

Research Paper

To Study Parental Overprotection, Maladaptive Daydreaming, and Psychological Well-being among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between overprotective parenting, maladaptive daydreaming, and psychological well-being in young adults. The sample comprised 360 young adults aged 18 to 30, selected through convenience sampling. A correlational research design was employed to evaluate the nature and strength of the relationships between the variables. Data were gathered using standardized instruments: the Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (16 items), the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (16 items), and the Psychological Well-being Scale (18 items based on Ryff's framework). Descriptive statistics, including Pearson's correlation, were calculated to analyze the data. The results suggested that both anxious overprotection and overall overprotection positively correlated with maladaptive daydreaming. These parenting dimensions were also negatively correlated with various aspects of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and overall well-being. Maladaptive daydreaming indicated a negative correlation with all dimensions of psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals who engage in extensive fantasy activities tend to report lower levels of psychological well-being. In comparison, ego-enhancing parenting did not showcase any significant relationship with maladaptive daydreaming or the domains of psychological well-being. Results suggest that both overprotective parenting and maladaptive daydreaming negatively impact the mental health of young adults. Promoting balanced parenting and healthy coping mechanisms enhances emotional resilience and well-being. The impact of these results will be significant for counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals working with youth populations.

Keywords: *Overprotective Parenting, Maladaptive Daydreaming, Psychological Well-being, Young Adults*

Young adulthood (18 to 30 years), is a crucial period for developing one's identity, independence, and autonomy. This period primarily focuses on relationships, mental well-being, and career decisions (Arnett, 2000). A significant challenge during young adulthood is transitioning from childhood dependency to adult independence. This shift can be especially challenging for individuals who have experienced overprotective parenting, as they may not have had the opportunity to develop decision-making and self-reliance skills (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). As a result, individuals may fear facing real-

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world challenges and may experience anxiety. This can have a lasting impact on psychological well-being; in some cases, maladaptive coping strategies may lead to maladaptive daydreaming.

Arnett's (2000) concept of 'emerging adulthood' explains that young adulthood is a transitional period that is the phase between adolescence and adulthood in which individuals explore identity, are emotionally self-focused, and experience instability in life. In this phase, educational challenges, financial independence, social expectations, and emotional development happen simultaneously, which can affect their mental health. Career uncertainty, peer pressure, and unstable romantic relationships strongly impact the emotional well-being of young adults (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Collins & Laursen, 2004).

Among these parenting style plays a major role. It is not limited only to childhood but persists into adulthood. While positive parenting, such as an authoritative or supportive style, boosts self-confidence and emotional resilience (Arnett, 2000; Malhotra & Chander, 2025), overprotective parenting or helicopter parenting creates opposite effects. Constant monitoring and over-control can suppress the autonomy and independence of young adults (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Studies also suggest that helicopter parenting is a major cause of anxiety, stress, and poor coping skills (LeMoyné & Buchanan, 2011).

Overprotective parenting is marked by high control, emotional overinvolvement, and decision-making restrictions by parents, which limit a child's independence and self-confidence (LeMoyné & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Parents who fear failure or risk often prevent their children from making mistakes or exploring on their own, resulting in low resilience, fear of failure, and poor decision-making (Odenweller et al., 2014). Types of such parenting include helicopter, snowplow, and intensive parenting – all of which are associated with anxiety, low frustration tolerance, perfectionism, and stress (Segrin et al., 2012). These children grow up with poor emotional regulation, increased dependency on parents, and often adopt maladaptive coping strategies like daydreaming to escape control and pressure (Ahmed & Mingay, 2023). Over time, this leads to psychological concerns such as low self-worth, high anxiety, and difficulty in handling life challenges independently.

Diana Baumrind (1971) classified parenting into four types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. According to Baumrind (1991), Overprotective Parenting, to some extent, is a mixture of authoritarian and permissive parenting. Research shows that Helicopter Parenting and Snowplow Parenting are extreme forms of authoritarian and permissive parenting, which develop more dependency and low emotional resilience in children (Odenweller et al., 2014).

Haim Ginott (1969) is a renowned child psychologist who established the notion of parent-child communication and emotional intelligence. In his book *Between Parent and Teenager* (1969) he observed that teenagers need autonomy and independence, but if parents always control them, they can be rebellious and emotionally distant. Overprotective parents create unintentional fear and anxiety, which persists from childhood to adulthood. So, it is essential to maintain a healthy balance in parenting, ensuring that it is neither too strict nor excessively permissive. Ginott also believed that without empathy and understanding, the parent-child relationship can be dysfunctional. If parents do not acknowledge the feelings of

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their children, then they start suppressing them, which later on causes low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety disorders.

