

BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERPARENTED CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

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Abstract. Parenting styles and behaviours are critical in shaping a child's personality, beliefs, values, and behaviours, affecting their academic achievement, mental health, and future success. Being active in a child's life can increase the child's confidence, build a closer bond between parent and child, and increase the child's chances of becoming a successful adult. However, excessive involvement and control over a child's life can lead to negative consequences for the child's development. Overparenting refers to overprotective and controlling behaviour towards the child when the parents tend to micromanage their child's lives, make decisions for them, and shield them from challenges and disappointments.

The study aims to reveal the behavioural characteristics of overparented children and their parents. 262 teachers across six countries (Slovenia, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and Lithuania) participated in the study. An online survey using closed and open-ended questions was used to collect the data. The study results revealed that overparenting can negatively affect a child's development, leading to dependence, poor decision-making skills, anxiety, reduced academic performance, and lack of resilience. Overparenting parents tend to micromanage their children's lives, shield them from disappointment, and have unrealistic expectations. They may also lack trust in teachers, leading to strained relationships. Survey results suggest a lack of positive parenting skills and understanding of child development. To promote healthy parenting, it is crucial for parents to develop emotional regulation skills, positive parenting skills, and knowledge of their child's social and emotional needs.

Keywords: overparenting, overparented children, parents, behavioural characteristics, teachers.

Introduction

Parenting is a crucial aspect of human development. Parenting style refers to a parent's attitudes and behaviours towards their children, creating a certain emotional climate for them. It is the expression of strategies employed by parents in child-rearing. The way parents interact with their children has a profound impact on their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Parenting styles and behaviours play a critical role in shaping a child's personality, beliefs, values, and behaviours, which can affect their academic achievement, mental health, and future success (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019; Halford et al., 2018; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Baumrind, 1991).

Overparenting, often described by the terms *helicopter parenting* (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022; Schiffrin & Liss, 2017; Montgomery, 2010; Ginott, 1965), *intrusive parenting*, *overprotective parenting* (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Ginott, 1965); *oversolicitous parenting*, *lawnmower parenting* (Steinberg et al., 1992; Ginott, 1965), *overly effortful parenting* (Montgomery, 2010), refers to overprotective and controlling behaviour towards the child, when the parents tend to micromanage their child's lives, make decisions for them, and shield them from challenges and disappointments.

This parental behaviour has become increasingly prevalent in modern society. Researchers refer to several reasons for this tendency, including changing societal values, increased competition,

and the availability of technology (Dittman, 2019; Storberg-Walker & Kiger, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2016). Many parents have adopted an overprotective and controlling approach to parenting with the changing societal attitudes towards parenting, the belief that children require more intensive parenting to succeed in a rapidly changing world, and the rise of the pressure to ensure their child's success and achievement. The "cult of the child" (Dupont et al., 2022), which emphasises the importance of children and places significant pressure on parents to prioritise their child's needs above all, has also contributed a lot to the belief that children need to be constantly monitored and protected (Dittman, 2019). Also, increased competition in education and the job market has played a role in the growing tendency of overparenting. These changes have created a sense of urgency for parents to ensure their children succeed. Parents may feel that they need to push their children to achieve high levels of success to compete in a rapidly changing and competitive job market.

Additionally, parents may view their children's success as a reflection of their own parenting abilities and fear that they will be judged if their child does not succeed (Dittman, 2019; Storberg-Walker & Kiger, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2016; Segrin et al., 2013). Lastly, the availability of technology has enabled parents to stay constantly connected to their children, leading to a greater sense of control over their child's life. This has contributed to the tendency for parents to micromanage every aspect of their child's life, including education, social life, and extracurricular activities.

Being an involved parent is not a bad thing. Being active in a child's life can increase the child's confidence, build a closer bond between the parent and child, and increase the chances of the child becoming a successful adult. However, excessive involvement and control over a child's life can lead to negative consequences for the child's development.

