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# Helicopter parenting and psychological well-being: impact on adolescents' nutrition attitudes

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## Abstract

**Background** This study aimed to examine the effect of helicopter parental attitude and psychological well-being level on Attitude towards nutrition in adolescent students.

**Methods** This study was designed with the relational-cross-sectional-descriptive model and was conducted with 652 adolescent students studying in a province in eastern Turkey between 16.05 and 10.07 2024. Data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 and G\*Power 3.1 statistical package programs.

**Results** Based on the results of Model 1, the Psychological Well-Being level explained 3.5% of the total variance in Attitude Towards Nutrition level ( $R^2=0.035$ ,  $F(1,650)=23.878$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and it was determined that the increase in Psychological Well-Being level significantly increased the attitude towards nutrition ( $t=4.886$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In Model 2, Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother variables together explained 12.2% of the total variance ( $R^2=0.122$ ,  $F(2,649)=44.912$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), it was found that an increase in both variables led to a significant increase in nutrition attitude (Psychological Well-Being:  $t=5.601$ ,  $p<0.001$ ; Mother Attitude:  $t=7.978$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In the results of Model 3, Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother/Father variables explained 12.6% of the total variance ( $R^2=0.126$ ,  $F(3,648)=31.266$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), Psychological Well-Being ( $t=5.864$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and Mother Attitude ( $t=5.416$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) significantly affected the nutritional attitude, while the effect of Father Attitude was not significant ( $t=1.900$ ,  $p=0.058$ ).

**Conclusions** In this study, it was found that Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude (especially mother attitude) levels had significant effects on individuals' Attitudes Towards Nutrition. In addition, the strong effect of the mother's attitude on eating habits was noted, but it was determined that the father's attitude did not have a significant effect on this relationship.

**Keywords** Helicopter parenting, Psychological well-being, Nutrition, Adolescents

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## Introduction

Adolescence expressed as the period of rebirth is when the individual experiences various social, physical, mental, emotional, and moral changes and simultaneously strives to create an identity [1]. In this period, adolescents exhibit many impulsive behaviors that pose a risk of admiring themselves and their academic success pressure, being accepted in peer groups, and showing that they are adults. Although adolescence is a period in which physical health is generally good, it is a period in which habits such as diet, smoking, conflict with family, exercise, substance use, and risky driving can be developed that will have long-term risk or protective features for healthy life in adulthood [2]. All these factors can directly affect the psychological well-being of young people. Psychological well-being is defined as the process of helping the individual to make sense of the situations encountered in his/her life, to know himself/herself and to realize himself/herself, to gain the ability to manage by strengthening his/her bond with his/her social environment, to protect the health in different parts of the body and to support the formation of various situations that will positively affect personal development [3, 4]. Since adolescents' psychological well-being is an important factor affecting their general health and quality of life, this situation may also affect their eating habits. Nutritional habits are a variable that can be affected by environmental factors, the nutritional attitudes of the family, and the psychological state of the adolescent [5]. Nutrition is taking and using the nutrients necessary for human growth, development, healthy and productive life for a long time [6]. Balanced and adequate eating habits support mental and psychological health and protect physical health. It is assumed that healthy eating behavior increases psychological well-being and decreases mental distress, while unhealthy eating behavior decreases psychological well-being and increases mental distress. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains (healthy eating behaviors) is positively associated with lower self-reported negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, depression, health, happiness, and better sleep. Based on this result, it is seen that students with healthy diets tend to feel psychologically better and exhibit less risk-taking behavior. On the other hand, eating habits were found to affect psychological well-being in the opposite direction. For example, stress, anxiety, and depression may cause students to exhibit behaviors such as overeating, emotional eating, or turning to unhealthy foods [7].

