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# Helicopter Parenting and its Influence on the Children in Pakistan: Thematic Analysis

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# Abstract

Background: The helicopter parenting style is also known as the over-indulgent parenting style. It is associated with mental health and development issues in children. The helicopter parenting style is common in Asian countries. Children of helicopter parents are most likely to have underdeveloped coping skills and life skills.

Aim: The prime aim of the study was to identify helicopter parenting styles and their effects on children's mental health and how they affect the growth and development of children.

Methodology: A qualitative thematic analysis was employed to conduct the research. Semi-structured interviews were directed for data collection. Potential themes were extracted on the basis of participants' responses.

**Results:** The results of the study were divided into suitable themes under the similarity of the responses of the participants. The results suggested the negative interlinkage between

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helicopter parenting and its effects on children's mental and emotional growth and development. **Conclusion:** The outcomes revealed that children with helicopter parents lack confidence, have low self-esteem and suffer from different mental and emotional health issues including anxiety, depression and stress. They are unable to build any connection or relation with friends or any other person and the helicopter parents do not give their children any privacy or any personal space.

Keywords: Helicopter parenting, Over-indulgence, Independency, Pakistan

## Introduction

Indulgent parenting also known as helicopter parenting has been a growing trend in contemporary society (Cui et al., 2019). Helicopter parenting deleteriously affects children's mental health (Reed et al., 2016) Overinvolved parents may increase depression, and anxiety, and reduce perseverance in children (Schiffrin et al., 2014). Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of parental involvement on child development. However, it has become increasingly clear that excessive involvement, commonly referred to as helicopter parenting, can have a detrimental effect on a child's well-being (Schiffrin & Liss, 2017) and academic achievement (Akhtar et al., 2022).

Parents who use psychological control threaten to withdraw love, induce guilt and anxiety, and limit their children's autonomy, communicative behaviour, and personal identity (McGinley, 2018). The term "helicopter parenting" refers to an overbearing caregiving style, regardless of the child's age, and has become a common term in many industries, including education and the media (van Ingen et al., 2015). Helicopter parenting is a common practice among parents who constantly hover over their children, but it can have a detrimental effect on their adult children's self-reliance and efficacy (Raza & Ahmed, 2017). By sending the message that their children are incapable of handling their own lives, parents are inadvertently hindering their ability to become self-sufficient adults. It's important to understand that parental behaviours have a profound impact on a child's thoughts, behaviours, and emotions, which can last well into adulthood. Let's take a step back and give our children the space they need to develop the necessary skills to thrive on their own (Kelly, 2002; Kim, 2018). It is essential for children to learn how to handle the outcomes of their poor

decisions, and when parents constantly rescue their children from negative consequences, they are not able to develop the resilience needed to overcome failure (Ahmad, Thomas, & Hamid, 2020). Helicopter parenting, which involves overprotecting and micromanaging a child's life, prevents the child from developing the necessary skills to deal with the challenges of life. By always fixing their children's problems, helicopter parents deprive their children of the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and grow from them (Evans & Karl, 2022; Pricer, 2008). Parental overprotectiveness can lead to psychological maladjustment, including anxiety and low self-esteem (Koutra et al., 2023). Research has shown that excessive parental involvement is linked to mental health issues, and children of helicopter parents are more likely to be prescribed medication for anxiety and depression (Wenze et al., 2019). Numerous studies have repeatedly demonstrated that parental over-involvement can hinder healthy development in children (Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021; Hoehn et al., 2016).

The helicopter parenting style is common in Asian nations (Ahmed & Mingay, 2023). Numerous existing studies have discussed the mental and psychological effects of helicopter parenting on children in different countries (Ganaprakasam et al., 2018; Okray, 2016; Srivastav & Mathur, 2020; Wieland & Kucirka, 2020) but there is not much literature on effects of helicopter parenting on children in Pakistan. Thus, the main focus of our study is to identify the effects of helicopter parenting on mental health and how it affects the growth and development of children in Pakistan.

#### Research Aim

The prime aim of the study is to identify the effects of helicopter parenting style on the mental and emotional health of children and how it affects the growth and development of the children through a thematic analysis.

