



## A Review of the Supporting Research on Childhood Overindulgence\*

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The Overindulgence Project began in 1996 with the mission of studying the relationship between childhood overindulgence and subsequent adult problems and parenting practices. To date, ten studies investigating overindulgence have been conducted involving a combined 3,531 participants (Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter & Clarke, 1998; Bredehoft, Clarke & Dawson, 2003; Bredehoft, 2006; Bredehoft & Clarke, 2006; Bredehoft & Leach, 2006; Bredehoft, 2007; Walcheski, Bredehoft & Leach, 2007; Bredehoft & Ralston, 2008; Slinger & Bredehoft, 2010; Sims & Bredehoft, 2012; Bredehoft, 2013). These studies provide the scientific backbone for this work. We feel that the results add to the body of knowledge on childhood overindulgence and give us new insights into the parenting problems associated with this issue. A summary of the findings from our ten studies are presented below.

### Study I: (N=720)

Bredehoft, D. J., Mennicke, S. A., Potter, A. M., & Clarke, J. I. (1998). Perceptions Attributed by Adults to Parental Overindulgence During Childhood. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*. 16(2), 3-17.

#### Findings:

1. Parents are responsible for the majority of overindulgence.
2. The overindulgence was most often related to some issue from the parents' experience (e.g., growing up in poverty, or working all of the time).
3. Overindulgence is complex. In addition to too many things, it involves soft structure and over-nurture.
4. Adults who were overindulged as children report feeling unlovable, needing constant outside affirmation, having a lack of skills, and not knowing how to take care of themselves.
5. Adults who were overindulged as children report being self-indulgent as adults resulting in their gaining weight, feeling guilty, lower self-esteem, poor health, and loneliness.
6. Adults who were overindulged as children identified the pain resulting from not knowing "What is enough".

### Study II:

Bredehoft, D. J., & Leach, M. (2006). Relationships Between Childhood Overindulgence on Young Adult Dispositions – Executive Summary Study 2.

#### Findings: (N=74)

1. Overindulgence is complex. It is related to too many things (e.g., clothes, toys, being entertained), soft structure (e.g., didn't have rules, rules not enforced), and over-nurture (e.g., too much attention, doing things for children they should be doing for themselves).
2. Overindulgence occurs in all family system types in the circumplex model (balanced, midrange and extreme).
3. Childhood overindulgence is related to adolescent/young adulthood dysfunctional thinking, feelings of ineffectiveness, and self-righteousness.
4. In this small sample of college students childhood overindulgence does not appear to be associated with late adolescent/young adulthood self-esteem, life satisfaction, or life distress.

### Study III:

Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2003). Relationships Between Childhood Overindulgence and Parenting Attributes: Implications for Family Life Educators. Paper presented at the 2003 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 8-11, 2003, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

#### Findings: (N=384)

1. Childhood overindulgence is related to ineffective parenting beliefs such as: "My child controls my life," "I have little control over my child," "Neither my child nor myself is responsible for his/her behavior."
2. Childhood overindulgence is related to adult self-esteem, adaptability in the family they are raising, and dysfunctional attitudes.
3. There are three types of overindulgence: material overindulgence (too many things), structural overindulgence (soft structure), and relational overindulgence (over-nurture).

### Study IV:

Walcheski, M. J., Bredehoft, D. J., & Leach, M. (2007). Overindulgence, Parenting Styles, and Sense of Competence – Executive Summary Study 4.

#### Findings: (N=311)

1. Parents who overindulge their children are more likely to be authoritarian (use verbal/hostility and corporal punishment), and/or permissive (lack of follow-through, ignore misbehavior, and lack parental self-confidence).
2. Parents who **do not** overindulge their children are more likely to be authoritative (use information and reasoning).
3. Parents who overindulge their children don't feel competent as parents. They lack parenting skills, feel frustrated, anxious, and are poorly motivated as parents.
4. Finally, if a parent was overindulged as a child, it increases the chances that they will overindulge their own children.

