

# FROM OVERPROTECTION TO INDEPENDENCE: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HELICOPTER PARENTING, PEER ATTACHMENT, AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## Abstract

**Background and Aim:** In recent years, the phenomenon of helicopter parenting characterized by overinvolvement and excessive control in children's lives has raised concerns about its impact on young adults' social and emotional development. The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between helicopter parenting, peer attachment and emotional maturity in university students.

**Methodology:** A correlation research design and non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect data (N=300) consisted 144 females with 48% and 156 males with 52% recruited from Government and Private Universities of Lahore by using self-report measures. The sample was consisted of both male and female with age range 18-25 years. The results of the study were analysed through SPSS-21.

**Results:** Results revealed that helicopter parenting was positively correlated with autonomy support, while peer attachment especially trust and communication was positively linked to emotional maturity. Peer alienation showed negative associations. Stepwise regression indicated that peer trust and alienation significantly predicted emotional maturity. Notably, autonomy support had a negative predictive value. Additionally, male students reported higher emotional maturity than females.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that peer relationships, particularly trust and reduced alienation, play a critical role in fostering emotional maturity among university students, while the impact of helicopter parenting and autonomy support is more complex and culturally influenced.

**Keywords:** helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity

## Introduction

Parenting styles refer to the psychological constructs representing standard strategies that parents use in raising their children (Mahmood et al., 2023; Sana et al., 2021). Diana Baumrind's typology is among the most widely accepted, identifying four primary styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Authoritative parents are both responsive and demanding, fostering independence while maintaining clear boundaries. This style is often linked with positive outcomes such as high self-esteem, academic success, and social competence in children (Baumrind, 1991). In contrast, authoritarian parents are highly demanding but less responsive, emphasizing obedience and discipline over warmth, which can lead to anxiety and lower self-worth in children (Elshanum, 2024).

Permissive parenting, characterized by high responsiveness and low demands, often results in children with poor self-discipline and increased behavioural issues due to a lack of boundaries (Tu et al., 2018). Meanwhile, uninvolved or neglectful parenting, which features low responsiveness and low demands, is associated with the most detrimental outcomes, including emotional withdrawal and poor academic performance (Yanxue & Bhaumik, 2024). Cultural

factors and socioeconomic conditions can also influence how these parenting styles manifest and impact children's development (September et al., 2016).

Parenting practices play a central role in shaping children's emotional, social, and cognitive development (Sanders & Turner, 2018). Among the various parenting styles, helicopter parenting—a form of overinvolved and overprotective parenting—has garnered increasing attention in recent years for its potential impact on the autonomy and emotional development of adolescents and young adults (Segrin et al., 2012). Helicopter parenting is characterized by excessive involvement in a child's life, particularly in situations where independent problem-solving and decision-making are expected (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). While such behavior often stems from concern for the child's well-being, it may hinder the development of essential life skills, including emotional maturity and the ability to form and sustain peer attachments.

University students, who are at a critical juncture between adolescence and adulthood, are especially vulnerable to the consequences of overprotective parenting (Khizer et al., 2024; Tariq et al., 2024). As they transition into more autonomous roles, students must navigate a range of social and emotional challenges (Umar et al., 2024; Naz et al., 2021). Emotional maturity, defined as the capacity to manage emotions, take responsibility for actions, and respond to interpersonal demands appropriately, is crucial for successful adjustment during this period (Singh & Bhargava, 2010). Emotional maturity is closely linked to emotional regulation, as it reflects an individual's ability to manage and respond to emotions in a balanced and constructive manner. Emotionally mature individuals typically demonstrate strong emotional regulation skills, enabling them to handle stress, resolve conflicts, and adapt to changing situations with composure and empathy (Javed et al., 2022; Sabri et al., 2021). Helicopter parenting may interfere with this developmental process by limiting opportunities for independent emotional regulation and decision-making, potentially resulting in lower emotional maturity (Luebbe et al., 2018).

