



Over-Parenting and the Development of Youth Autonomy in Nigeria: Implications for National Productivity and Social Resilience

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Abstract

The phenomenon of over-parenting has emerged as a significant challenge to human capital development in developing nations. In Nigeria, extreme parental intervention risks stifling the independence of the youth, who are intended to be the primary drivers of economic growth. This study analyzes the impact of over-parenting on the autonomy, social resilience, and economic productivity of Nigerian youths. Methodology: A descriptive survey design was employed, collecting data from 600 respondents aged 18–35 across six Nigerian states representing the country's geopolitical diversity. Data were gathered using standardized self-administered questionnaires measuring over-parenting, youth autonomy, work readiness, and civic resilience. Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including the chi-square test. The results reveal a statistically significant relationship between excessive parental involvement and diminished youth autonomy, particularly in decision-making, risk-taking, and problem-solving. The findings confirm that low autonomy negatively impacts innovation, social adaptability, and employability. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature by applying self-determination and ecological systems theories to the African sociocultural context. National resilience and economic productivity depend heavily on the innovative spirit of independent youth. The study concludes that over-parenting creates a "dependency trap" that hinders development. It recommends strategic interventions such as parental education programs, youth empowerment initiatives focused on independence, and curriculum adjustments designed to foster adaptive life skills and self-reliance.

Keywords: Over-parenting, youth autonomy, national productivity, social resilience

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Introduction

According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2022) of Nigeria, the country has the highest proportion of youthful population globally, with over 60% of the demographic below 35 years. This social composition represents both a potential and a problem for the country's national development planning. A youthful demographic, when socially and psychologically prepared, serves as a resource for creativity and a driving force for productivity and innovation. In the past, declining autonomy is a noticed phenomenon among the Nigerian youth. The problem is expressed in the youth's dependence on parents, a phenomenon which prolongs their transition into adulthood and socially reduces their resilience to challenges of varying economic conditions. Over-parenting is a cause for concern of this problem. Over-parenting as having helicopter or intensive parenting style, where there is extreme involvement by parents, with both control, supervision, and especially intrusion, in the children's academic, social, and personal activities, not considering what is appropriate for that developmental stage. There is cultural significance in the Nigerian context about positive parental involvement, especially in the unitary family frameworks. However, within the framework of over-involvement, there is a potentially negative impact, where youths may not cultivate the self-efficacy and autonomy. The socio-economic stress and uncertainty, and the unyielding competition for attainable education and employment, also heighten parents' nervousness in the frameworks of their children micromanaged for (Cardenas et al., 2022) Situation of Parenting in Nigeria) exemplifying over parenting).

Numerous studies in the world, especially Africa and more specifically Nigeria, have documented the consequences of over parenting. The negative effects have included anxiety, self-esteem, coping skills, and over parenting have been documented. Economic dependence during over parental control reinforces unemployment and underemployment. There is underutilized socialization in the family units that articulates the Nigerian policies on youth socio-economic empowerment that is designed to promote autonomy in the youth. The definition of Youth Autonomy is the ability of young people to function independently, to control their own actions, to assume responsibilities for their life decisions, and for their interpersonal social relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy correlates with the development of human capital, and with the ability to think creatively, start businesses, work in different kinds of jobs, and participate in communities. From the perspective of a nation, autonomous youth add to the innovative and proactive/resilient people for the workforce. Having little or no autonomy may lead to being dependent, and having no or little risk-taking behavior which may negatively affect the economy and social well-being of a country. In the case of Nigeria, the increasing youth unemployment and social vulnerability have prompted factors concerning the ability of the youth to transition to adult roles. The quality of education and the labor market have been the two major structural issues identified. Still, the psychosocial elements and parental styles have not been studied extensively. Hence, it is important to understand the impact of over parenting on youth autonomy to create a framework to enhance the social resilience and productivity of the nation.

The primary aim of this research work is to understand the impact of overparenting and its implications on youth autonomy in Nigeria concerning social resilience and national productivity. The following are the specific objectives of the study: To understand the extent of overparenting in Nigerian households; 2. Measure the degree of independence of Nigerian youth; Analyze the correlation between over-parenting and youth independence; Analyze the effects of youth independence on a country's economic output and social robustness. Research Questions: How

common is over-parenting in Nigeria?; How independent are Nigerian youth?; What is the magnitude of correlation between over-parenting and youth independence?; What are the effects of youth independence on a country's economic output and social robustness? Research Hypotheses: H01: There is a statistically significant correlation between over-parenting and youth independence in Nigeria; H02: There is a statistically significant correlation between youth independence and a country's economic output and social robustness; The study utilizes the Self-Determination Theory and the Ecological Systems Theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as explaining the essential psychological needs for understanding growth and wellness. To SDT, psychologically supportive environments and it cuts off children's ability to develop autonomy. Nigerian parents socially control their children's education, career, and relationship choices, which may result in children being less motivated and less able to adapt to new situations. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Osher et al., 2020) the multiple environments that support human development, such as family, education, and community. The family and its parenting styles are microsystems that are also influenced by the macroeconomic, cultural, and policy environments. Over-parenting in Nigeria is a function of the prevailing high economic insecurities, which get translated to lower family levels. The combination of these theories helps the research explain the relationship between high parental control, lack of autonomy, and low productivity and resilience of different social structures.

