

Over-parenting from the perspectives of Chinese parents and youths

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Abstract

Overparenting has become an emergent parenting style since the 2000s and blossomed rapidly globally. Unfortunately, empirical studies on overparenting are severely lacking particularly in the Chinese context. This study explored the views of Chinese parents and youths on overparenting in Hong Kong. Based on four focus groups involving 23 parents and five young people, eight themes were extracted from the qualitative findings, including close monitoring, intrusion of child's life and direction, strong emphasis on child's academic performance, frequent comparisons on child's achievement with peers, anticipatory problem-solving, overscheduling of child's activities, excessive care, and excessive affective involvement. While some of these themes correspond to overparenting concepts in the Western contexts, some themes are distinctive to the Chinese culture. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Overparenting, focus group, Chinese, parental intrusion, helicopter parenting

Introduction

Since the 2000s, overparenting has become an emergent parenting style that draws the attention of mass media and the public. Generally speaking, overparenting refers to the phenomenon that parents are over-involved in their children's daily routines and become highly intrusive in their children's lives. It is not surprising to find out that some parents even use Global Positioning System (GPS) to constantly track the whereabouts of their children, asking for special privileges and attention from the teachers for their children, scheduling many interest classes and extracurricular activities for developing "talents" of their children (1, 2), and actively building up a "greenhouse" for their children to grow up so as to fulfill the dreams of the parents (3).

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Conceptually, there are different definitions of overparenting. According to Segrin et al. (4), overparenting refers to “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” (4). Similarly, Rousseau and Scharf (5) defined overparenting as “the use of developmentally inappropriate levels of involvement, control, and problem-solving by parents of young adults, and indicates problems in family differentiation, as it emphasizes relatedness while disregarding autonomy” (5). Although both definitions emphasize overparenting as a “developmentally inappropriate parenting,” they have different foci.

In fact, there is muddiness in defining and conceptualizing overparenting (3). While some researchers posit overparenting as “parenting characteristics taken to an inappropriate degree” (6) and focus on the “excessive” levels of parental demandingness, responsiveness, and involvement (7), others look for specific and unique features of overparenting. Regarding the former view (i.e., looking into excessive levels of parenting), Locke et al. (7) conducted a qualitative study to examine the concept of overparenting based on the different aspects of parental demandingness (e.g. demands, supervision, and disciplinary efforts) (8) and responsiveness (e.g., supportive and acquiescence to the child’s needs) (8), and suggested that the “excessive” proportion only applied to parental responsiveness but not fully in parental demandingness. While some characteristics of overparenting demonstrate a high level of parental demandingness (e.g. strict parental control, over-scheduling of children’s routine), some overparenting behavior does not show high parental demandingness, such as over-protection of children and risk aversion.

Regarding the unique characteristics of overparenting that are different from other parenting styles and practice, Segrin et al. (4, 9) identified four features of overparenting, including anticipatory problem-solving and risk aversion, excessive advice and affective involvement to children, control over children’s self-direction, and provision of over-abundant tangible assistance. Garst and Gagnon (10)

suggested three main types of overparenting: helicopter parenting, lawnmower parenting, and intrusive parenting. Helicopter parenting refers to parents who excessively shield risks and solve problems for their children; lawnmower parenting means that parents “mow” away from the obstacles from their children’s life paths; and intrusive parenting refers to over-scheduling and micromanagement of their children’s daily routine. An integration of these views suggests some common understanding of overparenting: parents exercise high levels of parental control, care and involvement of their children in their daily routines and life plans, and at the same time they grant less autonomy to them.

As culture plays a crucial role in shaping parenting strategies and adolescent development (11), it is anticipated that there would be differences in the concepts of overparenting between Chinese and Western societies. Particularly, parenting in the Western societies builds on an individualistic perspective that focuses on independence, self-identity, and autonomy of the offspring which is fundamentally different from Chinese parenting that is grounded in a collectivistic perspective focusing on one’s responsibilities to bring honor to the family (12, 13).

There are some unique features of Chinese parenting that have relevance to the Chinese concepts of overparenting. First, Chinese parenting is characterized by high levels of demandingness, behavioral and psychological control over their children (14, 15). Second, good academic performance and personal achievements are stressed by Chinese parents so as to build up family pride (16, 17). Third, parents are highly involved in their children’s education and development, and are ready to sacrifice their own needs and interests (18, 19). Fourth, parental control and parental care can coexist from the same parent at the same time (20). These features may serve as an incubator for formulating the Chinese concept of overparenting. Unfortunately, research related to the conceptualization of overparenting is almost non-existent in different Chinese contexts. Computer searches of PsycINFO in April 2017 using the search term “overparenting” produced only 27 publications. The number of citations dropped to “0” when the search term “Chinese” was added. As such, there is a need to explore the conceptions of overparenting in the Chinese context.

