

Helicopter Parenting: Effects on Medical Students' Adaptation and Academic Achievement

Chaina Hanum^{1*}, Atien Nur Chamidah², Rita Mustika³

¹Medical Education Unit, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³Department of Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: chainahanum@uny.ac.id Mobile number: +6281327246222

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Helicopter parenting has many negative impacts on higher education, including how it affects students' college adjustment and academic achievement. Although a wide range of articles explore helicopter parenting and its influence on higher education, the research on medical education still scarce.

Methods: The aims of this study provide a brief explanation of helicopter parenting and its impact on medical education. Articles were collected by assessing SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar databases.

Result: Overcontrol and overprotective manners from helicopter parents may reduce children's sense of autonomy and competence. Hence, it significantly reduces students' self-efficacy, self-directed learning, and has low intrinsic motivation in learning. The children of helicopter parents are vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and depression, and tend to have difficulties adjusting to college life.

Conclusion: Considering the negative impacts of helicopter parenting, faculty and medical teachers need to develop strategies to address the issue and prevent further impacts.

Keywords: Helicopter parenting; medical; education



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Introduction

The role of parents in higher education is much needed, not only in providing financial support for their children.¹ Parents also have a significant impact on students' college adjustment and academic achievement.²⁻⁴ Parenting style is a key factor in the development of children's cognitive, social, and emotional abilities, which influences the development of autonomy and independence during the transitional phase.⁴ Students in higher education are generally in this transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood, also known as emerging adulthood, typically spanning the age range of 18 to 25 years.⁵ Although children's autonomy and independence have increasingly developed during this transitional phase, parents still have an important role in the development process and in maintaining children's well-being.⁴

Parenting style with excessive parental involvement and control is often referred to as helicopter parenting.^{4,6} Helicopter parents tend to overprotect their children, have high expectations of their children's education, but treat them as if they are incapable of solving their problems.^{7,8} Children raised with helicopter parenting are usually lacking in independence and confidence in their abilities. They also tend to have difficulties in self-regulation, controlling their emotions, decision-making, and determining life goals.^{4,9} Helicopter parenting significantly increases children's vulnerability to stressors, anxiety, and depression, thereby increasing alcohol and drug use.¹⁰ Furthermore, the children may have an increased risk of school burnout, college maladaptation, and failing in academic achievement.^{8,9,11,12}

Despite extensive research on helicopter parenting and its psychological and academic consequences, there remains a significant gap in understanding its specific impact within the context of medical education. Medical students face unique academic pressures, emotional demands, and professional expectations that distinguish them from students in other disciplines. The rigorous and high-stakes nature of medical training requires not only cognitive competence but also emotional resilience, autonomy, and self-regulation—traits that are often undermined by helicopter parenting.¹³

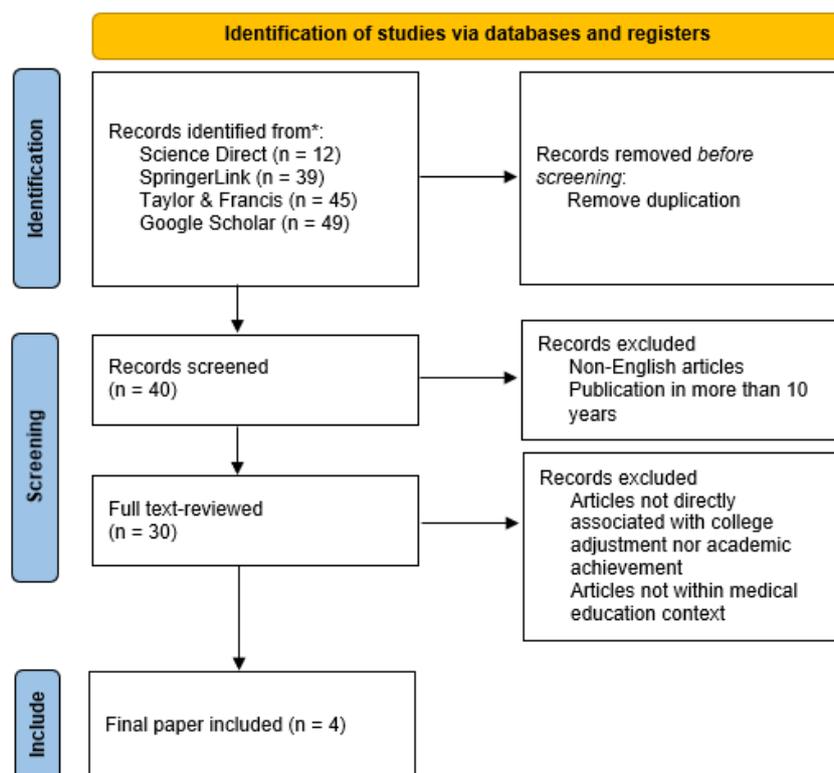
Medical education emphasizes the development of clinical judgment, ethical decision-making, and independent problem-solving, all of which are foundational to professional competence. However, students raised with excessive parental control may struggle with these competencies due to limited exposure to autonomous decision-making and self-directed learning.² This can result in poor adaptation to the demands of medical school, increased psychological distress, and reduced academic performance. Moreover, the culture of excellence and competitiveness in medical education can exacerbate the vulnerabilities associated with helicopter parenting, such as perfectionism, fear of failure, and dependence on external validation.¹⁴ These factors may contribute to higher rates of burnout, anxiety, and academic disengagement among medical students, ultimately affecting their professional development and patient

