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Perceived Overparenting and Developmental Outcomes among Chinese Adolescents: Do Family Structure and Conflicts Matter?

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Abstract

“Overparenting” refers to an inappropriate parenting style in which parents intervene intrusively in their children’s development and overprotect them from difficulties and challenges. However, there is scant research on the relationship between overparenting and developmental outcomes in early adolescence. Moreover, the moderating roles of parent–child conflict, family intactness, and the adolescent’s gender on the relationship are undetermined. This study examined the associations between overparenting and developmental outcomes (indexed by egocentrism and positive youth development) of a sample of 1,735 Grade 7 students in Hong Kong (mean age = 12.63; 47.4% females). The moderating effects of parent–child conflict, family intactness, and the adolescent’s gender on these relationships were also examined. The results indicated that paternal overparenting and maternal overparenting were positively related to egocentrism and positive developmental outcomes among young Chinese adolescents. Furthermore, father–child conflict moderated the associations of maternal overparenting with egocentrism and positive youth development. At higher levels of father–child conflict, egocentrism and positive youth development increased at higher levels of maternal overparenting. Family intactness and the adolescent’s gender were also found to have moderating effects. The results provide insights into how familial conditions alter the relationship between overparenting and adolescent development. As related studies using adolescent samples are sparse, this study is pioneering in examining the impacts of overparenting on adolescents.

Keywords: Keywords: overparenting, egocentrism, positive youth development, parent-child conflict, early adolescence

Introduction

The transition from childhood to adolescence is a crucial developmental stage. During this period, adolescents develop their competencies, self-identity, independence, and wider connections with others (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents need parental support and guidance when facing developmental challenges and ecological risks (Galambos et al., 2003). Nonetheless, they expect to be granted more autonomy as they develop their own independent way of thinking and explore the outside world (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986). In the past two decades, parents have devoted a great deal of attention to their children and removed obstacles away from their life paths, in an effort to groom them for future success (Segrin et al., 2012). It is not uncommon for parents to track their children via the Global Positioning System and fill up their spare time with extra tutoring and programs (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Leung et al., 2018). Parents try to preserve their children from potential risks, difficulties, and failure (Leung & Busiol, 2016).

However, although overparenting is common among children of different ages (Gibbs, 2009), the majority of overparenting studies have focused on emerging adults (e.g., Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012); studies on early adolescents are severely lacking. Overparenting in early adolescence is especially salient in Chinese communities, in which parents are particularly anxious about their children's future success in a competitive world (Leung et al., 2018). Besides, the moderating effects of family structure and dynamics on the associations between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes have seldom been explored. In addition, most related studies have not differentiated the relative contributions of fathers and mothers to overparenting (e.g., Schiffrin et al., 2014). In responding to these research gaps, the present study examined the relationship between overparenting and developmental outcomes (indexed by egocentrism and positive youth development) in young Chinese adolescents. The moderating effects on

this relationship of family intactness, parent–child conflict, and the adolescent’s gender were also assessed.

Conceptions of Overparenting

Overparenting has been defined as “a form of developmentally inappropriate parenting that is driven by parents’ overzealous desires to ensure the success and happiness of their children, typically in a way that is construed largely in the parents’ terms, and to remove any perceived obstacles to those positive outcomes” (Segrin et al., 2012, p. 238). Segrin et al. (2012) identified four unique features of overparenting: anticipatory problem-solving and risk aversion, excessive affective response and advice, control over children’s self-direction, and excessive tangible assistance.

As culture crucially shapes child socialization strategies (Bornstein, 2012), Chinese overparenting is likely to have distinctive features relative to Western forms, as Western individualism emphasizes autonomy, independence, and individual competencies, whereas Chinese collectivism emphasizes interdependence, family harmony, and honor (Shek, 2006). Leung et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study of overparenting from the perspectives of parents and adolescents. Eight features were identified from the qualitative data: parental surveillance, intrusion into children’s daily routines and future direction, overemphasis on children’s academic performance, repeated comparisons of children’s performance with other children’s, overscheduling of learning activities, anticipatory problem-solving, excessive care, and excessive affective involvement (Leung et al., 2018). While some features (parental surveillance, intrusion into children’s daily routines and future direction, anticipatory problem-solving, excessive care, and excessive affective involvement) resembled the features of overparenting identified by Segrin et al. (2012), others were unique to Chinese overparenting (overemphasis on children’s academic performance, repeated comparisons of

the children's performance with other children's, and overscheduling of learning activities). In Chinese culture, children's achievements are highly valued by parents, as they bring honor to the family (Chao & Sue, 1996). For this reason, parents focus obsessively on boosting their children's academic results and achievements. Leung and Shek (2019) identified the same features of overparenting in a study of early adolescents.

Overparenting and Adolescent Egocentrism

During early adolescence, the development of formal operational thought enhances adolescents' capacity to conceptualize their own thoughts and take other people's views into account (Piaget, 1962). Egocentrism emerges when adolescents fail to differentiate between other people's thoughts and their own preoccupations, leading to the assumption that others are paying attention to them and to what they are thinking of (i.e., an "imaginary audience"; Elkind, 1967). Corresponding to this "imaginary audience," adolescents develop a "personal fable" (Elkind, 1967) in which they experience exaggerated feelings of being unique, invulnerable, and omnipotent (Shek et al., 2014).

While egocentrism has usually been explained from the cognitive developmental perspective as part of the formation process of formal operational thought (Elkind, 1967), Lapsley (1993) applied a family systems perspective and separation-individuation theory (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986) to account for adolescent egocentrism. Adolescents seek to establish greater individuality so that they can shift from childhood identification with their parents to a more mature interdependent relationship with them. To achieve this transformation, they need to negotiate relationship boundaries with their parents (Longmore et al., 2013). Blos (1962) suggested that egocentrism performs defensive and restitutive functions for adolescent ego development during the separation-individuation process. While "imaginary audience" is related to the adolescent desire for connectedness; "personal fable"

expresses a need for self-assertion and agency (Lapsley, 1993). In families with healthy differentiation, adolescents can achieve individuation and thus maintain a balance between separation and connectedness. However, in poorly differentiated families, adolescents must strive hard to maintain a balance, or must choose between individuality and connections, providing more room for egocentrism to flourish (Lapsley, 1993).

