

Public Opinions of WA Residents on Free-range Parenting and Their Legal Implications on Child Neglect

Ruoya Huang¹, Lauren Barry¹, Sam Niehl¹, Rielly Springer¹, Elizabeth Mader^{1#} and Tara Maloney^{1#}

¹Eastside Catholic High School

#Advisor

ABSTRACT

Free-range parenting is the practice of giving children more freedom to act independently. However, in recent years, many proponents of this practice got into legal trouble or faced social criticism for being neglectful and were labeled as “bad parents.” Most of them are low-income families that cannot afford babysitters. Others are well-off parents that advocate for fostering independence. Nevertheless, their actions incurred various consequences due to their socioeconomic status as helicopter parenting becomes increasingly popular. The lack of specific laws to clarify the difference between neglectful parenting and free-range parenting cause poorer or uneducated parents to suffer from serious legal charges unjustly. Washington is among those states that have not updated its laws to keep up with the heated debate over parenting preference, so gathering input from WA residents on this topic is essential for highlighting the controversy and providing necessary insights into the social trend to inform the policymakers when evaluating and amending neglect laws. 222 WA residents were conveniently selected to answer a 30+ question survey over two months. This study found that younger generations, high-income parents, and people with higher education are more disapproving of free-range parenting. It was also found that average WA residents believe parents have the responsibility to always accompany children under 12 years old, presenting a more conservative/pro-helicopter parenting preference. The reasons behind the inclination were explored. Based on those results, the researchers discussed legal recommendations for the WA legislature to reduce ambiguity to better protect parental rights while sustainably alleviating child neglect.

Literature Review

Free-Range Parenting

The dictionary defines free-range parenting as “a style of child rearing in which parents allow their children to move about without constant adult supervision, aimed at instilling independence and self-reliance” (“Free-range parenting Definition”). This philosophy takes form in various ways based on circumstances and each child's ability. They might include “walking to the park alone, riding bikes to school, or taking public transportation without supervision” (Niz & Harris, 2019). In recent years, the discussion of online activities and privacy was added to the conversation. Although free-range parenting was the dominant practice of American families for generations (NPR Staff, 2015), it has been increasingly challenged in recent decades; there has been a cultural and legalistic shift towards helicopter parenting.

Helicopter Parenting

In 1967, Baumrind's theory, which holds that authoritative parenting is the optimal parenting style, ended an era of a hands-off approach (McMurtry, 2013). Helicopter parenting has been the most prominent and widely practiced parenting approach for the past 20 years. Economists Matthias Doepke of Northwestern University and Fabrizio Zilibotti of Yale found that between the late 1970s and 2005, the time mothers and fathers spent with their children per week increased about six hours each, which is equivalent to 1.75 hours of parent-child interaction per day (2019). Initially, helicopter parenting was used as a form of overprotection. It characterizes parents that watch their child's every move by "hover[ing] over [him or her] like a helicopter" (Ginott, 1973). Proponents say that helicopter parenting leads to a more successful life. Doepke and Zilibotti also found that kids whose parents were considered more intense and involved were more likely to graduate from college and go on to get graduate degrees (2019). In her book *Unequal Childhoods*, Dr. Annette Lareau observed that "middle and upper-class parents were often more structured and interventionist in their children's lives than the "natural growth" method used by the lower classes." Thus, this active intervention had a long-term beneficial impact on the development and eventual socioeconomic status of the children (Roth, 2015). Though no direct cause and effect relationship was proven between the two things, several studies in developmental psychology have found evidence that points to this conclusion (Chan & Koo, 2010). Dornbusch, et al. (1987) and Rudasill, et al. (2012) found authoritative parenting promotes positive outcomes regarding academic performance for children. On the other hand, critics argue that helicopter parenting is bad for children for the following reasons: 1) it takes away chances for children to learn from their mistakes, preventing them from developing to their full potential. 2) It diminishes leadership and self-discipline, which are crucial skills and personality traits for future success. 3) It causes anxiety for both parents and the children, resulting in intense relationships. 4) It discourages children from being self-reliant and independent, causing low self-esteem and high dependency ("Helicopter Parenting," 2015). Dr. Peter Gray, a research professor of developmental and educational psychology at Boston College, argues that by implementing a strictly controlled environment, parents are doing their children more harm than good because they develop "habits of helplessness" that last into adulthood (Gray, 2019). This is demonstrated by a study conducted by Jill Bradley-Geist and Julie Olson-Buchanan, which found that college undergraduates whose parents had employed a helicopter parenting approach generally had lower levels of self-efficacy and were less able to find adaptive solutions to workplace problems (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014).

Current Debate over Free-Range Parenting

Critics of free-range parenting accuse it of being a form of risky neglect (Niz & Harris, 2019). They believe parents fail to protect innocent children from dangers when they give them too much freedom and allow them to act alone or unsupervised. The call for more protective and hands-on parenting was so strong and prevalent that laws have been interpreted and applied in favor of helicopter parenting. Free-range parents have a greater chance of facing criminal charges and legal interventions today than ever (Manno, 2016). This encroachment sparked many free-range supporters' discontent, leading to the Free-range movement. Lenore Skenazy, a columnist for the *New York Sun*, founded the Free-Range Kids Movement after she was denounced virulently for her decision to let her 9-year-old son ride the New York City subway by himself. The primary agenda of the movement was to "separate the real dangers from the ones foisted upon us by the media, and by other folks with things to sell" (Lascale, 2019) and fight the belief that children are in constant danger ("Free-range Kids," 2016). Skenazy argues that this "pessimistic, fearful way of looking at childhood" is ingrained into our beliefs and not grounded (Prichep, 2018).

Free-Range Parenting and Neglect

Neglect is the most prevalent type of maltreatment reported in the United States with high rates of recidivism and untoward outcomes (Jonson-Reid et al., 2013). The belief that free-range parenting is a form of neglect has influenced policies and laws in many states. In 2014, Danielle and Alexander Meitiv were reported of being neglectful for letting their children, a 10-year-old and a 6-year-old, play outside alone. Child Protective Services (CPS) threatened to remove the children if the Meitivs did not sign a form requiring them to supervise the children at all times. The Maryland CPS also decided that the Meitivs were guilty of unsubstantiated child neglect. Half a year later, in 2015, the Meitivs were confronted with another legal challenge. The Maryland police picked up the Meitivs' children as they were walking back home alone from a nearby Park. The children were in the custody of police and CPS for more than five hours. The Meitivs were under investigation for neglect for several months. Their first and second charges were eventually cleared (Manno, 2016). Debra Harrel faced a similar incident in South Carolina in 2017. Harrell couldn't afford a babysitter to watch her 9-year-old daughter while she was working at McDonald's, so she allowed her daughter to play alone in a park about 6 minutes walking distance away. Harrell was reported to CPS, resulting in her being confined in jail for one night and losing custody of her daughter for 17 days (Calarco, 2018). She was charged with "unlawful conduct toward a child, a felony punishable by up to 10 years in jail" (Wallace, 2014). Though her charge was later cleared, the question of at what point free-range parenting becomes neglect remains a difficult one to answer.

