

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Attitude towards dating and sexual behaviour in Chinese adolescents:

**An investigation into the impacts of parental control, parent-child
relationship, sex education at home and perceived dis/approval of
early sexual intercourse**

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by

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of parenting practices, parent-child relationship, sex education at home, perceived parental disapproval of early sexual intercourse as well on dating and sexual behaviour among 381 adolescents (195 males and 186 girls) ranging in age from 10 to 19 years old. Data are collected in Hong Kong by using questionnaire. Parenting practices are measured in two dimensions: psychological control and behavioral control which includes knowledge, expectation, monitoring and discipline. Chi-square analysis, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVA are used to test the independence, association and effect. Results reveal that parent-child relationship is associated with dating and sexual intercourse while perceived paternal disapproval of early sexual intercourse is related to abstinence of early sexual intercourse among adolescents' girls only. However, psychological control and behavioural control are not associated with dating and sexual intercourse. Adolescents who are currently dating or had experience of sexual intercourse are more likely to spend less time on studying and family. Age and educational differences are found in dating as well as in sexual intercourse in both genders. Older adolescents are more likely to have experience of dating and sexual intercourse than younger one.

Table of contents

	Page No.
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
Table of contents	4
List of illustrations	5
Chapter 1: Literature Review	
1.1 Adolescence	6
1.2 Adolescent Sexuality	11
1.3 Parenting Practices	15
Psychological control	16
Behavioural control	17
Sex education at home	19
1.4 Relationship and other family factors	
Parent-Child relationship	20
Parents' SES & educational level	21
1.5 Individual factors	
Perceived parental dis/approval of early sexual intercourse	22
1.6 Hong Kong Situation	23
1.7 Research Questions	25
Chapter 2: Methodology	26
Chapter 3: Results	
3.1 Background information of participants	33
3.2 Students' dating experience	34
3.3 Students' dating attitude	37
3.4 Students' sexual intercourse	39
3.5 Students' sexual attitude	41
3.6 Students' sexual knowledge	42
3.7 Relationship with parenting factor and dating	42
3.8 Relationship with individual factor and dating	44
3.9 Relationship with parenting factor and sexual intercourse	45
3.10 Relationship with individual factor and sexual intercourse	48
Chapter 4: Discussions	50
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Limitations	58
References	60

List of illustrations

Figures

	Page No.
<i>Figure 1: Conceptual framework of this study</i>	16
<i>Figure 2: Distribution of age of participants by gender</i>	30
<i>Figure 3: Distribution of age of first date by gender</i>	31
<i>Figure 4: Distribution of age of first sex by gender</i>	37

Tables

<i>Table 1: Distribution of Participants by gender and age</i>	26
<i>Table 2: Distribution of Participants by school grades</i>	26
<i>Table 3: Frequencies and χ^2 results for students who had dating experience with age, gender and grade.</i>	32
<i>Table 4: Mean score and t-test results of paternal and maternal control</i>	40
<i>Table 5: Mean score and ANOVA results of students' perception of parental disapproval of early sexual intercourse</i>	43

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Adolescence

Adolescence, a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, is a period when teenagers experience three fundamental changes – biological, cognitive and social (Steinberg, 1999). According to Hill (1983), puberty begins, advanced thinking abilities emerge and new roles take up in this period. (as cited in Steinberg, 1999). These changes provide numerous developmental opportunities for adolescents to make different decisions that have important implications for their life.

In order to have a better understanding about adolescence, two classical theoretical approaches can best explain how this transition takes place, which are psychoanalytic approach and social-psychological approach. The psychoanalytic approach highlights the processes of ‘individuation’ and ‘disengagement’. In these processes, the individual’s awakening sexuality leads him or her to look outside the family setting for appropriate ‘love objects’ and weakens the emotional ties with their parents (Blos, 1979). Besides, the social-psychological approach concerns the process of socialization. It is the process whereby individuals learn values, standards and form beliefs through the agents of socialization such as parents, teachers, peers and media (as cited in Coleman & Hendry, 1990).

At this stage, teenagers face many challenges and uncertainties. It is the time of identity formation and a period of “storm and stress” that produces conflicts between

the generations which stated by Erik Erikson (1963) and G. Stanley Hall (1916)

respectively. It is a period characterized by exploration and decision-making.

Self-reliance, self-control and the capacity for independent decision making are all increased over this course (Feldman & Elliott, 1990). It involves gaining autonomy, assuming responsibility and making choices about family, peers, schooling, love and career (Furstenberg, 2000). In this period, adolescents may easily feel frustrated and nervous to act like an adult and make many decisions. Most likely, they feel tension between dependency on their parents and the need of independence and autonomy. One of the key tasks for the adolescent is the development of independence or autonomy in respect of family relationships. The goal of every teenager is to be free from parental restraint and to achieve control over one's own life (Coleman, 2000).

Middle adolescence is the stage that the most intense negotiations take place regarding autonomy (as cited in Coleman, 2000). Teenagers at this stage are in the most need of establishing their right to gain freedom while at the same time it is the stage for parents when they least wish to lose control. In the Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck and Duckett's study (1996), it found that the overall time spent with the family decreased throughout the teenage years but time spent with mothers and fathers on a one-to-one basis hardly changed at all between age 10 to 18. Feldman and Quatman had given two explanations for early expectations of autonomy. The first one is related to personal growth, maturity & a sense of responsibility. The second one is

'pseudoautonomy' which means too-early detaching from parental guidance and supervision. They also mentioned the importance of relationships between autonomy timetables and outcomes such as misconduct and lack of restraints (Feldman & Quatman, 1988).

Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) argued that young people who score highly on measures of autonomy but also see their parents as unsupportive would be more at risk than autonomous adolescents who have supportive parents. However, Fuhrman and Holmbeck (1995) took the different viewpoints. They believe that it is only under conditions of family pressure. This facilitates adolescents to cope and to find support outside the family but it is only under conditions of positive parental relationships.

Teenagers also want to experience adult-like life by having sexual activity. Many teenagers view sexual activity as a way to develop adult identity. They look for validation from opposite sex. Sexual behaviour also gives ways to challenge and confront parents who have opposite stand toward independence (Musick, 1993).

There are several theories which are widely used to explain the phenomenon of romantic relationship and sexual behaviour among adolescents. Problem behavior theory (PBT; see Jessor & Jessor, 1977) is a psychosocial model. According to Jessor (1991), PBT consists of three independent systems of psychosocial components: the perceived-environment system, the personality system and the behavior system. In this study, parenting process is categorized by the perceived-environment system;

satisfaction of parental control, age expectation of autonomy and sexual self-efficacy are categorized by the personality system and age of first sexual intercourse is categorized by the behavior system. Jessor and colleagues (1991) assumed that dating and early sexual intercourse stem from an individual's affirmation of independence and autonomy from parents. Additionally, many adolescents view dating and sexual activity as a way to develop adult identity (Melchert & Burnett, 1990; Musick, 1993), so they look to the opposite sex for validation and approval. Sexual behavior also provides a means of challenging parents on the way toward independence (Musick, 1993).

The following two theories, include McCabe's theory of adolescent dating and behavioral-ecological model, are good to demonstrate the importance of family in affecting adolescent dating and sexual behaviour. McCabe's theory of adolescent dating (1984) explains why adolescents start to date when they grow up in terms of biological, social and situational factors (Tang & Zuo, 2000). It highlights interplay among maturation, social influences and opportunities which must appear in adolescence. Maturation causes a desire for sexual release and search for sexual identity during physiological and psychosocial changes. Despite the fact that everyone undergoes maturation, we are influenced by our society sometime unconsciously. Therefore, dating practices vary from one society to another. This brings another major force: social influence, which largely comes from parents, peers, media and religion. Opportunities such as time alone, unsupervised activities with deviant peers, the last major force,

together with maturation and social influence explain the difference in the dating and sexual experiences of sexually active and inactive adolescents.

The behavioural-ecological model argues that risky sexual behavior is determined by proximal and distal factors within youngsters' social-ecological systems and also by a range of background predisposing factors (Hovell et al., 1994). Proximal factors are related to personal values, family, school, peer groups and dating partners. Distal factors are media and society. For family factor, the risk factors are inadequate parental supervision and poor parent-child communication. For value domain, adolescents who have low sexual self-efficacy would be more easily to engage in risky sexual behavior. For demographic domain, adolescents with low socio-economic status or low educational aspirations would be more likely to have risky sexual behavior.

