



Working together
www.rcis.ro

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

**PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVE COMPONENTS
OF A PARENTING PROGRAMME FOR PARENTS
OF ADOLESCENTS IN HONG KONG**

Yiu Tsang LOW

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2014, vol. 46, pp. 162-181

The online version of this article can be found at:

www.rcis.ro, www.doaj.org and www.scopus.com

Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



Parents' perception of Effective Components of a Parenting Programme for Parents of Adolescents in Hong Kong

Yiu Tsang LOW¹

Abstract

The present study investigates participating parents' perception of the effectiveness of the components of a parenting programme aimed at reducing parent-adolescent conflicts in Hong Kong. Sixty-five parents of adolescents completed a four-week parenting programme of two hours per week. They responded to a questionnaire concerning the usefulness of the components of the programme. After responding to the questionnaire, they were invited to attend a semi-structured interview to express their views on the components of the programme. The result indicates that participants found self-reflection, discussion among participants and listening to facilitators' advice to be the three most important components of the programme. They also benefited from learning communication skills and more about adolescents' development. Nevertheless, the granting of autonomy and conflict resolution skills were not totally acceptable to Chinese parents. The present study indicates culturally sensitive components of parenting programmes for Chinese in Hong Kong.

Keywords: parenting programme, parent-adolescent conflicts, Chinese parents, culturally sensitive parenting components, Chinese parenting.

Introduction

There is a lot of emphasis on evidence-based social work practice and its importance as a basis for carrying out interventions (Webb, 2001). The custom of building evaluation routinely into programme designs and budgets has now been widely adopted (Solesbury, 2001). For example, randomised controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental studies, rigorous surveys and qualitative studies are

¹ City University of Hong Kong, Department of Applied Social Sciences, HONG KONG. E-mail: yiutlow@cityu.edu.hk

generally considered as reliable evidence for practice. Such an emphasis arises from critiques of the theory and practice gaps reported across many professions (Swinkels, Albarran, Means, Mitchell, & Stewart, 2002), the failure to adequately address the needs of practitioners and allowing gaps in the dissemination of research in an accessible form to policymakers and practitioners (Kirk & Reid, 2001; Swinkels *et al.*, 2002; Shek, Lam, & Tsoi, 2004). Furthermore, social work knowledge has also been criticised as poorly organised, unsystematic and scientifically unsound (Light & Pillemer, 1984). Contemporary concerns about auditing, effectiveness, rationalism, transparency, professional accountability and consumerism, along with the emergence of managerialism and the prominence of value for money, have directed social welfare services towards evidence-based practice (Swinkels *et al.*, 2002). In addition to the importance of evidence-based practice, we also need to consider which types of evidence will be considered acceptable. For example, it is widely accepted that RCTs are the gold standard and they form the dominant source of evidence in medicine (Nutley, Davies, & Walter, 2002). The Campbell tradition of using experimental and control groups is also widely accepted as the most “scientific” way of considering the outcomes of social work practice. However, relying solely on quantitative methodology to understand the overall effectiveness of a programme has limitations in that it lacks the power to address the complex and multi-faceted nature of social work practice. Other, qualitative methodologies may be needed to evaluate such practice effectively. For example, the empiricist view that knowledge only builds on raw sensory data has been challenged by critical theorists (Habermas, 1968), who suggest that there are no certain foundations for empirical knowledge (Webb, 2001). An understanding of evidence-based practice which relies solely on quantitative data needs more consideration when applied to social work practice, in which more complex issues, such as the influence of cultural background and worker-client interaction in the service delivery process, need to be taken into consideration when delivering services. Methodologies other than the purely quantitative in nature, for example the mix methodology, which uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods together (Fuller, 1996), can provide detail beyond the overall outcomes of interventions. In addition, naturalistic evaluation strategy, which focuses on the understanding of how a researcher knows and understands the participants of the research through qualitative evaluation methods, is regarded as more appropriate when we would like to understand the complex process within a programme and the context in which the programme is running (Cojocar, & Cojocar, 2011). The present study attempts to fill the knowledge gap in social work practice on participants’ views on effective components of parenting programmes for Chinese Hong Kong parents with adolescent children.

Components of parenting programmes

An overview of some of the recent initiatives in parenting programmes for parents of adolescents indicated some common elements that have been adopted by scholars. Table 1 gives an overview of some of the components of parenting programmes for parents of adolescents.

Table 1. *Components of parenting programmes for parents of adolescents*

Programme	Components
Triple P Adolescent (UK) (Clark & Churchill, 2010)	Communication with teenagers Conflict resolution skills Ideas from cognitive behavioural therapy
Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation (UK) (Lindsay <i>et al.</i> , 2008) (<i>Four Programmes were included in this study</i>) Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (Steele, Marigna, Tello, & Johnson, 2000)	Child development Developing positive relationship Positive Discipline Cultural/Spiritual/ethnic and family roots
FAST (Families and Schools Together) (McDonald <i>et al.</i> , 1997)	Family tables on on-conflict family meal Peer group activities for parents and children in separate rooms. Parent child activities
Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010)	Group discussions, sharing and problem solving Behavioural, Cognitive and Emotional Skills training Child behaviour management strategies Discussion of DVD vignettes of parents and their children Self-reflection Role play Home activities assignments
Strengthening Families Programmes (Kumpfer, Molgaard & Spoth, 1996)	Based upon video tape that includes didactic presentations Positive and negative interactions with youth. Role Play, group discussions and support.
Adolescent Transition programme (US) (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000)	Incentives promote positive behavioural change Limit setting and monitoring skills Relationship skills
Living with Teenagers (UK) (Roker & Coleman, 1998)	Understanding adolescent development Communication skills Conflict management skills
Problem solving communication training (Robin & Foster, 1989)	Improving communication Addressing cognitive distortion Problem solving skills

