



Overparenting: The current situation in Greece comparing to European and Worldwide context.

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ABSTRACT

Overparenting is a parental style that seems to be popular in all over the world. Specific parental characteristics and multi-cultural differences seemed to play an important role in this parental style to appear. Therefore, the purpose of this review is to identify the factors shaping overparenting and the impact in children, adolescents and young adults in Greece, comparing to European and Worldwide context. A literature review was conducted using online databases and words such as «overparenting», «helicopter parents», «intrusive parenting», «parental interference», and «parental control». Overparenting seems to be related to negative effects in children's psychosocial and mental health. It was associated with lack of autonomy, low levels of self-regulation and mastery, which affected social adjustment skills and higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, poor self-regulation and low levels of life satisfaction in children. In Greece, overparenting was related to poor school adjustment, obesity, internet addiction and post-traumatic stress from bullying. Overparenting is becoming more and more popular, so more research is becoming a necessity. It is important for every state to support and consult parents, from pregnancy to school, with specialized programs and teachers' training with the collaboration of social scientists. Further research of the phenomenon, in Greece and cross-culturally, is however needed.

Key Words: *overparenting, children, parental style*

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Introduction

In 1969, Dr Haim Ginnott, teacher, school psychologist and psychotherapist, described the term “helicopter parenting”, in his book “Between Parent and Teenager” (1). The term is referred to the parents who control their children’s life, by restricting their independence and undertaking all their responsibilities (1). Numerous studies have been conducted concerning this matter, including the parents’ characteristics, which affect the psychosocial development of their children (2) and the connection between overparenting and poor health conditions in adulthood (3). Furthermore, some of them included the teachers’ opinions in overparenting, since they are the first to encounter with this matter (4).

Parental Characteristics and multi-cultural differences

Overparenting has been linked in many cases with negative parental characteristics, such as guilt and anxiety (2, 5-7). Specifically, those parents who experienced anxiety during parenthood consider their children as more vulnerable, compared to other parents, leading to overparenting behavior (7). Furthermore, parents with an anxious/ambivalent bond, do not behave in a stable way to their children or in case of overparenting, they over-involve in their lives, limiting their independence (8, 9). Thus, overparenting parents seems to create a more anxious attachment style with their children (10). Some researchers suggest that overparenting parents criticize in a more extreme way than usual (11),

Overparenting is more common in parents with children with chronic diseases, such as type 1 diabetes, because controlling their children, helps them deal with their fear and anxiety, concerning their health (12, 13). Controlling is appeared to be stricter, introducing the use of a smartphone and enhancing the culture of safety-ism (14). More and more children and adolescents have smartphones, making in it easier for parents to know the exact location of their children anytime, through tracking apps (15).

It is interesting though, that overparenting is negatively associated to parents who had children with in vitro fertilization (IVF), due to high children acquisition awareness (16, 17).

On the other hand, multi-cultural differences are present in overparenting, for instance in eastern societies, such as the Chinese. Parenting style is based on collectivism and family dependence; while in western

societies the children’s independence is promoted (18). In fact, in China, overparenting characteristics were identified, as follows (19): close monitoring, intrusion and manipulation in children’s life, excessive importance in children’s performance, frequent comparing with other children’s accomplishments, enhanced daily program for children, solving problems for children, excessive emotional response and excessive care (19).

Another factor that affects overparenting is parent’s gender, within social context. In an Israeli study, mothers were more likely to follow an overparenting style, rather their male counterparts (10), while on the contrary, in an American study, there was no difference between the two genders (20), indicating that there are gender differences due to the social dimension of the genders.

Furthermore, an association between the generation that parents were raised, compared to their children’s, was noted, with baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1962), to be involved in their children’s lives more than past generations (21). Changes in born rates, technology, lifestyles, financial state and in development of new parental tactics played a significant role (22). The purpose of this review is to identify the factors shaping overparenting and the impact in children, adolescents and young adults in Greece, comparing to European and Worldwide context.

Materials and Methods

A research of published papers was conducted, using online databases (Pubmed, Scholar, Scopus). Key-words such as «overparenting», «helicopter parents», «intrusive parenting», «parental interference», and «parental control» were used. There were no geographical and cultural landmark restrictions. However, the assessment of this parenting style was difficult, due to different definition used by researchers. In some studies, there is no reference in overparenting, but parental control or parental interference is used instead (23) or different parental styles are being studied (20).

Results

Concerning the impact of overparenting in children, adolescents and young adults, Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) conducted a study with contradictory results (5). Overparenting was positively correlated with parental involvement and other positive aspects to parent-child relationship, while was negatively associated with the lack

of autonomy and school obligations, preventing children from developing important life skills, such as empathy and prosocial behavior (5). According to McGinley, children who experience overparenting had less positive outcomes in those skills (24).