Washington State Laws Regarding Neglect of Children

The Washington State RCW section 26.44.020 defines abuse or neglect as "sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the child's health, welfare or safety...or the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a person responsible for or providing care to the child" ("RCW 26.44.020"). Negligent treatment or maltreatment is defined as "an act or failure to act, or the cumulative effects of a pattern of conduct, behavior, or inaction, that evidences a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to a child's health, welfare, or safety" ("RCW 26.44.020"). This includes failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, or health care and actions/failures to act that result in injury or create a substantial risk of injury. Caretakers are left without a specific understanding of what constitutes "serious disregard of consequences" or "clear and present danger," giving courts the discretion and power to decide if a certain situation constitutes neglect on a case-by-case basis. Several states have specific requirements for the minimum age a child must be to stay home alone, for example, Illinois (14 years), Maryland (8 years), New Mexico (10 years), North Carolina (8 years), and Oregon (10 years). Other states offer only a recommendation for minimum age, ranging from 6-14 years (WP Company). Many states offer neither a requirement nor a recommendation. The Washington State legislature does not set a specific minimum age requirement for children to stay home alone but recommends the child be at least 10 years old (WP Company). The Washington Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) says that children 9-12 years old can be left alone for less than 2 hours and children 13 or older can be left alone longer and strongly advises against leaving a child younger than 8 years old home alone (KREM, 2017). However, the DSHS says that parents need to take other factors into account, such as the maturity level of their child or whether their child has a disability when deciding to leave them home alone. Given the nonspecific requirements for the minimum age that a child can stay home alone in the Washington State and vague legislative language, parents are left unsure whether leaving their child home alone, along with other types of conduct, constitutes neglect.

Legal Problems and Implications of Free-Range Parenting

There are more laws and policies that restrict free-range parenting today compared to twenty years ago. Supporters of the free-range movement argue that the Constitutional rights should decide how they can interact and take care of their

children. According to the American Bar Association, The Court explained that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects this liberty, incorporating “the right to marry, establish a home, and bring up children” (“Parental Rights Cases to Know,” 2016). Proponents of free-range parenting argue that this clause protects parents’ right to raise children as they wish as long as those actions do not harm the children’s interests and do not break federal laws. Despite the theory that every citizen should be protected and treated under the Constitution equally and justly, there is a double standard when it comes to which parents’ actions constitute negligence among different populations.

Influences of Demographic Factors on Free-Range Parenting

Socioeconomic

Studies have found that income levels have an impact on neglect. Cheadle and Amato found, in their 2010 study, that “socioeconomic status (SES) was the major correlate of parents’ use of concerted cultivation” (Cheadle & Amato, 2010). Then, in 2013, Washington University conducted research to explore the correlation between subtypes of neglect, race, and poverty. They found that there is a moderate correlation between lack of resources/low income and a higher rate of neglect and recommended focusing policy on ameliorating disparities in living conditions of poorer families to better address maltreatment problems (Jonson-Reid et al., 2013). Past studies explored the cause of the correlation. One primary reason is the lack of time, availability, and money to oversee children at all times. Unable to make sufficient money to both support the family and afford childcare, most poorer parents have to leave their children alone when they are at work (Calarco, 2018). Thus, out of necessity, many low-income families practice a more free-range parenting style. In the ’90s, the sociologists Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein studied single working mothers, who had no choice but to leave their kids at home (Calacro, 2018). Despite being unable to supervise children as much as wealthier parents, low-income parents are more likely to express concerns about their children being victims of violence, most likely due to security disparities among different neighborhoods (“Parenting in America,” 2015). Pew Research Center found that 59% of parents with an income of \$30,000 or less say they worry that their children might be kidnapped while 55% worry about beating and attacks. 47% of them also worry about children getting shot at some point while about 23% of higher-income parents share the same concerns (2015). Therefore, there is the possibility that lower-income parents perceive helicopter parenting as necessary to ensure the safety of their children but practice free-range parenting due to financial difficulty.

Geographic

The differences in landscape, infrastructure, and transportation incur varying parenting styles. Some parents, speaking from experience, reflect that city transportation helps cultivate a greater sense of independence because schools and friends are usually located across town (Perino, 2019). Suburban areas’ lack of convenient transportation, combined with driving restrictions, limit the opportunities for children to become independent (Perino, 2019). In this sense, parents in cities practice more free-range parenting due to the facilities available to assist children traveling alone. However, others moving to the suburbs aim to provide more chances for exercise and time outdoors. Children are allowed to walk out the front door and go places with friends alone to enhance social skills while participating in physical activities that are less likely to be available in cities (Glover, 2016). Furthermore, the scope of a parent’s “activity” zone drastically affects their use of helicopter parenting or punitive parenting practices. For example, the Child and Youth Care Forum found that parents that were socially isolated in their activity space were more likely to become less trusting of their surrounding area and thus practice more forms of a punitive parenting style (Bridget, et. al, Child & Youth Care Forum). With this information, we can assume that different neighborhoods will lead to different activity spaces for parents, and thus different styles of parenting. The different aspects of cities and suburbs likely influence the parents’ choices when raising their children, but which direction each of those two types of neighborhoods leads to is unclear and needs to be further explored.

Ethnic/Racial

Different ethnic groups have drastically different parenting styles. Past studies have found that racial/ethnic differences in concerted cultivation are moderately strong (Cheadle & Amato, 2010; Rudasill et al, 2013). The authoritative style embraced by parents in East Asia or those who grow up with Asian cultural background is well-known to the world. Studies found that among all ethnic groups, African Americans and Asian Americans have the most intense parenting approach on average. European American or Caucasian parents are the least hands-on. Other minority groups are in between (Web Solutions LLC). Multiple studies found that “authoritarian parenting style has been linked to less aggression, protective factors for suicidal behavior, and positive social interaction in Black American youth parented by authoritarian parents,” making safety the primary reason for intense parenting style (McMurtry, 2013). Though some studies found that helicopter parenting has negative physiological impacts on children in Western nations (American Psychological Association, 2018), Asian children perform better under an intense parenting approach (Cheadle & Amato, 2010). According to Ruth Chao, “strictness is located in Protestant Christian beliefs” for white families, “whereas for Chinese parents, strictness is rooted in a notion of training (chiao shun and guan) that reflects role relationships defined by Confucianism” (Chao, 1994). The different goals likely shaped the philosophy of helicopter parenting, causing varying results on Europeans/Americans and Asians. Considering race and ethnicity may play a significant role in shaping parenting, goal, style, and effect, this study examines the association between them and public perception of neglect and free-range parenting to generate policy-making suggestions on certain populations based on ethnicity. However, rather than focusing on the academic and job performance of the children, this study explores parenting decisions based on safety concerns and the sense of parental responsibility, so the results might differ from previous findings.

Generational

Parenting styles have shifted dramatically in past decades. Family composition plays an important role in this change. The U.S. has the world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households (Kramer, 2019), which is one possible cause for the increasing popularity of free-range parenting practices. It was found that younger-generation fathers are much less likely than older generations to live in a household with their own children. In 2019, Pew Research found that “32% of Millennial men reported living in a household with their own children, compared with 41% of Gen X men in 2003, 44% of Boomer men in 1987 and 66% of Silent men in 1968” (Barroso, Parker, & Bennett, 2020). They also discovered that one-in-five Millennial fathers are single dads (2020). The absence of one parent likely leads to free-range parenting due to one parent’s limited time to balance work and family requires more cultivation of independence of the children to take on domestic responsibility (“Pros and Cons in Single-Parent Families”). However, Americans’ trust in others has plummeted significantly in the past four decades. Josh Morgan analyzed the data collected by the General Social Survey (GSS) from 1972 to 2012 and found that trust in people dropped from 46% to 32% in 40 years (2014). This means that parents in the 1970s, which are likely the Silent and Baby Boomer generations, may have employed a less protective parenting approach whereas Millennials feel the need to be more protective. This salient trend of practicing a more hands-on parenting style may have shaped different public opinions of neglect policies.

Research Gap

The study examines the association between unexplored demographic characteristics and WA public opinion on free-range parenting. The results inform the WA legislature of the need for clarifying statutes regarding child neglect to form a better legal definition for free-range parenting and prevent inconsistencies.

Methods

Under the general research question “how are demographic characteristics influencing the formation of disparities between the legal enforcement of parenting policies (e.g., neglect) and the public’s understanding of free-range parenting and neglect in Washington?” researchers aim to answer the following sub-research questions: Does geography (rural, urban, suburban) influence parenting style? What different opinions do older and younger generations have on free-range parenting? How do culture and race shape one’s opinion regarding parental obligation? Or parenting pressure and expectations? Does gender play a role in determining how protective and authoritative a parent is? What impacts do religious beliefs have on how parents raise their children? How does socioeconomic status affect parenting style? What are the policy implications of the discoveries?

