopter parents are named so because, they “hover overhead”, like helicopters, keeping a constant eye in every step of their child’s life be it indoor or outdoor.³ This type of parent is also known for their closed monitoring of their children in every aspect of lives being indoor or outdoor.⁴

Howe, Neil⁵ defined helicopter parenting is a parenting style associated with Baby Boomer parents. He describes the helicopter parenting of baby boomers as a unique child rearing style that is “often annoying, and often helpful, yet always hovering over their children and making noise.” He suggested that baby boomers are very attached to their children, and thus, this was a good practice.

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Methods

It is an open-ended observational study based on self-explanatory questioners in 100 families who have single child and 50 families who have more than one child as a control. The study was conducted after hospital ethical committee approval between Jan 2019 and Sep 2021. Each included family was given self-explanatory questionnaires with only “Yes” or “No” response. The collected responses were analyzed and tabulated.

Inclusion criteria

(a) Single or more than one child family (with both parent present)
(b) Age of child between 3 years and 15 years
(c) No medical comorbidity in child
(d) No inborn metabolic syndrome in a child
(e) No developmental abnormalities in a child.

Exclusion criteria

(a) family with only one parent present
(b) A child with medical, inborn, or developmental abnormalities.

Statistical analysis

We used SPSS (version 19, IBM, Inc USA). For qualitative and quantitative data, Numbers and percentage values, and mean and standard deviation (±SD) values were used, respectively. Chi-square test was taken as a test of significance for ordinal data. Student’s t-test and linear correlation (Pearson’s coefficient-2-tailed) was used to compare both groups with a P value set at less than 0.05 for significance.

Results

In both the groups, child age was not associated with over-care; however, in study group it was noted that 41% children were overweight with BMI >25 kg/m² as compared to control group (p = 0.0012). Education of parents was also a significant factor for overparenting. It was noted that parents who were graduate or postgraduate were involved in overparenting (P = 0.023) Table 1.

It was noted that parents of the single child when asked “Feelings of anxiety about your child future”, 94% responded “Yes” (p = 0.003) as compared to the control group. It was also noted that parents of the single child, when asked “Overcompensation for his bad mood”, 77% responded “Yes” (p = 0.023) compared to control group. There were such many questions where parents of single child responded “Yes” vis-à-vis control group [Table 2].

In present study, we noted that the single-child family responded by “Yes” in majority of questions compared with the control group. This indicates that parent of single child show behavior of helicopter parenting at large in comparison to the parents with > 1 child. This cannot be generalized, as any parent is supposed to give equal care to all irrespective of the number of children. Yet, overparenting does happen unintentionally and become a habit over the period [Figure 1].

Discussion

Overprotective tendencies are the main features of Helicopter parenting in their child’s upbringing; however, this definition may not be generalized sometimes. These parents are always after their children more than expected and extensively involved in their children’s lives. They are so much involved that their own career, activities, and interests become secondary. They spend a hefty amount of their budget on the kid’s needs. These parents may not care about their personal goals and careers in front of their kids’ needs.

Helicopter parents tend to outperform their child to give them a competitive advantage in everything being it school or outdoor. Many such parents may even monitor and manipulate their child’s friend circle and social networking like conversation details of meetings and mails and minute details of their friends and so on. Their goal is to provide for their children in every possible way.

Helicopter parents do not see or realize the wrong in their parenting because they are so engaged in their children’s lives.

Helicopter parenting can be defined by three types of behaviors.

(a) Always information-seeking behaviors about child’s daily schedule.
(b) Direct intervention, jumping into conflicts with kids’ activities no matter wrong or right.

© Not giving autonomy to children, limiting, and controlling them from making their own small mistakes and controlling their lives.

All of us as a parent love our children as much as possible and protect them from ill effects of our society. We live in a community with a continually rising competition in the world.
and want to give our children the best as far as possible. But if we do overparenting and pamper them too much, it can backfire in a big way. A published data in recent years shows an association between such parenting and mental wellbeing in the child, such as anxiety and depression, because as children get older, they are forced to make their own independent decisions for which they have not been trained in childhood.

**Positive aspects**

Helicopter parenting is almost always used in a derogatory manner, although it is not all bad. They bring discipline to child's life, and they live in a cocooned life. It is double edge sword and cannot be continued for forever. Helicopter parents keen to know the location of their children at all times, which is critical to their safety. Helicopter parents are usually very aware about with whom their child is, and how their child is doing in school. They support their child if he is not doing well or struggling in school in the academic performance. Similarly, they help their child during his illnesses, fighting among friends, and even in bullying issues also. These parents will work relentlessly to ensure that these issues are addressed as soon as possible. These parents tend to be involved in every school function and encourage or sometimes force their children to participate in all school functions. In this way, schools, principals, teachers, and other staff tend to improve the school facilities.

**Drawbacks**

Being too much involved in child's lives can be detrimental, and children might feel suffocated. They struggle for their independence and autonomy.

**Helicopter parenting's potential disadvantages:**

(a) **Hamper in the problem-solving skills development:**

Children of all ages are required to learn problem-solving/managing skills. Whether a parent has a 5-year-old child or a 25-year-old, it is essential for kids to learn and know how to manage their own problems. Hovering parents often solve their problems, and kids do not get to learn valuable problem-solving skills.

(b) **Increases dependency on parents:**

Helicopter parents get so much involved with their children that child become totally dependent upon them. In morning while child is getting ready for school mother tend to organize his school bag, tiffin, started polishing his shoes etc., and in this way, children do not learn how to do these tasks for themselves.

