

Volume 9, n 3, 2021

Articles

Overparenting hurts me: how does it affect offspring psychological outcomes?

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Abstract

This review focuses on a peculiar typology of parenting characterized by overprotection, overinvolvement, overcontrol and an excess of entanglement; academic literature refers to this parenting style with the term overparenting or helicopter parenting. An in-depth description of overparenting constitutes the first part of this review. The second part of this review reports empirical evidence regarding the effects of overparenting on offspring psychological outcomes with particular regard to internalizing and externalizing disorders, coping strategies and dysfunctional personality traits. Depression and anxiety symptoms are frequently exhibited in offspring exposed to overparenting, as well as negative affectivity and maladaptive coping. Furthermore, adolescents and adults with overparenting parents seem to have an increased likelihood of exhibiting narcissistic pathological traits.

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Keywords:

Overparenting; Helicopter parenting; Externalizing symptoms; Internalizing symptoms; Narcissism.

Received: 28 May 2021

Accepted: 21 October 2021

Published: 30 December 2021

Citation: Miano, P., Palumbo, A. (2021). Overparenting hurts me: how does it affect offspring psychological outcomes? *Mediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.13129/2282-1619/mjcp-3081>

1. Introduction

Overparenting, or helicopter parenting, is a distinct parental style characterized by an extreme focalization on parental care behaviours, by overprotective and intrusive practices (Starcher & Child, 2019) and by an attitude that hinders the offspring's autonomy (Cui et al., 2019a; Dumont, 2019; Gagnon et al., 2019; Leung & Shek, 2019; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2013). An overparenting style is associated with maladaptive developmental outcomes (Kwon et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2020; Nelson, 2010; Schiffrin et al., 2014) such as depression (Reilly & Semkowska, 2018), anxiety (Leung, 2020), maladaptive coping strategies (Onderweller et al.,

2014) and narcissistic traits (Segrin et al., 2013a). Overparenting is defined by high levels of parental warmth, support, and involvement (Darlow et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2018; Segrin et al., 2013b), by high levels of parental control (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), responsiveness, and a tendency to replace children in facing their difficulties and dealing with their problems (Leung & Shek, 2019; Locke et al., 2012).

In this review our aim was to analyse the effects of overparenting practices on offspring developmental outcomes and psychological well-being, with particular regard to internalizing and externalizing symptoms, coping skills, dependency and pathological narcissism.

Overparenting implies family relationships in which parents project their own desires onto their children so that parents' aims are confused with their children's aims (Segrin et al., 2013a). Families characterized by an overparenting style exhibit difficulties in differentiation processes (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Each member of the family seems to be unable to meet both needs for closeness and support, on one hand, and needs for autonomy and independence, on the other hand (Cui et al., 2019a; Gagnon et al., 2019; Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Van Schie et al., 2020).

Various studies on family systems have underlined that the quality of family relationships affects the odds of showing psychopathological symptoms (McCleod et al., 2007; Minuchin, 1975; Pellerone et al., 2017; Repetti et al., 2002; Schwartz et al., 2011; Yap et al., 2014). Overparenting has been shown to be associated with internalized problems, including anxiety and depression (Affrunti & Ginsberg, 2012; Cui et al., 2019b; Darlow et al., 2017; Leung, 2020; Perez et al., 2019; Schiffrin et al., 2014); deficits in self-development, self-efficacy and self-regulation, and in problem solving and in decision making (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; Darlow et al., 2017; Givertz & Segrin, 2012; Hong & Cui, 2019; Leung et al., 2018; Love et al., 2019); maladaptive and ineffective coping strategies (Power, 2004; Smith et al., 2006; Wolfrad et al., 2003); lack of coping skills and high levels of stress (Sideris & Kafetsios, 2008); social anxiety and a relational attitude based on an external locus of control (Spokas & Heimberg, 2008); difficulties in social adaptation during transition phases, with particular regard to academic achievement (Hong & Cui, 2019; Howard et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Love et al., 2019); dysfunctional personality traits (Cramer, 2015; Horton et al., 2006; Winner & Nicholson, 2018). With regard to externalizing symptoms, an association was found between overparenting and hostility, violent behaviours, substance abuse (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Cui et al., 2018; Grolnick et al., 2000); eating (Taborelli et al., 2013) and sleep disorders (Brand et al., 2009; Shibata et al., 2016).

Overinvolvement is the major characteristic of an overparenting style: parents are prone to do everything themselves in order to assure their children's psychological well-being and, as a consequence, they have intrusive behaviours that lead to entangled family relationships (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Dumont, 2019; Garst et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Munich & Munich, 2009; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013b). Parental overinvolvement is associated with maladaptive outcomes in their offspring (Dumont, 2019; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Jiao & Segrin, 2020; Kwon et al., 2017; Nelson, 2010; Pistella et al., 2020): a lack in the ability to face stressful life events (Möller et al., 2014), a greater vulnerability to develop both internalized symptoms (Bayer et al., 2006; LeMoine & Buchanan, 2011; Muris et al., 2003; Reilly & Semkowska, 2018; Schiffrin et al., 2014) and externalizing symptoms (Bizzi & Pace, 2019; Grolnick et al., 2000; Fischer et al., 2007).