The stage of adolescence brings challenges for parents when adolescents seek greater autonomy and bargain for a looser parent–child relationship boundary (Longmore et al., 2013). They are less tolerant of their children’s vulnerabilities and failures. Parents who engage in overparenting often intrude into their children’s daily routine and future plans. According to family systems theories, enmeshed parent–child relationships and the failure of role differentiation are revealed in adolescents’ psychosocial immaturity and maladjustment (Bowen, 1993; Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1990; Minuchin, 1974). Baumrind (1978) found that parental overprotection prolongs adolescent egocentrism and fantasies of omnipotence. Furthermore, parents who overparent may model the use of aggression, control, and manipulation to achieve success, and a sense of entitlement, superiority, and perfection, which will enhance their children’s narcissistic and egocentric traits (Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Segrin et al., 2012). Previous research has shown that overparenting positively predicts adolescent narcissistic traits and sense of entitlement (Segrin et al., 2012; 2013).

Overparenting and Positive Youth Development

In the positive psychology literature, the concept of positive youth development has emphasized the assets, abilities, and competencies of adolescents (Shek et al., 2007). This literature has contended that positive youth development attributes are not innate but can be nurtured. Lerner et al. (2009) identified six “C”s of positive youth development: competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution. Catalano et al. (2002) proposed a

systematic framework highlighting 15 positive youth development constructs (bonding, resilience, cognitive competence, emotional competence, moral competence, behavioral competence, social competence, spirituality, belief in the future, clear and positive identity, self-determination, self-efficacy, pro-social involvement, pro-social norms, and recognition of positive behaviors).

According to self-determination theory, human agentic action is motivated by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These needs are interwoven and influence each other. As mentioned earlier, adolescents search for self-identity and autonomy during the individuation process (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986), but overparenting restricts the basic human need for autonomy (Schiffirin et al., 2014), which hinders adolescents' development of competencies. In addition, intrusive parenting and overprotection prevent adolescents from differentiating themselves from their parents, which may jeopardize their maturity and psychosocial development (Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1990). Empirical evidence has been provided that overparenting negatively predicts adolescents' self-efficacy (Reed et al., 2016), autonomy, and competence (Schiffirin et al., 2014). Gibbs (2009) further asserted that overparenting "infantilizes" children, leading to incompetence. However, most related studies have been conducted based on a sample of older adolescents just emerging into adulthood. There is a need to examine the relationship between overparenting and positive youth development in younger adolescents.

The moderating roles of parent–child conflict, family intactness, and the gender of adolescents

Parent–child conflict involves disagreement between parents and children, which has been shown to hamper positive adolescent development and lead to pathologies (Shek, 1998). However, parent–child conflict may be regarded as a normative family process when

adolescents strive for more autonomy and greater differentiation from their families, which is an important signal for parents to modify their parenting practice (Steinberg, 2001) and rebuild a more appropriate parent–child relationship boundary (Longmore et al., 2013). The separation–individuation process is important for adolescents’ ego development (Lapsley, 1993). Thus, parent–child conflict may weaken the positive impacts of overparenting on egocentrism and negative impacts on positive youth development by allowing more room for parent–child differentiation.

However, according to family systems theory, one subsystem influences other subsystems within the family (Belsky, 1981; Minuchin, 1974). Dyadic conflict with one parent may push a child to form a coalition with the other parent, particularly in non-intact families or families with intense family conflict (Bowen, 1993; Cox et al., 2001; Minuchin, 1974). The allied parent may be more solicitous in protecting the child to compensate for the loss in the relationship (Nelson et al., 2009). The parent–child coalition thus involves stronger attachment to the allied parent (Minuchin, 1974), and adolescents may perceive more positively on their care and attention. As previous studies have shown that the compensatory process only occurs with mothers (e.g., Belsky et al., 1991), we propose a moderating effect of father–child conflict on the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes. The perceived care and devotion from mothers may enhance the positive development of adolescents when there are higher levels of father–child conflict or in non-intact families. At the same time, the enmeshed mother–child relationship may lead to adolescent egocentrism (Lapsley, 1993). Unfortunately, little research has examined the effects of parent–child conflict and family intactness on the relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes.

According to the psychogenic needs model (Bem, 1974; Hosley & Montemayor, 1997), girls are more sensitive to relational stimuli (e.g., parental warmth and closeness) and have a

stronger attachment to their parents than boys. Hence, parenting behavior is more impactful for girls than boys. However, previous studies have obtained ambiguous results regarding the relationship between overparenting and the adolescent developmental outcomes of boys and girls. While some studies indicated that maternal overparenting was associated with less interpersonal sensitivity for boys (Rousseau & Scharf, 2015), other studies showed that maternal overprotection predicted harm avoidance and self-directedness in girls, whereas paternal overprotection predicted harm avoidance and self-directedness in boys (Oshino et al., 2007). Given these inconclusive findings, it is necessary to examine the moderating effects of the gender of adolescents on the relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental attributes.

The Current Study

The current study examines the relationship between overparenting and the developmental outcomes of Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. We also examine the moderating effects of parent–child conflict, family intactness, and the adolescent’s gender on this relationship. According to family systems theory (Bowen, 1993; Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1990) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), role differentiation failure and restricted autonomy may lead to psychosocial immaturity and maladjustment in adolescents. We hypothesize that paternal and maternal overparenting are related to stronger egocentrism and poorer positive youth development among Chinese adolescents (H1a to H1d). Furthermore, as parent–child conflict represents adolescents’ desire for parent–child differentiation, we hypothesize that father–child conflict weakens the relationship between paternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism (H2a) and positive development (H2b). Moreover, mother–child conflict also weakens the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism (H2c) and positive development (H2d).

Furthermore, father–child conflict may push the adolescent child to form a coalition with his/her mother (Cox et al., 2001), which may strengthen the impacts of maternal overparenting. We hypothesize that at higher levels of father–child conflict, higher levels of maternal overparenting are associated with stronger adolescent egocentrism (H2e) and more positive youth development (H2f). We further hypothesize that the main effect of maternal overparenting on adolescent egocentrism and the moderating effect with father–child conflict are stronger in non-intact families than intact families (H3a and H3b). In addition, higher levels of maternal overparenting are expected to be associated with more positive youth development in non-intact families than intact families (H3c), and the interactive effect of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on positive youth development is hypothesized to be stronger in non-intact families than intact families (H3d). Finally, based on the psychogenic needs model (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997), we hypothesize that the associations of overparenting with egocentrism and positive youth development differ between adolescent boys and girls, with stronger impacts of paternal and maternal overparenting on egocentrism (H4a and H4b) and positive youth development (H4c and H4d) for girls than boys, respectively.

