

How Do The Family Factors Affect The Development Of Pre-School Children In Hong Kong?

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Background

Chinese society traditionally puts emphasis on children development, and Hong Kong, as a well-developed region in China, is not an exception. According to the Social Development Index by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, some indicators measuring the status of the children in the city, including the Infant Mortality Rate, the Percentage of children fully immunized against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough, and the Number of Children (aged 2-6) enrolled in kindergarten or childcare centers per 100,000, had recorded a positive trend (The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2012). The figures showed the achievements of the society had made on children development.

The focus of Hong Kong parents on children development is, however, never only on physical development. They are concerned with cognitive, emotional and psycho-social growth as well. Terms and expressions like “Hong Kong Kids” (refers to children who are unable to look after themselves, have low emotional intelligence and are vulnerable to adversity), “Princess / Prince Sickness” (refers to young Hong Kong people who are too self-centered and behave like princesses or prince), and ‘Helicopter Parents’ (refers to parents who love their children too much and become too attentive to their children’s needs) have become popular to illustrate HK parents’ concerns. There were 28, 475, and 921 articles in the Chinese printed media covering the topics related to the phenomenon of “Hong Kong Kids” in 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively. However, not many local researches are available to understand the psycho-social development of children in Hong Kong beneath this “Hong Kong Kids” phenomenon in the context of family in Hong Kong.

Like other developed regions, Hong Kong families face tremendous changes in terms of structure and size. Socio-economic uncertainties resulting from economic fluctuations and raising poverty pose many challenges to families. Moreover, the special political and geographical position of Hong Kong in the Greater China gives rise to other unique challenges like the shape rise of births in Hong Kong given to women of the mainland of China who do not have rights of abode in Hong Kong. All these cast a shadow on the caring function of families in Hong Kong.

Purpose

Based on a large scale survey, this paper aims at:

- Outlining the psycho-social development of the pre-school children aged 3 to 6 in Hong Kong; and
- Discussing how the change of family structure and the challenges faced by the families in Hong Kong affect the development of the pre-school children.

Findings

1. Peer relationship is found to be the major problem among the children;
2. Family size is strongly associated with children’s peer relationship problems.

Table 1: Children’s Scores by Parents and Teachers Using the SDQ

Subscale	Parent’s rating (n=2068)		Teacher’s rating (n=2068)	
	Mean	Standard Deviations	Mean	Standard Deviations
Emotional Symptoms Scale	2.147	1.674	1.93	1.847
Conduct Problems Scale	2.60	1.218	2.42	1.213
Hyperactivity Scale	3.93	1.450	3.63	1.339
Peer Problems Scale	4.38	1.443	4.17	1.274
Prosocial Scale	6.91	1.848	6.70	2.402
The Total Difficulties Score	13.07	3.817	12.15	3.336

Black = Normal Blue = Borderline Red = Abnormal

Table 2: % of Children Scored as Having Abnormal Behaviours by Parents & Teachers Using the SDQ

Subscale		Parent’s rating (n=2068)	Teacher’s rating (n=2068)
Emotional Symptoms Scale	Normal	79.8%	89.3%
	Borderline	10.9%	5.9%
	Abnormal	9.3%	4.8%
Conduct Problems Scale	Normal	51.8%	64.6%
	Borderline	27.9%	18.4%
	Abnormal	20.3%	17.0%
Hyperactivity Scale	Normal	86.2%	90.7%
	Borderline	8.9%	7.0%
	Abnormal	4.8%	2.3%
Peer Problems Scale	Normal	8.5%	27.5%
	Borderline	17.2%	35.8%
	Abnormal	74.4%	36.7%
Prosocial Scale	Normal	77.0%	27.5%
	Borderline	10.9%	35.8%
	Abnormal	9.3%	36.7%

Table 3: Number of Family Members and Children’s Scores on Peer Problems Scale by Parents Using the SDQ

