

Overprotective Parenting and its Impact on Young Adults' Sense of Individuality and Independence

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of overprotective parents on young adults' autonomy, individuality, and self-identity. There is evidence that overprotected children, primarily through quantitative studies, are over-controlled and have few opportunities to govern themselves, leading to a lack of development of independence and emotional competency. This paper draws on an online questionnaire administered to Delhi NCR respondents aged 18–30 to measure perceived overprotectiveness and its association with autonomy. The data were gathered from 100 participants using the Overprotection measure of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and the Autonomy measure of the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS). Contrary to these expectations, findings show that overprotective parenting was negatively-weakly correlated with autonomy, $r = -0.0158$, $p > 0.05$, meaning that if overprotection slightly increases, it might decrease autonomy, such effects are minimal in this sample. Results indicate that components of resiliency, for example, peer support and individual coping strategies, may be able to mitigate the overly restrictive effects of overparenting. Such findings suggest that it would be useful to conduct much more thorough analyses focused on the impact of external influences on developing autonomy and the long-term effects of overprotective parenting styles.

Keywords: Overprotective parenting, Young adults, Autonomy, Individuality, Independence, Self-identity, Correlation

INTRODUCTION

Excessive parental control can stifle a child's emotional maturity, hindering the development of essential life skills such as self-governance, individuality, and a clear sense of self. Being able to make decisions and control one's life is a vital part of growing up; unfortunately, overprotective parents tend to kill that. The same goes for independence which is very much related to autonomy and allows one to think and more importantly act without being dependent on others too much. A well-defined sense of self-identity is also vital, allowing individuals to recognise themselves as distinct entities with their strengths, weaknesses, and values. If parents are too controlling, they can and do rob their children of these abilities, and as a result, the children grow into adults who can't make decisions, who must have others validate

them, who can't seem to form a stable identity. This dependency and lack of control can also cause more anxiety, bad coping skills, and problems with interpersonal relationships (Fen Bruysters and Pilkington, 2023; Garcia-Ruiz *et al.*, 2023; Choosing Therapy, 2023).

Overprotective parents inadvertently hinder their children's capacity to make decisions, develop self-esteem, and cope with anxiety by constantly shielding their children from failure, frustration, and independence. Research has shown that this type of parenting can even contribute to the development of the onset of anxiety disorders in kids, which can persist into adulthood. A study reveals that overprotective parenting has a detrimental effect on adolescents' overall well-being, motivation, and ability to tackle challenges. Limiting opportunities for children to develop problem-solving skills, resilience, and independence, such as parenting can lead to young adults

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delaying important life milestones, such as learning to drive, forming romantic relationships, or entering the workforce. This can ultimately impede their transition to independent adulthood (Hua *et al.*, 2022; Neuroscience News, 2023).

Some of the literature states that overprotective parenting often kills the promotion of a sense of self or individuality in young adults. As Vigdal and Brønnick point out in their recent review of literature, over-controlling parenting, otherwise known as helicopter parenting, is highly correlated with anxiety and depression symptoms, both of which can severely impair the identity formation process. That kind of parenting usually inhibits a person from discovering who they are and they end up wondering what kind of person they are and never really finding out. Grotevant and Cooper also found that family processes in overprotective homes stifle identity exploration in the adolescent period. Therefore it is hard for individuals to emerge as separate, unique beings. This agrees with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory that environmental factors, such as parenting styles, are crucial factors in the evolution of an individual (Vigdal and Brønnick, 2022; Grotevant and Cooper, 1985; Jiao, and Segrin, 2023).

New studies have shown that open family communication can offset the harm done by overparenting, thus a more successful transition to being one's person. But then again open communication is not always the best thing, because when young adults decide that they are going to be independent and those who are sheltered too much can never break away. Furthermore, research by Holmbeck *et al.* states that preteens who viewed their parents as over-controlling lacked behavioural autonomy, and this pattern continued into adulthood. That reliance on others (most of the time parents) seems to grow from that lack of self-reliance, the lack of ability to decide what truly matters in life (Jiao, and Segrin, 2023; Holmbeck *et al.*, 2002).

Objectives:

- To examine the relationship between Overprotective Parenting and Level of Independence and autonomy.
- To study the variables (Overprotective Parenting and Autonomy) in the context of gender difference.
- To find the research gap in this research topic.

Hypothesis:

- **H0:** There is no correlation between overprotective parenting and autonomy in young adults at all.
- **H1:** There is a significant correlation between overprotective parenting and autonomy in young adults.
- **H2:** There might be a correlation between overprotective parenting and autonomy in young adults but it is very minimal.

Rationale of the study:

Overprotective parenting, characterized by overcontrol and protection, hampers the autonomy, individuality, and independence of young adults—critical factors for emotional development and the transition into adulthood. While research has established that overprotective parenting could be associated with anxiety and decision-making impairment, its specific effects on autonomy remain underdeveloped, particularly in the Indian context.

