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# Can Parenting Programme Reduce Parent-Adolescents Conflicts in Hong Kong?

Yiu Tsang LOW<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article reported the outcome of an adapted British parenting programme in Hong Kong which aimed at reducing parent-adolescents conflicts. Adolescents' outcome was measured by Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and parent's parenting stress was measured by parenting stress Index short form (PSI-SF). The level of conflict between parents and their adolescents was measured by parent-adolescent conflict scale (PAC). The study showed that parents of the experimental groups showed significant decrease in parenting stress after the programme. SDQ showed significant decrease in adolescents' difficulties and significant decrease in conflict between parents and their adolescents. Significant between group differences was observed between experimental groups and comparison group in parent child dysfunction interaction and granting of autonomy to their children. Participant satisfaction survey indicated majority of parents perceived the programme as helpful to their parenting as well as reducing conflict with their adolescents. The presence study showed a promising design of a parenting programme that support parents of adolescents in facing their conflicts with their adolescents.

*Keywords:* parenting programme; parent-adolescent conflicts; Chinese parents; social learning theory; Chinese parenting.

## Introduction

Study indicates that parent-adolescent conflict is related to delinquency (Dekovic, Janssens & Van As, 2003; Patterson, 1982) and running away from home (Safyer, Thompson, Maccio, Zittel-Palamara, & Foreland, 2004; Mallett, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005; Tyler, 2008). Such conflict is more common when adolescents

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perceive their parents as uncaring and unsupportive (Adams & Laursen, 2007; Hall, 1987). It is also well documented that parent-adolescent conflict is related to poor psychological well-being in adolescents with low academic achievement (Shek, Chan & Lee, 2011). Furthermore, it is also now believed that adolescents' involvement in drugs (Brook, Brook, Zhang & Cohen, 2010), early sex and multiple sex partners (Gardner, Martin & Brooks-Gunn, 2012), alcohol abuse (Chaplin et. al., 2012) and crime is partly related to conflict with parents. Excessive and abusive physical punishment by parents has a negative impact on the emotional and mental well-being of young people (Henricson, 2001). Families with a history of child maltreatment also demonstrate their family dysfunction in roles, problem solving behavioural control, affective involvement as well as affective responsiveness (Iovu, 2011). Dekovic (1999) suggests that high levels of conflict and low levels of emotional bonding between adolescents and their parents are associated with strong tendencies in the former to externalise behavioural problems. They also have less monitoring from their parents. Young people involved in crime have a history of being subjected to one or more of harsh or erratic discipline, emotional or physical neglect or inadequate supervision (Farrington & West 1990). Parents' negative parenting approaches are also related to the development of delinquency in young people in Euro-American culture: neglect and failure to supervise effectively, conflict between parents and children, parental criminality and family disruption such as inter-parental conflict (Henricson, 2001).

### **Parenting programme as a means of support to parents of adolescents**

Parenting programmes and educational work was particularly important for families with teenagers especially to cater for their developmental needs (Molina, Pastor & Violant, 2011). As indicated in the table 1 above, literature indicated that various forms of parenting support have been used to support parents of adolescents (age 10-14). Early example, Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber (1984) demonstrate that parental family management skills (composed of four components: monitoring, discipline, problem solving and reinforcement) were favourable to non-conflictual relationship between parents and their adolescents. Parenting programmes that developed with components including focus on affective quality of parent-child relationship (Dekovic et al., 2004), consistent parenting (Patterson, 1982) and reinforcement of good behaviour of their children (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber 1984) seems to benefit both parents and their adolescents to reduce their conflict (Guernsey, Coufal & Vogelsohn, 1981; Robin & Foster 1989; Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000; Long & Adams, 2001, Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Behavioural parenting programmes that based on the principles and curriculum of Webster Stratton and Triple P programmes for parents of adolescents showed that