Numerous studies have found that overparenting practices have more negative than positive outcomes for children. Young children who are overparented have been noted to exhibit anxious, withdrawn, depressive, insecure, dependent personality traits, and neuroticism (Montgomery, 2010; Bayer et al., 2006). Empirical evidence consistently indicates that overparenting is linked to negative outcomes in adolescents, including increased anxiety, emotional distress, procrastination, narcissistic traits, decreased academic motivation, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Schiffrin & Segrin, 2017; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Studies have also found that overparenting can lead to a poor adjustment in emerging adults, with attachment anxiety and psychological control partially mediating the link between paternal overparenting and poor adjustment. Furthermore, overparenting has been associated with ineffective coping skills in young adult children, which can result in greater stress and anxiety (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022; Dittman, 2019; Storberg-Walker & Kiger, 2019; Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Segrin et al., 2013).

Surveys exploring the impact of parental involvement from teachers' perspectives are limited; therefore, the survey used in this research specifically focuses on insights into the phenomenon from a teacher's point of view.

The aim of the study is to reveal the behavioural characteristics of overparented children and their parents.

The objectives of the study:

1. to identify the behavioural characteristics of the overparented children;
2. to reveal the behavioural characteristics of the overparenting parents;
3. to determine the gaps in parenting skills.

Research methodology

Organisation of the study. The study was carried out as part of the international project "Overparenting – allow your children to make mistakes" (Free Kids), No. 2020-1-PT01-KA204-078497. The data for the study were obtained from a comprehensive online survey of teachers across Portugal, Slovenia, Lithuania, Turkey and Romania. A convenient sampling technique was used. The questionnaire was

created through Google Forms, and the link was sent to kindergartens, schools and teachers in person across the mentioned countries using social media and personal contacts (emails, FB).

Teachers are in a unique position to observe the children's behaviour and their interactions with parents. Conducting a survey on the behavioural characteristics of overparented children and their parents with the input of teachers can provide a unique and valuable perspective on the impact of overparenting practices. Questions related to parenting behaviours can provide insight into the motivations and attitudes behind overparenting behaviours, which can inform intervention strategies to promote balanced parenting practices. The research findings can inform parents, educators, and mental health professionals about the potential risks associated with overparenting practices and the importance of promoting balanced parenting styles for children's optimal development.

This article does not present all the survey results. The results discussed in this publication are based on open-ended questions included in the survey questionnaire. The open-ended questions aimed to facilitate a better understanding of the subject being analysed. They were targeted to learn teachers' opinions and experiences regarding overparented children and parents' behaviour and attitudes towards school life. Teachers were requested to respond to two open-ended questions based on their daily interactions with parents. The first question asked teachers to provide concrete instances of overparenting. The second question aimed to discover the difficulties teachers face when communicating with overparenting parents. Collecting feedback in their own words enabled a deeper exploration of the respondents' answers, resulting in valuable insights into how overparenting manifests and the challenges teachers face due to such parenting behaviours.

Survey participants. The survey involved 262 teachers across six partner countries: Slovenia, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and Lithuania. The attendees were categorised based on the type of school they teach in, with 30.2 per cent from kindergartens, 28.3 per cent from primary schools, 29.5 per cent from basic schools, 9.7 per cent from high schools, and 1.6 per cent from other types of schools.

The majority of participants were females (84.9 per cent), followed by males (11.6 per cent), and a small percentage (3.5 per cent) preferred not to state their gender. Most of the teachers had extensive teaching experience, with 66.5 per cent having more than 15-year experience, 24.8 per cent having between 5-15-year experience, and only 9.7 per cent having less experience. Regarding the classroom

population, almost half of the participants (45 per cent) indicated that they work with 21-30 learners, while 33.3 per cent have 10-20 learners in the class. A smaller percentage of teachers (8.9 per cent) work with less than 10 students.

The study ethics. The research adhered to the ethical principles of informed consent and confidentiality to protect the participants' rights and privacy.

