



The Effect of Parental Over-Protection on Adolescent Children's Self-Exploration and Rebellious Behavior

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Abstract. Adolescence is a critical period for children's individual growth, and self-exploration and rebellious behavior are particularly prominent at this stage. Self-exploration helps adolescents to deepen their self-knowledge, clarify their values, life goals and social status, and then build a solid self-identity and self-confidence. On the other hand, rebellious behavior reflects adolescents' desire to express themselves, pursue independence and the ability to challenge authority, and helps to develop critical thinking and innovation. However, in reality, many parents are overprotective, which hinders children's self-exploration and stimulates rebelliousness. This study focuses on the effects of parental over-protection on adolescent children's self-exploration and rebellious behaviors, and analyses the characteristics, forms and psychological mechanisms of over-protection, aiming at providing new perspectives for understanding adolescent psychological development. Parents are expected to recognize the potential threats of over-protection and adjust their educational style to promote their children's self-development and psychological health.

Keywords: Over-protection; self - exploration; rebellious behavior

1 Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage in a child's individual development, in which self-exploration and rebellious behavior are particularly critical. Self-exploration enables adolescents to Internalize their knowledge of themselves, clarify their values, life goals, and social orientation, and then build a solid self-identity and self-confidence, thus laying a solid foundation for independent living in the future. At the same time, as a way for adolescents to express themselves, pursue independence, and resist authority, rebellious behavior helps to cultivate their critical thinking and innovation ability and enables them to better adapt to the complex and changing social environment. Therefore, parents and educators should fully understand and support these behaviors to promote the overall healthy development of children. However, in today's society, the phenomenon of over-protection by parents is prevalent, which has far-reaching effects on the development of adolescent children, not only restricting their self-exploration and weakening their independence but even triggering mental health problems.

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This study adopts a case study approach, aiming at exploring in depth the specific impact of parental over-protection on adolescent children's self-exploration and rebellious behavior. By selecting representative cases, we will analyze in depth the specific manifestations of overprotective behaviors, their effects on children, and the psychological mechanisms behind them, with the hope of providing parents and educators with more specific and targeted guidance, helping them to more accurately understand the psychological changes and behavioral characteristics of their children's adolescence and learn to adjust their education methods to promote their children's self-development and psychological health.

2 Overview of Research

2.1 Definition and Manifestations of Parental Over-Protection

Conceptual Definition

Over-parenting refers to over-intervention by parents and control over a child's behavior, decision-making and daily life, beyond the child's own capacity and developmental needs. Over-parenting is seen as an unhealthy form of parenting that may hinder a child's psychological growth, social adaptation and development of autonomy.

What is colloquially referred to as "helicopter parenting" is a form of overparenting in which parents apply overly involved and developmentally inappropriate tactics to their children who are otherwise able to assume adult responsibilities and autonomy. Overparenting is hypothesized to be associated with dysfunctional family processes and negative child outcomes.¹ It has also been found that overparenting occurs in a family content marked by criticism, less positive attitudes between parent and child, and conditional parental regard.² Overprotection is defined as overprotective, anxious parenting with a tendency for control attempts.³

2.2 Manifestations of Parental Over-Protection

Personal Attendant

Close protection is in fact a behavioral limitation on the part of the parent, who is always aware of the child's trajectory and cares about the child's every move. Parental protection makes it impossible for the child to anticipate whether he or she will be chastised and punished or praised and encouraged for his or her reaction to something new and different. A close-knit type that never leaves the child alone. A close-knit type who never lets the child leave him or her. The child is always taken care of like a baby. The child becomes almost the center of the family, and the parents are afraid that the child will freeze, starve, get tired or hurt, and do everything for the child, spoiling him or her.⁴

Avoiding too Much Damage

"Individual parents exert direct and complete control over their children, implement excessive safety measures in their activity areas, and limit their freedom of movement.