care outcomes.^{9,15}

Given the critical importance of fostering independence and emotional maturity in future healthcare professionals, it is essential to explore how helicopter parenting influences college adjustment and academic achievement specifically in medical education. Understanding this dynamic can inform targeted interventions, student support strategies, and parental guidance frameworks that promote healthier developmental trajectories for medical students.

Methods

This is a literature study on helicopter parenting in medical education and how it impacts students' college adjustment and academic achievement. Literature exploration is done by accessing the SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar databases. Literature search was conducted from January 5 to March 20, 2025, using the keywords of “helicopter parenting”, “parenting style”, “college adjustment”, “academic achievement”, as well as the combination of these four keywords with “higher education”, “medical education” and “medical students”. Based on the literature search, 27 articles related to helicopter parenting and parenting style in the context of medical education and their correlation to college adjustment and academic achievement were obtained. The systematic step in identifying relevant articles is described in Figure 1 (PRISMA flow diagram).¹⁶



Result

A total of 4 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in this review (Table 1).^{2,17-19} The studies were selected based on their focus on helicopter parenting and its impact on college adjustments and academic achievement in medical students. After screening duplicates, title and abstract reviews and full-text evaluations, 4 articles were included in the final synthesis.

Table 1. Included studies

No	Author (year)	Title	Key findings
1.	Lee JY, Park IB, Yune SJ, Park KH. (2024)	Structural relationships between psychological factors and college adjustment among medical students in South Korea: focusing on helicopter parenting and respectful parenting.	Helicopter parenting plays as a mediator in affecting mindset, grit, and self-directedness, which negatively impact college adjustment
2.	Qamar T, Majeed S. (2020)	Parenting Styles, Self-efficacy, Emotional Intelligence, and Academic Achievement in Medical Students	Positive parenting styles foster emotional stability and confidence, which are crucial for success in demanding academic environments
3.	Huang L, Wang Z, Yao Y, Shan C, Wang H, Zhu M, et al. (2015)	Exploring the association between parental rearing styles and medical students' critical thinking disposition in China	Positive rearing styles, especially those high in emotional support and autonomy encouragement, significantly influence critical thinking
4.	Suliman S, Allen M, Chivese T, de Rijk AE, Koopmans R, Könings KD. (2024)	Is medical training solely to blame? Generational influences on the mental health of our medical trainees	No significant relationship between parenting style and mental health outcomes among medical trainees

Discussion

Helicopter Parenting and Its Impact on Education

Helicopter parenting is a term to describe a parenting style characterized by overprotection and control.¹⁰ Helicopter parents may hover over their children, ready to rescue their children from disappointment and painful experiences. By doing so, they are sending a message to their children that they are incapable of doing their chores, overcoming their problems, and require constant protection from

their parents.⁷ Helicopter parents are usually high in warmth and support, but also high in control and low on granting autonomy to the child. Hence, they can reduce their children's sense of autonomy and competence.²⁰ The self-determination theory posits that an individual must fulfill three basic needs to promote health and well-being: (1) the need for autonomy, which involves feeling free to make one's own choices, (2) the need for competence, or a feeling of confidence in one's own abilities, and (3) the need for relatedness, which involves feeling that one is part of a genuinely caring relationship.²¹

Many studies indicate that overparenting reduces children's self-efficacy, a measure of children's sense of competence, which supports self-determination theory.^{4,22,23} Self-efficacy is needed for the self-regulated learning perspective, which addresses the belief one has in one's ability to regulate academic achievement through thoughts, motivation, affect, and actions. Children with low levels of self-efficacy might struggle with social and academic adjustment to college and have lower GPAs.^{4,23}

