

Parent-Child Interaction and Parental Goals: Insights from Hong Kong

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Background

Parent-child interactions that are characterized by an adequate level of sensitivity is vital for children's mental health and socio-emotional development. This study investigates the patterns of parenting strategies in Hong Kong, including the use of attentiveness, rewards, commands, and warnings following the Behavioral Coding System (BCS). This study will also explore how parental goals may have shaped these strategies.

Method/Data Analysis

18 Chinese parents with their typically-developed children aged 3–5 were recruited. The parent-child dyads participated in a 10-minute video recorded sessions involving free-play, a drawing task and a co-operative task at their homes. The interactions were analyzed using BCS to quantify the parenting strategies exhibited. Individual interviews were conducted to explore the parental goals with data analysed following grounded theory.

Results

During parent-child dyadic interactions, there were limited parental use of rewards and attentiveness (Mean = 1.59 per minute, SD=0.66) but frequent use of commands (Mean = 4.72 per minute, SD=1.43), reflecting a predominately parent-led approach. Among eight children displaying inappropriate behaviors, only one mother issued effective warnings; others responded with “No” without any explanations or simply intervened directly during frustration. Contingent attention—parental attention following child compliance—was low (Mean = 36.60%, SD=0.15).

Narrative analysis identified two key parental goal categories: **Child-centred** (e.g., child's wellbeing) and **Goal-directed** (e.g., child's achievements). Majority of parents (80%), especially mothers (90%) prioritized future-oriented goals/goal directed achievement, while only one-fifth of parents, especially fathers (70%) focused on child's needs.

Conclusion

The study suggested that Hong Kong parent's exhibited a limited repertoire of effective parenting strategies in addressing positive and negative behaviour in children. The results also highlight their tendency to prioritize goal-directed interactions (e.g., giving commands) over child-centered approaches (e.g., being attentive and expressing praise), which are essential for fostering children resilience and socio-emotional development. Notably, the alignment of goal-directed parenting strategies with future-oriented parental goals suggests that parenting strategies might be shaped by parental goals.

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