They consistently prohibit outdoor activities and closely monitor their children even when they are out, striving to confine them within a safe range of activities and provide secure equipment and toys. Some parents emphasize obedience and issue numerous instructions and restrictions, imposing various rules that interfere with the child's autonomy. Children's natural inclination for exploration is often stifled by phrases such as "you can't do this" or "you can't do that", leading to varying degrees of inhibition in their curiosity and desire for discovery. ⁵

Over-Indulgence Leads to A Lack of Autonomy in Children

According to Cai(2021), "Parental over-protection deprives young children of their autonomy, making them more likely to become dependent and lack social skills, and prone to internalize behavioral problems. ⁶Lin & Lin (2024) also mentioned: "In family education, some parents over intervene in their children's learning and interpersonal communication, worried that their children will have puppy love, worried that he will learn bad with his peers, and then interfere with children and peers." They devote most of their time and energy to their children and "plan their lives" for them. In the name of "I am for you" and "love", children who are overprotected lose their independence, responsibility and self-confidence."⁷

2.3 Characteristics of Self-Exploration in Youth

"Self-exploration refers to how well one knows oneself, whether it is a deep understanding or a shallow understanding, i.e., the degree of 'self-knowledge'.⁸ The process of self-discovery in adolescence is a journey of challenge and growth. They begin to think deeply about their own identity, values, interests and abilities, and try to find their place in the world. It is a critical stage when children move from dependence to independence and from ambiguity to clarity. The characteristics of adolescent self-exploration are listed below:

Awakening and Enhancement of Self-Awareness

Adolescence is a critical period in which a child's sense of self awareness and growth. Children begin to pay more attention to their inner world and think about their values, beliefs, interests and abilities. They begin to realize the differences between themselves and others and try to find their place in society. According to Erikson, "On the one hand, adolescents in this period are searching for sameness, and on the other hand, they are seeking the uniqueness of their individual selves. Therefore, adolescents in this period are prone to self-identity confusion, confusion and disorientation about the self and the future. ⁹

Construction of Identity and Recognition

Adolescents are also trying to construct their own identity and recognition. They begin to think about who they are, what they want to be, and how they relate to others. This includes identifying and exploring gender, culture, social groups, and more.

"Students are prone to two unbalanced tendencies in the development of objectivity in the three factors of self-knowledge, self-experience and self-control, namely, over-estimation of the self and underestimation of the self. There is a clear tendency to over-estimate the self in self-knowledge and self-control, and a clear tendency to underestimate the self in self-experience. Too high or too low self-evaluation often leads to the individual self-consciousness establishment process of excessive pretentious or excessive inferiority of the two major psychological defects, is to hinder the formation of a good self-consciousness of the psychological obstacles."¹⁰

Exploration of Self-Worth

Children begin to pay more attention to their own worth, trying to determine their value in the family, school and community. They may explore their worth by engaging in a variety of activities and experimenting with different roles and relationships.

"Adolescent children, their self-perception is related to their parents' attitudes, and the more care and love they invest in their children, the more fully their children's self-perception will develop."¹¹

Self-Challenge and Trial and Error

Adolescence is also a time of self-challenge and trial and error for children. They may try out new behaviors, decisions and relationships to test their abilities and boundaries. This process of trial and error helps them understand their limitations and potential.

"In the process of unification of the self, the individual needs to complete the choice of a social occupation, the formation of personal life goals and the establishment of outlook on life, to learn to adapt to reality and to draw on the strengths of growth, but also to gradually detach himself from the relationship of dependence on others, to link relevant experiences and information, and to form an appropriate system of knowledge and regulation of himself, which is a belief system of thoughts and feelings integrating several aspects of his physical self, social self and psychological self. A system of beliefs about one's thoughts and feelings that integrates aspects of one's physical, social, and psychological selves."⁹