Theoretical perspectives:

- **Attachment Theory** (Bowlby, 1988) suggests that overprotective parenting develops an insecure attachment, which inflates emotional dependence.
- According to **Erikson's Psychosocial Theory (1968)**, overprotective parenting hinders autonomy and identity development, which triggers self-doubt and role confusion in adulthood.
- **Self-determination theory** says that suppressing autonomy and competence impacts self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

According to research, overprotected individuals are more hunted to maladaptive daydreaming and escapism. This happens because they don't have the experience to develop autonomy and solve real-world problems (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010).

Maladaptive daydreaming (MD) is a condition where an individual gets excessively immersed in a fantasy world to protect themselves from real-life stressors (Somer, 2002). MD sufferers get engaged in vivid and prolonged daydreams which affect their functioning, social life, and academic/career performance (Somer et al., 2017). Studies show that individuals growing up in overcontrolling or emotionally cold environments develop more maladaptive daydreaming.

According to Escape Theory (Baumeister, 1990), Maladaptive Daydreaming acts as a coping mechanism, allowing individuals to protect themselves from real-life setbacks and emotional distress through extensive daydreaming. Also, to manage negative emotions, individuals with maladaptive daydreaming indulge in extreme daydreaming, which weakens their emotional regulation skills (Soffer-Dudek & Somer, 2018). Psychological Well-being is a multidimensional concept that includes emotional resilience, self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, and overall life satisfaction. According to **Western psychology** (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011), psychological well-being relates to happiness, autonomy, self-acceptance, and accomplishments, whereas **Eastern psychology** (Bhugra & Becker, 2005) associates psychological well-being with inner peace, balance, and collectivistic values. Psychological Well-being major model like Ryff's six dimensions or Seligman's PERMA model shows that without emotional maturity and autonomy, complete well-being is not possible.

Overprotective parenting, maladaptive daydreaming, and psychological well-being are closely connected and significantly impact young adults' mental health. Excessive parental control can limit autonomy and emotional growth, pushing individuals toward avoidant behaviors like maladaptive daydreaming. This may further reduce psychological well-being, which includes self-acceptance, emotional balance, and purpose in life.

While many studies have explored these factors individually, very few have examined their combined relationship. Understanding this link is important in the Indian context, where parental involvement often continues into adulthood. The findings may help improve parenting approaches and guide mental health interventions.

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Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between overprotective parenting and maladaptive daydreaming.
- To investigate whether overprotective parenting negatively affects psychological well-being.

Hypotheses

- Individuals with high parental overprotection are more prone to maladaptive daydreaming.
- Higher parental overprotection is associated with lower levels of psychological well-being.
- There will be a significant relationship between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many studies show the negative impact of overprotective parenting on children's autonomy, self-confidence, and decision-making skills. Padilla-Walker & Nelson (2012) examined that helicopter parenting increases anxiety and stress. According to Baumrind (1971), extreme styles of authoritarian and permissive parenting form a pattern of overprotection. This was defined as snowplow and helicopter parenting, which suppresses autonomy (Odenweller et al., 2014; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Studies also suggest that overprotective parenting results in the development of insecure attachment, due to which emotional instability increases in adulthood (Bowlby, 1988; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

Maladaptive daydreaming is a condition in which an individual indulges in excessive daydreaming, disrupting their real-life functioning (Somer, 2002). According to Somer et al. (2016, 2017), maladaptive daydreaming is associated with trauma, overcontrol, and loneliness. MD sufferers often escape real-life problems through a fantasy world in which they imagine themselves as heroic or ideal. Research shows that procrastination, poor concentration, and emotional imbalance develop due to maladaptive daydreaming (Pietkiewicz et al., 2018; Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011).

According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is based on six dimensions: self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations, and environmental mastery. Keyes (2002) added social well-being in this. Studies show that overprotective parenting negatively impacts psychological well-being (Segrin et al., 2012). LeMoyne & Buchanan's (2011) research shows that self-doubt and anxiety increase due to autonomy suppression and overparenting. Soffer-Dudek & Somer (2018) found a strong link between maladaptive daydreaming and psychological well-being.

