

Overprotective Parenting and Its Implications for Independent Character Development in University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of overprotective parenting on independent character development among out-of-town university students enrolled in a Home Economics Education Program. Independence in emerging adulthood encompasses emotional, behavioral, and value-based autonomy, essential for functioning as responsible adults. Using a quantitative approach with simple linear regression analysis, data were collected from 103 students selected through purposive sampling. The results show a negative relationship between overprotective parenting and student independence; however, the effect was not statistically significant ($p = 0.744$). These findings suggest that while overprotective parenting may inhibit autonomy to some extent, student independence is more significantly shaped by broader contextual factors such as peer interaction, campus engagement, and experiential learning. Peer interaction can provide opportunities for students to practice independence in a supportive environment, while campus engagement and experiential learning can foster autonomy by encouraging students to take initiative and make decisions. The study highlights the need for holistic strategies within higher education to foster independence beyond family influences alone. Implications of this study indicate that universities should create structured programs that support student autonomy and self-regulation. At the same time, future research is encouraged to explore mediating variables that may better explain the development of independence during emerging adulthood.

Keywords: overprotective parenting, independent character, university student

INTRODUCTION

Independence is widely recognized as a critical developmental task during adolescence to early adulthood (Schneider et al., 2016). At this stage, individuals are expected to develop the capacity to manage their personal affairs, make informed decisions, and assume responsibility for the consequences of their actions (DREVER et al., 2015). One of the primary indicators of successful transition into adulthood is the ability to function independently in academic, social, and emotional domains (Scales et al., 2016). For university students, particularly those who leave their hometowns to pursue higher education, independence is not merely a psychological ideal but a practical necessity. These students must adapt to unfamiliar environments, handle daily tasks without direct parental assistance, and independently make various personal and academic decisions. Higher levels of student independence are associated with better adjustment to campus life, increased self-confidence, and more effective problem-solving and decision-making abilities (Sholehati et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of independence in the development of young adults, its formation is strongly influenced by prior experiences within the family, particularly parenting styles (Kaniūšonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018). Parenting plays a vital role in shaping children's behavior, personality, and level of autonomy (Bi et al., 2018). Among various parenting styles, overprotective parenting has drawn significant attention for its potentially negative consequences (Choirunnisa et al., 2025). Overprotective parenting refers to behaviors in which parents are excessively involved in their children's lives, often controlling decisions, shielding them from risks, and limiting their opportunities to face challenges independently (Soumokil & Kristinawati, 2024). While this style may stem from parental concern or a desire to protect, it can inadvertently hinder children's ability to become self-reliant. Overcontrol from parents can lead to confusion, dependency, and reduced self-efficacy in decision-making among adolescents and young adults (Wang, 2023).

Strong familial ties and parental involvement are culturally reinforced and even expected in many

cultural contexts, including Indonesia. However, when such involvement extends into overprotection, it may have unintended effects on the development of autonomy. Interestingly, this independence is not always achieved even when students begin living away from home, such as those who migrate to other cities for university. Many out-of-town students remain emotionally or behaviorally dependent on their parents (Güvercin, 2023). They may seek parental approval before joining student organizations, socializing with peers, or making financial decisions. This paradox of physical separation but psychological dependency raises concerns about the effectiveness of the transition to adulthood, especially in students who experience high levels of parental control (Doyle & O'Donnell, 2022).

In the Home Economics Education Program context, such patterns are often observable. Students frequently report difficulty making decisions independently, relying heavily on parental input despite their geographical separation. This suggests that the internalization of overprotective parenting may persist into young adulthood, influencing students' ability to act autonomously. Empirical evidence supports this concern. For instance, a study found that students raised in overprotective environments displayed lower levels of adaptability and self-confidence in college settings (Soumokil & Kristinawati, 2024). Similarly, overparenting negatively correlates with self-efficacy, resilience, and autonomous functioning in adolescents and emerging adults (Cui et al., 2022). These findings align with broader psychological theories that link autonomy-supportive environments to positive developmental outcomes, while controlling environments often inhibit growth and self-regulation (Jang & Hong, 2022).

