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Impact of Parental Overprotection on Impulsivity and Decision-Making among Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, parental overprotection has been discussed regarding their effects on impulsivity and decision making among emerging adults. We believe that emotional and cognitive development can be influenced by extreme parental control and a deficit of autonomy and affect impulse control and decision-making skills. The quantitative correlational design employed had a sample of (N=105) individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 years who had taken standardized self-report questionnaires. The measure of parental overprotection, impulsivity, and decision-making was administered on validated psychometric scales and analyzed in the SPSS version 27. The Pearson correlations demonstrated the significant positive correlation between parental overprotection and impulsivity (r = .42, p <.01) and the significant negative correlation between parental overprotection and effective decision-making (r = -.31, p <.05). These correlations were verified using multiple regression. The assessment of reliability showed that the instruments have good internal consistency with Cronbach values of between 0.68 and 0.78. According to our results, parental overprotectiveness when elevated correlates with extreme impulsiveness and poor decision-making capabilities in developing adults. The findings highlight the need to have balanced parenthood that promotes independence and yet gives relevant guidance. Future research ought to test such correlations in various cultural settings and their use of longitudinal research designs to determine cause and effect.

Background of the Study

Parental role is a critical factor in determining emotional, cognitive and social growth of adolescents. The research topic of the present study is based on the predictive role of overprotective parenting, this hypothesis suggests predicting the increase in the level of externalising behavioural issues (Huijsduijnen, 2021). The active adulthood that is also called the transitional stage, which is the period between 18-29 years, is a phase of identity exploration, a phase of growing independence as well as a time of expanding choices of decision making (Arnett, 2000). Parental practices that limit autonomy during this developmental phase are likely to interfere with the development of the basic life skills, such as coping, problem-solving, and impulse control. Among salient disorders that can develop as a side effect of overprotective parenting is the impulsivity directly linked with the way in which adults react to emotional and social problems further on (Crone et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021). Impulsive adults are personality features that are characterised by quick and emotional decision-making processes; Wolff and Crockett (2011) note that parents have a critical role to play in shaping decision-making processes of the emerging adults, especially in the social context of the family set-up.

Parental Overprotection

Parental overprotection has been defined as an over-regulation, over-surveillance and over-invasion of parental behaviour (Boeckels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006). These practices hinder the growth of self-reliant problem solving skills. Experimental studies have proven that parental overprotection is directly associated with the development of externalising behavioural issues in adulthood, and stronger overprotective behaviors indicate a greater prevalence of externalising behaviour (Nelson et al., 2020). Furthermore, parents tend to create an impression of risky and responsible surroundings in the minds of their children, which causes them to view the environment around as dangerous and adhere to it inaccurately, in spite of their best efforts to evaluate danger. As a result, this attitude increases the chances of development of violent and delinquent behavior (Nelson et al., 2020; Szkody et al., 2020; Ungar, 2009).

Attachment theory is another hypothetical approach that explains how some parenting styles can trigger the development of maladaptive behaviour, such as externalising behaviour, as formulated by Bowlby. According to this theory, parent-child relationship is the central component of the adaptability and psychological health of the adult (Jones & Bowlby, 1970). Such an insecure attachment, once formed, predisposes the emerging adults to externalising behavioural disorders including violent and antisocial behaviour (Fearon et al., 2010).

Impulsivity

Impulsivity refers to a blind reaction of a person to the internal stimulus, which takes place without deliberation or preparation (Moeller et al., 2001). That is, impulsiveness is defined as the tendency to take actions without giving them much thought on the potential implications of the course of actions (Carver, 2005). Impulsiveness has a strong impact on everyday functioning, personality, quality of life, and decision making, which eventually results in psychopathological symptoms and psychiatric disorders (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001).

The overprotective parenting can either increase or not alleviate the impulsive tendencies because the denial of the possibilities of the autonomous decision-making hampers the development of the skills of self-regulations in the young adult. Of all the range of behavioural disorders caused by overprotective parenting, the issue of impulsivity can be mentioned as one of the most salient characteristics, as it affects directly the reaction of the emerging adults to the emotional and social barriers (Crone et al., 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021).

