

# Historical and cultural differences in perceived overprotective parenting from 1976 to 2023

## A cross-temporal meta-analysis

Stijn Van Petegem, Cindy Eira Nunes, Annalisa Soncini,  
Şule Selçuk, Gaëlle Venard, Elliana Lamprianidou,  
Bart Soenens, Grégoire Zimmermann, & Patty Leijten

# Introduction

## Contemporary parenthood



# Introduction

## Contemporary parenthood



«Back in the days»

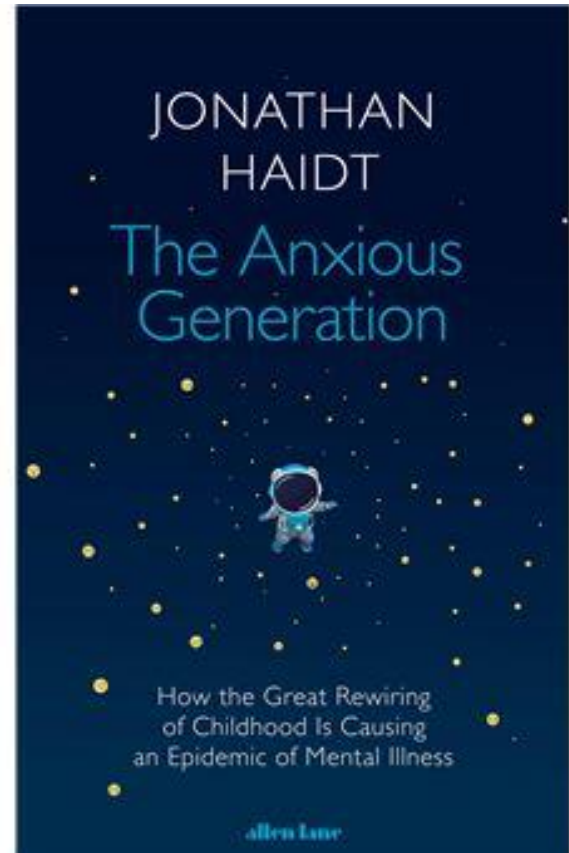
«Nowadays»



Visit the LittleLife website at [www.littlelife.com](http://www.littlelife.com)

# Introduction

## Contemporary parenthood



# Overprotective parenting

## Conceptualization and implications

« The provision of a level of protection that is excessive, considering the child's developmental level » (Thomasgard et al., 1995)

### History:

→ Since 40's: first studies

→ Since end of 70's: systematic quantitative research

- Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker et al., 1979)
- *Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran* (EMBU; Perris et al., 1980)

Risk factor for psychopathology (e.g., de Roo et al., 2022; Kidd et al., 2022)

# Previous research

## Historical trends in parenting

### + Parental involvement

→ time spent with children (Gauthier et al., 2004)

→ financial investment (Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013)

### + Parental monitoring, quality time (Collishaw et al., 2012)

### - Authoritarian parenting, physical punishment

(Ryan et al., 2016; Trifan et al., 2014)

### + Parental pressure (Curran & Hill, 2022)

### - Parental self-efficacy (Glatz & Buchanan, 2023)

# Sociocultural factors

## Societal prescriptions

Intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996)

- E.g., self-sacrifice
- Parents are held personally responsible
- Gendered representations

Past research

- Pressure, guilt, shame, stress
- Overprotective parenting (e.g., Lampryanidou et al. 2025; Venard et al., 2024)



# Goals of the study

## Research questions



RQ1: time trends?

→ Changes across time in youth's perceptions of OP?

RQ2: gender differences?

→ Mothers > fathers

→ Increases in both mothers & fathers

(...)