This study assessed overprotective parenting's role in the autonomy of young adults based on established tools such as the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS) during the Delhi NCR region. The findings will fill the gap related to developmental challenges, aid interventions that support independence, find out if other factors alter independence other than parenting and contribute to understanding parenting patterns influenced by culture.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to understand the link between overly protective parenting and the concepts of autonomy and individuality among young adults. In this regard, a proper methodology will involve an online survey across specific geographic areas targeting the demographic of young adults so that such behaviour by parents can be ascertained about the perception of autonomy.

Research Design:

This is a cross-sectional study based on correlational research. With such a design, it is possible to examine participants' experiences and attitudes at a single point in time, which may be relevant to determining whether there is a potential correlation between overprotective parenting style and autonomy level among young adults.

Participants:

The study population consisted of 100 young adults aged 18–30 years from the Delhi NCR region. Using snowball sampling, the researcher started with a small contact group within their networks, who further informed others to participate in the study. The method adopted ensured that the sample size contained diversities within the age group. Half of the population was male and the rest half were female.

Measures:

Two standardised, validated tools were employed to measure parental overprotection and autonomy:

Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) :

Overprotection subscale: This subscale by Parker *et al.* (1979) measures the extent to which participants' parents were rated as being overprotective at the time these participants were raised. Items in this subscale assist in evaluating dimensions of parental control, restraint and protection. Responses were obtained on a Likert scale of 5 points. The higher the scores, the greater the rated level of overprotection.

Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS):

Autonomy Subscale: Bieling *et al.* (2000) autonomy subscale measured participants' independence, self-governance, and reliance on themselves. In the current study, the scale examined how autonomous participants were and to what extent they could independently function. Each participant rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale that indicated higher scores represented more independence.

Procedure:

Data were collected using an anonymous online questionnaire via Google Forms. It was posted on social media and sent via email to everyone within the networks of the researcher so that participation became freely voluntary. The respondent was enlightened regarding the essence of the research, assured of confidentiality, and provided with a form of consent before carrying out the survey. The instrument consisted of demographic questions: age and gender, followed by the PBI and SAS subscale. Participants were informed of their liberty to withdraw from the survey at any point without prejudice.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of data. Mean scores and their respective standard deviations of both overprotection and autonomy scales provided a general profile of the participants' perceptions. t-test was also used to analyse the gender difference of the participants. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the degree of association between overprotective parenting and autonomy. The *r* value established the strength and direction of the association, while the significance level was less than 0.05. All analyses were performed through Excel sheets for accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and findings according to the data collected are discussed with help of graphs and tables as follows:

Respondants' Profile:

The respondents' profile was determined by their name (which was not mandatory to respond), age, gender, highest level of education, occupation, and nationality which were recorded in the first segment of the questionnaire.

Fig. 1 interprets that out of 100 respondents, 50% were female and 50% were male.

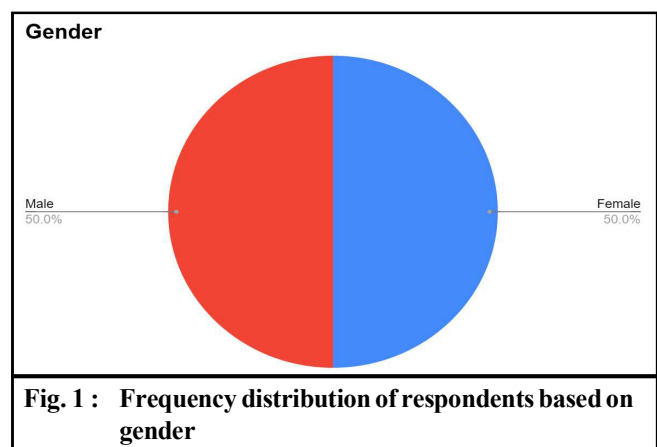
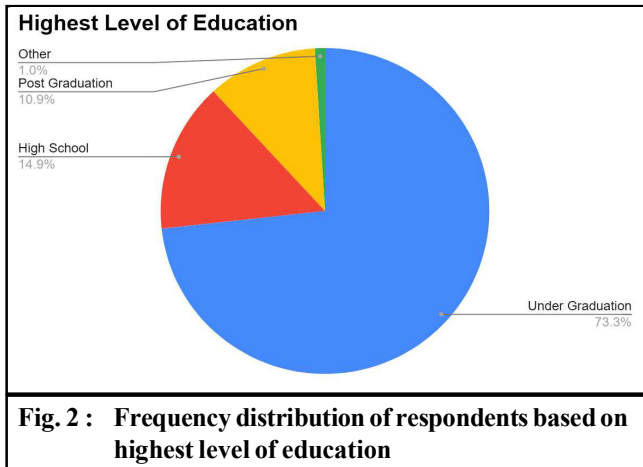


Fig. 2 interprets that out of all the respondents, 73.3% of respondents were doing their underproduction or completed it, 14.9% of respondents were completed their higher schooling or were in the process, 10.9% of respondents were doing their post-graduation or completed it and 1% of respondents have chosen "other"



in their highest level of Education.