Decision-Making

The ability to choose or make a decision based on the alternatives and considering the repercussions, risks, and long-term consequences is termed as decision-making. It is one of the most basic elements of life, where adolescents and young adults are constantly in the process of negotiating the right courses of action in the variety of settings (Bruine de Bruin et al., 2007; Salo & Allwood, 2011). The process of decision making in itself can constitute one of the primary sources of risk behaviour that is witnessed among the adolescents and emerging adults (Steinberg, 2004). As an example, a young person may decide to try smoking, to fit in with his or her peers, not knowing the risks involved to health, and how they can be addicted to the habit over time (Steinberg, 2008). Nevertheless, in situations where immediate reward is opposed to long-term risk, where behavioural inhibition is needed, an adolescent and emerging adult might avoid a conscious decision-making process (Crone & van der Molen, 2008; Steinberg et al., 2009). This tendency makes one more sensitive to risky or spontaneous behaviour.

The role of parenting has a deep effect on the decision-making abilities growth. Wolff and Crockett (2011) argue that parental involvedness is an important factor that dictates the way emerging adults make decisions. By inhibiting independent thinking, overprotective parenting can result in adolescents and new adults over- depending on parental advice instead of learning how to make choices on their own (Udell et al., 2008).

Various researches have provided us with the understanding of the effect of overprotective parenting on the adolescent behavior. For example, Zeynep (2020) tested the hypothesis of the effect of impulsivity and overinflated sense of self on the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychiatric symptoms in university students (N = 37). The results revealed that maternal helicopter parenting was closely correlated with increased impulsivity which consequently enhanced psychological symptoms. This implies that parents who are overprotective may affect the decisions made by emerging adults negatively by promoting impulsive tendencies and misplaced self-conceptions.

Similarly, Ran et al. (2021) examined the mediating role of impulsivity between maternal overprotection and the behavioral outcome in adolescence in a large Chinese sample (N =3,146). Their results showed that parental overprotection and rejection had a strong correlation with greater impulsivity, which was the predictor of greater self-harm and predisposed risk-taking behaviors. This points to the aspect that overprotective parenting increases the impulse which results in ineffective decisions among young adults.

Moreover, Wolf et al. (2024) also studies the effect of perceived overprotective parenting on decision making in emerging adults (N = 246). Although overprotection was not directly related to confidence in decision making, it was also correlated with lower self-efficacy and more anxiety which have been known to hamper decision-making and elevate impulsivity. Their findings suggest that parental protection has an indirect negative effect on the cognitive and emotional development of emerging adults.

In a different approach, Davids et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review to determine the effects of parenting approaches and particularly overprotection on the decision-making patterns of emerging adults. The review established that maladaptive decision-making was more prevalent in emerging people who were exposed to poor parenting especially the overprotective or authoritarian styles. These results confirm the hypothesis that the effect of overprotective parenting is a barrier to effective decision-making in young adults.

Finally, Urone et al. (2024) were able to study the relationship between overparenting and emotional dysregulation, impulsiveness, and risky behavior among emerging adults (N=310).

Their findings showed that overprotective parenting had a positive linkage with impulsivity and emotional dysregulation which resulted in risky and maladaptive decision-making. The paper highlights that overprotection of parents has adverse consequences on the emotional control and judgment ability of emerging adults.

Research Objectives

- To test the association between parental overprotection and impulsivity among emerging adults.
- To test the association between parental overprotection and decision making among emerging adults.
- To examine the predictive nature of parental overprotection in young adults impulsivity and decision-making .
- To estimate gender variation in impulsivity and decision-making amongst emerging adults.

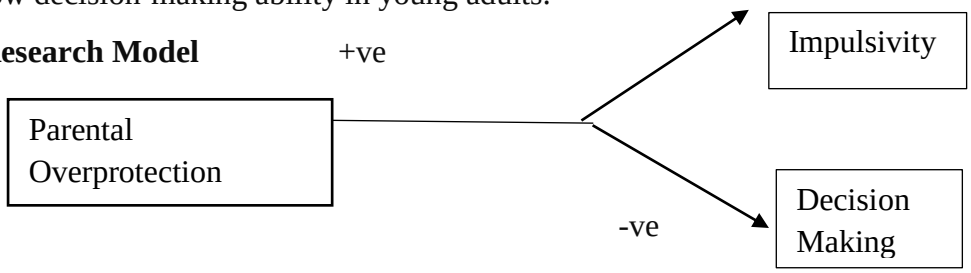
Hypotheses

- There will be a positive relationship between parental overprotection and impulsivity among emerging adults.
- There will be a negative relationship between parental overprotection and decision making among emerging adults.
- Parental overprotection significantly predicts Impulsivity and decision-making in emerging adults.
- There will be significant gender difference in Impulsivity and Decision making of emerging adults.