# Sociocultural factors

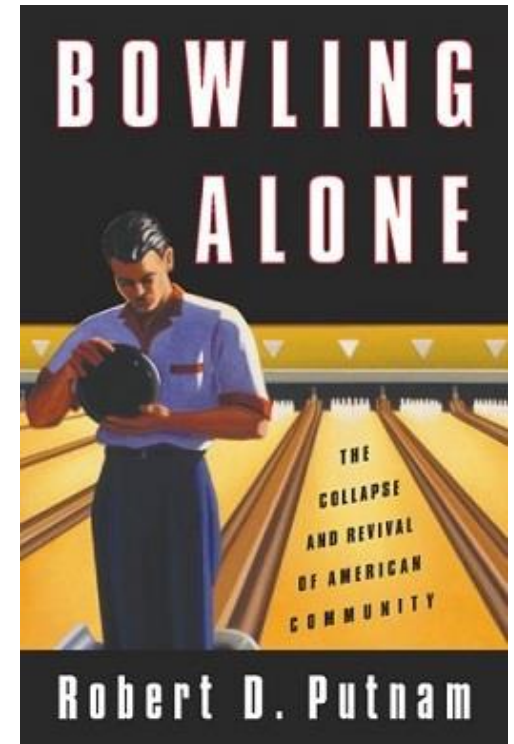
## Social capital theory

Declines in social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000)

- Less trust in others
- Public space is considered less safe

Past research

- Parents' social worldviews (e.g., Mouton et al., 2025; Ryan et al., 2025)



# Goals of the study

## Research questions



RQ1: time trends?

RQ2: gender differences?

RQ3: country-level perceived trust?

→ Explains differences between countries in OP?

→ Explains time trends in OP?

(...)

# Sociocultural factors

## Economic inequality

Inequality, job insecurity

→ Educational attainment

Overly involved in children's lives?

Past research

- Parents' excessive expectations (e.g., Curran & Hill, 2022)
- Controlling school involvement (e.g., Van Petegem et al., 2024)



## LOVE, MONEY, AND PARENTING

How Economics Explains  
the Way We Raise Our Kids

Matthias Doepke & Fabrizio Zilibotti

# Goals of the study

## Research questions



RQ1: time trends?

RQ2: gender differences?

RQ3: perceived trust?

RQ4: country-level economic inequality?

→ Explains differences between countries in OP?

→ Explains time trends in OP?

(...)

# Sociocultural factors

## Gender role beliefs

Social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012)

Gendered division of labor

- Gender stereotypes
- Gender roles influence behavior



Past research

- Gender essentialism & overprotection

(e.g., Eira Nunes et al., 2025)

# Goals of the study

## Research questions



RQ1: time trends?

RQ2: gender differences?

RQ3: perceived trust?

RQ4: economic inequality?

RQ5: country-level traditional gender role beliefs?

→ Related to more OP?

→ Related to more pronounced gender differences?

# Methodology

## Cross-temporal meta-analysis



### Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)

- Parker et al. (1979)
- Overprotection subscale: 13 items
- E.g., « my parents did not want me to grow up »

### *Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran* (EMBU)

- “Memories of my Parents’ Upbringing”
- Perris et al. (1980)
- Overprotection subscale: 16 items [but: many versions]
- E.g., « I think that my parents’ anxiety that something might happen to me was exaggerated »