Table 1. Evaluation of parenting programme for parents of adolescents

Programme	Content	Method	Outcome
Triple P Adolescent (UK) Clark & Churchill (2010)	Eight weekly two hour sessions by trained facilitator Learning parenting skills	Cognitive Behavioural approach	Reduce in Conflict with adolescents Changing parenting style
Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation (UK) Lindsay et al (2008)	Incredible years, Triple P and Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities	Cognitive Behavioural and Social learning Approach	Improvements in parents' mental well-being, parenting skills and their sense of being a parent. Improvement in behaviour of their concerned adolescents (age 8-13)
Adolescent Transition programme (US) Dishon & Kavanagh (2000)	Incentive promote positive behavioural change Limit Setting and Monitoring skills Relationship skills	Multilevel approach family intervention	Reduce parent-child conflict Reduce teacher report externalizing problem Improved parenting practice
Living with Teenagers (UK) Roker & Coleman(1998)	Understanding adolescent development Communication skills Conflict management skills	Ecological approach	Qualitative data indicated very useful Quantitative data showed less confident as a parent after the programme
Problem solving communication training (Robin & Foster 1989)	Improve communication Address cognitive distortion Problem solving skills	Social learning approach	Improved mother adolescent dyad Improved behaviour of adolescents with attention deficit hyperactive disorder
Parents who care Catalano & Hawkins (1996)	Protective factors, Effective communication Family management	Behavioural and systemic approach	Improvement in family discipline, less tolerance of antisocial behavior
Family Nurturing Programme Bavolet (1987)	Teaching concepts to parents and adolescents Brief relaxation exercise	Discussion with facilitator	Improve understanding on adolescent's needs Appropriate expectations on adolescents
Parent adolescent relationship development programme (US) Guerny, Coufal & Vogel song (1981)	Teaching communication Problem solving and conflict resolution skills	Social learning approach	Improvement in empathic & expressive skills Improve communication pattern Improve quality of relationship

the participants benefitted from reminding them of parenting tips, feeling supported, more confident to be parents and learning a number of useful skills in the programme (Clarke & Churchill, 2010). Another parenting programme that based on social learning principles indicated that parents found this course very useful and rated very high by parents in qualitative data but quantitative data indicated that some parents felt less confident about certain aspects of their parenting and also less influential over certain areas of their teenager's lives (Roker & Coleman, 1998). The use of social learning theory provided active skills training for parents to help them to improve their relationship and daily positive interaction with children. It also involved learning effective discipline strategies to reduce parenting stress, decrease coercive discipline and reduce relationship conflict (Sanders & Woolley, 2005). The effectiveness of various parenting programmes that applied social learning approach were indicated in various studies (Prinz & Jones, 2003, Sanders, Mackie-Dadds, Turner & Ralph, 2004, Prinz & Dumans, 2000). Furthermore, a recent evaluation of social learning and behaviour approach parenting programmes in the UK, which involved more than 3000 parents in different Local Authorities, indicated positive results in improvements in parent mental well-being as well as their adolescents' (age 8-13) behaviour (Lindsay et. al., 2008). In the present study, a British programme, the Challenging Years that based on social learning approach was adopted.

The "challenging years" was originally published by Surrey County Council under the title of "Living with Teenagers". The authors of this programme were Sonya Hinton and Angela Taylor. After noticing the promise of its effectiveness, "Young People In Focus" then work with the authors to publish the programme and rename it as "The Challenging Years". This is a programme that based on social learning theory to help parents to learn communication skills and conflict resolution skills. It also allowed parents to reflect on their parenting practice and used interactive workshop to facilitate parent participants to reflect and learn. Brief summary of the four weekly two hour programme content are as follow:

- Week 1: "Understanding the teenage years". Parent participants were facilitated in an interactive way to reflect on their perceptions of teenagers nowadays.
- Week 2: "Talking to teenagers". This week's programme focus on helping participants to identify and practice good listening skills, learn about different styles of communication and practice helpful ways of communication.
- Week 3: "Parenting style". Participants were able to talk about different styles of parenting and consider how their upbringing is affecting their parenting practice.
- Week 4: "Dealing with conflicts" Participants were able to consider conflicts between themselves and their teenagers. Participants were also able to practice approaches in problem-solving with their teenagers.

Parents' participants were able to learn different communication skills and problem solving skills through understanding and retaining of all the skills with the help of the facilitators. They were also able to learn and acquire all those skills through the time they practice these skills during the sessions. The programme also used an interactive and experiential approach in facilitating participants learning throughout the programme.

### **Evaluation of culturally-sensitive parenting programmes**

Parenting interventions were also found to have effects on ethnic minority parents. Chinese parents and their children can also benefit from joining a culturally-adapted parenting programme through improvement in their communication between parents and their children. Parents were also better able to learn about their children's lives and benefited from improving their listening skills (Yuen, 1997, quoted in Barlow, Shaw & Steward-Brown, 2004). Parents also allowed their children to have more autonomy which helped increase their self-confidence. There is also evidence that Chinese parents who join a parenting programme benefit from the opportunity to support each other (Chau, 1996).

