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A Cross-Cultural Perspective on the Role of Parents in University Students' Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

There is an increasing trend of overparenting across different cultures and there is a growing interest in its influence on the prevalence of university students' mental health problems. Overparenting can undermine the development of autonomy and independence among young adult children. In this chapter, focusing on parental influence on university students' mental health, we first described the background and current state of overparenting. Following that, we reviewed the research literature on the association between overparenting and university students' mental health.

Methods

We summarized and compared three empirical studies that were conducted on overparenting and university students' mental health in U.S. (N = 441), Finland (N = 306), and China (N = 545).

Results

Study 1 of American university students revealed that helicopter parenting was associated with university students' anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, and life dissatisfaction. Study 2 of Finnish university students found similar results. Study 3 of Chinese university students suggested that parental overprotection was associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Conclusions

We discussed the implications of the research for parents, family practitioners, educators, and administrators in higher education.

Keywords: cross-cultural, mental health, overparenting

Introduction

Mental Health Issues among University Students

Mental health problems among university students are an on-going salient issue across the United States. According to a recent national survey by the American College Health Association (2016), 20.6% of the undergraduate students in the United States reported feelings of overwhelming anxiety for the 2016-2017 academic year. In particular, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is one of the most common mental health disorders among university students, affecting around 7% of university students nationwide (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013). Aside from those who are considered to have anxiety at the clinical level, data also suggested that up to 39.4% of the university students might be at-risk for developing anxiety disorders (Kanuri, Taylor, Cohen, & Newman, 2015). Similarly, 16.7% of the university students reported feelings of depression, and 45.1% reported significant amounts of stress (American College Health Association, 2016). These mental health problems are often concurrent with other difficulties and problems, such as challenges related to academics, finances, intimate relationships, careers, and family issues (American College Health Association, 2017).

Mental health problems are not limited to American university students. It is one of the greatest public health threats in the European region as measured by prevalence as well as severity (World Health Organization, 2015). In Finland, as is the case in other European countries where comprehensive social welfare permits a large proportion of young adults to attend higher education, anxiety and depression among university students is a rising concern. In a recent report, the Finnish Student Health Service (2016) revealed that among university students nationwide, diagnosed depressive disorder (10.2%) and anxiety disorder (7.4%) have tripled between the years of 2000 to 2016. Besides diagnosable depression and anxiety, 33% of all university students reported having experienced considerable stress in the past month, and 16% have suffered psychological symptoms on a daily basis. The most commonly reported symptoms included continuous overstrain and fatigue, feelings of being low and unhappy, difficulties in concentrating, loss of sleep because of worries, and losing self-confidence, all of which manifest anxiety and depression problems (Finnish Student Health Service, 2016).

Similar problems are also common in Asia. With over 1.3 billion people, China has more than 20% of the world's population (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). There are over 5 million new student enrollees each year resulting in over 35 million total students enrolled in over 2,800 universities in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). With the large number of Chinese young adults attending universities, mental health issues among university

students have become a growing public health concern. Likewise, Chinese university students' mental health problems have increased across cohorts over the past two decades (Liu et al., 2017; Xin, Xin, & Zhang, 2011). Over 20% of students reported having suffered moderate anxiety (Lu et al., 2015) and over 10% reported depressive symptoms (Lu, Engs, & Hanson, 1997). The numbers might be higher considering Asian students are less likely to report mental problems than their western counterparts (Yen, Robins, & Lin, 2000).

Due to the prominence of mental health difficulties among university students across countries, it is important to identify the various factors that may lead to the development of mental health concerns. Successfully uncovering any precursors of university students' mental health issues may allow educators and practitioners to prevent or lower the proportion of those who may be at-risk. One major factor is the influence of university students' parents and their families of origin. From a life course perspective and socialization theory, parents have a significant influence on their offspring's well-being throughout their lifespan (Elder & Giele, 2009; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Thus, parents continue to have an impact on their young adult children even when they leave home to pursue independent lives (e.g., in universities).