Parents who care (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996)	Protective factors Effective communication Family management
Family Nurturing Programme (Bavolet, 1987)	Teaching concepts to parents and adolescents Brief relaxation exercises
Parent adolescent relationship development programme (US) (Guernsey, Coufal, & Vogel song, 1981)	Teaching communication Problem solving and conflict resolution skills

Summarising these parenting programmes targeted towards parents of adolescents, several common components can be identified. The first component that commonly appeared in parenting programmes is communication skills with adolescents (Guernsey *et al.*, 1981; Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000; Roker & Richardson, 2001). The second common component is conflict resolution and problem solving strategies (Guernsey *et al.*, 1981; Long & Adams, 2001; Robin & Foster, 2003). Assertive parenting, which concerns authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1971) and understanding adolescents' development (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Roker & Coleman, 1998) are other common components in parenting programmes for parents of adolescents. In Hong Kong, the most common components covered in parenting programmes include parenting and communication skills, knowledge of child development and behaviour, the spousal relationship, moral education for children, sex education and strategies to improve children's academic performance (Tsang, 2004). Such programmes are generally based on three different theoretical approaches: the behavioural method (Ho *et al.*, 1999; Leung, Sanders, Leung, Mak, & Lau, 2003), PET (Cheung & Yau, 1996) and STEP (Kwok, 1994). Apart from these main approaches, other approaches are Harris' Transactional Analysis model (Harris, 1969; Tsang 2004), the Satir (1983) model and the eclectic approaches (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). Practitioners in Hong Kong mostly ground their theories in those developed in the west without consideration of culturally sensitive parenting practices. For example, McBride-Chang and Chang (1998) indicated the possibility that the Chinese parenting style may not be reflected by Baumrind's typology. Family loyalty, responsiveness to group expectations and conformity to authority figures are considered particularly important in Chinese culture (Ho, 1994; Peterson *et al.*, 2004). This shows that parenting behaviours and beliefs in Chinese and western culture are not exactly comparable. The simple borrowing of theories from the west to run parenting programmes may not be appropriate for the needs of Chinese Hong Kong parents. This study attempts to fill the knowledge gap in social work practice in Hong Kong concerning the kind of components important for the effectiveness of a parenting programme that focuses in particular on reducing parent-adolescent conflict from the point of view of service users, and in which circumstances.

Evaluation of Parenting Programmes

Social workers in Hong Kong use parenting programmes as a prevention measure to support parents in Hong Kong. It is estimated that nearly 500 parenting programmes are launched every day in Hong Kong by different helping professionals (for example social workers, nurses, psychologists etc.) (Tsang, 2004). Evaluation of parenting programmes in previous research mostly demonstrates their overall effectiveness without attempting to examine the components that benefited participants within those programmes. These results, aggregated across different groups of individuals in heterogeneous contextual settings, ignored the issues of “what works for whom in what circumstances” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Determining which component is essential and which component is not has implications for practice, allowing us to implement those programmes that have effective components and exclude those with non-effective components. Furthermore, we may also make our existing programmes more effective by including effective components and providing practitioners as well as service users a better choice of programmes (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008). Furthermore, programmes with mixed results, that is, those with no significant result in quantitative data but with very positive results from the qualitative data of the overall programme evaluation, may overlook those components that have the potential to effect change. By evaluating the components of a parenting programme, we could identify which components within a multi-component programme contribute to its success. This could allow us to adapt our programme for future trials, tailoring it to new populations of service users. In addition, through identifying which parts of the programme contribute to the outcome, we could understand whether programme components are effective in themselves or changes can be effected simply by exposing participants to any programme. We could also identify any effective components within a programme that seems unable to achieve its aim in general. This could enhance our understanding of the theoretical and practical outcomes of the programme. We could also learn how to revise our programme for new service users with different backgrounds or cultural differences (Riggs, Elfenbaum, & Pentz, 2006).

This study therefore attempts to identify, through the participants’ experiences, the potentially generalisable causal pathways of the interventions and to understand the complex mechanism that brings about changes by identifying the components of the programme that participants found helpful.

Method

This is part of a larger study on the effectiveness of a parenting programme based on social learning theory. Quantitative and qualitative data on the effectiveness of the programme were collected. Quantitative data were collected to compare the before and after scores of the participants, using the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire Chinese Version (Goodman, 1997), the Parenting Stress Index Short Form (PSI-SF) (Abidin, 1995); the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale (PACS) (Shek & Ma, 1997). The result was published in another paper which indicated that there were significant within-group differences between the before and after scores of the experimental groups while there were no significant differences between those of the experimental groups and comparison group, with the exception of the parent-child dysfunctional interaction score (Low, 2013). This aspect means that parents found themselves to be more effective in managing their adolescents after joining the programme ($p=.03$).

