

Parents Just Don't Understand: The Role of Parental Control in Western and East Asian Countries

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Many parents like to meddle in their children's lives. Sometimes this can be beneficial, if the meddling is in the form of parental guidance or setting rules. However, numerous studies have found that in Western countries, when parents are very controlling and dominating over their children, the children suffer psychologically. It has also been suggested that this effect may not be as strong in East Asian countries — researchers have posited that certain aspects of East Asian culture may make children more accepting of their parents' intrusive behavior. In a new report in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, psychologists Eva Pomerantz from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana and Qian Wang of The Chinese University of Hong Kong review evidence comparing the effects of parental control in the United States and China.

Much of the research examining the effects of parental control has been guided by the idea that too much may interfere with a child's psychological development by making them feel as though they don't have any control over their lives. This outcome may be particularly pronounced in the West, where autonomy and independence are emphasized.

Longitudinal studies have indicated that parental control in both Western and East Asian countries can have similar results on children from those regions. For example, as children are entering adolescence, the more parents make decisions for them regarding personal issues, the more the child's emotional suffering will be affected two years later — the size of this effect was similar in the United States and China.

However, there may be some contexts in which the effect of parental control is stronger in the West than in East Asian countries. In Western countries, parents tend to decrease control more than Chinese parents do as children go through adolescence; Western children expect this decrease in supervision and therefore, their psychological functioning may be dependent on the extent to which parents decrease their control over them. In addition, the negative effects of parental control over children's academic learning may be stronger in the West than in East Asia. In East Asian countries, there is a very strong moral aspect associated with learning and an education has much greater financial impact than in the West. For these reasons, when it comes to academics, East Asian children may be more accepting of excessive parental involvement.

Recent studies investigating the question of parental control in the West and in East Asian countries suggest that extreme meddling by parents can have negative effects on their children's psychological development in both of those regions, although the effects may not be uniform. Pomerantz and Wang conclude their report by noting, "Recommendations that parents limit their intrusiveness in children's lives are likely to be useful both in the West and in East Asia."