The results of the survey on behavioural characteristics of overparented children and their parents

Behavioural characteristics of overparented children. Excessive parental involvement, or overparenting, can substantially impact a child's development. When parents become too involved in their child's academic and social lives, it can lead to a range of negative outcomes evident in their school experiences.

Constant parental micromanagement of a child's academic and social lives can diminish their sense of independence and self-efficacy (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019; Schiffrin & Liss, 2017; Grolnick, 1997). Overparented children may have difficulty making decisions, taking responsibility for their actions, and developing a sense of autonomy. This limited sense of responsibility can be especially challenging in school, where children must assume control of their academic and social lives to succeed. In addition, overparented children may have a harder time taking responsibility for their actions, as their parents often step in and solve problems for them (Schiffrin & Liss, 2017). This may also negatively affect the level of confidence in a child's abilities as parental approval is constantly sought.

The above-mentioned characteristics of overparented children are clearly identified by teachers. Research participants note that overparented children *"are not able to perform school activities autonomously"*, *"do not perceive homework as their responsibility"*, *"sometimes it is clear that the kids didn't do their homework by themselves"*, and *"children struggle with doing something on their own"*.

The lack of responsibility and independence is demonstrated by such teachers' statements as: *"the second form schoolchild claims that he does not have a book because the mother hasn't put it"*, *"parents do homework for a child"*, *"parents do hygiene and other school tasks for the children"*, *"children aren't allowed to do very basic tasks, parents are motivating that they are too small"*, *"mother brings the backpack, takes off the books, undresses the child and puts clothes. If she could she would stay at the lesson instead of the child"*.

Overparented children often experience heightened pressure to meet their parents' expectations, leading to increased anxiety and stress levels. This pressure may be particularly intense in the school environment, where children may feel overwhelmed by academic requirements and social expectations. Children may lack the opportunity to develop resilience and coping mechanisms, which can lead to difficulties in handling setbacks and failures (Pressman & Black, 2016; Killeen & Rubin, 2013; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Teachers confirm that by the following statements: *"children feel stressed by school grades"*, *"children feel distressed when they are not able to achieve some goals or perform requested activities"*, *"when children face difficulties in accomplishing specific objectives or completing requested activities, they experience frustration or disappointment"*, *"it is common for children to feel distressed when they are not able to perform tasks that have been assigned to them"*.

Although parental involvement can positively impact academic achievement, overparenting can have the opposite effect. Overparented children may feel stressed and overwhelmed, which ultimately leads to reduced academic performance.

Furthermore, overparenting can hinder the development of a child's problem-solving skills and strategies, which are crucial for academic and overall life success (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019; Schiffrin & Liss, 2017). The lack of problem-solving skills is supported by such teachers' statements as: *"a child is not able to solve even a simple problem. Say, he forgot a notebook at home. A teacher does not see any problem (he can write on a sheet of paper and copy later), but the child bursts into tears, and parents rush home to bring a notebook. Obviously, the child needs a supersaver and is not able to cope with the situation which needs a solution"*, *"if the learner doesn't like something, he immediately calls the parents"*, *"when the learner did not do his/her homework, a parent gives a reason instead of the learner"*.

Overparented children often face challenges in developing their social skills, as they may depend on their parents to navigate their interactions with peers and teachers (Storberg-Walker & Kiger, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2016; Killeen & Rubin, 2013). This overreliance on parental guidance can have a negative impact on social development, potentially leading to issues with establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Teachers notice that for overparented children, *"often it is hard to establish good and healthy relationships with their peers"*, they *"are not able to deal with any friendship difficulties"*, and *"the child does not want to talk with friends in class"*.