Method

Participants

A multi-stage stratified cluster sampling method (Rubin & Babbie, 2017) was used to recruit respondents for this study, with geographical area and school banding as the stratifying factors. The participants comprised 1,735 students in Secondary One (Grade 7) at 20 secondary schools across Hong Kong. The response rate was 89.0%. Among the respondents, 912 (52.6%) were boys. The mean age was 12.63 ($SD = .78$). There were 367 (22.1%) respondents from non-intact families, including remarried ($n = 144$; 8.2%), divorced

($n = 129$; 7.4%), separated ($n = 58$; 3.3%) and widowed ($n = 36$; 2.1%) families. The majority of the adolescents from non-intact families lived with their mothers ($n = 228$; 62.3%), and 453 (25.8%) came from poor families who received either Comprehensive Social Security Assistance or Full Textbook Allowance, which are means-tested cash assistance provided by the government of Hong Kong.

Procedure

Before data collection, we sent invitation letters to the participants' parents describing the purpose and procedure of the study. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents. Data collection was conducted during classes at the participating schools. Trained research assistants introduced the objectives of the research, the anonymous nature of the data collection procedures, the participants' right to voluntarily participate in and withdraw from the study, and the intended use of the data. Written assent was obtained from the students. The students were invited to fill out a questionnaire that contained measures of perceived parental and maternal overparenting, father-child and mother-child conflict, egocentrism, positive youth development, and some demographic characteristics. Those who did not participate in the study were allowed to do their home assignments in class. The participants were given enough time to complete the questionnaire. The study was approved and monitored by the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-committee of an internationally recognized university.

Measures

Overparenting

Chinese Overparenting Scale (PCOS/MCOS). Based on the literature (e.g., Segrin et al., 2012) and the qualitative findings of focus groups of parents and adolescents (Leung et al.,

2018), a 42-item Chinese Overparenting Scale was developed with eight dimensions: close monitoring (parental surveillance), intrusion into children's daily routines and future direction, overemphasis on children's academic performance, repeated comparisons of children's performance with other children's, overscheduling of learning activities, anticipatory problem-solving, excessive care, and excessive affective involvement (Leung et al., 2018). Each item was rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree." A sample item is "My father/mother requires me to follow his/her plans for my development." Both PCOS and MCOS have shown good reliability and factorial validity among early Chinese adolescents (Leung & Shek, 2019). Higher PCOS and MCOS scores indicate greater perceived paternal and maternal overparenting, respectively. Both PCOS and MCOS showed good reliability in this study (PCOS: $\alpha = .95$; MCOS: $\alpha = .96$).

Parent-child conflict

Father-Adolescent Conflict Scale (FAC) and Mother-Adolescent Conflict Scale (MAC).

Based on the Conflict Behavior Questionnaire developed by Robin and Foster (1989), Shek and colleagues (1995) created a Chinese version. The measurements showed good psychometric properties in a Chinese community sample (Shek, 1998; 2002). A three-item short form was used in this study (Shek, 2002). A sample item is "My father and I always criticize or pick on each other." Each item was rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree." Higher mean scores in FAC and MAC indicate higher levels of father-child and mother-child conflict, respectively. Both FAC and MAC showed good reliability in this study (FAC: $\alpha = .89$; MAC: $\alpha = .90$).

Adolescent developmental outcomes

Egocentrism—Chinese Adolescent Egocentrism Scale (CAES). Based on the literature on egocentrism (e.g., Elkind, 1967; Goossens et al., 2002), Shek and colleagues (2014) developed a 14-item CAES to assess adolescent egocentrism in Chinese communities. Each item in this scale is rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree.” A sample item is “I believe that my views are superior to others’.” The measure showed acceptable internal consistency, construct validity, and factor analysis in a Chinese adolescent sample in Hong Kong (Shek et al., 2014). Higher mean scores of CAES indicate higher levels of adolescent egocentrism. CAES showed good reliability in this study ($\alpha = .86$).

Positive Youth Development—Chinese Youth Positive Development Scale (CYPDS). Based on Catalano’s (2002) framework of positive youth development, Shek et al. (2007) developed the CYPDS to assess the psychosocial competencies of Chinese adolescents. This scale measures 15 psychosocial constructs: bonding, resilience, cognitive competence, emotional competence, moral competence, behavioral competence, social competence, spirituality, belief in the future, clear and positive identity, self-determination, self-efficacy, pro-social involvement, pro-social norms, and recognition of positive behavior. A short form containing 44 items was used. Except for three items on spirituality, which were rated on a 7-point semantic differential scale, all of the items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree.” A sample item is “When I face difficulty, I do not give up easily.” The CYPDS showed good internal consistency, criterion validity, and convergent validity in a validation study (Shek et al., 2007). Higher scores indicate a higher level of positive youth development. CYPDS showed excellent reliability in this study ($\alpha = .96$).

Data Analyses

Correlational analyses were performed to examine the relationships between paternal and maternal overparenting, father–child and mother–child conflict, adolescent egocentrism, positive youth development, and various socio-demographic characteristics (adolescent gender and age, father’s and mother’s age and educational level, family intactness, and economic hardship). Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. For each outcome variable, covariates were entered into the hierarchical regression blocks. Next, the predictors (i.e., paternal and maternal overparenting) were added to the regression equation. Then, the moderator (i.e., father–child and mother–child conflict) was added to the model. Finally, all of the predictors and moderators were mean-centered. Four interaction terms, “paternal overparenting X father–child conflict,” “maternal overparenting X mother–child conflict,” “paternal overparenting X mother–child conflict,” “maternal overparenting X father–child conflict,” were computed and entered into the regression model. If the interaction term significantly predicted adolescent developmental outcome, the moderating effect was supported. Simple slope analyses and plotted graphs (Cohen et al., 2003) were used to interpret the effects of paternal/maternal overparenting on adolescent developmental outcome at high levels (1 *SD* higher than the mean) and low levels (1 *SD* lower than the mean) of father–child/mother–child conflict.