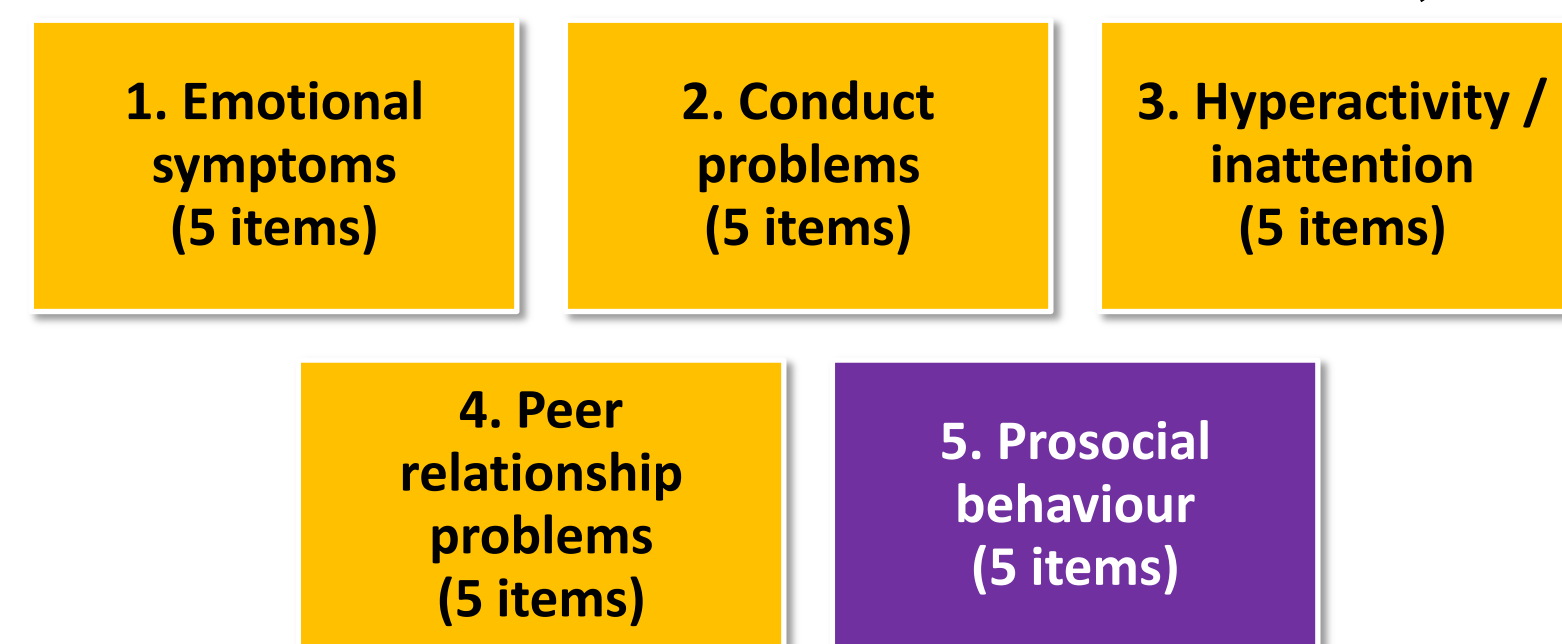
		Number of Family Members (n=2014)			
		1-2 Family members (n=53)	3-4 Family members (n=1,382)	5-6 Family members (n=506)	7 Family members or above (n=73)
Scores on Peer Problems Scale by Parents Using the SDQ **	Normal	13.2%	6.7%	11.3%	13.7%
	Borderline	9.4%	16.9%	18.6%	27.4%
	Abnormal	77.4%	76.3%	70.2%	58.9%

** p<0.01

Methods

2,769 sets of questionnaires were sent to the class teachers and the parents of the randomly sampled pre-school children aged 3 to 6 studying in nursery-cum-kindergartens (full-day mode). The questionnaire adopted the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) as the inventory to measure the development status of target children.

