

Transcript for “The Effect of Helicopter Parenting on the Prosocial Behaviors of Emerging Adults” by Erin Whitesell, Miranda Batte-Futrell, Christine Cao, and Nichole Boigegrain

Slide 1: Good afternoon! My name is Miranda, and today, we’re going to discuss how helicopter parenting is related to prosocial behavior of emerging adults, ages 18 to 25, through its association with the basic psychological needs identified by self-determination theory.

Slide 2: Helicopter parenting is the use of developmentally inappropriate levels of problem-solving and control in which parents do things for their children that they could do for themselves. Studies have typically found that mothers engage in helicopter parenting more than fathers from the perspectives of both emerging adults and their parents. Several studies have found helicopter parenting was associated with internalizing outcomes, such as depression and anxiety, among emerging adults.

Slide 3: The majority of research on helicopter parenting focuses on its negative effects on well-being, rather than on positive outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, which are voluntary actions people engage in to help others. The limited research on helicopter parenting and prosocial behaviors is contradictory. Some studies have found no direct relationship between helicopter parenting and these adaptive behaviors, although self-regulation was found to mediate the relationship between helicopter parenting and prosocial behaviors such that people who report more helicopter parenting exhibited less self-regulation and fewer prosocial acts. One study found that helicopter parenting increases certain types of prosocial behaviors such as prosocial behaviors performed in public, but not more altruistic acts. However, these relationships were moderated by the emerging adults’ attachment to their parents, as well as the gender of the parent and child.

Slide 4: One way researchers have tried to explain the relationship between helicopter parenting and negative outcomes in emerging adults is through its impact on the basic psychological needs that are essential to well-being according to self-determination theory. When the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, people experience greater intrinsic motivation and well-being; however, when these needs are not being met, this frustration is associated with extrinsic motivation and decreased well-being. In prior research, helicopter parenting has been associated with lower levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others, which were related to decreased well-being and adjustment among emerging adults.

Slide 5: There is some evidence from prior research that the satisfaction or frustration of these basic psychological needs are also associated with engaging in prosocial behaviors. Several studies have found needs satisfaction to be associated with increases in prosocial behavior. Other studies have found that needs frustration has been associated with antisocial behaviors. Since antisocial behaviors are viewed as the opposite of prosocial behaviors, we speculate that needs frustration will be related to decreases in prosocial behaviors.

Slide 6: Given prior research, we hypothesized that the psychological needs from self-determination theory would mediate the relationship between both maternal and paternal helicopter parenting and prosocial behaviors. We expected helicopter parenting would be associated with less needs satisfaction and more needs frustration, which would be associated with fewer prosocial behaviors. Next, Nichole is going to tell you about our methodology.

Slide 7: The final sample used in our analyses was 288 people after removing participants who didn't complete the survey or who asked that their data not be included in analyses. Majority of the participants were white and female with an average age around 20 years old.

Slide 8: Our survey included three measures, which all had either adequate or excellent reliability. The predictor was the 10-item Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale. A sample item from this measure is "My mother or father supervises my every move." Higher scores on this scale indicate that the participant experienced more helicopter parenting. The mediator was the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale. This is a 24-item measure that looks at the satisfaction and frustration of the three psychological needs identified by the self-determination theory. A sample item from this measure is "I feel the relationships I have are just superficial." Higher scores indicate more needs satisfaction and frustration. Prosocial behavior's measured using the 6-item Primary Prevention Awareness and Usage Scale. A sample item from this measure is "Raised or donated money for a charitable cause." Higher scores reflect that participants more frequently engaged in helpful behaviors.

Slide 9: Participants were recruited to complete an online survey from the Introduction to Psychology participant pool at the University of Mary Washington as well as through snowball sampling from the link on social media sites. Psychology students received partial credit towards a course requirement for their participation while other respondents did not receive any compensation. Participants were required to be able to answer questions about both a maternal and paternal caregiver and be emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 25. The data were collected anonymously. Participants were allowed to skip questions and exit the survey at any time without penalty. Now, I am going to turn things over to Christine to tell you about our results.

Slide 10: First, we ran correlations, which I will go over from left to right. Mothers' and fathers' helicopter parenting were positively correlated with each other, meaning that mothers and fathers reportedly helicopter parent together as a unit.

Slide 11: As mothers and fathers helicopter parented more, emerging adults reported less satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and more frustration of these needs.

