

Too Much Parenting, Not Enough Exercise

Children with parents overly involved in their lives tend to be less physically active, a study finds



[Hyper-parenting may increase the risk of physical inactivity](#) in children, a study in the April issue of Preventive Medicine suggests.

Children with parents who tended to be overly involved in their academic, athletic and social lives—a child-rearing style known as hyper-parenting—spent less time outdoors, played fewer after-school sports and were less likely to bike or walk to school, friends' homes, parks and playgrounds than children with less-involved parents.

Hyperparenting, although it's intended to benefit children by giving them extra time and attention, could have adverse consequences for their health, the researchers said.

The study, at Queen's University in Ontario, surveyed 724 parents of children, ages 7 to 12 years old, born in the U.S. and Canada from 2002 to 2007. (The survey was based on parents' interaction with the oldest child.)

Questionnaires assessed four hyper-parenting styles: [helicopter or overprotective parents](#); [little-emperor parents](#) who shower children with material goods; so-called [tiger moms who push for exceptional achievement](#); and [parents who schedule excessive extracurricular activities](#), termed concerted cultivation. Hyperparenting was ranked in five categories from low to high based on average scores in the four styles.

Children's preferred play location was their yard at home, and 64% of the children played there at least three times a week. Only 12% played on street and cul-de-sacs away from home. Just over a quarter walked or cycled to school or friends' homes, and slightly fewer to parks and playgrounds. Organized sports participation was 26%.

Of parents, about 40% had high hyper-parenting scores and 6% had low scores. The most active children had parents with low to below-average scores in all four hyper-parenting styles, while the least active had parents with average-to-high hyper-parenting scores. The difference between children in the low and high hyper-parenting groups was equivalent to about 20 physical-activity sessions a week, the researchers said.

Of the four styles assessed, only little emperor, tiger mom and concerted cultivation were independently associated with lower physical activity in 7- to 12-year-olds, the study found.

Helicopter parenting was the most common behavior reported by parents, but it wasn't associated with physical activity. The reason for this isn't clear, but a possible explanation is that the hyperparenting scores for the helicopter parents were all quite high, said researcher Ian Janssen, a professor of kinesiology and public health at Queen's University. Statistically it is more difficult to find associations when there is little variability in measurements across a study sample, he said.

Caveat: All information was self-reported by parents. The duration of physical activity wasn't assessed.

Source: *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 March 2015