Furthermore, peer relationships become increasingly significant during the university years (Maunder, 2018). Peer attachment, which refers to the emotional bonds and trust between individuals and their close friends, plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging, emotional support, and self-identity (Nie et al., 2022). Secure peer attachments can buffer the adverse effects of parental overcontrol by providing alternative sources of emotional and social support. However, excessive parental involvement might inhibit the development of these critical peer relationships, either by reducing opportunities for independent social interaction or by fostering dependency and social anxiety (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). This dynamic raises important questions about the mediating or moderating role of peer attachment in the relationship between helicopter parenting and emotional maturity.

Existing literature suggests that helicopter parenting is negatively associated with autonomy, self-efficacy, and emotional competence in young adults (Odenweller et al., 2014). Simultaneously, studies have shown that strong peer relationships are associated with better psychological adjustment, higher emotional regulation, and improved coping mechanisms (Wentzel et al., 2014). Despite these established links, limited research has examined how these variables interact with one another in a university context, especially in collectivistic cultures where parental involvement tends to be more normative and persistent (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). Understanding this triadic relationship—helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity—is essential for informing interventions that promote healthy development and independence in emerging adults.

The present study aims to investigate the relationships between helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity in university students. Specifically, it seeks to explore whether peer attachment mediates or moderates the effect of helicopter parenting on emotional maturity. By focusing on these dynamics, the study aspires to contribute to the growing body of research on parenting styles, emotional development, and social relationships in emerging adulthood. The findings may offer practical insights for parents, educators, and mental health professionals aiming to foster resilience, autonomy, and emotional well-being among young adults transitioning into independent life.

### Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship among helicopter parenting, peer attachment and emotional maturity in university students.
- To assess the predicting role of helicopter parenting and peer attachment on emotional maturity in university students.
- To examine gender differences in emotional maturity among university students.

### Hypothesis of the Study

- There is likely to be a significant relationship among helicopter parenting, peer attachment and emotional maturity.
- There is likely to be a significant predicting role of helicopter parenting and peer attachment on emotional maturity in university students.
- There would likely to be significant gender differences on emotional maturity among male and female students.

### Material and Method

A correlational research design was employed, and data were collected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique from a sample of 300 university students, comprising 144 females (48%) and 156 males (52%) aged between 18 and 25 years. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. The research adhered to institutional and ethical standards at all stages of the process. Demographic questionnaire was constructed by the researcher that included age, gender, and education level of the students. Along with, three standardized measures were utilized to collect data from the participants.

The **Helicopter Parenting Scale (HPS)**, developed by Schiffrin et al. (2013), was used to assess parental involvement and autonomy support. It is a 15-item self-report measure rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater helicopter parenting. The scale includes 9 items assessing helicopter parenting and 6 items assessing autonomy support. In the current study, with author permission, the term “mother” was replaced with “parents” for broader applicability. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.78 for helicopter parenting and 0.70 for autonomy support.

The **Inventory of Peer Attachment (IPA)**, developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), was used to assess adolescents’ perceptions of their attachment to close friends. The revised version includes 25 self-report items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never or never true) to 5 (almost always or always true), with higher scores indicating stronger peer attachment. The IPA measures three dimensions: mutual trust, quality of communication, and feelings of anger and alienation. In the current study, only the peer attachment version was

used. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. Subscale reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.83$  for Trust,  $\alpha = 0.81$  for Communication, and  $\alpha = 0.61$  for Alienation.

The **Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS)**, developed by Singh and Bhargava (1991), was used to assess emotional maturity across five dimensions: Emotional Stability, Emotional Progression, Social Adjustment, Personal Integration, and Independence. The scale consists of 48 items rated on a 5-point scale (Very much to Never), with higher scores indicating greater emotional maturity. Each subscale contains 10 items, except the Independence subscale, which has 8 items. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency in the present study, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96. Subscale reliabilities were  $\alpha = 0.86$  (Emotional Stability),  $\alpha = 0.86$  (Emotional Progression),  $\alpha = 0.86$  (Social Adjustment),  $\alpha = 0.92$  (Personal Integration), and  $\alpha = 0.97$  (Independence).