Some researchers pointed out that maladaptive coping (maladaptive daydreaming) patterns develop when autonomy and decision-making opportunities are denied. Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory suggests, if autonomy is not developed, it will result in identity confusion and role instability in the future. Self-determination theory supports that autonomy and competence are critical for well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

360 individuals participated in the study (males-176 and females-184), and a convenience sampling method was used for data collection. Young adults (18-30 years) were the main focus of sample collection.

Tools Used

- **Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (Chevrier et al., 2021):** This scale measures multiple aspects of overprotective parenting. The short version of this scale consists of 16 items, which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. It consists of two subscales- Anxious Overprotection (worry-based control) and Ego-Enhancing Overprotection (focuses on status and achievement). The scale is found to have strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha > 0.85. Construct validity is also established, and its two-factor model is confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).
- **Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (Somer et al., 2016):** This scale assesses the severity of MD. Scale consists of 16 items ranging from 0% to 100%. Its Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.90, and its validity has been established through correlations with obsessive-compulsive symptoms and dissociation. This tool is used in both research and clinical settings.
- **Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 1995):** This scale measures overall mental health and emotional well-being's six dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and self-Acceptance. Each dimension defines specific items. Scale has high reliability with Cronbach's alpha between 0.70 – 0.90. The validity of the scale is also strong, including construct and discriminant. This tool captures a broad picture of psychological health.

Procedure

This study focuses on young adults aged 18 to 30. A total of 360 individuals participated, comprising 184 females and 176 males. For data collection, both Google Forms and printed questionnaires were used to reach the maximum number of participants. Individuals who wished to participate voluntarily and met the inclusion criteria were provided with the questionnaires. Participants who completed the online survey were granted access to Google Forms, ensuring efficient data collection. For those opting for offline participation, printed questionnaires were distributed. Sociodemographic information was also collected from participants before they completed the questionnaire. They were informed about the study's objectives and ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained to ensure that participants' responses would be used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

Table 1: Sociodemographic Profile of Participants

Demographics	Male (n = 176)	Female (n = 184)
Age Range (in years)	18–30	18–30
Most Common Age Group	23 years (35)	22 years (60)
Education	Mostly Graduate	Mostly Graduate
Occupation	Majority Students	Majority Students
Birth Order	Mostly Youngest	Mostly Firstborn
Family Type	Mostly Nuclear	Mostly Nuclear
Parental Status	Majority Married	Majority Married

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Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean (M)	SD
Anxious Overprotection	360	6	48	20.13	8.19
Ego-Enhancing Parenting	360	4	27	15.08	3.62
Overall Overprotection	360	8	70	28.98	14.76
Maladaptive Daydreaming	360	0	1520	327.29	398.49
Autonomy	360	5	21	13.95	3.20
Environmental Mastery	360	4	21	14.55	3.27
Personal Growth	360	3	119	51.91	36.44
Positive Relations	360	4	21	13.28	3.47
Purpose in Life	360	3	21	13.29	3.27
Self-Acceptance	360	3	21	14.98	3.50
Total Well-being	360	56	119	85.70	12.35

Table 3: total sample correlation

S. No	VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Anxious overprotection	1										
2	Ego enhancing	0.058	1									
3	overprotection	.896**	.495**	1								
4	Maladaptive daydream	.305**	-0.02	.257**	1							
5	Autonomy	-.161**	0.045	-.120*	-.284**	1						
6	Environmental mastery	-.087	-.002	-.077	-.147**	.255**	1					
7	Personal growth	-.224**	0.028	-.182**	-.348**	.389**	.317**	1				
8	Positive relations	-.261**	0.025	-.215**	-.305**	.184**	.266**	.387**	1			
9	Purpose in life	-.206**	0.065	-.208**	-.314**	.116*	.107*	.300**	.342**	1		
10	Self-acceptance	-.212**	0.028	-.172**	-.194**	.199**	.418**	.379**	.338**	.158**	1	
11	Total wellbeing	-.308**	0.016	-.261**	-.421**	.546**	.610**	.733**	.680**	.540**	.671**	1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Blank cells represent symmetric entries or N/A.

DISCUSSION

The main goal of the current study was to explore the connection between overprotective parenting, maladaptive daydreaming, and psychological well-being in young adults. Using developmental and clinical perspectives, the research aimed to comprehend how various

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aspects of perceived parental overprotection relate to fantasy-based coping mechanisms and mental health outcomes.