2.4 The Impact of Parental Over-Protection on the Rebellious Behavior of Adolescent Children

Rebelliousness is a kind of psychological state and tendency with strong antagonistic colors that arises when the subject's psychological needs are contrary to the objective psychological environment. It is an inevitable concomitant phenomenon in the process of children's development, is a sign of the physical development of junior high school students and "self-consciousness" budding. With the accumulation of knowledge, the insight growth, the influence of peers, junior high school students desire for autonomy, the demand for independent words and deeds of the desire to significantly enhance, once someone against their will, or does not support their ideas, it is easy to produce

resistance to psychological or rebellious behavior. Normal rebelliousness is a manifestation of junior high school students' demand for self-reliance and autonomy, while excessive rebelliousness is not conducive to children's physical and mental health, and can easily lead to obstinacy, anxiety, suspicion, prejudice and hostility towards others, which is not conducive to the development of interpersonal relationships.

In their study, Liu Yumin et al. (2023) found that overprotective and negative parenting styles are accompanied by more interference, punishment, and denial, resulting in the lack of a safe environment for children to fully develop positive psychological qualities. Moreover, overprotective and interfering parents can restrict children's behavior, resulting in poor self-efficacy, lack of self-confidence and dependence, and other undesirable personality traits.¹² A study by Han Mei et al. (2016) revealed that parents try to avoid using negative parenting styles, such as over-interference and over-protection, in raising and disciplining their children.¹³ Parents' overly interfering and overprotective parenting styles in educating and disciplining their children can make adolescents feel that they are regarded as individuals who cannot solve problems independently, which conflicts with their adolescent psychology of longing for respect and independence, which in turn may lead to rebellious behaviors. Therefore, parents should respect the rights of adolescents, safeguard their self-esteem, give them more room for autonomy, and avoid excessive constraints.

Zhong Qiuyang (2022) found that parenting styles have a significant effect on children's behavior and psychology. "Positive and positive parenting styles generally have a positive impact on children's behavior and psychology, while negative and negative parenting styles generally have a negative impact on children's behavior and psychology."¹⁴ Restricting a child's opportunities for free growth may trigger resistance and rebellion within the child. On the contrary, emotional warmth between parent and child and the child's independence and freedom of thought can help to increase identification with and trust in the parent and reduce the development of rebelliousness.

3 Case Studies

3.1 Parental Over-Protection and Adolescent Self-Destruction

Case Background

In 1998, Mr and Mrs Zhang Changgen, who worked at the Jiangnan Oilfield Mining Machinery Research Institute, lost their only son, Zhang Lei. A few years later, Mr and Mrs Zhang Changgen conceived a new life, through which they tried to fill the void of losing their only son. However, due to their sad memories of the past, they were extraordinarily precious and strict with the new life. They do not allow the child to play and stay outside, and even after the child goes to high school, the couple stays with the child, severely limiting the child's friendships and activities. They tried to protect their child in this way to avoid the tragedy repeats itself again. However, this over-protection brought great psychological pressure to the child. Just the night before the start of his senior year of high school, the child chose to jump off a building to end his life at the age of 17.

Theoretical Framework

According to Freud, experiences in childhood have a significant impact on the personality formation and psychological development of an individual. Erikson emphasize adolescence as a critical period for establishing self-identity and self-worth. At this stage, adolescents need to explore and establish their identity through interaction with peers and participation in social activities. However, parental over-protection deprives children of this important opportunity for self-exploration, resulting in their inability to develop a healthy sense of self-knowledge and self-worth. Baumrind classifies parenting styles into four types: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful. In the case, Mr and Mrs Zhang Changgen's parenting style is clearly inclined to the authoritarian type, i.e., strictly controlling and supervising the child. This type of parenting leads to psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, and even triggers self-destructive behavior in the child.

Manifestations of Parental Over-Protection

The manifestations of parental over-protection include: (1) daily life intervention: parents intervene excessively in the adolescent's daily life, such as restricting going out, supervising studies, etc.; (2) decision-making control: parents control the adolescent's decision-making excessively, such as choosing schools, extracurricular activities, and friends. (3) Emotional dependence: Parents establish excessive emotional dependence with their adolescents and find it difficult to tolerate their adolescents' independence and growth.