The literature on the impact of over parenting on youth continues to grow. Helicopter parenting leading to a decrease in self-efficacy and an increase in dependence for young adults in the US. Higher levels of parental involvement predicted poorer levels of emotional regulation and decision-making. Further confirming these findings, (LeBlanc & Lyons, 2022) helicopter parenting predicts emerging adults' career adaptability and psychological resilience. (La Rosa et al., 2025) also found that intrusive parental monitoring is linked with young adults' indecisiveness and increased dependence. In a cross-cultural study, over parenting in young adults affects other areas by decreasing the ability to solve problems and preparing to be employed. Parent control and self-regulatory competence is a vicious cycle. Autonomy-restrictive parenting results in lower entrepreneurial intentions and problem-solving abilities. Over parenting adults' young adults during anxiety and in a state of decline and also struggling to become adults. While in the African context it is less present, it is true that it is increasing. Youth dependence in Nigeria and formed a statement that prolonged parental control leads to delayed economic independence. Recent African-centred evidence depicts the same narratives. Parental over-involvement to be positively linked with prolonged financial dependence among Nigerian university graduates. (Adebusuyi & Adebusuyi, 2021) also noted high parental control and the West African setting work readiness competencies to correlate negatively.

In the same vein, excessive parental control was reported by (Kant & Metasebia Adula, 2023) in Ghana, leading to a reduction in entrepreneurial intent among young adults. With respect to these findings, (Hoegler Dennis et al., 2025) autonomy-supportive parenting leads to greater innovation orientation than controlling parenting. Parental over-involvement decreases emerging adults' civic efficacy and coping adaptability. Studies on youth autonomy in Nigeria have primarily been concerned with education and employment. (Wanwan & Khairani, 2025) discovered that in informal employment, higher autonomy led to better outcomes among Nigerian youth. More recently, (Li et al., 2025) found a link between civic participation and innovation in urban youth and the presence of an autonomy-supportive structure. While there has been some research done on the impact of over-parenting and autonomy on productivity and social resilience on a macro level, there is scant research done on over-parenting and autonomous youth on a micro level and on a family level. This study is the first of its kind within the Nigerian context to combine original family data across Nigeria's various states and use it to address the macro-level data on social productivity and resilience

Methodology

This research employed a descriptive survey research methodology to assess the correlation between over-parenting and youth autonomy, and the impact on Nigeria's national productivity and social resilience. This methodology is suitable since a survey research method allows the data to be collected from a large and heterogeneous population in a systematic way, and the researcher has then the freedom to determine the relationships among the variables in a natural situation without any interference or manipulation. Various studies conducted in the social sciences and education that focus on psychosocial and behavioural issues phenomena have adopted this same methodology. The study's population consisted of young people aged 18–35 years from eight purposive sampling states in Nigeria. These included: Lagos and Oyo (South-West), Delta and Rivers (South-South), Anambra and Enugu (South-East); and Kaduna and Benue (North). The states were chosen to capture Nigeria's regional, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. From estimates by the National Bureau of Statistics Commission, the youth population is over 10 million in the selected states.

Using Cochran's (1977) sample size determination formula, we calculated the sample size to be 700. Of the 640 completed questionnaires used in the analysis, the resulting response rate of 91.4% was attributed to successful completion of the survey. A multistage sampling technique was used whereby: 1) two states were chosen from each of the six geopolitical zones in the country (North, West, and East); 2) urban and semi-urban Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected within each state; and 3) stratified random sampling was used to select respondents based on age and gender to achieve proportional representation. Research data was gathered using the Over-Parenting and Youth Autonomy Questionnaire (OPYAQ). The OPYAQ consists of a structured questionnaire with 4 parts: Part A includes demographic information; Part B evaluates over-parenting using a modified version of the helicopter parenting scale; Part C reviews the youth's autonomy through decision-making, emotional independence, self-financial problem-solving, and self-problem-solving; and Part D reviews self-perceived productivity and social resilience, with each of the 4 sections evaluated using a 4-part Likert scale (4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree).