To examine whether the main effects and interactive effects varied between adolescents from intact and non-intact families, a dummy variable was created with the values “non-intact” = -1 and “intact” = 1. Eight interaction terms, “paternal overparenting X intactness,” “maternal overparenting X intactness,” “father–child conflict X intactness,” “mother–child conflict X intactness,” “paternal overparenting X father–child conflict X intactness,” “maternal overparenting X mother–child conflict X intactness,” “paternal overparenting X mother–child conflict X intactness,” and “maternal overparenting X father–

child conflict X intactness,” were computed and added to the regression equation. If the regression of the interaction term(s) on adolescent developmental outcome was (were) significant, the moderating effect(s) of family intactness was (were) supported. Identical procedures were conducted using gender (boys = -1; girls = 1) as the moderator.

Prior to the analysis, linear mixed model analyses were performed to examine the existing variabilities in adolescent egocentrism and positive youth development between schools (i.e., school effects). The interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of each outcome variable was computed. If ICC has a value .05 or above that represents a substantial clustering of observations within schools (Heck et al., 2014), hierarchical linear modeling would be performed.

Results

Missing values in the data were analyzed using the Missing Value Analysis module in the SPSS 26.0 package. The amount of missing data (ranging from 0.1% and 5.7%) and the pattern of missing values of items and measurements indicated that the data were Missing Completely at Random (Enders & Ebrary, 2010). Pairwise deletion was adopted to deal with missing data. Correlation analyses showed that both paternal and maternal overparenting were positively associated with father–child and mother–child conflict, egocentrism, and positive youth development. Regarding demographic characteristics, boys, adolescents from intact families and those with highly educated fathers perceived more paternal overparenting. Maternal overparenting did not correlate with other demographic characteristics. The mother’s age and family economic hardship were not associated with the studied variables. The correlation matrix for the variables is given in Table 1.

[Table 1 to be inserted around here]

The SPSS linear mixed analyses showed that there was significant heterogeneity in adolescent egocentrism at the within-school ($Estimate = .65, SE = .02, p < .001$) and between-school levels ($Estimate = .02, SE = .01, p < .05$). The ICC was .036 ($.02 / [.02 + .65]$), suggesting that 3.6% of the total egocentrism score variability was due to differences between schools. Similarly, significant heterogeneity in positive youth development was identified at the within-school ($Estimate = .65, SE = .02, p < .001$) and between-school levels ($Estimate = .02, SE = .01, p < .05$). The ICC value was .023, suggesting that 2.3% of total positive youth development score variability was due to differences between schools. As the ICC values of adolescent egocentrism and positive youth development were both smaller than .05, the clustering of observations within schools was minor (Heck et al., 2014). Hierarchical multiple regression was therefore performed.

After controlling for the covariates (adolescent gender, father's age, father's and mother's educational levels, and family intactness), paternal and maternal overparenting were positively associated with adolescent egocentrism, with $\beta = .18 (p < .001)$ and $\beta = .15 (p < .001)$, respectively (Table 2). H1a and H1b (i.e., a positive relationship between paternal/maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism) were supported. Contrary to the hypothesized negative relationship between overparenting and positive youth development (H1c and H1d), the results showed positive associations of paternal and maternal overparenting with positive youth development, with $\beta = .09 (p < .01)$ and $\beta = .07 (p < .05)$, respectively (Table 2).

[Table 2 to be inserted around here]

Furthermore, the results indicated that maternal overparenting interacted with father-child conflict to affect adolescent egocentrism (Table 2). The association of maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism increased at a faster rate when there were higher levels ($\beta = .20, p < .001$; Table 3) rather than lower levels of father-child conflict ($\beta = .07, p$

> .05; Table 3). Hypothesis 2e (i.e., father–child conflict intensifies the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism) was supported. Figure 1 provides a graph of the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism at high (1 *SD* higher than the mean) and low (1 *SD* lower than the mean) levels of father–child conflict.

[Table 3 to be inserted around here]

[Figure 1 to be inserted around here]

Moreover, maternal overparenting and father–child conflict had moderating effects on the positive youth development of Chinese adolescents (Table 2). The influence of maternal overparenting on positive youth development increased at a faster rate when there were higher levels ($\beta = .20, p < .001$; Table 3) of father–child conflict rather than lower levels ($\beta = .09, p < .05$; Table 3). Hypothesis 2f (i.e., higher levels of maternal overparenting are associated with more positive youth development at higher levels of father–child conflict) was supported (see Figure 2).

[Figure 2 to be inserted around here]

It was found that family intactness moderated the interactive effect of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on adolescent egocentrism (Table 2). In general, the scores for adolescent egocentrism were higher in non-intact families than intact families, regardless of the level of maternal overparenting. In non-intact families, maternal overparenting was positively associated with adolescent egocentrism at higher levels of father–child conflict ($\beta = .31, p < .001$; Table 3), but the relationship was non-significant when father–child conflict was lower. Similar patterns were found in intact families, but the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism at higher levels of father–child conflict was weaker ($\beta = .17, p < .001$; Table 3) than in non-intact families.

Hypothesis 3b (i.e., the interactive effect of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on adolescent egocentrism is stronger in non-intact families) was supported (see Figure 1).

Moreover, the results indicated that family intactness moderated both the main effect of maternal overparenting and the interactive effect with father–child conflict on positive youth development (Table 2). For the main effect, the positive relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development was stronger in non-intact families ($\beta = .19, p < .001$; Table 3) than intact families ($\beta = .07, p > .05$; Table 3) (see Figure 3). Hypothesis 3c (i.e., higher levels of maternal overparenting are associated with positive youth development in non-intact families) was supported. For the interactive effect of maternal overparenting with father–child conflict, the positive youth development score was generally higher in adolescents from intact families than from non-intact families (Figure 2). In intact families, there was a marginally significant association between maternal overparenting and positive youth development at different levels of father–child conflict ($\beta = .09, p < .10$; Table 3). In non-intact families, the positive youth development scores were lowest when there were lower levels of maternal overparenting but higher levels of father–child conflict. However, the relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development was significantly positive when adolescents perceived more father–child conflict ($\beta = .49, p < .001$; Table 3), whereas the relationship was non-significant at lower levels of father–child conflict ($\beta = .06, p > .05$; Table 3) (see Figure 2). Hypothesis 3d (i.e., the interactive effect of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on positive youth development is stronger in non-intact families) was supported.