Looking for overparenting precursors, Segrin et al. (2013b) and other studies (Gagnon, 2019; Jiao & Segrin, 2020) have posited that high levels of parental anxiety are related to overparenting. High levels of parent involvement seem to be positively associated with anxious personality traits in parents, so they behave in an apprehensive way with regard to their children's life choices (Clarke et al., 2019; Darlow et al., 2017; Kins et al., 2012): overparenting parents perceive their children as vulnerable, exposed to danger, and highly in need of protection (Nelson, 2010). Moreover, a feeling of regret about parents' own life could be seen as an indirect precursor of overparenting: parental regret produces parental anxiety for their children (Segrin et al., 2013b). Sometimes a middle-aged parent realizes that he or she has lost the opportunity to reach his/her objectives; this failure to achieve specific significant goals and the consequent loss of motivation produces anxiety symptoms that, in turn, they deal with by projecting their objectives onto their offspring (Beike et al., 2009).

In doing so, their children's success becomes the projection of their own achievements and are used as defensive strategies to mitigate their own regrets and anxiety. Every objective achieved by the offspring works as a source of personal satisfaction for their parents (Munich & Munich, 2009; Scharf & Rousseau, 2017). This parental attitude of being overinvolved and overprotective as well as a high level of parental monitoring are associated with separation anxiety symptoms and perceived extreme control as soon as the children grow up (Dumont, 2019; Gagnon & Garst, 2018; Kins et al., 2012). Taylor and Alden (2006) also analysed the association between overprotection and a higher vulnerability to social phobia in offspring. Furthermore, overparenting is expressed through a tendency to direct their children (Segrin et al., 2012) and to control them. Even if this controlling behaviour cannot be recognized as an abusive or violent

behaviour, it has detrimental effects on offspring (Darlow et al., 2017; Gagnon, 2019; Leung, 2020; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), and these include anxiety symptoms (Leung, 2020; Niditch & Varela, 2012; Perez et al., 2019; Reitman & Asseff, 2010), maladaptive coping strategies, a dysfunctional pattern of defence mechanisms (Creveling et al., 2010), and low levels of perceived self-efficacy (Affrunti & Ginsberg, 2012; Darlow et al., 2017).

It should be noted that in overparenting some adaptive and effective practices are taken to the extreme and became maladaptive: it seems that parental involvement in children's lives is positive until it reaches such a high level that it turns into intrusive overinvolvement. As long as parents' involvement is moderate it appears to foster their children's development, to promote children's emotional and behavioural regulation (Segrin & Flora, 2019; Shields et al., 1994; Wong et al., 2018), and social skills (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989) such as, especially during adolescence, the ability to establish positive peer relationships and to behave prosaically (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Garst et al., 2019).

2. Method

Articles included in this review were identified through a search on Scopus. Moreover, a manual search was conducted by examining bibliographies and using Google Scholar and PubMed. The following keywords were used to identify articles to be included in the review: Overparenting, Helicopter Parenting, Parental Overprotection, overparenting AND children's outcomes, overparenting AND pathological narcissism and overparenting AND coping skills. The review included retrospective and research studies, published between 1989 and 28 February 2021, which satisfy the following inclusion criteria: 1) the study focused on overparenting practises characterized by overprotection and/or by overinvolvement; 2) the study analysed the effects of overprotective and/or overinvolved parenting on offspring psychological outcomes. We screened 787 records from the initial search and 253 articles were selected for full-text retrieval. After screening the full-text articles, a total of 99 empirical and theoretical studies were included in this review (and marked with an asterisk in the reference list); 154 articles were excluded because at least one of the inclusion criteria was not satisfied. Articles included in this review (marked with an asterisk in the reference list) focus on *a*) the association between the quality of parenting and development outcomes in offspring; *b*) the association between permissive and overprotective parenting and psychophysical well-being in offspring; *c*) the association between overparenting and both internalizing and externalizing symptoms in offspring.

3. Results

3.1 Overparenting and offspring psychological outcomes

Even if some authors (Fingerman et al., 2012; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) have pointed out that overparenting is positively associated with positive outcomes including emotional well-being, the belief that one has been loved and supported, and a happy memory of one's childhood and, as a result, a sense of satisfaction with one's adult life, there is broad consensus that overparenting practices are positively associated with negative outcomes in offspring (Cui et al., 2019a; Gagnon, 2019; Kouros et al., 2017; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Perez et al., 2019; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012; Yilmaz, 2020).