## Results

**Table 1**

*The Cronbach's Alpha, Mean, and Standard Deviation for the Helicopter Parenting, Peer Attachment, and Emotional Maturity*

Scales	<i>k</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Helicopter parenting	15			.84
Helicopter parenting	9	3.33	5.96	.78
Autonomic Support	6	23.54	3.73	.70
Peer Attachment	25			.83
Peer Trust	10	33.54	7.4	.83
Peer Communication	8	28.20	5.74	.81
Peer Alienation	7	20.64	4.72	.62
Emotional Maturity	48			.96
Emotional Stability	10	3.03	9.47	.86
Emotional Progression	10	28.68	9.56	.86
Social Adjustment	10	26.08	9.31	.86
Personal Integration	10	25.77	11.0	.92
Independence	8	25.75	8.10	.87

**Note.** *K*= Number of items, *M*= Mean, *SD*= Standard deviation,  $\alpha$ = Cronbach's Alpha

The table presents the reliability, mean scores, and variability of the study measures. All three scales helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency. Subscales under each measure also showed satisfactory reliability, indicating that the instruments used were psychometrically sound for assessing the targeted constructs.

**Table 2**

*Relationship among Helicopter Parenting, Peer Attachment and Emotional Maturity (N=300)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M	SD
1.HOP	-	.60**	.09	-0.3	.17**	.10*	.12*	.12*	0.8	.14**	.10*	.13*	33.66	5.96
2.ATNP		-	-0.9*	-.18**	0.5	-.17*	-0.4	-0.6	-.10*	-.033	-.08	-.07	23.54	3.73
3.P-TRUST			-	.74**	.00	.91**	.39**	.33**	.30**	.39**	.32**	.39**	24.46	7.45
4.P-COMM				-	-.15**	.81**	.30**	.21**	.21**	.31**	.20**	.28**	19.80	5.74
5-P-ALIEN					-	.29**	.28**	.32**	.34**	.29**	.33**	.35**	21.36	4.72
6.PA7SCALE						-	.46**	.40**	.39**	.47**	.39**	.47**	65.61	12.9
7.EMOS							-	.70**	.68**	.77**	.72**	.79**	30.03	9.47
8.EMOP								-	.71**	.77**	.72**	.69**	28.68	9.56
9.SOCAD									-	.79**	.76**	.67**	26.08	9.31
10.PRSINT										-	.65**	.53**	25.77	11.0
11.INDP											-	.70**	24.63	9.11
12.EMO												-	132.6	42.70

**Note.** \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , HOP=Helicopter parenting, ATNP=autonomy support, PTRUST=Peer trust, PCOMM=Peer communication, PALIEN=Peer alienation, PASCALE= Peer Attachment scale, EMOS= emotional stability, EMOP= emotional progression, SOCAD=social adjustment, PRSINT=personal integration, INDP=Independence, EMO=emotional maturity

The table 2 illustrates the relationships among helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity in a sample of university students. Significant positive correlations were observed between helicopter parenting and autonomy support, as well as between peer attachment and emotional maturity dimensions. Peer attachment subscales, particularly peer trust and communication, were positively associated with various components of emotional maturity. Conversely, peer alienation showed negative correlations with emotional maturity domains. These findings suggest that supportive parenting and secure peer relationships contribute positively to emotional maturity, while alienation from peers may hinder emotional development.



**Table 3**

*Stepwise Regression Analysis of Helicopter Parenting, Peer Attachment and Emotional Maturity*

Variable	Model1B	Model	
		B	CI95%
Helicopter parenting	.826	.81*	[-.088-1.723]
Autonomy support	-1.31	-1.42	[-2.856--.002]
Peer Trust	1.69***	2.104***	[1.536-2.673]
Peer communication	.717		
Alienation	3.173***	3.038***	[2.147-3.930]
R <sup>2</sup>	.289	.285	
F	23.90	29.44	
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.289	-.004	
ΔF	23.90	1.54	

*Note.* N=300 \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .005$

The stepwise regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of helicopter parenting and peer attachment dimensions on emotional maturity. In the first model, helicopter parenting, autonomy support, peer trust, communication, and alienation collectively explained approximately 29% of the variance in emotional maturity. Among these, peer trust and peer alienation emerged as significant positive predictors, indicating that higher trust and alienation in peer relationships were associated with greater emotional maturity. In the final model, communication was removed, and the explained variance slightly decreased but remained statistically significant. Notably, autonomy support had a negative coefficient, suggesting that higher autonomy support might relate to lower emotional maturity in this context.