Behavioural characteristics of overparenting parents. Overparenting parents are characterised by overly involvement in their children's lives, including academic and social activities. They tend to hover over their children and intervene in every aspect of their lives, from homework to friendships (Schiffrin & Liss, 2017; Schiffrin et al., 2014). When referring to the attributes of overparenting parents, teachers note that: *"parents interfere in the school affairs even when children are over 15", "parents try to protect their children from every kind of harm (peer wrestling, finding their place in their own society, ...)", "primary school parents claim tasks are too difficult, children get tired, due to that parents do tasks for children, they say that children are too small and not able to button, tie up, put on shoes etc.", "the child wants to dress himself, but the mother is helping him against his will, or somebody asks the child a question, and the mother answers for him", "parents draw for children, do not leave them alone during online lessons, sit together"*.

Parents tend to closely monitor and control their children's schedules, activities, and decision-making. They often take charge of planning every aspect of their children's lives, without providing opportunities for their children to learn how to make their own choices and develop independence: *"the parents don't allow their children to dress themselves although they are perfectly capable of that", "parents too much control the learning process and do not let the child to undertake responsibility himself, control child's relations with friends", "controlling their child homework, playtime, waiting at school", "the parent is overinvolved in the child activity, answer the questions instead of the child", "parents contact the teacher too many times", "parents bring to school the things a child has forgotten at home (notebooks, textbooks even a backpack), call during lessons and breaks, call the teacher at any time of the day or at weekends, during holidays", "parents too much control the learning process and do not let the child to undertake responsibility himself, control child's relations with friends", "parents call for small problems even though the child communicates with other children and the teacher himself"*.

Parents may be overly protective of their children, shielding them from the consequences of their actions and preventing them from experiencing failure or disappointment. They may also be overly concerned with their children's safety and well-being, limiting their opportunities for growth and exploration. Teachers confirm this by the following statements: *"homework is done for the child", "regularly correct mistakes, do not let the child find mistakes himself", "do not allow to open windows*

of the classroom in winter, autumn", "monitor playgrounds to see if the child plays", "call the teacher every day to tell how the child works at home or that he experienced stress if the teacher did not notice something, or asks who made friends with him"; "exaggerated care for the child not to get injured; too much care of the environment, food", "parents try to protect their child in any situation, do not see their mistakes", "mother wants to hear a child during every break", "change a teacher because she answered the daughter's question the wrong way, e.g. that angel loves her more than mother".

Overparenting parents tend to overreact to their children's struggles or challenges, leading to a lack of resilience and problem-solving skills in their children. They may also have unrealistic expectations for their children's achievements and become overly critical or disappointed when they do not meet those expectations. These behaviour patterns of overparenting (excessive intervention, unrealistic expectations, a lack of space for children to develop resilience and problem-solving skills independently) are confirmed by such teachers' statements as: *"believe that their child is very smart and always expect the highest grades", "tolerate bad behaviour and claim other children for that", "a 5-year-old girl is under strict control, parents' questions are always negative; mother calls if the child failed at school", "instead of the child writing an assignment, they sit hidden next to him in distance learning"*.

The discussed behaviour patterns of the parents who are involved in overparenting demonstrate that they may become "enmeshed" with their children, meaning they are too closely intertwined and lack clear boundaries. This can lead to a lack of individuality, as the parent may see their child as an extension of themselves rather than as a separate individual with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Teachers report encountering a lack of trust from overparenting parents. A common case when parents do not trust teachers' professional judgment or are overly critical of their teaching methods: *"the father of my pupil came to school and argued with me about test results", "often demonstrate dissatisfaction on evaluation of their child's knowledge", "always have too big expectations to the teachers", "teacher is blamed for the child's failures", "when the initial approach is made to parents about their children's difficulties, parents do not accept justifying that they are still very small", "not always listen to the teacher, always have their own opinions"*.

When parents tend to overparent, they may find it challenging to recognise the boundaries between

their role as a parent and the teacher's role. Teachers then feel that their authority is being undermined or that their professional judgment is being challenged: *"parents do not accept the teacher's point of view or advice"*, *"they (parents) always feel right"*, *"often parents do not understand that they exaggerate, do not want to hear arguments"*, *"know everything, especially about education"*, *"they always feel right"*, *"parents think that children must behave as they want"*, *"parents always defend their children even though their children cause disturbances at school"*.

