

# The Mediating Role of Perfectionism and the Need for Social Approval in the Effect of Helicopter Parenting on Psychological Well-Being in Emerging Adults

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Although helicopter parenting first attracted attention in the popular press, it is a concept that has gained experimental significance in the last few years. The growing literature on this subject has revealed many negative consequences of helicopter parenting. Research on emerging adults has shown that helicopter parenting is related to negative mental health outcomes. However, this effect can show a complex structure. The structure revealed by helicopter parenting attitude and related factors should be supported by a new study. In line with this information, the mediating role of perfectionism and the need for social approval in the effect of helicopter parenting attitudes in emerging adults on psychological well-being were investigated. The study was carried out on 405 university students (Mean=21.09, SD= 1.79). The relations between the variables were analyzed by the Structural Equation Model. According to the research findings, the need for social approval and maladaptive perfectionism played a fully mediating role in the effect of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being. The results highlighted that although the helicopter parenting attitude poses a threat to emerging adults' psychological well-being, this effect occurs indirectly through maladaptive perfectionism and the need for social approval.

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**Keywords:** Helicopter parenting, Need for social approval, Perfectionism, Psychological well-being

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## INTRODUCTION

Helicopter parenting, which expresses an overly involved parenting style, has attracted the attention of the media and researchers in recent years (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). In the literature, it was explained as developmentally improper parenting that includes over-advising, providing excessive sources, problem solving, and observation of the developing adult exercises (Segrin et al., 2015). Helicopter parents are overly interested and preventive parents who often deal with problems, decide on their behalf and moderate their daily routines (Reed et al., 2016; Howard et al., 2020).

Helicopter parents' styles may violate the autonomy of their children, especially at university age, by showing excessive interest and interference in children's problems. At the same time, they can experience the process required to enter adulthood for their children which causes them to have difficulties in forming an individual identity and psychologically dissociating. These children may also experience a decrease in self-control, satisfaction with university life, and well-being, along with problems in interpersonal relationships (Fingerman et al., 2012; LeMoyné & Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

Self-determination theory underlines the significance of compensating three innate psychological demands (autonomy, competence, and relationship) for well-being and healthy psychological development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Over-involved and intrusive parenting may prevent the fulfillment of psychological demands such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness. These unmet psychological needs may cause young people to become vulnerable in situations that require self-control and regulation and to experience well-being-related problems such as depression, anxiety, life satisfaction, and emotional dysregulation (Cui et al., 2019). Well-being is accepted as one of the most important positive psychology concepts (Diener et al., 2009; Keyes et al., 2002; Seligman, 2011). Well-being is defined as the state of adapting to the dangerous world and the ability to avoid negative emotions or situations (Thoits, 1992). Psychological well-being is defined as gaining insight, self-realization, and becoming fully functional (Günay & Çelik, 2019). Psychological well-being also makes crucial contributions to individuals overcoming traumatic events and experiencing psychological growth, and it functions to protect mental health (Breitbart et al., 2015, Weiss et al., 2016).

Parenting style has a crucial role in the well-being of university students (Padilla-Walker et al., 2021). "Helicopter parenting" is accepted as a new parenting style in the studies, and investigated together with the variables (stress, anxiety, depression, etc.) that may affect well-being and well-being. Many of these studies argue that helicopter parenting is a developmentally inappropriate parenting style and may have a negative effect on emerging adults (Luebbe et al., 2018; Segrin et al., 2015). According to Gençdoğan and Gülbahçe (2021), it is difficult for the children of parents who revolve around their children like a propeller and interfere in every aspect of their lives, to feel well psychologically, and this will undoubtedly negatively affect the psychological health of the children.

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Psychological well-being consists of self-acceptance, autonomy, the capacity to control the environment, positive relationships with others, the meaning of life, and personal development (Keyes et al., 2002). Helicopter parenting may create an obstacle to psychological well-being, being autonomous, having to manage the environment, and personal development (Yam & Kumcagiz, 2021). Because parents with helicopter parenting styles are involved in many areas such as their children's clothing selection, friendship relations, and school and career preferences from an early age and make decisions for their children (Ganaprakasam et al., 2018). This situation may cause their children to be negatively affected emotionally and socially in the future (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2015).