Sixty-five participants recruited from members of five secondary schools' parent-teacher associations in the northern district of Hong Kong completed a four-week parenting programme. The participants voluntarily participated in the programme and agreed to participate in the study after the programme. All participants have at least one child between 11 and 14 years old and considered themselves to have frequent conflicts with their adolescent children. They also declared that they had not received any social work service during the three months since the programme was launched. They joined a parenting programme called "Challenging Years" which is adapted from the UK. It is a programme using the social learning approach to support parents of adolescents. It aims to convey communication and conflict resolution skills as well as allow parents to reflect on their parenting practice with an interactive workshop. The first session, "Understanding the teenage years", is intended to enable parents to reflect on their perceptions of today's teenagers. The second session focuses on helping participants to identify and practice good listening and communication skills. The third session encourages participants to talk about different styles of parenting and consider how their upbringing is affecting their parenting practices. The fourth session discusses and allows parents to practice problem-solving techniques with their teenagers in conflict resolution. The parenting programme was facilitated by social workers in Hong Kong with more than 15 years' frontline casework experience with adolescents and their families.

After completion of the programme, each participant was required to fill in a questionnaire indicating their views on the sessions, and the components within the programme, they found useful and those they considered not useful. Afterwards, they joined an hour-long semi-structured group interview session. All groups were asked similar questions which depended on the flow of the discussion, some specific questions were covered in some but not all groups.

Analyses

The total number of responses from all the participants were counted. In order to understand whether there were any significant differences between the number of respondents who answered useful and not useful, a non-parametric T test of related samples was used. The non-parametric test was used because the data were not normally distributed, and the sample size was small and was not randomly sampled.

All the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the themes concerning the effective components of the parenting programme were identified and any related or unexpected themes that emerged from the data were also analysed afterwards.

Results

Quantitative Results

Thirteen fathers (20%) and 52 mothers (80%) completed the parenting programme and participated in this study. The mean age of the participants was 45.6, and they had an average of 1.5 children. The majority (89.2%) were married and lived with their partner. Almost half (49.1%) were housewives, while the rest (49.9%) were working full- or part-time.

The questionnaire covered the participants' view of the programme sessions and components they found helpful. In order not to let the participants perceive the programme overly positively, a set of questions were asked about the elements they considered not helpful. We can observe from Table 2 that the highest number of parents considered self-reflection as the most important element in the programme (N=55, 85%). This is followed by discussion among participants and facilitators' suggestions, both (N=50, 77%). This was followed by parenting style (N=43, 66%), communication skills (N=40, 62%) and understanding teenagers (N=34, 52%). The element considered least helpful by parents was role-playing (N=21, 32%). The Wilcoxon sign rank test, a non-parametric equivalent of t-test for related samples, was performed to consider any difference between the number of parents who considered an element helpful and the number who did not. The result indicated that there were significant differences between the number of parents who considered the elements helpful and those who did not, with the exception of role-playing. This indicates that participants considered all the elements in the programme helpful, apart from role-playing.

Table 2. Comparison between participants' views on helpful and unhelpful elements in the programme (Wilcoxon sign rank test)

	Helpful %	Not Helpful %	Z	P
Self-reflection	55 (85%)	3 (5%)	-6.8	.001*
Discussion among participants	50 (77%)	6 (9%)	-6.1	.001*
Facilitators' suggestions	50 (77%)	1 (1.5%)	-6.9	.001*
Parenting style	43 (66%)	8 (12%)	-5.1	.001*
Conflict resolution	42 (65%)	4 (6%)	-5.7	.001*
Communication skills	40 (62%)	11 (17%)	-4.3	.001*
Understanding teenagers	34 (52%)	9 (14%)	-4.0	.001*
Role-playing	21 (32%)	17 (26%)	-.65	.516
*P<.05, N=65				

Participants were also asked to consider which sessions they considered helpful or not helpful in the programme (Table 3). We can observe from the table that parents regarded communication skills as most helpful (N=54, 83%). The second most helpful session was that on conflict resolution (N=34, 52%), and then that on understanding teenagers (N=28, 43%). The session considered least helpful was that on assertive parenting style (N=23, 35%). The Wilcoxon sign rank test was again conducted to consider whether there were any significant differences between the parents' judgements. The result indicates significant differences regarding all sessions except that on assertive parenting style ($z=-1.15, p=.25$).

