**Helicopter Parenting**

**Overindulgent/Helicopter Parenting**

Helicopter Parenting is a relatively new concept. The term was coined in 1990 by Jim Fay and Foster Cline in their book, Parenting With Love and Logic. (Morin, 2020) According to Merriam Webster, the definition of a helicopter parent is one who is overly involved in the life of his or her child. This style of parenting has been found to be developmentally inappropriate for emerging adults, ages 18-25. While there has been some research done on the effects of this type of parenting style, there hasn’t been many longitudinal studies because of how new the idea of helicopter parenting is. We will look at the effects of helicopter parenting on both the child and the parent. The common theme throughout all the research is that helicopter parenting has negative effects on emerging adults.

**Effects on Parents**

Research is clear that parents experience significantly higher levels of stress than non-parents. (Cui et al., 2019) This is due to all the added responsibilities a parent has with each additional child as well as the strain it can cause on the relationship with a spouse. Helicopter parents have even higher levels of stress added due to constantly trying to solve all the children’s problems and trying to step in to save them before they experience failure. Because of this they experience low levels of satisfaction with their own lives.

***Mental and Emotional Stress***

While there has not been extensive research done on the effects of helicopter parenting on the parents, all the available research points to parents feeling less satisfaction overall in life compared to non-helicopter parents. (Cui et al., 2019) Many parents felt stretched too thin while trying to provide everything that their adult children needed from them. Helicopter parenting leads to more conflict with adult children which is a source of stress for the parents. (Fingerman et al., 2012)

***Financial Stress***

Parents in the 21st century provide a lot more financial assistance to their emerging adult children than did people in the 20th century. In the last 50 years there has been a major shift on the time of adults leaving their parents wings and going out on their own completely. It used to be early 20’s that children would have finished school, gone into the work force, gotten married, and started having kids. (Fingerman et al., 2012) That age has changed drastically. This shift has caused some parents to suffer financially which is an added stressor as parents age and are making sure that they have enough money to retire and live on.

**Effects on Children**

Helicopter parenting has been found to have many negative effects. It is becoming a growing concern for professionals dealing with emerging adults. There is a growing body of research that supports there is a correlation between helicopter parents and mental and physical health problems among adolescents. This is a time in life when autonomy should be increasing instead helicopter parents are granting less autonomy. (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)

Autonomy supportive parenting had a direct correlation to more positive life satisfaction and physical and mental health while helicopter parenting had the adverse effect. (Reed et al., 2016)

***Decision Making***

Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations." (Cherry, 2020) Self-efficacy is central to emerging adults making decisions. One study questioned if parents who perceive their child struggles with self-efficacy overinvolved themselves because they believe they can’t do it on their own or if a or if a parent overinvolved themselves initially caused the child to struggle with self-efficacy. (Reed et al., 2016) While more research was needed to fully know the answer to that question it is believed that indulgent parenting comes first causing the problems. There are three dimensions of indulgent parenting. They are material, relational and behavioral indulgence. Material indulgence is when a parent provides excess material goods. Relational indulgence is when parents are overprotective and do things their children should be doing for themselves. Lastly, behavioral indulgence is when parents fail to uphold responsible behavior from their children. The assumed trend is that parents who are overly involved when the child is young will continue that into adulthood trying to keep their involvement and protection by whatever means necessary. (Cui et al., 2019) Helicopter parents don’t allow their child to be autonomous, provide them with too much advice, supply them with too many physical resources and make them feel powerless. There is also a correlation between parents providing too much help in problem solving and decision making which leads to the emerging adult having difficulty making decisions for themselves. (Cook, 2020) All of these extra resources hinder emerging adults in their problem-solving skills. They have parents who go before them and provide by any means necessary which means they don’t have the ability or freedom to work hard and be resourceful with what they do have.

***Mental Health***

As children grow, they naturally need to have more autonomy, when parents don’t allow for that, it creates a problem with the emerging adult’s well-being. One study found that college students whose parents were overinvolved reported higher levels of anxiety and depression as well as overall less satisfaction with their life. (Cook, 2020) Another study looked self-determination theory to show that over involved parents may violate some of the basic psychological needs of their children. This theory looks at three needs all humans have in order to have healthy development. The first is autonomy, the second is competence, and the third is relatedness. When these needs are met humans are more satisfied. The findings in this study were that the level of inappropriate parental behavior directly correlated to negative outcomes in children’s psychological state. (Schiffrin et al.) Almost all the research provided on helicopter parenting shows an increased risk of depression and anxiety in the emerging adults. In order to build and develop resiliency in life humans must go through trying times that help build that in them. When parents overstep boundaries and shield their children from experiencing failure or difficulties, they rob them of opportunities to grown and learn leading to children having no confidence and low self-esteem. They are then unable to deal healthily with any trials and crumble because they think they have failed. Failure seems a lot bigger and more impactful when you have never really experienced it. This causes these adults to have higher anxiety which could lead to depression over things that their peers may be able to shrug off because they know how to deal with and handle the difficulties of life.

***Substance Abuse***

Helicopter parenting leads to adolescents having lower sense of independence, self-sufficiency and resilience when faced with challenges. We know from research that peers have a large impact and influence on decisions made during adolescence. On both ends of the spectrum, parents who are lenient and permissive as well as parents who are over involved and authoritarian, there is a higher likelihood of alcohol use and abuse. (Pistella et al., 2022)

***Academic Success***

Multiple research articles showed that helicopter parenting has a negative effect on college student’s academic achievements which is ironic considering that parents are trying to help their children be more successful than others. It was found that these children had lower GPA’s than those with parents who were not overindulgent. (Jung et al., 2019) It is becoming a growing problem on college campuses for parents to contact professors and help their children do work. Many colleges are informing parents that in their efforts to help they are harming their children and some even explicitly ask that parents take a step back and let their children work through their own issues. (Jung et al., 2019) Students with parents who are over involved report feeling higher levels of pressure to perform which causes anxiety causing them to perform more poorly. (Schiffrin et al.)

**Helicopter Parenting Viewed Through a Theoretical Lens**

**Family Systems Theory**

The family systems theory is a complex theory that looks at the relationships among family members and how they interact and influence one another’s behavior. In any system, it is important to have knowledge of all the parts of the system in order to understand the whole. (Gavazzi, 2014) Bowen says that one’s family unit has a profound impact on the emotions and actions in a family. No matter the closeness of a family there is some level of interdependence among them. (Team, 2022) When looking at helicopter parenting through the lens of the family systems theory we see how interdependence can play a negative role. When parents are overinvolved in their emerging adult children’s lives an unhealthy interdependence is formed in which the child relies on the parent for too much emotional and physical support and in return the parent spends too much time focusing on and solving the child’s problems. A big concept of family systems theory is hierarchy – the arrangement of a family system and who is in charge. (Gavazzi, 2014) In a typical family the parents are at the top of the hierarchy but at adolescents begin the transition from childhood to adulthood there is usually some struggle regarding the natural order. Adolescents begin testing the boundaries and authority of the parents. Helicopter parents shut down this natural shift and continue to hover over and not allow for the child to have autonomy which creates a plethora of problems. Boundaries are another

**Conclusion**

Helicopter parenting is shown to have adverse effects on children compared to autonomy supportive parenting. Based on all the research found there is nothing to show that helicopter parenting has positive benefits for the long-term health and well-being of the child. Whether it is the mental, physical, emotional or financial health of the adolescent, there is a negative correlation between overindulgent parenting and the success of the emerging adult.

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