Other highly important skills are social adjustment and self-regulation, where high levels of overparenting seemed to negatively affect self-regulation and mastery, while through those skills other social adjustment skills are affected, such as social convenience, pre-social behavior, depression, substance use, criminality etc. (25). It is important to notice that practices that parents apply to their children from an early age are related to the adjustment they will have as adolescents as well as the skills, such as self-regulation, that they will acquire (26). Consequently, low self-regulation leads to more psychological and school related problems, as stated by children and reduced social skills and school performance, as reported by teachers (27). Furthermore, overparenting delays the development of self-control and is associated with students' burn out, because of high parents' expectations (mostly father's) in school performance (27).

Similar findings presented by Hong and Cui (2019), where low levels of self-regulation act as a mediator between overparenting and maladjustment of adolescents (28). Respectively, children's place of residence seemed to affect the way children, adolescents and young adults, accept or not overparenting, with young college students, who live with their parents to present higher levels of adjustment comparing to those who live away from home (28).

Maladjustment and self-regulation, with lack of social skills could affect the psychological state of individuals. Many studies reported that overparenting was associated with higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, poor self-regulation and low levels of life satisfaction (29-34). In some cases, overparenting was linked to narcissistic characteristics in young adults (2, 35). In addition, individuals who experienced overparenting were more likely to use medication for anxiety disorders or depression, and more often recreational consumption of pain pills (29). Also, overparenting was associated with higher alcohol consumption in younger females, while alcohol consumption was combined with low levels of life satisfaction and self-regulation (32). On the contrary, a high functioning bond was associated with low desire for gaming, pornography, online shopping and gambling (36). Furthermore, according to Odenweller et al. (2014), millennials experiencing overparenting, tended to present

more neuroticism, interpersonal dependency, low coping efficacy (37).

The impact of overparenting does not only appear in social skills, as stated above, but also in well-being of individuals. (29-34). In fact, mother's overparenting was associated with obesity in children (38). In addition, in a study related to Greek, Dutch, Polish, Swiss adolescents' well-being, it was found that the autonomy provided by both mother and father was positively related to the well-being of adolescents (39).

Overparenting in Greece

Greece is no exception in the popularity of overparenting as a parenting style. Even though, overparenting as definition is not common in Greek language, overprotection of parents, especially mothers, seems to be a unique feature of Greek families (40). In Greek literature, some studies associate overparenting with poor school adjustment (41), obesity (42), internet addiction (36) and post-traumatic stress from bullying (43). However, those studies included small samples, so further research should be conducted, in order to draw secure conclusions.

According to Greek literature, the most popular parenting styles are: authoritative, permissive, authoritarian and democratic (44). Authoritative parents want to have constant control and do not support their children, while democratic parents provide safety and set boundaries to their children (45). On the contrary, permissive parents can support their children, but not set boundaries (45). Authoritarian parents are a mixed style incorporating authoritative and democratic, they use techniques of Authoritative parents (criticism, detention, bawling), without explaining to their children why they were punished and they are not trying to improve their behavior (44). Taking into consideration the overparenting style, some similarities with other parenting styles were identified. Overparenting parents limit their children, without punishing them as authoritative. They are trying to provide security, as democratic, but over-react. They over-involve in their children's affairs (e.g. in school matters) and they fail to set boundaries. They could be identified as Authoritarians, because they criticize. Overall, overparenting is the parenting style of contradictions: the intentions of the parents are good, but the result (as well as the parental bond that is created) is ambivalent.

Discussion

Parental style can affect children, who face pressure and restriction, especially if parents' actions are exaggerated and over-emphasized. On the other hand, children who experience overparenting present lower social skills, maladjustment and psychological and school related problems. Winnicott in his book "The Game and the Reality" was referred to the "good enough mother" (46). A good enough mother (not necessarily biological mother, but also carer) is the one adopting to her baby's needs and helping them to be independent. However, in overparenting, the parent cannot let the child take responsibilities; thus, creating a dependent adult. In that case, negative results affect not only children but also their parents. For instance, not only children's psychological state and adjustment is affected, but also their close environment. In that way, school related problems appear regarding teachers and staff, and later in life work-related problems, making difficult the relationship between employers and other colleagues. It is obvious that this phenomenon is of high importance and more research is needed.

Some questions were aroused during the research concerning overparenting, including: "In which parental style, children who experienced overparenting, will be evolved, if they decide to have children?" "As millennials, children who experienced overparenting, started to create a family, which parental style they adopt?" and "How the surrounding of the child, especially teachers should manage overparenting?" Furthermore, it would be interested to clarify the impact of overparenting in those parents who practice it, not only the impact in their children.

Conclusions

Overparenting is a parental style that is gaining ground in everyday life. Thus, more research is considered necessary. It is important for every state to support and consult parents, from pregnancy to school, with specialized programs and teachers training with the collaboration of social scientists. Therefore, due to the multifaceted nature of the issue, overparenting is a phenomenon that should be investigated holistically: psychologically, socially, educationally, and even psychoanalytically.

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