The study targets Washington State residents and was conducted over two months. Two surveys were formulated. One was designed for parents of any age and the other for children older than age six. As the research question was mostly based on qualitative analysis, the beginning design consisted of mostly free-response questions. However, it was then decided that the surveys were too intuitive to organize and collect data from, so most questions were revised into multiple-choice form. Many of the questions were in the form of the Likert Scale (e.g., strongly agree, agree, indifferent, disagree, strongly disagree), so the data can be measured on a 1-5 scale. Others were “Yes,” “No,” and “Maybe” questions. A huge portion of research questions included the use of demographics. The average participant took about 15 minutes to respond to all the questions, covering about 30. Two surveys were created using Microsoft Forms for online data collection. Using Excel facilitated access to tools for data analysis. To obtain more data, researchers printed out surveys and asked passersby to fill them out. In total, 222 responses were collected through convenience sampling.

The research took the quantitative analysis approach and used SPSS to analyze the survey answers to explore the descriptive correlations between demographic variables and public opinions on neglect laws and free-range parenting. Due to the small sampling of Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and populations with Atheist/Agnostic, Indigenous religious, and Confucian beliefs, they were excluded to ensure the validity of the study. Free-response questions were analyzed using keyword search and interpreted manually to understand the nuances. Chi-square tests were used to examine the relationships between every two variables.

Results

Change of opinion on parental rights based on age and ethnicity:

After conducting a series of tests, the following results were obtained. None of the respondents aged 6-10 thought parents should have the power to restrict certain family members from visiting. When moving up to age 11-13, this changed as half chose “yes” and the other half chose “maybe”. Nearly half (20.4/43.7= 46.68%) of respondents aged 14-17 answered “yes”, denoting a drastic change in the trend. This increased dramatically when 61% (31.1%/50.5%) of 18 years old or above respondents said “yes”. A meager less than 10% in each of the top two age groups said “no”. In short, the trend is that the older the respondents, the more power they think parents should have over their children to restrict certain family members from visiting. In other words, children become more understanding of parents’ concerns when they age.

Table 1. Relationship between age and children’s opinion on parental rights over family visiting.

			Do you think parents should have the power over their children to restrict certain family members from visiting?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe	
How old are you?	6-10	Count	0	3	1	4
		% of Total	0.00	2.90	1.00	3.90
	11-13	Count	1	0	1	2
		% of Total	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.90
	14-17	Count	21	4	20	45
		% of Total	20.40	3.90	19.40	43.70
	18 or above	Count	32	5	15	52
		% of Total	31.10	4.90	14.60	50.50
Total	Count	54	12	37	103	
	% of Total	52.40	11.70	35.90	100.00	

Note: *p*-value equals 0.003 for a two-tailed test.

A similar “ask for more attention” phenomenon happens among children whose parents leave them at home alone for things other than work. More respondents who answered “indifferent” to “Whenever my parents leave/left me home alone, they are/were usually at events other than work”, replied with “yes” than “no” to “if leaving a nine-year-old at a park was neglectful”. However, there was a noticeable trend when looking at those who strongly disagreed (71.92%) to those who only disagreed (57.97%) and continuing down the line ending in “strongly agreed”. A higher percentage of respondents did not think that leaving a nine-year-old alone at home was neglectful the more their parents left them at home alone due to events other than work. However, it should also be noted that the data becomes smaller, and therefore not very representative. When analyzing the second dependent variable, a similar trend was found, with 63.58% of “strongly disagree” respondents saying “yes” compared to 57.64% of “disagree” respondents. In both cases, only 3-4 respondents said “no”, with more respondents moving from the “maybe” group to the “agree” area. That means more often respondents’ parents leave them at home for events other than work, the more likely respondents perceive the action of leaving a 9-year-old child at home alone is acceptable. Unexpectedly, ethnicity was found to be a moderate factor concerning authoritarian parenting. 47.3% of respondents with Asian ethnicity criticized letting children ride the subway alone compared to 34.7% of Caucasian/White respondents. More Caucasian respondents were unsure about their view on the issue, but not significantly. Only nine respondents were of African American origin. Most of them are unsure about whether the action is neglectful.

The correlation between magnitude of parental care perceived by children/parents and their opinion on free-range parenting respectively

With regards to respondents that reported a negative answer for “if their parents made an effort for them to be loved and cared for”, there were few, which left minimal answers for if a parent is being neglectful if they allow their 9-year-old to ride a subway alone. Progressively, participants that felt “not cared for” thought parents can let 9-year-olds ride the subway alone. Only 5% who answered, “strongly agree” thought the action is appropriate while 12% of “agree” and 40% of “indifferent” participants believed the same. The trend shows that the more caring that the children thought their parents were, the more likely they are to see letting a child ride the subway alone neglectful. Normally, parents make/made an effort to make children feel loved and cared for by spending time with them, so naturally, those respondents associate love and responsibility with the parental company. In other words, respondents that lacked parental attention and love tend to give “accompanying children” fewer credits and less importance, so they are less likely to see the scenario as neglectful. A similar trend was discovered between the questions “My parents make/made it a priority to attend my special events (sports games, concerts, etc.) (when I was small).” The more a respondent’s

parents make/made it a priority for them to attend their children’s special events, the more likely the children think leaving a nine-year-old on a subway was neglect (Df= 8, P = 0.044) and accept parental restrictions on family visits (P = 0.036). Both these independent variables and the one above demonstrates the amount of time and attention parents devote to children. As such, the more respondents’ parents made it a priority to accompany their children, the more accepting the children are of stricter/closer parenting.

Table 2. The association between children’s perception of parental care and love and their opinion on whether allowing a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone is neglectful

			Do you think parents are being neglectful if they allow a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe	
My parents make/tryed to make me feel loved and cared for (when I was small).	strongly disagree	Count	1	2	0	3
		% of Total	1.00	2.00	0.00	3.00
	disagree	Count	2	0	1	3
		% of Total	2.00	0.00	1.00	3.00
	indifferent	Count	2	2	1	5
		% of Total	2.00	2.00	1.00	5.00
	agree	Count	13	4	16	33
		% of Total	12.90	4.00	15.80	32.70
strongly agree	Count	33	3	21	57	
	% of Total	32.70	3.00	20.80	56.40	
Total		Count	51	11	39	101
		% of Total	50.50	10.90	38.60	100.00

Note: *p*-value equals 0.016 for a two-tailed test.

Table 3. The association between parents’ perception of the amount of attention devoted to children and opinions on whether letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in downtown area alone is neglectful.

			Do you think letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in downtown area alone is being neglectful?			Total	
			Yes	No	Maybe		
How often would you say work or other priorities distract you from giving attention to your child; even when you really want to?	Never	Count	4	0	2	6	
		% of Total	5.60	0.00	2.80	8.30	
	Rarely	Count	16	0	1	17	
		% of Total	22.20	0.00	1.40	23.60	
	Sometimes	Count	17	3	8	28	
		% of Total	23.60	4.20	11.10	38.90	
	Often	Count	10	5	2	17	
		% of Total	13.90	6.90	2.80	23.60	
	All the time	Count	2	0	2	4	
		% of Total	2.80	0.00	2.80	5.60	
	Total		Count	49	8	15	72
			% of Total	68.10	11.10	20.80	100.00

Note: *p*-value equals 0.05 for a two-tailed test.

Parents that strongly believed they never or rarely get distracted by work from giving attention to their children thought that letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in a downtown area alone is or might be neglectful. Among them, over 66% were adamant that the action was neglectful. None of them saw the action as not neglectful. On the contrary, almost 1/3 of parents that often got distracted by work thought the action was appropriate. The trend is that the more often parents devote attention to work rather than to children, the narrower their definition of "neglect" is.