Various authors (Affrunti & Ginsberg, 2012; Hong & Cui, 2019; Love et al., 2019; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Reed et al., 2016; Schiffrin et al., 2013; Segrin et al., 2013a) have highlighted that despite parents' best intentions, overparenting decreases the odds that offspring reach parents' expectation and show positive development outcomes, and furthermore, increases the odds that offspring exhibit psychological symptoms and a low level of adjustment during adolescence and adult life (Cui et al., 2019b; Hong, 2019; Kouros et al., 2017; Leung & Busiol, 2016; Love et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2016; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

Overparenting practices, such as overprotective and intrusive parenting, are positively associated with the lack in offspring of adjustment skills and intrapsychic processes that support them (Kouros et al., 2017; Rapee, 2009; Reed et al., 2016; Thomasgard, 1998; Zheng et al., 2019). Moreover, overparenting is related with dysfunctional personality traits in offspring (Fletcher et al., 2020; Locke et al., 2012; Segrin et al., 2013a; Van Schie et al., 2020), with dysfunctional defensive patterns, and with maladaptive coping strategies (Onderweller et al., 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

Functional and dysfunctional parenting during childhood have an influence on the development of internalizing symptoms, so that they could respectively be considered as a protective or a risk factor for anxiety disorders (Dadds & Barrett, 2001; Fox et al., 2005; Rapee, 2009). Overall, overparenting is correlated with internalizing and externalizing symptoms in offspring.

3.1.1 Overparenting and offspring internalizing symptoms

With regard to internalizing symptoms, overparenting increases the likelihood that symptoms of depression and anxiety will arise. Offspring exposed to dysfunctional parenting show negative affectivity, generalized fear, and concern about others' judgement (McLeod et al., 2007). Anxiety

symptoms compromise development outcomes in various domains of psychological functioning and lead to difficulties in social adjustment (Asselmann et al., 2018; de Lijster et al., 2017).

Anxiety symptoms are related with dysfunctional parenting and, more specifically, with the dimension of acceptance and rejection, and with high levels of parental control and protection in opposition to autonomy granting (Cui et al., 2019a; Gagnon et al., 2019; McLeod et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2003). Overparenting leads offspring to develop a cognitive style characterized by an external locus of control and offspring will tend to evaluate their successes and failures as being determined by external factors (Ingram & Ritter, 2000; Taylor & Alden, 2006). They perceive feelings of powerlessness and absence of control due to their parents' directive and controlling behaviours (Gagnon & Garst, 2018; Leung, 2020; Scharf & Rousseau, 2017; Spokas & Heimberg, 2009).

During adolescence, in addition to anxiety symptoms, experiences of depersonalization in offspring seem to be related to parenting practices characterized by an excess of pushing to succeed, directionality, and parental control (Gagnon & Garst, 2018; Wolfradt et al., 2003). Furthermore, social anxiety can be recognized in the adult offspring of overparenting parents. More broadly, Le Moyne and Buchanan (2011) posited that children raised with overparenting practices are more vulnerable to depression and tend to be less resilient.

With regard to young adults and adults who have grown up with overprotective parents, Spokas and Heimberg (2009) underlined that this parenting style increases negative reactions to social situations in adult offspring, such as an extreme preoccupation with being rejected or criticized, which leads them to avoid social situations. Overparenting appears to be associated with psychological maladjustment, with a high vulnerability to psychological disorders such as anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms, and poor life satisfaction (Cui et al., 2019a; Hong & Cui, 2019; Kelly et al., 2017; Leung, 2020). Various studies have highlighted that overparenting is positively associated with internalizing symptoms, and specifically with anxiety and depressive symptoms that require medication (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011), with frustrated needs for autonomy and, in turn, with a low level of perceived satisfaction about their life (Kelly et al., 2017; Pistella et al., 2020; Schiffrin et al., 2014). Depression in adulthood seems to be related with previous exposition to overparenting, particularly with regard to overprotection, intrusiveness, and parental control (Reilly & Semkowska, 2018).

The association between parenting, with particular reference to overparenting practices, and the psychological well-being of offspring could be moderated by gender difference (Barton &

Kirtley, 2012; Gagnon & Garst, 2019; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2010; Kouros et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2020; Mandara & Pikes, 2008), especially before early adulthood (Bumpus et al., 2001; Davies & Lindsay, 2001; Hill & Lynch, 1983; Lanza et al., 2012; Mandara & Pikes, 2008). A first finding is that women exposed to dysfunctional parenting are twice as likely to develop anxiety and depression symptoms (Hankin et al., 1998), so parenting seems to be a stronger predictor for women than for men.