Theoretical Direction: Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

This study examining Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that was developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). It assumes that motivation and self-development depends on the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs, which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Once these needs are fulfilled, people are bound to be self-regulatory, more confident, and thus make more informed decisions.But on the other hand, autonomy is destroyed, competence is lowered and independent learning and problem-solving is curtailed when parents become overprotective or controlling. This kind of overprotection increases impulsivity and the inability to make good judgments.Protective parenting is therefore theorised as a barrier that increases impulsivity and the low decision-making ability in young adults.

Research Model



This research is based on Self-Determination Theory and aims at hypothesizing that parental overprotection is positively linked to impulsivity and negatively to decision-making among emerging adults.

Method

Participants

In this study, 105 undergraduate students (26 men, 79 women) who were aged 18-25 participated. I used convenience sampling in selecting participants who were in some Southern Punjab colleges and universities. The mean age was 21.93 years (SD = 1.82). The inclusion criteria were that they were actively recruited, were aged between 18 to 25, spoke fluent English and are willing to provide informed consent. The final sample was to be taken by removing the participants who failed to answer the questions incomplete or inconsistently or failed to provide consent.

Research Design

A quantitative correlational design was used to evaluate the association between parental overprotection, impulsivity, and decision-making among emerging adults.

Measures

Parental Overprotection was measured with the Overprotection subscale of the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 1979), which is a 13-item scale evaluating overprotectiveness of the parent and his / her restriction of the child autonomy. The subscale was very reliable (α =.81).

Impulsivity was measured by Barratt Impulsiveness Scale -11 (BIS-11; Patton et al., 1995), which consists of 30 items that determine attentional, motor, and non-planning elements of impulsiveness. The instrument was internally consistent (α=.79).

Decision-Making was measured using General Decision-Making Style Questionnaire (GDMS; Scott and Bruce,2005),which has 20 items, and five different styles; logical, intuitive, reliant, avoidant, and spontaneous. The subscales were reported to have reliabilities of between α =.71 to.85.

Procedure

Primary data were obtained using the printed questionnaire which was given to students in different colleges and universities. The subjects were made aware of the objectives of the study, efforts that were made to guarantee confidentiality and that the study was voluntary; informed written consent was signed. The survey lasted about 20-25 minutes and involved demographic data and three standardized questionnaires mentioned above in each of the surveys. The form was then checked against completeness and coded up to be analysed accordingly.

Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data. Calculated descriptive statistics were determined to generalize the demographic features of the participants. Pearson correlations were used in testing the relationship between the variables and multiple regression studies performed to test the predictive role of parental overprotection on impulsivity and decision-making styles.

Ethical Considerations

The research was based on the best ethical principles. The participants were guaranteed of confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw freely and without the consequences. All the filled out questionnaires were put in a secure place and could only be accessed by the research team. All the procedures were conducted in accordance with the existing ethical principles of psychological research.

Results

Table 1: ***Descriptive Statistics of demographic Characteristics of Study Sample (N=105).***

Characteristics	***n***	**%**
Gender		
Men	26	24.8 %
Women	79	75.2%
Program		
Undergraduate	33	31.4%
BS	68	64.8%
MPhil	04	3.8%
Who do you live with		
Mother only	5	4.8%
Father only	1	1.0%
Both parents	94	89.5%
Guardian	5	4.8%
Socioeconomic Status		
Lower	3	2.9%
Middle	87	82.9%
Upper	15	14.3%

Note. *N* = 105. Participants age is between 18 to 25 years (*M* = 21.93, *SD* = 1.82).

Table 1 Shows most participants were women (75.2%) and men are 24.8% of the sample. The majority were BS students (64.8%), undergraduates are (31.4%) and MPhil students are (3.8%). Most participants lived with both parents (89.5%), were unmarried (89.5%), and belonged to the middle class families (82.9%).