The Role of Parents and Parenting in University Students' Lives

Given university students' prolonged education and career-preparation, their transition to self-sufficient adulthood has been extended, which often necessitates continued parental support (Arnett, 2015). Comparative cohort data from the United States and Finland suggested that parental support of their young adult children has increased markedly over the past three decades, regardless of parental socioeconomic status (Fingerman et al., 2015; Majamaa, 2011). Among various types of parental support, the most commonly reported was nontangible support, such as advice, companionship, and emotional support, followed by financial and practical support (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012; Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012). Although parents may become less directly involved in scaffolding, these multidimensional supports facilitate young adults' ongoing process of experimentation and exploration--the remarkable developmental tasks in early adulthood (Aquilino, 2006).

University students generally receive more support from parents than their nonstudent peers since parents view a college degree as pivotal for future success (Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer, & O'Brien, 2011). For example, parental financial subsidies, career advice, and emotional support, such as esteem, encouragement, and autonomy support, have been identified as important contributing factors for

university students' vocational exploration and career aspiration (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Also, parental support is clearly linked with university students' higher academic motivation and performance (Fulton & Turner, 2008; Ratelle, Larose, Guay, & Senécal, 2005), better psychological adjustment to university life (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994), and less risky behaviors on campus (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, & Barry, 2008).

Despite entering a university, students remain closely connected with their parents, which is noteworthy as compared with previous generations (Kiyama et al., 2015; Taub, 2008). This trend has been demonstrated in young adults' living arrangement in the current era. Coresidence with parents has become increasingly common among university students worldwide. In the United States, the share of young adults age 18-34 residing with their parents has been rising steadily since 1940, accounting for 32.1% in 2014 – with a significant proportion being university students (Fry, 2015). Although coresidence is relatively less common in Nordic countries (e.g., 21% in Finland in 2007; Fingerman, 2017), it appears more common in some European societies where university students tend to live with parents partially due to a scarcity of on-campus housing and expensive rents in off-campus accommodations (Arnett, 2015). Notably, young adults across southern European nations such as Italy (73%) have pronounced rates of shared living with parents (Cherlin, Scabini, & Rossi, 1997).

Living with parents is also prevalent among university students in Asian countries. Indeed, nearly 50% of university students in the Hong Kong region in China and 60% in South Korea live with their parents (Fingerman et al., 2016). These high rates are partly attributed to the greater emphasis on family interdependence and filial piety in Asian culture (Ting & Chiu, 2002; Yi, Coale, Choe, Zhiwu, & Li, 1994). Another substantial proportion of students are living semi-independently (e.g., living in the dorm but returning to the parental home on a regular basis; Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). Under the same roof or by frequent reunions, parents have more opportunities to offer support and be involved in the lives of their young adult children.

For students living away from their parents, modern technology like cell phones, social media, email, and high-speed transportation has helped maintain parent-child bonds regardless of spatial distance (Cotten, McCullough, & Adams, 2012). A national survey in the United States found that over 60 % of parents reported contact with their children age 18-25 on a daily basis via phone, text, or email. A similar proportion of young adults reported contact with parents every day or nearly every day, with another 24% contacting them at least several times per week (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). A comparable pattern has been observed in the Netherlands (Bucx, Van Wel, Knijn, & Hagendoorn, 2008) and Great Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001).

Across Western and Asian societies, university students typically engage in more frequent contact and involvement with parents than their nonstudent cohort, with Asian students having the highest contact rate (Fingerman et al., 2016). A qualitative study tapped 40 American university students' perspectives of phone contact with their parents while away from home; almost all participants viewed phone connecting with parents as an enjoyable moment, whereby they shared experiences, articulated emotions, sought advice and other assistance, and fulfilled family roles from afar (Chen & Katz, 2009). Data from European nations and the United States suggest that frequent contact is related to a greater probability of parental financial transfer (Brandt & Deindl, 2013), and emotional support (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994), as well as parents' enhanced awareness of their adult children's needs (Kalmijn & Dykstra, 2006).

