

Study shows parental training helps parents cope with stress

August 24 2016

A project which was funded by Save The Children Hong Kong has revealed that parents from families with low monthly household income are more likely to have higher parental stress and lower parental self-efficacy.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) was funded by Save The Children Hong Kong to conduct a research titled "Transition to Primary School: Parental Training to Help Children Coming from Socially Diverse Background", revealing that [parents](#) from families with low monthly household income are more likely to have higher [parental stress](#) and lower parental self-efficacy. It is also found that parental training programmes were effective in relieving their stress and gaining [social support](#).

Transition from pre-school to [primary school](#) can be very challenging for children and their families. Children coming from socially disadvantaged background may find it particularly difficult to regulate themselves and adapt to a new environment. The study aimed to identify ways of reducing stress and increasing resilience of parents of children in transition to primary school. A community-based early intervention programme was developed and tested to enhance the psychological well-being of parents and children coming from socially diverse backgrounds, and improve behaviour as well as the learning motivation of children.

During the period of May 2014 to December 2015, a total of 200 parents whose children are six to seven years old on average attended the

introductory talks of the intervention programme and filled in a questionnaire. Sixty point five percent agreed that they have parental stress and 34.7% thought that their children have motivational difficulties.

In addition, parental stress and parental self-efficacy are related to low monthly household income. Children from families with low monthly [household income](#) exhibited more motivational difficulties. Higher perceived economic stress is also associated with more homework problems of children. On the other hand, higher education level and better emotional regulation skills of the parents are associated with higher levels of self-efficacy.

Among the 200 parents, 117 participated in and completed the intervention programme comprised of six sessions of group parenting training. It was designed and operated by a multidisciplinary team which included social workers, clinical psychologists, educational psychologist trainees and students of the master programme of applied psychology. This model focused on the use of positive parenting skills of the parents and how they can enhance self-regulation of the children.

After the group training, parents were randomly assigned to the follow-up sessions or control group. The sessions made up of telephone follow-up and homework focused programme aimed to encourage parents to put into practice what they have learned.

Compared to the control group, parents who went through the follow-up sessions reported reduced stress, enhanced self-efficacy and emotional regulation skills. Moreover, they reported less problems with their children's homework. Furthermore, higher self-efficacy is found in parents with higher perceived economic stress. Qualitative analysis of the group process reinforces the importance of group support among the parents.

The quality of parenting and family interaction is one of the most significant aspect in the socio-emotional development of children. Dr Alma Au, Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at PolyU, emphasised that "Early and brief interventions are effective in promoting parental self-efficacy and emotional regulation in parent-child relationships. To maximise treatment gains, parents should be given opportunities to practise the skills they have learnt. Experience sharing sessions can be carried and telephone follow-up for sustained intervention can make the results more long-lasting. These community-based interventions can be feasibly carried out in a community setting through collaboration with schools and relevant non-government agencies."

Ms Chine Chan, Programme Manager of Save The Children Hong Kong, highlighted eight points for parents: 1) interact more with children; 2) give clear instructions/requirements; 3) praise the children promptly, accurately and truly; 4) communicate parenting principles with other family members to ensure everyone shares the same standard of reward and punishment; 5) create the opportunities to praise the children; 6) do not reward children when they disobey their parents; 7) explain the consequences of certain behaviors to children; and 8) every child is unique.

She also said, "It is crucial to know that every child is unique. The same parenting skills may have different impact on children. Guiding [children](#) according to their talents should produce the best results."

Provided by Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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