Last but not the least, Hoffman's control theory (1970, 1975) tries to explain how psychological control affects adolescents' behaviour. He suggested that excessive psychological control may smother the process of social and psychological maturation that are necessary for adolescents to make responsible choices about their behaviors in control theory. So, adolescents whose parents use excessive psychological control may be less likely to have internalized moral reasoning and have early sexual intercourse as a result. Controlling through guilt or withdrawing love fails to promote maturity or responsibility for teen's behavior (Rodgers, 1999). Hirschi's (1969) control theory supports the importance of behavioral control that it creates a bond between parents and

their teen in which parents' views of adolescent sexual behavior, expressed both directly or indirectly, may be internalized by the adolescents and thus, play a protective role by monitoring and disciplining their teens to behave properly (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell & Dintcheff, 2007).

To conclude, it is clear that parents are a powerful source of influence in adolescent development. Hence, it is worthwhile to take a deep look in parenting practice.

Adolescent Sexuality

Romantic relationship is common among adolescents nowadays. Adolescents start dating at an age earlier than that 10 years ago. According to Blyth and his colleagues (1982), they found that adolescents start to date at the age of 15 while interest and interaction with opposite sex increase. More than 20 years later, Santrock (2003) report that romantic relationship emerges in early adolescent. It starts from age 10 to 13. Accordingly, over one third of adolescents of age 12 have experienced a romantic relationship, whereas more than 80 percent of adolescent of age 18 have involved in dating. Gender difference is also found. Before age 15, boys generally reported slightly higher rates of romantic relationship experience than girls. After age 15, however, adolescent girls have more dating experiences than boys with intimate relationships, due to their greater maturity (as cited in Carver, Joyner & Udry, 2003). Over the past two decades, it always shows more informal, less competitive and less rigid structure in

intimate relationship (Miller & Gordon, 1986). Older adolescents are more likely to engage in romance relationship than younger adolescents.

Dating potentially facilitates adolescents' social development positively but it may also put adolescents at risk. Normally, it is viewed as a sign of successful interpersonal maturity for older adolescents. Erikson (1950) believes that romantic relationship is not a mean of satisfying sexual needs, but to define and revise their self-concept. This contributes to their development of an identity (as cited in Muuss, 1988). However, dating in adolescence has been linked with problem behaviors. Having romantic experience at an early age has been associated with adjustment problems and risky behaviors (as cited in Beth-Doyle, Brendgen, Markiewicz & Kamkar, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner & Collins, 2001). Research found out that adolescents who are involved in romantic relationships at an early age have higher rates of drug use, psychological and behavioral difficulties, as well as lower levels of academic performance than those who are not currently involved in a relationship or who delay dating until late adolescence (as cited in Brown, Feiring & Furman, 1999). Dating in early to middle adolescence has also been found to be associated with early sexual activity. Adolescents who engage in romantic relationships are more likely to have sexual intercourse than their counterparts. Current daters report having more sexually intimate behaviours with their partner than non-daters (Shulam & Scharf, 2000).

Early sexual intercourse is a risky behavior in adolescence due to its lifelong and

irreversible harm. Data clearly show the adverse impacts of early sexual intercourse including sexually transmitted diseases, increased risk of cervical cancer, pelvic inflammatory disease, unwanted pregnancy, lower educational achievement, greater social isolation and poor economic situation (as cited in Lammers, Ireland, Resnick & Blum, 2000). Bloss (1970) warns that early sexual initiation may interfere with ego development and growth of emotional maturity (as cited in Muuss, 1988).

Today, more teenagers are becoming sexually active at a younger age than in the 1980s (Buhi & Goodson, 2007). To consider this issue, it is obvious by looking at their age of first sexual intercourse. In the most extensive study by Wellings and his colleagues (1994), it shows that the younger adolescents are more likely to have had sex before the age of 16. In addition, Steinberg (1996) reported that approximately 33 per cent of boys and 25 per cent of girls have had sex by the age of 15.

Adolescent sexuality differs by gender. Males have more liberal attitudes toward sexuality than females whereas females are more likely to view sex as part of love relationship (De Gaston et al., 1996). Males expect sexual intimacy earlier in a relationship but females link sexual intimacy with love. In Roche's study (1986), adolescent males and females were asked about whether they believed a particular behaviour was appropriate during a given stage of dating. In the early stage of relationship, more males believed and actually engaged in behaviours such as heavy petting and sexual intercourse than did females. Males view sex as a part of dating

whereas females want romance (Lin, 2007). In regard to attitudes toward causal premarital sex, males reported more permissive attitude than females (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Males also showed higher frequency of sexual intercourse, younger age of first intercourse and more numbers of sex partners than that of females.

For the first time of sexual intercourse, males and females have different expectations. Study finds that the most common immediate responses to having first time intercourse among adolescent males are excitement, satisfaction, exhilaration and happiness (Gordon & Gilgun, 1987; Oswald, Bahne, & Feder, 1994; Sorensen, 1973, as cited in Steinberg, 1999). However, girl's sexual script relates to romance, love, friendship and intimacy (Aitken & Chaplin, 1990; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1994, as cited in Steinberg, 1999). It seems that adolescent females view sexual intercourse as a mean of intimacy and emotional involvement while males are more likely to separate the matter of sex and intimacy.

This gender difference can be explained by the term erotic plasticity which refers to the degree to which the sex drive is influenced by social, cultural and biological factors (Baumeister, 2000). Girls have higher erotic plasticity than boys. Female sexuality is less directly tied to biological factor than that of male. These social, cultural and situational variables, such as social norms, parental influence and religion, have greater impact on female sexuality than on male. The traditional attitude concerning sexuality reflects a double standard (Kaplan, 2004). This double standard can be shown

in parenting styles. Parents tend to give more freedom to boys rather than girls and react differently to the sexual behaviours of their children. Hence, males have been permitted sexual freedom while females have been denied sexual needs. Moreover, parental influences and behaviours appear to have a greater and more lasting impact on the sex lives of their daughters than of their sons (as cited in Engels, Kerr & Stattin, 2007).

Overall, gender difference of sexuality is obvious. Girls regard sexual activity as a sign of being in love and engagement in a serious relationship. However, early initiation was associated with perceptions of greater physical maturity, desire for earlier autonomy (Rosenthal, Smith & deVisser, 1999) and opportunity to practice sex (Kaplan, 2004) among boys.

Parenting practices

In the past ten years, increased attention has been given to the role of the family predicting and understanding adolescent dating behaviour and sexual behaviour. Small and Luster (1994) suggested an ecological model of selected risk factors for adolescent sexual activity. It identifies risk factors at the individual, familial and extrafamilial levels. The most important predictors of sexual activity, which found in a study, are having a steady boyfriend or girlfriend, having drinks regularly, having parents with permissive values towards sex. For the familial level, risk factors are single parent household, poor parental monitoring and low SES.

In regard to the role of family, review of empirical research highlights some important variables such as family structure, parenting process/practice, parent-child relationship, parental communication about sex issue and perceptions of parental disapproval of sex. Despite the vast body of researches, the relationship between parental influence and adolescent love and sex issue are still not clear even though quite a number of researches emphasize the importance of family and personal factors in shaping young people's sexual behaviour. The conceptual framework is formed based on the previous literature supports (See Figure 1).