# Research Objectives

- 1. To identify the effects of helicopter parenting style on children's mental health.
- 2. To identify the effect of helicopter parenting on the coping and life-managing skills of children.

## **Research Questions**

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1. What are the lived experiences of parents who engage in helicopter parenting?

2. How do parents perceive and interpret their own helicopter parenting behaviors?

3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges associated with helicopter parenting

from the perspective of parents?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs phenomenological design of Qualitative approach to explore lived experiences of helicopter parenting., utilizing highly effective semi-structured interviews to report the findings via thematic analysis. The semi-structured interviews provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, perspectives, and practices, while the thematic analysis facilitates the identification of recurring themes and patterns within the data. The chosen approach allows for a more thorough and rigorous interpretation of the data, providing a strong

foundation for making reliable conclusions.

**Participants** 

The participants in this study were Parents (mothers and fathers) from Karachi urban using a purposive sample of parents with different parenting styles. A total of 7 parents with different parenting styles were interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with parents of different parenting styles. The interviews were conducted in person. The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives and perceptions related to helicopter

parenting and its effects on children's growth and development.

A set of open-ended questions guided the interviews, covering topics such as participants' perceptions of helicopter parenting, and their perspectives on the effects of helicopter parenting on the growth and development of children. These questions were first piloted with a small group of parents to ensure clarity and relevance.

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For data analysis of the interview, thematic analysis was employed consisting of the following steps:

#### **Familiarisation**

Transcripts of the interviews were read and reread to become familiar with the data. Initial notes and impressions were recorded.

# **Generating Themes**

The participants' responses were extracted and organised into potential themes by accumulating relevant ideas.

# Reviewing Themes

The selected themes were thoroughly reviewed and refined to guarantee the accurate representation of the data and address research objectives.

Defining and Naming Themes

To capture the essence of each theme, they were defined and given a descriptive name.

# Report Writing

The identified themes were confidently presented in a narrative form, expertly supported by relevant interview quotations. This approach enhanced the overall impact and credibility of the findings.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The study strictly adhered to ethical principles along with voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. All participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any given time, research purpose and procedure.

#### **Results and Discussion**

Helicopter parenting has a significant effect on the emotional health of children along with their mental health (Kouros et al., 2017). Children of helicopter parenting develop certain mental disorders including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and more (Srivastav & Mathur, 2020). Many studies have shown a negative association between helicopter parenting and emotional and

mental health problems (Cook, 2020; Darlow et al., 2017; Hong & Cui, 2020; Turner et al., 2020).

While interviewing the selected participants on the effects and challenges of helicopter parenting numerous themes arose. The discussions have aided us in more meticulously examining parent's attitudes towards the helicopter parenting style allowing for a more discursive encounter. The parents provided their experience with helicopter parenting and the children of helicopter parenting. The themes stemming from the interview responses were then sorted and categorized under relevant and apposite headings. At the end of focus group interviews and open-ended questions, the following themes emerged from the data (Imran, et al., 2023).

# Effects of Helicopter Parenting on Children's Life

*Under-developed Cognitive and Confronting skills* 

"My daughter had a friend who had helicopter parents... that kid had no sense of life skills or how to manage things on her own... I think it is very important for parents to educate their kids to manage their own task and let kids practically develop life skills on their own... as much as parents want their children to be safe and protected parents need to control their interference with their kids' life and let them learn how to handle certain life aspects by themselves."

## Another participant said:

"I feel like the children of helicopter parenting have low coping ability and low capability for managing life which is probably the result of parents' overly interfering in their children's lives... Over-indulgence of parents in each and every little detail of their kid's life damages the kid's ability to function on their own... Most kids become spoiled and don't meet with any consequences whenever they do anything bad... Kids don't learn from their mistakes due to the parents constantly solving their child's mistakes."