Along with extended education and delayed marriage, most college-age young adults do not yet view themselves as being fully adult (Arnett, 2000; Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015). Parental support and parent-adult child interactions are core elements of interpersonal relationships during this transitional phase. During college years, parents remain in active parenting roles and serve as important socialization agents, continuously influencing their adult children's developmental trajectories and life-course transitions (Arnett, 2007; Guan & Fuligni, 2016).

The Changing History of Parenting

Parenting perspectives and practices changed throughout the history (see Bigner, 2010). In Ancient Greece and Rome, there were only two stages of life: childhood and adulthood (Cunningham, 2005), with childhood ending between the ages of five and seven. During this stage, the main concern was to prepare children for adulthood and to assume adult responsibilities, as well as contribute to family welfare. Formal education was minimal and considered as a privilege. During the Middle Ages, parents did not maintain close emotional ties to children (partially due to high infant and child mortality rates). Producing food and providing clothing and shelter to survive were the priorities rather than providing warmth and nurture to children. Children's education mostly came from observing parents and other adults. During the Renaissance, despite the period of cultural revitalization, attitudes toward children and ideas about parenting did not change much, although a new sentimentality began to emerge because of artists' attention to children.

In Europe and colonial America, children continued to be perceived as a good source of cheap labor. During this period, many parents, stemming from their religious orientation, believed the nature of children was sinful (Mintz, 2006) and, as a result, stern discipline and harsh parenting were common practices. Jean

Jacques Rousseau, however, believed that children were inherently good. As compared to the previous eras, some evidence suggested that parents showed their affection in ways appropriate at that time, and the emotional aspect of parenting started to emerge. During the Industrial Revolution Era, three contradictory parenting philosophies existed: Calvinism (inspired by the Calvinist religious movement, advocated harsh parenting and physical punishment), Environmentalism (influenced by John Locke, whose "tabula rasa" theory of development suggested that personalities and skills can result from learning and interaction with the environment, highlighting the important role of parents), and Early Developmentalism (advocated early education, giving rewards rather than physical punishment). The view from Early Developmentalism is regarded as the first developmental attitude that recognizes children's needs and the role of parents in influencing their children, as well as the ill effect of parental neglect and harsh punishment.

In the Twentieth Century Era, many different attitudes toward child rearing have emerged, from the restrictive and authoritarian parenting advocated by John Watson to the permissive parenting advocated by Sigmund Freud and Benjamin Spock. Further, with the increase in family diversity (e.g., single-parent family, stepfamily, adoptive and foster family, minority family, interracial family, immigrant family, and gay and lesbian family) and the simultaneous decrease in the traditional nuclear family, parenting perspectives have further evolved, modified, and adapted over time. Importantly, it is during this era that empirical research started to emerge that provided a scientific view of parenting.

The Current Trend of Overparenting

In the twenty-first century, the current culture may promote overparenting (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2015). Such overparenting practices have emerged as a growing trend for various reasons – fewer numbers of children in contemporary families allow increased resources to invest in children, working parents feeling guilty about spending less time with their children; parents with marital problems wanting to gain advantage with their spouses; divorced parents trying to compensate their children for their divorce/separation; parents' own indulgence history; and the influence of consumerism, media, community, and other people (Clarke, Dawson, & Bredehoft, 2014; Cui, Graber, Metz, & Darling, 2016; Driscoll, Russell, & Crockett, 2008). In particular, as higher education costs much more today than it did in the past, parents are increasingly invested in their children's education and future. Given such investment, it is not suprising that today's parents are more involved in the lives of their children in college.