Teachers report even being blamed for child's failures or misbehaviour: *"the accountability of teachers for poor results instead of their children"*, *"all responsibility is placed on others: teachers, canteen workers, cleaners but never see problems in the child's behaviour"*, *"they often do not hear and do not want to hear the problem; do not try to react to teacher's comments, tend to blame"*.

Gaps in parenting skills. The survey results show that one of the main behavioural characteristics of overparenting is the parents' excessive concern for children and the attempt to protect them from all possible dangers. These parents strive for perfection and believe that it is their responsibility to shield their children from all forms of danger and disappointment. However, such behaviour can hinder a child's ability to develop confidence in their problem-solving skills and resilience. Overparenting parents tend to micromanage their child's life, making decisions on their behalf without allowing the child to exercise their own decision-making abilities. This overbearing behaviour not only undermines a child's autonomy and responsibility but also demonstrates a lack of concern or understanding of the child's emotional needs (Dittman, 2019; Storberg-Walker & Kiger, 2019). Ultimately, this highlights a deficiency in skills for effective communication and healthy interaction with their child.

A child's ability to take responsibility for their behaviour is not developed when their parents are either excessively strict and controlling or too permissive. The child learns responsibility when encouraged to be independent, and their thoughts and actions are respected and valued (Dittman, 2019; Rosenfeld, 2016; Montgomery, 2010). However, teachers have noted that communication with overprotective parents can be challenging, as they are often resistant to changing their parenting style, particularly regarding the development of their child's independence. These parents may not realise that their parenting methods can have a negative impact on their child's independence, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. These findings suggest that overprotective parents may

lack positive parenting skills, knowledge about child development, and understanding of their child's emotional and social needs. They may also be unaware of the principles of child behaviour development.

Many studies show that parental anxiety strongly predicts overprotectiveness in parenting (Rapee, 2009). Additionally, Thomasgard (1998) found that parental anxiety is linked to the perception of the child as vulnerable.

Another factor that may drive overparenting is regret. Roesse and Summerville (2005) developed a theory of regret based on the principle of missed opportunities, which was later refined by Beike, Markman, and Karadogan (2009). Anxiety and regret may work in conjunction to encourage overparenting. According to the principle of missed opportunities, people experience regret when they feel like they have missed out on important goals in life. One factor contributing to overparenting is projecting one's goals onto their adult child. If parents regret not pursuing opportunities in their own lives, they may become anxious about their child missing out on similar opportunities. This suggests that regret can contribute to parental anxieties leading to overparenting. To prevent this emotional regulation, skills targeted to promoting abilities to take care of themselves and act thoughtfully are of great importance for the parents.

Conclusions

1. Overparenting, characterised by excessive parental involvement, can significantly impact a child's development. The behavioural characteristics of overparented children include a lack of independence, a limited sense of responsibility, and difficulty in decision-making and problem-solving. Such children may also have heightened anxiety and stress, reduced academic performance, and a lack of resilience and coping mechanisms. Teachers often note that overparented children struggle to perform school activities autonomously, have difficulty perceiving homework as their own responsibility, and are often unable to complete tasks assigned to them. They may also rely heavily on their parents for social interaction guidance and lack the skills necessary to establish and maintain relationships with peers.
2. Overparenting parents tend to be excessively involved in their children's lives, controlling every aspect, from academic performance to social relationships. Such parents may shield their children from failure or disappointment and have unrealistic expectations for their achievements. Additionally, overparenting

parents may lack trust in teachers and their professional judgment, leading to strained relationships. The enmeshment of overparenting parents with their children can lead to a lack of individuality, and the parents' inability to recognise the boundaries between their role and the teacher's role may challenge the teacher's authority.