Table 3. Comparison between participants' views on helpful and unhelpful sessions (Wilcoxon sign rank test)

	Helpful M(SD)	Not Helpful M(SD)	Z	P
Communication skills	0.83 (.38)	0.03 (.17)	-7.08	.001*
Praise	0.68 (.47)	0.11 (.31)	-5.18	.001*
Conflict resolution	0.52 (.50)	0.11 (.31)	-4.32	.001*
Understanding teenagers	0.43 (.49)	0.18 (.39)	-2.67	.008*
Assertive parenting style	0.35 (.48)	0.25 (.43)	-1.15	.25
*P<.05, N=65				

Considering the elements that participants found useful, we can observe from Table 3 that the three sessions considered most helpful were self-reflection (85%), discussion among participants (77%) and facilitators' suggestions (77%), followed by parenting style (66%), conflict resolution (65%), communication skills (62%) and understanding teenagers (52%). Further testing was conducted, using the Wilcoxon sign rank test, to consider whether there were any statistically significant differences between the participants' views on helpful elements within the

parenting programme. The result indicates that there was no significant difference in the number of participants who considered self-reflection, discussion among participants ($p=.29$) and listening to facilitators' suggestions ($p=.23$) helpful. This indicates that the participants regarded these three elements as almost equally important. Nevertheless, significant differences were found in self-reflection with parenting style ($p=.02$), self-reflection with conflict resolution ($p=.01$), self-reflection with communication skills ($p=.001$), self-reflection with understanding teenagers ($p=.001$) and self-reflection with role-playing ($p=.001$). This indicates that participants found self-reflection more helpful than the other four elements. These four elements are not as popular as the first three and they have significant differences with the self-reflection. In addition, role-playing is the only element that has significant differences with all other elements, which indicates that participants did not find this element helpful.

Table 4. Comparison of the acceptability of different elements of the parenting programme (Wilcoxon sign rank test) N=65

	Self-reflection	Discussion among participants	Facilitators' suggestions	Parenting style	Conflict resolution	Communication skills	Understanding teenagers	Role-playing
	0.85 (.36)	0.77 (.43)	0.77 (.43)	0.66 (.48)	0.65 (.48)	0.62 (.49)	0.52 (.50)	0.32 (.47)
Self-reflection 0.85 (.36)		Z=-1.04, p=.29	Z=-1.21, p=.23	Z=-2.35, p=.02*	Z=-2.5, p=.01*	Z=-3.44, p=.001*	Z=-3.9, p=.001*	Z=-5.0, p=.001*
Discussion among participants 0.77 (.43)			Z=.001, p=1.0	Z=1.46, p=.12	Z=-1.63, p=.10	Z=-1.8, p=.07	Z=-3.3, p=.001*	Z=-4.77, p=.001*
Facilitator's suggestions 0.77 (.43)				Z=-1.3, p=.19	Z=-1.7, p=.09	Z=-1.96, p=.05*	Z=-2.74, p=.01*	Z=-4.4, p=.001*
Parenting style 0.66 (.48)					Z=-.19, p=.85	Z=-.0, p=.55	Z=-1.62, p=1.1	Z=-4.0, p=.001*
Conflict resolution 0.65 (.48)						Z=-.34, p=.73	Z=-1.41, p=.02*	Z=-3.7, p=.001*
Communication skills 0.62 (.49)							Z=-1.1, p=.22	Z=-3.3, p=.001*
Understanding teenagers 0.52 (.50)								Z=-2.1, p=.03*

* $p < .05$

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data indicated essential elements that participants found useful in the parenting programme. Several themes emerged from the data concerning programme components.

Sharing with each other

In terms of the type of activities that participants found useful, the data from the interviews showed that parents in all seven groups favoured sharing and group discussion, in which they could share their views on parenting. Participants said that they had felt supported by the parenting programme. One said that when she listened to other parents sharing their experiences, she felt that she was not alone and that she was being supported by the others. Another parent from a different group said that she found that her daughter's behaviour was not the worst when compared with the other participants' children. She had previously thought that she had a lot of problems with parenting but found that others shared the same problems, which made her feel supported. This suggested that the parenting programme was perceived by some parents as creating a supportive environment among the participants, which in turn could help them gain confidence in their parenting ability. This is consistent with previous findings on the effectiveness of parenting programmes which have shown that parents tend to feel supported within programmes (Wolfe & Haddy, 2001; Moran, Ghate, & Merwe, 2004). In addition, one study of Chinese parents' experience with Filial Therapy programmes shows that they appreciated being supported by other parents (Barlow, Shaw, & Stewart-Brown, 2004).

The supportive environment of the programme was also another important reason participants stayed in the group. One father explained the importance of sharing:

When we share with others, different people have different views on parenting. When other parents did not agree with me, I could think more about my own views. If I had not joined the programme and just focused on my own family, sometimes I would have lost my direction in parenting. To share with other parents helps me to think more about myself (Participant from focus group 6).

This example of sharing views and ideas with other parents as a means to enhance self-awareness is similar to the findings of literature (for example First and Way's 1995; Cojocaru 2011) concerning parents' experiences with a parenting group, which found that one of the effects of the programme was to provide an opportunity for parents to meet each other to socialise and share skills and tips. The data indicated that it is essential to facilitate participants' sharing and create a supportive environment for participants in a parenting programme.

Listening and communication skills

One theme that emerged from the data was that the second session on listening and communication was the most helpful. Parents mentioned in interview that Transactional Analysis (Harris, 1969) had been helpful when communicating

with their adolescents. Further discussion from the group interviews indicated that communication, listening and Transactional Analysis skills were the major things they had learned from the programme. Transactional Analysis is a concept that was first developed by the American psychologist Eric Berne (Berne, 1975). He observed that humans interact from three different perspectives, which he labelled Parent, Adult and Child. The parenting programme studied here made use of these concepts to help parents understand that difficulties may arise when parents and adolescents use mismatched communication patterns. For example, when parents were in the Parent role (that is, they were ordering or instructing), their adolescent children showed no interest in communicating with them since they also wanted to play an Adult role, creating a situation in which both parties would sit down and logically discuss the matter at hand. Some parents found this concept helpful in their communication with their adolescent children. This suggests that another essential component within parenting is to facilitate parents to become better communicators.