After losing their only son, Zhang Lei, Mr and Mrs Zhang Changgen experienced great grief and trauma. Feeling self-reproach, helplessness and despair, they tried to fill the void inside by conceiving a new life. However, the new life did not completely heal their hurt, but instead made them cherish and worry even more. Fearing the loss of their child again, they choose to protect their child by being overprotective. Worried and disturbed by their child's every action, they try to ensure their child's safety through strict control and restriction. However, this controlling and worrying mood may also escalate and eventually evolve into deprivation of the child's freedom and oppression of the mind.

Psychological Implications of Impeded Self-Exploration

The period from 12 to 18 years of age is critical period of personality development. The task at this stage is to establish "self-identity" and prevent "identity confusion". Individuals who have established "self-identity" tend to be able to definitely different people's evaluations of themselves and become sound human beings. "Confusion of identity" is the opposite of "self-identity". The child does not know "who I am", does not recognize his/her own personality, relies on others' opinions of him/her, is confused about himself/herself, and is maladjusted to life. Parental over-protection deprives the child of the opportunity for self-exploration. The child longs for freedom, interaction with peers, and exploration of the outside world, but these desires are denied by the parents one by one. Under such psychological pressure, the child gradually develops

depressive tendencies, loses confidence in the future, and eventually chooses to free himself by self-destruction.

Conclusions and Implications

Overprotective behavior on the part of parents not only fails to ensure the healthy growth of adolescents but also accelerates the process of their self-destruction. In the process of family education, parents should fully respect the autonomy of adolescents and give them an appropriate degree of freedom and space for exploration, to fully promote their growth. This case first highlights the central position of family education in the development of adolescents. Parents are not only the teachers of their children's enlightenment, but also the key force in shaping their character, values, and behavioral patterns. Zhang Changgen and his wife's behavior due to over-protection reflects their attempt to avoid further trauma by strictly controlling their newborn child in the face of the loss of their son. However, this type of education ignored the child's inner needs and mental health, which ultimately led to the tragedy. Parents should be acutely aware of their responsibility in family education and should care not only for their children's material needs but also for their psychological and emotional needs. They need to learn to find a balance between protection and fostering autonomy, allowing their children to explore and develop freely in a safe environment.

3.2 Over-Protection and Loss of Adolescent Independence

Case Background

Yang Suo, known as "The laziest man in China", has a life trajectory that demonstrates how over-protection can lead to a complete loss of individual independence. As he grew up, his parents were overprotective of him, and even when he was eight years old, they still carried him on a stretcher when he went out, preventing him from walking on his own. As a result of this coddling, Yang Suo failed to acquire basic life skills and could not solve problems independently. After his parents passed away, Yang Suo was unable to live independently and eventually starved to death at home.

Theoretical Framework

Attachment theory states that the attachment relationship that develops between an individual and his or her primary caregiver has a profound effect on his or her growth and personality development. In a healthy attachment relationship, children develop a sense of trust and security with their parents while learning to explore and learn independently. However, when parents are overprotective and hinder the development of independence, a child's attachment relationship may become distorted and pathological.

In Yang Suo's case, his parents' over-protection and spoiling of him led to the development of an unhealthy attachment pattern. He was overly dependent on his parents and had no opportunity to learn independent living skills. This dependence is not only manifested in his material life but also in his psychological side. He lacked the self-confidence and autonomy to make decisions or solve problems independently. When

his parents passed away, he lost the object of his dependence and was unable to adapt to independent living, which eventually led to tragedy.

Psychological Implications of Loss of Independence

Independence is the ability and trait of an individual to make decisions and act autonomously, without dependence on others, as demonstrated in thought, action and life. It involves an individual's ability to be autonomous and self-managed at multiple levels, including but not limited to decision-making, problem-solving, emotional processing, and life skills. A person with independence is often able to find solutions to problems and challenges on his or her own, rather than relying excessively on others.

