

Keeping an Eye: Influence of Helicopter Parenting on Self Esteem and Stress among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the relationships between helicopter parenting, self-esteem, and stress among young adults, including gender differences. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted in New Delhi with 200 participants aged 18-25 years (100 women, 100 men). Data were collected using the Helicopter Parenting Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Perceived Stress Scale-10. **Results:** Significant relationships were found between helicopter parenting and both self-esteem and stress. Higher helicopter parenting was associated with lower self-esteem and increased stress levels. Significant gender differences were also observed in these relationships. **Conclusion:** Helicopter parenting negatively impacts young adults' psychological well-being, affecting self-esteem and stress levels differently in men and women. These findings emphasize the importance of balanced parenting approaches.

Keywords: Helicopter Parenting, Self-Esteem, Stress, Young Adults, Gender Differences

Helicopter parenting, also known as cosseting, refers to a parenting style characterized by excessive monitoring and involvement in children's experiences, particularly in educational settings. The term derives from parents' tendency to "hover overhead" like helicopters, overseeing every aspect of their child's life (van Ingen et al., 2015). This parenting approach involves protecting children from potential harm, maintaining constant contact with teachers and administrators, and making academic and social decisions on behalf of their children, including course selection, friendship choices, and daily activities.

Helicopter parents typically shield their children from challenges and establish rigid rules without considering individual needs. According to Hirsch and Goldberger (2010), this parenting style prevents children from making mistakes while creating a stress-filled environment. Rather than allowing children to develop essential decision-making and problem-solving abilities, these parents provide constant intervention without teaching independence skills (LeMoyné & Buchanan, 2011). Common behaviors include frequent phone calls when children are away, interference in social interactions, completing homework assignments, and directly contacting school professionals about grades and

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assignments rather than encouraging children to do so themselves (Lock, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory provides crucial insight into helicopter parenting's negative effects. The theory identifies three basic psychological needs essential for healthy development: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomy refers to individuals taking responsibility for their behavior and controlling their destiny. Competence involves confidence in one's skills and abilities. Relatedness encompasses feelings of love and belonging that every individual requires.

When parents are overly involved in their children's lives, these fundamental needs are undermined, leading to increased stress and diminished self-esteem (Schiffirin et al., 2013). This violation of psychological needs results in reduced competence, limited autonomy, and impaired relatedness, ultimately causing low self-esteem and elevated stress levels.

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Bowen's theory explains helicopter parenting through the lens of family anxiety and dysfunction. The theory identifies over functioning and under functioning reciprocity as a key pattern, where excessive parental involvement leads to children's under functioning. When parent's complete tasks that children should handle independently such as homework, projects, or goal-setting it diminishes children's self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and creates self-doubt (Chan, 2015).

Problem Statement

Mental health challenges among young people have reached alarming levels globally. According to the World Health Organization, 14% of adolescents aged 10-19 experience mental health difficulties, with suicide ranking as the fourth leading cause of death among young adults. In India, the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare reports that 6-7% of the population suffers from mental disorders.

Research consistently demonstrates that helicopter parenting contributes significantly to these mental health challenges. Overinvolved parents who complete tasks for their children create conditions that foster low self-esteem, increased stress, anxiety, and depression. This parenting style reduces young adults' competence and independence, becoming a primary factor in the rising prevalence of mental health issues among this population.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Helicopter Parenting:** A parenting style involving constant monitoring and excessive involvement in children's experiences and decisions, characterized by "hovering" behavior that limits children's independence and problem-solving opportunities.
- **Self-Esteem:** An individual's overall evaluation and perception of their own worth, based on beliefs and attitudes about oneself that influence confidence and self-regard.
- **Stress:** According to the WHO, any change that creates physical, mental, or psychological pressure on an individual, representing the body's response to demands requiring attention or action.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The present study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the effect of helicopter parenting on young people's self-esteem
2. To examine the influence of helicopter parenting on stress levels in young adults
3. To investigate gender differences in helicopter parenting, self-esteem, and stress among young adults

Hypotheses

Based on the stated objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There will be a significant relationship between helicopter parenting and self-esteem in young adults.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There will be a significant relationship between helicopter parenting and stress levels in young adults.
- **Hypothesis 3:** There will be significant gender differences in self-esteem and helicopter parenting between men and women.
- **Hypothesis 4:** There will be significant gender differences in helicopter parenting and stress levels between men and women.

