

# Helicopter Parenting and Related Issues: Psychological Well Being, Basic Psychological Needs and Depression on University Students\*

Zihniye OKRAY\*\*

European University of Lefke, North Cyprus

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## Abstract

Helicopter parenting is not a new dimension of parenting but it is a parenting that involves hovering parents who are potentially over-involved in the lives of their child (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, 2012). Helicopter parenting is a unique phenomenon (Odenweller et al, 2014) and unique form of parental control (Willoughby et al., 2013) which can be described as highly involved, intensive, a hands-on method. (Schiffirin et al, 2014) In this study, university students examined about their parental attitudes and a number of well-being and mental health related issues. Helicopter Parenting Scale's psychometric properties examined with factor analysis. After this step basic psychological needs, psychological well-being, students' depression levels and also their parenting styles were assessed with the relationship of helicopter parenting. As a result this study is the first which examines the effects of helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood period in Turkish culture. As seen from the results helicopter parenting style make children more prone to the depression in their emerging adulthood period. Also helicopter parenting live scares on their self-esteem makes them more dependent on their families.

**Keywords:** Helicopter Parenting, University, Cyprus, Scale.

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## \*\*Sorumlu Yazar /

Corresponding Author:  
European University of  
Lefke, North Cyprus  
[zokray@eul.edu.tr](mailto:zokray@eul.edu.tr)

## 1. Introduction

Helicopter parenting is not a new dimension of parenting but it is a parenting that involves hovering parents who are potentially over-involved in the lives of their child (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, 2012). Helicopter parenting is a unique phenomenon (Odenweller et al, 2014) and unique form of parental control (Willoughby et al., 2013) which can be described as highly involved, intensive, a hands-on method. (Schiffirin et al, 2014) In the year of 2012 Padilla-Walker and Nelson described helicopter parenting as 'parents who are highly invested, extremely concerned for the well-being of their children and well intentioned albeit misdirected' (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, 2012). Helicopter parenting captures parents who are very much involved in their children's lives, they can be even intrusive, but they always have concerns about their children's well-being

(Willoughby et al., 2013). Helicopter parents usually hover over their children to shelter them from stress, resolve their problems and offer constant support and affirmation (Hirsch, Goldberger, 2010). Helicopter parenting seems like authoritative in too many areas in the relationship with their children but instead of nurturing the ability to handle tasks they stunt independence by performing transactions for their children (LeMoyne, Buchanan, 2011). This kind of parenting does not allow children to develop independence or become fully-functioning, community-minded adults (Locke, Campbell, Kavanagh, 2012).

Helicopter parenting can be exists in all races, ages, regions but some experts argue that it depends on class, race, ethnicity, culture and finance (Vinson, 2013). Mass communication abilities earned by television and computers and also with internet they bring the consumers a kind of education about world conditions, changing family trends and changing world (Wesner, Tammy, 2008).

In literature; helicopter parenting has been associated with a decreased sense of school engagement (Padilla-Walker and Nelson 2012) and lower academic achievement (Kim et al. 2013; Shoup et al. 2009). These students also experience decreased well-being (LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011; Schiffrin et al. 2014) including higher rates of medication for anxiety and depression (LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011; Kim et al. 2013) as well as decreased coping skills and increased anxiety (Segrin et al. 2013). Although parents believe that parental over involvement into the childrens activities and planning every minute for them affects positively the children's happiness, health and success but in contrast intensive parenting an engagement in structured activities have few beneficial effects on child outcomes (Schiffrin, Godfrey, Liss, Erchull, 2014). In young children overparenting is related with anxious, withdrawn, depressive and insecure tendencies (Bayer, Sanson, Hemphill, 2006) and young adults helicopter parenting is associated with reported relationship problems, this type of parenting does not promote positive interpersonal relationships and social problem solving in emerging adults. Also helicopter parenting is related with criticism and less positive attitudes between parent and children (Segrin, Givetz, Swaitowski, Montgomery, 2015). Janssen also reported that parental over involvement is also associated with lower physical activity (Janssen, 2015). Retrospective parenting styles studies also showed that recollections of specially maternal overprotection predicted an increase in social anxiety (Spokas, Heimberg, 2009).

Helicopter parenting affects children at all ages in their life span development. As seen above over involved parenting styles have some negative outcomes not only on the psychological well-being as depression of child, adolescence and young adults but also in their perception of psychological well-being of themselves. Well-being traditionally associated with happiness, quality of life and life satisfaction (LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011). Well-being related with the need of self-acceptance, autonomy and positive relations. Psychological well-being can be described as the theory which investigate individual characteristics who are functioning positively and efficiently ( Özen, 2010).