### Study V:

Bredehoft, D. J., & Clarke, J. I. (2006). Study 5: Answering Questions About Growing Up Overindulged and Adult Relationships. Poster presented at the 2006 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 8-11, 2006, Minneapolis, MN.

#### Findings: (N=233)

As adults overindulged children:

1. have money management problems
2. select a partner to control the relationship
3. find a partner to overindulge them



4. overindulge their partner
5. with their partner overindulges their children
6. are dissatisfied with their relationship
7. have trouble resolving relationship conflicts

#### Study VI:

Bredekhoft, D. J., & Ralston, E. E. (2008). Factors Connecting Childhood Overindulgence and Adult Life Aspirations, Executive Summary Study 6

**Findings:** (N=369)

The **MOST** important aspirations for overindulged children in adulthood are extrinsic goals:

1. wealth (to make the most money/wealth and to own expensive possessions)
2. fame (to be famous and admired by many people)
3. image (to have people comment on how attractive and stylish they are)

The **LEAST** important aspirations for overindulged children in adulthood are intrinsic goals:

1. meaningful relationships (to share life with someone they love in a committed relationship)
2. personal growth (to learn new things and have a meaningful life)
3. community contributions (to work for the betterment of society and to help others without anything in return)

#### Study VII:

Bredekhoft, D. J. (2007). Reliability and Validity Findings for A Measure of Childhood Overindulgence. Poster presented at the 2007 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 7, 2007, Hilton Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA.

**Findings:** (N=124)

1. Established test-retest reliability for *OVERINDULGED* a 14-item measure of childhood overindulgence.
2. Established construct validity for *OVERINDULGED* using the *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (PAQ). The PAQ measures parental authority and disciplinary practices from the point of view of the child of any age.

#### Study VIII:

Slinger, M., & Bredekhoft, D. J. (2010). Relationships Between Childhood Overindulgence and Adult Attitudes and Behaviors. Poster presented at the 2010 National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, November 5, 2010, Minneapolis, MN.

**Findings:** (N=466)

Childhood overindulgence leads to the following characteristics in adults:

1. the inability to delay gratification (lack of self-control)
2. an increase in materialistic values (selfish and greedy)
3. unappreciative and ungratefulness
4. unhappiness

#### Study IX:

Bredekhoft, D. (2013). Empirical Connections Between Parental Overindulgence Patterns, Parenting Styles, and Parent Sense of Competence – Executive Summary Study 9.

**Findings:** (N=609)

1. Mothers and fathers who overindulge their children are more likely to be authoritarian (use verbal/hostility, and corporal punishment), and permissive (lack of follow-through, ignore misbehavior, and lack parental self-confidence).
2. Mothers and fathers who **do not** overindulge their children are more likely to be authoritative (use reasoning and induction).
3. Mothers and fathers who overindulge their children don't feel competent as parents. They lack parenting skills, feel frustrated, anxious, and are poorly motivated as parents.
4. If a mother or father was overindulged as a child, it increases the chances that they will overindulge their own children.
5. Overall, fathers overindulge children more than mothers do
6. Compared by age, younger parents (age 20-41) overindulge their children more than older parents (age 42-79); younger mothers overindulge more than older mothers; and younger fathers overindulge more than older fathers.

#### Study X:

Sims, G., & Bredekhoft, D. J. (2012). Pathways from childhood overindulgence to helicopter parenting, psychological entitlement and spiritual involvement. Poster presented at the 2012 Minnesota Undergraduate Psychology Conference, April 28, 2012, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN.

**Findings:** (N=579)

The path analysis showed that adults who were overindulged as children:

1. were parented by helicopter parents
2. feel that they are entitled to more of everything and that they deserve more than others
3. are not interested in spiritual growth
4. have difficulties finding meaning in times of hardship
5. are less apt to develop a personal relationship with a power greater than themselves

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