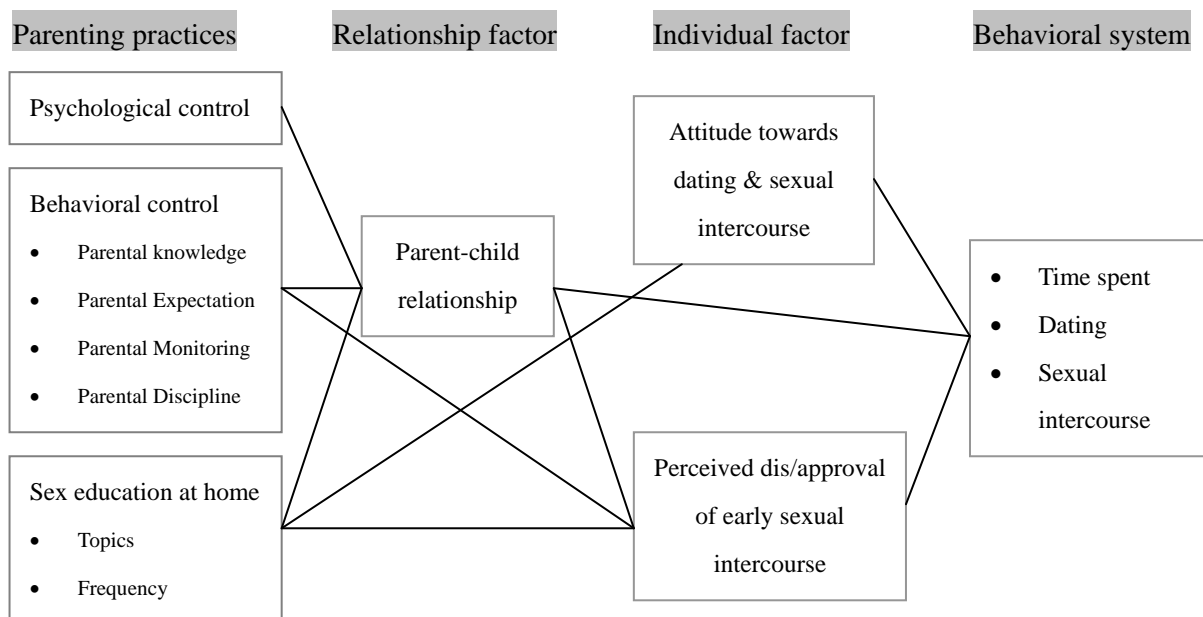


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study

Parental psychological control

Smetana and Daddis (2002) conceptualize psychological control as ‘parents’ attempt to control the child’s activities in ways that negatively affects the child’s psychological world and thereby undermines the child’s psychological development’

(p.563). Examples of parental psychological control are constraining verbal expression, love withdrawal, invalidating feelings, personal attack, guilt induction, and abnormal emotional behavior (Shek, 2005).

Rogers et al. (2003) found that earlier psychological control predicts higher externalizing behavior among adolescence. Likewise, it has been linked with increasing externalizing symptoms including precocious sexual activity in both boys and girls (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Specifically, Rodgers's study (1999) reported paternal psychological control is significantly related to daughter's sexual risk behaviour. For females, paternal psychological control increases the probability that a sexually active daughter may take more sexual risks.

Parental behavioral control

Parental behavioral control refers to 'rules, regulations and restrictions that parents have for their children' (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Shek (2005) conceptualizes parental behavioral control into five different aspects by integrating existing research findings, including parental knowledge, parental expectation, parental monitoring, parental discipline and global parental demandingness.

Friedlander and her colleagues found that parental monitoring is an important contributor in dating behavior among early adolescence. Parental monitoring has a negative association with dating. For girls, the level of parental monitoring does not impact the number of dating activities. For boys, however, the more knowledgeable

parents are about their activities, the lower number of dating activities reports (Friedlander, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2007). Parents' expressions of high expectations, love and concern and clear rules are related to late sexual activity (Aspy et al., 2007). A study reported that females experienced significantly more rules than males (Hovell, Hillman, Blumberg, Sipan, Atkins, Hofstetter & Myers, 1994). Rates of sexual activity tends to be higher among teens who lived in neighbourhoods where a relatively high percentage of women works in full-time (Brewster, 1994; Brewster, Billy, & Grady, 1993)

It is controversial to determine that whether parental monitoring or supervision is significant or not as it shows the strongest variability in previous findings. Six studies empirically identify protective effects of monitoring or supervision is significantly associated with earlier sexual activity among boys. Conversely, seven studies find no empirical relationship between monitoring and early sexual intercourse. It can be accounted for the different kinds of scale to measure parental monitoring as some focus on "do parents know where their teens are?" and "what their teens are doing?" while others mention on "rules for going out in the evening" only. In view of how parental monitoring influenced their teens' sexual behaviour, increases in parental monitoring are related to less frequent adolescent sexual intercourse and age at first intercourse (Miller, 1999; Romer, 1999; Li, 2000; Longmore, 2001; Huebner, 2003, Wight, Williamson & Henderson, 2006). High levels of parental supervision (Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985) and a

close relationship between adolescents and their parents (Greene, 1985) significantly predicts the later timing of adolescent sexual activity (as cited in Meschke & Silbereisen, 1997). However, lack of monitoring by parents is linked to risky sexual behaviour (see Fletcher et al., 1995). Smith (1997) reported that lower supervision is related to early sexual activity for boys, but not for girls. Cotton and her colleagues' study (2004) found that parental monitoring is only associated with girls' delay of sexual initiation (Cotton, Mills, Succop, Biro & Rosenthal, 2004).

Apart from parental monitoring, a lack of rules and strictness was associated with sexual experience (as cited in Hovell et al., 1994). Stattin and Kerr (1999) suggest that, rather than parental monitoring, it is the teenager's disclosure or non-disclosure which is the key variable having links with problematic behaviour (as cited in Coleman, 2000). Moreover, high parental expectations are related to delayed onset of sexual activity for males, but not for females (Lammers, 2000).

Sex education at Home

Family plays a key role in the formation of sexual attitudes and behavior by providing role models and norms of social conduct (Thornton & Camburn, 1987). The level of parental communication about sexual issues, expressing love and affection, or set rules to be followed by their adolescent children may influence their children's

sexual behavior (as cited in Hovell et al., 1994).

Ideally, parents should take the responsibility to provide sex education to their children. In the past 20 years, adolescents reported that their parents' role as a source of sexual information is minor; parents typically do not discuss sexual issues with them (Hayes, 1987; Roberts & Holt, 1980). Parents find it difficult to talk with their children about these sensitive topics and communication about sex is often incomplete (Kaplan, 2004). Some parents may wait to talk until they believe their child is in romantic relationship. In the parent-child communication, HIV or AID and STDs are the most commonly discussed topics whereas masturbation and physical and sexual development are the least mentioned (Miller et la., 1998).

Nowadays, this situation changes a little but still prevalent. Adolescents are more likely to discuss sexual topics with their mothers than their fathers in general (Wyatt, 1989). However, research found parental sex education of either parent with children depends on different sex-related topics. Male adolescents are significantly more likely than females to discuss HIV or AIDS and STDs, condoms and reproductions with their fathers (Miller et al., 1998). Darling and Hicks (1982) found that most parental sexual messages tend to be negative and convey double standards regarding sons' versus daughters' behaviour.

Adolescent sexual attitudes are influenced by the frequency and type of communication that occurs within the family (Rothenberg, 1980; Fisher, 1985). If

parents taught children to say no, set clear rules and talked about what is right and wrong and about delaying sexual activity, these adolescents are much less likely to have sexual intercourse (Aspy et al., 2007).

Relationship and other family factors

Parent-child relationship

Some studies find that close parent-child relationship is related to later and less adolescent sexual activity (Dittus & Jaccard, 2000; Lammers, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 2000). Closeness has a greater effect on younger adolescents than on older adolescents. Higher mother-child connectedness is significantly related to delay in first sex for eighth and ninth graders. For older adolescents, high mother-child connectedness delayed first sex for boys but not for girls (Sieving, McNeely & Blum, 2000). Girls with higher parental connectedness and higher level of mother-child communication are less likely to engage in sexual risk behavior over time (Henrich, Brookmeter, Shrier & Shahar, 2006). Several studies report that mother-child connectedness delayed first sex for either boys or girls (Davis & Friel, 2001; Miller et al., 1997; Sieving et al., 2000). However, Regnerus and Laura (2006) found out that there is no direct effect of the mother-child relationship on first sex. Overall, the influence of parent-child relationship or closeness on adolescent sexual behavior is still unclear, possibly due to sampling biases.

Mother-daughter closeness is the only family variable significantly related to delayed first sex (Miller et al., 1997). Girls who reported sharing a greater number of

activities with their mothers in the past 4 weeks were actually less likely to have sex than those who reported having fewer shared activities (Davis & Friel, 2001). However, the extent of mother-child interaction has no effect on timing of coital debut for boys (Davis & Friel, 2001). Girls who have better relationship with their father are less likely to report first sex (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006).