First session on understanding adolescents' development

One theme that emerged from the data was that parents found the first session on understanding adolescents' development helpful because it had helped them to appreciate more about how adolescents think today. For some this was their reason for participation and found this session very helpful. As one parent put it:

The first session helped me to understand what adolescents are thinking nowadays. And we cannot always look at the children's weaknesses without looking at their strengths (participant from focus group 4).

Most of the parents in one of the interview groups agreed that they now understood more about the problems and worries that their adolescents were experiencing and had some ideas for how to solve them. One mother explained that she had developed a better understanding of her daughter's needs, which gave her more confidence as a parent. Others agreed.

Facilitators' style

One theme that emerged from the data was that the facilitators' demonstration of parenting skills and interactive elements helped the participants to discuss topics with the facilitator. Interestingly, a parent in one of the groups said that at the time she had not really been comfortable with the interactive nature of the programme in which parents had to try the new skills and engage in a lot of discussion with the facilitator. Nevertheless, looking back, she had found this useful. This point helped to explain the quantitative data which indicated that parents found the role-play least useful. It let us understand that the role-play in

itself is not a favoured element. Nevertheless, participants found it useful to be able to talk with the facilitators about their own problems. We were able to learn further from the quantitative data how participants perceived the role of the facilitators (Table 5). From the table, we can see that most of the respondents considered giving advice on how to handle their adolescents as the most important skill for a facilitator. In other words, the participants valued a facilitator who could address their particular problems during the programme. This is not an easy task in a group setting as parents may have diverse problems and needs. The next most important quality of a facilitator was being able to give an interactive presentation and teach participants new skills. Furthermore, a friendly, warm and sincere attitude, and the facilitator's own experience of being a parent and being able to display empathy and understand participants' situation were among other valued qualities.

Table 5. *Valued qualities in a facilitator (n=65)*

Category	Number of Participants
Giving advice on how to handle your adolescent children	57 (87.7%)
Interactive presentation skills	57 (87.7%)
Teaching of new skills	54 (81.8%)
Friendly, warm and sincere attitude	51 (78.5%)
Experience of being a parent	49 (75.4%)
Able to give empathy and understand your situation	46 (70.8%)
Able to create a supportive and trusting relationship among participants	45 (69.2%)
Providing local examples	45 (69.2%)
Good interpersonal skills	41 (63.1%)
Social work experience	41 (63.1%)
Qualification	28 (43.1%)
Not looking down on you	25 (38.5%)

As one parent said,

I think the most important aspect was the facilitator's casework experience. The second most important was the sharing of our own experiences. The third most important thing was the programme content (Participant from focus group 6).

This finding was in general consistent with previous findings of parents' experience of parenting programmes, which showed that they found parent educators' personal experience as parents an essential quality (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Furthermore, some parents indicated that it was useful to consider their

own personal experience of being a child and how this had influenced their parenting style. As one parent put it:

The facilitator helped me to think about my past experience as a child. This let me realise that my children's needs are the same as mine were when I was a child. This helps me to understand how to communicate with my child now (Participant from focus group 3).

Culturally sensitive elements

When participants were asked about whether the programme was in conflict with Chinese culture, the general view expressed was that it was well adapted culturally. Nevertheless, further exploration of this issue in the group interviews indicated that there were three important areas where participants did not regard the programme as sufficiently culturally attuned. The first was the concept of letting go, the second was conflict resolution and the third parenting goals. One of the important concepts introduced in the "Challenging Years" programme is to encourage parents to give their adolescents more autonomy in matters such as their academic work and their belongings. Parents in most of the groups said that it was very difficult to let go of their children, particularly in relation to academic results, their friends and their moral conduct. One participant in particular did not trust the idea of letting go. She was extremely sceptical about the idea and claimed that she needed some time to practise it before she would believe that it was appropriate.

In addition, some parents felt that they could not use the letting go strategy, since if it was left up to them their children would not make any changes. When their adolescent children did not take responsibility for things, parents felt they needed to do it for them. They found it hard to let go. This suggests that Hong Kong Chinese parents are protective, possibly even over-protective, of their adolescent children. They were not able to give responsibility back to them but kept the burden on their own shoulders. They found it very hard to contemplate letting their children face their own problems because they were afraid that they would not be able to take the responsibility or simply would not be able to take care of themselves. On the other hand, one parent talked about having had a good experience of letting go, as a result of which her child's academic achievement had improved. Those parents who were unwilling to let go of their children reflected the traditional Chinese idea of parenthood, in which a son or daughter is not considered to be grown up until they have married and become a parent themselves (Lam, 2005). Such a conception of their children's development may make it hard for parents to let go and give their adolescents more autonomy to face their own problems.