Slide 12: There was a strong inverse relationship between need satisfaction & need frustration in that as emerging adults reported more need satisfaction, they reported less need frustration and vice versa.

Slide 13: Neither maternal nor paternal helicopter parenting were correlated with emerging adults' prosocial behaviors. However, psychological need satisfaction was associated with more

prosocial behaviors, while emerging adults reporting needs frustration participated in fewer prosocial behaviors.

Slide 14: Because previous research has found mothers and fathers tended to display helicopter parenting behaviors at different amounts, mothers and fathers were looked at separately in our mediation model. Focusing first on maternal helicopter parenting, we found that as emerging adults reported their mothers engaging in more helicopter behaviors, they felt less need satisfaction. Also, as their need satisfaction increased, emerging adults engaged in more prosocial behaviors. There was also an indirect effect of maternal helicopter parenting on prosocial behavior through need satisfaction in that as emerging adults perceived that their mothers were helicopter parenting more, they would feel that their needs aren't being satisfied, and were less likely to display helpful behaviors.

Slide 15: Although maternal helicopter parenting was associated with emerging adults reporting more frustration of their psychological needs, needs frustration was not significantly related to prosocial behavior in this model. Thus, needs frustration did not mediate the relationship between maternal helicopter parenting and emerging adults' prosocial behavior.

Slide 16: For the fathers, we found similar patterns to the mothers'. So, as fathers reportedly engaged in helicopter parenting behaviors more, emerging adults had decreased need satisfaction, and need satisfaction had a positive relationship with prosocial behavior. Psychological need satisfaction mediated the relationship between paternal helicopter parenting and prosocial behavior. As emerging adults perceived that their fathers were helicopter parenting more, they reported less need satisfaction and engaged in less prosocial behavior.

Slide 17: Similar to the mothers, perceived helicopter parenting from fathers was also related to increased need frustration, but again, need frustration wasn't significantly associated with prosocial behavior and did not mediate the relationship between paternal helicopter parenting and prosocial behavior. Now, Erin will discuss our findings further.

Slide 18: Our original hypotheses predicting that both needs satisfaction and needs frustration would mediate the relationship between helicopter parenting and prosocial behaviors were partially supported. Only psychological need satisfaction was identified as a significant mediator. As either maternal or paternal helicopter parenting increased, emerging adults experienced less satisfaction of their psychological needs and engaged in fewer prosocial behaviors.

Slide 19: Our study demonstrated similarities with past research. First, participants reported that their mothers engaged in helicopter parenting more than fathers. Second, the correlation between helicopter parenting and a global measure of prosocial behaviors was not significant, but a variable was found that significantly mediated this relationship. While Moilanen & Manuel identified self-regulation, we identified psychological need satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between helicopter parenting and prosocial behaviors. Our findings differ from McGinley who examined various motivations for prosocial behaviors and found that helicopter parenting increased prosocial behaviors performed in public, but decreased altruistic prosocial behaviors.

Slide 20: Self-determination theory suggests that when people have the autonomy to make choices, feel competent to achieve a task, and feel connected to others while doing it, then they feel intrinsically motivated to engage in the task more frequently. If these psychological needs are not met, then they are more likely to engage in behaviors for external reasons such as praise or money. Given that prosocial behaviors are voluntary actions aimed at helping others, they should be intrinsically motivated. If helicopter parents are making their children participate in prosocial behaviors to build resumes, then they may be shifting the emerging adults' motivation to engage in prosocial behaviors from more intrinsic reasons to extrinsic reasons, thus we see a decline.

Slide 21: Our study had several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the sample consisted of primarily Caucasian, female, college-students, which limits the generalizability of our results. Future research should try to replicate these findings with a more diverse sample. Second, the findings of our study are correlational, and thus, no causal conclusions can be made. Future research should aim to examine these relationships longitudinally or experimentally to determine causality. Finally, our study relied on self-report data from emerging adults, and future research should aim to obtain parent or observer reports of helicopter parenting, as well as a behavioral measure of prosocial activity to see if the relationships among variables remain. In addition to addressing these limitations, future researchers should examine the three psychological needs of self-determination theory separately, given that one study found relatedness to be associated with greater prosocial tendencies than other components of self-determination theory, while another study found competence to have the strongest correlation with prosocial engagement. In addition, satisfaction of psychological needs should be examined in relationship to different motivations for prosocial behaviors to determine how it relates to public versus altruistic prosocial acts.

Slide 22: Thank you for your time. If you have any further questions, please contact us.