According to the gender intensification hypothesis (Hill & Lynch, 1983), the construction of gender roles is affected by offspring gender, and therefore family processes and parenting could influence gender roles differently in offspring. Parents could have significant impact in the construction of stereotypical gender roles and may tend to promote different elements in their male and female children: parents tend to foster independency, autonomy, and assertiveness in boys, while girls are encouraged to take care of others and to assume an interpersonal perspective (Davies & Lindsay, 2001; Hills & Lynch, 1983). It should be noted that this commitment to caring for others enhances individual vulnerability within dysfunctional families, such as within families with overparenting parents (Kourus et al., 2017).

A crucial difference in parenting practices directed to female and male offspring concerns the two dimensions of psychological control and autonomy: compared to females, males are less controlled and obtain more autonomy (Bumpus et al., 2001; Lanza et al., 2012; Mandara & Pikes, 2008); Kourus et al. (2017) have underlined that this difference in parenting affects offspring psychophysical well-being and adjustment skills. In other words, promoting autonomy and independence is a protective factor against depression and anxiety, both in male and female offspring (Bumpus et al., 2001; Dowdy & Kliewer, 1998; Gaylord-Harden et al., 2010; Lanza et al., 2012). Moreover, overparenting seems to produce worse results in females, compared to males, because it also damages coping strategies in offspring and reduces their ability to cope with stressful events (Kourus et al., 2017).

Dysfunctional maternal parenting, too, seems to be associated with internalizing symptoms; more specifically, authoritarian maternal parenting characterized by high control and low support appears to be related to a higher level of anxiety, while permissive maternal parenting characterized by low control and mild support results in an increased vulnerability to depressive symptoms and increased stress. A gender difference can also be identified in these correlations, as a study by Barton and Kirtley (2012) has demonstrated that a significant association can be found only in female offspring. Likewise, Gaylord-Harden et al. (2010) have specified that perceived low maternal control appears to be linked to dysfunctional coping strategies only in

female offspring. Mandara and Pikes (2008) have proposed that female offspring, compared to male offspring, are more vulnerable to negative effects of overparenting because they tend to pay more attention to non-verbal and emotional signals coming from parents. Female offspring tend to interpret overparenting practices as a result of a negative evaluation of themselves and of their coping and adjustment abilities, so that in turn, overparenting can be associated with low self-esteem and a negative psychological state.

3.1.2 Overparenting and offspring externalizing symptoms

Overparenting practices are also associated with externalizing disorders in offspring, especially substance dependence and aggressive and oppositional behaviours.

A study by Grolnick et al. (2000) indicated that overinvolvement and intrusiveness in parenting, especially maternal parenting, are related with externalizing symptoms, including resorting to acting out. More recently, Nelson (2015) and Cui et al. (2019a) underlined the association between overparenting and a greater vulnerability to substance abuse in offspring during the transition from adolescence to adulthood; furthermore, overparenting was shown to be associated with a severe lack of autoregulatory ability and thus with alcohol abuse (Cui et al., 2019; Perez et al., 2021).

Both parenting style and the quality of the parent-child relationship affect the development of self-efficacy skills in offspring (Darlow et al., 2017; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Locke et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2016; Segrin et al., 2012). Self-efficacy skills are linked to competence (Reed et al., 2016), which in turn are correlated to good levels of psychophysical well-being (Fortier et al., 2007; Liem et al., 2010; Martinek, 2012; Sweet et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2005), to high levels of motivation (Schwarzer & Fuchs, 1996), to more adaptive coping strategies (Thoits, 2010) and, in general, to better adjustment to social relations in adulthood (Reed et al., 2016; Zambianchi & Ricci Bitti, 2014).

Family relationships characterized by positive affects, support, appropriate rules and limits lead offspring to a functional development of self and also to higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Darlow et al., 2017; Liem et al., 2010). On the contrary, parenting conducts based on a lack of discipline (Love & Thomas, 2014), high levels of parental control (Gagnon & Garst, 2018; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Leung & Shek, 2017; Reed et al., 2016), and a tendency to overprotection and directionality (Leung & Busiol, 2016; Leung & Shek, 2019; Odenweller et al., 2014) increase the odds of exhibiting low levels of self-efficacy that, as a consequence, diminish capacity of adjustment. Furthermore, low levels of self-efficacy negatively affect personal growth in offspring, as well as the ability to be socially and professionally well adjusted,

to accept oneself, and to plan one's own future (Leung & Shek, 2017; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Reed et al., 2016; Segrin et al., 2013a).