It is difficult for adolescents to feel psychologically well because of helicopter parents who do not allow them to express themselves. Parents intervene in every stage of their children's lives and revolve around their children like a propeller, negatively affecting their children's psychological health [8]. Helicopter Parenting Attitude: The

concept of helicopter parents, first introduced by psychotherapist Haim Ginott in 1969, emerged due to a child's saying that his mother 'circles around me like a helicopter' [9]. Helicopter parenting is a concept that refers to interventionist and perfectionist parental attitudes that are obsessively interested in their children, trying to dominate their children and making decisions on their behalf, managing the child's every move. Thinking that their children are an extension of themselves, they interfere excessively in their children's personality structures, decisions, and lives and try to realize their dreams, ambitions, and egos through their children. Helicopter parents exert intense control and supervision over their children's academic achievements, social relationships, daily activities, and eating habits [10]. Eating habits that are developed and established in childhood with the guidance of parents continue in later years of life [11]. In the helicopter parenting approach, overprotective and intrusive attitudes of parents may limit children's autonomy in making their own dietary choices and developing healthy eating habits. This may affect children's food choices, eating habits, and general nutritional behaviors. Studies have shown that helicopter parents' strict control of their children's diets may lead to diet-related stress, anxiety, and eating disorders in children [12].

Adolescence is a critical stage in which the individual is in search of identity and experiences intense physical, emotional and social changes. During this period, young people face many stress factors such as peer pressure, academic expectations, family conflicts and efforts to prove themselves. Especially in today's competitive society, the 'helicopter parent' attitude, which directs parents to control their children's lives excessively, is becoming widespread. This attitude may limit the autonomy of adolescents, preventing them from developing healthy eating habits and leading to problems such as dietary anxiety, emotional eating or eating disorders. At the same time, there is a bidirectional relationship between psychological well-being and eating habits: while healthy eating supports psychological well-being, negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety and depression can trigger unhealthy eating behaviors. In the existing literature, there is no study that examines the relationship between psychological well-being, helicopter parenting and eating behaviors together. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in the field by revealing the interaction between these three variables and to provide guidance for parents, educators and health professionals. It also aims to present its findings from a broader perspective by considering the effects of social and cultural context on adolescents' eating attitudes and psychological well-being.

This study aimed to evaluate the effects of psychological well-being and perceived helicopter parent attitude on the levels of Attitude towards nutrition in adolescent

students. There is no similar study in the literature, and this study will likely contribute to the literature.

Research Questions of the study:

**RQ1** Does perceived helicopter parental attitude affect attitude towards nutrition in adolescent students?

**RQ2** Do perceived helicopter parental attitudes of adolescent students affect the father's attitudes towards nutrition?

**RQ3** Does the psychological well-being level in adolescent students affect their attitude toward nutrition?

## Methods

This study, designed in the relational-cross-sectional-descriptive model, was conducted in 3 different high schools in the central districts of a province in eastern Turkey between 16.05 and 10.07 2024.

### Population and sample of the study

The study population consisted of 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th-grade students studying in 50 high schools, including eight in Aziziye, 25 in Yakutiye, and 17 in Palandöken. In determining the sample size, it was determined that the sample size should be at least 384 by using the formula for calculating the sample size ( $n = t^2 \cdot p \cdot q / d^2$ ). A multi-stage sample selection method was used in sample selection. Accordingly, three different high schools, namely Anatolian High School, Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, and Imam Hatip High School, are typical in the Central Districts of a province in eastern Turkey, and one from each of these three schools was randomly selected for the study by drawing lots. From

one Anatolian High School, 1 Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School, and 1 Imam Hatip High School, the proportional stratified sampling selection method determined how many students would be included in the sample. For each school, the stratified sampling method was used to determine the stratum weights at the class level and how many students from each class would be included in the study. Data were collected from a total of 711 students who agreed to participate in the study. Fifty-nine students with incomplete survey forms were excluded from the study and the study was completed with 652 participants. In the post hoc power analysis performed with the G\*Power 3.1 statistical package program, the power of our study was calculated as 99%, medium effect size at a 95% confidence level [13]. STROBE guidelines were used in reporting this research article [14].

It was found that 43.1% of the individuals studied at Anatolian High School, 75.0% of them were female, 30.2% were 9th-grade students, 59.5% of them had income equivalent to expenditure, the mean age was  $15.91 \pm 1.21$ , and the number of siblings was  $2.65 \pm 1.27$  (Table 1).

### Inclusion criteria

- Being a student of Anatolian High School, Imam Hatip High School, and Vocational and Technical Anatolian High School in the central districts of a province in eastern Turkey.
- Volunteering to participate in the study.
- Being under 18 years of age.
- Those whose parents were alive were included.