Regarding the under-developed cognitive and confronting skills of the children of helicopter parenting, participant 7 responded:

"I think the children of helicopter parents lack basic day-to-day skills to survive on their own... The constant over-indulgence of parents in their child's life makes it difficult for the kid to <u>learn and develop skills to manage their life... The kids of helicopter parents will grow up with</u>

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under-developed managing skills and practical knowledge and have a hard time surviving on their own"

A study by Oh et al. (2021), also reported the association between helicopter parenting and under-development of children's cognitive and confronting skills.

*Self-entitlement* 

Gao et al. (2023) and Fletcher et al. (2020), reported the effects of helicopter parenting in their study. Their study reported that children of helicopter parents have severe self-entitlement issues. Participant 4 said:

"Smugness, pridefulness and arrogance are common outcomes of helicopter parenting... helicopter parents are constantly spoon-feeding their kids and solving and helping in every minor inconvenience that happens to their kids which obviously spoils the kids"

Participant 6 said:

"Helicopter parents don't seem to set boundaries for their kids which I personally could never bring myself to do... Not setting boundaries and limits and giving the kids everything wrapped in cotton wool in my opinion spoils the kids and the kids will resultingly grow up to be self-entitled, egoistic and self-centred"

Participant 2 responded:

"Helicopter parenting develops narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder in kids... Children with Narcissistic Personality Disorder [NPD] believe that they are more special and superior than others... They show different symptoms like indifference towards attempts to connect and engage, dismissing and belittling others, or even making comments that highlight the inferiority of others."

A study by Candel (2022), also suggested the correlation between helicopter parenting and self-entitlement behaviour in children of helicopter parents.

Neuroticism

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Neuroticism in young adults is a common personality trait (Schiffrin et al., 2014). It is caused mainly by the environment of a person or genetic roots or possibly a combination of both (Barlow et al., 2014). Helicopter parenting increases the possibility of children acquiring different personality traits including neuroticism. Likewise, one of the participants shared their thoughts regarding helicopter parenting and neuoticism:

"Helicopter parenting results in children having low self-esteem and low confidence... Children with helicopter parenting have difficulty in expressing their thoughts openly due to the constant involvement of their parents in their decision-making stage."

Participant 5 stated:

"Children of helicopter parenting suffer from issues like anxiety and stress... I have neighbours who are helicopter parents their son has anxiety issues because his parents are over-involved in everything he does... they need to know where he is going, and whom he is meeting... that boy has no privacy, no personal space"

Participant 1 responded:

"Mental health issues are common in children of helicopter parents... Children become overly sensitive... because of the parents' relentless interfering, children usually have a difficult time making friends."

*Interpersonal Dependency* 

"Parents interfere in every aspect of their child's life, and because of it, children face difficulties making friends or forming any kind of connection with anyone"

Another participant said:

"I'm a teacher and I've seen kids with helicopter parents sit in a corner alone... these kids hardly make any friends or talk with anyone... I've tried asking the kid if he is having any issues at home or at school but he was having a hard time answering my question and I didn't want to force him so I asked his parents to which they responded that for some reason he only seems to be comfortable with us."

Participant 3 stated their experience with helicopter parents:

"Even in kids-only gatherings, these parents come along with their kids... I invited my relative's kids for my son's birthday and it was a kids-only party but even there a few parents came along with them... these parents don't give any privacy to their kids not even for like half an hour."

To sum up, the results suggest the significantly negative impact of helicopter parenting on children's mental and emotional development. Many studies have also reported the negative correlation between helicopter parenting and its effects on the mental and emotional development of children (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; McGinley, 2018; Odenweller et al., 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2019; van Ingen et al., 2015)

# **Discussion of the Study**

The findings of this study highlight the significant adverse impacts of helicopter parenting on children's mental and emotional health. Consistent with previous research by Kouros et al. (2017), our study found that helicopter parenting is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in children. This aligns with the reports by Srivastav & Mathur (2020), who also observed a negative association between over-involved parenting and children's emotional well-being.

Our research further reveals that helicopter parenting inhibits the development of essential coping and life-managing skills, a finding that supports the results of a study by Oh et al. (2021), which showed a correlation between overbearing parenting and the under-development of children's cognitive and confronting skills. This lack of developed skills contributes to difficulties in handling day-to-day tasks independently, thus impacting long-term personal and professional achievements.