Yang Suo is a typical case of a person who has lost his independence due to over-indulgence by his parents. From an early age, his parents were overprotective of him and took care of almost all of his daily chores, which resulted in Yang Suo having little opportunity for independent decision-making and action as he grew up. When his parents passed away, Yang Suo was completely unable to adapt to independent living and eventually went on a path of self-destruction. In Yang Suo's case, we see that over-protection led to a complete loss of his independence. This loss is reflected not only in his daily living skills but also in his psychological and social functioning. He is unable to live independently or establish healthy interpersonal relationships with others.

Conclusions and Implications

The doting mentality of Yang Suo's parents is not an isolated case; it reflects the general mentality of some parents who are overprotective of their children. This mentality often stems from excessive worry and reluctance to give up on their children, as well as excessive intervention in their children's future lives. However, not only does this doting mentality fail to help their children grow up, but it also leads to their lack of self-confidence and dependence, making it difficult for them to adapt to the competition and challenges of society. Apart from material care, parents should also pay attention to their children's mental health and emotional needs. The excessive content of material is no substitute for emotional support and companionship. Parents should establish a good communication mechanism with their children, understand their inner world, and give them sufficient care and support.

4 Discussion

4.1 The Deep-Rooted Effects of Over-Protection on Adolescent Children's Self-Exploration and Rebellious Behavior

Zhang Lei's tragedy triggered deep thoughts, and his family environment and education style became the key to the problem. Due to the death of their only son, Mr and Mrs Zhang Changgen were over-protective and restrictive towards their new child, causing immense psychological pressure. Strict control over their lives and no deviation in their emotions deprived their children of the opportunity for self-exploration and independence, leading to inner depression and depression. Adolescence is a stage of self-

awareness and the pursuit of independence, but an over-protective family environment prevents children from experiencing the satisfaction of self-fulfillment and the sense of achievement that comes with independence. The child may feel bound and unable to express himself freely, and long-term repression may lead to psychological problems or even rebellious behavior. Zhang Lei's jumping from the building is an extreme manifestation of long-term repression and rebelliousness.

The case of Yang Suo visualizes the consequences of over-protection leading to a loss of independence. Yang Suo was deprived of the opportunity to learn basic life skills by his overprotective parents, thus making him unable to solve problems independently. After his parents passed away, Yang Suo was unable to live independently and became a beggar, highlighting the failure of family education.

Both cases reveal that parental over-protection hinders children's growth. Children need the freedom to explore space to develop self-identity and problem-solving skills. Parental over-intervention not only deprives children of the opportunity to grow but also triggers rebelliousness and psychological problems. Therefore, parents should let go of their children to develop their independence and the ability to solve the problem.

4.2 Promoting Self-Exploration and Healthy Development of Adolescent Children Through Changes in Educational Methods

Adolescence is a period of significant changes in children's psychological, physiological, and social roles, as well as a critical period for their self-exploration and the formation of an independent personality. At this stage, parents and educators should adjust their educational approach to promote children's self-exploration and healthy development.

Firstly, parents should give their children an appropriate degree of freedom, allowing them to choose their hobbies and interests, participate in social activities, and so on, and provide them with the necessary support and guidance. Secondly, parents and educators should focus on cultivating children's independent thinking ability. In daily life, children can be guided to participate in family decision-making, so that they can learn to think, analyze and solve problems independently. At the same time, they should respect their children's opinions and ideas, and encourage them to put forward their views and suggestions, to cultivate their self-confidence and ability to express themselves. In addition, parents and educators should focus on emotional communication with their children, communicate with them frequently, understand their needs and confusion, and give positive feedback and suggestions. At the same time, they should also pay attention to their children's emotional changes, provide timely comfort and support, and help them establish a healthy mechanism for emotional expression and regulation.

To sum up, parents and educators should adjust their educational approach by giving children an appropriate degree of freedom, fostering independent thinking, focusing on emotional communication, and providing diversified educational resources and environments, to promote the self-exploration and healthy development of adolescent children. Such an educational approach will not only help children develop independent, confident, and responsible personality traits but also lay a solid foundation for their future development.

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