[Figure 3 to be inserted around here]

Lastly, adolescents' gender moderated the relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development (Table 2), with a stronger influence of maternal overparenting on positive youth development for boys ($\beta = .20, p < .001$; Table 3) than girls

($\beta = .08, p < .05$; Table 3). Hypothesis 4d (i.e., a stronger relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development for girls than boys) was not supported (see Figure 4).

[Figure 4 to be inserted around here]

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between perceived overparenting and developmental outcomes (indexed by egocentrism and positive youth development) of Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. As suggested by separation–individuation theory, overparenting may lead to poor parent–child differentiation, which contributes to the development of adolescent egocentrism (Lapsley, 1993). In agreement with this theory, the findings showed a positive association between overparenting and adolescent egocentrism among Chinese adolescents. Moreover, adolescents may perceive themselves as superior and privileged when parents do so much for them, leading to a greater sense of entitlement and egocentrism (Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Segrin et al., 2012).

Contrary to the hypothesis of negative associations between overparenting (paternal and maternal) and positive youth development, the results indicated positive relationships. There are three ways to account for these findings. One is that most previous studies have focused mainly on emerging adults (Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1990; Segrin et al., 2012). However, during early adolescence, adolescent children still need parental supervision and support (Galambos et al., 2003). Overparenting fulfills the functions of protection and monitoring of adolescents, which may enhance their competencies. Another possibility is that because the selected targets were Secondary One (Grade 7) students who had just started their secondary school life, they may have needed to adjust to the academic challenges and social threats of the new environment (Sirsch, 2003). During such a transition, overparenting may

protect adolescents, as parents' support and guidance can help resolve their problems and improve their adjustment (Serbin et al., 2013). The third possibility is that Chinese adolescents highly value "relatedness" with their parents and are extremely tolerant of parental demands (Markus & Kitayama, 2003), due to the collectivist-oriented socialization in the Chinese culture (Bao & Lam, 2008). Nevertheless, paternal and maternal overparenting had a small relationship with positive youth development (Cohen, 1988), suggesting that parents' strong involvement and over-enthusiasm may not necessarily greatly enhance their children's positive youth development, as revealed in the previous literature (e.g., Reed et al., 2016; Schiffrin et al., 2014).

Furthermore, family structure and dynamics moderated the relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes, and their interactions affected adolescent development. The relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism increased at a faster rate when adolescents perceived higher levels of father-child conflict. According to family systems theories (Minuchin, 1974), one subsystem of a family may affect another subsystem. When adolescents perceive greater father-child conflict, they may turn to their mothers to form a coalition, particularly when mothers use overparenting to show love and concern to their children. The enmeshment of the mother-child relationship may further increase adolescent egocentrism (Bowen, 1993; Lapsley, 1993). This proposition may also explain why the relationship between maternal overparenting and adolescent egocentrism at higher levels of father-child conflict was stronger in non-intact families than in intact families. In divorced and separated families, father-child conflict may be more intense. When single mothers offer extensive care and guidance to their children as a compensation for the absence of paternal care (Belsky et al., 1991; Villalobos, 2015), an enmeshed mother-child relationship may occur, which is linked to stronger adolescent egocentrism (Lapsley, 1993).

Family intactness and father–child conflict moderated the relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development, respectively. At lower levels of maternal overparenting, poorer youth development was identified at higher levels of father–child conflict and in non-intact families, respectively. With intense father–child conflict or the absence of a father, adolescents may experience insecure attachment and in turn seek attention from their mothers (Brennan & Shaver, 1998). When maternal overparenting increases, the intense care and attention may bring security and comfort to the child, which may enhance their positive developmental outcomes.

Moreover, the results indicated that the interactive effect of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on positive youth development was different between non-intact and intact families. In general, the findings showed that adolescents from non-intact families displayed poorer developmental outcomes than those from intact families, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Amato, 2010). The relationship between maternal overparenting and positive youth development was marginally significant at different levels of father–child conflict in intact families, whereas the relationship was strong at high levels of father–child conflict in non-intact families. The mother–child enmeshment thesis (Belsky et al., 1991) and compensatory hypothesis (Villalobos, 2015) may also account for these findings. In non-intact families with higher levels of father–child conflict, adolescents may feel more secure when mothers make tremendous efforts to guide and care for them. Maternal overparenting, in this sense, serves as a protective factor for adolescent positive development in non-intact families.

Contrary to the psychogenic needs model (Bem, 1974), which holds that girls are more affected by relational stimuli than boys, the association of maternal overparenting with positive youth development was found to be stronger for both adolescent boys and girls. At lower levels of maternal overparenting, positive youth development was higher among girls

than boys. One possibility is that adolescent girls have better self-regulation than boys during early adolescence (Raffaelli et al., 2005); hence, they may exhibit better positive development even without special attention from their mothers. On the contrary, boys are more impulsive and rebellious than girls during early adolescence (Meier et al., 2008), requiring more attention from mothers. However, at higher levels of maternal overparenting, positive youth development increased at a faster rate for boys than girls. Maternal overparenting of adolescent boys entails the allocation of maternal control and resources, which enhances the boys' positive development attributes. In contrast, girls are more sensitive to the pressure and demands imposed by maternal intrusion and psychological control (Pettit et al., 2001). Hence, their positive developmental attributes increase at a lower rate than those of boys.

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it expands the study of overparenting from emerging adulthood to early adolescence and demonstrates the associations of overparenting with egocentrism and positive development among young Chinese adolescents. The findings show that paternal and maternal overparenting are positively related to adolescent egocentrism, which enriches the study of adolescents' cognitive traits from a family systems perspective. Rather than a negative relationship between overparenting and positive youth development, the present findings reveal positive associations of paternal and maternal overparenting with positive youth development in young Chinese adolescents, even though the effect is small. The findings make an important addition to the existing literature on the study of overparenting in early adolescence.