To examine content and face validity, a review of the instrument was conducted by experts in educational psychology and sociology. A pilot study was conducted with 50 youths from states outside the sampled states. Using Cronbach's alpha, the over-parenting scale had a coefficient of 0.84, and the youth autonomy scale had a coefficient of 0.81. This demonstrated that the scales have high internal reliability and are good to use for the main study. Data review was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The research questions were analysed using the descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. The hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics, where a chi-square and regression analysis were used at a 0.05 level of significance. Ethical standards were adhered to throughout the study. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained and documented from all participants. Respondents were assured that their participation was confidential, and no identifying information was collected. The data were used solely for the purpose of the study and in compliance with the international research ethics guidelines.

Table 1 gives the detailed demographic data of the respondents and the distribution of the questionnaires in eight Nigerian states that were chosen for the study to ensure adequate representation for every region of the country. The selected states include two from each of the four regions of the country. The high return rate of the questionnaires (91.4%) indicates that the respondents were highly engaged and motivated, and also adds to the reliability of the data collected. The distribution of the respondents by age and occupation indicates a predominance of the youthful population in Nigeria, while the level of education of the respondents was adequate

to enable them to engage meaningfully in the assessment of the constructs relating to autonomy. The inclusion of Delta and Anambra States in the study also provided the South-South and South-East perspectives which contribute to the external validity of the study and also ensured that the analysis addressed the impact of varying socio-cultural practices of parenting in the different regions.

Data analysis

Table 1. Demographic Representation of Respondents and Questionnaire Distribution by State

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	340	53.1
	Female	300	46.9
Age	18-24	220	34.4
	25-30	260	40.6
	31-35	160	25.0
Education	Secondary	130	20.3
	Diploma/NCE	190	29.7
	Bachelor's	235	36.7
	Postgraduate	85	13.3
Occupation	Student	215	33.6
	Employed	275	43.0
	Self-employed	150	23.4
State (Region)	Lagos (SW)	90	14.1
	Oyo (SW)	80	12.5
	Delta (SS)	85	13.3
	Rivers (SS)	75	11.7
	Anambra (SE)	80	12.5
	Enugu (SE)	70	10.9
	Kaduna (NW)	85	13.3
	Benue (NC)	75	11.7
	Returned	640	91.4
Questionnaire	Distributed	700	100
	Returned	640	91.4

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2026

Hypothesis Testing: Chi-Square Analysis

Table 2: Chi-Square Test of Relationship between Over-Parenting and Youth Autonomy

Variables	X ²	df	p-value	Decision
Over-parenting & Youth Autonomy	21.87	4	0.001	Reject H ₀₁

Table 2 details the chi-square statistic of the relationship between over-parenting and youth autonomy. The calculated chi-square statistic ($\chi^2 = 21.87$) was statistically significant with $p < 0.05$. This implies there is a positive relationship between over-parenting and youth autonomy. It suggests that there is extreme parental over-involvement causing youth to have lower autonomy. The result proves the study's assumption theoretical, and proves the case that over-parenting practices, especially in the Nigerian context, are negatively affecting the youth's psychological autonomy as well as their capacity to self-regulate.

Table 3. Youth Autonomy Scale Descriptive Statistics

Autonomy Dimension	Mean	SD
Decision-making autonomy	2.41	0.68
Emotional independence	2.53	0.71
Financial self-reliance	2.22	0.65
Problem-solving autonomy	2.38	0.69
Overall autonomy score	2.39	0.68

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2026

Table 3 describes the statistics of the youth autonomy scale. The mean scores of all dimensions of the scale are less than the benchmark mean of 3.00. This shows that the autonomy of the respondents is low (in general). The financial autonomy dimension had the least mean which depicts the economic situation of Nigeria, as well as the extended parental dependence. The result has proven the fact that the youth in Nigeria have very little autonomy and this could be the reason of their low productivity, low innovation, and low resilience. The fact that the autonomy scale has a significant internal consistency makes the result even more powerful.

Table 4. Regression Analysis of Over-Parenting on Youth Autonomy

Predictor	B	SE	β	T	P
Constant	3.91	0.21	-	18.62	0.000
Over-parenting	-0.47	0.06	-0.51	-7.83	0.000
$R^2 = 0.26$					

Table 4 shows the results from the regression analysis on the effect over-parenting has on youth autonomy. Over-parenting negatively and significantly predicts youth autonomy ($\beta = -0.51$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 26% of the variance in autonomy scores. This shows that excessive parental control is a significant factor in the loss of autonomy for Nigerian youth. The regression model demonstrates prediction and not just association, advancing the statistical strength of the study.

