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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Multivariate Analysis of Sociodemographic Predictors and Gender Moderation in Perceptions of Parental Overparenting among College Students

Ms. K. Menaashe Pooja[1*] and Dr. B. Damodaran[2]
[1]PhD Scholar, Department of Psychology, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Chennai, India
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research, Chennai, India

*Corresponding Author
Ms. K. Menaashe Pooja

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Abstract: This study enquires the cause of overparenting and the moderating role of socio-demographic factors on university students. Overparenting, defined as intrusive and inappropriate parental involvement, is associated with psychological distress and reduced autonomy in emerging adults (Perez et al., 2019). Data were collected from 500 students through a cross-sectional survey design. Multiple regression tests, ANOVA, and independent samples t-tests were employed to examine how perceptions of overparenting were influenced by variables like age, gender, marital status, birth order, family structure, level of education, academic year, area of residence, socioeconomic status, and parents' occupation. The findings revealed that the perceptions of overparenting were strongly influenced by parental occupation, age, marital status, gender, and socioeconomic level. The findings of the moderation analysis indicated that the relationship between parental occupation and overparenting was strongly moderated by socioeconomic level. This suggests that, higher socioeconomic circumstances may moderate overparenting orientations. Moreover, overparenting behaviour was also found to be moderated by interaction effects of family type and education level. These results highlight the intricate interaction between parenting practices and contextual influences in emerging adulthood. This study adds to the growing body of research through the establishment of key mediators of overparenting and by providing evidence to support targeted interventions for parental education and emerging adults' mental health

Keywords: Overparenting, economic status, predictors, emerging adults, demographic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting styles and children's attitudes toward parental involvement are significantly affected by sociodemographic factors such as parental education, family income, cultural background, and family structure (Chen et al., 2024). Parents who are better educated, for instance, may be more academically involved with their children, which, depending on circumstances, could be seen as either positive or overbearing (Wang, 2023). Likewise, socioeconomic status may influence the degree and type of parental involvement during college years (Liu et al., 2019). Hence, it is important identify which student populations are more likely to view their parents' behaviors as overparenting, to have better understanding about these predictors.

The issue of overparenting is particularly significant when looking at today's college students (Creste, 2020). Parent involvement in this phase tends to remain elevated as higher education is increasingly serving as a bridge to adulthood (Zhang & Ji, 2024). Overparenting can become detrimental despite altruistic intentions having the goal of ensuring the success and welfare of children. According to research, overparented college students could be responsible for poorer coping ability, lower self-efficacy, and higher anxiety levels in managing social and academic difficulties (Schiffrin et al., 2013). It is therefore important to clarify the predictive dimensions that predict perception of overparenting as a way of forming measures that help in the construction of young adults as well as strengthening parent-child interaction.

It is assumed that sociodemographic variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, birth order, and family composition affect the way students view the behavior of their parents (Engberg et al., 2024; Hadjicharalambous & Demetriou, 2020; Lou et al., 2024). For example, younger children may see more parental control compared to older students who are becoming more self-sufficient. It is also believed that firstborns may face more parental expectations and supervision than later-born siblings (Sulloway, 1996). Another powerful predictor might be socioeconomic status (SES). Higher SES families may have more time and resources to be involved in their children's life (Wilson & Worsley, 2021). As children from nuclear families are likely to have more direct parental monitoring than children from extended family households, family structure—nuclear or shared—may also play a role in the dynamics of parental involvement (Pribesh et al., 2020).

Above all, academic curiosity regarding the moderating influence of gender has grown. Parenting can be experienced differently by male and female children, depending on processes of gender socialization (Morawska, 2020). According to research, daughters are more emotionally involved and monitored by their parents than sons (Levy-Warren, 2000). Gender may

therefore act as a moderator between sociodemographic characteristics and overparenting perceptions. For instance, although both male and female students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds might feel parental involvement, the different expectations and relational dynamics of the parents can make female students feel it more strongly as overparenting (Segrin et al., 2020).

Though overparenting has increasingly come under scrutiny by researchers, only few studies have been done to investigate its determinants in a multivariate setting Hence, multivariate analysis of sociodemographic predictors on perception of parental overparenting among college students is the focus of this study. This study primarily focuses on how sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, birth order, marital status, education, year of study, residence, socioeconomic status, family structure, and parent occupation are related to mothers' and fathers' overparenting behaviours. It also focuses on how gender mediates the relationship between these sociodemographic factors and perceptions of overparenting. Overall, this research offer a more complete and subtle understanding of the complex relationships between individual, family, and social factors in shaping young people's views about their parents' involvement through the application of a broad multivariate approach.