In Hong Kong there, the mode of delivery of parenting programmes includes lectures, groups and promotional activities (Tsang, 2004). It also includes formats like public education through the mass media, talks, small-group programmes, family life camps and so on. Most of these programmes are delivered by NGOs, private practitioners and education or health departments (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). Lectures and parenting groups aim to promote awareness or train parents to adopt new strategies. Promotional activities aim to arouse public awareness of the importance of parenting programmes (Tsang, 2004). However, social workers in Hong Kong have been using parenting programmes as an intervention strategy to cater for the needs of parents in secondary schools in Hong Kong for many years without any systematic evaluation of their effectiveness. Overall, there tends to be a lack of interest in Hong Kong in embarking on rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of parenting programmes (Cheung, 2001). Most of the evaluations that have taken place are based on participant satisfaction surveys and do not use scientific measures or control groups (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). In addition, not all parenting programmes in Hong Kong are theory driven or evidence based. Many practitioners run parenting programmes based on their practical experiences or simply rely on the practice wisdom they have gained through being a social worker. The assessment of the needs of the target participants also relies strongly on practitioners' observations and parents' opinions. Most of the programmes have been designed to address the expressed needs of parents rather than focusing on outcomes for their children. There has also been limited use of scientifically-verified tools to evaluate

outcomes for either parents or their children, and a lack of knowledge about which elements of a parenting programme actually lead to behavioural change. The absence of knowledge and rigorous studies in these areas results in most of these programmes being organised in a piecemeal way without systematic planning and evaluation (Tsang, 2004).

In relation to the literature on the evaluation of parenting programmes in Hong Kong, behavioural interventions have been shown to be effective in reducing children's disruptive behaviour and increasing parents' ratings of their own performance (Ho, Chow, Fung, Leung, Chin & Au, 1999; Leung, Sanders, Leung, Mak & Lau, 2003). Other programme evaluations have also put more emphasis on parents' outcomes. For example, programmes based on Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasises helping parents to understand how their children develop and to increase their empathy and communication skills, have been found to be effective in improving parents' knowledge of their children's development, parent-child communication and empathic skills (Cheung & Yau, 1996), as well as changing attitudes (Kwok, 1994). Parenting programmes have also been shown to be more effective if they are theory-driven and facilitated by more experienced and better-trained social workers (Education and Manpower Bureau 2003). Evaluation of parenting programmes have rarely attempted to focus on interventions designed to help reduce parent-adolescent conflict, despite the evidence suggesting that such conflict is associated with adolescent anti-social behaviour in Hong Kong (Shek & Ma, 1997). The present study set out to fill this gap.

Most parenting programmes in Hong Kong have borrowed material developed in the Euro-American culture with little attention being paid to developing a culturally-sensitive approach. However, direct use of Western-developed training materials may not be appropriate for programmes aiming to improve adolescent outcomes in Hong Kong Chinese culture. For example, studies have indicated that Western typologies of parenting style are insufficient to describe Chinese parenting practices (McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998). Chinese parenting style has been characterised as containing a unique concept of "training" (Chao, 1994) which is an additional element to Baumrind's typology of parenting style. In addition, the meaning of the term authoritarian in the Chinese context may not be the same as in Western society. For example, the Western concept of authoritarian connotes harsh treatment of the child. However, the Chinese concept includes a strong emphasis on a set of standards and, importantly, the concept of parental concern and care. In addition, Chinese parenting also involves specific concepts such as filial piety, hierarchy, strict obedience and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony, all of which are unique to Confucian Chinese beliefs (Lieber, Fung & Leung, 2006). Concerning parent-adolescent relationship, Chao (2005) uses the concept of "contingent autonomy" to distinguishing these concepts in adolescents. The notion of "contingent autonomy" emphasises that young people must show their parents they can act responsibly before they will be granted

autonomy. Chinese parents will observe their behaviour and allow young people their autonomy when they have shown they are able to act responsibly. These examples demonstrate the culturally-specific Chinese parent-adolescents' relationships with the western culture. The current study attempt to add on to the existing literature to identify whether parenting programme that developed mainly with western theories are effective to reduce parent-adolescent conflict in Chinese population

## **Method**

The present study adopted a quasi-experimental design with comparison group. 91 parents participated in seven experimental groups and two comparison groups. The sample was drawn from five secondary schools in the Northern District of Hong Kong. Letters were sent to each Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) inviting them to participate in this study by agreeing to launch a parent training group and inviting their members to join. Five schools agreed to participate. Leaflets about the programme were then sent to the parents. All parents gave written consent to participating in the study. They were then invited to join the parenting programme provided that they fulfilled the following criteria. Firstly, they were a parent of at least one child in early adolescence (11-14). Secondly, they considered themselves to have frequent parent-adolescent conflict. Thirdly, they had not attended any counselling, family therapy or psychotherapy or received psychiatric treatment in the three months prior to recruitment to the study, nor did they have chronic mental health problems. Finally, all participants needed to have basic literacy skills and to be able to read and write Chinese. The recruited parents participated in four weeks of two-hour sessions group parenting programme. The groups were conducted by three qualified and experienced registered social workers of Hong Kong. In order to make sure that the contents of the programme were consistent across the different groups, the study adopted the Challenging Years parenting programme materials. Two waiting-list comparison groups of 26 parents each were recruited using the same criteria as for the experimental group. They received no service during the time they filled out the questionnaires, and were invited to join the programme after the experimental period had been completed. This study received ethics approval from the research ethics committee of School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol.