A helicopter parenting style can affect the perfection of children. Intervention and management can convey messages of high standards and fear of failure to the child (Hayes & Turner, 2021). If a parent is worried about his child's success and is afraid of failure, he may show more helicopter parenting behaviors to help him make fewer mistakes (Nelson, 2010; Segrin et al., 2013). Anxious parents may interfere with their children more frequently, and this intensive parental intervention may contribute to the child's self-criticism and perfectionism. In addition, fear of failure and high standards lay the groundwork for the development of maladaptive perfectionism in children (Hayes & Turner, 2021).

Individuals with maladaptive perfectionism are defined as those who are extremely afraid of criticism and criticism, experience the anxiety of making mistakes, give excessive importance to order, and expect complete and complete appreciation (Rice and Preusser, 2002). Soonens et al. (2005) discovered that parental control was positively associated with maladaptive perfectionism. This relationship may be more important and evident in emerging adulthood, a period when young people make important decisions about their future (Hayes & Turner, 2021). Perfectionism is also associated with the need for social approval. The need for social approval refers to the individual seeking the approval of others and trying to avoid disapproval (Karaşar & Öğülmüş, 2016). According to Antony and Swinson (2009), perfectionist individuals are people who are excessively concerned about other people's thoughts and have a high need for approval. From another point of view, people with a high need for social approval also have a perfectionist attitude (Chang, 2000; Mor et al., 1995). Helicopter parenting is a form of parenting that never allows children to make mistakes or experience stress (Hirsch & Goldberger, 2010). These parents do not provide space for their children to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills, and they do not show and teach the necessary skills for their children to act independently and decide their current and future actions for them (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Handling everything for their children can negatively affect their children's self-efficacy and cause them to develop a dependency on their families or other people. People who develop addictions need the approval of others (Tanhan & Mukba, 2014; Yates & McDaniel, 1994). In this sense, there may be a relationship between helicopter parenting and the need for social approval.

In line with the relevant literature, this study investigated the relationship between helicopter parenting and young adults' psychological well-being, the need for social approval in this relationship, and the mediating role of perfectionism. Although helicopter parenting attitudes can have a negative impact on all developmental areas, there are fewer studies on young adults (Yılmaz & Büyükcebeci, 2019). Considering that helicopter parenting behaviors are difficult to observe in childhood, and its effects are more evident in adolescence and especially in adulthood (Stafford et al., 2016), it is important to investigate this issue in a young adult sample. Additionally, since helicopter parenting studies are generally conducted in the USA and parenting behaviors can be better understood in cultural contexts (Cui et al., 2019), it is significant to investigate this phenomenon in Türkiye, where collective cultural characteristics are more common (Şimşir Gökalp, 2022). Based on this information, this study is in a mediation model to analyze the hypotheses below:

H1. Helicopter parenting negatively predicts psychological well-being.

H2. Perfectionism plays a mediating role between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being.

H3. The need for social approval plays a mediating role between helicopter parenting and psychological well-being.

## **METHOD**

In this study the mediating role of perfectionism and the need for social approval in the effect of helicopter parenting attitudes on psychological well-being were investigated. For this purpose, a correlational survey model was used in the research.

### **Research Sample**

This study is designed with a cross-sectional design, and the sample of the study consists of 405 young adults from three different universities in Türkiye. 231 of the participants were female (57.04%), and 174 were male (42.96%). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 29 (Mean = 21.09, SD = 1.79).

### **Procedure**

After the research permissions, the demographic questionnaire, Helicopter Parenting Scale, Need For Social Approval Scale, Almost Perfect Scale, and Psychological Well-Being Scale were transferred to electronic form. Data were collected through a web-based online survey. The questionnaire link was sent to respondents by e-mail, social media (e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.), and other online platforms. Participants were also requested to send the link to others. Data were collected within two weeks and then the questionnaire was closed for the answers.

### **Data Collection Tools**

*Demographic Questionnaire:* Demographic questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information about the participants, including age, economic status, educational status, and gender.