Not surprisingly, the trend of overparenting is not limited to the U.S. Curling parents, the Scandinavian metaphor of overparenting, was initially coined by a Danish psychologist Ben Hougaard in his book "Curling Parents and Service Children" (2004). To prevent children stuck on the way, curling parents act like curlers at the Olympics winter sport, meticulously helping sweep obstacles out of the way and smooth the ice surface so that their children will slide the prepared pathway and achieve a desired result. Curling parents are characterized by being overly attentive to the potential obstacles their children might face and overly compensatory to their children's struggles despite their own pressures, with a wish to provide their offspring with a trouble-free life (Pedersen, 2013). A Swedish journalist who covered a series of reports on curling parents complained "Swedish parents today tend to do too much for their children and that children rule the families in many cases" (Carling, 2011).

In China, high parental expectations of academic achievement and the decades-long one-child policy seem to have normalized overparenting of university students. The annual National College Entrance Examination is an important event in the country every year. A young adult who has been admitted to a university is conventionally referred to as "God's favored one." During the registration days, some universities would turn their gyms into temporary campsites and provide "tents of love" for parents who traveled across the country to accompany their children into the college (Wang & Hunt, 2016). To urge offspring to fully focus on studying, many parents would encourage their adult children to not do chores, thus it is not rare for students to mail dirty laundry home (Zhang, 2014). Some parents even rent an apartment near campus to take care of their adult child's everyday life (Ye, 2016).

Such phenomena related to overparenting young adult children have been labeled in many different terms, mostly as "helicopter parenting," but also overindulgent parenting, hovering, hyper-parenting, intensive parenting, alpha parenting, overhelping, and overprotective parenting. It describes a developing occurrence particularly relevant to the parent-child relationship as offspring are entering young adulthood. Overparenting is defined as an overly-involved and overly-controlling parenting style that is developmentally inappropriate and thus considered a maladaptive form of parenting (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). Indeed, theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence suggest that overparenting behaviors could be negatively associated with university students' health and well-being (Klein & Pierce, 2009).

Theoretical Perspectives

The life course perspective and socialization theory highlight the importance of parents in an individual's lifespan development (Elder & Giele, 2009; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Therefore, parents continue to influence their offspring's lives even when they enter adulthood and pursue further independence (e.g., at institutions of higher education). Overparenting, as a form of maladaptive parenting, could lead to university students' maladjustment (Klein & Pierce, 2009; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

From a developmental perspective, compared to their non-university counterparts, university students might be particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of overparenting. Given university students' prolonged education and delayed transition to self-sufficient adulthood, parents continue playing an active role in their lives (Guan & Fuligni, 2016). Indeed, parental support of children in higher education has increased significantly from the late 1980s into the 21st century, including financial, emotional, and practical support (Fingerman et al., 2012; 2015). Thus, overparenting could maintain an important influence on college students' outcomes.

Self-determination theory (SDT, Ryan & Deci, 2000) is helpful when exploring the influence of overparenting on university students. SDT proposes that individuals develop self-motivation to succeed in life, as success is considered personally satisfying and rewarding. Throughout the course of development, an individual may become unmotivated and passive if growing up in environments that discourage self-motivated behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such environments could undermine the development of competence and self-efficacy. According to SDT, overparenting could hinder the development of self-motivation, competence, and self-efficacy, which in turn, may promote the development of mental health problems.

Overparenting and University Students' Mental Health: A Review of the Literature

Despite limited research on overparenting and university student well-being, some important findings have emerged. Many relate to psychological well-being and mental health outcomes. For example, Segrin and colleagues (2013) found an association between overparenting and internalizing behavior problems (e.g., anxiety) among the university students. An association between overparenting and lower self-efficacy among university students was noted by Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014). Another study reported that college students who reported higher levels of helicopter parenting also reported higher levels of depression and lower levels of life satisfaction (Schriffin et al., 2013). LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) also found positive associations between helicopter parenting and

depression, anxiety, and prescription medication use among college students. Significant relationships between helicopter parenting and anxiety through self-efficacy have been identified (Reed et al., 2016) along with helicopter parenting's association with neuroticism, interpersonal dependency, and lower coping efficacy (Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2014).

