

Child Anxiety and Overparenting in Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Youth

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Authors:

L. Talavera-Garza¹, L. Seligman¹, J. Hovey¹

Institutions:

¹The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, TX

Non-Presenting Co-Author(s):

Laura Seligman, Ph.D. - [Contact Me](#)
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Joseph David Hovey, Ph.D. - [Contact Me](#)
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Abstract:

Background: Overparenting, or "helicopter parenting," has been associated with negative outcomes in young adults (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012). Recent research suggests this construct may have cross-cultural relevance (e.g., Jung et al., 2019); however, this research has examined limited cultural groups and child outcomes. Constructs related to overparenting such as psychological control and family accommodation have been linked to child anxiety but there appear to be no examinations of whether overparenting is related to child anxiety. In the current investigation, we examined the relationship between child anxiety and overparenting in Hispanic and non-Hispanic youth.

Investigation of parenting in Hispanic youth was viewed as important given that research suggests that Hispanic youth may evidence higher anxiety and cultural values may lead to high levels of parent and family involvement.

Methods: Parents/caregivers of 125 youth between the ages of 8 and 18 years completed an online survey that included the parent version of the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children -2 and a measure of overparenting.

Results: Controlling for child's age, correlations between dimensions of overparenting and child anxiety revealed different patterns in Hispanic and non-Hispanic youth. In general, significant correlations between overparenting and child anxiety were more evident in the Hispanic sample. Parenting behavior that limited child self-direction appeared to be the most problematic in that it emerged as being positively related to a variety of anxiety symptoms for Hispanic youth including separation anxiety/phobias ($r = .44, p < .01$), GAD ($r = .38, p < .01$), SAD ($r = .42, p < .01$), and humiliation/rejection ($r = .44, p < .01$). Evidence of the relationship between overparenting and child anxiety in non-Hispanic youth was limited to separation anxiety/phobias ($r = .44, p < .01$) and OCD ($r = .29, p < .05$). On the other hand, affect management was consistently inversely related to child anxiety symptoms in Hispanic youth and, although the direction of this relationship was the same in the non-Hispanic sample, it was less global. Comparisons of overparenting behavior between Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents suggest that Hispanic parents may allow for less child self-direction ($p = .069$).

Conclusion: Although overparenting has been conceptualized as interfering with positive child development, our results suggest that this may depend on the specific type of parenting behavior and the cultural context in which the behavior occurs. This may have implications for the development of culturally informed theories of parenting and child anxiety; however, given that data were cross-sectional, correlational, and both parenting behavior and child anxiety were reported by parents, further research in this area is needed.

Demographic:

Children & Adolescents

Disorder:

Anxiety Disorders

Treatment Approach:

Not Applicable