# Methodology

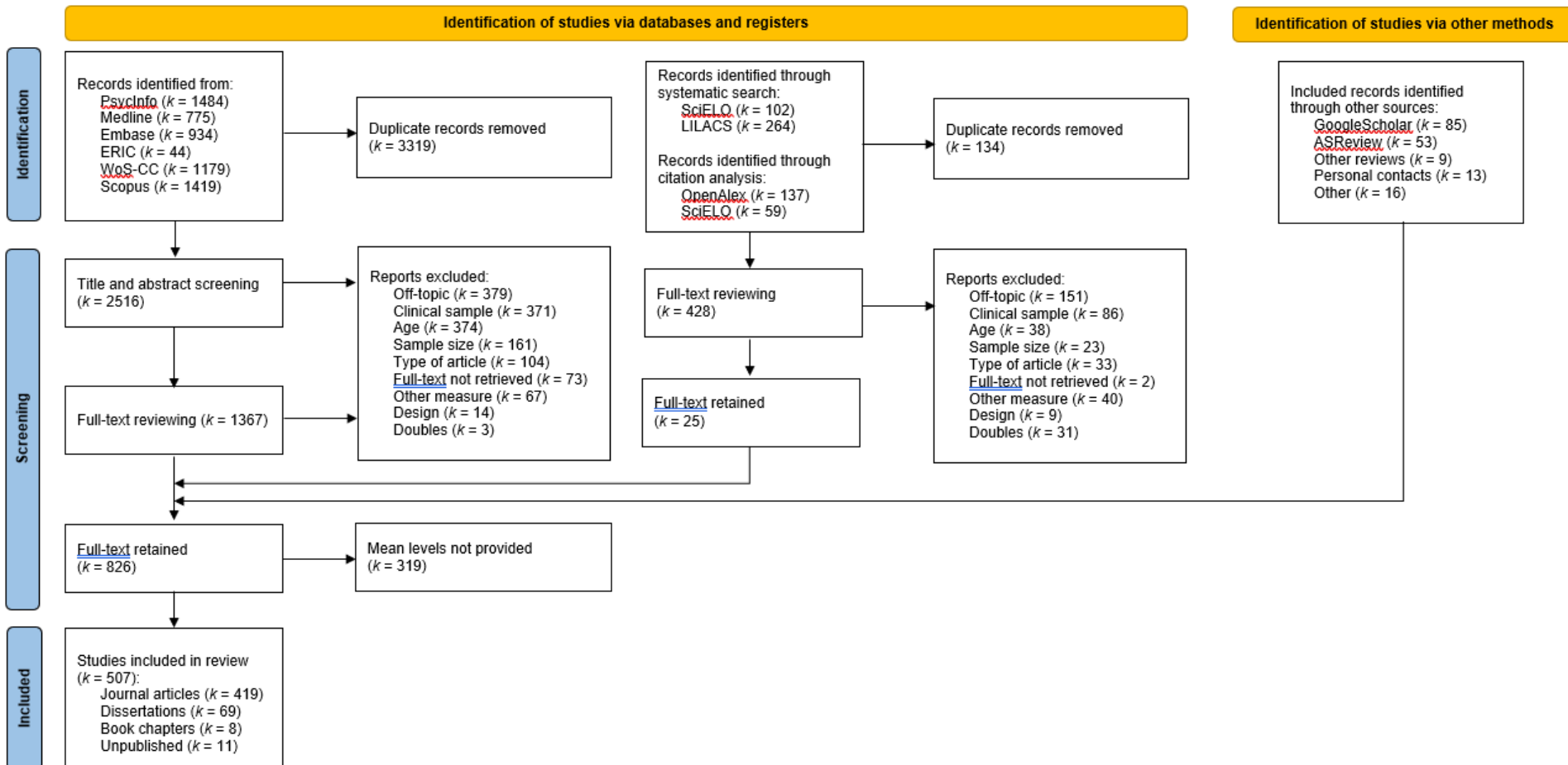
## Inclusion criteria



- Mean/total score PBI/EMBU, theoretical range
- Mean age: 12-25 years
- No clinical / high-OP sample
- If experimental: before manipulation
- If longitudinal: wave 1
- At least  $N = 40$

# Methodology

## Literature search



# Methodology

## Coding



### Information from articles

- Sample & study characteristics (e.g., year of data collection)
- Results (e.g., mean, SD, theoretical range)

### Linear transformation of OP scores

- Percentage of maximum possible (POMP) = 
$$\left[ \frac{\text{observed} - \text{minimum}}{\text{maximum} - \text{minimum}} \right] \times 100$$

### Information from other databases (RQ3-5)

- Perceived trust in others
  - *“Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?”* (World Value Survey; Inglehart et al., 2020)
- Economic inequality
  - Gini-coefficient (World Bank, 2022)
- Traditional gender role beliefs
  - *“When a mother works for pay, the children suffer”* (WVS; European Value Survey, 2022)

# Results

## Descriptive information

### Study characteristics

- 507 studies
- 541 samples
- 984 means
  
- 82.6% journal articles, 13.6% dissertations, 2.1% unpublished, 1.6% book chapters
  
- 83.3% English (16 languages)

# Results

## Descriptive information

### Sample characteristics

- Total N = 288,276 (range N = 40 – 11,537)
- Mean age = 18.43 years
- Gender: 58.88% girls
  
- 77.6% PBI, 22.4% EMBU
  
- 54 countries
  - (21% US; 9.5% CN; 8.4% AU; 7.1% IT; 5.5% JP)
- Year of data collection: 1976-2023