These studies suggest that overparenting is linked to adverse mental health outcomes for American university students. Several studies from other countries reported similar findings. For example, Locke, Campbell, and Kavanagh (2012) found overparenting was associated with lack of resilience and life skills among Australian participants. Kwon, Yoo, & Bingham (2016), with a sample of Korean college students, suggested a positive association between helicopter parenting and low locus of control. Data from Israeli young adults and their parents indicated overparenting was associated with maladaptive interpersonal sensitivity (Scharf, Rousseau, & Bsoul, 2017) and attachment anxiety (Rousseau & Scharf, 2015). Studies from Chinese university samples found overparenting was related to poor self-regulation (Hong, Hwang, Kuo, & Hsu, 2015), lower self-efficacy, and narcissistic perceptions (Leung & Shek, 2018).

The findings, however, are not always consistent, as some studies have suggested a positive effect of overparenting. For example, Somers and Settle (2010) suggested that university students are generally positive about parental interventions on their behalf. Overparenting was found to be positively related to disclosure in parent-child relationship (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Several other studies suggested that intense parental support was associated with better psychological adjustment and life satisfaction (Fingerman et al., 2012). Earle and LaBrie (2016) also suggested that helicopter parenting could mitigate alcohol-related risk. In addition to the positive associations reported, there were many null findings (not related to proposed outcomes such as self-efficacy by Segrin et al., 2013; not related to emotional well-being by Kwon et al., 2016).

Such inconsistency in findings could be due to many reasons. One reason might be the limitation of the cross-sectional designs of studies, which could confound the potential negative effect of overparenting. When parents satisfy their children's every demand and help them solve problems, it is not surprising that these children could experience and report immediate satisfaction, but the ill effect could become more pronounced in future years (Cui, Darling, Lucier-Greer, Fincham, & May, 2018). Another reason is the variation in the conceptualization of overparenting, as many different terms and operationalizations exist. Third, the inconsistency could also be due to the limitation of the current studies mostly using simple descriptives with convenience sampling. Finally, the differences in findings could also be

attributed to cultural differences. Therefore, future research is needed to examine the phenomenon of overparenting and its effect on university students.

A Review of Our Research - Methods and Results

Overview

Over the past decade, our team has examined the effects of overparenting on university students' well-being. In the following section, we will present three of our studies with samples from the U.S., Finland, and China. Among these studies, those from the U.S. and Finland are directly comparable because they were designed for this purpose. Table 1 summarizes and compares the key demographics of the three samples.

Table 1 about here

From Table 1 we can see that the samples from U.S. and Finland were more similar in terms of participants' gender composition, age, and family background. Compared with participants from U.S. and Finland, those from China were younger (*M age* = 18.21), more homogeneous in age (range 17-20), more balanced in gender distribution (47.0% female), and mostly from two-parent families. Such differences are due to the design of the studies as well as different cultural backgrounds. For example, the participants from the U.S. and Finland were recruited from university programs in which the majority of the students were female, therefore resulting in the overwhelmingly female samples, which was not the case in the sampling frame in China (i.e., from a more gender-balanced university program). Because of the lower divorce rate in China, most of the participants in the Chinese sample (93.2%) came from two-parent intact families. Further, because of the restricted ways to enter universities in China (i.e., after high school) and the sampling method and frame, the age of Chinese university students is very homogenous (i.e., freshmen are similar in age). On the other hand, young adults in U.S. and Finland have more options, especially in Finland where many young adults do not enter a university after high school graduation, resulting in students being much older and having larger variations in age. In order to examine parental influence on young adults, even though there were students over the age of 35 in the original samples from the U.S. and Finland, age was restricted to be under 35 in the analytical samples. Next, we will discuss major findings from each of the studies and compare the findings across samples.

Study 1 – U.S.

A research project was conducted in 2017 examining the association between overparenting (helicopter parenting) and American university students' wellbeing (Cui et al., 2018). In this chapter, we focus on the findings from a study on a range of mental health problems. Details about the sample, procedures, measures, and analyses can be found in the study by Cui, Janhonen-Abruquah, Darling, Carlos Chavez, and Palojoki (2019). Briefly, participants were recruited from two universities in the U.S. A total of 449 undergraduate students completed an online survey on their perceptions of their parents and their own well-being. For the purpose of studying parental influence on young adults, participants over the age of 35 were excluded. As a result, the final analytical sample included 441 university students.