## ***Measures***

Before the start of the programme, participants were asked to complete a newly-developed questionnaire to collect demographic data. In addition, before and after the programme, participants were asked to fill in the following



questionnaires: Chinese version of the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale (PAC: Robin & Foster 1989), Chinese version of Parenting Stress Index short form (Abidin, 1995), modified version of Chinese parenting beliefs questionnaire (Leiber, Fung & Leung, 2006).

The PAC scale developed by Robin and Foster (1989) has been translated into Chinese by Shek, Lee, Ngai, Law and Chan (1995) and used in other relevant studies such as Shek (1998), who reports high internal consistency and temporal stability. This is a 20-item scale with indication of conflicts with their adolescents from a parents' perspective. It is designed to measure perceived conflict behaviours at home. It also provides a general estimate of how much conflict and negative communication there is within a family, and of the level of distress its members are experiencing with reference to their pattern of interaction (Robin & Foster 1989). The version of the PAC adopted in this study was the short form of the Conflict Behavior Questionnaire. This scale has been tested and correlates highly with the longer-form scores ( $r=0.96$ ). The highest-possible score is 20; a mean score indicating distress for mothers is 12.4 while for fathers it is 10.5. The non-distressed mean score for mothers is 2.4 and 3.2 for fathers. In this study, its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.82.

Chinese version of the Parenting Stress Index Short form (PSI-SF: Abidin, 1995) was employed to measure any change in the levels of parenting stress before and after the programme. The PSI-SF is a 36-item self-report measure used to reflect the extent of the stress experienced by an individual when caring for a child or adolescent (Tam, Chan & Wong, 1994). It was originally developed through factor analysis of the full-length PSI. The PSI-SF scale consists of three factors; Parental Distress (PD), Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction (PCDI) and Difficult Child (DC). The validity and reliability of the PSI-SF scale is close to that of the original, long form (Abidin, 1995). The stress score of the PSI-SF ranges from 36-180 with the majority of the items on a five-point scale from very agree to very disagree. This scale has been translated into Chinese and found to have high validity (Lam 1999). In this study, its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.89.

The Chinese version of the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) was used to measure any change in adolescents' emotional and behavioural problems before and after the programme. It was originally developed for the purpose of screening for problems of children and adolescents, and is also intended to measure treatment outcome and as a research tool (Goodman, 2001). The scale consists of 25 items divided across 5 factors and is available in different languages including Chinese. It measures emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationships and pro-social behaviour. The questionnaire has the advantage of including both positive and negative descriptions. Respondents use a 3-point Likert scale (certainly true, somewhat true and not true) to indicate how far these items apply to the individual child or adolescent. The questionnaire can be completed by parents, teachers or the adolescents themselves. It is also easy to administer and

has been validated in various studies (for example Leung et al., 2003), and is available free of charge for use in non-profit making research and the public sector (Goodman, 2001). In this study, its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.79.

Chinese version of the Modified Chinese Parenting Belief questionnaire (CPBQ: Leiber, Fung & Leung, 2006) is used to measure any change in attitudes towards parenting before and after the programme. Studies suggest participation in this type of programme can lead to such a shift. It consists of four dimensions of Chinese child-rearing beliefs; authoritativeness, autonomy, shaming and training. These four aspects have been identified by the authors through factor analysis as culturally-specific parenting practices among Chinese families. A modified (that is, shortened) version of the scale was used in this study. Respondents are asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with each statement. In this study, its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.57.

After the completion of the programme, participants were required to fill in a questionnaire concerning their perception of the programme. These areas include whether they found the programme helpful, whether the programme could help them to reduce their conflicts and whether they found the programme useful.

### **Statistical analyses**

A series of Chi square test were used to compare any demographic differences between the experimental and comparison groups at pre-test. On the other hand, the data collected in the SDQ, PSI-SF, PAC and adapted CPBQ were not normally distributed, they were transformed into a normal distribution by the SPSS software by square rooting all the data. Afterwards, repeated-measures analyses of variance (RM-ANOVAs) were employed to examine the time effect on the outcome variables. The objectives of the present study was to explore any improvement in the behaviour of adolescents, reduce in parenting stress level, changing of parenting belief and reduce in conflict level between parents and their adolescents after parents joining a parenting programme. The null hypothesis in this study was that there was no significant difference in the score of SDQ, PSI-SF, PAC, and CPSQ before and after parents joining the programme.