Table 2: ***Psychometric Properties of Study Scales (N = 105)***

Scales	**M**	**SD**	**Range**	**Cronbach's α**
Parental Bonding Instrument (26 items)	32.35	8.31	0.85–1.88	.78
General Decision-Making Scale (20 items)	40.90	4.71	1.66–2.37	.68
Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11; 30 items)	70.47	8.76	1.99–2.81	.71

Note. p < .05. *M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.*

Table 2 displays the psychometric features of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), General Decision-Making Scale (GDMS), and Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11). These three scales showed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values from .68 to .78. In particular, the PBI had high level of reliability (α =.78), GDMS had sufficient internal consistency (α =.68), and BIS-11 had reasonable reliability (α =.71). These reliability values support the use of the scales for assessing parenting styles, decision-making tendencies, and impulsivity correspondingly within this population.

Table 3: ***Descriptive Statistics and Correlation of Parental Overprotection with Impulsivity and Decision-Making (N = 105)***

Variables	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Parental overprotection	35.10	8.38	–	.42**	–.31*
Impulsivity	72.81	10.89	–	–	–.27*
Decision Making	36.55	8.21	–	–	–

**p < .05, **p < .01*

The correlation between parental overprotection, impulsivity and decision-making is shown in table 3. The findings indicate that there is a good positive association between parental overprotection and impulsivity (r =.42, p <.01) which shows the more the parental overprotection is the more impulsive a person becomes. The negative correlation between parental overprotection and decision-making was also statistically significant (r = -.31, p, <0.05), which suggests that the more the parental overprotection, the higher the obstacles to good decisions. Further, decision-making was also negatively correlated with impulsivity (r = -.27, p <.05), which means that those who are highly impulsive show poor decision-making.

Table 4: ***Independent Sample t-test Showing Gender Differences in Parental Overprotection, Impulsivity, and Decision-Making (N = 105)***

Variables	**Men (n = 26)**		**Women (n = 79)**		**t (103)**	**p**	**Cohen's d**
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**			
Impulsivity	70.77	10.31	73.48	11.05	-1.10	.273	-0.25
Parental Overprotection	34.12	5.75	35.43	9.09	-0.69	.490	-0.16
Decision-Making	36.85	7.07	36.46	8.58	-0.21	.834	0.05

Note. *p < .05; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Cohen's d = Effect size*.

As Table 4 shows, there are no statistically significant gender difference in impulsivity, parental overprotection or decision-making.Though women obtained slightly higher in impulsivity and parental overprotection, and men slightly higher in decision making, none of the differences were statistically significant (p > .05). The effect sizes (Cohen d) were insignificant and they signified practically negligible differences between genders.

Table 5: ***Regression Coefficient of Parental Overprotection on Impulsivity (N = 105)***

Variables	**B**	**β**	**SE**
Constant	57.98***	—	4.37
Parental Overprotection	0.42**	.325	0.12

R^2 = .106

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05*

Note. N = 105; B = Unstandardized Coefficient; β = Standardized Beta; SE = Standard Error.

Table 5 shows that the overprotection of parents is a significant predictor of impulsivity. The simple linear regression analysis was performed. The R^2 value of .106 revealed that the predictor variable explained 10.6% of the variance in impulsivity with F(1, 103) = 12.17, p < .01. Parental overprotection positively predicted impulsivity (β = .325, p = .001). The results have indicated that increased parental overprotection is related to greater impulsiveness among young adults.

Table 6: ***Regression Coefficient of Parental Overprotection on Decision-Making (N = 105)***

Variables	**B**	**β**	**SE**
Constant	43.67***	—	3.41
Parental Overprotection	–0.20*	–.207	0.09

R^2 = .043

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05*

Note. *N=105,B=Unstandardized Coefficient, 8 = Standardized Beta and SE=Standard Error.*

The table 6 shows that parental overprotection was an important predictor of decision-making. The value of R^2 is 0.043 shows that the predictor contributes 4.3% of the variance in the decision-making, with $F(1, 103) = 4.61$, $p < 0.05$. Decision-making was determined to be negatively predicted by parental overprotection ($\beta = –.207$, $p = .034$). The implication of these findings is that increased parental overprotection is linked with low decision-making abilities in emerging adults.