The second theme that emerged was the use of the conflict-resolution strategies introduced by the programme. Some parents found it impossible to consider resolving conflicts with their adolescent child on an equal basis. They considered Chinese parents as occupying a position of power within the family hierarchy, making it quite impossible to discuss a solution eye to eye with their adolescent children. Such a view also made them feel uncomfortable about establishing equal status when discussing the issues from which conflict between them and their children had arisen. In addition, one parent commented that it was difficult for a Chinese adult to see an adolescent as an equal and resolve conflict with him or her, and that it was hard for a parent to change. Another parent in the same group agreed, suggesting that “to keep a hierarchy with their adolescent children and have more power over them” is a deep-rooted concept in the mind of a Chinese parent. This made it difficult to use the conflict resolution strategies covered in the programme, which assumed a non-hierarchical relationship. Similarly, another group of parents considered the conflict resolution strategies to be “lowering parents’ status”. According to them, these approaches were problematic since Chinese parents consider it important to maintain a hierarchy within their families. These comments indicate that some parents could not accept the conflict resolution strategies taught in the programme. As Bond (1996) discusses, this family hierarchy is one of the characteristics of Chinese interpersonal relationships, but is particularly obvious in parent-child interaction. Thus, the concept of a win-win situation in conflict resolution seems to be in direct conflict with the Chinese conception of parent-child relationships.

The third important theme to emerge was the parenting goal of Hong Kong Chinese parents. They considered that training children to respect their parents, a topic that is not particularly emphasised in the programme, was very important in parenting adolescents. Another important aim of parenting for these participants was children’s obedience to what their parents had planned for them. This finding is generally consistent with previous findings on the parenting approach of Chinese Americans, in which children are socialised to maintain harmony with others. In order to achieve this, most parents taught their offspring to show respect and support to family members (Russell, Crockett, & Chao, 2010). These findings suggested that parenting beliefs, parenting goals, perception of different parenting practices of Chinese Hong Kong parents are very culturally specific. These points need to be carefully addressed in parenting programmes.

Discussion

The present study indicates participants’ views on the usefulness of the components of a parenting programme that aims at reducing parent-adolescent conflict in Hong Kong. This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to identify

the components that effect changes in participants. It found that the quantitative and qualitative data were able to complement to each other to achieve methodological complementarity. We can address the difference in the results from the quantitative and qualitative data and try to achieve a better understanding of participants' feelings through the data. One important observation from the data is that rather than commenting on the programme content as the most useful component, the participants identified self-reflection, sharing among participants and listening to facilitators' comments as the three most useful components. This may suggest that parents do not focus on the programme content itself but more on the process that they have gone through. This finding is generally consistent with previous findings that participants found a supportive environment very important (Lindsay *et al.*, 2008). This may be more important for the participants than the programme designer, who is more focused on the programme content and how this might effect changes in the participants. It is also essential to consider whether this is an essential element of all parenting programmes since a lot of western as well as Hong Kong studies have indicated its importance.

The fact that the quantitative data indicated participants' preference for self-reflection, discussion among participants and listening to facilitators' comments may suggest that one of the ways in which Chinese parents make changes is through self-reflection. This may be consistent with the programme nature, which consists of interactive activities to inspire parents on the theme of the programme. This may help parents to reflect more after those activities. Considering these results together with those from qualitative data, we can further understand that they found useful the supportive environment generated from the discussion among participants, together with the comments from facilitator. Qualitative data suggested that the participants were able to gain more confidence while listening to others' responses to their sharing or comparing their parenting situation with other participants.

Quantitative data also indicated the importance of facilitators' advice when joining a parenting programme. This is broadly consistent with previous findings indicating that Chinese Hong Kong parents are more likely to listen to expert advice from a facilitator (Lam & Kwong, 2013). The qualitative data further show that participants considered facilitators' personal experience a very important contribution. This is also consistent with previous findings that facilitators' personal experience was perceived to be one of the most important qualities in a facilitator (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). Although there is an inconsistency in the quantitative data in that participants rated facilitators' personal experience as less important than being able to give direct advice, interactive presentation skills and being able to teach new skills, the qualitative data was able to supplement the quantitative data indicating that the personal experience of facilitators may contribute to their ability to address personal problems in parenting.

Concerning the components of the programme itself, participants would appear, from the qualitative data, to consider communication and understanding of adolescents' development the most useful aspects. Participants may have found these components helpful because they helped them to communicate better and understand their adolescent children better. This is especially important when teenagers usually found themselves difficult to talk to their parents (Molina, Pastor & Violant, 2011). This is also in general consistent with other findings that participants consider improving their relationship with their adolescents as the most important outcome of the programme (Lindsay *et al.*, 2008). Another component rated by participants as very useful was parenting style. This may be because the parenting programme talked about "assertive parenting style", which participants may considered a new skill. When facilitators talked about "letting go" (i.e. granting more autonomy to their adolescents), there was approval and disapproval of this concept among participants. On the other hand, conflict resolution skills were ranked lower than the other components. This was explained through the qualitative data, which indicate that participants were more sceptical about such parenting concepts. This was indicated particularly in the fact that participants did not totally agree with "conflict resolution strategies". This finding has been discussed in detail in the above section on culturally specific elements.

Limitations

The data of the present study suffered from the limitation that participants of the study have successfully completed the parenting programme. Their views may be overwhelmingly positive. In addition, the sample size was small and lacks the generalization power to the wider Chinese population. Furthermore, it could also benefit from having a post group interview with the informant to validate the themes developed by the researcher.

