

Introduction

Background

- Parents who attempt to control their college-aged children take part in a parenting style phenomenon called "helicopter parenting" (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).
- Parents who engage in helicopter parenting are excessively involved and monitor their children, which is associated with mental health problems (Schiffirin et al., 2014).
- Children's report of maternal helicopter parenting is associated with perfectionist discrepancies, extrinsic motivation to learn, and avoidance to goals in learning which have been related to lower academic performance (Schiffirin et al., 2014).
- However, there is a lack of research that examines the role of helicopter parenting in college students' academic satisfaction and mental health outcomes.

Aims

- The current study examined the associations between helicopter parenting, academic satisfaction, and internalizing symptoms in college students.

Method

Sample

- Recruited 667 participants from Texas Christian University and Southern Methodist University students during Spring 2019.

Measures

- Helicopter Parenting: Padilla-Walker & Nelson Helicopter Parenting Scale (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).
- Internalizing Symptoms: Inventory for Depression and Anxiety Symptoms (IDAS; Watson et al. 2007).
- Academic Performance: College Student Subjective Well-Being Scale (Renshaw & Bolognino, 2016).

Analysis

- Conducted multiple moderated regressions and examined simple slopes for significant interactions.

Results

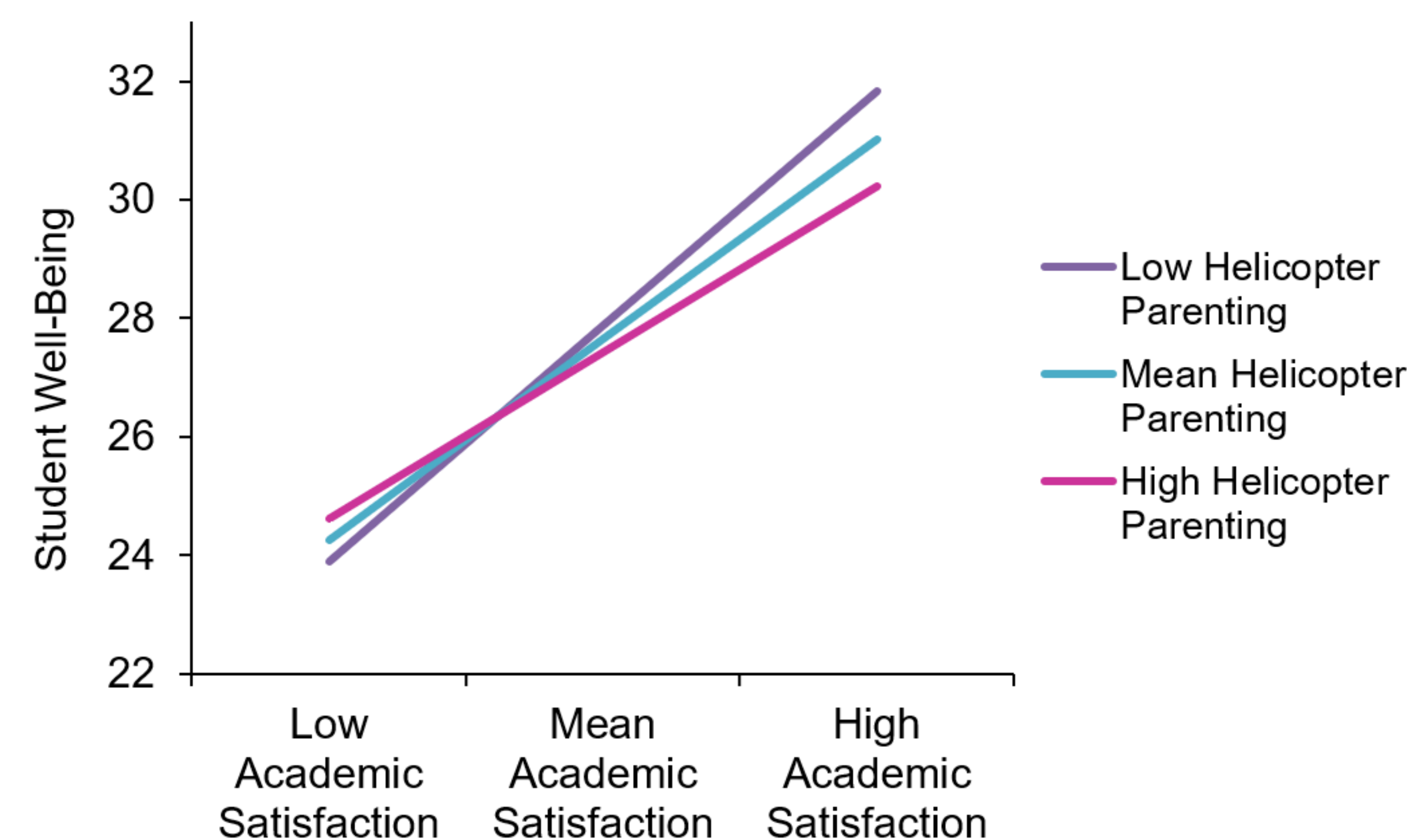
Depressive Symptoms

- For depressive symptoms, there was a significant main effect for both academic satisfaction, $b = -1.12$ ($SE = .09$), $t = -11.82$, $p \leq .001$, and helicopter parenting, $b = 1.88$ ($SE = .84$), $t = 2.25$, $p \leq .001$.
- As academic satisfaction increases, depressive symptoms decrease.
- Higher levels of helicopter parenting were associated with a decrease in depressive symptoms.
- The interaction between academic satisfaction and helicopter parenting for depressive symptoms was not significant ($p = .41$). This association does not change based on the level of helicopter parenting.

Student Well-Being

- For student well-being, there was a significant effect for academic satisfaction $b = 0.61$ ($SE = .04$), $t = 14.01$, $p \leq .001$. There was not a significant main effect for helicopter parenting ($p = .36$).
- These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $b = -.17$ ($SE = .07$), $t = -2.35$, $p = .02$.
- Simple slope analyses revealed that at low (-1 SD), $b = 0.71$ ($SE = .06$), $t = 11.83$, $p \leq .001$, mean, $b = .61$ ($SE = .04$), $t = 14.01$, $p \leq .001$, and high ($+1$ SD), $b = .51$ ($SE = .06$), $t = 7.88$, $p \leq .001$, levels of helicopter parenting, higher student academic satisfaction resulted in higher well-being.

Helicopter Parenting Moderates the Association
Between Academic Satisfaction and Student Well-Being



Discussion

- The results of the current study revealed that helicopter parenting is significantly associated with an increase in depressive symptoms in college students.
- These results are consistent with past research (Wang et al., 2025) that suggests increased levels of helicopter parenting is associated with mental health problems in college students.
- The significant interaction revealed that at low, mean, and high levels of helicopter parenting, higher academic satisfaction was associated with increased student well-being.
- Academic satisfaction appears to be a potential protective factor against helicopter parenting for students' well-being. It is possible that when students are satisfied with their academic success it can potentially protect from the negative impacts of helicopter parenting.
- A potential limitation of the current study is that the sample is not representative of the broader population but rather the sample of high-income college-aged students.
- Overall, based on these findings, school psychologists should focus on increasing academic satisfaction by fostering a supportive environment for students, and aiding in aligning students' courses to their preferences and personal strengths in order to counter potential parental pressures.

References

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