Research Design

- **Study Design:** This study employed a cross-sectional research design.
- **Study Type:** A quantitative approach was utilized to examine the relationships between helicopter parenting, self-esteem, and stress among young adults, with gender as a moderating variable.
- **Study Locale:** The study was conducted in New Delhi, India.

Participants

Sample Size and Demographics

The study sample comprised 200 young adults, equally distributed by gender (n = 100 women, n = 100 men). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years (M = 20.90, SD = 2.03).

Inclusion Criteria

- Age between 18-25 years
- Ability to read and understand English
- Voluntary participation with informed consent

Instruments

1. **Helicopter Parenting Scale (Le Moyne & Buchanan, 2011):** The Helicopter Parenting Scale is an 8-item self-report measure designed to assess perceived helicopter parenting behaviours during childhood. Participants respond to items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale includes items such as "My parent supervised my every move growing up" and "My parent often stepped in to solve life problems for me." Higher scores indicate greater perceived helicopter parenting behavior.
2. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965):** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a widely used 10-item measure of global self-worth. The scale assesses both positive and negative self-evaluations on a unidimensional construct. Participants respond on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly

disagree. The scale demonstrates strong reliability and validity across diverse populations. Higher scores indicate greater self-esteem.

- 3. Perceived Stress Scale-10 (Cohen et al., 1983):** The Perceived Stress Scale-10 (PSS-10) is a 10-item instrument that measures the degree to which situations in one's life are perceived as stressful. The scale assesses how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives during the past month. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). The PSS-10 is suitable for use with adolescents and adults aged 12 years and older. Higher scores indicate greater perceived stress.

RESULT

Socio Demographic Details

Table 1: Socio demographic profile of participants

Age	n	Occupation
18-25 years	100- male	Students
	100- female	

This study has attempted to explore the influence of Helicopter Parenting on Self Esteem and Stress among Young Adults.

Table 2: In the following table the mean and standard deviation of age is reported

Age	n	Mean ± SD
Male	100	20.84±1.98
Female	100	20.92±2.09

Above table 2 represents the mean age of male and female, the mean age of male (n=100) reported to be 20.84±1.98, the mean age of female (n=100) is 20.92±2.09.

Table 3 – independent sample t-test between male and female on helicopter parenting

Helicopter Parenting Scale	n	Mean ± SD	p value
Male	100	5.49±0.69	0.003
Female	100	4.95±0.76	

Score in above (table 3) represent the presence of helicopter parenting (score above 4) in one's home environment. In the above table we can see the mean and standard deviation in both male and female. In male (M=5.49±0.69), which indicates there is the presence of helicopter parenting, females (M= 4.95±0.76). In comparison we can say the helicopter parenting is more in males than females.

The independent t test show between males and females on helicopter parenting was significant (p=0.003)

Table 4- independent sample t-test between male and female on Self Esteem

Self Esteem	n	Mean ± SD	p value
Male	100	12±4.74	0.003
Female	100	14±0.76	

A score below 15 represents low self-esteem. In the table 4 the mean and standard deviation was found. The individual self-esteem is measured through Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.

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Mean and standard deviation for males scored 12 ± 4.74 whereas for female the mean and standard deviation is 14 ± 0.76 .

An independent t-test was conducted to compare the male and female self-esteem. The male (12 ± 4.74) have a lower score in comparison to the females (14 ± 0.76), the difference is significant.