**Table 1** Descriptive characteristics of individuals ( $n=652$ )

Demographic Characteristics		n	%
School	Anatolian High School	281	43.1
	Imam Hatip High School	251	38.5
	Vocational High School	120	18.4
Gender	Female	489	75.0
	Male	163	25.0
Grade	9th-grade	197	30.2
	10th-grade	167	25.6
	11th-grade	163	25.0
	12th-grade	125	19.2
Income Level	Income Less than Expenditure	65	10.0
	Income Equivalent to Expenses	388	59.5
	Income More than Expenses	199	30.5
Family	Extended Family	107	16.4
	Nuclear Family	545	83.6
$\bar{x} \pm SS$ (Min-Max)			
Age (year)	15.91 $\pm$ 1.21 (10–19)		
Number of siblings	2.65 $\pm$ 1.27 (0–11)		

### Exclusion criteria

- Not accepting participation in the study.
- Those without communication with their mother or father were not included.

### Variables of the study

The study's independent variable was the mean score of the Perceived Helicopter Parent Attitude Scale, and the dependent variables were the mean scores of the Nutrition Attitude Scale and the Psychological Well-Being Scale.

### Data collection tools

**Socio-Demographic Characteristics Information Form:** The form created by the researchers consisted of 7 questions, including demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and class.

**Perceived Helicopter Parent Attitude Scale (HPAS):** The Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude Scale was developed by Yilmaz et al. in 2019 to determine whether mothers and fathers have helicopter parental attitudes [15]. The scale consists of 21 items on a 4-point Likert scale (1-never behaves like this, 4-always behaves like this) and has four sub-dimensions: 'helicoptering in ethical and moral issues' (items 5-9-12-16-21), 'helicoptering in academic/school life issues' (4-8-11-15-20), 'helicoptering in basic trust and life skills' (1-3-6-13-17-18) and 'helicoptering in emotional personal life' (2-7-10-14-19). The total score of the AHETS is obtained by averaging the scores obtained from the items, and mother/father scores are calculated separately. The higher the scores obtained from the scale, the higher the helicopter parenting attitude. The internal consistency coefficients of the scale are .85 and .83. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.82 for the mother and 0.87 for the father.

**Nutrition Attitude Scale:** The scale was developed by Kayapınar and Savaş, and its validity and reliability were performed. The scale is used to evaluate nutritional attitudes in individuals aged 12–25 years [16]. The scale form is in five-point Likert form, and the score obtained from the scale varies between 21 and 105. The total variance of the scale is 58.908%, and the overall reliability coefficient is 0.795. There are no reverse items in the scale. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.66.

**Psychological Well-Being Scale:** The Psychological Well-Being Scale was developed by Diener et al. (2009–2010) to complement existing well-being measures and to measure socio-psychological well-being [17]. The adaptation of the scale into Turkish was conducted by Telef [18]. The scale is a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree-1, strongly agree-7). Scores obtained from the scale range

from min. 8 to max. 56. A high score indicates that the person has many psychological resources and strengths. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient obtained in the reliability study of the scale was calculated as 0.80. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.90.

### Data collection

The researchers reached the students during class hours by obtaining permission from the teachers at each grade level. Before starting data collection, information about the study was given to the participants in the relevant class and parental consent forms were distributed to obtain parental consent. The next day, the students whose parents gave consent to participate in the study and who volunteered to participate were included in the study. Data were collected by the researchers through face-to-face interviews. The data collection process was completed within an average of 10 min for each participant. The personal information of the participants was not questioned (e.g. name-surname, school number, ID number). The questionnaire was numbered.

### Evaluation of the data

This study analyzed numbers, percentages, minimum and maximum values, and mean and standard deviation using the SPSS statistical program (SPSS-25). In order to determine the normal distribution, the kurtosis-skewness value was analyzed. According to the result of the kurtosis-skewness value, a normal distribution of the data (+ 2.0/-2.0) was determined (George, 2011). In this study,  $p < 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

### Ethics

Before starting the study, written permission was obtained from a province in eastern Turkey: the University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee and the Provincial Directorate of National Education. During data collection, written informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians, who were informed that they could leave the study at any time. The Declaration of Helsinki was complied with within the scope of the study.