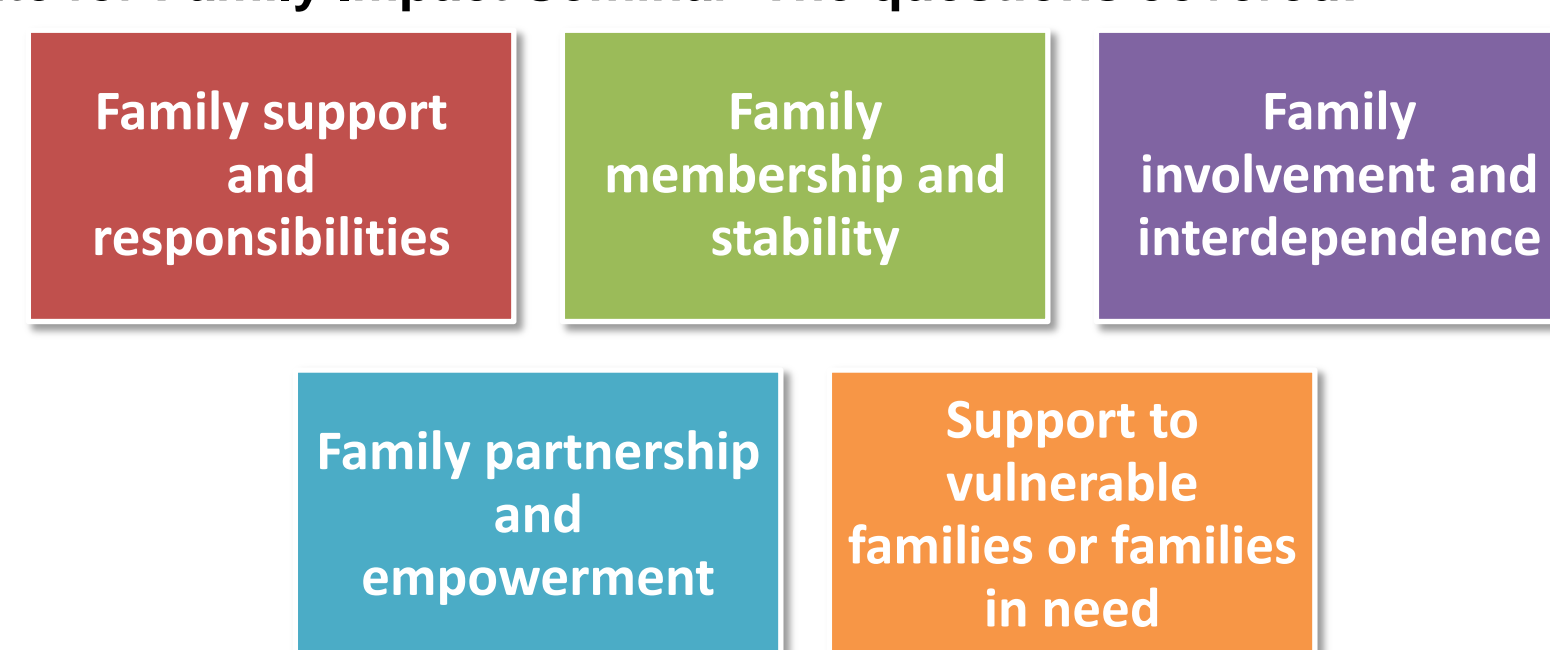
The **Strengths and Difficulties** Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire about 3-16 year olds which has 25 items (positive and negative) on psychological attributes. The 25 items are divided into 5 sub-scales, namely:



Scores of items from part 1 to part 4 add up to a total difficulties score. Based on the scores for the 5 sub-scales, children were classified as normal, borderline and abnormal.

Two sets of the SDQ questions were adopted. One was completed by the parents and the class teachers of children aged 4 to 6. A slightly modified version was for the parents and teachers of 3-year-old targets. 22 items are identical, and one item on reflectiveness is softened, and 2 items on antisocial behaviour are replaced by items on oppositionality.

To measure family relationships, marital and parent-child relationships, 24 questions were designed based on concepts from the Family Criteria (Ad Hoc) Task Force, Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminar. The questions covered:



Only parents of the sampled targets were invited to answer the questions. The parents were also invited to answer the questions on their family structure and social-economic status.

Findings (Cont.)

3. Scores of SDQ of the children have strong association with the relationships among members of their families

The findings reveal that the intimacy among the parents and children, the marital relationship among the parents, as well as the division of labour on housework and parental roles / style / skills had strong association with the children development.

4. Some family conditions, such as low income, are not favorable for children development

Unfavorable family conditions, in terms of the adequacy of the household monthly income to cover the household expenditure, the education level of the parents, the family structure (whether they come from single-parent families or not always living with their parents), were associated with children’s conduct problems and emotional well-being.

Conclusions and implications

1. As the caring function of the family declines, community-based supports and services should be strengthened to ensure the children’s developmental needs are not compromised. Also, nursery schools and kindergartens can offer more opportunities for children to experience peer interactions.
2. In the context of growing inequality, children from deprived families should be given extra supports to make sure they enjoy equal chance for development;
3. Parental education should be fostered to change the mind-set of the parents, especially for the selection of the types of extra-circular activities (from academic oriented to development oriented).

Reference Literature

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