Another important implication relates to the moderating effects of family structure and parent-child conflict on the relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes. These novel findings showed that father-child conflict moderated the association of maternal overparenting with adolescent egocentrism and positive youth development, and that there was a significant difference between intact and non-intact

families in the interactive effects of maternal overparenting and father–child conflict on adolescent developmental attributes. This study illustrates how family structure and family dynamics interact to modify the relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes in Chinese families, which enriches our understanding of the complex familial conditions necessary for the establishment of relationships. The findings make a contribution to the development of family socialization models.

Practically, the study showed that paternal and maternal overparenting were associated with stronger egocentrism and positive youth development in Chinese adolescents, which can help with the design of parent education programs and youth development strategies. On the one hand, overparenting may help early adolescents overcome developmental challenges and ecological threats (Serbin et al., 2013), which enhances their positive development. On the other hand, overparenting may lead to poor parent–child differentiation, which is associated with adolescent egocentrism (Sergin et al., 2012). Family practitioners and youth counselors should be sensitive to the impacts of overparenting and remind parents to strive for balance in their parenting. Furthermore, the findings revealed that at higher levels of father–child conflict, the associations of maternal overparenting with adolescent egocentrism and positive youth development were strong in non-intact families. Family practitioners and youth counselors may need to further explore the family dynamics among members in non-intact families and assist them in dealing with the post-divorce transition (Anderson, 2003).

This study had several limitations. First, we adopted a cross-sectional design, which made it difficult to identify a cause-and-effect relationship between overparenting and adolescent developmental outcomes. A longitudinal study is recommended in future. Second, the study was conducted from the perspective of adolescents, without considering the views of parents. Although adolescents are regarded as the “receivers” of overparenting and their subjective experiences are indeed crucial in shaping their developmental outcomes (Elstad &

Stefansen, 2014; Leung & Shek, 2016), multiple informant sources can better capture different views of the actors in family processes (Day et al., 2001). Third, the effect size of overparenting on positive youth development was small. Although the results have important implications for the usefulness of parental effortful involvement in nurturing their children, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Fourth, the sample was selected from Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a metropolitan city and parents there are highly sensitive to the need to increase their children's competitiveness. However, the impacts of overparenting may also be amplified in mainland China due to the One Child Policy. Hence, there is a need to replicate the study in mainland China and other non-Chinese communities to assess the generalizability of the findings. Lastly, based on family systems theories (e.g., Minuchin, 1974), parent-child enmeshment may play a crucial role in the association between overparenting and adolescent development. However, this construct was not included in the present study. Future research could explore the role of parent-child enmeshment in the relationship between overparenting and adolescent development.

Overparenting has spread rapidly across different age groups and nations, with parents making tremendous efforts to ensure their children's success (Leung & Busiol, 2016). Recently, overparenting among emerging adults has been researched (e.g., Rousseau & Scharf, 2015; Segrin et al., 2012). However, we believe that overparenting starts early in childhood and adolescence, and it continues to impact children's life trajectories. The present study found that both paternal and maternal overparenting were related to egocentrism and positive youth development among young adolescents. The results also showed that father-child conflict and family intactness moderated the associations of maternal overparenting with egocentrism and positive youth development among Chinese early adolescents. In view of the lack of research on overparenting at different ages and places, the present study takes an important step in addressing this research gap.

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Table 1. Correlations of the measuring variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Paternal overparenting	2.60	.80													
2. Maternal overparenting	3.11	.91	.52***												
3. Father-child conflict	2.77	1.38	.30***	.19***											
4. Mother-child conflict	3.03	1.40	.13***	.34***	.34***										
5. Egocentrism	3.04	.82	.26***	.24***	.18***	.14***									
6. Positive youth development	4.21	.81	.14***	.13***	-.14***	-.17***	.22***								
7. Adolescent gender (boys = -1; girls = 1)	N.A.	N.A.	-.09***	-.02	-.05*	.02	-.14***	-.00							
8. Adolescent age	12.63	.78	.00	-.03	.02	.04	.01	-.02	-.07**						
9. Father's age	2.69	1.23	-.01	-.01	.05*	.02	-.02	-.08**	.02	.04					
10. Mother's age	1.92	.89	-.01	.01	.02	-.02	-.04	-.05	.00	.02	.51***				
11. Father's education	3.84	1.11	.10***	-.01	-.01	-.04	.03	.08**	-.05*	-.08**	-.06*	.02			
12. Mother's education	3.69	1.13	.03	.04	-.05*	-.06*	.04	.11***	-.09***	-.13***	-.13***	-.01	.52***		
13. Family intactness (non-intact = -1; intact = 1)	N.A.	N.A.	.06*	-.02	-.00	-.11***	-.01	.06*	-.02	-.14***	-.03	.02	.09***	.12***	
14. Economic hardship (non-poor = -1; poor = 1)	N.A.	N.A.	-.04	.02	-.00	.02	.02	-.02	.02	.11***	.01	-.05	-.25***	-.21***	-.17***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2: Regression of adolescent developmental outcomes by overparenting in the context of parent-child conflict, family intactness and adolescent gender

	Egocentrism			Positive youth development		
	β	R^2	ΔR^2	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1		.02			.02	
Gender of adolescents	-.13***			.03		
Father's age	-.02			-.07**		
Father's education level	.01			.03		
Mother's education level	.02			.08**		
Family intactness	-.01			.04		
Step 2		.10	.08		.03	.02
Paternal overparenting	.18***			.09**		
Maternal overparenting	.15***			.07*		
Step 3		.11	.01		.10	.06
Father-child conflict	.08**			-.13***		
Mother-child conflict	.04			-.19***		
Step 4		.11	.01		.10	.01
Paternal overparenting X father-child conflict	.02			-.04		
Maternal overparenting X mother-child conflict	-.04			.05		
Paternal overparenting X mother-child conflict	-.00			-.01		
Maternal overparenting X father-child conflict	.07*			.06*		
<u>Intactness as a moderator:</u>						
Step 5		.11	.00		.11	.00
Paternal overparenting X Intactness	.02			.04		
Maternal overparenting X Intactness	-.02			-.06*		
Step 6		.12	.00		.11	.00
Father-child conflict X Intactness	-.02			.01		
Mother-child conflict X Intactness	.06*			.06*		
Step 7		.12	.00		.12	.01
Paternal overparenting X Father-child conflict X Intactness	N.A.			N.A.		
Maternal overparenting X Mother-child conflict X Intactness	N.A.			N.A.		
Paternal overparenting X Mother-child conflict X Intactness	N.A.			N.A.		
Maternal overparenting X Father-child conflict X Intactness	-.06*			-.08**		
<u>Gender as a moderator:</u>						
Step 5		.11	.00		.11	.00
Paternal overparenting X Gender	.01			.00		
Maternal overparenting X Gender	.01			-.06*		
Step 6		.12	.01		.11	.00
Father-child conflict X Gender	-.01			-.02		
Mother-child conflict X Gender	-.07**			-.04		
Step 7		.12	.00		.11	.00
Paternal overparenting X Father-child conflict X Gender	-.04			-.03		
Maternal overparenting X Mother-child conflict X Gender	-.01			-.01		
Paternal overparenting X Mother-child conflict X Gender	-.03			-.04		
Maternal overparenting X Father-child conflict X Gender	-.01			-.00		