Parental control's effects on parenting opinions

Unlike most of the other results thus far, there appeared to be a much weaker trend when it comes to the question, "Do you think monitoring children's actions 24/7 is overprotective?" A similar percentage, 51.57%, and 68.93%, of respondents, thought that it is excessive. The respondents whose parents tracked their presence were more open to increased child monitoring, but not near the extent to which the hypotheses suggested. Of the "used to but now removed" group, the minimal responses were split very evenly with no clear distinction. Furthermore, one can see that the respondents that were monitored by parents were much more likely (71.83%) to think that leaving a 9-year-old on a subway alone was neglectful, compared to the "No" respondents (42.24%). When analyzing the "used to but now removed" group, it is difficult regarding either dependent variable to identify a trend or pattern, as there is a fairly even number of responses for "yes", "no" and "maybe" for both questions. In short, monitoring children has a moderate positive correlation to the perception of the parental company being necessary.

Table 4: The association between parents' tracking of children at a young age and the children's opinion on whether monitoring 24/7 is excessive and overprotective, as well as if allowing a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone is neglectful.

			Do you think monitoring children's actions 24/7 is excessive and overprotective?			Total	Do you think parents are neglectful if they allow a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe		Yes	No	Maybe	
My parents have/had a method of tracking my location on my phone.	Yes	Count	17	1	9	33	18	1	6	25
		% of Total	13.1	5.4	6.9	25.40	17.60	1.00	5.90	24.50
	no	Count	62	4	24	90	30	8	33	71
		% of Total	47.70	3.10	18.50	69.20	29.40	7.80	32.40	69.60
	now removed	Count	2	2	3	7	3	2	1	6
		% of Total	1.50	1.50	2.30	5.40	2.90	2.00	1.00	5.90
Total		Count	81	13	36	130	51	11	40	102
		% of Total	62.30	10.00	27.70	100.00	50.00	10.80	39.20	100.00

Note: "Do you think monitoring children's actions 24/7 is excessive and overprotective?": *p*-value equals 0.014 for a two-tailed test. "Do you think parents are neglectful if they allow a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone?": *p*-value equals 0.016 for a two-tailed test.

Things changed when parents impose helicopter parenting methods on children, specifically regarding the use of social media. A greater portion of nonparent respondents that were restricted from using any social media (6/25=24%) thought leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is not neglectful than children that were free to use any social media (7/67=10.4%).

When considering parental power over restricting certain family members from visiting, children that were restricted from using any social media are more likely to think parents should not have such rights (16%) than non-parents respondents that had free access (5.9%). When certain restrictions were in place (aka. "They allow me to use certain"), more respondents thought parents should not have the right. However, only six participants answered the question, so the validity of the result might be undermined due to the small sample size. The "Not applicable" group was eliminated due to small sampling. Overall, partial restrictions on social media are associated with the desire for less parental control over family visitations and lighter parental responsibility.

Table 5: The association between children’s freedom of using social media and their opinions on whether leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful and if parents should have the power over their children to restrict certain family members from visiting.

			Do you think leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful?			Total	Do you think parents should have the power over their children to restrict certain family members from visiting?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe		Yes	No	Maybe	
Do/did your parents allow you to have social media apps? (When you were small?)	yes	Count	51	7	9	67	38	4	26	68
		% of Total	51.5	7.1	9.1	67.7	38.0	4.0	26.0	68.0
	no	Count	15	6	4	25	13	4	8	25
		% of Total	15.2	6.1	4.0	25.3	13.0	4.0	8.0	25.0
	al-low use cer-tain	Count	3	1	2	6	2	3	1	6
		% of Total	3.0	1.0	2.0	6.1	2.0	3.0	1.0	6.0
	Not ap- pli- cable	Count	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
		% of Total	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
Total		Count	69	14	16	99	53	12	35	100
		% of Total	69.7	14.1	16.2	100.0	53.0	12.0	35.0	100.0

Note: “Do you think leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful?”: *p*-value equals 0.02 for a two-tailed test. “Do you think parents should have the power over their children to restrict certain family members from visiting?”: *p*-value equals 0.005 for a two-tailed test.

Circumstantial factor’s association with parenting choices

Parents that decided how much freedom is given to children based on the perception of online security were more likely to raise children differently than the way they were raised (64%/72%=88.9%). Fewer respondents than raise kids similarly to the way they were raised take online security into consideration when parenting (52.5%). This suggests parents’ awareness of online security issues greatly impacts the way they raise kids. See table 6.

The association between people’s perception of how safe the world is today compared to 10 years ago and opinions on free-range parenting is unclear. Those respondents that acknowledge a change in the past 10 years tended to think parental accompany in public transportation is necessary, while the people that said “no change” believed there is no good reason for parents to supervise their kids during those activities.

Table 6: The association between whether parents raise kids differently than the way they were raised and if they consider online security when deciding the amount of freedom given to children.

			Does your perception of online security impact the freedom you give your children to explore online?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe	
Do you raise your child(ren) differently than the way you were raised?	yes	Count	48	3	3	54
		% of Total	64.0	4.0	4.0	72.0
	no	Count	11	3	7	21
		% of Total	14.7	4.0	9.3	28.0
Total		Count	59	6	10	75
		% of Total	78.7	8.0	13.3	100.0

Note: *p*-value equals 0.002 for a two-tailed test.

Education/income status and parenting choices

Parents who have completed undergraduate or both undergraduate and graduate degree programs (Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, and Professional), as well as parents with any college credit but no degree, were more likely to consider leaving a toddler alone to be neglectful than those with a lower level of education (grade school or middle school). However, parents with a doctorate degree were more likely to be unsure whether the behavior is neglectful (2.6%) than say "yes, it is" (1.3%). Thus, except for those who have earned a doctorate degree, parents with higher education are more likely to disapprove free-range parenting.

Table 7: The association between highest level of education of parents and their opinion on whether leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful.

			Do you think leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful?			Total	
			Yes	No	Maybe		
What is the highest level of education you have received?	Grade school	Count	1	0	1	2	
		% of Total	1.3	0.0	1.3	2.6	
	Middle school	Count	0	0	1	1	
		% of Total	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.3	
	Some college credit, no degree	Count	9	0	0	9	
		% of Total	11.7	0.0	0.0	11.7	
	Associate degree	Count	7	0	1	8	
		% of Total	9.1	0.0	1.3	10.4	
	Bachelor's degree	Count	26	8	1	35	
		% of Total	33.8	10.4	1.3	45.5	
	Master's Degree	Count	11	2	2	15	
		% of Total	14.3	2.6	2.6	19.5	
	Professional degree	Count	4	0	0	4	
		% of Total	5.2	0.0	0.0	5.2	
	Doctorate degree	Count	1	0	2	3	
		% of Total	1.3	0.0	2.6	3.9	
	Total		Count	59	10	8	77
			% of Total	76.6	13.0	10.4	100.0

Note: *p*-value equals 0.004 for a two-tailed test.

Most respondents identified with the upper income bracket, getting an annual income above \$150,000. Most of these respondents (71%) thought letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in downtown area alone is being neglectful. 69% of respondents with medium income agreed. This trend changed drastically when looking at respondents with lower income. Only 33% of them thought the action is neglectful and the majority felt unsure. It was found based on the free-response questions, the strong disapproval among high-income parents is due to their opinions that children at age 9 should be studying and having fun rather than selling products.

Table 8: The association between annual income level and parents’ opinion on whether letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in downtown area alone is being neglectful.

			Do you think letting a 9-year-old child sell a product in downtown area alone is being neglectful?			Total
			Yes	No	Maybe	
Annual Income	Lower than 50,000	Count	2	0	4	6
		% of Total	2.7	0.0	5.5	8.2
	Between 50,000 and 150,000	Count	20	5	4	29
		% of Total	27.4	6.8	5.5	39.7
	Above 150,000	Count	27	4	7	38
		% of Total	37.0	5.5	9.6	52.1

Note: *p*-value equals 0.005 for a two-tailed test.