The sociodemographic profile of the participants gave important context for understanding the results. The sample included 360 young adults, with nearly equal numbers of males (176) and females (184), aged between 18 and 30. Most of the participants were undergraduate students (males 60.22% and females 57.60%), while others were pursuing postgraduate studies (males 19.88% and females 25.54%) or, to a lesser extent, diplomas (males 2.27% and females 9.23%) and doctoral degrees (males 1.70% and females 3.26%). A significant number of respondents were actively studying (males 67.04% and females 90.76%), indicating that this group mainly consisted of individuals in a transitional phase characterized by identity exploration and growing independence. In terms of birth order, a large segment identified as either first-born (males 32.38% and females 50.54%) or the youngest child (males 42.61% and females 28.80%), with only a small fraction being a single child (males 10.22% and females 4.89%). The majority came from nuclear families (males 68.18% and females 64.13%), and most reported that both parents were alive (mothers 97.77% and fathers 92.22%) and married (according to data of: males 93.75% and females 95.10%). This demographic detail provides insights into the psychosocial context of the sample and may clarify certain trends noticed in the variables, such as the prevalence of overprotection or the differences in personal growth and autonomy.

The findings show a variety of significant and non-significant relationships. Anxious overprotection and overall overprotective parenting were found to have a positive relationship with maladaptive daydreaming and a negative correlation with several aspects of psychological well-being. Maladaptive daydreaming also exhibited strong negative correlations with all domains of well-being, indicating its potential effects on mental health. Moreover, different components of psychological well-being were positively correlated, highlighting the interconnected nature of mental wellness.

The results are discussed concerning existing theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies, providing a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of parenting styles and fantasy-related behaviours in young adults.

The descriptive statistics provided initial insights into the overall distribution and patterns within the data. The relatively high average scores for Overprotection ($M = 28.98$) and Anxious Overprotection ($M = 20.13$) indicate that a notable number of participants viewed their parents as protective or controlling during their childhood. This finding is consistent with Segrin et al. (2012), who observed that overprotective parenting often becomes more pronounced during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Additionally, the large range and standard deviation in Maladaptive Daydreaming scores ($M = 327.29$, $SD = 398.49$) indicate significant individual differences in the frequency and intensity of daydreaming. These results support Somer's (2002) idea of maladaptive daydreaming existing on a spectrum, from occasional escapism to excessive involvement that could disrupt daily functioning.

Psychological well-being scores across areas like Autonomy, Positive Relations, and Purpose in Life were moderate, suggesting a generally stable mental state among participants. However, the high variability seen in the Personal Growth domain ($M = 51.91$, $SD = 36.44$) may indicate varying levels of self-development and future-oriented thinking

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among young adults. Together, these patterns set the stage for interpreting the correlation analysis findings, which further clarified the relationships among the primary constructs of the study.

The results reveal several significant connections between parenting styles, daydreaming habits, and psychological well-being. Anxious Overprotection was positively associated with both overall overprotection and maladaptive daydreaming. This supports previous research indicating that anxiety-driven parenting often manifests as overcontrolling behaviors, which can drive children to seek psychological escape (Parker et al., 1979; Somer, 2002). Anxious parenting also presented significant negative correlations with various well-being domains, including autonomy, personal growth, and self-acceptance. These results correspond with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which stresses that autonomy and competence are vital for psychological health. When parental behaviors limit independence and encourage dependency, they can hinder these fundamental psychological needs.

Interestingly, ego-enhancing parenting displayed a positive association with overall overprotection, suggesting that even confidence-boosting behaviors can coexist with a controlling parenting style. While ego-enhancing parenting was not significantly connected to daydreaming or well-being domains, its positive link with overprotection suggests overlapping patterns (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). Furthermore, overall overprotection was positively related to maladaptive daydreaming and negatively correlated with several well-being dimensions, highlighting its detrimental psychological impacts.

Maladaptive daydreaming was significantly negatively correlated with all elements of psychological well-being, especially total well-being. This reinforces the maladaptive aspect of this behavior, as immersive fantasy may provide temporary relief but eventually undermines real-world functioning and mental health (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011). These results emphasize the need to regard maladaptive daydreaming as more than merely an odd habit; it may represent a deeper coping strategy in response to emotional deprivation or controlling environments.

To support Hypothesis 1, a significant positive correlation was identified between overall overprotection and maladaptive daydreaming ($r = .257^{**}$, $p < .01$). This result implies that individuals who viewed their parents as excessively protective or controlling were more prone to engage in intense and excessive fantasy activities. These findings are consistent with earlier studies (Somer, 2002) that have associated maladaptive daydreaming with emotional detachment and a reduced sense of autonomy.

