

The Impact of Perceived Parental Overprotectiveness on Marital Expectations in Unmarried Females

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Abstract

Parental overprotection plays an important role in shaping the attitudes and expectations of individuals. The present study aimed to examine the impact of parental overprotection on marital expectations among unmarried females. The Short Version of the Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (SMOPS) and the Marital Expectation Scale (MES) were used to assess the variables among 300 unmarried females in Tamil Nadu, India. Linear regression and basic statistical analyses were applied to analyse the collected data. The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between AO and SMOPS ($r = .793$, $p < .001$) and a moderate positive relationship between EO and SMOPS ($r = .557$, $p < .001$). However, the relationship between parental overprotection and marital expectation was found to be very weak ($r = .023$). Regression analysis further indicated that AO ($\beta = -.012$, $p = .830$) and EO ($\beta = .060$, $p = .303$) were not significant predictors of marital expectation, and the overall regression model was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .004$, $p > .05$). From the results, it can be concluded that parental overprotection does not significantly influence marital expectations among unmarried females in the present sample, although certain dimensions of parenting show associations with overprotective parenting measures.

Keywords: Parental overprotection, marital expectation, unmarried females.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a crucial process that influences an individual's emotional, cognitive, and social development. From early childhood to adolescence, parents act as primary agents of socialization, shaping how children understand themselves, interact with others, and manage life challenges. Although parental care and supervision are essential for healthy growth, excessive protection can lead to negative developmental outcomes. In recent years, parental overprotectiveness has gained attention due to its long-term impact on autonomy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning. Parental overprotectiveness refers to a parenting style characterized by excessive control, overinvolvement, and restriction of a child's independence. Parents with this approach tend to intervene frequently in their children's decisions and daily activities. While such behavior often arises from concern and the desire to prevent harm, it may limit the development of independence, confidence, and coping abilities. As a result, children may become highly dependent and face difficulties functioning independently in adulthood. Overprotective parenting also affects emotional development. Children require exposure to manageable challenges to develop

resilience, emotional regulation, and problem-solving skills. When parents consistently shield children from difficulties, it may lead to anxiety, low self-efficacy, and poor stress management. Thus, excessive protection can restrict emotional maturity and adaptive functioning. Beyond childhood, the effects of parenting extend into adulthood, particularly in shaping relationship patterns and expectations. Marriage represents not only a social institution but also an emotional and psychological bond involving intimacy, commitment, and shared responsibilities. In modern society, changing social conditions such as education, urbanization, and evolving gender roles have influenced attitudes toward marriage. Marital expectations include beliefs about emotional closeness, communication, roles, and stability, which are often shaped by early family experiences. Parental overprotectiveness may influence how individuals perceive independence, trust, and commitment in future relationships. For unmarried females, these expectations are shaped by both personal experiences and societal influences, often emphasizing emotional compatibility, mutual respect, and autonomy. Thus, early parenting experiences play a significant role in forming adult relationship expectations. Parental overprotectiveness develops due to multiple interacting factors, including parental anxiety, personality traits, cultural values, and family dynamics. Factors such as over-cautiousness, fear of failure, and societal expectations may encourage excessive control. Cultural norms, especially in collectivistic societies, may further reinforce such behaviors. Additionally, parents' own childhood experiences and family situations can contribute to overprotective parenting. Therefore, it is important to examine how parental overprotectiveness influences marital expectations, particularly among unmarried females.

Concept of Parental Overprotection, Marital Expectation and Unmarried Females

Definitions Parental Overprotection

- Parker, Tupling, & Brown (1979): Parental overprotection is defined as a pattern of excessive control, intrusion, and prevention of independent behavior in children.
- Barber (1996): Parental overprotection refers to psychological control involving manipulation, overinvolvement, and restriction of a child's autonomy.

Definitions Marital Expectation

- Murstein (1970): Marital expectations are defined as the beliefs and assumptions individuals hold regarding roles, behaviors, and satisfaction within marriage.
- Baucom et al. (1996): Marital expectations refer to individuals' standards and perceptions about communication, emotional support, and role performance in marital relationships.

2. Review of literature

Motevalli and Baniasadi (2025) explored the relationship between perceived parental overprotection and autonomy among young adults, with self-efficacy acting as a mediating variable. The study used a quantitative research design and applied structural equation modeling on data collected from young adults using standardized scales. Findings indicated a significant negative relationship between parental overprotection and autonomy, both directly and indirectly through reduced self-efficacy. The results suggest that individuals raised in overprotective environments may struggle with independence and self-confidence, which can influence their expectations of reliance, control, and reduced personal responsibility in marital relationships.

Kim et al. (2024) examined the association between perceived child vulnerability, parental overprotection, and parenting stress using a cross-sectional survey design. The sample consisted of 163 parents, and

standardized instruments were used to measure parenting stress and protective behaviors. Data analysis using regression

techniques revealed that higher perceived child vulnerability significantly predicted increased parental overprotection and parenting stress. The findings indicate that such family environments may create emotionally intense and dependency-driven relational patterns, which children internalize and later reflect in their expectations of care, protection, and emotional support within marital relationships.