### **Results**

*Table 2* showed the demographic data of the experimental and comparison groups. In general, there is no significant difference between the experimental groups and the comparison groups except that the mean age of experimental group (45.1) is higher than the comparison group (43.1) ( $p=.03$ ) and mean age of

partner of experimental groups (47.1) is younger than comparison group (56) ( $p=.01$ ).

The demographic data shows that more mothers than fathers took part in the experimental and comparison groups. Most were in low-income Hong Kong households with no more than two children. The majority were married and lived with their original partners. In terms of education, most were educated to Form 5 level, which means they had left school at 16. More than half of the participants in both groups were housewives, with the experimental groups having more participants who were working full time.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the sample

	Experimental groups N=65	Comparison groups N=26	Statistics, <i>P</i>
Place of Birth			
Hong Kong	43(66.2%)	7 (26.9%)	$X^2(1)=11.55, p=.001^*$
Mainland China	22(33.8%)	19 (73.1%)	
Mean years of residence	17.9 years	14.1 years	$U=224.5, z=-.031, p=0.76$
Child Age (years)	13.9 (1.8)	14.8 (2)	$U=605, z=-2.15, p=.03^*$
Parent's age (years)	45.6 (4.9)	43.1 (4.3)	$U=589.5, z=-2.17, p=.03^*$
No. Children	1.5(0.7)	1.7(0.6)	$U=708, z=-1.34, p=.18$
Parent's gender			
Male	13(20%)	1(3.8%)	$U=708, z=-1.34, p=.18$
Female	52(80%)	25 (96.2%)	
Parent's marital status			
Married	58 (89.2%)	24 (92.3%)	$X^2(3)=1.65, p=.65$
Divorced	3 (4.6%)	2 (7.7%)	
Remarried	2(3.1%)	0	
Others	2(3.1%)	0	
Parent's education			
Post-Secondary/University	12(18.5%)	2 (7.6%)	$X^2(6)=4.27, p=.64$
Secondary	51(66.2%)	22(84.6%)	
Primary or below	2(3.1%)	2(7.7%)	
Parent's Employment			
Employed	31(47.7%)	10(38.5%)	$X^2(7)=8.73, p=.27$
Housewife	32(49.2%)	16(61.5%)	
Unemployed	2(3.1%)	0	

\* $p<.05$

### Comparison of Pre and Post intervention score

The RM-ANOVA was then used to test for within-group and between-group differences. Concerning the adolescents' behaviour before and after the programme, we can observe from *Table 2* that there was a higher reduce in mean score of total score, hyperactivity score, emotional problem score and conduct score of experimental groups than the comparison groups. Nevertheless, there were no significant changes in the total SDQ scores over time: ( $F(1, .03)=2, p=.16$ ). In addition, there was a non-significant between-group difference ( $F(1, .03)=2, p=.16$ ) in the total SDQ score meaning that the experimental and comparison groups were changing in more or less the same way. Similar non-significant within group and non-significant between group differences were observed from all other subscale of SDQ. Although non-significant within group difference and between groups differences were identified in all subscale of SDQ, there was a higher mean score reduction in experimental groups in total SDQ score and all other sub scale except conduct problem subscale when compared with the comparison groups.

The result of PSI-SF indicated that there was a higher reduction in the mean score of the total parenting stress score as well as all sub scale of the experimental groups than the comparison groups when before and after score was compared. RM-ANOVA indicated that significant within-group difference for the experimental groups in total stress score ( $F(1, .01) = 5.3, p = .02$ ), parent-child dysfunctional interaction score ( $F(1, .01) = 4.6, p = .04$ ) and difficult child score ( $F(1, .11) = 6.9, p = .01$ ); meaning that there was a significant change in score across time. In addition to that, there was a significant between group differences in the difficult child subscale of the PSI-SF ( $p = .04$ ) meaning that there was significant between group difference in reduce in score of difficult child subscale. The significant reduce in difficult child subscale is come from parents participating the programme.

Concerning the Parent-Adolescent Conflict scale (PAC), we can observe that there is a higher reduction in conflict score of experimental groups than the comparison groups. RM-ANOVA indicated there was a significant within group difference ( $F(1, .48) = 12.6, p = .001$ ) in the scale but no significant between group difference between the experimental and comparison groups ( $F(1, .00) = 3.0, p = .09$ ). Again, this suggests there was no significant treatment effect from participating in the programme.