# Results

## Preliminary analyses

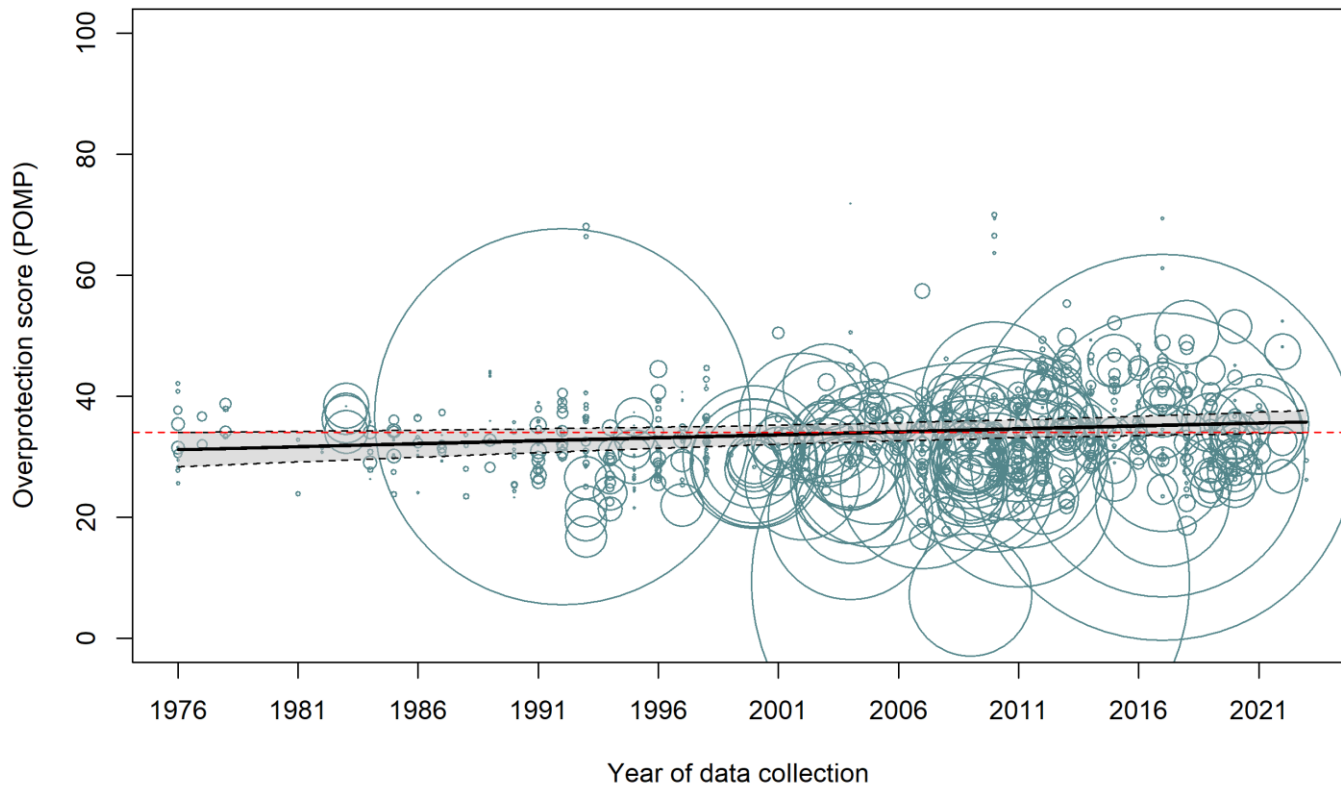
### Multilevel analyses

- Level 1: typical within-study variance
  - 0.82%
- Level 2: variance within samples
  - 18.09%
- Level 3: variance within studies
  - 33.37%
- Level 4: variance within countries
  - 17.37%
- Level 5: variance between countries
  - 30.34%

# Results

## RQ1: time trends

Changes in overprotection (PBI) in adolescents and emerging adults  
from 1976 - 2023



Year of data collection:  $b = 0.10$ ,  $p = .01$ ; standardized beta = .15  
Effect size = increase of 0.24  $SD$  over 47 yrs