*Helicopter Parenting Scale (HPS):* The Helicopter Parenting Scale developed by LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) consists of 7 items and one dimension. The Turkish version of this scale was done by Okray (2016) in a sample of university students. The scale is scored on a Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). As a result of the explanatory factor analysis, the total explained variance was 55%. The factor loads of the scale items were found to be between .56 and .76. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .74, and the test-retest correlation value was .80.

*Psychological Well-Being Scale:* The Psychological Well-Being Scale was developed by Diener et al (2009), and the Turkish adaptation was made by Telef (2013). The scale consists of 8 items and one dimension. The scale is scored on a Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As a result of the explanatory factor analysis, the total explained variance was 42%, and the factor loads of the scale items were calculated between .54 and .76. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .80, and the test-retest correlation value was .86. The item-total correlations of the scale range from .41 to .63. In confirmatory factor analysis, fit index values were found as RMSEA= .08, SRMR=.04, GFI= .96, NFI= .94, RFI= .92, CFI= .95, and IFI=.95.

*Need For Social Approval Scale:* The Need For Social Approval Scale developed by Karavaşar and Öğmüç (2016a) consists of 25 items and three sub-dimensions: social withdrawal, sensitivity to others' judgments, and leaving a good impression. The scale is scored on a Likert type (1= totally disagree, 5= totally agree). The scale explained 45% of the total variance, and the factor loads of the scale items were found to vary between .45 and .75. The internal consistency coefficients of the three sub-dimensions that make up the scale were found .83 for sensitivity to others' judgments, .80 for a good impression, and .80 for social withdrawal. The internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale was found to be .90. . In confirmatory factor analysis, fit index values were found as  $\chi^2/sd= 2.11$ , RMSEA=.06, NNFI= .94, CFI= .95, RMR= .06, NFI= .90, and IFI= .95.

*Almost Perfect Scale:* The Almost Perfect Scale was developed by Slaney et al. (2001) to determine whether individuals have perfectionist attitudes and to distinguish between adaptive and maladaptive features of perfectionism. The Turkish adaptation of this scale was created by Sapmaz (2006). The scale consists of 23 items and four sub-dimensions. The standards and order sub-dimension constitutes positive perfectionism, and the contradiction and dissatisfaction sub-dimension constitutes the maladaptive perfectionism scores. The scale is scored on a Likert type (1= totally disagree, 7= totally agree). The scale explained 50% of the total variance, and the factor loads of the scale items were found to vary between .33 and .85. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found .80 for adaptive perfectionism and .83 for maladaptive perfectionism. The split-half reliability coefficient was calculated as .74 for the adaptive perfectionism subscale and as .80 for the maladaptive perfectionism.

### **Data Analysis**

First of all, it was checked whether there were any missing values in the data. Then, frequency, percentile, mean, standard deviation, correlation, and Cronbach's alpha values were calculated. The normal distribution of the data was checked with skewness and kurtosis values. The direct and indirect effects between the variables were analyzed with AMOS, and the maximum likelihood was used in the estimation of the model. Bootstrapping was performed with 5,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval (Montoya & Hayes, 2017).  $\chi^2 / df < 5$  for the criteria for the model's goodness of fit; SRMR < 0.08; NFI, GFI, CFI, TLI > 0.90 criteria were used (Byrne, 2010; Kline, 2001).

### **FINDINGS**

**Preliminary Analysis**

The skewness and kurtosis values of the measurement tools used in the study varied between -.45 and 1.14. Skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the data have a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). Cronbach alpha values were .72 for helicopter parenting, .88 for psychological well-being, .94 for the need for social approval, .86 for the adaptive perfectionist, and .91 for the maladaptive perfectionist. Helicopter parenting demonstrated a positive correlation between the need for social approval ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ) and maladaptive perfectionist ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ). The findings also showed a negative relationship between psychological well-being and the need for social approval ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ) and maladaptive perfectionist ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ). No significant relationship was found between helicopter parenting and adaptive perfectionist, and it is therefore not included in the mediator effect model is seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics with Correlation Coefficients

	M	SS	$\alpha$	Skew.	Kurt.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Helicopter Parenting	20.10	4.87	.72	.18	-.15					
2. Psychological Well-Being	41.05	8.13	.88	-.75	1.14	-.17**				
3. Need For Social Approval	73.31	18.82	.94	.01	-.14	.42**	-.26**			
4. Adaptive Perfectionist	56.40	10.49	.86	-.45	.47	.04	.38**	.05	-	
5. Maladaptive Perfectionist	46.02	14.81	.91	.19	-.27	.26**	-.31**	.43**	-	-