### Results

When the results of the analyses of the hierarchical regression models, which were made to reveal the effects of Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother/Father and Psychological Well-Being on the level of Attitude Towards Feeding, 95,0% Confidence Interval for B; Statistical estimates for Model 1 show that the model is significant and usable ( $F(1,650) = 23.878$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Psychological Well-Being level explains 3.5% of the total variance of Attitude Towards Nutrition level ( $R^2 = 0.035$ ).

**Table 2** Hierarchical regression analysis results to determine the effect of perceived helicopter parental Attitude-Mother-Father and psychological Well-Being on attitudes towards feeding

Predictive Variables	Attitude towards Nutrition Scale (Dependent variable)					
	B	SD	$\beta$	t	p*	95,0% Confidence Interval for B
Model 1						Lower Bound Upper Bound
(Constant)	48.821	1.072		45.529	0.001	46.715 50.926
Psychological Well-Being	0.150	0.031	0.188	4.886	0.001	0.090 0.210
Model 2						
(Constant)	33.675	2.157		15.611	0.001	29.439 37.911
Psychological Well-Being	0.164	0.029	0.206	5.601	0.001	0.107 0.222
Perceived Helicopter Mother Attitude	0.290	0.036	0.294	7.978	0.001	0.219 0.362
Model 3						
Psychological Well-Being	32.314	2.269		14.244	0.001	27.860 36.769
Perceived Helicopter Mother Attitude	0.174	0.030	0.219	5.864	0.001	0.116 0.233
Perceived Helicopter Father Attitude	0.241	0.045	0.244	5.416	0.001	0.154 0.329
	0.073	0.038	0.087	1.900	0.058	-0.002 0.147
R	Model 1: 0.188 Model 2: 0.349 Model 3: 0.356					
R <sup>2</sup> /Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Model 1: 0.035 / 0.034 Model 2: 0.122 / 0.119 Model 3: 0.126/0.122					
R <sup>2</sup> Change	Model 1: 0.035 Model 2: 0.086 Model 3: 0.005					
F	Model 1: 23.878 Model 2: 44.912 Model 3: 31.266					

Hierarchical Regression Analysis \*

In the regression model, when the t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficient were examined, it was determined that the increase in the Psychological Well-Being level of the participants ( $t=4.886$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) caused a statistical increase in the level of 'Attitude Towards Nutrition' (Table 2).

Statistical estimates for Model 2 show that the model is significant and usable ( $F(2,649)=44.912$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother levels explain 12.2% ( $R^2=0.122$ ) of the total variance in Attitude Towards Nutrition. In the regression model, when the t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficient were examined, it was determined that the increase in the level of Psychological Well-Being ( $t=5.601$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the increase in the level of Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother ( $t=7.978$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) caused a statistical increase in the level of 'Attitude Towards Nutrition.' Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother levels in Model 2 affect the Attitude toward nutrition more (Table 2).

Statistical estimates for Model 3 showed that the model was significant and usable ( $F(3,648)=31.266$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother/Father levels explain 12.6% ( $R^2=0.126$ ) of the total variance in Attitude Towards Nutrition. In the regression model, when the t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficient were examined, it was determined that the increase in the Psychological Well-Being level of the participants ( $t=5.864$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and the increase in the Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Mother level ( $t=5.416$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) caused a statistical increase in the level of

'Attitude Towards Nutrition.' Perceived Helicopter Parental Attitude-Father attitude ( $t=1.900$ ,  $p=0.058$ ) was found to have no significant effect on Attitude Towards Nutrition (Table 2).

## Discussion

This study was conducted to determine the effect of psychological well-being and helicopter parenting attitudes on nutrition in high school students, and the findings are discussed in this section of the literature.

In our study, a statistically significant relationship was found between perceived helicopter parenting attitudes and mothers' attitudes toward nutrition, which led to a statistical increase in "Attitudes towards Nutrition". This finding is in line with studies on the effects of parental attitudes and knowledge on children's feeding behaviors and nutritional knowledge [19–21]. Parents play an important role in shaping their children's understanding of food and nutrition [20]. Moreover, studies have shown a significant association between parents' healthy eating attitudes, nutritional knowledge, and diet quality of preschool children [19]. This suggests that parents' attitudes towards nutrition are directly related to children's nutrition behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, this study highlights the effectiveness of nutrition education interventions involving parents and children and shows that regular participation in such activities is positively associated with nutrition-related behaviors [22]. This supports the idea that interventions targeting parents and children can improve attitudes towards nutrition. In addition, the literature has emphasized that parents' healthy eating attitudes and motivations are significantly related to the nutritional quality of young people, further emphasizing



the relationship between parental attitudes and children's nutrition [21]. In conclusion, the existing literature supports a significant difference between parental attitudes and knowledge about nutrition and children's attitudes and behaviors towards food. Therefore, our findings on the relationship between perceived helicopter parental attitudes and maternal attitudes towards nutrition are related to children's attitudes and behaviors toward nutrition and parental attitudes.