3. The survey results on overparenting behaviour characteristics highlight a deficiency in positive

parenting skills, knowledge about child development, and understanding of a child's emotional and social needs. Parental anxiety and regret can also contribute to overparenting behaviour. To promote healthy parenting, it is crucial for parents to develop the mentioned skills and knowledge, along with emotional regulation skills.

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HIPERGLOBĄ PATIRIANČIŲ VAIKŲ IR JŲ TĖVŲ ELGESIO YPATUMAI

Santrauka

Auklėjimas ir tėvų elgesys atlieka reikšmingą vaidmenį formuojant vaiko asmenybę, įsitikinimus, vertybes ir elgesį, o tai gali turėti įtakos jo akademiniam pasiekimams, psichinei sveikatai ir būsimai sėkmei (Tamis-LeMonda ir kt., 2019; Halford ir kt., 2018). Aktyvus tėvų dalyvavimas vaiko gyvenime gali prisidėti prie vaiko pasitikėjimo savimi stiprinimo, glaudesnio ryšio su tėvais formavimo bei sėkmingo vaiko gyvenimo prielaidų sukūrimo. Tačiau per didelis tėvų įsitraukimas į vaiko gyvenimą gali sukelti neigiamų pasekmių vaiko raidai. Hipergloba reiškia pernelyg saugantį ir kontroliuojantį elgesį su vaiku, kai tėvai linkę valdyti savo vaiko gyvenimą, priimti už jų sprendimus ir saugoti jį nuo galimų iššūkių ir nusivylimų. Tyrimu siekiama atskleisti hiperglobą patiriančių vaikų ir jų tėvų elgesio ypatumus. Tyrime dalyvavo 262 mokytojai iš šešių šalių (Slovėnijos, Portugalijos, Rumunijos, Turkijos ir Lietuvos). Duomenys rinkti naudojant apklausą internetu. Analizė grindžiama mokytojų atsakymais į atviro pobūdžio klausimus, kurie skirti atskleisti mokytojų patirtis apie hiperglobojamų vaikų ir jų tėvų elgesį. Tyrimo išvados: 1) Hipergloba gali turėti didelės įtakos vaiko raidai. Hiperglobą patiriantiems vaikams būdingas savarankiškumo trūkumas, ribotas atsakomybės jausmas, sunkumai priimant sprendimus ir sprendžiant problemas. Tokie vaikai taip pat gali patirti padidėjusį nerimą ir stresą, prastesnius akademinis rezultatus ir atsparumą bei įveikos mechanizmų trūkumą. Mokytojai atkreipia dėmesį, kad hiperglobojami vaikai patiria sunkumų savarankiškai dalyvaudami įvairiose mokyklos veiklose, namų darbų nesuvokia kaip savo atsakomybės, dažnai negali atlikti jiems skirtų užduočių. Jie taip pat stokoja socialinių įgūdžių, reikalingų užmegzti ir palaikyti santykius su bendraamžiais. 2) Hiperglobojantys tėvai yra linkę per daug įsitraukti į savo vaikų gyvenimą, kontroliuoti kiekvieną jų gyvenimo sritį. Tokie tėvai stengiasi apsaugoti savo vaikus nuo nesėkmių ar nusivylimų ir turi nerealių lūkesčių dėl jų pasiekimų. Į hiperglobą linkusiems tėvams taip pat būdingas nepasitikėjimas mokytojais, jų profesine kompetencija. 3) Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė pozityvios tėvystės įgūdžių, žinių apie vaiko raidą, emocinių ir socialinių vaiko poreikių supratimo trūkumą. Tėvų patiriamas nerimas taip pat gali pastūmėti tėvus į hiperglobojantį elgesį. Skatinant pozityvią tėvystę tėvams labai svarbu gilinti žinias apie vaiko socialinius ir emocinius poreikius, stiprinti emocinio reguliavimo bei pozityvios tėvystės įgūdžius.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: hipergloba, hiperglobą patiriantys vaikai, tėvai, elgesio ypatumai, mokytoja.

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