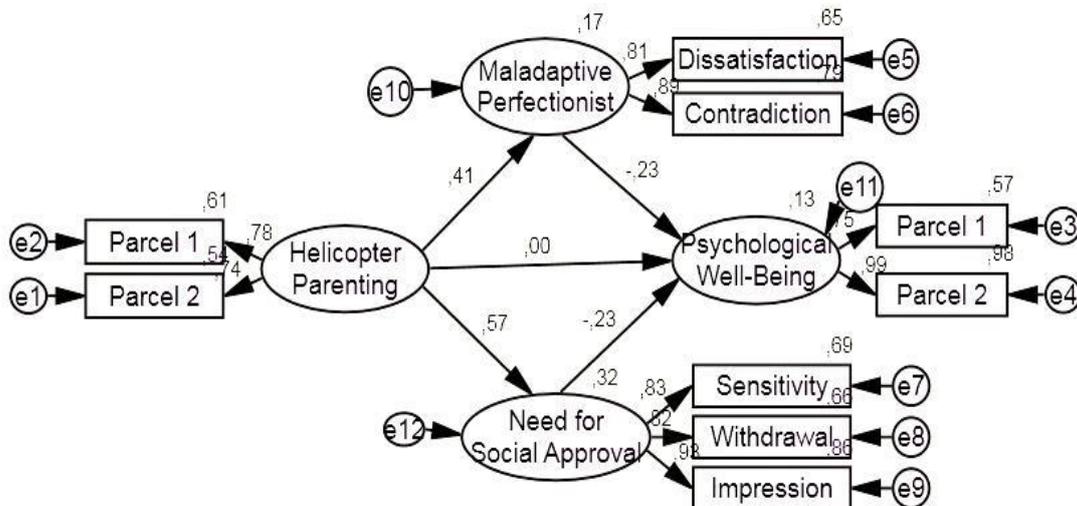
\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Measurement Model**

Analyses of the current study were done in two stages. First of all, the structure consisting of four hidden (i.e., helicopter parenting, psychological well-being, need for social approval, maladaptive perfectionist) and nine indicators (four parcels and five components) variables belonging to the model was tested with EFA. As a result of confirmatory factor analysis, the fit values of the model ( $\chi^2/df = 4.85$ , GFI= 0.95; CFI= 0.96; NFI= 0.95; TLI= 0.93; SRMR= 0.05) were found to be sufficient. In this analysis, standardized factor loads for the indicators ranged from .73 to 1.00 ( $p < .001$ ). In the model, the indicators represent the latent variables significantly.

**Structural Model**

First of all, the effect of helicopter parental attitude on psychological well-being was examined with a simple effect model. Then, the direct and indirect effects of helicopter parental attitude on psychological well-being were examined by including mediator variables in the model. In addition, the need for social approval and the direct effects of maladaptive perfectionism on psychological well-being were examined. The model is shown in Figure 1. The fit values of the model ( $\chi^2/df = 4.71$ , GFI= 0.92; CFI= 0.92; TLI= 0.91; IFI= 0.92; SRMR= 0.05) were found to be sufficient.



**Figure 1.** Structural Model Depicting The Mediating Effect Model.

As a result of the structural model, a positive effect of helicopter parental attitude on the need for social approval ( $\beta = .57$  [.47, .68],  $p < .01$ ) and maladaptive perfectionism ( $\beta = .41$  [.29, .57],  $p < .01$ ) was observed. The

need for social approval ( $\beta = -.23 [-.38, -.05], p < .01$ ) and maladaptive perfectionism ( $\beta = -.23 [-.37, -.08], p < .01$ ) were found to have negative effects on psychological well-being. In the simple effect model, while the helicopter parental attitude negatively affected psychological well-being, this effect was meaningless with the inclusion of mediator effects in the model. The helicopter parent attitude had a significant indirect effect on psychological well-being ( $\beta = -.22 [-.12, -.32], p < .01$ ). According to the findings, the need for social approval and maladaptive perfectionism played a fully mediating role in the effect of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being. Lastly, squared multiple correlation values ( $R^2$ ) explored that the predictor variables clarified 13% of the variance in psychological well-being. The result of the bootstrapping process regarding the significance of the effect sizes is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Bootstrapping Results