Our study determined that the increase in the participants' psychological Well-Being level statistically significantly increased the level of 'Attitude Towards Nutrition' ( $p < 0.001$ ). In a study similar to ours, the relationship between children's psychological well-being and academic achievement was examined, and it was found that psychological well-being positively affected children's general attitudes and behaviors. The same study determined that psychological well-being may positively affect other behavioral attitudes of children, such as eating habits [23]. Another study showed that positive emotions and well-being increase the likelihood of individuals making healthy lifestyle choices. In this context, individuals with high psychological well-being tended to develop more positive attitudes towards nutrition [24]. Increased psychological well-being may help individuals pay more attention to their general health, keep their stress levels low, increase self-regulation skills, and receive positive social support. These factors are thought to improve individuals' attitudes toward nutrition by positively affecting their eating habits. It was determined that the increase in the Psychological Well-Being level of the participants ( $t = 5.864$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) caused a statistical increase in the level of Perceived Helicopter Parent Attitude-Mother ( $t = 5.416$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) in the level of 'Attitude Towards Nutrition.'

In our study, psychological well-being decreases as the perceived helicopter parent level increases ( $p < 0.05$ ). Helicopter parenting may lead to an increased risk of anxiety and depression in children. Studies show that overprotective and controlling parenting attitudes increase psychological stress and anxiety levels by preventing children from developing independence [25, 26]. In a study conducted by Reed et al., helicopter parents prevented their children from making independent decisions, weakening their ability to solve their problems, reducing their self-confidence, and limiting their ability to act independently in their future lives [27]. A study conducted by Llorca et al. reported that helicopter parenting affects academic achievement and psychological well-being. It shows that helicopter parents may decrease academic achievement by weakening their children's academic self-efficacy [28]. In another study, it was reported that there were significant relationships between the perception of helicopter parenting and children's behavioural

and emotional problems [29]. In addition, children may feel under constant pressure due to excessive control and interference, which may undermine their emotional well-being [25]. Helicopter parenting is thought to reduce children's psychological well-being by having adverse effects on critical areas such as independence, self-confidence, stress management, and social skill development.

## Conclusions

It was determined that the increase in the perceived helicopter parental attitude-mother level and the psychological well-being level of adolescent students positively affected the Attitude towards nutrition.

## Limitations

The fact that the study was limited to high school students in a province located in eastern Turkey may limit the generalisability of the findings for different regions and cultural structures. However, this situation provides a valuable opportunity to examine regional differences. The cross-sectional design may be insufficient to fully reveal causal relationships due to the fact that the data obtained belong to a certain time period; however, it provides important clues about the relevant relationships. Although the self-reported nature of the data carries some risks of bias, adolescents' self-reporting of their perceptions is critical in understanding psychological dynamics. In addition, although the helicopter parental attitude is based only on adolescents' perceptions, it provides important information to understand the effects of parental attitudes on adolescents. Despite these limitations, the study makes significant contributions to the literature on adolescents' nutritional attitudes and parental attitudes.

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## Author contributions

Conceptualization, M.A.A. and I.U.; methodology, N.G.A. and M.Y.; formal analysis, M.Y., S.P., and N. G. A.; data curation, S. P., A. C. and C.K.; writing—original draft preparation, A.C., I.U. and C.K.; writing—review and editing, I.U., M.A.A., N.G.A. and M.Y.; project administration, M.A.A.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Data availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Declarations

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Permission was obtained from the authors who developed the scale and from the ethics committee before data collection began. The Declaration of Helsinki conducted the study at all stages. Informed consent forms were obtained from the participants, and it was explained to them that their participation was voluntary and that the data obtained would be used for

scientific purposes. The Ethics Committee approved the study protocol at Erzurum Technical University in Türkiye. (16/05/2024-06-16).

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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