**Table 4**

*Independent Sample t-test for Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotionally Maturity Based on Gender Differences in University Students*

Variable	Male (n=156)		Female (n=144)		t	df	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Emotionally Maturity	31.42	5.19	22.58	4.47	2.47	298	.001***	0.6

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The table 4 presents the results of an independent samples t-test comparing emotional maturity between male and female university students. Male university students reported significantly higher levels of emotional maturity compared to female university students with a medium effect size.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the interrelationships among helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity in university students. The findings offer nuanced insights into how parental involvement and peer dynamics shape emotional development during emerging adulthood. Aligning with previous research, the study observed significant positive correlations between helicopter parenting and autonomy support, suggesting that even within a controlling parental style, aspects of perceived support may coexist. This aligns with Schifffrin et al. (2014), who argued that some dimensions of helicopter parenting might reflect a form of over-involvement that students interpret as care and support, especially in collectivist cultures like Pakistan.

Peer attachment emerged as a significant correlate of emotional maturity, reinforcing the critical role of peer relationships in psychosocial development. Subscales such as peer trust and communication were positively associated with various emotional maturity domains, echoing the findings of Delgado et al. (2022), who emphasized that secure peer attachments provide a foundation for emotional regulation, identity formation, and adaptive functioning. Conversely, peer alienation was negatively associated with emotional maturity, consistent with the work of Osman and Miranda (2021), who highlighted that feelings of alienation and exclusion from peers are risk factors for emotional distress and immaturity.

Stepwise regression analysis further clarified these relationships. Peer trust and alienation were significant predictors of emotional maturity, indicating that quality of peer interactions is a stronger determinant of emotional development than parenting variables in this age group. Interestingly, autonomy support displayed a negative predictive value, a finding that appears counterintuitive. One plausible explanation may be that autonomy support, when experienced as a sudden shift from previously controlling parenting, might lead to confusion or poor adjustment, particularly in cultural contexts where independence is not strongly encouraged during adolescence (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Alternatively, this may reflect a mismatch between the autonomy support provided and the individual's readiness to handle it, resulting in emotional instability.

Additionally, gender differences revealed that male university students reported significantly higher emotional maturity levels than females. This result aligns partially with some literature (e.g., Brody, 2013), which indicates that cultural expectations and gender socialization might impact the expression and development of emotional competencies. In patriarchal societies, male students may be socialized to exhibit emotional restraint and self-control, which are often misinterpreted or measured as higher emotional maturity. However, this finding warrants deeper exploration, especially through qualitative inquiry, to understand gendered emotional experiences in South Asian contexts.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate dynamics between helicopter parenting, peer attachment, and emotional maturity in university students. The findings suggest that while parental involvement plays a role, the quality of peer relationships particularly trust and communication has a more substantial impact on emotional maturity. Peer alienation, conversely, hinders emotional development. The unexpected negative association of autonomy support with emotional maturity indicates the influence of cultural context and transitional challenges. Additionally, gender differences point to the need for deeper understanding of how emotional maturity is

shaped by societal norms. Overall, fostering secure peer attachments and culturally attuned parenting strategies may enhance emotional development in young adults.

### Implications and Future Directions

The study offers valuable implications for educators, counselors, and parents. First, promoting secure peer relationships can significantly enhance emotional maturity in university students, emphasizing the need for peer support programs on campuses. Second, parenting interventions should balance involvement with developmentally appropriate autonomy, especially in collectivist cultures. Lastly, gender-sensitive approaches are essential to support emotional growth across diverse student populations.

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