OBJECTIVE:

The primary objective of this study is to explore the sociodemographic predictors of college students' perceptions of parental overparenting and to examine the moderating role of gender in these perceptions.

HYPOTHESIS:

H1: Sociodemographic factors, including age, socioeconomic status, and family structure, will significantly predict college students' perceptions of parental overparenting.

H2: Gender will moderate the relationship between sociodemographic predictors.

METHODOLOGY:

Sample

Cross-sectional survey design was employed in the research. The research sample consisted of 500 students (279 females and 221 males) from various colleges in and around Tamilnadu. Convenience sampling was employed in selecting the participants. The samples should lie between the ages of 18 and 25 years and pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree to qualify for inclusion. To ensure variance in sociodemographic factors such as gender, birth order, year of study, socioeconomic status, type of family, and residence, students from diverse backgrounds were recruited.

Tools used

The Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale (CHPS) developed by Schiffrin et al. (2014), is a 10 item scale that was used to measure student beliefs about involvement of parents in their lives. This scale addresses intrusion of parents in college, emotional, and everyday decision-making involvement. Higher scores are associated with greater perceived helicopter parenting. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 7 represents "strongly agree." Cronbach's alpha for the scale was found to be greater than.80, reflecting high internal consistency. A self-constructed demographic sheet was also used to collect information on the following variables: age, gender, birth order, marital status, educational qualification, study year, area of living, socioeconomic status (SES), family type, father's and mother's occupation.

Procedure

Prior to the data collection, participants provided their consent by filling the given informed consent form after the study's purpose was explained to them. Demographic sheet and overparenting scale were both on the questionnaire, and the questionnaire was administered via Google Forms or on paper and pencil based on the need. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The respondents were allowed about 15–20 minutes to answer the survey. Voluntary participation was ensured, and the study adhered to ethical guidelines. Ethical approval had been obtained from the institutional review board prior to the collection of any data.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS version 26 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies were computed to summarize the sample and major variables. Age, Socio economic status, and overparenting scores were among the continuous variables whose association was examined using Pearson Correlation Coefficients. Gender differences in mothers' and fathers' overparenting were examined using independent samples t-tests. Group differences in overparenting for marital status, birth order, year of study, place of residence, and family structure was analyzed using one-way ANOVA. In identification of sociodemographic predictors with significant effects on ratings for father overparenting and mother overparenting, multiple linear regression analysis was utilized. Moderation Analysis (Interaction Terms) was utilized in the research in order to determine if gender moderated the association between sociodemographic variables and perceptions of overparenting.

RESULTS:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of study variables (N=500)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age	2.61	1.60
Socioeconomic Status	3.20	0.72
Father Overparenting	37.13	12.29
Mother Overparenting	37.58	12.24
Gender	1.44	0.50
Marital Status	1.34	0.64
Birth Order	1.23	0.77
Educational Qualification	1.11	0.31
Study Year	2.74	0.50
Area of Living	2.05	0.66
Father's Occupation	3.61	1.74
Mother's Occupation	3.96	1.59
Family Type	1.29	0.45

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between key variables

Variable 1	Variable 2	r - value	p - value
Age	Father Overparenting	–.442	< .001
Age	Mother Overparenting	–.475	< .001
Socio-economic Status	Father Overparenting	.281	< .001
Socio-economic Status	Mother Overparenting	.220	< .001

Table 3: Multiple regression predicting father and mother overparenting

Predictor	β (Father OP)	p - value (Father OP)	β (Mother OP)	p - value (Mother OP)
(Constant)	46.492	< .001	44.338	< .001
Age	–2.408	< .001	–2.419	< .001
Gender	0.907	.350	7.997	< .001
Marital Status	–1.209	.129	0.154	.845
Birth Order	–5.819	< .001	–4.498	< .001
Educational Qualification	–3.714	.141	–6.274	.012
Study Year	0.018	.988	–1.933	.120
Area of Living	0.594	.393	0.920	.180
Socio-economic Status	2.990	< .001	2.678	< .001
Father's Occupation	–0.551	.044	–0.599	.027
Mother's Occupation	0.091	.755	0.040	.888
Family Type	–0.519	.613	–2.152	.034