Table 5- Independent sample t-test between male and female on Stress

Stress	n	Mean \pm SD	p value
Male	100	19.48 ± 0.69	0.003
Female	100	21.32 ± 0.76	

The score ranging from 14-26 would be considered as moderate stress whereas score ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress. In the table 5 p value is calculated along with the mean and standard deviation. The mean and standard deviation scored by male is (19.48 ± 0.69) and in female the mean and standard deviation is (21.32 ± 0.76). p value (0.003) is calculated which shows its significance.

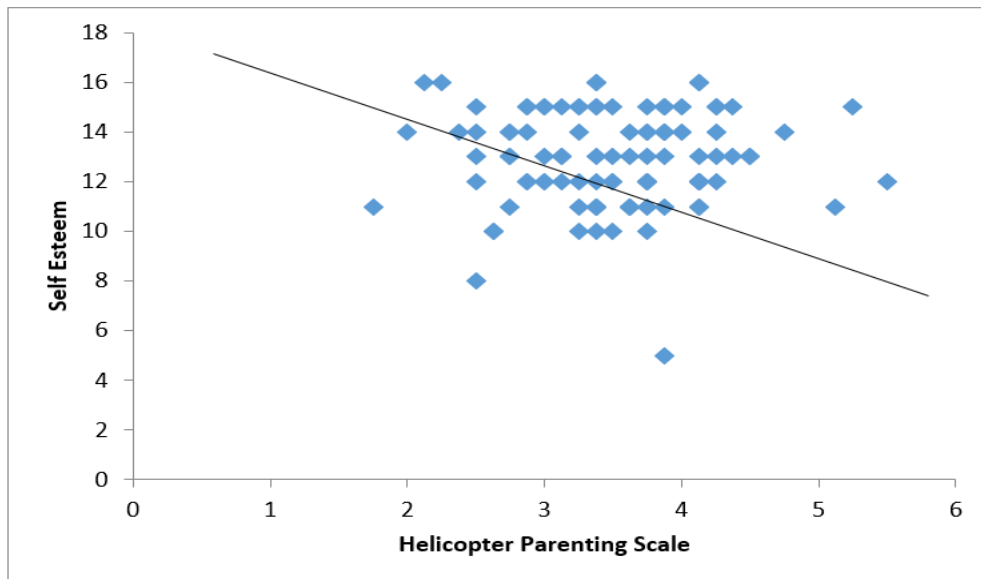


Fig 1 -Relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem among male

Pearson Correlation was used to assess the relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem of the male.

In our study, there was no statistically significant difference ($p < 0.003$) between the Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem.

A significant and negative correlation was observed between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem ($r = -0.005$) (Figure 1).