Parents' SES & educational level

In addition to parenting practices, relationship factor on adolescents' sexual development, there are other influential factors such as income and education. Socioeconomic status (SES) of the family may determine the quality of parental sex education and expectation on adolescent children educational level. Adolescents of lower SES have been related to early sexual activity and higher rates of adolescent pregnancy (Panzarine & Santelli, 1987). Lower income parents experience more barriers to control adolescents' behavior due to competing family, health and financial problems, and less ability and resources to supervise their adolescents (Norr, 1991). (as cited in Hovell et al., 1994) Other than these, maternal educational level may associated with later onset of sexual intercourse. Cotton and her colleagues (2004) reported that girls who have higher educational level mothers are less likely to have sexual intercourse than others.

Individual factors

In this study, it does not only emphasize the family influence, but also the role of each adolescent plays in their development. According to the principles of lifespan developmental psychology, each adolescent is an 'active agent' in shaping their own development (as cited in Coleman & Hendry, 1990). Hence, it is important to know what teenagers' concerns are in their sexual development.

Several studies show that adolescents perceived maternal disapproval of sex can predict the occurrence of sexual intercourse (Dittus & Jaccard, 2000; Sieving, McNeely & Blum, 2000). Perception of paternal disapproval of premarital sex predicts later age of sexual initiation (Dittus et al., 1997). A recent research shows that parental disapproval of sexual behavior displays very evident associations with first sex (Regnerus & Luchies, 2006). More specific, mother's disapproval of adolescent sex is associated with less likelihood of early sex (Davis, 2001). Adolescents are less likely to initiate sexual activity or to become pregnant when they have high satisfaction on their relationship with their mothers and perceived maternal disapproval on sexual intercourse (Dittus & Jaccard, 2000). Females are significantly more likely than males to anticipate father's disapproval but does not show the expected sex difference with respect to mother's disapproval (Hampton, Jeffery, McWatters & Smith, 2005).

Hong Kong situation

There is no exception of such cases in Hong Kong as recent researches show that

the number of adolescents involving in dating and sexual behaviour is dramatically increasing and the age of onset of first dating and first sexual intercourse is decreasing in the past 10 years. Data from the Youth Sexuality Study (1996) conducted by The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong indicates that the percentage of Form 1-2 students who have dating experience was 60%. However, the percentage increased to 92% in accordance to Youth Sexuality Study (2006). Regarding the number of adolescents who have sexual intercourse, more adolescents have sexual intercourse when comparing with that ten years ago. According to Youth Sexuality Study (2006), the percentage has increased from 10.1 to 21.4 within 10 years. Moreover, nearly 10% of adolescents who aged 15 or below had experienced sexual intercourse. Surprisingly, the percentage of having first sexual intercourse in Form 1 and 2 was the highest compared with those of Form 3 to 7 and undergraduate students (Lin, 2006).

Research Questions

The present study examines the parental influence such as the use of psychological control, parental control, sex education at home on adolescents' dating and sexual behaviour. Besides, adolescents' perceived of parental dis/approval of early sexual intercourse is also investigated. It aims to address the following questions.

1. Do parents have any influence(s) on adolescents' decision making on romantic relationship and sexual behaviour?
2. To what extent is/are the influence(s) of parents on adolescents' decision making on romantic relationship and engaging in sexual behaviour?
3. Is there any difference between mother and father in terms of providing sex education to children?
4. What are the characteristics of those teenagers who are less inclined to have sexual intercourse with others?
5. Are higher psychological control and lower parental monitoring related to younger age of dating and sexual intercourse?
6. Are there any gender differences in the age of first sexual intercourse and perceived parental dis/approval of sexual intercourse in their age?

Chapter 2: Methodology

To test the relationship among dating, sexual experience and parental influence in adolescence, this study covers three main factors: family, personality and behaviours. Family factors include psychological control, behavioural control, parent-child relationship, sex education at home, parental values regarding dating and perceived parental disapproval of having sex. The second factor is personality factors which are educational aspiration, needs for autonomy and independence, sexual self-efficacy and attitudes towards dating and sexual intercourse. The behaviour factors are pattern of time spent, dating behaviour and sexual experiences among adolescents.

Owing to this sensitive research topic, especially under the present Chinese-based cultural background in Hong Kong, participants might not be willing to disclose their personal experience in interviews where the interviewers can identify them. Therefore, a self-administrated anonymous questionnaire would be the best way to collect valuable data.

2.1 Objectives

- To explore the prevalence of the use of psychological control and behavioral control by father and mother in the family;
- To explore four dyadic relationships (mother-son, father-son, mother-daughter, and father-daughter) in terms of parent-child relationship and parental sex education;

- To explore pattern of time spent, needs for independence and autonomy, sexual self-efficacy among adolescents;
- To explore dating pattern and sexual behaviour among adolescents;
- To investigate the relationship among psychological control, behavioral control and dating behavior among adolescents;
- To investigate the association among psychological control, behavioral control and sexual experience among adolescents.

2.2 Participants

Participants are students who study in primary five to secondary three in Hong Kong. The reason for choosing them is that romantic relationship starts from early adolescence.

2.3 Sampling

A total of 381 students participated in this study. There are 123 students who study in primary school while 136 students study in secondary school. It was not feasible to conduct a territory-wide research for the reason of budget and time constraints. Hence, schools with different religious backgrounds would be selected for study purpose. Three schools in Kowloon Peninsula and one school in the New Territories were selected as sample for convenience sake (one Catholicism, one Christianity, one Buddhism and one with no religious background). The schools were not random samples, but they were willing to participate. They represented the different educational and religious

philosophies of schools in Hong Kong.

2.4 Background information of participants

195 boys and 186 girls participated in this study. Their age range is from 10 to 19 years old. A total of 10 classes of P.5 to F.3 students were selected from the above four schools. The detail breakdown of the participants is tabulated in Tables 1 & 2.

Table 1

Distribution of Participants by Gender and Age

Sex/ Age	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Boy	36	22	6	14	36	25	29	20	2	2	192(51.8%)
Girl	37	18	1	11	26	37	29	13	7	0	179(48.2%)
Total	73	40	7	25	62	62	58	33	9	2	371(100%)

Table 2

Distribution of Participants by school grades

Grade	No.	Percentage (%)
P.5	123	31.7
F.1	15	3.9
F.2	79	20.4
F.3	99	25.5
F.4	72	18.6
Total	388	100

2.5 Procedure

The study was carried out from January to March 2008. In this study, five student helpers assisted in distributing and collecting questionnaires throughout the whole process of study. Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaires in the classroom by themselves during lesson. It took about 15-20 minutes to finish all the questions. The

student helpers were available during the whole period to answer questions from participants, including clarification about the meaning of items. All completed questionnaires were collected from schools by student helpers directly.

2.6 Measurements

The present study adopted the following measurements including some composite scales to find out relationships in three systems-parenting factor, personality factor and behaviour factor. For parenting factors, these measurements included 'Chinese parental psychological control scale', 'Chinese parental control'. For personality factor, the measurement is 'Age expectations for behavioural autonomy' and 'Perceived parental disapproval of having sex'. For behaviour factor, these measurements included 'Time use variables' 'Dating attitude and experience' and questions about sexual experience. They were selected and modified from original scales.

1. 'Chinese Parental Psychological Control'. Psychological control scale consists of five items include invalidating personal feelings and experiences, personal attack, love withdrawal and excessive control. It was referenced from existing scales (Shek, 2005). Responses for the items are in terms of a five-point Likert scale that varies from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) such that higher score represents higher psychological control level. The alpha coefficient of Chinese parental psychological control scale was .713.

2. 'Chinese Parental Control'. Behavioral control scale consists of 15 items

include knowledge, expectation, monitoring and discipline. It was referenced from existing scales (Shek, 2005). Responses for the items are in terms of a five-point Likert scale that varies from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) such that higher score represents higher behavioral control level. The alpha coefficient of Chinese parental control scale was .814.

3. *'Age Expectations for behavioral autonomy'*. Ten items assessing expectations for behavioral autonomy across a variety of everyday life event were extracted from existing scales (Feldman & Quatman, 1988; Rosenthal & Bornholt, 1988). Adolescents were asked to decide the age that they first engage or expect to engage in certain behaviors. Participants rated each item on a five-point scale: (1) before age 14; (2) 14-15 years; (3) 15-16 years; (4) 16-17 years; (5) 18 or older. Lower score represents lower needs for independence and autonomy. The alpha coefficient of this scale was .876.