Basic psychological needs described by Deci and Ryan are the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness and they must be always satisfied for people to develop and function in healthy or optimal ways. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

In this study, university students examined about their parental attitudes and a number of well-being and mental health related issues. Helicopter Parenting Scale's psychometric properties examined with factor analysis. After this step basic psychological needs, psychological well-being, students' depression levels and also their parenting styles were assessed with the relationship of helicopter parenting.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

The data was collected in European University of Lefke students' who were in their first and second years of their university education. Psychology department and Guidance and Psychological Counselling

departments undergraduate students was selected because these two majors' educational language is in Turkish. The sampling frame is composed of the total enrollment for the targeted classes (N= 430). From this frame questionnaires distributed and collected to this targeted classes. After the elimination of incomplete surveys the final sample consists of 399 students, resulting in a response rate of 92,8%. The distributions of socio-demographical variables of the sample were shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distribution of Sociodemographic Variables (N= 399)*

Variable	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	200	50,1
Male	199	49,9
<b>Family Income</b>		
Low	16	4
Average	355	89
High	28	7
<b>Class Standing</b>		
Freshmen	174	43,6
Sophomore	225	56,4
<b>Residency</b>		
Dormitory	57	14,3
Private Dormitory	105	26,3
House close to Campus	162	40,6
House distant from Campus	58	14,5
With Family	17	4,3

## 2.2. Translation Study

In order to assess the content validity of the scale, the scale was translated from English into Turkish, and backward translation was performed by two English Language and Literature lecturer after taking an expert opinion. No meaning loss or conflicted items were found during forward and backward translations. As the intelligibility and cultural appropriateness of the scale was shown by these evaluations, the content validity of the scale was demonstrated as well.

## 2.3. Data Collection Tools

**Socio-Demographic Information Form:** Demographic information form was used by researchers in order to get information about the age, gender, parental conditions, communication incidences with parents and such variables of the participants.

**Helicopter Parenting Scale (HPS):** HPS was developed by LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011). The respondents were asked their level of agreement with statements relating to their experience with their parents while growing up. The items attempt to capture a global assessment of their experience leading up to their college years. It is hypothesized that helicopter parenting represents a collection of tendencies that constitute appropriate parenting characteristics taken to an inappropriate degree. This inappropriateness manifests itself in the parents' inability or unwillingness to (as perceived by the respondent) allow their children to experience life's challenges independently. Higher scores represent higher levels of helicopter parenting perceived by respondents. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for reliability was calculated as 0.71 (LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011).

**Psychological Well-Being (PWB):** PWB was developed by Diener et al in 2009. PWB consists of eight items describing important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships, to feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life. Each item is answered on a 1–7 scale. All items are phrased in a positive direction. Scores can range from 8 to 56. High scores signify that respondents view themselves in very positive terms in diverse areas of functioning (Diener et al., 2009). Turkish form's psychometric properties were examined by Telef. For criterion validity, psychological well-being scales and a need satisfaction scale were used. The Pearson product moment correlation between psychological well-being scales and a need satisfaction scale was calculated as .56 and .73 ( $p < .01$ ). The reliability study indicated that the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .80. According to the test retest results, there was a high level of a positive and meaningful relation between the first and second applications of the scale ( $r = 0.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (Telef, 2013).

**Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS):** BPNS was developed by Deci and Ryan (Deci, Ryan, 2000). The scale consists of 21 items. It is a five point likert type scale. In this scale the individuals are asked to decide in what frequency they want to have the given needs. The scale have 3 sub-scales. Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness. Turkish reliability and validity study of the scale was done by Kesici, Üre, Bozgeyikli and Sünbül. The reliability study indicated that the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.76 (Kesici, Üre, Bozgeyikli and Sünbül, 2003).

**The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D):** CES-D was developed by The American National Mental Health Institute, it is a short self-report scale which is developed for screening purpose and used in scientific studies for the assessment of depressive symptoms in general population. Turkish version of the scale was done by Tatar and Saltukoğlu and internal consistency coefficient was between 0.75 and 0.90, the Gutmann split half coefficient was 0.89, the test-retest reliability for two weeks was 0.69 (Tatar, Saltukoğlu, 2010).

**The Parenting Styles Scale (PSS):** The scale was developed by Lamborn et al. (1991). In PSS acceptance-involvement, strictness-supervision and psychological autonomy was measured. Cronbach alpha coefficients for three subscales was 0.72, 0.76 and 0.82 respectively. Turkish version of the scale was done by Yılmaz (2000). The cronbach alpha coefficients for three subscales for university students was found as 0.79 for acceptance-involvement, 0.85 for strictness- supervision and 0,65 for psychological autonomy (2000).