Hypothesis 2 was also confirmed, as increased levels of overprotective parenting, especially the anxious subtype, were found to negatively correlate with several aspects of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, personal development, sense of purpose, and self-acceptance. These results support Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for psychological advancement. When overprotection hinders these essential needs, it adversely affects well-being.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, maladaptive daydreaming was found to have a significant negative correlation with all aspects of psychological well-being, particularly overall well-being ($r = -.421^{**}$, $p < .01$). This emphasizes the maladaptive characteristics of daydreaming

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as a coping mechanism that, while it may provide short-term emotional relief, ultimately compromises overall mental health and real-life functioning (Bigelsen & Schupak, 2011).

Further analysis indicated strong intercorrelations among well-being domains, supporting Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model. Autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance were closely linked, suggesting a cohesive psychological profile where strengths in one area bolster others. These connections imply that psychological well-being is not separate but operates as an integrated whole.

This research reveals that overly protective parenting, particularly the anxious type, is linked to both heightened maladaptive daydreaming and diminished psychological well-being. These findings emphasize the necessity of promoting autonomy, emotional transparency, and encouraging parenting methods that support a child's independent growth. The study adds to the expanding body of research by investigating these three factors together, a combination that has not been widely studied before. Although the findings provide significant insights, they also highlight the necessity for additional longitudinal and qualitative research to investigate causal links and moderating factors, such as personality characteristics or cultural influences. By emphasizing the enduring psychological impact of parenting styles, this research has implications not just for scholars and clinicians but also for educators, parents, and mental health professionals engaged with young adults. Encouraging healthier parenting approaches and greater awareness of emotional needs could help reduce maladaptive coping strategies and improve overall well-being.

Future implications of the study

Future research could expand on the current findings by adopting longitudinal or experimental designs to determine causal relationships between parenting styles, daydreaming behaviors, and well-being outcomes. Studies could also examine the moderating role of personality traits, attachment styles, or coping strategies in these relationships. Including diverse age groups and socio-cultural backgrounds would help generalize the findings and offer culturally sensitive insights. Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews or thematic analysis may discover deeper emotional experiences related to overprotection and fantasy behaviors. Exploring the role of digital environments in facilitating maladaptive daydreaming could also offer novel directions in an increasingly online world.

Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample was selected using convenience sampling and consisted solely of young adults, limiting the generalizability of the results to other age groups and populations. Secondly, all data were collected through self-report measures, which are subject to social desirability bias and may not capture the full complexity of participants' psychological experiences. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the understanding of how these relationships evolve. Lastly, while the study focused on overprotective parenting, it did not account for the broader family environment or other parenting dimensions, such as neglect, authoritarianism, or warmth.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand how overprotective parenting styles, particularly anxious and ego-enhancing behaviors, influence maladaptive daydreaming and psychological well-

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being among young adults. By integrating these three variables within a single framework, the study addressed a key research gap and provided deeper insights into the psychological challenges faced by individuals during the transitional phase of emerging adulthood. Findings indicated that anxious overprotection and overall overprotective parenting significantly predicted higher maladaptive daydreaming. These parenting styles were also negatively associated with all dimensions of psychological well-being, including autonomy, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and total well-being. Maladaptive daydreaming emerged as a critical psychological pattern, showing significant negative associations with every aspect of psychological well-being. This highlights its maladaptive nature, reflecting its role as an avoidant strategy that ultimately disrupts emotional and psychological balance. Interestingly, the study found no significant relationship between ego-enhancing parenting and either maladaptive daydreaming or psychological well-being. This may suggest that not all forms of parental control are equally detrimental and that the emotional tone and underlying intentions behind parenting behaviors play a crucial role. In addition to these findings, strong positive intercorrelations were found among the subdomains of psychological well-being. This suggests that psychological strengths such as autonomy, mastery, purpose, and self-acceptance are not isolated but work in tandem to form a resilient and well-rounded mental health profile. The study thus concludes that parenting practices, particularly overprotective and anxiety-driven ones, play a crucial role in shaping a young adult's psychological health. It also brings attention to maladaptive daydreaming as a potential psychological concern that warrants greater awareness and clinical focus. Overall, this research contributes meaningfully to the field of developmental and clinical psychology by offering empirical evidence on the intersection of parenting, fantasy behavior, and mental wellness in emerging adulthood.

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Conflict of Interest

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