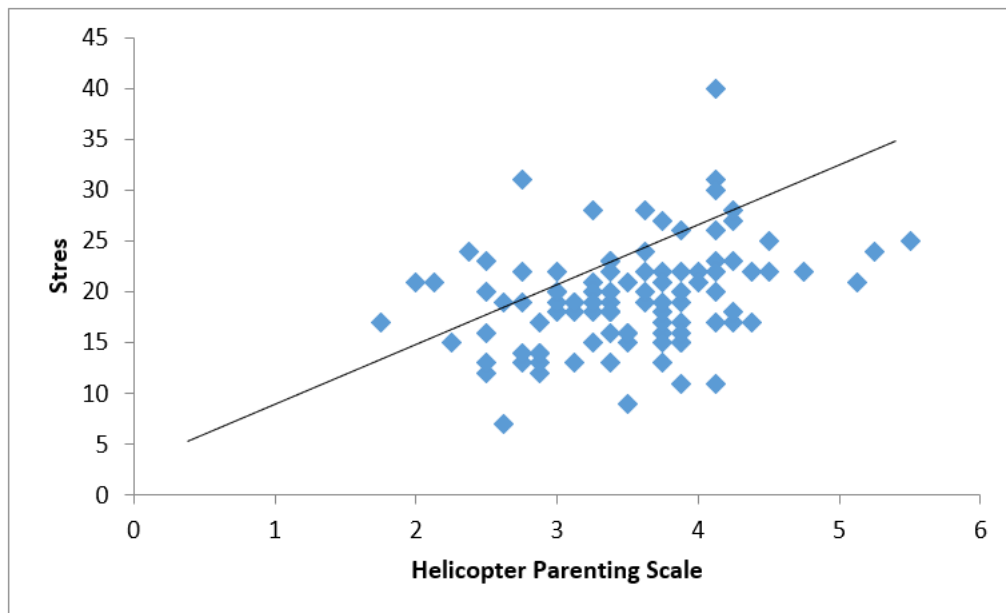


Fig 2 – Relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Stress in males.

Pearson Correlation was used to assess the relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Stress of the male.

In our study, there was no statistically significant difference ($p < 0.003$) between the Helicopter Parenting and Stress.

A significant and positive correlation was observed between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem ($r = 0.320$) (Figure 2).

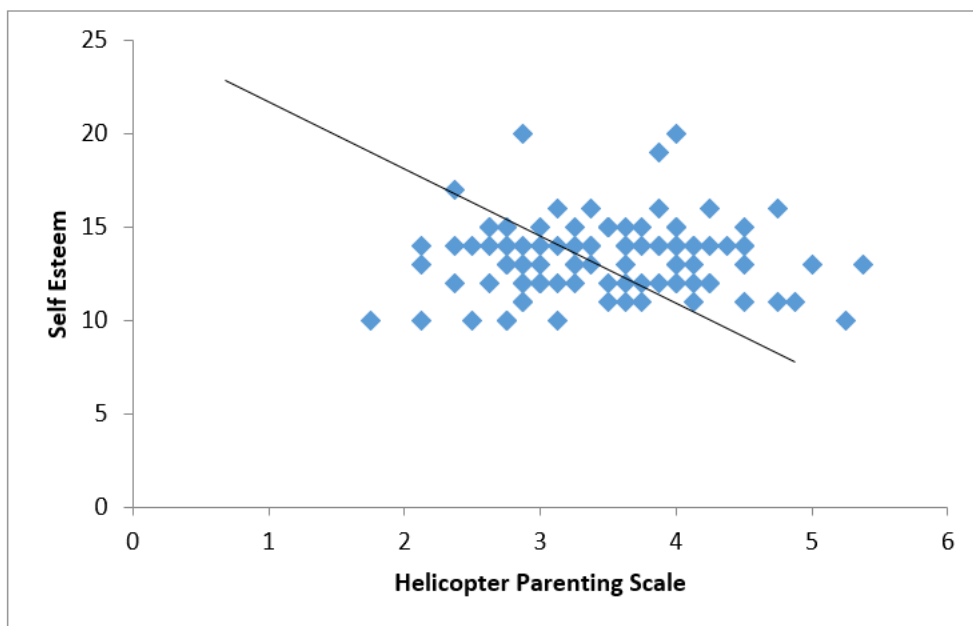


Figure 3 – correlation between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem in females.

Pearson Correlation was used to assess the relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem of the male.

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In our study, there was no statistically significant difference ($p < 0.003$) between the Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem.

A significant and negative correlation was observed between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem ($r = -0.05$) (Figure 3).