The measures used in this study included helicopter parenting (5-item, α's = .86 for mother and .89 for father; Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014), anxiety (Beck Anxiety Inventory, 10-item, α = .88; Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988), depression (CES-D, 10-item, α = .80; Radloff, 1977), emotional dysregulation (the short version of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale DERS-18 (18-item, α = .89; Victor & Klonsky, 2016), and life (dis)satisfaction (5-item, α = .91; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Covariates included in this study were age, gender, year in school, and family structure.

Structural equation modeling (SEM; Kline, 2015) with Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) was used to assess the association between helicopter parenting and university students' mental health. Major findings are summarized in the first column in Table 2. Maternal and paternal helicopter parenting were examined separately. The results suggested that, in general, helicopter parenting was significantly associated with anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and life dissatisfaction. For example, the path coefficient from maternal helicopter parenting to university students' depressive symptoms was .13 ($p < .01$), and the path from paternal helicopter parenting to university students' emotional dysregulation was .16 ($p < .01$). The only non-significant path was from maternal helicopter parenting to university students' anxiety.
Table 2 about here

Study 2 – Finland

A similar study was conducted in Finland in 2017, with cross-cultural comparisons in mind. Details about the study can be found in Cui et al. (2019).

Briefly, Finnish participants were also recruited from two universities in Finland and asked to complete an online survey, which was the same survey used in the U.S. and translated into Finnish. A total of 342 university students participated in the online survey. For the same purpose of studying helicopter parenting of young adults, students over age 35 were excluded from the current analyses. The final sample size was 306.

The measures used in this study were the same as those in the U.S. sample: helicopter parenting (α's = .87 for mother and .84 for father), anxiety (α = .84), depression (α = .87), emotional dysregulation (α = .89), and life (dis)satisfaction (α = .88). The covariates included were the same as in the U.S. study.

Findings from this study are provided in the second column in Table 2. The results were similar with those of the U.S. sample, suggesting that helicopter parenting was positively related to anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and life dissatisfaction. For example, the effect of maternal helicopter parenting on university students' depressive symptoms was .20 ($p < .01$). Paternal effect was a slightly weaker as compared to maternal effect.

Study 3 – China

The study (Cui, 2017) from China was not designed for comparison, and therefore had different measurement operationalizations. The sample was recruited from a major university in China in 2007. Participants were freshmen students who completed a pencil-and-paper survey about their parents and their personal well-being. The sample size was 545.

The measures used in this study included a parenting scale (Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran – EMBU; Perris, Jacobsson, Linndström, Knorring, & Perris, 1980) which contained a subscale of parental overprotection (7-item, α's = .71 for mother and .73 for father), anxiety (Self-rating Anxiety Scale - SAS, 20-item, α = .84; Zung, 1971; 1965), and depression (Self-rating Depression Scale - SDS, 20-item, α = .84; Zung, 1971; Zung, 1965). Emotional dysregulation and life dissatisfaction were not included in the survey, and therefore not available for comparison. Covariates included gender, age, single-child status, family structure, parent education, and family income.

The results of the analyses are reported in the last column of Table 2. Maternal overprotection was significantly associated with university students' anxiety (b = .19, $p < .01$) and depression (b = .26, $p < .01$). Paternal effect was not significant.

Comparisons

Although the studies in the U.S. and Finland were designed to be compared, the study in China was not. As a result, it is different from the other two studies in terms of measures, sample demographics, and time of data collection. However, given the similar topics on parenting and university students' mental health, as well as the availability of related measures, the study in China has also been included to provide insights into cultural similarities and differences. Because different measures with a sample of slightly different demographics at a different time point still yielded similar results, the study provided added validity and support to the hypothesized associations.

