

How do family factors affect the development of pre-school children in Hong Kong?

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Background and purpose: Chinese society traditionally puts emphasis on children development, and Hong Kong, as a well-developed region in China, is not an exception. For the past decade, the dynamic changes of family structure and size, as well as socio-economic challenges resulting from economic fluctuations, raising poverty and the sharp rise of non-residential births given by women of the mainland of China cast a shadow on the caring function of families in Hong Kong. Based on a large scale survey, this paper discusses how these family challenges affect the development of the pre-school children in the city.

Methods: 2,769 sets of questionnaires were sent to the class teachers and the parents of the sampled pre-school children aged 3 to 6. The questionnaire adopted the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as the inventory to report the development status of target children. Questions about family relationships, marital and parent-child relationships were designed based on concepts from the Family Criteria (Ad Hoc) Task Force, Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminar.

Results: 1. Scores of SDQ of the children have strong correlation with the relationships among members of their families; 2. Peer relationship is found to be the major problem among the children; 3. Some family conditions, such as low income, are not favorable to children development.

Conclusions and implications: 1. As the caring function of family declines, community-based supports and services should be strengthened; 2. In the context of growing inequality, children from deprived families should be given extra supports to ensure that they enjoy equal chance for development; 3. Parental education should be fostered to change the mind-set of the parents.

Keywords: family relationships, caring function of the family, Hong Kong, pre-school children development.