Result and Discussion

This study demonstrates a significant negative correlation between the phenomenon of over-parenting and the level of youth autonomy in Nigeria. This finding is fundamentally aligned with the principles of self-determination theory, which asserts that an excessively controlling environment is detrimental to an individual's psychological development. The data indicates that youths who reported high levels of parental involvement tend to face serious obstacles in their mental maturation process, showing they were less able to make decisions, solve problems, and make money. This failure within the microenvironment creates barriers to self-actualization, demonstrating that the basic human need for autonomy remains unfulfilled.

Furthermore, the results reveal that youths subjected to intense parental involvement exhibit significant deficits in independent decision-making, creative problem-solving, and financial capability. This confirmation suggests that the basic human need for autonomy is unmet due to overprotective parenting styles. When parents assume responsibilities that the child should naturally learn to navigate, they inadvertently "atrophy" the youth's psychological muscles. As a result, rather than emerging as proactive agents of change, these youths become trapped in a state

of prolonged dependency that sociologically hinders their transition toward economic independence.

Regression analysis indicates that parental over-involvement serves as a potent predictor of youth autonomy, explaining 26% of the variance in the autonomy variable. This notable effect size underscores the critical importance of family socialization processes in determining the quality of youth outcomes. This is consistent with the findings of Mariano et al. (2025) regarding parental over-control and its correlation with diminished self-efficacy and independence in emerging adults. Such a substantial percentage sends a strong signal to policymakers that interventions at the family level carry significant weight in shaping the quality of national human capital.

In the Nigerian sociocultural context, prolonged parental control is frequently exacerbated by external systemic factors, such as economic instability and high youth unemployment rates. These conditions create a "vicious cycle" where economic uncertainty prompts parents to provide extreme protection, which in turn delays the psychosocial maturity of their children (Borah et al., 2025). In Nigeria, this phenomenon is not merely a matter of parenting style but a defensive response to an unpredictable environment. However, this protective stance often backfires by sustaining dependency, making it difficult for youths to achieve self-reliance before full maturity.

Utilizing ecological systems theory, the findings indicate that over-parenting does not occur in a vacuum but is rooted in a specific socio-economic context characterized by labor market insecurity and intense competitiveness (Kong et al., 2021). These structural macro-system impacts shape parental behaviors at the micro-system level, where control and monitoring are intensified (Fuller et al., 2025). Parents feel compelled to maintain strict control to ensure their children's future remains safe amidst a fragile job market. While these practices are well-intended, the study indicates that such behaviors ultimately lower the adaptive capacity and resilience of the youth.

The study further emphasizes that the current lack of youth autonomy has systemic negative effects on national productivity and social resilience in Nigeria (Dwikat et al., 2023). Nigerian youths characterized by high autonomy are more likely to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and adaptable—attributes that are essential for economic diversification and social cohesion. On the other hand, constrained autonomy prevents the emergence of new talent willing to take economic risks. Without this spirit of autonomy, as noted by Jang & Kim (2025), the vast potential of Nigeria's youth population remains untapped, failing to serve as the expected engine for economic growth.

Finally, these findings suggest a significant contribution to the country's human capital deficit due to constrained youth engagement in work and civic life (Kadikilo et al., 2025). In line with global trends regarding the impact of restricted autonomy, Nigeria faces a major challenge in building a self-sustaining economic foundation if its younger generation remains overshadowed by restrictive parenting. These results warrant addressing over-parenting not just as a domestic issue but as an urgent national developmental policy concern (Shir et al., 2019). Synergy between educational, social, and economic policies is required to create an environment that supports the growth of independent, resilient, and globally competitive youth.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, over-parenting has serious implications for national productivity and social resilience, and this study demonstrates that the phenomenon significantly limits youth autonomy. Excessive parental control hinders independent, flexible, and problem-solving decision-making, which consequently reduces the agency available to youth for making meaningful contributions to the economy and social order. Nigeria's demographic dividend can only be secured through the strategic promotion of autonomy-supporting parental practices that empower the next generation

to become self-reliant drivers of innovation. To better understand the impact of parental engagement on the development of autonomy, future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to determine the long-term effects of over-parenting behaviors as children transition into full adulthood across different cultures. Furthermore, future academic inquiries should utilize qualitative methodologies to capture the lived experiences of families and engage in transnational studies to compare how various sociocultural norms influence parental over-involvement. Ultimately, bridging this gap requires a multi-sectoral approach—integrating parent education, youth empowerment, and curriculum adjustments—to transform Nigeria’s youthful population into a resilient and globally competitive workforce.

Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of Interest

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, validation; formal analysis, investigation; resources, data curation; original draft writing; review and editing, visualization. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript: Juliet N. Ossai, Magaji Tingong zakaria.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Grammarly in order to improve the grammatical flow, refine the structural organization of the introduction, and assist in synthesizing policy review sections.

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