The impact of parenting on psychological functioning and adjustment skills in offspring was investigated by various authors (Burke et al., 2018; Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Segrin et al., 2013b). Overparenting seems to be associated with difficulties in establishing attachment relationships with peers: young adults who have evaluated their parents as intrusive tend to show a lack of self-efficacy, a lack of confidence in their own ability to succeed at a task and in being accepted by their peers (Van Ingen et al., 2015). Likewise, Reed et al. (2016) posited that overparenting could undermine in offspring the development of perceived self-efficacy, which could lead to low adjustment in educational and academic contexts, to experience failures, to loss of motivation, and the development of a negative tendency to waive (Darlow et al., 2017; Ganaprasasam et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2019; Schiffrin & Liss, 2017; Tam & Chan, 2009).

Other studies have analysed the association between overparenting and specific symptomatology in offspring from infancy to adult life (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Reitman & Asseff, 2010; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013a). Other researchers have investigated development outcomes in offspring and have revealed that overparenting is associated with academic difficulties (Burke et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2019; Locke et al., 2016; Love et al., 2019). Overprotection could be considered a crucial factor in developing eating disorders in offspring, especially in females (Taborelli et al., 2006), just as overprotective behaviours seem to be associated with dysfunctional sleep rhythms in offspring during adulthood (Shibata et al., 2016).

Overall, this review underlines two major offspring symptomological outcomes related to overparenting: on one hand, overparenting is associated with dysfunctional coping strategies in offspring and on the other hand, dysfunctional parenting could lead to pathological narcissism in offspring (Horton et al., 2006; Leung & Shek, 2017; Locke et al., 2012; Otway & Vignoles, 2006; Segrin et al., 2013a; Van Schie et al., 2020). The relation between these two key variables will be discussed below.

3.2 Parenting practices and coping: does overparenting affect coping skills?

Various studies have shown that parenting practices are related to coping skills in offspring (Fox et al., 2005; Power, 2004; Segrin et al., 2013; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Smith et al., 2006; Wolfradt et al., 2003). The concept of coping refers to self-regulation processes that individuals use to cope with stressful events (Compas, 1987; Compas et al., 2001; Fabes &

Eisenberg, 1997; Gianino & Tronick, 1998). Coping mechanisms involve emotional experience, physiological reactions, motor behaviours, attention, and cognition associated to adjustment strategies (Compas et al., 2001; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Furthermore, coping skills seem to be correlated to intrapsychic processes, including behavioural and emotional self-regulation (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Kopp, 1989; Lausi et al., 2020; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999), attention (Wilson & Gottman, 1996), self-cohesion, and resiliency (Block & Block, 1980).

The family system is the main relational context in which individuals learn to cope with stress (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); it is within the parent-children relation that offspring develop their coping strategies (Dusek & Danko, 1994; Kliewer et al., 1994; Sandler et al., 1997). Parents teach their children to evaluate stressful events, to estimate if they are harmful or easy to handle, and to react to them (Power, 2004; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Parents' coping skills serve as a model to offspring to develop their own strategies; in particular, parents' emotional reactions have a crucial role in structuring offspring coping strategies (Power, 2004; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Adequate levels of parental warmth, support, acceptance, family cohesion, and clear rules facilitate the development of positive coping strategies in offspring (Brook et al., 2002; McKernon, 2001), including negotiation (Parkin & Kuczynski, 2012; Skinner & Edge, 2002) and accommodative strategies (Morling & Evered, 2006).

In order to understand the association between overparenting and psychological disorders, Segrin et al. (2013a) investigated the mediation effect of coping ability with particular attention to internalizing and externalizing symptoms and suggested that the lack of coping strategies leads to dysfunctional psychological functioning in offspring adult life. Given that parenting is associated with offspring coping skill, various research (Onderweller et al., 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012) has underlined that parenting practices comparable to overparenting negatively influence coping skills, and thus overparenting has a relation with maladaptive coping strategies in offspring.

Overparenting compromises offspring coping systems through specific parenting practices such as an anticipatory problem-solving attitude, an extremely high standard of assistance, support and protection, and excessive engaging. As a consequence children who have grown up with overparenting parents do not have the chance during their childhood and adolescence to test their own abilities, to rely on themselves, and to solve independently the challenges related to each stage of the life cycle; furthermore, in order to face difficulties, individuals who were exposed to overparenting instead of developing functional coping strategies tend to build a

dysfunctional defensive pattern, including internalization, withdrawal, and fugue (Segrin et al., 2013a).

Overparenting, particularly when it is a maternal parenting style, is also often related to a greater propensity to show dysfunctional strategies focused on emotion linked to deep concern for oneself, rumination, and escape into fantasy (Uehara et al., 1999).

Since overparenting parents behave in an overcontrolling manner and are prone to be intrusive, to facilitate their children or even to replace their children in solving their problems, offspring exposed to overparenting are lacking in coping skills (Schiffirin et al., 2014) precisely because they haven't practiced problem solving or decision making in various contexts (Leung et al., 2018; Segrin et al., 2013a).