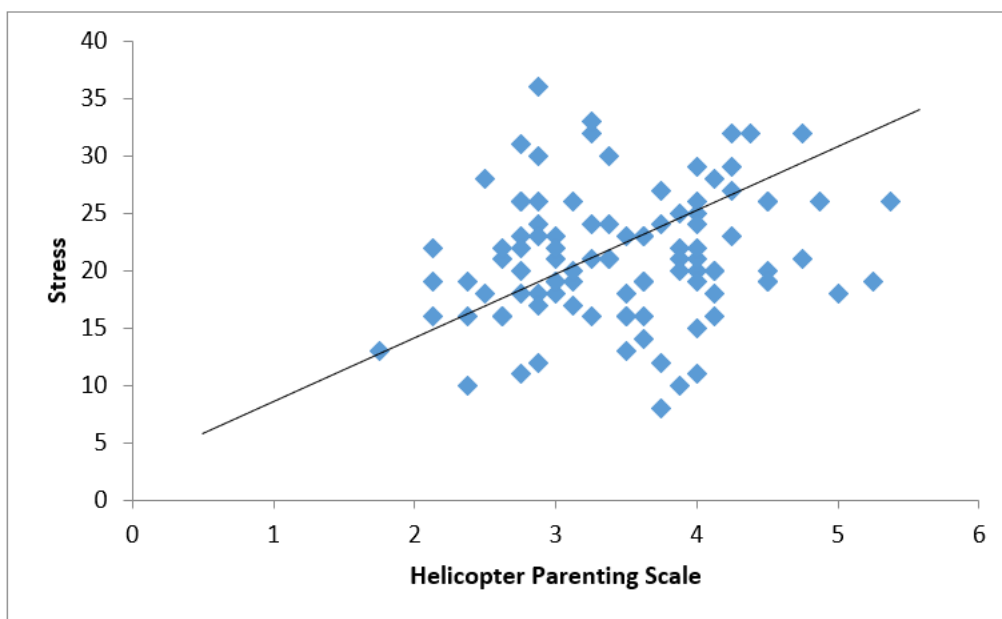


Figure 4- Relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Stress in females.

Pearson Correlation was used to assess the relationship between Helicopter Parenting and Stress of the male.

In our study, there was no statistically significant difference ($p < 0.003$) between the Helicopter Parenting and Stress.

A significant and positive correlation was observed between Helicopter Parenting and Self Esteem ($r = 0.14$) (Figure 4).

DISCUSSION

The overall finding of this study was that helicopter parenting was disruptive to young adult's perceived stress and adversely correlated with their self-esteem. The study's conclusions demonstrated the detrimental effects of overprotective parenting on male and female psychological results. The results of this investigation are in agreement with other studies (Kouros, Pruitt, Ekas et al., 2017; Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, Murphy, 2013). Higher levels of overprotective parenting style predicted worse levels of well-being among respondents, according to a study by Kouros and colleagues (2017) on 118 undergraduate students. According to our findings, helicopter parenting reduces young adult's capacity to operate appropriately for their developmental stage.

The result of the study suggested that there is negative relationship between helicopter parenting and self-esteem. After the observation of the result it can be seen that influence of helicopter parenting on self-esteem and stress is higher in male. i.e. lower self-esteem and high stress than female. Intriguingly, further investigations into the association between gender and each indicator of helicopter parenting's capacity to forecast each psychological

consequence (depression, anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy) yielded significant results. Helicopter parenting and stress is positively correlated to each other. The results also showed that helicopter parenting has a detrimental impact on how young adult develop their sense of self-efficacy for learning. Our findings parallel those of Love & Thomas (2014) and van Ingen et al. (2015) in several ways.

CONCLUSION

This research leads us to the conclusion that helicopter parenting has a detrimental impact on young adult (male and female) self-efficacy for learning and is disruptive to their mental health (stress). This overprotective parenting, while probably appears positive to parents and others on the outside, likely resulted in a variety of negative behaviors and psychological problems among young adult. This damaging parenting approach, which is now popular, should be stopped right away, according to our satisfactory results. Our knowledge and comprehension of the idea of helicopter parenting are increased by this discovery, which contributes to the expanding body of literature in the field. It is obvious that there are a number of gaps in our research. The sample size constraint is the most significant one. Because of the study's modest size, we were unable to extrapolate its results to a larger population.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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