Conclusion

The present study fills the knowledge gap relating to Chinese Hong Kong parents' perceptions of the components of a school-based parenting programme for parents of adolescents. The present study indicated that participants appreciated self-reflection, support among participants and learning something new from the facilitators in the group process. In addition, Chinese Hong Kong parents believe that they benefit from greater understanding of their adolescents' development and improved communication with their adolescents by participating in parenting programmes. Conflict resolution strategies and the concept of granting autonomy to their adolescents were only acceptable to some participants. Those who accepted these concepts were able to benefit while those who disagreed with

them did not consider them useful components of the programme. Furthermore, participants also highly valued the advice given by facilitators. They especially valued facilitators' personal experience, which contributed to addressing their own parenting problems. Social workers in Hong Kong could benefit from the present study when designing parenting programmes. In addition, policy makers could also benefit from evaluating the usefulness of a parenting programme strategy by identifying whether culturally sensitive elements are included.

References

- Abidin, R. (1995) *Parenting Stress Index-Professional Manual*, 3rd edition, Odessa FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Barlow, J., Shaw, R., & Steward-Brown, S. (2004) *Parenting programmes and minority ethnic families Experiences and outcomes*. National Children's Bureau, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Baumrind, D. (1971) Current patterns of parental authority. *Developmental Psychology Monograph*, 4, 1-103.
- Bavolet, S.J. (1987) *Building Nurturing Interactions in Families Experiencing Parent-Adolescent Conflict: Validation of the Nurturing Parenting Program for Parents and Adolescents*. Asheville: Family Development Resources, Inc.
- Berne, E (1975) *Transactional analysis in psychotherapy: a systematic individual and social psychiatry*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Bond, M.H. (1996) *The Handbook of Chinese Psychology*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Catalano, R.F., & Hawkins, J.D. (1996) The social development model: A theory of antisocial behavior. In J.D. Hawkins (Ed.), *Delinquency & Crime Current Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.149-197.
- Cheung, S.K., & Yau, Y.L. (1996). Parent effectiveness training for Chinese parents: Adaptation and evaluation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work*, 6(1), 30-42.
- Clarke, K., & Churchill, H. (2010). 'A chance to stand back': Parenting programmes for parents of adolescents. *Children & Society*, 26 (4), 316-327.
- Cojocaru, D. (2011). Attending parenting education programmes in Romania. The case of the Holt Romania Iasi programme, *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 32,140-154.
- Cojocaru, S., & Cojocaru, D. (2011). Naturalistic evaluation of programs. Parents' voice in parent education programs, *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 34E, 49-62.
- Dishion, T.J., & Kavanagh, K. (2000). A Multilevel approach to family-centered prevention in schools: Process and outcome. *Addictive Behaviors*, 25(6), 899-911.
- Education and Manpower Bureau (2003). *Parent Education Database in Hong Kong – A Pilot Study*. Unpublished report of Hong Kong SAR Government.
- First, J.A., & Way, W.L. (1995). Parent education outcomes insights into transformative learning. *Family Relations*, 44(1), 104-109.

- Fuller, R. (1996). Evaluating social work effectiveness: A pragmatic approach. In P. Alderson, S. Brill, I. Chalmers, R. Fuller, P. Hindley-Smith, G. Macdonald, T. Newman, A. Oakley, H. Roberts, & H. Ward (Eds.), *What Works? Effective Social Interventions in Child Welfare*. Ilford, Essex: Barnardos.
- Goodman, R. (1997) The strengths and difficulties questionnaire: A research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38, 581-586.
- Guernsey, B.G., Coufal, J., & Vogelsong, E. (1981). Relationship enhancement versus a traditional approach to therapeutic/preventative/enrichment parent-adolescent programs. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 49(6), 927-939.
- Habermas, J. (1968). Science and technology as ideology. In B. Barnes (Ed.), *Sociology of Science*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Harris, T.A. (1969) *I'm Ok You're Ok*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Ho, D.Y.F. (1994) Cognitive socialization in Confucian heritage cultures. In P.M. Greenfield & R.R. Cocking (Eds.), *Cross-Cultural Roots of Minority Child Development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 285-313.
- Ho, T.P., Chow, V., Fung, C., Leung, K., Chiu, K.Y., Yu, G., & Au, Y.W. (1999). Parent management training in a Chinese population: Application and outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 38(9), 1165-1172.
- Kirk, S.A., & Reid, W.J. (2002). *Science and Social Work: A Critical Appraisal*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kumpfer, K.L., Molgaard, V., & Spoth, R. (1996). The Strengthening Families Program for the Prevention of Delinquency and Drug Use. In R.D. Peters & R.J., McMahon (Eds.) *Preventing Childhood Disorders, Substance Abuse, and Delinquency*. London: Sage Publications, pp.241-267.
- Kwok, L.Y.C. (1994). Systematic training for effective parenting (STEP): Its applicability for the Chinese parents of primary school children in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 28(1), 22-30.
- Lam, C.M. (2005) In search of the meaning of parent education in the Hong Kong-Chinese context. In M.J. Kane (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Parenting*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, pp. 111-124.
- Lam, C.M., & Kwong, W.M. (2013). Powerful parent educators and powerless parents: The 'empowerment paradox' in parent education. *Journal of Social Work*, 14(2), 183-195.
- Leung, C., Sanders, M., Leung S., Mak R., & Lau, J. (2003). An outcome evaluation of the implementation of triple P-Positive Parenting Programme in Hong Kong. *Family Process*, 42(4), 531-544.
- Light, R., & Pillemer, D.B. (1984). *Summing Up: The Science of Reviewing Research*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lindsay, G., Davies, H., Band, S., Cullen, M.A., Cullen, S., Strand, S., Hasluck, C., Evans, R., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2008). *Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation*. London: Department for Children, Schools & Families.
- Long, E.S., & Adams, C.D. (2001). Mediation of parent-adolescent conflict through the combination of problem-solving communication training and behavioral exchange. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy*, 23(3), 1-17.
- Low, Y.T. (2013). Can Parenting Programme Reduce Parent-Adolescents Conflicts in Hong Kong? *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*, 42, 7-27.