Overparenting parents limit the exposure of their offspring to stress so that the children only rarely face failures and frustrations: instead of helping their children in developing functional strategies to cope with stress, overparenting parents try to prevent them from facing any stress. In doing so, offspring of overprotective and overinvolved parents learn neither to cope with problems nor to recognize if something could be potentially detrimental for themselves (Dumond, 2019; Fox et al., 2005; Power, 2004). Contrary to overparenting parents who encourage inhibition as a reaction to stressful events, functional parents are firm and able to establish clear and stable rules so that their offspring succeed in building adaptive strategies to respond to social requests (Kagan, 1994). Likewise, Van Petegem and colleagues (2017) have emphasized that parents who support offspring autonomy and avoid being intrusive and over-supportive decrease the odds that their children will exhibit oppositional behaviours, show submission with regard to social relationships, or establish dysfunctional self-regulation strategies.

Since the importance of assessing paternal and maternal parenting separately has been emphasized (Barton & Kirtley, 2012; Di Stefano & Miano, 2020; Love et al., 2020; Van Heel et al., 2019), another issue concerns the difference between maternal and paternal parenting in contributing to offspring psychological functioning. While some research studies have emphasized that from adolescence to young adulthood the importance of the father-children relationship increases as a result of the decreasing levels of maternal physical caretaking in adolescence and young adulthood (Allen et al., 2007), other research has underlined that maternal parenting characterized by intrusiveness and excessive support has a greater influence in offspring behavioural inhibition and shyness already in childhood (Rubin et al., 2002).

3.3 Analysis of the correlation between overparenting and pathological narcissism in offspring

Overparenting practices, as mentioned above, have negative effects on offspring adjustment. According to the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), offspring have difficulties in achieving a positive adjustment because essential needs such as autonomy, self-competence, and relationality are not met because they are overwhelmed by parental overinvolvement, intrusiveness, and directionality (Cui et al., 2019a; Garst et al., 2019; Jiao & Segrin, 2020; Scharf & Rousseau, 2017; Yilmaz et al., 2020). Overparenting has a negative influence on offspring self-cohesion, ego strength (Hong & Cui, 2019; Segrin et al., 2013a; Yilmaz et al., 2020), and could lead to dysfunctional personality traits with a prevalence of narcissistic symptomatology (Horton et al., 2006; Leung & Shek, 2017; Locke et al., 2012; Longobardi, 2016; Otway & Vignoles, 2006; Segrin et al., 2013b; Van Schie et al., 2020).

The term narcissism was used by Halevock Ellis (1898) to refer to autoeroticism in human beings, and later, Freud (1909, 1913, 1914) utilized it to describe more generally the condition in which the libido folds back onto oneself. More recently, the concept of narcissism was examined more deeply by Kohut (1971, 1977) within the theory of the psychology of the self; Kohut proposed that a positive psychological development is related to parents' ability to satisfy the narcissistic needs of their offspring through attenuated empathy and optimal frustration that, in turn, enable children to manage narcissistic needs without their parents' support, to diminish traits of grandiosity, and to interiorize a realistic image of themselves. According to this theory, excessive narcissistic gratification could lead to a fragmentation of the self; since overparenting practices are characterized by overinvolvement, overprotection, and intrusiveness, offspring exposed to overparenting are more inclined to maintain their grandiose self and tend to remain in an archaic condition in which grandiose fantasies overwhelm the self and intense narcissistic needs remain sorrowfully unsatisfied by others, resulting in narcissistic personality traits. Narcissism doesn't allow one to recognize, accept, and deal with one's imperfections and limitations and, as a consequence, it impedes a person from developing positive self-esteem and effective self-efficacy and increases the tendency to establish dependent relationships (Cain et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2011). With special regard to overinvolvement, overparenting seems to be related to pathological narcissism in offspring through a projective process in which parents project their expectations and desires onto their children (Segrin et al., 2013a). This relational dynamic could also be seen as a circular one in which a child with a

particular sense of grandiosity induces his/her parents to fulfil his/her narcissistic needs as if they were their own (Segrin et al., 2012).

Recently, wide agreement has underlined the correlation between environmental factors, especially parenting style, and offspring dysfunctional narcissism (Barry et al., 2015; Horton et al., 2006; Segrin et al., 2013b); a greater vulnerability to develop narcissistic personality traits during adolescence and adulthood may be attributed to overparenting and comparable practices (Horton et al., 2006; Horton & Tritch, 2013; Locke et al., 2012; Otway & Vignoles, 2006; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2013b; Winner & Nicholson, 2018). Some pivotal research studies described below have analysed this correlation (Longobardi, 2016).

Watson, Little and Biderman (1992), pursuing Kohut's theory (1971; 1977), have investigated the association between parenting styles and narcissism in offspring by paying particular attention to parenting practices characterized by excessive permissiveness, which seems to be related to emotional immaturity, pathological narcissistic traits, and grandiosity in offspring. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979) and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991) were administered to a sample of 324 university students and data confirmed the hypothesized correlation between permissive parenting and narcissistic personality.

