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Pathways from Childhood Overindulgence to Helicopter Parenting, Psychological Entitlement and Spiritual Involvement

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Introduction

The area of overindulgence in children is growing exponentially, and this area of research has dramatically changed the views and ideas of how much is enough for children in today's western society. It has forced parents to re-evaluate the way in which they interact with their children, what they give to their children, and the structure of the environment in which they place their children. We can't be sure what has caused this rapid growth in research, but it appears it may be due to a new way of thinking or just a desire for parents to produce self-actualized adults. What we do know is that children are being overindulged; and it does not seem to be a result of social economic classes but rather too much, over-nurturing, and soft structure. These three things have led to a delay in the child's transition into adulthood. It appears that children who are overindulged either have a prolonged time in the transition to adulthood period or never actually leave the emerging adult stage. This study examines the pathways from overindulgence to helicopter parenting, psychological entitlement and spiritual involvement.

Research Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 579 participants (74% female, 26% male; ages 16-59; mean age 23.23) from thirty-four states and the countries of Canada, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, India, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, United Kingdom. Participants accessed the study through the web at www.overindulgence.info (60.1% from psychology classes at Concordia University, and 39.9% from the webpage). Participants answered 128 questions consisting of demographic data and seven psychological scales.

Measures

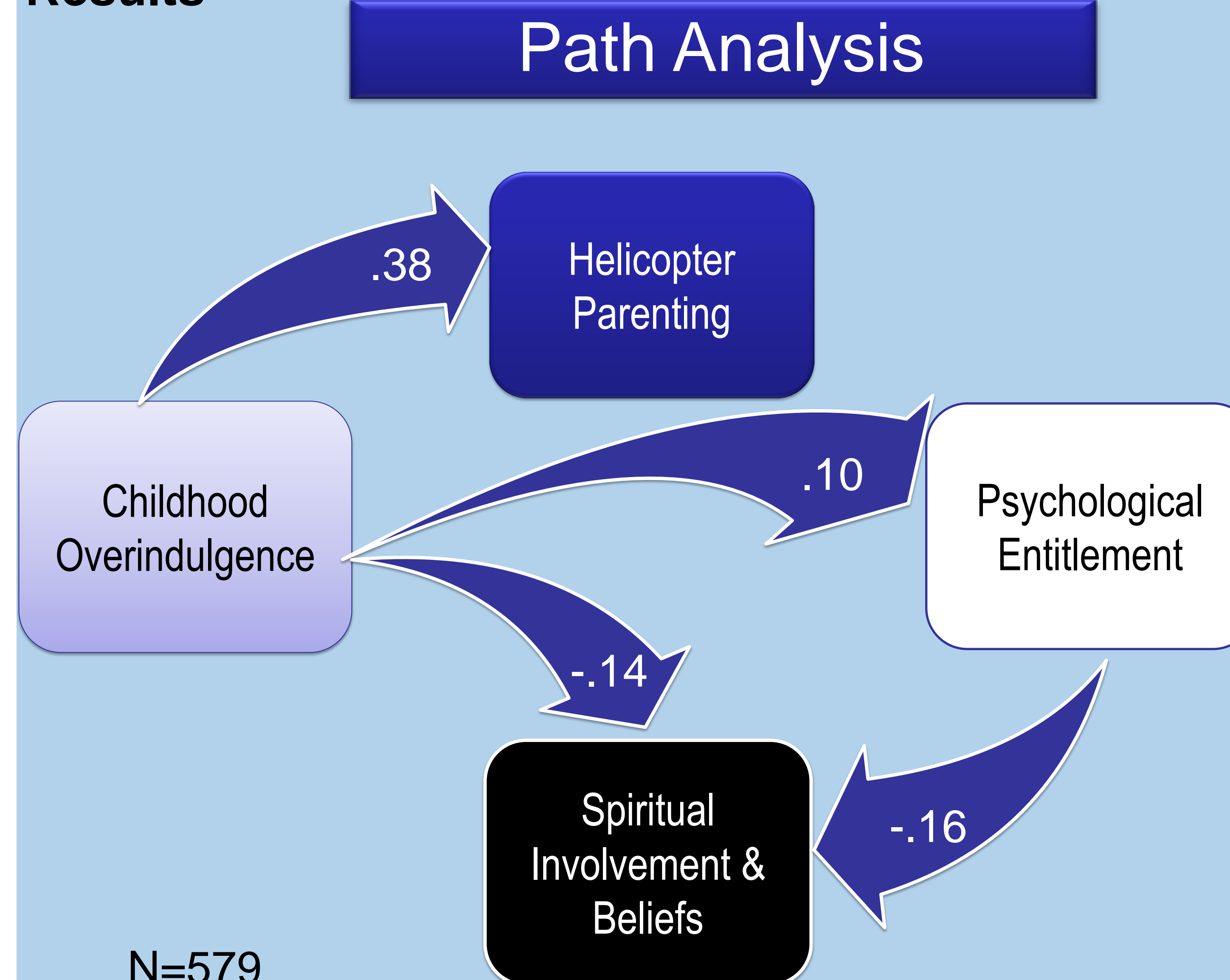
Overindulged (Bredehoft, Clarke & Dawson, 2002; Bredehoft, 2007) is a 14-item instrument designed to measure parental overindulgence from the point of view of the child of any age (total overindulgence score and three subscores: *Too Much*, *Over-nurture* and *Soft structure*).