4. *'Perceived Parental Disapproval of Sex'*. Adolescents were asked to indicate their perceptions of father or mother disapproval of sex. Responses for the items are in terms of a five-point Likert scale that varies from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Scores are assigned such that higher scores indicated greater perceived parental disapproval of sex.

5. *'Time Use Variables'*. Participants were asked a series of questions about the frequency and usual numbers of hours spent per occasion on numerous activities such as

study, family time, dating, part-time job. The response choices for frequency range from 1 to 6, from 'never' to 'everyday'. The choices for time spent per occasion are less than 1 hour, 1 to 3 hours, 4 to 7 hours and more than 8 hours respectively.

6. 'Dating Attitude and experience'. Six items were referenced from existing scales (Tang & Zuo, 2000). They are mate selection criteria; boundary of physical contact in dating relationship, reasons for dating or not dating and respondent's age at first dating.

7. 'Sexual Behaviours'. 17 items related to experience of having sexual intercourse, reasons for having or not having sexual intercourse, use of contraception, place to have sex, alcohol and drug use before having sex, numbers of sex partner and respondent's age at first sex were asked.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data was coded, entered and statistically analyzed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS PC+) computer programme.

2.8 Limitations

In the development of the present study, it was assumed that participants would complete the questionnaire genuinely and honestly on some personal issues, which may not reflect the reality. There were no controls for them not giving true answers. They might just tell lies or follow what teachers or parents said. To minimize the effects of peer influence and social desirability, the questionnaires were distributed to the students during the class, completing questionnaires anonymously and no discussion was

allowed among them. It was expected that these effects were minimized by taking these actions during the study.

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Background information of the participants

The participants:

Participants are 381 students, ranging in age from 10 to 19 (mean age 13.67).

There are 195 boys and 186 girls (see Figure 2). Regarding their educational level,

123 (30.8%) are P.5 and 265 (66.4%) are studying from F.1 to F.4. Regarding

religious faith of the participants, 251 (62.8%) have no religious faith. 96 (24%)

are Christians, 16 (4%) are Catholics, 18 (4.5%) are Buddhists. 3 (0.8%) have

other religious faiths. The majority of the participants is living with both of the

parents: 302 (75.5%), 60 (15%) of them live with either father or mother, 17 (4.3%)

live with neither. As regards the duration living in Hong Kong, nearly half of them

(47.3%) live in Hong Kong since birth. Surprisingly, over 40% of participants live

in Hong Kong less than 10 years.

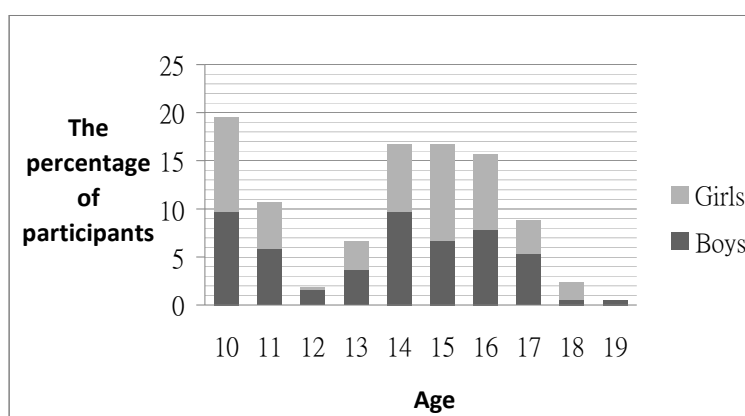


Figure 2. Distribution of age of participants by gender

Students' parents:

Most of the students' parents had studied up to primary or secondary education level. In general, the students' mothers are better educated than the fathers. 61.8% of the mothers have secondary education or above, while corresponding figures for the father are 59.6% only. Only 5.2% of the parents have a university education or above. Nearly 40 percent of parents are working in service industry where they have to do manual work, which indicates that they may come from the lower income brackets. Yet, about 15.5% of the students' fathers are engaged in professional jobs. Besides, nearly half of the students' mothers are full time housewives.

3.2 Students' dating experience

3.2.1 Age of first date

Girls started to date earlier than boys. Students started to date at age 10.

Average age to start first dating is 13.8 (Range: 10-18). Nearly half of them started to date at age 13-14 (see Figure 3).

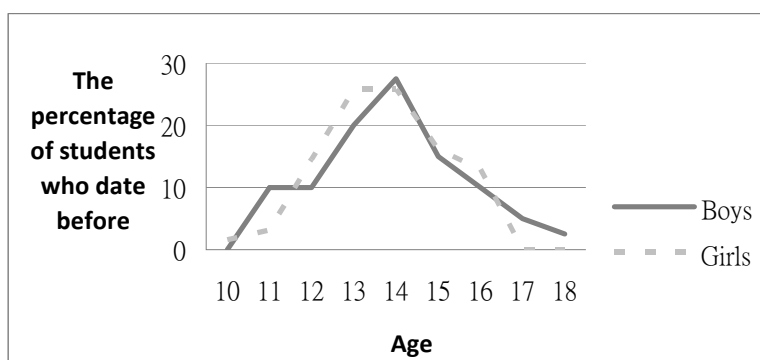


Figure 3. Distribution of age of first date by gender

3.2.2 Past & Current dating experience

109 (28.3%) out of 394 participants have dating experience while 57 (14.3%) are currently dating. More girls (56.6%) engage in dating relationship than boys (43.4%) currently. Age and grade are significantly associated with dating. Younger students are significantly less likely to engage in dating relationship. However, there is no gender difference. (see Table 3)

Table 3

Frequencies and χ^2 results for students who had dating experience (n=109) with age, gender and grade.

	No.	χ^2	p-value ^a
Age			
10-13	5	22.00	.000**
14-18	47		
Gender			
Male	23	1.305	.253
Female	30		
Grade			
Primary	3	19.933	.000**
Secondary	51		

Note. ^a p <.05*, p <.01**

3.2.3 Informed to parents

The percentage of parents who don't know their children are engaged in dating (57.9%) is slightly higher than that of parents who know (42.1%). No gender and parents difference are found.

3.2.4 Coverage of dating expenses

Boys (58.6%) tend to be responsible for the coverage of dating expenses

while only few girls (0.8%) pay the expenses. Approximately 34 percent of participants are willing to share dating expenses.

3.2.5 Pattern of time spent

Independent sample t-test is used to analysis the difference of time spent between dating and non-dating group. Time spent on certain aspects such as studying, going out with friends and dating partners, with family and in part-time work are significantly associated with dating (see Table 4). Students who are currently involved in dating would spend more time with friends, dating partners and in part-time work. Over half of them spend 4 to 7 hours with friends, dating partners and in part-time job for each occasion.

Table 4

Mean score and t-test results of time spent (n=385) on study, with friends, family, dating partner and part-time work between dating group and non-dating group

	Dating group	Non-dating group		
	Mean score ^b		t	Sig. (2-tailed) ^a
<i>Study</i>	3.37	4.00	-2.77	.006**
<i>With friends</i>	3.42	2.56	4.88	.000**
<i>With family</i>	4.88	5.60	-4.581	.000**
<i>Go out with lovers</i>	3.20	1.26	13.00	.000**
<i>Chat with lovers on phone</i>	4.32	1.59	13.77	.000**
<i>Part-time work</i>	2.02	1.32	4.31	.000**

Note. ^ap <.05*, p <.01**

^b score, 1: never, 2: 1 time per week, 3: 2 times per week, 4: 3 times per week, 5: more than 4 times per week, 6: everyday

3.3 Students' dating attitude

3.3.1 Reasons for dating

Among students who are currently engaged in dating, over half of them (65.5%) claim that they want to find someone to share and to find someone care them (62.1%). The third popular reason is attractiveness (34.48%). Girls who are currently dating are significantly more likely to express the importance of finding partner to care them than males $\chi^2(1)= 5.618, p<.05$ and emphasis on curiosity than males $\chi^2(1)= 4.038, p<.05$.