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Simple slope analyses of the prediction of overparenting on adolescent developmental outcomes with adolescent gender, family intactness and parent-child conflict as moderators

Moderator	Predictor	Regression Coefficient (β)			
		Overall	Non-intact families	Intact families	
Egocentrism					
Father-child conflict	Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	Maternal overparenting	.20***	.31***	.17***
	Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)		.07	.07	.06
Positive youth development					
Father-child conflict	Higher level (+1 <i>SD</i>)	Maternal overparenting	.20***	.49***	.09†
	Lower level (-1 <i>SD</i>)		.09*	.06	.09†
Family intactness	Non-intact	Maternal overparenting	.19***	N.A.	N.A.
	Intact		.07	N.A.	N.A.
Adolescent gender	Boys	Maternal overparenting	.20***	N.A.	N.A.
	Girls		.08*	N.A.	N.A.

† $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Regression of adolescent egocentrism by maternal overparenting in high and low levels of father-child conflict in overall sample, intact and non-intact families

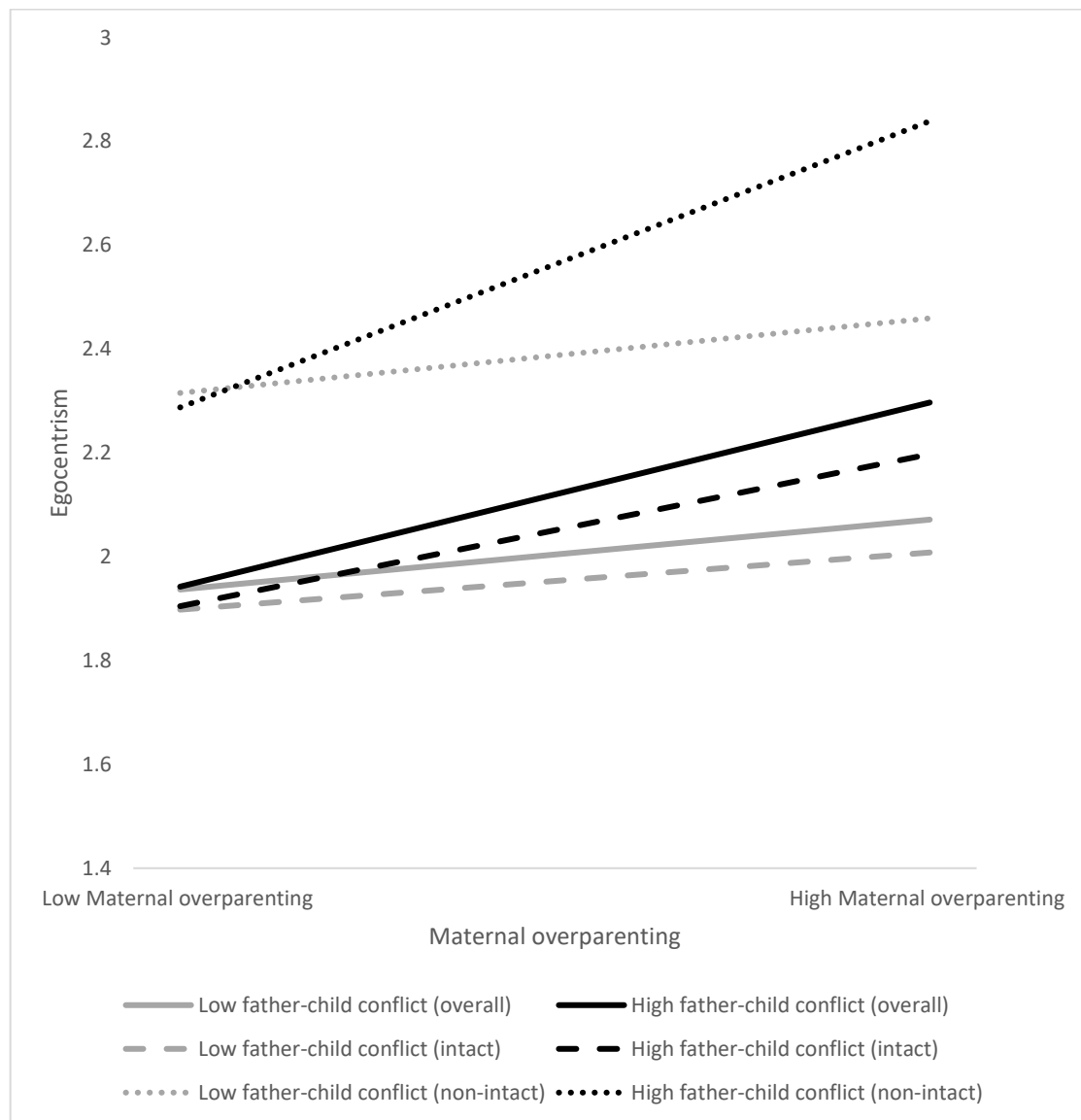


Figure 2. Regression of positive youth development by maternal overparenting in high and low levels of father-child conflict in overall sample, intact and non-intact families

