

Growing up too Soon: The impact of Parentification on Relationships and Emotional well-being

Amy Marroquin, Zamy D. Slack, Brandon Mares-Lopez, Brenda Ramirez , Daniela Velazquez

INTRODUCTION

Parentification occurs when children take on adult responsibilities that are typically meant for parents or other adults. This can include caring for younger siblings, providing emotional support for their parents, or taking on the role of a primary caregiver for family members. While helping family members can be a healthy and supportive experience, it becomes problematic when children are consistently expected to assume these responsibilities. Taking on responsibilities that exceed their developmental stage can negatively affect their emotional, social, and psychological development, especially during childhood and adolescence. The purpose of this research is to increase awareness of the effects of parentification on mental health and family relationships in adulthood, with the goal of promoting healthier relationships and improved mental well-being.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does parentification affect the adolescents’ relationships with family during adolescence , and how can it impact their mental health during adulthood?

METHODS

Title:Parentification Vulnerability, Reactivity, Resilience, and Thriving

- Mixed methods study

Title: Parentification: Definition, Signs and Causes

- Literature review

Titles: 1. Sensitive, Not Broken: Reclaiming Nervous System Regulation After Childhood Parentification 2. How Growing Up Parentified Impacts Your Relationships 3."Like stepping on glass": A theoretical model to understand the emotional experience of childhood parentification

- Clinical analysis/clinical perspective

RESULTS-PRIMARY FINDINGS

How does parentification affect the adolescents’ relationships with family during adolescence?

-Parentification leads to confusion where children struggle to understand what is expected of them. Parentified individuals show a high level of predicted avoidant or anxious relationship styles in adulthood. Parentification disrupts the development of healthy autonomy, leading to guilt and overfunctioning in adult relationships.

How does parentification affect mental health during adulthood?

-Children who experience parentification are more likely to have mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. These challenges can continue into adulthood and affect their emotional well-being. Parentified people feel the need to keep their families emotionally and practically stable, creating ongoing anxiety, hypervigilance, and emotional exhaustion.

REFERENCES

Dariotis, J. K., Chen, F. R., Park, Y. R., Nowak, M. K., French, K. M., & Codamon, A. M. (2023). Parentification Vulnerability, Reactivity, Resilience, and Thriving: A Mixed Methods Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(13), 6197. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20136197>

Schorr, S., & Goldner, L. (2023). “Like stepping on glass”: A theoretical model to understand the emotional experience of childhood parentification. *Family Relations*, 72(5). <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12833>

Lizárraga, S. (2025, June 9). *Sensitive, Not Broken: Reclaiming Nervous System Regulation After Childhood Parentification*. Firstsession.Com; First Session. <https://www.firstsession.com/resources/nervous-system-regulation-childhood-parentification>

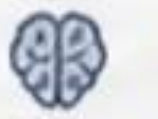
Parentification: Definition, Signs and Causes. (n.d.). Attachment Project. Retrieved July 13, 2026, from <https://www.attachmentproject.com/psychology/parentification/>

How Growing Up Parentified Impacts Your Relationships. (2026). Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-mental-health-of-girls-and-women/202602/how-growing-up-parentified-impacts-your>

RESULTS-PRIMARY FINDINGS

- Emotional parentification is more common among girls.
- Instrumental parentification is more common among boys.



Finding	Evidence
 Youth affected	Approximately 2% to over 30% experience parentification.
 Mental health	Increased anxiety, depression, and chronic stress.
 Relationships	Greater difficulty with trust, boundaries, and forming healthy relationships.
 Gender differences	Girls experience more emotional parentification; boys experience more instrumental parentification.
 Cultural impact	Youth of color often report higher rates of parentification in several studies.

Conclusion

Our project examined how parentification can affect adolescents’ relationships with their families and how these experiences can influence mental health during adulthood. Our research showed that parentification can lead to long-term issues such as anxiety, depression, chronic stress, and difficulty forming healthy relationships. These findings matter because parentification is often overlooked, yet it can become significant when young people grow and understand themselves. By recognizing the early signs, families, schools, and mental health professionals can better support adolescents and help prevent long-term emotional harm. Overall, the key takeaway is that parentification has lasting effects, and increasing awareness can lead to healthier relationships and improved mental well-being.

RESULTS — THEMES

Theme 1. [Childhood Misfortune]
Parentification causes a loss of childhood due to adult responsibilities.

Theme 2. [Development with Emotions]
Parentification may cause emotional development to be disrupted .

Theme 3. [Later Effects}
Parentification effects often continue even during adulthood.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Our findings suggest that parentification interrupts normal developmental processes, affecting how adolescents build relationships and understand themselves. Taking on adult responsibilities prematurely can distort family dynamics and emotional growth. These disruptions often persist into adulthood, influencing mental health, boundary-setting, and long-term relationship stability.

LIMITATIONS

-Our sources mainly focus on adults who have experienced parentification during their adolescent years, and not as many experiences coming from current adolescents.
-Our findings don’t focus on a particular demographic, but rather everyone as a whole.
Strengths
-Our findings work for all kinds of people, not just one group.
-Different studies show similar results, which makes our findings stronger.
-Using adult experiences helps you see how parentification impacts someone later in life.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE-

Parentification has lasting effects, and increasing awareness can lead to healthier relationships and improved mental well-being.