3.3.2 Reasons for not to date

In non-dating group, nearly half of them (48.2%) believe that they are not suitable to date at this age. Over 40 percent of participants report that dating will affect their study (44.7%) and they can't find the right person to date (46.5%). In addition, some reasons such as affecting study, parent dislike, afraid of having sexual intercourse, money concern and peer pressures are significantly associated with gender. Girls who choose not to date at this age tend to think dating will affect their study than boys $\chi^2(1)=9.245, p<.01$. Girls also think dating is not approved by parents than boys $\chi^2(1)=4.706, p<.05$. Because of fear to have sexual intercourse in dating, more females tend to avoid dating than boys $\chi^2(1)=5.407, p<.05$. Besides, boys concerns more on money constraints, $\chi^2(1)=9.072, p<.01$, and peer pressures, $\chi^2(1)=4.756,$

$p < .05$, than girls.

3.3.3 Mate selection criteria

There are three popular criteria, mostly personality, secondly appearance and lastly interests or hobbies, in affecting students to choose dating partners.

The least popular criteria are peer popularity and preference of teacher. Some criteria such as academic performance, talents and filial piety are significantly associated with gender difference in choosing dating partners. More girls emphasize on the importance of academic performance $\chi^2(1)=4.897$, $p < .05$., talents $\chi^2(1)=3.83$, $p \leq .05$. and filial piety $\chi^2(1)=12.25$, $p < .01$. than boys.

However, more boys emphasize on the importance of interests or hobbies $\chi^2(1)=4.792$, $p < .05$ than girls.

3.3.4 Important elements in dating

Three elements in dating, include loyalty, acceptance and trust each other, are commonly chosen by students. The least chosen element is willing to have sexual intercourse in dating relationships. More girls choose to be loyal $\chi^2(1)=4.31$, $p < .05$ and keep distance with opposite sex $\chi^2(1)=3.977$, $p < .05$ than boys if they are engaged in dating. Besides, more boys choose to trust his dating partner $\chi^2(1)=4.367$, $p < .05$ than girls.

3.3.5 Boundaries of physical touch in dating

Over 50 percent of students agree to have physical touch such as holding

hand, lying on the shoulder, kissing face or lip and sitting on the legs with dating partners. Students agree to have petting (11.3%), bathing together (7.4%) and sexual intercourse (8.7%) in dating relationships.

3.3.6 Perceived parental approved age to date

Nearly 50 percent of students perceive their parental approved age to date is 18. Mean age of paternal and maternal approved age to date are 18.55 and 18.79 respectively. There is no significant difference between paternal and maternal approved age to date.

3.4 Students' sexual intercourse

3.4.1 Age of first sexual intercourse

Girls engage in sexual intercourse earlier than boys (see Figure 4). Age of first sex of girls is 13 while that of boys is 14. Average age to have sexual intercourse is 15.31 (Range: 13-17). Over 50 percent of these students start to have sexual intercourse at age of 14.

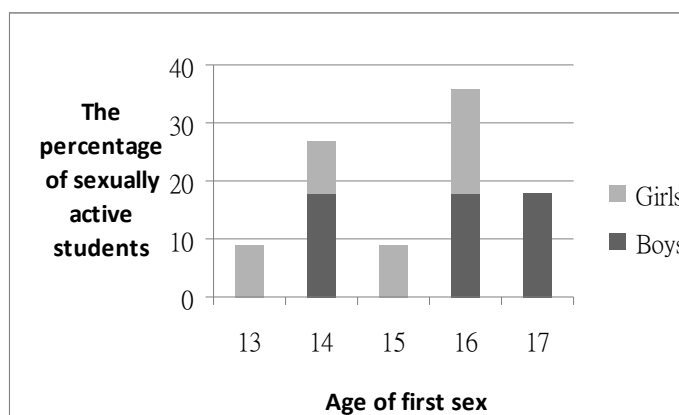


Figure 4. Distribution of age of first sex by gender

3.4.2 Sexual experience

Over 20 percent of students engage in sexual behaviours which include petting (18%), touch/ being touched the sexual organ (5.9%) and sexual intercourse (3.6%). Students who have experience of sexual intercourse report that their sex partners are either their boyfriends or girlfriends. Half of them have sexual intercourse with their dating partners after 1-2 months of dating. 12.5 percent of them claim that they have sexual intercourse with dating partners after one week of dating. Students who have experience of sexual intercourse report that boys (53.8%) are more likely to take initiative in having sexual intercourse. Average number of sex partner is 2.75.

3.4.3 Places to have sex

Regarding the places to have sex, home (79%) is the most common place than others. They tend to have sexual intercourse in boys' home (47.4%) rather than girls' home (15.8%).

3.4.5 Use of Contraceptives

Over 45 percent of students who have sexual intercourse report that they never or seldom use contraception before or during sexual intercourse. 33 percent of them claim that they are persuaded not to use contraception by their boyfriends. 16 percent of them claim that it is inconvenient to use.

Nearly 45 percent of students who have sexual intercourse report that they

always or very often use contraception. The reasons of using contraception are to avoid unwanted pregnancy and venereal diseases.

The most common contraception is condom (64.7%). However, some students try to ejaculate out of body (11.76%) and to count menstrual period (5.88%).

3.5 Students' sexual attitude

3.5.1 Motives of having sexual intercourse

All students who have sexual intercourse report that loving their dating partners is the utmost in decision making of having or not having sexual intercourse. Over 60 percent of them think that 'don't want to make partner upset' and 'enjoy having sex' are the second important factors. Only 15 percent of them think sexual intercourse is a mean of growing up.

3.5.2 Commitment to marriage

Nearly 90 percent of students who have experience of sexual intercourse report that they are not sure to get marry with their sex partners (40%) and must not marry him or her (50%).

3.5.3 Reasons of not having sexual intercourse

In the group of sexually inactive students, they claim that sexual intercourse will make parents unhappy and being scolded (67.9%). Over 60 percent of them think that they are not ready to have sex, disagree with pre-marital sex and feel

afraid of pregnancy. More girls choose not to have sex than boys due to several reasons: not ready, situation does not allow, disagree with pre-marital sex, religious reason, don't know how to have sex, prevent infecting from venereal disease, don't want to make parents unhappy, afraid of getting hurt and peer pressure.

3.6 Students' sexual knowledge

Over 60 percent of students do not know the consequences of early sexual intercourse. 9 percent of them get incorrect information about that.

3.7 Relationship with parenting factor and dating

3.7.1 Self-disclosure to parents

Self disclosure to parents is significantly associated with dating. Those who are not currently involved in dating report having higher self-disclosure to parents than those students who are presently involved in dating $t(359)=-2.537, p<.05$.

3.7.2 Parent-Child relationship

Parent-child relationship is significantly associated with dating. Those who are not currently involved in dating report having higher quality of parent-child relationship than those students who are presently involved in dating $t(379)=-2.417, p<.05$.

3.7.3 Parental control

Parental control is significantly associated with parents' gender. Mothers are more likely to have higher parental knowledge, $t(385)=-2.574$, $p<.01$, monitoring, $t(385)=-2.047$, $p<.05$, and psychological control, $t(389)=-2.666$, $p<.01$, on their children than fathers (see Table 3). Parents with higher education level are associated with children who experience higher behavioural control, $t(252)=-3.89$, $p<.01$. Mothers with higher educational level are related to exert higher psychological control, $t(114)=-2.288$, $p<.05$, on their children.

Table 4

Mean score and t-test results of paternal and maternal control (n=387)

	Paternal		Maternal	
	Mean score ^b	t	Mean score ^b	Sig. (2-tailed) ^a
<i>Parental behavioral control</i>	11.94	13.3	-2.66	.00**
<i>Parental knowledge</i>	14.5	16.0	-2.574	.01**
<i>Parental expectation</i>	7.8	7.9	-.416	.678
<i>Parental monitoring</i>	10.34	11.23	-2.047	.04*
<i>Parental discipline</i>	15.89	16.25	-.785	.433
<i>Parental psychological control</i>	48.11	51.32	-2.409	.01**

Note. ^a $p<.05^*$, $p<.01^{**}$

^b score of each item, 1: never, 2: seldom, 3: sometimes, 4: always, 5: very often

Parental knowledge of children's activities especially after school and free time are significantly associated with dating. Students who are not currently engaged in dating report higher parental knowledge of their whereabouts after school, $t(387)=-2.406$, $p<.01$, and free time, $t(387)=-2.352$, $p<.01$. Maternal parental

knowledge of their whereabouts after school, $t(188)=-2.114$, $p<.05$, check homework very often, $t(188)=-2.093$, $p<.05$, are also related to dating.