## **2.4. Statistical Analysis**

Statistical analysis was performed by SPSS 20.0 in order to evaluate the obtained data. The validity of the HPS was assessed by Principal Component Analysis. The internal consistency of the HPS was calculated with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and test-retest reliability was performed. In order to investigate the impact of helicopter parenting on well-being, depression and psychological needs scale measures regression analysis were performed. Independent sample T-test and One-Way ANOVA was done in order to see the group differences between the scale measures of Helicopter parenting. In order to estimate the relationship between helicopter parenting and parental attitudes the Pearson correlation coefficients was calculated.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Psychometric Properties of the HPS**

In order to evaluate the internal consistency of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.74. In the original study the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.71 by LeMoyne and Buchanan (LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011).

In order to evaluate test re-test reliability of HPS, the same group of participants was retested after two weeks. As a result of the performed analyses, the statistical analysis the correlation coefficients between two applications was found as  $r = 0.805$  ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Validity of the HPS was examined by explanatory factor analysis. Principle Component Analysis was applied on the correlation matrix obtained from HPS items and factors which have Eigenvalue over 1 are determined. Two factor structures were obtained for HPS as a result of continuing the analysis with the Varimax rotation as one of the orthogonal rotation methods. Two factors with an Eigenvalue over 1 are determined related to the HPS. These two factors explain the 55% of the variance. In the original scale, all of the items are extracted in one factor. In this study, item 3 (My parents let me figure things out independently) and 5 (My parents were not afraid to let me stumble in life) were to be in the second factor. These two items was reverse coded items and again both of them courage independence. The factor loadings of the scale can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. HPS Factor Loadings

Scale Item	Factor1	Factor 2
<b>Item 7.</b> Büyüme; bazen anne-babamın projesi olduğumu hissedirdim.	0.687	
<b>Item 2.</b> Bazen anne-babamın kendi kararlarımı veremeyeceğimi hissettiklerini hissedirdim.	0.670	
<b>Item 6.</b> Anne-babam benim hayat sorunlarımı çözmek için müdahale ederlerdi.	0.659	
<b>Item 1.</b> Anne- babam büyürken tüm hareketlerimi denetlerdi.	0.585	
<b>Item 4.</b> Anne-babam için hayatta asla başarısız olmamam çok önemliydi.	0.566	
<b>Item 5.</b> Anne-babam hayatta tökezlememe izin vermekten korkmazlardı.		0.769
<b>Item 3.</b> Anne-babam olayları bağımsız bir şekilde çözmeme olanak tanırdı.		0.735

### 3.1.2. Other Findings

According to gender variable the descriptive statistics for female participants is 10,  $29 \pm 3$ , 44 ( $n = 200$ ) and 11,  $14 \pm 3$ , 15 ( $n = 199$ ) for male participants on HPS.

In order to investigate the impact of helicopter parenting on well-being, depression and psychological needs scale measures regression analysis were performed. Each model consisted of regressing the respective well-being, depression and psychological needs measures on helicopter parenting while controlling for sex, family income, residency and class standing. A correlation matrix for all measures used in the multivariate analyses is displayed in Table 3. The helicopter parenting measure is not highly correlated with any of the measures in the models. The correlations found between Helicopter Parenting Scale measures and BPNS-Autonomy ( $r = -0,229$ ,  $p = 0,000$ ,  $p < 0, 01$ ), CES-D ( $r = 0,102$ ,  $p = 0,021$ ,  $p < 0, 05$ ), sex variables ( $r = 0,128$ ,  $p = 0,005$ ,  $p < 0, 05$ ). Other variables such as residency, family income, class standing did not give any significant results so these variables were not included in our models.

Table 3. *Intercorrelations for all Variables used in Multivariate Analyses (N= 399)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>1. Helicopter parenting</b>	1,000									
<b>2. PWB</b>	-,003	1,000								
<b>3.BPNS-Autonomy</b>	-,229**	,292**	1,000							
<b>4. BPNS-Competence</b>	,008	,310**	,480**	1,000						
<b>5. BPSN-Relatedness</b>	-,028	,397**	,482**	,478**	1,000					
<b>6. CES-D</b>	,102*	-,238**	-,397**	-,316**	-,346**	1,000				
<b>7. Sex</b>	,128*	,022	,065	,039	-,086	,005	1,000			
<b>8. Family Income</b>	-,060	,040	,048	,036	,068	-,029	,008	1,000		
<b>9. Class Standing</b>	,028	-,027	,039	,066	,025	,057	-,033	,039	1,000	
<b>10. Residency</b>	,060	,077	,056	,029	,088	-,117*	,138**	,070	,198**	1,000
<b>M</b>	10,72	42,07	15,55	14,11	19,95	23,65	1,49	2,03	1,56	2,68
<b>SD</b>	3,32	8,88	3,65	3,19	4,15	11,96	0,50	0,34	0,50	1,04
<b><math>\alpha</math></b>	0,741	0,758	0,733	0,708	0,754	0,743				