The Helicopter Parenting Scale (Barton, 2008) is a 17-item instrument designed to measure helicopter parenting from the child's viewpoint. The scale yields a total score along with four subscales: *Involvement*, *Discouraged Autonomy*, *Angry-Defense*, and *Protectiveness*.

The Psychological Entitlement Scale (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline & Bushman, 2004) is a 9-item instrument designed to examine psychological entitlement. The scale yields one total aggregate score.

The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (Hatch, Spring & Burg, 1998) is a 39-item scale designed to examine spiritual involvement and beliefs. The scale yields a total score and three subscale scores: *Core Spirituality*, *Spiritual Perspective – Existential, Personal Application – Humility*. All inventories have established reliability and validity.

Results



- Low chi-square value (1.607; df = 2; p = .448) and lack of statistical significance indicates a good fit of the model to the data (no significant differences between the model and the data).
- All paths are statistically significant (Total Weighted Overindulgence Score, p = <.0000; Total Psychological Entitlement, p = .012; Total Spiritual Involvement Belief Scale Score, p = <.0000).
- Fit indices indicate a solid model fit: Comparative Fit Index as perfect and Normed Fit Index as sufficient/good.
- Critical N value of 3313 is very high (rule of thumb: above 200).

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Discussion

Our research confirmed our hypothesis that our data fits the model. Childhood overindulgence (CO) was statistically significant to each area tested. CO leads to helicopter parenting, a sense of psychological entitlement, and a reduction in spiritual involvement and beliefs (SIB). Not only does CO affect SIB but a sense of psychological entitlement does also. They both have a negative effect. The path analysis that was created was found to be a good fit for our data. All paths were statistically significant, and this suggests that we have a solid model for how our data is behaving.

Conclusions

Based on our findings, we can conclude that childhood overindulgence and helicopter parenting are strongly related to each other. Further, CO leads to a sense of entitlement and this then erodes one's spiritual beliefs. Children who are overindulged are at risk of feeling that they deserve more than others and are entitled to more of everything. They have difficulties finding meaning in times of hardship and developing a personal relationship with a power greater than themselves.

Further Research

Future research needs to examine the relationship between childhood overindulgence and bullying. Since childhood overindulgence leads to psychological entitlement and the erosion of spiritual involvement and beliefs it seems logical that CO would also contribute to acts of bullying.

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