A correlation between the data reveal that parental behavioral control and time spent in dating are significantly related, $r = -.77$, $n=358$, $p<.05$. However, parental psychological control is not significantly related to time spent in dating. Excessive control is the only item in psychological control which significantly associated with dating $t(384)=3.058$, $p<.01$. Students who experienced higher excessive control by parents are more likely to engage in dating relationship. Boys who experienced more excessive control are more likely to engage in dating relationship than that of girls $F(5)=2.532$, $p<.05$.

3.8 Relationship with individual factor and dating

Time spent with family is significantly associated with dating. Students who are currently engaged in dating report less time spent with family than students who are not currently engaged in dating $t(382)=-4.581$, $p<.01$.

Students who are currently engaged in dating perceived of choosing dating partner $t(385)=-2.026$, $p<.05$ and going out with dating partner $t(385)=-2.244$, $p<.05$ at an earlier age than students who are not currently engaged in dating.

Self-disclosure to parents is significantly associated with dating, $t(359)=-2.537$, $p<.01$. Students who are not engaged in dating ($M=2.35$) report

higher self-disclosure to parents than students who are engaged in dating (M=1.87).

School grade and age are significantly associated with dating. Secondary students are more likely to experience dating than primary students $\chi^2(1)=19.933, p<.01$. Older students are more likely to experience dating than younger students $\chi^2(1)=22.001, p<.01$.

3.9 Relationship with parenting factor and sexual intercourse

3.9.1 Parent-child relationship

Parent-child relationship is the only factor significantly associated with adolescents' sexual intercourse. Sexually active adolescents report lower quality of parent-child relationship than that of sexually inactive adolescents $t(378)=-2.024, p<.05$.

3.9.2 Parental control

No significant relationship is found between parental control and sexual intercourse among adolescents. Only maternal knowledge of children's activities after school and free time is associated with sexual intercourse. Maternal knowledge of their children's whereabouts after school (M=3.15) and in free time (M=3.34) in sexually inactive group are significantly higher than that (M=1.00) & (M=1.33) of sexually active group, $t(185)=-2.285, p<.05$ &

$t(184)=-2.422, p<.01$. Besides, students who have experience of sexual intercourse are less likely to spend time with family than students who have no experience of sexual intercourse $t(376)=-3.282, p<.01$.

3.9.3 Perceptions of parental disapproval of early sexual intercourse

Based on the total sample, the female mean score for anticipate fathers' disapproval (3.73) is significantly higher than that of male (2.77) where higher score represents higher paternal disapproval $t(373)=-4.385, p<.01$. The female mean score of anticipated mothers' disapproval is significantly higher than that of male $t(183)=-5.144, p<.01$.

A one-way correlated analysis of variance show that perceived paternal disapproval of early sexual intercourse significantly affects girls' decision making (see Table 5). For female perceived stronger paternal disapproval of having sex are less likely to engage in early sexual intercourse than that of male, $F(4)=2.626, p<.05$. However, perceived maternal disapproval of early sexual intercourse is not associated with adolescents' sexual behaviour in both sexes.

Table 5

Mean score and ANOVA results of students' perception of parental disapproval of early sexual intercourse

	Male	Female	F	Sig. (2-tailed) ^a
	Mean score ^b			
Perception of parental disapproval				
<i>Father</i>	2.77	3.73	2.626	.036*
<i>Mother</i>	2.52	4.07	.502	.775

Note. ^a p <.05*, p <.01**

^b 1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: average, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree

3.9.4 Sex education at home

Over 50 percent of students had sex education at home. However, most of the topics merely cover physical body changes and how to protect their body from being hurt only. Only 30 percent of topics are related to consequences of having early sexual intercourse. Less than 15 percent relates to venereal diseases. Sex education at home is not significantly associated with sexual intercourse.

Students who have been taught sexual topics related to the consequences of early sexual intercourse, $\chi^2(1)=4.57$, $p<.05$, contraception, $\chi^2(1)=4.328$, $p<.05$, and mate selection, $\chi^2(1)=5.783$, $p<.01$, are less likely to engage in sexual intercourse.

Nearly 50 percent of students who have not had sex education at home

report that they do not know the reason of no sex education at home. 12 percent of them think that it is embarrassed to discuss sexual topics. 4.5 percent of them report that their parents are too busy so that they have no time to teach them. 3.9 percent of them believe that their parents are lack of sexual knowledge. Students report that the mean perceived ideal age of having sex education is 12.04 (range from 0 to 35).

3.10 Relationship with individual factor and sexual intercourse

School grade is significantly associated with sexual intercourse. Secondary students are more likely to experience sexual intercourse than primary students $\chi^2(2)=29.382, p<.01$.

Perception of own autonomy and independent is significantly related to sexual intercourse. Students who have experience of sexual intercourse are more likely to perceive higher autonomy and independent by themselves than students who have no experience $t(379)=1.954, p\leq.05$.

Times spent with friends, alone and in part-time work are significantly associated with sexual intercourse. Students who have experience of sexual intercourse are more likely to spend more time with friends $t(376)=2.111, p<.05$, alone $t(375)=-2.234, p<.05$ and in part-time job $t(378)=6.472, p<.01$ than students who are sexually inactive.

Commitment to marriage is significantly related with sexual intercourse.

Students who have experience of sexual intercourse are more likely to decide not to marry with his or her sex partner $\chi^2(4)=15.029, p<.01$.

Chapter 5. Discussions

This study aims to shed light on how parenting practices like psychological, behavioral control and sex education at home relate to adolescents' dating and early sexual intercourse in both genders. It also reveals that how needs for autonomy and independence, pattern of time spent and their perception of parental dis/approval of early sexual intercourse associate with dating and sexual activity among Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. In reviewing the western studies, parental monitoring, one of the parental behavioral controls, is associated with dating and sexual activity (Friedlander et al., 2007; Aspy et al., 2007). However, the relationship between parent-child relationship and dating or sexual intercourse is unclear (Rogers et al., 2003). Sex education at home is associated with sexual intercourse only if topics relate to birth control and contraceptive use (Wells, 2006). Higher needs for autonomy and independence (Rosenthal, Smith & DeVisser, 1999), less time spent in the family and more peer time (Barnes et al., 2007) are also shown in association with early sexual intercourse.

Characteristics of students involved in dating and sexual intercourse

In accordance with the findings, students who are currently engaged in dating tend to have lower quality of parent-child relationship, less time spent on studying and family, but more time with friends and part-time jobs. These students perceive an earlier age to

make decisions on mate selection and going out with dating partners under the condition of without asking parents' opinion. In the parent-child communication, these students report lower self-disclosure to parents. However, parental psychological control and behavioral control are not related to students' dating behaviour.

Sexually active students report lower quality of parent-child relationship, less time spent in the family but more time spent with friends, alone and part-time work. Concerning perception of parental dis/approval of early sexual intercourse, these students are likely to report stronger disapproval when comparing with sexually inactive students. These students also perceive greater needs for autonomy and independence at an earlier age. About sex education at home, these students said their parents are less likely to discuss or talk to them about certain sexual issues, for instance, mate selection, contraceptive use and potential consequences of early sexual intercourse.

Parenting practices, dating and sexual intercourse

Parental control

Although this study finds that psychological control is not associated with dating, parental behavioral control is associated with dating and sexual intercourse. Higher parental behavioral control, parental knowledge of children's activities, expectations, monitoring and discipline of child's behaviour, are associated with less time spent on dating. This is consistent with Friedlander and her colleagues' study (2007) that higher

parental knowledge of children's activities and monitoring are related to lower number of dating activities. However, Friedlander and her colleagues (2007) mentioned that the effects of parental monitoring on dating in the early adolescent years are still unknown.