- McBride-Chang, C., & Chang, L. (1998). Adolescent-parent relations in Hong Kong: parenting style, emotional autonomy and school achievement. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 159(4), 421-436.
- McDonald, L., Billingham, S., Conrad, T., Morgan, A., & et al., (1997). Families and schools together (FAST): Integrating community development with clinical strategies. *Families in Society*, 78(2), 140-155.
- Molina, M., Pastor, C., & Violant, V. (2011). Parental Education as Health Protection Factor in Vulnerable Childhood and Adolescence. *Revista de cercetare si interventie sociala*, 34, 38- 55.
- Moran, P., Ghate, D., & Van Der Merwe, A. (2004). *What Works in Parenting Support? A Review of the International Evidence*. London: Policy Research Bureau.
- Nutley, S., Davies, H., & Walter, I. (2002). *Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Cross Sector Lessons From the UK*. London: ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Research Unit for Research Utilisation.
- Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.
- Peterson, C.A., Wall, S., Raikes, H.A., Kisker, E.E., Swanson, M.E., Jerald, J., Atwater, J.B., & Qiao, W. (2004). Early head start: Identifying and serving children with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 24(2), 76-88.
- Riggs, N.R., Elfenbaum, P., & Pentz, M.A., (2006). Parent program component analysis in a drug abuse prevention trail. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39(1), 66-72.
- Robin, A.L., & Foster, S.L. (1989). *Negotiating Parent-Adolescent Conflict: A Behavioral Family Systems Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Roker, D., & Coleman, J. (1998). Parenting teenagers programmes: A UK perspective. *Children & Society*, 12(5), 359-372.
- Roker, D., & Richardson, H. (2001). Schools as a context for working with parents- the 'Living with Teenagers Supporting Parents' Project'. In J. Coleman, & D. Roker (Eds), *Supporting Parents of Teenagers A Handbook for Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Russell, S.T., Crockett, L.J., & Chao, R.K. (2010). Introduction, Asian American parenting and parent-adolescent relationships. In S.T. Russell, L.J. Crockett, & R.K. Chao (Eds), *Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development*. London: Springer, pp.1-16.
- Satir, V. (1983). *Conjoint Family Therapy*, (3rd edition). Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Shek, D.T.L., & Ma, H.K. (1997). Perceptions of parental treatment styles and adolescent antisocial and prosocial behavior in Chinese context, *Psychologia*, 40, 233-240.
- Shek, D.T.L., Lam, M.C., & Tsoi, K.W. (2004). Evidence-based social work practice in Hong Kong. In B. Thyer, & M. Kazi (eds.), *International Perspectives on Evidence-Based Practice in Social Work*. London: Venture Press, pp.213-222.
- Solesbury, W.B. (2001) *Evidence Based Policy: Whence it Came and Where it's Going*. London: ESRC Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice.
- Steele, M., Marigna, M., Tello, J., & Johnson, R. (2000). *Strengthening Families: Strengthening Communities: An Inclusive Parent Programme*. Race Equality Unit: London.

- Swinkels, A., Albarran, J.W., Means, R.I., Mitchell, T., & Stewart, M.C. (2002). Evidence-based practice in health and social care: where are we now? *Journal of Inter-professional Care*, 16(4), 335-347.
- Tsang, S.K.M. (2004). Parent education in Hong Kong and implications for paediatricians. *Proceedings of Update Series, Hong Kong Journal of Paediatrics*, 9, 176-185.
- Webb, S.A. (2001) Some considerations on the validity of evidence-based practice in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31, 51-79.
- Webster-Stratton, C. & Reid, J. (2010). The Incredible Years parents, teachers and children training series: A multifaceted treatment approach for young children with conduct problems. In J. Weisz & A. Kazdin (Eds.) *Evidence-based Psychotherapies for Children and Adolescents*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Wolfe, R.B., & Haddy, L. (2001). A qualitative examination of parents' experiences in parent education groups. *Early Child Development and Care*, 167, 77-87.
- Wyatt Kaminski, J., Valle, L.A., Filene, J.H., & Boyle, C.L. (2008). A meta-analytic review of components associated with parent training program effectiveness. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36, 567-589.