\*p<0, 05 ; \*\*p<0, 01

Independent sample T-test and One-Way ANOVA was done in order to see the group differences between the scale measures of Helicopter parenting and variables such as sex, residency, family income and class standing. Only sex variable of the participants make differences on the helicopter parenting scale measure. Male participants' perceptions of their parents as helicopter parents are more than female participants. (t=0,238, p=0,010, p<0, 05)

The results of ordinary least squares regression for total BPNS-Autonomy are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. *Ordinary Least Squares Regression of BPNS-Autonomy on Helicopter Parenting, CES-D and Sex (N=399)*

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Helicopter Parenting	-0,223	0,050	-0,203**
CES-D	-0,115	0,014	-0,377**
Sex	0,676	0,331	0,093
R <sup>2</sup>		0,202	
Adj R <sup>2</sup>		0,196	
F		33,335**	

\*\*p<0, 01

Helicopter parenting and depression are negatively related to autonomy and they are statistically significant. In this sample as the participants perceive their parents more as helicopter parents they feel more depressed and also their autonomy declines. The strongest contribution to the model was perceived as depression. The model explained 20% of the variation in Autonomy ( $R^2 = 0,202$ ).

In order to estimate the relationship between helicopter parenting and parental attitudes the Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. According to the scores on The Parenting Styles Scale the acceptance-involvement subscale scores are correlated with Helicopter Parenting Scale scores ( $r = 0,255$ ,  $p = 0,000$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ). Psychological autonomy ( $r = -0,052$ ,  $p = 0,303$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ), and strictness-supervision ( $r = -0,046$ ,  $p = 0,399$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ), scales are not correlated with helicopter parenting.

#### 4. Discussion

The reliability of the scale has been examined by calculating the coefficients of test-retest stability and internal consistency. Test-retest reliability is obtained by applying the same group twice at regular intervals. The alignment between the correlation coefficients among the obtained results indicates the stability of the scale in time (Büyüköztürk, 2007). The correlational coefficient between test and re-test of HPS scale was found as  $r = 0.805$  ( $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which is determined to show stability of the scale over time. In addition to this, Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient values were calculated. It has been shown that the scale is reliable as the reliability coefficient calculated for a psychological test is over 0.70 (Büyüköztürk, 2007). Internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.74. In the original study the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.71 by LeMoyne and Buchanan (LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011).

The factor analysis regarding the structural validity of HPS and the findings from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and reliability studies demonstrate that the scale is reliable. In the original scale, all of the items are extracted in one factor (LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011). In this study, item 3 (My parents let me figure things out independently) and 5 (My parents were not afraid to let me stumble in life) were to be in the second factor. These two items were reverse coded items and again both of them courage independence. While the control behaviors of the parents form a part of overprotective parenthood pattern in the western culture, they appear as a part of parental behavior pattern in the Turkish culture (Kaşçı, Küçükler, 2006). In Turkish culture no matter how old the child becomes they still the little boy or girl to their parents. The above-mentioned questions, encourages independency and also they are about to give child freedom to choose and decide their actions and also to face and accept the results of their behaviors. This can be evaluated as the original finding of the study.

Another finding of the study was female participants' perceived helicopter parenting less when compared with male participants. This finding is an expected one because in most of the Turkish cultures the male children seem to be the future of the family that is going to take care of the parents and also who will continue the generation (Diykanbayeva, 2011).

When the children perceived their parents more as helicopter parents their depression levels are also increased. This finding is also stressed in the literature. Lemoyne and Buchanan (2011) mentioned that as the helicopter parenting perception increases taken of depression and anxiety medications increase also. In this study as the helicopter Parenting Scale scores increase the depression scores increase also shows a positive correlation. A related result with this finding is also shown by the correlation between Autonomy scale scores. As their depression levels and perception about helicopter parenting increase the participants' autonomy levels decrease. Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) find a similar finding as while helicopter parenting increases the autonomy of children decreases.

Overall, this study is the first which examines the effects of helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood period in Turkish culture. As seen from the results helicopter parenting style makes children more prone to

the depression in their emerging adulthood period. Also helicopter parenting live scares on their self-esteem makes them more dependent on their families.

## **5. Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was twofold. First, the researcher intended to evaluate the psychometric properties of Helicopter Parenting Scale in Turkish language and estimate the reliability and validity coefficients of the scale. The researcher's second purpose was to estimate the relationships between helicopter parenting and student's basic psychological needs, psychological well-being, depression levels and also their parenting styles. As seen from the results helicopter parenting style make children more prone to the depression in their emerging adulthood period. Helicopter parenting disables children and emerging adults from developing their self-esteem makes them more dependent on their families. Male university students evaluate their parents more as helicopter parents. This finding regarded as a cultural factor in traditional Turkish family that they saw their male child as a guarantee for their old ages.

Further studies must be done in order to find other relationships between helicopter parenting and university students' academic achievement.

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