Marital Status, Geography and opinions on parenting

Parents were asked to respond to the questions, “Are you a single parent?” and “Does your perceived safety of the surrounding area impact how much freedom you give your children?” The relationship between the results of those questions presents a very significant trend. The data suggest that non-single parents are much more likely to be influenced by the safety of the surrounding area when deciding how much freedom to give their children as compared to single parents. This may be due to the lack of choice single parents have when it comes to their children’s freedom because they are likely already preoccupied with work and other duties.

The null hypothesis for people who live in urban areas give children less freedom than those that live in rural areas could not be rejected as no definitive correlation was discovered between geography and parenting style.

Reasons behind respondents’ answers to scenario questions on neglect

37% of participants that answered scenario questions thought allowing two unsupervised 6- and 10-year-old children to walk home together from a local park is not neglectful while 26% believe otherwise. The major concern behind this scenario is the risks of kidnap and other crimes and the inability of kids to handle the task. 48% of all respondents thought parents are being neglectful if they allow a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone, and 13% believed it is appropriate. Respondents seemed to be more accepting of having kids walk home alone rather than riding the subway alone (37% vs 13% said “No, it is not neglectful”). The difference is likely caused by parents’ perception that kids are more capable of handling the former task than the latter (42% vs 33%). Also, 6% more participants saw the former as a better opportunity to foster independence.

It was also found that 55% of participants believed the action of leaving a 9-year-old child alone at a park for a few hours while working nearby because the parent cannot afford a babysitter is neglectful and 73% found that leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is neglectful. About half the respondents reasoned that leaving children alone in a park as neglectful because 9-year-olds are incapable of handling the task and face the risk of getting kidnapped or other crimes (57%; 55%). The primary reason participants perceived the latter scenario

as neglectful is that toddlers are too small to be left alone (57%). Interestingly, participants saw leaving children in a park for hours as more dangerous than letting children ride the subway alone. Only 1/3 of participants that thought the action was neglectful reasoned that parents have the legal obligation to supervise children under 14 years old, showing a great discrepancy in the understanding of legal statutes.

For those that deemed the actions appropriate, they primarily valued fostering independence (53%; 11%; 6%). The risks of being victims of crimes only accounted for about a quarter of their reasons. Thus, respondents might not always see risks as minor but rather not consider this factor when deciding whether to leave children alone. Among respondents that answered “maybe” to the scenario questions, they base their opinions primarily on circumstances. Though the maturity of kids is an important consideration, it plays a smaller role than circumstantial situation does. This indicates that parents see external dangers as more legitimate than children’s ability to take care of themselves.

Table 9: Reasons for answering “Yes, it is neglectful”

	Unsupervised 6- and 10-year-old children to walk home together from a local park is being neglectful (47) (26% of total)	Parents are being neglectful if they allow a 9-year-old child to ride the subway alone (86) (48% of total)	Leaving a 9-year-old child alone at a park for a few hours while working nearby because the parent cannot afford a babysitter is being neglectful (98) (55% of total)	Leaving a toddler alone inside a car for 10 minutes while shopping is being neglectful (131) (73% of total)
Kids are too young to handle the task/be left alone in a car	22 (46%)	37 (43%)	56 (57%)	75 (57%)
Risks of kidnap and other crimes	26 (55%)	48 (56%)	54 (55%)	59 (45%)
Parents have legal obligation to accompany child below age of 14.	15 (32%)	29 (34%)	36 (37%)	40 (14%)
Other	2 (4.2%)	3 (3.5%)	3 (3.1%)	18 (14%)

Discussion

Our finding that parents with lower income give more freedom to children while parents with higher income are more likely to have a broader definition of neglect conforms to the general trend and corroborates previous findings. Wealthier parents’ financial capability to support adequate education and a worry-free environment for children allow them to focus on personal/intellectual development differ from parents with lower income. It is not abnormal for families with financial difficulty to have children participate in small acts of profiting. According to the New York Times, in poor families, children tend to spend their time at home or with extended family whereas wealthy families usually have two parents that take care of children both physically and mentally (Miller, 2015). Poorer parents have less time to invest in their children, which is reflected through their inability to monitor their children 24/7. Thus, free-range parenting appears not only favorable but also necessary to lower-income families.

In general, young children prefer more freedom (free-range parenting) over helicopter parenting more than teenagers do. Adolescents tend to think parents have the right and the responsibility to oversee and accompany children. However, the study shows that age does not impact people’s perception of online security significantly. Across

all populations, people discern the danger of cyberbullying, scams, and inappropriate content. This discovery corresponds to the intensifying issues shown by previous research. Teachers reported that cyberbullying is their #1 safety concern in their classrooms, according to a 2019 survey (“Cyberbullying Statistics”). This problem has been escalating since the pandemic started. There has been a 70% increase in the amount of bullying/hate speech among teens and children in the month since the Covid lockdown began (Sampathkumar & Shwayder, 2020). Parents usually monitor social media or children’s online presence to detect dangers. However, online access is hard to monitor entirely and regulate due to fake accounts, technical loopholes, and a lack of clear policy. Access to the internet is a double-blade sword that evokes a sense of urgency from many parents to hover over their teenage kids. Besides online security, some parents use monitoring apps to oversee their children constantly. Here are some self-reported reasons. One respondent said it is necessary “because of the unsafe environment.” Another concurred, saying “I want to know my child is safe.” It appears that personal experiences also impact how people raise their children. A participant said “I have a teenager. I don't need her following my terrible teenage choices.” People who do not use monitoring apps think that the action is “not necessary,” “invasive,” or “ineffective.” Others do not want children to “grow accustomed to surveillance.” Most children agree with the second opinion, writing that, “It's important to teach responsibility and build trust before letting kids go out on their own. Monitoring while they're in the care of other adults is totally unnecessary.”

Few previous research studies examined the relationship between the education level of the parents and their parenting approach. Our study found that parents with higher education are more likely to be helicopter parents, thus, informing later researchers of the positive correlation between the two. Except those who earned a doctorate, parents with more education are more likely to have a broader definition of neglect, (in other words, allowing limited freedom) compared to those who have a lower level of education. This might be because parents with higher education have more income, so they can be around their children more often and think accompanying young children is a parental responsibility. In contrast, parents with lower education may be both unable to take close care of children and give more freedom to children.

The more intense disapproval of free-range parenting actions among Asian respondents is not surprising. Also, research has suggested that authoritative parenting is more prevalent in European-American parents than in ethnic minority parents. African American and Asian American parents were found to be more authoritarian in their parenting practices than white parents are (“Parenting Styles: Culture And Ethnic Variations in Parenting Styles”). However, the small difference discovered in this study was unexpected. It can potentially be caused by Western nations’ shift from free-range parenting methods to more helicopter approaches due to safety concerns, technological advancement, and parenting pressure in recent decades.

Up until this point, factors that may cause certain levels of authoritarian parenting were discussed. One of the major reasons was the fear of child abduction with the common misconception that the crime rate increased in recent decades. “On average, fewer than 350 people under the age of 21 have been abducted by strangers in the United States per year since 2010”, the FBI says. “From 2010 through 2017, the most recent data available, the number has ranged from a low of 303 in 2016 to a high of 384 in 2011 with no clear directional trend” (Reuters, 2019). The misconception among the dangers of kidnapping likely comes from sources such as NBC, where they reported more than 58,000 kidnappings in one year (Kessler, 2015). However, the data was from 18 years ago, when cellphones and amber alerts were nonexistent. Many other studies similar to this cloud together make kidnapping seem like an epidemic. A study from Secure Life found that 14 percent of parents in the U.S. thought of kidnapping as the most prevalent fear (Marx, 2017). This public perception is paradoxical to the FBI reports, demonstrating unnecessary worries and paranoia.