Discussion

Parental Overprotection and Impulsivity

The hypothesis was confirmed empirically, the data showed that there exists a positive correlation between the measure of parental overprotection and the measures of impulsivity. Young adults who view their parents as being overprotective also show more impulsive behaviour which is consistent with previous studies that have found overprotective or imbalanced parenting to be a precursor of impulsivity and externalising behaviours.

Aggarwal et al. (2023) traced a close relationship between impulsivity and risk-taking where the latter is often explained by a lack of autonomy. According to Affrunti and Woodruff-Borden (2015), overprotective parenting may lead to a decrease in the competence of children and an increase in anxiety which subsequently develops impulsive behavior. Yu et al. (2024) also established that the anticipation of impulsivity and inattention in offspring is predicted by maternal overprotection.

Parental Overprotection and Decision-Making

The second hypothesis was that overprotecting parents hinders decision-making, and the findings supported this argument. The individuals with elevated levels of overprotection had low decision-making ability. This is consistent with the idea that the limitation of the autonomy limits personal reasoning and ability to solve problems. The study by Ju et al. (2020) has revealed that paternal overprotection was associated with risk-taking out of decreased coping efficacy. According to Otani et al. (2013), overprotection creates dependency and performance anxiety, which interfere with decision-making. Prinzie et al. (2009) found out that restrictive parenting only slows the development of autonomy, thus preventing cognitive flexibility. All these studies combined point to the notion that overprotective parenting prevents independent problem-solving and results in worse decisions by emerging adults.

Predictive Role of Parental Overprotection

Regression analysis affirmed the fact that parental overprotection is a strong predictor of impulsivity and decision making of young adults. This is in line with research works like De Roo et al. (2022), who noted that overprotection results in poor emotional control and problem-solving capacity. Similar results were obtained by Affrunti and Woodruff-Borden (2015) and Yu et al. (2024), who also determined that parental control was also a factor predictive of impulsive and maladaptive behaviours. According to Van Huijsduijnen (2022), students whose parents were overprotective exhibited higher levels of externalising behaviour and lower levels of decision outcome.

Gender Differences

The researchers found no big gender variations in impulsivity, decision-making or perceptions of parental overprotection. Although previous research (Cross et al., 2011; Duckworth and Seligman, 2006) findings have indicated greater impulsivity among males, the current evidence indicates that the influence of gender is not universalized across culture and situations. In line with Romer et al. (2009), the existing evidence indicated low levels of gender moderating impulsivity and decision-

making, which is the contributor to the understanding that gender norms and parental expectations in both gender have changed.

Implications

The implications of the findings are quite significant to the parents, educators, and mental-health practitioners. Despite the good intentions, parental overprotectiveness will have a negative impact on independence and emotional maturity. Parenting programmes that promote autonomy must lead the parents to a moderate position between protection and freedom. Training can be given by schools and counsellors to improve the decision-making and self-regulation of adolescents, which leads to adaptive coping and emotional stability, as well as responsible independence. On a bigger scale, both educational and family policies are supposed to support the parenting style that fosters autonomy and problem-solving skills to prepare the youth to become adults.

Limitations and Future Directions

Some of limitations of this study are that sample was mainly made up of college students which may not generalise to the rest of the population. Self-report measures can create the desirability bias or misinterpretation of items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, the cross-sectional design does not allow making causal inferences. The next research ought to utilize longitudinal and mixed-method designs in order to follow the path of development and clarify how overprotection, impulsivity, and decision-making are interconnected in various cultures and defined by different socioeconomic statuses.

Conclusion

In general, the current research explains how the parenting styles can help in shaping the behaviour and thoughts of young adults. The data confirm the hypothesis that parental overprotection is associated with increased impulsivity and poor decision-making because it is a predictive indicator of both of these factors regardless of the gender. Prolonged overprotection, which is supposed to be protective, can hinder the growth of a sense of self-control and independence in the adult life. Therefore, parents and guardians should foster balanced, autonomy-supportive parenting in order to empower the students to be in control of their emotions and make rational decisions to make them better equipped to face the challenges in life without any fear or being dependent.

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