Another significant issue identified is the emergence of self-entitlement behaviors in children, corroborated by findings from Gao et al. (2023) and Fletcher et al. (2020). These studies suggested that children raised with constant parental intervention develop a narcissistic outlook, which aligns with the observations by Candel (2022) linking helicopter parenting with narcissistic personality traits in children.

Additionally, our findings regarding the impact of helicopter parenting on children's neurotic tendencies complement those reported by Schiffrin et al. (2014), emphasizing how an

overbearing parental approach contributes to higher levels of neuroticism and stress. This observation is critical, as noted by Participant 5 in our study, who discussed the anxiety issues prevalent among children subjected to constant parental oversight.

Furthermore, our study sheds light on the interpersonal dependencies fostered by helicopter parenting, a factor that previous studies like those by LeMoyne & Buchanan (2011) and McGinley (2018) have noted as contributing to poor social skills and isolation from peers. This interference in developing normal social interactions can lead to significant challenges in adult relationships and professional environments.

In conclusion, while parents may adopt helicopter parenting with the intention of protecting their children, the long-term consequences suggest that such strategies may hinder rather than help. This study underscores the need for a balanced approach to parenting, promoting independence and resilience in children while offering necessary support and guidance

#### Conclusion

The study revealed the outcomes of helicopter parenting. Overindulgence of parents in children's lives can develop serious mental and emotional health problems altering the process of their growth and development. The results showed the mental effects of helicopter parenting on children. Through a thematic analysis, themes were designed in accordance with the similarity in the interviews. Most responses of the parents concluded that children with helicopter parenting have underdeveloped cognitive and confronting skills and are unable to make their own decisions and manage day-to-day tasks. The foremost self-entitled children emerge from helicopter parenting. Neuroticism also came out as a major concern. Helicopter parenting results in children suffering from anxiety, stress and depression. Children are unable to form any sort of connection or relation with friends or any other person, children become overly sensitive due to constant indulgence and interference of parents in their lives. The children of helicopter parents have no privacy or personal space.

# **Implications of the Study**

#### For Academia

This study contributes significantly to the academic understanding of parenting styles and their impacts on child development, particularly in the context of helicopter parenting. It highlights the detrimental effects such overbearing parental involvement can have on children's emotional and mental health, thus offering a nuanced perspective that can inform future educational practices and

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interventions. Academics and educators can utilize these findings to design curricula and programs that educate parents about the importance of fostering independence in their children to promote healthier cognitive and emotional development. Moreover, this research opens avenues for further academic inquiry into the mechanisms through which parenting styles influence various aspects of psychological growth in children.

## **For Parents**

For parents, this study serves as a crucial wake-up call regarding the potentially harmful effects of helicopter parenting. By understanding how this style of parenting can lead to issues such as underdeveloped coping skills, increased neuroticism, and a lack of personal autonomy, parents might be encouraged to reevaluate their approaches to child-rearing. The evidence suggesting that such parenting can contribute to disorders like anxiety and depression is particularly alarming and underscores the need for parents to allow their children more freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. This shift could help children develop stronger resilience and better mental health outcomes in the long run.

# Future Research Directions Aligned with SDG 2030

**Promoting Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3):** Future research should explore interventions that mitigate the negative impacts of helicopter parenting on mental health. Studies could investigate how parental education programs or community-based support systems improve children's psychological resilience and overall well-being.

**Quality Education (SDG 4):** Investigating educational frameworks that incorporate lessons on emotional intelligence, coping skills, and self-management could be beneficial. Research could assess how these programs aid children from overly controlled backgrounds in gaining independence and critical life skills.

**Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10):** Further studies could examine how helicopter parenting manifests across different socioeconomic, cultural, and racial contexts. Understanding these dynamics can help tailor interventions that address and reduce inequalities in child development outcomes.

**Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17):** Research could focus on collaborative approaches involving schools, parents, and mental health professionals to create holistic support environments for children. Studies might explore how these partnerships effectively reduce the adverse effects of helicopter parenting.

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