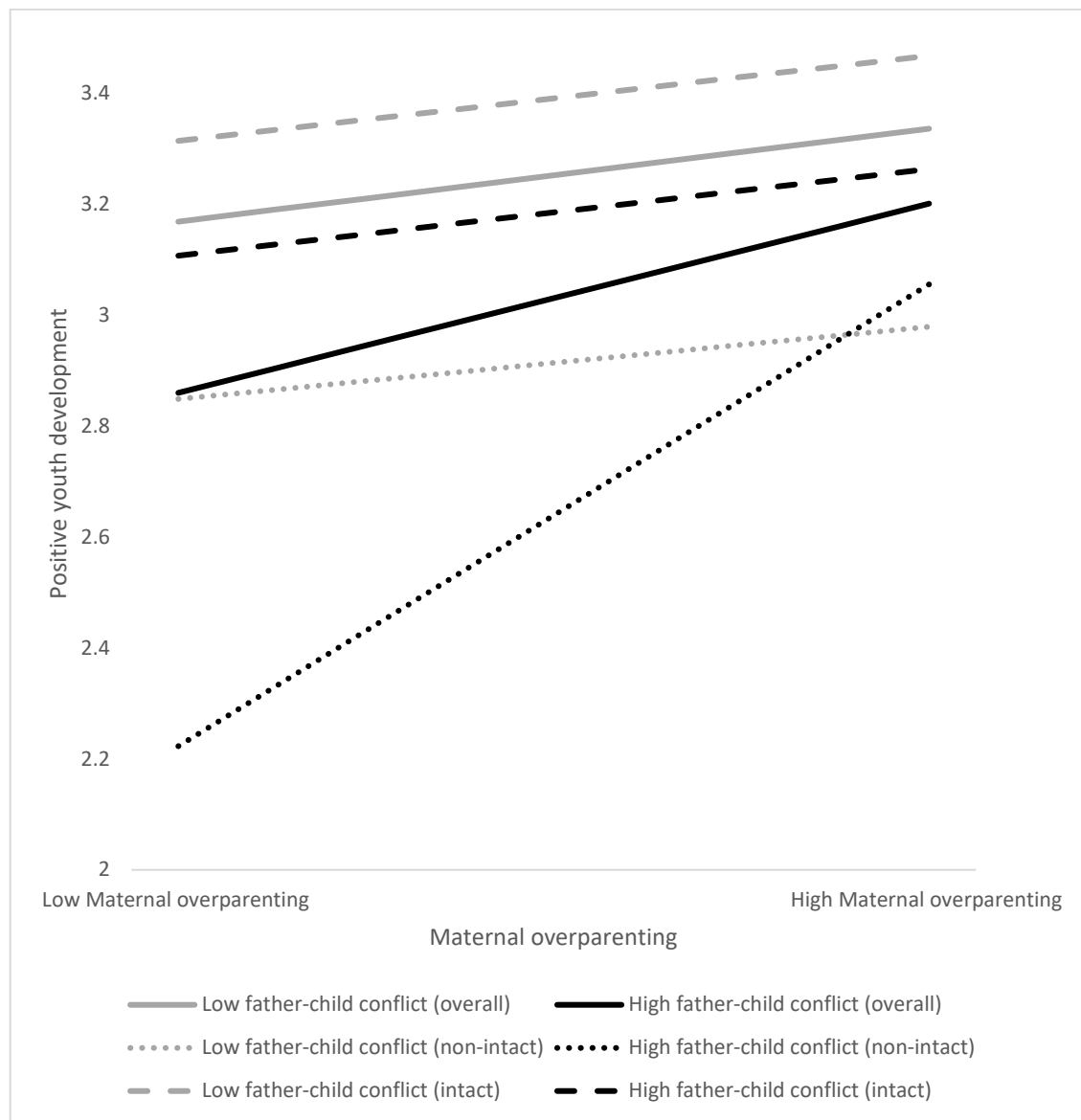


Figure 3. Regression of positive youth development by maternal overparenting in intact and non-intact families

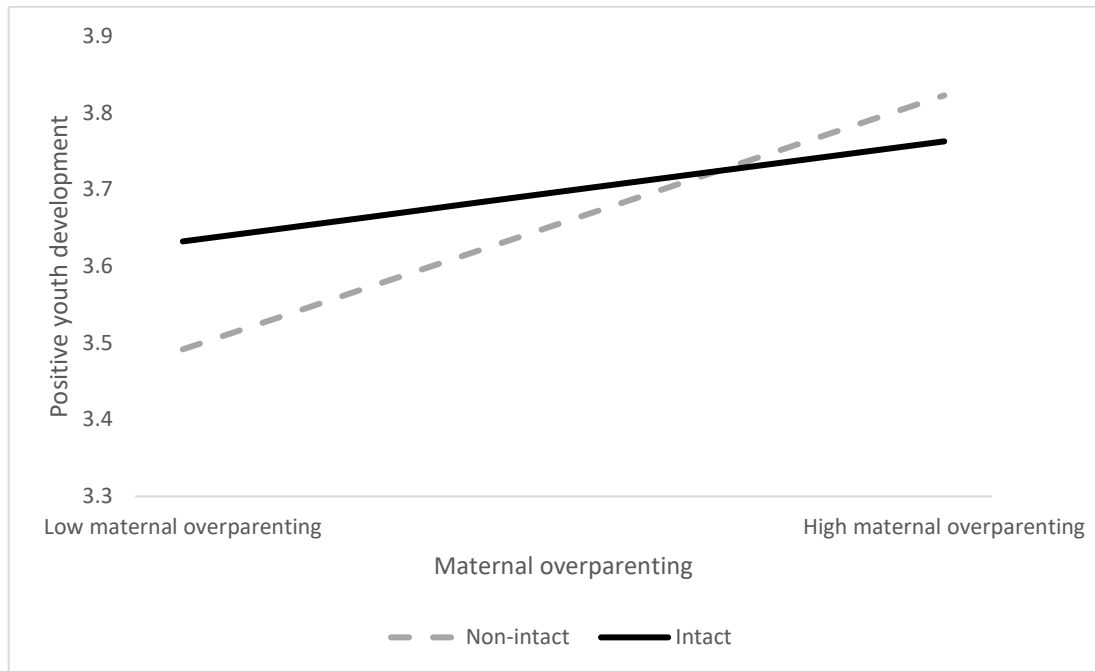


Figure 4. Regression of positive youth development by maternal overparenting between boys and girls