# Results

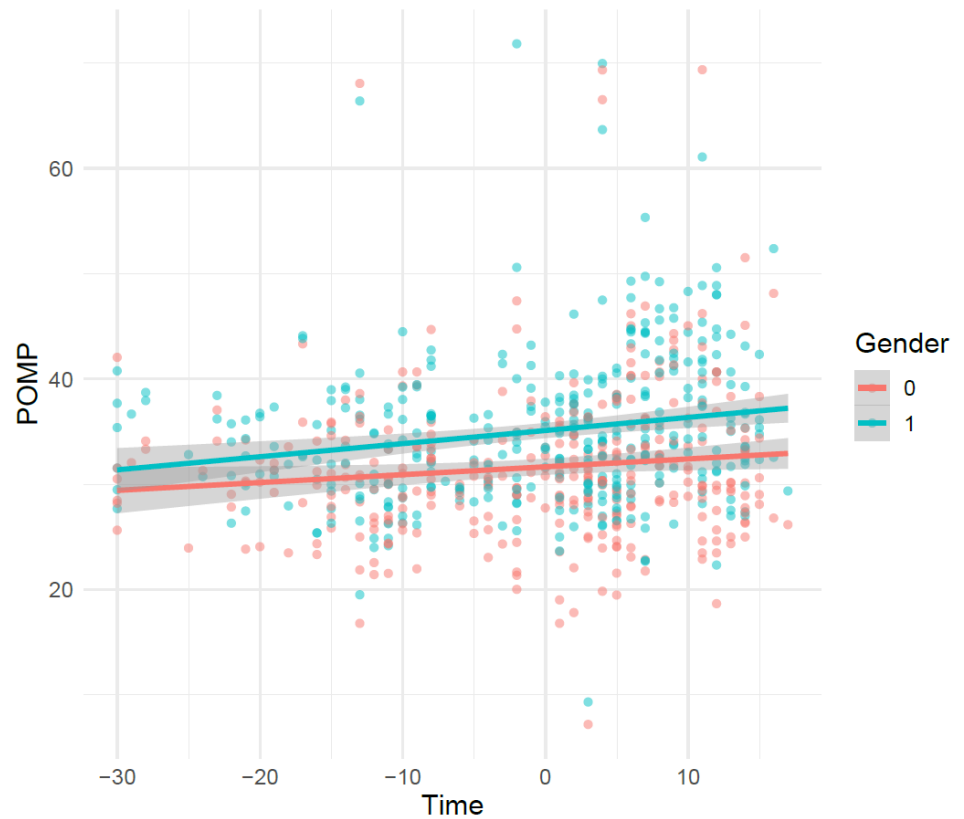
## RQ2: gender differences

Mean-level differences (RQ 2a)?

- $b = 3.41, p < .001$

Time \* gender (RQ 2b)?

- $b = .030, p = .14$



# Results

## RQ3: perceived trust

### Preliminary:

- ICC trust = .95
- Increase across time ( $p = .01$ )

### Analysis:

- Between-country effect (predictor: country average)
- Within-country effect (predictor: group-mean centered)

### Results:

- Between-country:  $b = -.14$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $beta = -.24$
- Within-country:  $b = -.24$ ,  $p = .034$ ,  $beta = -.11$

# Results

## RQ4: economic inequality

Preliminary:

- ICC = .98
- Increase across time ( $p < .001$ )

Results:

- Between-country:  $b = .21$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $beta = .16$
- Within-country:  $b = -.06$ ,  $p = .831$ ,  $beta = .01$

# Results

## RQ5: gender role beliefs

Preliminary:

- ICC = .75
- Decrease across time ( $p < .001$ )

Results – main effect:

- **Between-country:  $b = 8.48$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $beta = .32$**
- **Within-country:  $b = -3.73$ ,  $p = .284$ ,  $beta = -.08$**

Results – interaction gender:

- **Between-country:  $b = -1.62$ ,  $p = .210$**
- **Within-country:  $b = -5.38$ ,  $p = .028$**

# Discussion

## Overall patterns

### Time trends

- Small but significant increase in OP

### Gender differences

Importantly: particularly country-related differences!

- Social capital (perceived trust)
- Economic inequality
- Traditional gender role beliefs

→ Sociocultural context matters!

→ Refrain from parent-blaming!

contact

[www.safesorry.be](http://www.safesorry.be)

[stijn.van.petegem@ulb.be](mailto:stijn.van.petegem@ulb.be)