Concerning the CPBQ, the result indicated a very similar changes in the before and after treatment score of both the experimental and the comparison groups. RM-ANOVA showed no significant within group differences and between group

differences in the result. The significant between group differences indicated may be the result that the mean difference in experimental groups is higher than the comparison groups and that difference is statistically significant. This indicated that the programme has no effect on changing the parenting belief of parents.

Table 3. Intervention Effects: within groups and between group differences (RM-ANOVA)

	Experimental Groups (n=65)		Comparison Groups (n=26)		Within gp diff			Between gp diff.		
	Pre M(SD)	Post M(SD)	Pre M(SD)	Post M(SD)	df	F	p	df	F	p
SDQ										
Total Score	11.5(5.31)	10.3(4.86)	10.0(5.69)	9.2(4.65)	1	2.0	.16	1	2.0	.16
Hyperactivity	4.1(1.99)	3.8(1.87)	3.5(2.61)	3.6(2.45)	1	.19	.66	1	.16	.69
Emotional Problem	2.6(1.97)	2.1(2.05)	2.5(2.16)	2.2(1.59)	1	1.5	.22	1	.32	.58
Peer Problem	2.6 (1.96)	2.5(1.67)	2.4(1.27)	2.1(1.29)	1	.07	.79	1	.97	.33
Conduct Problem	2.1(1.60)	1.9(1.51)	1.6(1.65)	1.4(1.47)	1	1.9	.17	1	1.4	.24
PSI-SF										
Total Stress	96.1(21.1)	89.8(23.2)	88.8(19.4)	88.7(17.4)	1	5.3	.02*	1	3.3	.07
Parental Distress	32.3(8.2)	30.4(8.1)	30.0(8.4)	31.0(8.1)	1	.04	.84	1	1.5	.22
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	32.3(7.8)	30.2(7.7)	30.2(6.2)	29.3(5.6)	1	4.6	.04*	1	2.2	.14
Difficult Child	31.5(8.2)	29.2(9.9)	28.1(7.9)	26.4(6.5)	1	6.9	.01*	1	4.4	.04*
PAC	8.6(4.9)	6.6(4.7)	6.1(4.8)	5.0(4.2)	1	12.6	.00*	1	3.0	.09
CPBQ										
Authoritative	4.6(0.6)	4.6(0.7)	4.6(0.5)	4.7(0.5)	1	0.1	.74	1	0.3	.60
Autonomy	3.4(1.1)	3.3(1.2)	2.9(1.1)	2.8(1.2)	1	.06	.80	1	4.8	.03*
Shame	2.4(1.0)	2.4(1.1)	2.4(0.9)	2.3(1.0)	1	.05	.83	1	.01	.92
Training	3.9(1.2)	3.8(1.3)	3.9(1.3)	3.9(1.3)	1	.20	.66	1	.07	.79

\*P<.05

Table 4. Participant Questionnaire (n=65)

Question	Very helpful /suitable	Quite helpful/ suitable	Not very helpful/ suitable	Not at all Helpful/ suitable	No indication
Overall what is your view of this parenting group?	14 (21.5%)	49 (75.4%)	2 (3.1%)	0	0
Did the programme help you to reduce conflicts with your adolescent Children?	15 (23.1%)	46 (70.8%)	4 (6.2%)	0	1
Did you think the programme was suitable for parenting adolescents in Hong Kong?	17 (26.2%)	44 (67.7%)	1 (1.5%)	2 (3.1%)	0
Did joining the programme helps you feel more confident to be a parent of teenagers?	11 (16.9%)	47 (72.3%)	5 (7.7%)	2 (3.1%)	0
Did you enjoy this group?	32 (49.2%)	29 (44.6%)	2 (3.1%)	2 (3.1%)	0

As shown in *Table 4*, the questionnaire indicated that a large majority of the participants had found the programme very helpful (21.5%) or helpful (75.4%), with more than 90% giving a positive response. In terms of conflict resolution, the majority of participants (93.9%) indicated in the questionnaire that the programme had been very or quite helpful in assisting them to reduce conflict. One of the objectives of this study was to identify culturally-sensitive parenting practices or techniques, in order to enhance understanding of how to design a culturally-sensitive parenting programme and find out more about parenting practices in Hong Kong Chinese families. When participants were asked about whether the programme was suitable for Hong Kong parents, the majority of the participants found the programme very suitable (25.8%) or quite suitable (66.7%) for parents of adolescents in Hong Kong. Only 3 (4.5%) participants thought it was not very suitable. Finally, when asking about whether participants enjoyed the programme, 32 (49.2%) satisfied with the programme very much while 29 (44.6%) indicated that they were quite satisfied with the programme. This indicated majority, (93.8%) of the participants enjoyed joining the programme.