The inaccurate perception of the crime rate appears to impact people’s perception of how safe the world is today compared to 10 years ago, which was found to be an unclear trend. The inaccurate interpretation or understanding of real-world crime information of some direct them to impose stricter parenting than necessary. Also, the different perceptions that respondents have of the world 10 years ago likely contribute to the messy result. Without a universally acknowledged shared perception of reality, the comparisons do not provide meaningful results. It is thus highly

recommended that future researchers survey perceptions of changes by using two questions, each one pinpointing one perception at a specific period.

In addition, the busier the parents, the more likely they see giving children the opportunity to act alone as beneficial and appropriate. According to WOW Parenting, one of the positive effects of working parents is that the child learns to develop more independence from being alone (“Wow Parenting”). This independence and productivity connect to a parent’s working-class lifestyle. If the parent is constantly set with important responsibilities to provide for the family, they will feel less guilty about leaving their children to their own devices in the process. Parents who are very busy likely also have parents that were very busy and believe the same skills they developed on their own during their childhood are the ones that their children should be developing as well. They usually view the quality of time spent as more important than the quantity. Due to the lack of scholarly research surrounding the question of why busy parents view lone parenting in a more positive light, we would suggest this issue be taken into future inquires.

The hypothesis that restrictive parents influence their children by making them perceive free-range parenting as neglectful was also rejected. In fact, a restriction can have an inverse impact on children by evoking rebellious actions when children sense unfair treatment. A survey found that 89% of children do something that their parents would disapprove of because “[they are] just pursuing [their] freedom and... what [they] want to do” (“Five Facts”). Children are more likely to resist their parents when they believe they are overreaching. A study in the *Journal of Education and Educational Development* revealed that excessive control leads children to “become rebellious and adopt problematic behavior” (Sarwar, 2016). In this way, a very restrictive parenting method can backfire. Our finding shows that when children’s access to the internet is restricted, they develop a stronger dislike towards the control enforced upon them. Seeing the parenting method as excessive, children yearn for more freedom and less restriction. Consequently, this disdain for too much parental control is manifested and applied to other areas of children’s lives, such as their opinions on parents’ rights on restricting family visits. This was corroborated by the responses of non-parent participants. One participant said, “I think over monitoring leads to rebelliousness. They’re going to start lying to their parents and hiding things.” Another child confessed, “Because I grew up in a strict household and it made me into a liar and sneaky person because I didn’t trust my mom... [or] tell her anything because she could use it against me”. While the hypothesis was rejected, the participant respondents support the general trend that excessive parental control causes children to rebel.

The hypothesis that Washington state parents tend to be more accepting of free-range parenting than the national average because no law stipulates consequences of specific parental neglectful actions, was rejected. The Revised Code of Washington section 26.44.020 defines “negligent treatment” as “an act or omission that evidences a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to the child’s health, welfare, and safety” (citation). While this is a better, more specific neglect law compared to the ones of other states, it does not offer explicit guidelines for individual activities and behaviors. A survey by Pew Research found that, on average, parents say children should be at least 10 years old before they should be allowed to play in front of their house unsupervised while an adult is inside (“Parenting in America”, 2015). However, our findings show that parents say children should be even older before they are allowed to stay home alone for about an hour (12 years old) or spend time at a public park unsupervised (14 years old). Relative to other states, Washington parents are more accepting of helicopter parenting. The only state that requires children staying home alone to be older than 12 years old is Illinois (minimum age 14 years old). Other states take a much more free-range approach. For example, in Kansas, the minimum age is 6 years old, and North Carolina, Maryland, and Georgia have the minimum age set at 8 years old. 39 states do not have laws mandating a specific minimum age for children staying home alone. In comparison, Washington residents tend to take a more conservative stance on which unaccompanied activities are appropriate for children at different ages (“Latchkey children age”, 2021).

The vague legal standards allow parents to be subjected to criminal punishment without evidence of abuse or neglect. With the increasingly dominant “helicopter” way of protective parenting and the lack of policy to clarify “neglect” behaviors, parents are being condemned, fined, and criminalized for actions that they perceive to be reasonably appropriate. Parents can be bereaved of custody and children are separated from families. For example, in Shaina

Bell's case, an Ohio mom was arrested for leaving her kids, a 10-year-old and a 2-year-old, in a motel room while she worked her shift at a pizza shop" (Skenazy, 2021). Though she had someone check on the kids every hour, she was arrested on two counts of child endangerment, and the kids were sent to their father. In Debra Harrell's case, Debra is a single mother that must work at McDonald's, so she gave her daughter a cell phone when the girl went to the park that is popular throughout the day. She was reported and the kid was then placed in foster care. In both instances, the kid was under no evident danger, but the parents, who appeared to be minority groups from lower socioeconomic classes, were criminalized (Friedersdorf, 2014). Both Ohio and South Carolina are among the 39 states that had no clear policies to define child neglect, causing many parents to be vulnerable to harsh and unreasonable punishments unjustified by the law. All the cases mentioned above demonstrate that social status and financial ability greatly influence parenting practices. Our study that formulated five scenario questions based on those real cases helps evaluate WA residents' unbiased opinion on those legal precedents, soliciting valuable insights for its own state lawmaking. Based on the findings that show contradictory opinions on those cases, researchers believe a detailed statute is necessary for preventing inappropriate and unjust charges and punishments in WA. Furthermore, those cases demonstrate loopholes that contribute to discrimination against minority groups. The expectation of close monitoring and constant accompaniment incurred various consequences among different ethnic groups. Lenore Skenazy, the president of Let Go, a nonprofit organization calling for free-range parenting, was labeled "world's worst mom" for letting his 9 years old boy ride the subway alone in New York (Skenazy). However, there were no criminal charges raised against her despite her controversial actions and the later well-known free-range parenting advocacy. The different treatments and public reactions to similar parenting methods based on ethnicity/race and socioeconomic classes are amplified due to the ambiguity in legal guidance and standards. Therefore, there should be flexibility, yet a clear stipulation, in the consequences of unfulfilling parenting responsibilities. The Washington state government can consider Utah's recently passed Free-Range Kids law that clarifies that it isn't considered child neglect for parents to "allow kids 'of sufficient age and maturity to engage in independent activities such as walking to school, playing outside or staying in a car alone" (Lind, 2018). This law sets a clearer line between lawful free-range parenting and child neglect and can be a potential model for Washington State. However, the researchers are fully aware of the controversy around this Utah free-range parenting law and the differences between residents' preferences among states, so do not arbitrarily recommend the adoption of a similar law in WA directly.

Another potential solution to dealing with those incidents is to refine the evaluation standards or statutes of "Child Neglect" to consider multiple aspects/circumstances rather than the broad and vague phrase, "under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare, and safety is harmed" (Ferguson). The aforementioned cases demonstrated the nuances of child neglect, ranging from financial difficulties to the maturity and experiences of children. Thus, to make the most just and precise judgment possible, the State should consider more factors as Illinois does. Illinois statutes state that, in a child neglect allegation, 15 factors are evaluated, including education, health, religious upbringing, wishes of the child, the willingness and ability of each parent to build a close relationship with the kid, any relevant information, and so on ("Illinois Compiled Statutes"). As a result, circumstances for each case are not only considered, but also assessed with a more specific standard.

Another issue with unclear legislation is the generalization of all cases when some are "malicious" (intentionally putting the child in danger) and others are "forced" (necessary due to financial or other difficulties). Our data shows WA participants disagree on whether an action counts as "malicious" or "forced" neglect (68% vs 32%), suggesting a lack of common understanding and potential for confusion due to the vague legislation. When a case involves "forced" neglect, financial constraints, finding and imprisoning the parents appear to be ineffective or even detrimental to the already dire situation. Studies found that "children living in families facing economic hardship were almost two times more likely to be involved in a substantiated maltreatment investigation" (Lefebvre et al, 2017). This corroborates our finding that people with lower income give more freedom to children, likely due to the inability to balance work and family. Thus, fines or foster care are both unhelpful to those families. In contrast, a support program that helps raise awareness and provide necessary vocational training to alleviate poverty would be a more sustainable approach. Cheaper or community-based childcare services can also be effective. Assistance programs, coupled with

an expanded list of considerations can potentially distinguish “malicious neglect” from “forced neglect” and impose different penalties or assistance that cater to different family situations to create substantial improvements. Thus, it is recommended that WA state legislation diversify legal consequences of parental neglect, catering to various demographic situations, to reduce neglect law violations effectively and sustainably.