With similar aims, childhood memories regarding the parenting style subjects were exposed to were analysed in association with narcissistic personality traits. Data from a research study by Otway and Vignoles (2006) have shown a correlation between childhood memories and narcissistic traits, and the evaluation was carried out using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979); more specifically, on one hand, authoritarian parenting characterized by a lack of affection seems to be associated with covert narcissism in offspring, whereas on the other hand, parenting characterized by excessive acceptance, appreciation, and praise seems to be associated with overt narcissism in offspring. Parental overinvolvement and excessive support and affection, which also characterize overparenting practices, were shown to be correlated with narcissistic traits in a study by Horton, Bleau and Drwecki (2006) in which the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979) and the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI; Barber, 1996; Schaefer, 1965) were administered to 222 university students. In particular, parental affection and psychological control are both related to offspring dysfunctional narcissism, even if only parental affection seems to be related with functional narcissism in offspring.

A research study by Barry et al. (2007) revealed that narcissism (evaluated using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-Children - NPIC; Barry et al., 2003) and parenting (evaluated using the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire - APQ; Frick, 1991) were correlated in a sample of 9-15-year-olds: effective parenting with a functional level of parent involvement resulted correlated with adaptive narcissism in offspring, whereas dysfunctional parental strategies such as excessive or insufficient support and excessive strictness were positively associated with dysfunctional narcissism in offspring.

According to a study by Mechanic and Barry (2014) in which the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009) and the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Frick, 1991) were administered, grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability in adolescence are correlated with dysfunctional parenting; in particular, strategies related to overparenting such as parental overinvolvement and reinforcement strategies, on one hand, and parenting characterized by lack of severity and extreme permissiveness, on the other hand, are respectively related with grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability.

In a recent study by Winner and Nicholson (2018), the Helicopter Parenting Scale (HPS; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) and the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009) were administered to 380 university students, and the data revealed that overparenting practices lead offspring to develop a grandiose self and to show narcissistic vulnerability.

3.4 Overparenting in emerging adulthood

Even if overparenting practices are more frequent during offspring childhood, overparenting can be recognized also in parents-adolescent and parents-adult offspring relationships; it should be noted that as time passes and children grow up, overparenting has even more negative effects since it interferes with the later development of offspring, and during late adolescence and early adult life, overparenting impedes the separation-individuation process and the achievement of autonomy (Padilla-Walker et al, 2021; Willoughby et al., 2013). Family relationships based on parenting characterized by extreme intrusiveness and involvement, such as those involving overparenting, increase the tendency in offspring to develop interpersonal dependency contrary to the ability to cope autonomously with personal challenges (Darlow et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2016). Since parents with overparenting attitudes don't consider their offspring as adults, they continue to hinder their autonomy and independence (Dumont, 2019; Nelson, 2007; Segrin et al., 2020); moreover, this condition is exacerbated by the economic dependency of their offspring. In a vicious circle, the more the offspring are exposed to overparenting the less they are inclined to be autonomous, responsible for their own actions, able to establish mature

interpersonal relationships, capable of avoiding potential harmful behaviours, and all of this, in turn, promotes overparenting strategies since parents evaluate them as incompetent and in need of help and support (Darlow et al., 2017; Gagnon & Garst, 2019; Nelson et al., 2007; Segrin et al., 2020; Ungar, 2009).

When the parents-young adult offspring relationship is characterized by overparenting practices, it will result in relational conflicts between parents and offspring, as well as in adjustment difficulties, aggressive behaviours, a sense of entitlement, and a higher vulnerability to externalizing symptoms (Fletcher et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2016). Alternatively, conflicts could arise when offspring who are not independent and still in need of guidance expect to be supported by parents who actually are no longer willing to take care of them.

With regard to the capacity to be well-adjusted in social contexts, anxiety symptoms may occur in offspring during the transition to adulthood; adolescent and young adults who were exposed to overparenting are more prone to exhibit social anxiety symptoms because of their low self-esteem and self-efficacy, external locus of control, and a tendency to depend on others (Wieland & Kucirka, 2019). Offspring of overparenting parents are emotionally vulnerable and thus might behave aggressively in order to manipulate relational partners, to undermine the partner's self-esteem, and to maintain their own sense of superiority. This attitude is particularly frequent in young women who had grown up with overinvolved mothers, within their relationship with older women (Dumont, 2019; Loukas et al., 2005).