## Discussion

This study reported on outcome of a parenting programme held in secondary schools in the Northern District of Hong Kong. All participants had at least one adolescent child aged 11-14. The majority were women who had been educated to at least Form 5 (that is, they had left school at 16). They were at the low-income

end of the Hong Kong population and lived in an area mainly composed of public housing estates. Most had been born in Hong Kong, were living with their partners and had no more than two children. More than half of the participants in the experimental groups and majority of the comparison groups were housewives.

We were able to observe from the RM-ANOVA study that there was significant between group differences in the difficult child sub scale of PSI-SF. This means that the programme has effect on reducing in parenting stress in difficult child aspect. This indicated that the programme was effective to help parents to reduce their stress in managing their adolescent's behaviour as the difficult child subscale mainly reflect whether parents feel pressure in managing their adolescents (Abidin, 1995). This means that the programme were able to help parents manage their adolescents better after understanding more of adolescence development, communication skills, parenting style and conflict resolution strategies. For adolescents' behaviour, the results indicate that members of the experimental groups saw improvements (i.e. higher reduce in mean score) in adolescents' behaviour than the comparison groups immediately after completion of the programme. These improvements have statistically significant within group difference. This showed that the parenting programme did make a higher level of improvement in adolescents' behaviour when comparing both the experimental and comparison groups. Nevertheless, there was statistically non-significant between group differences of the improvement in behaviour of the adolescents of the experimental groups when compared with the comparison groups. This indicated no treatment effects on the behaviour of adolescents after their parents joined the parenting programme. This may be because the parenting programme content itself did not focus explicitly on helping parents to modify their adolescents' behaviour which is more strongly emphasis in behavioural parenting programme. In addition, the present parenting programme did not have elements that involve adolescents in the programme intervention. This may lessen the chance to change the adolescents' behaviour.

Similarly, there were higher mean differences in the PAC score of experimental groups than the comparison groups meaning that there was a higher level of reduction in conflicts level between parents and their adolescents after the programme. Nevertheless, there were no statistically significant between group differences in these two groups meaning that there was statistically no treatment effect on the improvements in parent-adolescents conflict after the programme. On the other hand, there were non-significant between group difference in the experimental groups and the comparison groups of PAC scores and CPBQ in the experimental groups to the programme. It might have occurred because those who most wanted to join the programme were enrolled in the experimental groups; in other words, they were highly motivated and prepared to change. Parents on the waiting list also showed a reduction in their scores. This may be because they were contemplating joining the programme, because they knew other parents in

the group who had shared what they have learned with them or perhaps because they had participated in similar programmes offered elsewhere.

Nonetheless, it is encouraging that parents indicate their satisfaction in joining the programme in the after programme questionnaire. They also indicated that they perceived they have less conflict with their adolescents, more confident to become a parent and also found the programme well adapted to Hong Kong parents. We can see that these changes in perception were able to change their parenting schema (Azar, Nix & Makin-Byrd, 2005) which in turn modified their parenting process and subsequently found changes in their relationship with their adolescents. In addition, the statistical test also indicated that at least some parents derived a benefit from participating in a school-based parenting programme although the effect was not significant. It is necessary to delineate further the processes associated with the programme which might have helped to improve participants' parenting practice. For example, previous experience of parenting programmes might have enhanced participation and understanding of the materials and hence led to more change. These factors could have been identified if questions about previous experience of such programmes had been included. Another potential improvement to the study method would be to recruit participants with similar levels of difficulties, stress and conflict to both the experimental and comparison groups. It would be important to ensure that there were few differences between groups to make it easier to determine whether the improvement had come from the programme or had arisen only by chance.

### **Implications for social work practice**

The data showed that there had been an improvement in the experimental groups. However, statistically this could not be attributed directly to the programme. In addition, the after programme questionnaire indicated that participants satisfy with the programme, perceive the programme was helpful to reduce their conflict with their adolescents. This supplemented the statistical test that we were able to see participants' benefit from the programme. Accordingly, there is a need to consider other what other elements within the programme that could help promote changes in parenting schema of participants that facilitate parents' change. Parenting programmes alone may not do enough to address the complex problem of parent-adolescent conflict.

In terms of policy, this study does show that the programme design with social learning principle has promise as an effective intervention theory for those who have conflicts with their adolescent children as well as lower levels of parenting stress. The programme was particularly useful to release parenting stress in managing their adolescents. Further work is needed to explore whether this is because of limitations in the study or the programme design itself. Given the



number of programmes run in Hong Kong schools, more studies in this area should be carried out in order to help policymakers gain more understanding of the effectiveness of such programmes for the purposes of allocating future funding. The positive feedback from the participants also needs to be considered, and the reasons behind it explored, in order to assist with the future design and implementation of parenting programmes.