Conclusion

This quantitative study aims to explore the factors that influence WA residents’ opinions on free-range parenting and provide legal recommendations based on the feedback from the public. The debate over whether free-range parenting is child neglect becomes increasingly heated as helicopter parenting sweeps the US in the past couple of decades. However, many states have limited legal guidance for parents to follow when evaluating their parenting preferences. Previous cases demonstrated that the lack of a clear definition or standard for “child neglect” creates a potential violation of the 14th Amendment Due Process right, especially for minority and low-income populations. Meanwhile, about 2/3 of parents remain unsure about their legal responsibilities, signaling a need for more specified legislative guidance.

The study shows that education and income level are major factors in influencing parenting approaches. More evidence must be obtained to explain how financial disparities reinforce intense parenting preferences, contributing to the prevalent helicopter parenting culture and more neglect law violations. Though Northwestern’s Doepke and Yale’s Zilibotti’s study found “the wider a society’s income gaps, the more intense parents become, the more they hover,” there is a lack of research conducted on exploring the implications of helicopter and free-range parenting on social justice and legal issues (Pizzigato, 2019). Therefore, it is worth researching the specific relationship between the wealth gap, parenting style, and their legal consequences.

This study is not intended to encourage the WA lawmakers towards supporting free-range or helicopter parenting. Rather, the researchers solely aim at informing the Washington state legislature of the inadequacy of the current statutes as populating helicopter parenting approach escalates the tension over parental negligence through providing a glimpse of public opinions concerning demographic factors on the matter. The results suggest that conducting further research on public opinions on parenting with a larger sample group is essential to obtaining the most accurate and informative data that can guide the WA lawmakers on evaluating parenting guidelines. Potentially, more moderate laws that focus on defining “neglect” rather than “free-range” can be more easily incorporated and enforced, considering the more conservative (pro-helicopter) tendency of WA residents.

Despite the small sampling size, this study provides a glimpse into the association between major demographic factors and parenting preferences of WA residents and informs the legal implications of those findings.

Limitations

After ending up with a small number of responses, the researchers resorted to in-person distribution at local parks. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and limited resources the researchers had, convenience sampling was employed to garner data. Thus, no external validity can be derived from the study. Future researchers should conduct similar studies on a larger sample group, ideally 1000+ participants.

Another major weakness to the approach chosen is the uncertainty that all respondents answered the survey truthfully, which could cause the data collected to be inaccurate. However, that is unlikely to undermine the validity of the study significantly because the questions are designed to be straightforward as well as the surveys being completely confidential and anonymous to encourage truthful answers from the participants. The researchers also made the questions as insensitive as possible by phrasing legal cases into hypothetical scenarios.

Finally, the result about marital status was highly skewed towards married parents because only two single parents (about 1% of all respondents) were surveyed when single-parent households account for 7.8% of all

households in WA (Underwood, 2021). Thus, this study cannot conclude any association between marital status and parenting preference. Future studies should be mindful of collecting randomized data that survey a number of single parents that corresponds to the entire targeted population. Some other demographic factors were also excluded due to small sampling sizes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Eastside Catholic High School for drafting and granting an Ethical Approval for this research paper and Susan Huang for assisting in-person data collection. We are appreciative of our advisors Tara Maloney and Elizabeth Mader for guiding the submission process.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2018). Helicopter parenting may negatively affect children's emotional well-being, behavior: Children with overcontrolling parents may later struggle to adjust in school and social environments, study says. *ScienceDaily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/06/180618102627.htm
- Barroso, A., Parker, K., & Bennett, J. (2020). As Millennials Near 40, They're Approaching Family Life Differently Than Previous Generations. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/27/as-millennials-near-40-theyre-approaching-family-life-differently-than-previous-generations/#:~:text=Millennial%20mothers%20are%20more%20likely,moms%20at%20the%20same%20age>.
- Bradley-Geist, J. & Olson-Buchanan, J. (2014). Helicopter parents: an examination of the correlates of over-parenting of college students. *Education + Training*, 56(4), 314–328. <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-10-2012-0096>
- Calarco, J. M. (2018). Free Range Parenting's Unfair Double Standard. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/04/free-range-parenting/557051/>
- Chan, T.W. & Koo, A. (2010). Parenting styles and youth outcomes in the UK. *European Sociological Review*, 27 (3), 385-399. DOI: [10.1093/esr/jcq013](https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq013)
- Chao, R. K. (1994). Beyond Parental Control and Authoritarian Parenting Style: Understanding Chinese Parenting Through the Cultural Notion of Training. *Child Development*, 65(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131308>
- Cheadle, J. E., & Amato, P. R. (2010). A Quantitative Assessment of Lareau's Qualitative Conclusions About Class, Race, and Parenting. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(5), 679–706. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513x10386305>
- Cyberbullying Statistics (n.d.). *Internet Safety 101*. Retrieved May 20, 2021 from <https://internetsafety101.org/cyberbullyingstatistics>.
- Dewar, G. (2018). Why kids rebel (and what we can do to encourage cooperation). *Parenting Science*. <https://parentingscience.com/why-kids-rebel/>
- Doepke M. & Zilibotti F. (2019). The economic roots of helicopter parenting. *Phi Delta Kappan*. <https://kappanonline.org/economic-roots-helicopter-parenting-parents-income-inequality-doecke-zilibotti/>
- Dornbusch, S.M., Ritter, P.L., Liederman, P.H., Roberts, D.F., & Fraleigh, M.J. (1987). The relation of parenting style to adolescent school performance. *Child Development*, 58 (5), 1244-1257. DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-8624.1987.tb01455.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1987.tb01455.x)
- Feldhahn, S. *The Five Facts of Teenage Freedom*. iMOM. Retrieved July 7, 2021 from <https://www.imom.com/the-five-facts-of-teenage-freedom/>
- Ferguson, B. (n.d.). *Child Abuse and Neglect*. Office of the Attorney General | Washington State. Retrieved June 11, 2021 from <https://www.atg.wa.gov/child-abuse-neglect>.
- Free-Range Kids*. (2016). Retrieved July 5, 2021 from <http://www.freerangekids.com>.
- Free-range parenting Definition. *Dictionary.com*. Retrieved May 3, 2021 from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/free-range-parenting>.