Parental knowledge, one of the aspects in behavioral control, is associated with sexual intercourse. Students who are sexually inactive report higher parental knowledge of their whereabouts after school and in free time than sexually active students. It is consistent with Small and Luster's study (1994) and Longmore, Manning and Giordano's study (2001) that parental monitoring is a significant predictor in adolescents' sexual behaviour. Parents who actively involve in monitoring their children can delay the onset of sexual activity. Monitoring is the extent to which parents know the whereabouts of their child and show interest in what their children do in free time, are good predictors of sexual behaviour. Though Small and Luster summarize these features of parenting into the category of parental monitoring, our study adopts Shek's (2005) ideas of measuring parental knowledge of their children's activities. Shek (2005) agreed with Stattin and Kerr's arguments (2000) that parental monitoring is different from parental knowledge of teenagers' activities because parental knowledge is based on communication between parents and their children and children's willingness in disclosing information to parents. As in previous studies, self-disclosure consistently relates to higher levels of parental knowledge (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Hence, parental monitoring and parental knowledge cannot be separated

independently, as parental monitoring can be altered with the support of parental knowledge.

In order to explain the relationship between parental monitoring or knowledge and dating or sexual intercourse, the role of parents in affecting child development cannot be neglected. Parents act as active socialization agents in interacting with their children (Hoffman, Hall & Paris, 1994). Parents intend to convey their values and standards, teach children the right and wrong ways of doing things and set rules and standards of children behavior. Parents who have more knowledge of children's activities and situations may set higher or lower monitoring for their children. According to McCabe's theory of adolescent dating (1984), children who experience higher parental monitoring may have less opportunities to be unsupervised. These children are less likely to engage in dating behaviour which may not be approved by their parents at this age. The behavioral-ecological model identifies that inadequate parental supervision may allow children to do things which are not approved by parents, such as engaging in dating relationship or having sexual intercourse. Parental monitoring or knowledge of children's activities serve as a protective factor in preventing children from engaging in dating or sexual behaviours.

Two factors, parents' educational level and children self-disclosure to parents, affect parental monitoring and knowledge. Mothers with higher education level tend to have higher parental knowledge, expectation and discipline on their children. Fathers

with higher education level tend to have higher behavioral control in terms of parental knowledge, expectation, monitoring and discipline. Parents with higher educational level may have more information of sources about good parenting. They may also set higher expectations on children's performance and behaviour. Stattin and Kerr (2000) proposed that children's voluntary disclosure of their information is crucial in parenting process. In this study, children self-disclosure to parents is positively correlated with parental knowledge. Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx and Goossens's study (2006) demonstrated that adolescents' self-disclosure is found to be a stronger predictor of problem behaviors than active parental regulation strategies. Child to parents disclosure may affect by family climate and quality of parent-child relationship. If children experience a warm and close relationship with their parents, they are more likely to disclose themselves. Soenens and his colleagues (2006) also suggested that parent's active involvement is associated with parental knowledge.

Moreover, adolescents' pattern of time spent can reflect their involvement in dating and sexual behaviours. Students who are engaged in dating or had sexual intercourse are more likely to have more unsupervised time and less time spent with family. This pattern of time spent may become one of the risk factors that adolescents can behave improperly or make wrong decisions without asking their parents. The majority of sexually active adolescents had sexual intercourse at their or their partner's home. It can be proved that it is dangerous to leave children at home alone.

Parent-child relationship

This result supports Dittus and Jaccard's findings (2000) and Lammers and his colleagues' study (2000) that higher quality of parent-child relationship is related to later and less sexual intercourse. The interplay between parents and their children is reciprocal socialization (Feldman, 2008). Higher quality of parent-child relationship may offer more chances for parents and adolescents to match expectations of proper behaviors. It can also foster honest self-disclosure and provide parents with accurate monitoring-relevant knowledge (Crouter & Head, 2002). If children satisfy with this relationship, they may listen to parents' advices about managing dating relationship and time spent.

Sex education at home

Regarding adolescent sexuality and dating relationships, children are first nurtured at home (Porter, 1991). Parents are the primary influences on their children and have great impacts on their developing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Burtney & Duffy, 2004). Nevertheless, the result of this study shows that half of the students have not had sex education at home and they even do not know the reasons behind. It seems that sexual issue is still a taboo in Chinese society. Studies support that family discussion about sexual matter is related to higher levels of knowledge about sexuality (Fisher, 1989) and more likely to delay first sexual intercourse (Dilorio, Kelley & Hockenberry-Eaton, 1999). However, sex education at home is not associated

with sexual intercourse in this study because of several reasons. The topics of sexual issue and children willingness to discuss with their parents are crucial. To extend previous research on topics of sex education, this study adds some sexual topics which are not measured in previous research, including mate selection, consequences of early sexual intercourse and moral issues. This study demonstrates that sex education at home with specific topics, like mate selection, contraception and potential consequences of early sexual intercourse are associated with later sexual intercourse. Through sex education at home, adolescents may have more accurate information about sex before making any decisions by their own. Moreover, students report that an ideal age of having sex education at home is around 12. It shows that students are ready to discuss and talk about sex with parents when they enter secondary school. The question is whether parents are ready to talk about sex with children or not. Parents' attitude toward sex and feelings on that may also hinder the occurrence of sex education at home.

Perceived parental disapproval of having sexual intercourse

One of the findings in this study is that there is gender difference in perception of parental disapproval of having sexual intercourse which is consistent with those reported in the literature. In Jaccard & Dittus's study (1991), mothers uniformly oppose to their adolescent offspring engaging in sexual intercourse. Their study found that maternal disapproval of having sexual intercourse is higher than paternal one in both genders. Daughters would be significantly more likely than sons to anticipate mothers'

and fathers' disapproval of having sexual intercourse. It is partly consistent with Hampton and McWatters's study (2005) that females are significantly more likely than males to anticipate fathers' disapproval. However, females also perceived stronger maternal disapproval of having sexual intercourse in their study. It may be concluded that fathers and mothers convey a stronger disapproval message to their daughters than sons. Unlike western culture, which encourages egalitarianism in sex role, Chinese culture is influenced by Confucian beliefs and collectivism which behaviour should be bounded by the appropriate and accepted social rules of the group (Moore, 1998, as cited in Moore & Leung, 2001). Premarital sex is not approved in Chinese culture. People should follow the law of propriety that they should keep their virgins until marriage especially to females. Another possible explanation is that females are trained to be more familial and relationship oriented in this Chinese culture as compared to males (Ho, 1987). Because of the strong familial and relationship orientation in females, it would be expected that females would be more influenced by their relationships with parents than men would be (Shek, 2002).

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Limitations

Findings from this present study exhibit that parenting practices and parent-child relationship are related to adolescent dating and sexual intercourse. Even though the influences may decrease as children grow up, this primary influence from parents on children cannot be ignored in child development. There are several risk factors such as low parental monitoring or knowledge about children's activities, poor parent-child relationship, perceived lower parental disapproval of early sexual intercourse and lack of accurate sex education at home. Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001) found that behavioral control serves as a good protective factor. This study reveals that the role of parents in grasping opportunities to teach and to influence children's behaviour is very important. Parents should initiate conversations about sexuality and be informed well of knowledge about sexuality. Nowadays, there are numbers of sources of sexual knowledge, including school, friends, magazines, the Internet and media which adolescents can access (Lin, 2007). Problems may arise if adolescents do not have enough critical thinking ability to distinguish between right and wrong. It may affect their decision making on dating relationship and sexual behaviour. Therefore, parents should play a strong role in helping their children sort through abundant of information they receive, so that they can develop skills and abilities to resist becoming romantically or sexually involved before they are ready for such involvement.

Despite the association of parenting practices, dating and sexual behaviours can be

investigated; an important limitation of the present study is its cross-sectional design. As a result, our data fails to draw firm conclusion about the direction of the parental influences on adolescents' dating and sexual behaviours and, should therefore be considered a preliminary.

The second limitation of this study relates to the validity of the measure of parenting practices. This study is merely about adolescents who relies solely on the students' self report of particular parenting practices, rather than the parents' report of such conversations take place. Previous research proves that there are discrepancies between parents' and their children' s report (Jaccard, Dittus & Gordon, 1998). Students may overestimate or underestimate parental control and parental dis/approval of early sexual intercourse. Future longitudinal research, including children and parents' self-reports, may be ideally suited to reveal reciprocal causal relations among parental control, parent-child relationship and self-disclosure to parents, individual factors and adolescents' dating and sexual behaviours.

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