Table 4: Interaction Regression (Gender × Predictors) on Overparenting

Interaction Term	β (Father OP)	p - value (Father OP)	β (Mother OP)	p - value (Mother OP)
Age × Gender	–1.480	< .001	–1.792	< .001
Birth Order × Gender	–3.226	< .001	–2.218	< .001
Education × Gender	–1.703	.211	–0.190	.887
Study Year × Gender	1.228	.032	1.620	.004
Area of Living × Gender	0.246	.594	1.124	.013
SES × Gender	2.567	< .001	2.727	< .001
Father Occ. × Gender	–0.302	.109	–0.214	.249
Mother Occ. × Gender	0.005	.978	0.114	.562
Family Type × Gender	–0.270	.688	–0.925	.162

Table 5: ANOVA Results for Group Differences in Overparenting

Grouping Variable	Dependent Variable	F value	df	p - value	Direction of Effect
Gender	Mother Overparenting	33.9	(1, 498)	< .001	Males > Females

Marital Status	Father OP	21.6	(3, 29.7)	< .001	Unmarried > Married
Birth Order	Father OP	74.9	(2, 252)	< .001	First-born > Others
Study Year	Father OP	202.0	(2, 67.9)	< .001	Higher years > Lower years
Area of Living	Father OP	5.38	(2, 206)	.005	Urban > Rural
Family Type	Father OP	12.0	(1, 249)	< .001	Nuclear > Joint

DISCUSSION:

In this research, multiple demographic and context variables were considered to identify the predictors of perceptions of overparenting among students.

Age:

The present research found that overparenting were significantly negatively related to age. These findings are in accordance with previous research that identified that younger individuals report more parental overcontrol and due to development expectations and independence (Padilla Walker & Nelson, 2012; Pérez et al., 2021; Segrin et al., 2013). Parents employ a more directive or hands-on style in initial stages of emerging maturity. However, parental involvement lessens over age and financial and emotional autonomy (K. L. Fingerman et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2024), which dimishes overparenting feelings in the minds of emerging adults (Kouros et al., 2017; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). The inverse association between overparenting and age may vary depending on the child's gender, as suggested by the regression model with gender interactions (Luebbe et al., 2018). This results shows that parental actions may be viewed or enacted differently depending on the gender and developmental level of the child, although gender-specific interpretations need to be researched further.

Gender:

Perceptions of overparenting are highly gender-specific, especially when used to describe maternal behaviors; male students perceive much greater levels of maternal overcontrol. Gender specific parenting styles and cultural expectations are probably the cause (Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Segrin et al., 2013). Since boys in late adolescence and adulthood are in search of socialisation and autonomy, they might regard more mothers' involvement in routine caregiving and affect regulation as intrusive or overcontrolling (Padilla Walker & Nelson, 2012; Tammilehto et al., 2021). It is interesting to note that, while it was a significant predictor of maternal overparenting in the model, gender was not statistically significant in the model for paternal overparenting when other variables were controlled. This discrepancy could indicate that males are less likely to engage in daily control behaviours that are more typically seen as overparenting, or that fathers' parenting is perceived more uniformly by both genders (Winner & Nicholson, 2018). In addition, in the moderation study, gender was also still a moderator of substantive associations between and demographic variables. Mothers in general might be more protective towards sons than their daughters on the basis of deeply ingrained gender role beliefs (Luebbe et al., 2018).

Marital status:

Single students indicated much higher levels of overparenting on the part of their parents than did married students. These results concur with developmental and psychosocial theories of individuation and autonomy that place marriage as a functional and symbolic marker of adult independence (Arnett, 2000; Melendro et al., 2020). When people move into married situations, their parents may become less involved in daily decision-making and emotional management as they feel their adult children are more independent and self-governing (Fingerman et al., 2012). Parents may view unmarried students as less completely individuated, as implied by Padilla Walker & Nelson, 2012, and this leads to ongoing supervision and behavioural control, especially if they are at home or are economically dependent. Surprisingly, the multiple regression models did not indicate marital status as a robust independent predictor.