Results of the studies from the three countries suggested some similarities as well as some differences. One similar finding is that the association between overparenting and university students' anxiety and depression was supported by all three studies. For the studies in U.S. and Finland, the findings also supported an association between overparenting and emotional dysregulation and life dissatisfaction. Such findings provided empirical support of the negative role of overparenting across different cultures.

There are, however, some differences. Specifically, it seems that maternal overparenting has a more pertinent role as compared to paternal overparenting in the studies in China and, to a lesser degree, in Finland; whereas mothers and fathers demonstrated similar effects of overparenting on university students in the study in the U.S. Such findings may suggest some gender differences in overparenting and its effects on university students across different cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

With the global prevalence of mental health problems among university students, researchers are trying to identify factors that either exacerbate or buffer such effects. In particular, risk factors in the family of origin could be particularly important. With the current trend of overparenting, the purpose of this chapter was to explore the role of overparenting in university students' mental health problems. Specifically, through discussion of the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, we presented a series of studies our research team has conducted that provided much needed empirical support of the current phenomenon of overparenting and its negative impact on university students' mental health across different cultures.

To counteract the practice of overparenting, some parents are reducing their children's extracurricular activities resulting in a "slow parenting" movement with the paradigm of "less is more." In addition, university programs are encouraging parents to "pull back;" to occasionally but not frequently visit and call; to not worry

too much; to expect changes in physical, emotional and cognitive development; and to trust their children to make appropriate decisions. The emerging philosophy at colleges and universities is that once parents have given them the skills and values they need for life, it is time to let them go and live their own lives. If they really want their children to succeed, parents need to know when to leave them alone, allow them to emerge, and be responsible for independent thoughts and actions.

While overparenting is quite prominent in many cultures, it also varies by culture. Although the three studies mentioned herein are affiliated with three different countries and continents, there are many other countries that have different values and practices related to parenting. There may be some similarities, but there are also differences across cultures. While it is common to view other cultures from an ethno-centric perspective and judge them by the values and standards of one's own culture, it is important to provide an alternative perspective to view parenting, in general, and also overparenting. We want to encourage an ethno-relative approach where cultures are understood relative to one and another and characteristics are regarded as differences with no perception of being good or bad (Darling & Cassidy, 2014). Infusing cultural content about families into parenting and educational programs can provide and enhance an international perspective to the study of families and parenting.

The findings from current studies could be useful to inform parents, family practitioners, educators, and administrators in higher education. Our research could provide empirical evidence to develop intervention and prevention programs designed to promote parenting practices that are likely to facilitate positive development (e.g., help parents to better understand the appropriate degree of involvement and the need for facilitating independence in their children). The information from these studies could also help educators and administrators to provide information and programs that help university students to make smooth transitions to their collegiate years and to adulthood (e.g., developing autonomy and taking responsibility). Healthcare providers in universities also need to be aware of the effects of overparenting on students and provide support programs and mental health assistance as needed. Since our goal is to assist parents, students, and educational institutions adapt successfully to changing times, we recommend that "overparenting" needs to be considered as salient during these times of transition.

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Table 1. Sample Demographics

	U.S	Finland	China
Year of Data Collection	2017	2017	2007
Sample Size	441	306	545
Mean of Age (Range)	20.45 (18-33)	22.86 (18-35)	18.21 (17-20)
Child Gender (Female)	89.3%	87.1%	47.0%
Family Structure (Two-Parent)	66.9%	68.0%	93.2%

Table 2. Findings of Overparenting and University Students' Mental Health

	Study 1 U.S *b*	Study 2 Finland *b*	Study 3 China *b*
Anxiety	.08/.14**	.23**/.09	.19**/.00
Depression	.13**/.15**	.20**/.12*	.26**/-.03
Emotional Dysregulation	.10*/.16**	.21**/.04	--
Life Dissatisfaction	.17**/.08*	.18**/.11*	--

Note. Standardized coefficients: Maternal/Paternal, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.