Analysing Overprotective Parenting scores and Autonomy scores:

Table 1 depicts mean, standard deviations and t-test scores for male and female participants, which are measures indicating the participants' experiences of parental overprotection as well as their level of autonomy.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-test
Overprotective Parenting	33.68627451	12.3584904	0.2325846212
Autonomy	81.97058824	19.15722126	0.4257848976

The mean for Overprotective Parenting was 33.68 (SD = 12.36), which indicates that participants perceived overprotective behaviour from their parents as moderate in level. The variability (SD) hints at diversity in experience within this sample, indicating some who reported high levels of parental control while others had lower levels.

The mean score for Autonomy was 81.97 (SD = 19.16), which means that most participants reported relatively high autonomy. Variability in this response indicates that while some people portray strong independence and self-governance, others feel less able to function under autonomous conditions.

The t-test p-values for both variables (0.233 for Overprotective Parenting and 0.426 for Autonomy) are greater than 0.05, indicating no statistically significant gender differences in the scores for either Overprotective

Parenting or Autonomy. This suggests that gender does not appear to be significant in shaping experiences of parental overprotection or autonomy in the sample studied. The absence of significant gender differences in either variable highlight that both males and females experience similar levels of Overprotective Parenting and Autonomy in this sample.

This Table 2 represents the relationship between overprotection and autonomy. This time, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was -0.0158. Bare value suggested a weak negative relationship between the variables. It remained non-significant since it was more than 0.05, thus might not reflect any meaningful trend but by chance. Such a weakly negative value for r confirms theoretical expectations that overprotective parenting undermines autonomy, but statistical non-significance may indicate factors exist that can reduce or counteract this effect. Personal resilience, cultural expectations, or peer influence might contribute to autonomy independent of parental behaviours.

Variable Pair	Correlation (R)	Significance (p-Value)
Overprotective Parenting and Autonomy	-0.0158	p > 0.05

The result of the study accepted the null hypothesis, H2: That is, there might be a correlation between overprotective parenting and autonomy in young adults but it is very minimal. (r = -0.0158, p > 0.05).

The findings of this research are very vital to the association that characterizes overprotective parenting and autonomy in young adulthood. The calculated correlation at -0.0158 reflects a very weak negative relationship between overprotective parenting and autonomy meaning that a high scale of parental control is irrelevant to the extent to which autonomy develops in this cohort. This contradicts the stated hypothesis that was postulated that overprotective parenting would have a significant impact on autonomy. While there were reports of being overprotected at moderate levels, respondents generally rated their independence high. This means that lots of people may have been resilient and had coping mechanisms helping them cope better with the effects of overprotective rearing than was supposed.

The weak correlation here contrasts with previous studies, which emphasize the negative effects of

overprotective parenting. Vigdal and Brønnick (2022) reported a strong association of over-controlling parenting with anxiety and depression symptoms that compromise autonomy and identity formation. Similarly, Holmbeck *et al.* (2002) found that overprotectiveness during pre-adolescence harmed behavioural autonomy and that these effects continued through adulthood. However, the study currently conducted suggests that perhaps young adults develop mechanisms that can counteract such influences, partly in line with Jiao and Segrin (2023), who illustrated that open family communication and autonomy traits could buffer the negative impacts of parents.

The absence of significant gender differences in overprotective parenting and autonomy adds an interesting dimension. Previous research often draws attention to gendered parenting dynamics, with daughters usually experiencing higher levels of control (Brenning *et al.*, 2017). The results suggest a relatively egalitarian experience of overprotection across genders within the sample, which may point to cultural or generational shifts in parenting approaches.

The fact that the study was conducted in the Delhi NCR region points out the role of cultural context. Indian parenting styles, influenced by collectivist traditions, emphasize interdependence within families (Hua *et al.*, 2022). However, the impact of urbanization and globalization on social norms can cause young adults to be more independent and counterbalance the effects of overparenting. Perhaps this is why high mean autonomy scores were found in this study.

Limitations and Future Research:

While this study sheds some light, there are many areas to be considered with these findings. The sample size used here was adequate for a preliminary analysis but was limited to a geographic location - Delhi NCR. Its generalizability may thus be limited to larger groups. Self-reported data again bring in the biasing problem because respondents may tend to report less or exaggerate experiences with parental behaviour.

Future research might further expand on the present study with a more diverse sample, as well as assess moderating factors such as personality, peer support, and cultural expectations. A longitudinal design could be added to examine changes in autonomy over time and whether the parental influence may change when young adults go through various stages of life.

Conclusion:

This paper addressed the main research problem: the relationship or connection between overprotective parenting and young adult autonomy. Data were gathered using two standardized instruments: the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) by Parker *et al.* (1979), which is highly reliable, and has excellent content validity with Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$, and the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS) by Bieling *et al.* (2000). In consideration of this, the collected data was put in tabulated forms (Tables 1 and 2) for in-depth analysis.

To establish the correlation between overprotective parenting and autonomy, descriptive statistics, t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used to analyze the data. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores calculated highlighted how responses were distributed across these critical variables, while correlation analysis evaluated the strength and direction of this correlation.

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