Education:

Although the impact was statistically significant in the model for mother overparenting only, education level and academic year were negative predictors of father and mother overparenting. Highly educated people are more likely to perceive reduced overparenting from their parents, especially from their mothers. A child's sensitivity to or acceptance of controlling parental behaviors may reduce as they advance academically because they become exposed to greater autonomy-supporting environments, such as peer-guided decision-making, independent inquiry, and critical thinking (S. Chen et al., 2024; K. L. Fingerman et al., 2012; Padilla Walker & Nelson, 2012).This is in line with developmental and sociocultural theory, which assumes education to be associated with greater independence, self-reflection, and cognitive maturity—all of which could serve as a buffer against the sense of parental control (Wilson & Worsley, 2021). Mothers' closer bond could be an indication of traditional gender roles in child-rearing, where mothers are often more actively engaged in emotional regulation and academic management, especially during the initial phases of schooling (Nelson et al., 2020; Tanskanen et al., 2023). Though study year has significant impact, the interaction regression model for educational qualification did not statistically significantly predict both mother or father overparenting, which suggests that gender differences in overparenting occur across stages of academia (Givertz & Segrin, 2014).

Area of living:
Urban environments can promote increased parental monitoring and engagement due to greater access to educational resources, competitive academic environments, and increased social risk issues (Fransisca, 2024; Wilson & Worsley, 2021). Such engagement can be beneficial, but when it becomes overly directive or stifles autonomy, especially during puberty and the early years of adulthood, it can also become overparenting (Teuber et al., 2022). In contrast, for reasons of environmental necessity and cultural values, families in rural areas can emphasize self-sufficiency and pragmatic independence more (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Therefore, overparenting may be viewed as less important in rural settings because parents micromanage personal and school choices of their children to a lesser extent. However, nonetheless, the interaction model illustrated that urban daughters endure more intense maternal involvement than rural ones, which is an articulation of gendered expectations of behavior, safety, and accountability with contemporary parent ideologies and relative sociality (Nelson et al., 2020; Segrin et al., 2013).

Socioeconomic status:
More affluent socioeconomic students indicated higher parental overcontrol, since this research found a significant positive relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and mothers' and fathers' perceived overparenting (Thomas Vogel et al., 2023; Wilson & Worsley, 2021). According to Koball and Princiotta (2008), parents of more affluent SES families possess greater financial, educational, and social resources, enabling them to closely monitor their children, plan, and guide their lives. Kids can experience a diminished sense of autonomy in making decisions, independently resolving problems, or developing resilience in the face of it, despite this potentially being good for their own scholastic performances or openings to opportunities (Balayar, 2021; Segrin et al., 2013).According to the interaction model, gender may be affected by SES to a greater degree, and that could be a reflection of how differently parents want their sons and daughters to be in high-SES homes. Research has indicated that in wealthy homes, sons might have more stringent behavior monitoring and performance expectations and that girls might have more emotional investment (Luthar & Barkin, 2012; Mistry & Elenbaas, 2021).

Occupation:
While the mother's occupation was not statistically significant in either model, the father's occupation was a significant inverse predictor of perceived overparenting. Children may feel less overcontrol if fathers hold time-demanding or stressful jobs, since they are less engaged in day-to-day parenting (Dunatchik et al., 2021)(Allison Dunatchik 2021). On the other hand, higher occupational status leads to more knowledge about autonomy-supportive parenting strategies (Ahn et al., 2022). Regardless of work status, mothering roles committed to providing care and emotional support could persist as more prevalent, indicated by null maternal occupation results (Jiao et al., 2024). According to Milkie et al., 2004, mothers could still be viewed as the sources of parental involvement, and their working status does not really influence the control over home. However, interaction model indicates that gender doesn't significantly impact the relationship between parental occupation and overparenting.

Family type:
Nuclear family students reported higher levels of overparenting especially from mothers compared to students from joint or extended families. This is in line with the earlier research that validated that parent–child interaction in nuclear family settings is more intense since there are fewer common caregiving tasks and more direct parental monitoring (Russell et al., 2022). On the other hand, joint or extended families typically have scattered caregiving duties among grandparents, uncles and aunts, and other kinfolk, which may temper the intensity or frequency of direct parental domination (Roy & Ayalon, 2021).

CONCLUSION:

The outcomes underscore the strong contextual and complex nature of overparenting more than a standard problem. The context of the family and one's demographic status are together considered to be determinants of overparenting. Most importantly, this result highlights the necessity of autonomy-supportive and age appropriate parenting, particularly during emerging adulthood, an important period of psychological well-being, identity development, and self-regulation.

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