Path	Standardized $\beta$	%95 C.I.	
		L.L.	U.L.
<b>Direct Effect</b>			
Helicopter Parenting $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being	0.00	-.16	.16
Helicopter Parenting $\rightarrow$ Need For Social Approval	0.57	.47	.68
Helicopter Parenting $\rightarrow$ Maladaptive Perfectionist	.41	.29	.57
Need For Social Approval $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being	-.23	-.38	-.05
Maladaptive Perfectionist $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being	-.23	-.37	-.08
<b>Indirect Effect</b>			
Helicopter Parenting $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being	-.22	-.12	-.32

## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Emerging adulthood is a critical time often characterized by autonomy and independence needs (Saikkonen et al., 2018). Individuals have to cope with many changes in this period, and how young people spend this period has implications for their development in the current period and the future (Arnett 2000). Families must provide them with autonomy and support so people to overcome this developmental process (Furstenberg, 2010). Many university students still depend on their parents for social and emotional support (Guan & Fulign, 2015; Nelson & Barry 2005), and most of them state that they want their parents' involvement and are satisfied with their parent's level of involvement (Pryor et al., 2007). However, for their children to achieve the best results from the emerging adulthood process, parents need to adjust their levels of involvement and control to support their autonomy in a healthy way (Arnett, 2000; Nelson et al., 2011). This is because parenting practices that undermine the competence and autonomy of these developing individuals can be problematic when young people are trying to improve the competencies they need to be succeeding adults (Patock-Peckham & Morgan-Lopez 2009).

In this study, the mediating role of perfectionism and the need for social approval in the effect of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being in emerging adults were examined. The research results showed that the increase in helicopter parental attitude negatively affects the psychological well-being of individuals (H1). The literature confirms that a developmentally inappropriate and intrusive parenting style, namely helicopter parenting, is problematic for the adjustment and well-being of children and young people (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al. 2014; Şimşir Gökalp, 2022). Studies have shown that this type of parental behavior is quite common. According to a study conducted in the USA, 40-60% of emerging adults stated that they had seen helicopter parenting behaviors from their parents (Somers & Settle, 2010). Additionally, the transition to traditional indicators of adulthood such as owning a home, and working a full-time job (Furstenberg, 2010), as well as the difficulty of entering good universities and the desired career (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011) have caused to be more involved in children's academic and social life. The development of technology has made it easier for families to control their children and involve them in their lives (monitoring with the help of smartphone applications, messaging, social media, etc.) (Dumont, 2021).

Some research results have shown that there are emerging adults who view helicopter parents as emotionally supportive and express satisfaction with their lives (Fingerman et al., 2012; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). However, most of the studies have focused on the decreasing well-being of emerging adults of helicopter parenting (Hwang & Jung, 2022; Schiffrin et al., 2019; Yam & Kumcagiz, 2021) and life satisfaction (Gençdoğan & Gülbahçe, 2021; Schiffrin. et al., 2014; Yam & Kumcagiz, 2021) revealed that they are related. In addition, helicopter parenting was found to be related to symptoms of depression (Kim et al.,

2013; Reed et al., 2016) and high levels of anxiety (Odenweller et al., 2014). When these findings are evaluated together, helicopter parenting supports the negative effect of emerging adults on psychological well-being.