- Friedersdorf, C. (2014). *Working mom arrested for letting her 9-year-old play alone at park*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/07/arrested-for-letting-a-9-year-old-play-at-the-park-alone/374436/>.
- Ginott, G. H. (1977). *Between Parent and Teenager*. Scribner. www.amazon.com/Between-Parent-Teenager-Ginott-1969-05-01/dp/B01FKTMZ26.
- Glover, J. (2016) *The suburban shift: why families are choosing to live in cities*. Child In The City. <https://www.childinthecity.org/2016/02/16/the-suburban-shift-why-families-are-choosing-to-live-in-cities/?gdpr=accept>
- Gray, P. (2019). *The many shades of Fear-Based Parenting*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201903/the-many-shades-fear-based-parenting>.
- Helicopter Parenting: When Too Much Help Is No Help. (2015). *Harvard Health Publishing Harvard Medical School*. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/parenting-issues/helicopter-parenting-when-too-much-help-is-no-help>
- Jonson-Reid M., Drake B., & Zhou, P. (2013). Neglect Subtypes, Race, and Poverty: Individual, Family, and Service Characteristics. *Child Maltreatment*. 18 (1), 30–41. DOI: [10.1177/1077559512462452](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559512462452)
- Kessler, G. (2015). *58000 children 'abducted' a year: yet another fishy statistic*. Fact Check by the Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/03/17/58000-children-abducted-a-year-yet-another-fishy-statistic/>
- Kramer, St. (2019). *U.S. has the world's highest rate of children living in single-parent households*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-one-parent/>
- KREM, A. S. (2017). *Washington and Idaho both have no law on what age kids can be left at home alone*. king5.com. <https://www.king5.com/article/news/washington-and-idaho-both-have-no-law-on-what-age-kids-can-be-left-at-home-alone/462645610#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Washington%20Department,the%20role%20of%20a%20babysitter>.
- Lascala M. (2019). Everything You Need to Know About the Free-Range Parenting Method. *Good Housekeeper*. <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/parenting/a26824973/free-range-parenting/>.
- Lefebvre, R., Fallon, B., Van Wert, M., & Filippelli, J. (2017). Examining the Relationship between Economic Hardship and Child Maltreatment Using Data from the Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2013 (OIS-2013). *Behavioral sciences* (Basel, Switzerland), 7(1), 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs7010006>
- Legislative Reference Bureau. (n.d.). *Illinois Compiled Statutes*. Illinois general assembly - Illinois COMPILED STATUTES. Retrieved August 5, 2021 from <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=070504050K2-3>.
- Lind, T. (2018). *Freedom to roam: With Utah law on the books, SPOKANE PARENTS mull 'FREE-RANGE PARENTING'*. Spokeman. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2018/jun/30/freedom-to-roam-with-utah-law-on-the-books-spokane/>.
- Manno, D. (2016). How dramatic shifts in perceptions of parenting have Exposed FAMILIES, free-range or otherwise, to state intervention: A common law TORT approach to Redefining child neglect. *AU Law Review*. <http://www.aulawreview.org/comment-how-dramatic-shifts-in-perceptions-of-parenting-have-exposed-families-free-range-or-otherwise-to-state-intervention-a-common-law-tort-approach-to-redefining-child-neglect/>.
- Marx, B. (2017). Are American Parents Unreasonably Afraid of Abduction? *Fatherly*. <https://www.fatherly.com/parenting/are-american-parents-unreasonably-afraid-of-abduction/>.
- McMurtry, S. L. (2013). *Parenting Style Differences in Black American and White American Young Adults*. Dissertations. 194. <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/194>
- Miller, C. C. (2015). Class differences in child-rearing are on the rise. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/upshot/rich-children-and-poor-ones-are-raised-very-differently.html>

- Morgan, J. (2014). *The Decline of Trust in the United States*. Medium.com. <https://medium.com/@monarchjogs/the-decline-of-trust-in-the-united-states-fb8ab719b82a>
- Niz, S. E. & Harris, N. (2019). What is Free Range Parenting, and Why is It Controversial? *Parents*. <https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/everything-kids/free-range-parenting-isnt-neglect-so-stop-penalizing-them-for-it/>
- NPR Staff. (2015). What kind of parent are you? The debate over 'free-range' parenting. *NPR* retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2015/04/26/402226053/what-kind-of-parent-are-you-the-debate-over-free-range-parenting>.
- Parental Rights Cases to Know. (2016). *American Bar Association*. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-35/february-2016/parental-rights-cases-to-know/
- Parenting in America. (2015). *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/>
- Parenting Styles: Cultural And Ethnic Variations in Parenting Styles. (n.d.). *Family.jrank.org*. Retrieved May 5, 2021 from <https://family.jrank.org/pages/1253/Parenting-Styles-Cultural-Ethnic-Variations-in-Parenting-Styles.html#:~:text=Research%20has%20suggested%20that%20authoritative.practices%20than%20are%20white%20parents>.
- Perino, M. (2019). *11 differences between raising kids in a big city versus the suburbs*. Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/city-or-suburb-raise-children-parents-2019-10#as-a-result-of-transportation-children-often-have-a-greater-sense-of-independence-living-in-a-city-2>
- Perry, N. B., Dollar, J. M., Calkins, S. D., Keane, S. P., & Shanahan, L. (2018). Childhood self-regulation as a mechanism through which early overcontrolling parenting is associated with adjustment in preadolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 54(8), 1542–1554. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000536>
- Pizzigati, S. (2019). Helicopter Parenting Linked to Economic Inequality. *Institute for Policy Studies*. <https://ips-dc.org/helicopter-parenting-linked-to-economic-inequality/>
- Prichep, D. (2018). To Raise Confident, Independent Kids, Some Parents Are Trying to ‘Let Grow.’ *NPR Morning Edition*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/09/03/641256596/to-raise-confident-independent-kids-some-parents-are-trying-to-let-grow>
- Pros and Cons in Single-Parent Families. *Universal Class*. Retrieved June 2, 2021 from <https://www.universalclass.com/articles/self-help/pros-and-cons-in-single-parent-families.htm>
- RCW 26.44.020: Definitions. Retrieved May 5, 2021 from <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=26.44.020>.
- Reuters. (2019). Kidnapped children make headlines, but abduction is rare in U.S. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-wisconsin-missinggirl-data/kidnapped-children-make-headlines-but-abduction-is-rare-in-u-s-idUSKCN1P52BJ>
- Roth D. (2015). Helicopter or Free Range: A Dilemma of Modern Parenting. *Dordt University Digital Collections @ Dordt*. https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1153&context=faculty_work
- Rudasill, K. M., Adelson, J. L., Callahan, C. M., Houlihan, D. V., & Keizer, B. M. (2013). Gifted Students’ Perceptions of Parenting Styles: Associations With Cognitive Ability, Sex, Race, and Age. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 57(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986212460886>.
- Sampathkumar M. & Shwayder M. (2020). Cyberbullying increases amid coronavirus pandemic. Here’s what parents can do. *Digitaltrends*. <https://www.digitaltrends.com/news/coronavirus-cyberbullying-distance-learning/>
- Sarwar, S. (2016). Influence of Parenting Style of Children’s Behavior. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*. 3(2), 222-249. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1161470.pdf>
- Skenazy, L. (2021). *Skenazy: Case highlights need for decriminalizing poverty*. *GazetteXtra*. https://www.gazettextra.com/opinion/columns/skenazy-case-highlights-need-for-decriminalizing-poverty/article_42f1d660-0e3d-5561-8f9c-7ad18fb44886.html.

- Skenazy, L. *Meet 'The World's Worst Mom'*. Honey, I'm Homeschooling The Kids. Retrieved June 5, 2021 from <http://imhomeschooling.com/worlds-worst-mom-lenore-skenazy/>.
- The Washington Post. (2021). *Latchkey children age restrictions by state*. The Washington Post. <https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/local/latchkey-children-age-restrictions-by-state/1555/>
- Underwood, A. (2021). *States with the most single-parent households*. Stacker. <https://stacker.com/stories/6318/states-most-single-parent-households>.
- Wallace, K. (2014). Mom arrested for leaving 9-year-old alone at park. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/07/21/living/mom-arrested-left-girl-park-parents/index.html>
- Web Solutions LLC. *Parenting Styles - Cultural And Ethnic Variations In Parenting Styles*. JRank Articles. Retrieved May 5, 2021 from <https://family.jrank.org/pages/1253/Parenting-Styles-Cultural-Ethnic-Variations-in-Parenting-Styles.html#:~:text=Research%20has%20suggested%20that%20authoritative.practices%20than%20are%20whi te%20parents>.
- WOW Parenting. (n.d.). Psychological and behavioral effects of both parents working on child. *WOW Parenting*. Retrieved July 6, 2021 from <https://wowparenting.com/blog/effects-of-working-parents-on-child/>
- WP Company. *Latchkey children age restrictions by state*. The Washington Post. Retrieved August 8, 2021 from <https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/local/latchkey-children-age-restrictions-by-state/1555/>.