This study indicated further that Chinese parents could benefit from joining a non-labelling and supportive parenting programme in which we need to further study in the future its effectiveness. This could have the possibility of preventing serious problems between parent and adolescents in the future despite the fact that there was no such evidence at the moment. We may need to consider whether there is a possibility of having some individual social work service together with the parenting programme that could at one hand reduce the labelling effect of joining a parenting programme but at the same time able to address the individual difficulties of each parents.

### **Limitation of present study**

This study adopted a non-random sampling strategy. Participants were allowed to choose themselves whether to join the experimental or the waiting-list group. It appears that parents who were more motivated and ready to change joined the experimental groups. There was, therefore, more chance of substantial differences between the groups, making comparison more difficult. Though it raises ethical issues, future studies should consider using random sampling to avoid this problem. In addition, the sample was drawn from the Northern District of Hong Kong only. The results cannot therefore be generalised to the population as a whole, but apply only to those who voluntarily join parenting programmes in the Northern District.

To minimise this problem, however, a series of measures was taken to make sure that the participants were as similar as possible, such as recruiting parents from within the same district to make sure they came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, and requiring all participants to have at least some level of conflict with their adolescent children and to have received no social services within the previous three months. Nevertheless, assessment against these criteria relied solely on participants' self-reports, with no steps taken to validate them before joining the programme. This approach could be improved in future studies.

This study adopted different scales to measure adolescents' behaviour, participants' parenting stress and conflict level: the PSI (Abidin, 1985), PAC (Robin & Foster, 1989) and SDQ (Goodman, 1997). These are widely-used scales which have been validated by different scholars and used in previous studies to measure

parental comments on children's behaviour before and after participating in a Hong Kong parenting programme (Leung et al., 2003). However, they have the disadvantage that data are gathered solely from parents, with no attempt made to collect the views of adolescents. As indicated in a review by Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe (2003), some previous studies on parenting programmes show that parents tend to indicate a substantial improvement in their relationship with their adolescents after taking part, while their children give no such indications when interviewed. It would be better to include adolescents' views despite the fact that difficulties would be encountered in doing so, such as the problem of how to collect such data if parents do not want their children to know that they are attending a group. In addition, the extra resources required to collect data from adolescents were beyond the scope of this study. It may be possible to get a better picture of the parent-adolescent relationship if a specific measurement scale like the Parent Adolescent Relationship Questionnaire (Robin, Koepke & Moye, 1990) were adopted. This was not used in the present study because the focus was more on parent-adolescent conflict, and also because there is currently no validated Chinese version available for which copyright permission for use in this study could be obtained.

This study would also have been improved by using video recordings of parent-adolescent interactions to measure change before and after the programme. Though this also raises ethical dilemmas, such visual evidence can present a fuller picture, as a source of data which is not based solely on self-reports. Observing and coding such interactions, and trying to interpret the meaning behind them, may yield more information about relationships between Hong Kong Chinese parents and adolescents in the current social context, and enable behavioural changes to be observed.

A further limitation arose from the differences in the styles of the three facilitators. Using three different group leaders was unavoidable, and the researcher participated in at least one session for each group to observe any differences in approach. Although all three facilitators were female and were registered social workers in Hong Kong, they came from different backgrounds and had diverse clinical experiences. Even though manuals were available, this did not guarantee that the programme was delivered in the way in which it had originally been planned and formulated (Forgatch, Patterson & DeGarmo, 2005). In future such research, more training for facilitators may be needed to try to maintain the consistency of the delivery of the programme. Another way to encourage fidelity to the programme materials is to give facilitators a checklist to complete after each session (Nilsen, 2007). This can ensure that the major topics within the manual have been covered.

Future research into the efficacy of a similar parenting programme using this model should collect more information by using a larger sample with a more varied demographic background, to further consider its efficacy. Moreover, it is

possible that a longer programme using these elements would result in more change (see for example Macdonald & Turner, 2005; Gordon, 1975). A longer parenting programme may benefit parents by giving them more time to practise their skills, embed their learning and share among themselves their experiences of taking care of adolescent children.

## Conclusion

The present study indicates the effectiveness of parenting programme with social learning principle to help parents better manage their adolescents. There was no direct evidence but promise of the present programme that could help reduce parent-adolescents conflicts in Chinese parents. The study also provided a proof in identifying the acceptability of Chinese parents of western ideas of parenting practice. Future work may need to identify which part of the western idea of parenting is more acceptable to Chinese parents and which part is not suitable to them. Such beneficially to the parent-adolescent relationship can moderate the undesirable adolescent's behaviour that arises from poor family relationship.

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