Although previous studies have addressed the impact of parenting styles on child development, there is a need to explore how these dynamics affect young adults becoming independent, particularly in the university context. Most research has focused on early childhood or adolescence, with limited attention given to the lingering effects of overprotective parenting into emerging adulthood. Moreover, little is known about how this phenomenon manifests in specific educational and cultural contexts, such as among out-of-town university students in Indonesia studying in programs like Home Economics Education, where personal responsibility and life skills are emphasized.

To address this gap, the present study explores how overprotective parenting influences the independence of out-of-town university students. By examining this relationship, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of parenting effects on character development and provide insights for educators, counselors, and parents in fostering greater independence among young adults.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a simple regression method, which was selected to measure the relationship between variables statistically. A simple regression analysis was deemed appropriate because the study examines the influence of a single independent and dependent variables. In this case, parental overprotective behavior (variable X) is treated as the predictor, and the independent character of out-of-town university students (variable Y) is the criterion variable affected.

This conceptual framework facilitates a clearer understanding of the causal relationship and is a basis for hypothesis testing. The null hypothesis (H_0) posits that overprotective parenting has no significant effect on student independence, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) suggests that overprotective parenting has a negative influence. Formulating these hypotheses sharpens the analytical focus and provides a benchmark for interpreting the results of the simple regression analysis.

The population in this study consisted of all students enrolled in the Home Economics Education Program, covering three academic cohorts: 2022, 2023, and 2024. The total population comprised 123 students, selected based on predefined criteria. These students were considered relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, as they likely experienced varying parental influence while living away from home.

The sample consisted of 103 students, including 29 from the 2022 cohort, 35 from 2023, and 39 from 2024. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives. This method was chosen because not all students in the program met the required criteria related to overprotective parenting and independent character traits.

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire developed based on overprotective parenting behaviors and student independence indicators. Indicators for overprotective parenting included: (1) excessive contact with the child, (2) continuous provision of unsolicited help, (3) over-monitoring of the child's activities, and (4) solving the child's problems on their behalf. Indicators for student independence were classified into three domains: emotional independence, behavioral independence, and value-based independence. The overprotective parenting questionnaire comprised 28 items, while the student independence questionnaire included 40.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate whether overprotective parenting significantly influences independent character development among out-of-town university students enrolled in a Home Economics Education Program. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine this relationship, with overprotective parenting as the independent variable (X) and student independence as the dependent variable (Y). The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Regression Output Summary

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	111.827	11.525	–	9.703	0.000
Overprotective Parenting	–0.057	0.171	–0.07	–0.331	0.744

The regression equation based on the results is as follows:

$$Y = 111.827 - 0.057(X) + e$$

This model indicates a negative but statistically insignificant relationship between overprotective parenting and student independence. The coefficient (–0.057) implies that higher levels of overprotection tend to reduce independence among students slightly. However, the p-value of 0.744 (> 0.05) and the t-value of –0.331 ($< t_a = 1.66$) show that the effect is not statistically significant. Thus, overprotective parenting does not have a meaningful direct impact on student independence within the observed sample.

Despite the lack of statistical significance, the findings prompt meaningful reflection within previous research on student independence. In the academic literature, independence during emerging adulthood is understood not merely as the physical act of living away from parents, but as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, behavioral, and value-based autonomy (Husna, 2018). Emotional independence is the ability to regulate feelings and make personal decisions without excessive reliance on parental approval (Grolnick et al., 2019). Behavioral independence involves managing responsibilities such as time, finances, and academic commitments. Meanwhile, value autonomy is demonstrated through forming personal beliefs, life goals, and ethical standards distinct from those of one's family. These dimensions collectively define the foundation of adult functioning and are considered critical indicators of successful developmental transitions during the university years.