In education, helicopter parenting may reduce children's intrinsic motivation to learn. Children growth by helicopter parenting often prioritize extrinsic motivators, such as gaining parental approval or achieving high grades. Children must have good grades and be academically successful to be loved and accepted.²⁴ They sometimes develop maladaptive perfectionism, which they feel as though they are unable to achieve the standards that have been set for them.^(11,12,24) Helicopter parents have been associated with an increased sense of entitlement, which might reduce academic performance by reducing children's intrinsic motivation to learn.²⁴

Children who receive constant protection and help from helicopter parents may feel less competent and more vulnerable to stressors. They have difficulties in the development of coping mechanisms, leading children to feel that they lack control over their lives, which results in a lack of volition.^{4,25} The inability to meet the daily demands of higher education might result in children's school burnout.⁹

Many studies addressing helicopter parenting in Indonesia showed that in higher education, helicopter parenting reduces students' self-confidence and increases vulnerability to stressors and anxiety.^{26,27} Children of helicopter parents often have difficulty determining their own career goals and personal interest.²⁸ Helicopter parenting significantly increases the possibility of the child having neuroticism traits, which makes children susceptible to stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions.²⁹

Helicopter Parenting in Medical Education

Medical students experience unique stressors during their education journey, and the role of parenting has been examined specifically in this context. However, there are limited studies addressing helicopter parenting in the context of medical education. Parenting styles have a positive association with self-efficacy and emotional intelligence, which were significant predictors of medical students' academic

achievement.¹⁷ Children with high-control parents usually show low self-confidence and have difficulties in solving their problems due to their dependency on their parents.^{2,18} High-control parents negatively impact medical students' critical thinking disposition, educational success, and career paths.^{18,30}

A study in South Korea showed that helicopter parenting hinders medical students' autonomy and independence and negatively impacts their mindset and college adjustment.² Mindset is a term to describe one's beliefs about their intellectual abilities in a given situation. Learners with a growth mindset are more adaptive in their goal standards and orientation, learning strategies, task difficulty preferences, and responses to criticism. They believe their abilities can be improved, fostering grit and maintaining passion and perseverance in pursuing long-term goals.^{2,31,32} Furthermore, the growth mindset and grit will reinforce self-directed learning attitudes, which can be a key factor in a medical student's college adjustment. Learners with high self-directed learning show better academic performance and may lead a successful college life.²

Contrary to the other studies, a study in Qatar showed that parenting styles do not affect the mental health of medical students. This might be associated with the collectivist cultures, in which parents are regarded as authorities in the family and are responsible for their children's success, even in adulthood.¹⁹

Considering the impacts of helicopter parenting on students' college adjustment and academic achievement, it's important to overcome the problems and prevent further negative impacts. However, the studies exploring student support related to helicopter parenting are still limited. Currently, student support focuses more on the effort to provide a smooth student transition and adaptation to college life.^{33,34} Involving parents in the student support program has positive impacts on academic achievement.³⁵ Parental involvement in higher education has three dimensions, which are parental support giving, parent-student contact and communication, and parental academic engagement.³⁶ To optimize parental engagement for academic success, academic socialization plays a key role in developing the kind of student support.³⁵ Within the medical education context, faculty are expected to be able to recognize student needs, both in fulfilling academic and clinical competencies, as well as developing individual students through optimizing the role of teaching staff, educational institution systems and management, and peers.^{37,38}

Conclusion

Helicopter parenting, characterized by high control and low autonomy-granting, can significantly hinder a child's educational development, particularly in higher education settings. While these parents often intend to provide support and protection, their overinvolvement tends to undermine a child's autonomy, competence, and self-efficacy—core components of self-determination theory. This parenting style has been linked to reduced intrinsic motivation, increased anxiety, maladaptive perfectionism, and

academic burnout, especially during the transition to college life.

In medical education, where students face high academic and emotional demands, helicopter parenting further impairs the development of independence, critical thinking, and self-directed learning, skills essential for long-term success. Although cultural differences may moderate these effects, the overall evidence suggests that excessive parental control compromises students' ability to cope, adapt, and thrive in challenging academic environments.

Minimizing the negative effects, it is crucial to enhance student support systems by incorporating suitable parental involvement and promoting healthier parenting styles that balance support with autonomy. Empowering faculty to address students' individual needs and promoting academic socialization can also help medical students develop resilience, self-efficacy, and a growth mindset essential for success in both education and future professional life.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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