Huang (2025) explored the association between parental overprotection and depressive symptoms among adolescents using a cross-sectional survey design. The study included 823 participants aged between 10 and 14 years and employed standardized measures of overprotection, psychological control, well-being, and depression. Mediation analysis revealed that parental overprotection significantly increased depressive symptoms through psychological control and reduced well-being. The study suggests that such early emotional vulnerabilities may influence later interpersonal relationships, leading individuals to expect excessive emotional support and reassurance in marital relationships.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Aim:

To study the impact of perceived parental overprotectiveness on marital expectation in unmarried females.

3.2 Objectives:

- To assess the level of perceived parental overprotectiveness experienced by unmarried females.
- To identify whether higher levels of perceived parental overprotectiveness are associated with unrealistic, anxious, or cautious marital expectations.
- To analyse the impact of perceived parental overprotectiveness on readiness for marriage among unmarried females.

3.3 Hypothesis:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between perceived parental overprotectiveness and marital expectation among unmarried females.

4. Research Design:

The study uses a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between perceived parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations among unmarried females. A simple sampling method will be used to select participants, with no age restriction. Data will be collected through standardized questionnaires assessing parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations. Participation will be voluntary, informed consent will be obtained, and confidentiality will be ensured.

4.1 Sampling Technique:

The study will employ a simple random sampling technique to select unmarried female participants. In this method, each individual in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. This technique is chosen to minimize selection bias and to ensure that the sample is representative of the population. Participants will be selected without any age restriction, based solely on their unmarried status and willingness to participate in the study.

4.2 Tool description:

- Short Version of the Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (SMOPS) was developed by Clarke et al. (2015) to assess individuals' perceptions of parental overprotective behaviors across multiple dimensions. The scale consists of a set of items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from

“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Higher scores indicate greater levels of perceived parental overprotection. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of approximately 0.80.

- Marital Expectation Scale (MES) was developed by Jones and Nelson (1996) to measure individuals’ expectations regarding various aspects of marital relationships, including emotional, social, and role-related expectations. The instrument consists of multiple items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Higher scores reflect higher or more idealistic marital expectations. The scale has shown acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of approximately 0.78.

4.3 Statistical analysis:

The collected data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation will be used to summarize the data, and Pearson’s correlation will be applied to examine the relationship between perceived parental overprotectiveness and marital expectationa.

4.4 Inclusive criteria:

- The participant has to be only Unmarried females
- Willingness to participate in the study is mandatory.

4.5 Exclusive criteria:

- Females who are currently married.
- Females who are divorced or widowed.

5. Result

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of the analysis carried out to examine the relationship between perceived parental overprotectiveness, emotional over-involvement, and marital expectations among unmarried females.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation of SMOPS and MES among unmarried females

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Parental overprotectiveness	49.11	4.51	300
Marital expectation	122.04	7.01	300

The above table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the variables. Parental overprotectiveness has a sample N = 300, mean = 49.11 and standard deviation = 4.51. Marital expectations has a sample N = 300, mean = 122.04 and standard deviation = 7.01.

Table 2 Correlation analysis showing the relationship between parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations among unmarried females

variables	Pearson’s correlation	Decision
Parental overprotectiveness & marital expectation	0.23	Accepted Ho

***Correlation is not significant (p > 0.05)**

The above Table 2 shows the values of Pearson’s correlation between parental overprotectiveness and

marital expectations. The results indicate that there is a very weak positive relationship between SMOPS and MES ($r = .023$, $p > 0.05$), which is not statistically significant. This suggests that parental overprotectiveness does not have a significant relationship with marital expectations among unmarried females. As per the stated hypothesis, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations.

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between perceived parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations among unmarried females. The findings of the study indicate that there is no significant relationship between these two variables. Although parental overprotectiveness is often associated with various psychological and behavioural outcomes, the present study suggests that it does not directly influence marital expectations. One possible explanation is that marital expectations are shaped by multiple factors such as personal experiences, social interactions, cultural values, and exposure to relationships rather than parenting alone. Another possible reason is that unmarried females may not have fully developed or realistic expectations about marriage, as these expectations tend to evolve over time with experience and maturity. Overall, the findings indicate that parental overprotectiveness does not have a direct impact on marital expectations. The null hypothesis is accepted. Future research can focus on exploring additional variables such as attachment style, relationship experience, and socio-cultural influences to better understand marital expectations.

7. Summary

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations among unmarried females. Parenting plays an important role in shaping an individual's emotional and social development, and it was expected that it may also influence expectations related to marriage. The study was conducted with a sample of 300 unmarried females. Data was collected using standardized questionnaires, namely the Short Version of the Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (SMOPS) and the Marital Expectation Scale (MES). The results of the study indicated that there is no significant relationship between parental overprotectiveness and marital expectations. Although parenting dimensions may influence various aspects of development, they do not appear to have a direct impact on expectations regarding marriage in the present sample.

8. Conclusion

The present study concludes that parental overprotectiveness does not have a significant relationship with marital expectations among unmarried females. The findings suggest that marital expectations are not directly shaped by parenting behavior alone. Instead, they may be influenced by multiple other factors such as personal experiences, social exposure, and cultural influences.

9. Limitations

- The study focused only on two variables and did not include other psychological or social factors.
- The sample consisted only of unmarried females, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

10. Recommendations

- Future research can include additional variables such as attachment style, personality traits, and relationship experiences.

- Studies can be conducted on different populations including married individuals and males.

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