Several prior studies have emphasized the importance of these dimensions in fostering successful adjustment to university life. Students with strong emotional and behavioral independence adapt more easily to academic pressure, social transitions, and long-term decision-making (Utami, 2020). Similarly, Wilcox & Nordstokke (2019) showed that independence predicts higher levels of life satisfaction, motivation, and academic persistence in higher education.

From a theoretical lens, Erikson's psychosocial development theory places independence as central to resolving the developmental stage of "identity vs. role confusion" during late adolescence and young adulthood (Knight, 2017). Failure to develop autonomy can result in prolonged dependence, indecisiveness, and reduced self-confidence (Bergamin et al., 2022). Overprotective parenting, which often restricts decision-making opportunities, can impede this stage of development.

However, the results of this study indicate that parental overprotection may not significantly hinder the development of independence, at least not in isolation. This may be due to a number of contextual and moderating factors that influence how independence develops during university life.

First, technology-enabled communication may alter the traditional separation between parents and university students. Although students live apart from their families, frequent contact through instant messaging and video calls allows parents to remain involved in their children's decisions, sometimes in real time. This "virtual proximity" may delay the need for complete independence while providing emotional comfort.

Second, independence may emerge more strongly through social learning experiences beyond the family domain. Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes that autonomy and initiative are learned through observation, imitation, and participation in real-life tasks (Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022). Engagement in student organizations, volunteer work, academic projects, and peer collaborations can all foster independence by requiring initiative, leadership, and accountability. These experiences may outweigh or buffer the negative influence of prior parental overcontrol.

Furthermore, the culture-specific nature of parenting norms should be considered. In collectivist societies like Indonesia, strong family ties and interdependence are often valued, and parental involvement may not be perceived as intrusive. As such, students may internalize parental guidance in a more balanced way, maintaining respect for their parents' input while still exploring independence in other domains of life.

The findings of this study are also supported by (Miroslavljević & Sablić, 2025), who conducted a systematic review of overparenting and concluded that its effects are context-dependent and not consistently statistically robust. In academic programs like Home Economics Education, which emphasize self-management, problem-solving, and practical application, students may develop independence organically through curricular and co-curricular structures, despite their upbringing.

The statistically insignificant result in this study may also signal the need to explore mediating variables, such as self-efficacy, resilience, or peer influence. A single factor rarely shapes independence, and future research could employ multivariate models or path analysis to uncover the complex interplay between parental behavior and student outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the influence of overprotective parenting on independent character development among out-of-town university students in a Home Economics Education Program. Although the regression analysis revealed a negative relationship between overprotective parenting and student independence, the result was not statistically significant. This suggests that overprotective parenting, on its own, does not directly predict the level of student independence within this context. The findings highlight the complex, multifaceted nature of independence, which may be more strongly shaped by contextual factors such as peer influence, campus involvement, institutional support, and social learning experiences.

The absence of a significant relationship does not diminish the relevance of parental roles in early development. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of complementary environments—such as higher education settings—in fostering autonomy. Moreover, cultural values, technological connectivity with parents, and personal experiences all appear to contribute to how independence is formed during the university years. Therefore, promoting student independence requires a holistic developmental approach that integrates family, education, and social experiences.

Based on these findings, several suggestions can be made. First, universities—especially in applied fields like Home Economics Education—should design learning activities that intentionally promote decision-making, problem-solving, and self-regulation among students. This may include project-based learning, leadership opportunities, and simulations of real-life responsibilities. Second, academic advisors and faculty members should be equipped to support students in navigating independence while recognizing the cultural nuances of parent–student relationships. Third, future research should investigate mediating and moderating variables—such as self-efficacy, peer support, or digital parental involvement—to understand better the dynamics between parenting styles and student character development. Expanding the model to include these factors may provide a more comprehensive explanation of what shapes independent character in emerging adults.

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