Another result obtained from the study was that maladaptive perfectionism had a mediating role in the effect of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being (H2). Perfectionism is defined as the tendency to achieve or keep unreasonably high standards (Hill et al., 1997). Perfectionists are never satisfied with their performance and try to be better and more successful than others (Başol & Zabun, 2014). There are different studies in the literature that perfectionism is unidimensional or multidimensional. However, when the structures that makeup perfectionism are examined, they are considered positive and negative structures. The main difference between the positive and negative dimensions of perfectionism is individuals' perceptions of the goals they set (Yılmaz et al., 2019). Positive perfectionists take pleasure in accepting their limits and striving to achieve perfection, believing that they can achieve the high goals they have set. Negative perfectionists have unrealistic expectations and are never satisfied with their performance, they belittle their achievements and cannot get satisfaction (Hamachek, 1978). When the related literature is examined, Soonens et al. (2005) explored that parental control is positively associated with maladaptive perfectionism. Schiffrin and Liss (2017) highlighted that mothers' helicopter parenting behaviors were associated with perfectionist tendencies in adult children, and Fletcher et al. (2020) similarly indicated that over-parenting predicted perfectionism in university students. In addition, studies report that helicopter parenting can lead to perfectionist and narcissistic personalities (Segrin et al., 2012) and that children exposed to excessive parenting may develop interpersonal dependence in later life (Odenweller et al., 2014). As a result of the relevant literature review, the studies support the results of the current study.

Finally, the need for social approval has a mediating role in the impact of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being (H3). The need for social approval has attracted the attention of researchers because it is an important variable that directs human behavior. The need for social approval is defined as the individual's view of other people's expectations, judgments, and compliance with them as important (Karaşar, 2014). People with a need for approval show behaviors that others will evaluate and support positively (Kell, 2009), experience intense anxiety about what others think of them (Grams & Rogers, 1990), fulfill the wishes of others to feel approved and loved and do what is asked of them. can't say no (Demirli & Değirmenci, 2019). The need for social approval is considered a pathological structure in western culture where individualism predominates (Canlı & Karaşar, 2021). However, the opinions of others, getting approval from others, and harmony in interpersonal relations are relatively more accepted features in collectivist cultures such as Turkish culture. For this reason, researchers emphasize that the need for social approval may be high in Türkiye (Karaşar, 2014; Tanhan & Mukba, 2014). Helicopter parenting is characterized as a parenting model that provides a high level of control and a low level of autonomy (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). For these reasons, it is considered an expected result that the increasing helicopter parental attitude will positively affect the need for social approval. While the need for social approval is accepted as an important need in the establishment of interpersonal interactions and social ties, giving excessive importance to the wishes and expectations of others may cause individuals to delay their wishes and expectations (Karaşar, 2014). Latimer and Martin Ginis (2005) noted that the need for social approval and the fear of negative evaluation are related. Karaşar and Öğmüş (2016b) revealed the negative relationship between the demand for social approval and happiness. In line with this information, the relevant literature supports the mediating role of the demand for social approval in the effect of helicopter parenting attitude on psychological well-being.

In general, this study showed that increasing helicopter parenting attitude increases the need for perfectionism and social approval in emerging adults, and as a result, it negatively affects the psychological well-being of individuals. However, there are limitations of this study, such as the fact that it was conducted in developing adults and could not be generalized to other age groups, the study was cross-sectional, and it was far from examining the course of psychological well-being. Mother and father helicopter parent attitudes were not measured separately. Data are based on participants' views. Finally, the study was carried out only with people from Türkiye can be a limitation.

The research findings are both innovative for the literature and suggest significant implications about the factors affecting psychological well-being. The research contributes to the literature on the mental health

of emerging adults. Although this research is based on the findings of previous studies, the model it presents contributes to our understanding of the factors affecting the psychological well-being of emerging adults and their structure. In addition to its theoretical contribution, this research offers important implications for mental health professionals. Considering that the helicopter parenting attitude is associated with perfectionism and the need for social approval and ultimately psychological well-being, it could be advantageous for mental health professionals to educate individuals about the consequences of parenting attitude. Mental health professionals can benefit from the findings of this research in their treatment plans and studies to increase the well-being of young people. The effect of perfectionism and the need for social approval should be taken into account in programs to increase well-being.

#### **Declarations**

##### **Ethics Approval**

The formal ethics approval was taken by the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University. The researcher conducted the study following the Helsinki Declaration in 1975.

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##### **Research and Publication Ethics Statement**

The study was approved by the Necmettin Erbakan University Ethics Committee (Approval Number/ID: 2022/407). Then, the author consciously assures that for the manuscript "The Mediating Role of Perfectionism and the Need for Social Approval in the Effect of Helicopter Parenting on Psychological Well-Being in Emerging Adults" the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the authors' original work and has not been published anywhere.
- The paper reflects the author's research and analysis truthfully and completely.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

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