Moreover, overparenting is positively associated with a sense of entitlement in adult offspring; individuals exposed to overparenting are used to having someone who supports them and fixes their problems and therefore, even in adult life, they expect to be treated in the same way by others (Fletcher et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2016; Segrin et al., 2012, 2020). With regard to academic results and professional success, offspring of overparenting parents tend to have high expectations and to assume that they should receive appreciation and unique privileges, regardless of their performance (Fletcher et al., 2020; Kopp et al., 2011; Schiffrin & Liss, 2017). Two other topics associated with having been exposed to overparenting have been investigated: economic autonomy and drug abuse.

As already mentioned, economic dependency is a critical factor that can moderate the association between overparenting and negative outcomes in offspring: the more offspring are economically dependent on their parents, the more the offspring will be dependent also in other

areas (Gagnon & Garst, 2019; Lowe et al., 2015). Another aspect concerns offspring difficulties in managing money: again, in a vicious circle, parents judge offspring as not quite responsible and reliable and offspring demonstrate inadequate handling of money and don't learn to be financially autonomous, so parents continue to support them financially even when they actually have enough resources to sustain themselves (Kim & Chatterjee, 2013; Letkiewicz et al., 2019).

Research indicates that overparenting is related to drug abuse during late adolescence and young adulthood (Earle & LaBrie, 2016); in relation to authoritarianism, excessive indulgence, permissiveness, and responsiveness by parents lead offspring to develop externalizing disorders such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and deviant behaviours (Bahr & Hoffmann, 2010; Cui et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2021). Some gender differences were reported by Schulte et al. (2009), who highlighted that male adolescent and young adults with overparenting parents are more likely to exhibit drug addiction, whereas female individuals tend to show aggressive and hostile behaviours within interpersonal relationships (Archer, 2004).

4. Discussion

Parenting style is a collection of behaviours, strategies, and practices that parents enact in their relationship with their children. It is widely accepted that parenting style and the familial emotional climate affect offspring personality development as well as intrapsychic structures and processes, which in turn result in the quality of psychological functioning and in adjustment ability (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Fletcher et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2019; Segrin & Flora, 2019; Spera, 2005).

After many years of analysis of negative and ineffective parenting practices and their effects on offspring, recent research studies have focused more closely on parenting characterized by excessive protection and support. Overparenting and helicopter parenting were recently examined by researchers; parenting practices and their short- and long-term consequences on offspring have been described (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Hong & Cui, 2019; Reilly & Semkovska, 2018; Schriffin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013a). Overparenting is defined on the basis of typical behaviours such as overprotection, overinvolvement, overcontrol, and excessive entanglement (Cui et al., 2019a; Dumont, 2019; Leung, 2020; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2013b).

With regard to offspring development outcomes, various studies have provided evidence that overparenting is related to negative effects in offspring, such as internalizing disorders, including anxiety and depression (Affrunti & Ginsburg, 2012; Hong & Cui, 2019; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Reilly & Semkovska, 2018; Schriffin et al., 2014), lack of development of coping skills

(Meesters & Muris, 2004; Power, 2004; Segrin et al., 2013a; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Van Petegem et al., 2017), and structuring dysfunctional personality traits (Fletcher et al., 2020; Horton et al., 2006; Mechanic & Barry, 2014; Winner & Nicholson, 2018).

It is important to recognise that this study has a few limitations. First, it doesn't distinguish between maternal and paternal parenting, nor offspring gender, nor birth order or family size which may act as mediators and affect offspring developmental outcomes. Another limitation concerns the literature searching process; even if a meticulous search was attempted, it is possible that significant studies were not included in the review due to unavailability.

Moreover, there are several questions that were left unanswered; in particular, further research is needed to deeply investigate maternal and paternal contribution in order to distinguish their specific effect on parenting processes and make it possible to understand how fathers and mothers influence offspring outcomes. Furthermore, gender differences in offspring should be highlighted with the purpose of clarifying if and how daughters and sons could be affected differently by overparenting. In addition, the potential effects of having a sibling should be investigated in future research.

To sum up, a deeper knowledge of overparenting precursors and consequences, as well as a greater understanding of moderating variables, could help identify crucial factors involved in overparenting practices during offspring childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. This review provides a contribution towards understanding dysfunctional parenting, such as overparenting practices characterized by overprotection, overinvolvement, overcontrol and an excess of entanglement. Certain implications for practice can be underlined; it might be worthwhile to design preventive interventions focused on parent-children's relationships, promoting effective parenting that could positively affect offspring developmental outcomes and psychophysical well-being. More specifically, it is pivotal to identify protective factors that help mitigate the detrimental effects of overparenting. An early assessment and identification of overparenting could help prevent the development of dysfunctional family relationships; appropriate intervention plans could effectively to reduce psychological risk within families with overparenting parents. Moreover, efforts need to be made in order to make informed decisions in a clinical context whenever overparenting parents and their offspring reach out for help.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any potential conflict of interest.

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DOI: 10.13129/2282-1619/mjcp-3081