(c) **Hindrance for child from learning to help for themselves:**

Rather than teaching their children to learn for themselves, helicopter parents generally do things for them. Asking questions, clarification in case of and speak up when required is very important for children for proper growth. In a crisis or adverse situation or at the workplace, these children would not have parents available to guide them or to deal with the situation.
(d) Shielding children from natural consequences:

It is important for children to face and tackle some benign natural consequences in life so that they learn how to handle them, and if required take guidance from parents. Children need to learn to face common adverse situation like small fight in the school, taunting among friends, jokes among friends or even when they fail in class test. Nevertheless, many helicopter parents begin micromanaging their children’s activities in order to prevent unwanted incidents or consequences.[9,10]

(e) Interference with the child-parent relationship:

Helicopter parents may interfere with the parent-child relationship by their daily activities. Constantly reminding the child to finish their homework on time or monitoring their progress won’t help much. Such activities of constant watch or nagging hamper relationship.[1,11]

(f) Lower confidence and self-esteem:

By doing helicopter parenting, it decreases child self-confidence because parents did not allow children how to cope up in an adverse situation or any such crisis.

(g) Delayed in development of coping skills:

If the parent is continuously attempting to correct child’s wrong or solve their problem before it arises, how does the child ever learn to manage with misfortunes, dissatisfactions, failure, or disappointment? Few studies have found that by helicopter parenting children feel incompetent to deal with the adverse situation or crisis on their own and they became nervous while dealing such situations.[12,13]

(b) Increased anxiety in child:

Higher levels of anxiety and depression are seen in children with overparenting. They feel that they are being under constant watch and their activities are being monitored. Further child thinks that if they commit any mistake, parents will shout on them. This behavior increases anxiety in the child.

(i) Sense of ingenuine privilege:

Over parented children whose studies, social life, lifestyle adjusted by their parents may become acclimated to such way of life and considers accessibility of anything simpler as compared with other children and in this way, it creates a sense of ingenuine privilege.

(f) Underdeveloped of life skills:

Over caring parents, who always prepare school bag, tie shoes, clear dining plates, organizes child’s study table, organizes his clothes, although child is capable of doing these tasks themselves; thus, such overcaring attitude prevent children from learning these small daily skills themselves.

How to minimize the helicopter habit

Every parent knows that parenting is not easy, especially in developing countries and low socioeconomic strata. Having children and raising them imposes immense and innumerable challenges and surprises, but it gives joy and love also. Now we know that overparenting only leads to more problems for our kids, we can make the following adjustments in our parenting approach:

(a) Bolster your children’s development and autonomy by tuning in to them and not continuously pushing your wants on them.

(b) Avoid doing every task for them. Take steps to slowly educate them how to achieve assignments on their own. Guardians ought to attempt not to assist your children on each step for their off-base activities unless you accept those are unjustifiable or hurtful.

(c) Parents should encourage their children to solve their own issues/problems by encouraging them to come up with positive or creative solutions.

(d) Do not raise your kids to anticipate to be treated in an unexpected way as compared to other children.

(e) Get it and acknowledge your children's shortcomings and qualities, and offer assistance them to use their qualities to attain their claim objectives.

(f) Educate your children to speak up for themselves in a respectful way and with everyone independent of their status within the society.

Every parent does the best they can for their children. Thoughts and impulses to get involved in one’s children’s lives often come from a sense of duty and unconditional love. We can modify our desires to provide the best to our children by reducing over parenting, otherwise; it leads to poor outcomes in adulthood.

Instead, try letting your children discover their weaknesses, strengths, goals, and dreams. As parents, we can help them succeed, but we should also let them fail sometime and let them learn from their failures, and help them learn to cope. Making them realize what failure means and preparing and fighting back are an important part of becoming independent in our world.

More recently Turner et al.[14] observed that helicopter parenting is an overcontrolling and overinvolved, style of parenting that likely interferes with children’s healthy development of his own personality (authenticity). This type of parenting has negative effect on child own personality and may contribute to difficulties in emerging adulthood.

Cook et al.,[15] in their study on 637 college students, were trying to find out associations between helicopter parenting and students’ relationship competence and noted that a negative effect on students’ relationship, increased depressive symptoms and reduced relationship competence as well.
Casillas et al.[16] observed that more parental involvement has positive outcomes; however, helicopter parenting may lead to poor or negative outcomes.

Limitation of the present study
Helicopter parenting is unintentional, and this is an overparenting way of upbringing of the child. A large study population is required to know the prevalence of such parenting behavior. Our study cannot be generalized because as a parent, we are supposed to give equal care irrespective of the number of children we have.

Role of primary physician
Primary healthcare giver should counsel parents regarding good skills of parenting and should educate them regarding mental growth of child. They should educate the ill effects of over parenting.

Key points
Overparenting even though done with good intentions but it has bad outcome. Parents should have constant watch on their children but over policing or constant guidance for every small thing make child less confident and generate anxiety in child. Parents are advised to read some good books or magazine on parenting. Remember parenting is a very delicate and discipline way of management of your children.

Conclusion
Children are lovable for every parent, but over parenting is harmful, though it starts unintentionally but become a habit, and if not checked, it will harm the child. Overcare will reduce self-esteem, self-confidence, and hamper the child in learning how to cope or prepare for a fight from adverse situations.

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Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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