Against this background, the study attempted to understand the conception of over-parenting from the perspectives of Chinese parents and youths in Hong Kong. Qualitative research using focus group interviews was conducted in the current study. The qualitative research approach explores the interpretive understanding of human experiences and provides more rooms for the exploration and creative synthesis of social reality (21, 22). This allows the participants to voice out interpretive meanings of overparenting that they have observed and experienced. Among different qualitative data collection strategies, focus group was used to understand the views of parents and adolescents on overparenting. Focus group is “a qualitative research technique used to obtain data about feelings and opinions of a small group of participants about a given problem, experience, service or other phenomenon” (23, p. 414). Krueger (24) suggested that focus group interviews can “tap into human tendencies” (p. 10) by capturing the attitudes and perceptions of the participants on a concept or product. This method is particularly sensitive to capture culturally sensitive phenomenon (25). The focus group methodology has been widely used in youth research in Hong Kong (26).

Methods

In this study, three focus groups of parents and one focus group of youths were recruited. The members of both parent and youth focus groups were recruited from eight children and youth service centers of a non-governmental organization in Hong Kong. There were totally 23 parents participated in the focus groups, forming three focus groups with nine, seven and seven members respectively. Most of them were mothers ($n = 22$, 95.7%), with one father joining the focus group. The mean age was 45.21 ($SD = 5.03$). The educational levels of the participants were quite diverse, with five parents (21.7%) with junior secondary level, five (21.7%) completed Secondary 4 and 5 (Grade 10 and 11), 4 (17.4%) completed Secondary 6 and 7 (Grade 12 and 13), four (17.4%) completed post-secondary education and five (21.7%) completed their undergraduate degree or above. Amongst the respondents,

11 (47.8%) participants were housewives and seven (30.4%) participants were managers or professionals. The majority of the participants were married with their first marriage ($n = 18$, 78.3%), while three were divorced (13.0%), one was widowed (4.3%) and one had their second marriage (4.3%). The household income also varied among the participants: HK\$10,001 - HK\$20,000 (US\$1,282.2 - US\$2,564.1); $N = 6$ (26.1%); HK\$20,001 - HK\$30,000 (US\$2,564.2 - US\$3,846.2); $N = 5$ (21.7%); HK\$60,001 - HK\$70,000 (US\$7,692.4 - US\$8,974.4); $N = 4$ (17.4%). A higher proportion of parents had two children ($N = 12$, 52.2%), while 8 (34.8%) parents had only one child. Among their children ($N = 41$), 29 (70.7%) were boys and 12 (29.3%) were girls. The age of their children ranged from 4 to 25, with the mean age of 14.56 ($SD = 4.81$).

Regarding the focus group for youths, there were 5 participants. All were females with the mean age at 19.60 ($SD = 1.52$). Four of them studied in university and one studied in a community college. All lived together with parents. All of them had intact families, with a mean family size of 4.40 ($SD = 0.55$). Four (80.0%) had one sibling and one had two siblings (20.0%). Three of them (60.0%) had a monthly household income of HK\$10,001 - HK\$20,000 (US\$1,282.2 - US\$2,564.1) and the remaining two had the monthly household income (40.0%) of HK\$30,001 - HK\$40,000 (US\$3,846.3 - US\$5,128.2).

Data collection was conducted in three children and youth service centers operated by the non-governmental organization. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants. The first author was the moderator of the focus group, and she led the discussion based on an interview guide (see appendix 1). The participants were encouraged to express their observations, experiences, views, and opinions of over-parenting in the group. The focus group interviews lasted for a duration of approximately one hour. All of the interviews were audio recorded under the consent of the participants, and the verbatim was transcribed by student helpers from a university.

Data analysis

A general qualitative orientation was adopted in this study (27). To interpret the qualitative data, thematic analyses using pattern coding was performed. Miles and Huberman (28) suggested that pattern coding is “a way of grouping those summaries into a small number of sets, themes, or constructs ... it’s an analog to the cluster-analytic and factor-analytic devices use in statistical analysis” (28). To ensure the reliability of the coding, inter-rater reliability check of the selected codes was performed by the first author and the third author.

Results

In this study, eight themes were extracted from the qualitative data, including close monitoring, the intrusion of child’s life and direction, strong emphasis on child’s academic performance, frequent comparisons on child’s achievement with peers, anticipatory problem-solving, overscheduling of child’s activities, excessive care and excessive affective involvement. To assess the inter-rater reliability, the third author coded 96 narratives from parents’ and youth’s focus groups into eight themes. The first author then recoded the 96 narratives again without knowing the original codes of the third author. The agreement of narratives having the same coding between the first author and the third author was 88 (91.7%). Each theme was discussed in details.

Theme 1: Close monitoring

Both parents and youths identified “close monitoring” as a dimension of overparenting. Overparented parents require the children to strictly follow the rules they had set and report the whereabouts to them constantly. Here are some narratives from the parents and youths:

“In order to monitor my elder daughter, I used to tell my parents (my child’s grandparents) what my daughter needed to do every day. When my daughter did not meet my requirements or I received any complaints from others, I would give her serious physical punishment. In short, I have

set strict rules and regulations for my daughters to follow.”
(Madam K, parent)

“Wherever they go and whatever they do, they [children] have to ask permissions from their [overparented] parents...Their parents like to regulate what they should or should not do. If the children do something without seeking permission from their parents, or when they make mistakes afterwards, they will be scolded repeatedly all day long.”
(Madam K, parent)

“Some adolescents have to go back home within the time limit set by their parents. If they do not do so, they would not be allowed to hang out with friends for one month as a kind of punishment. I have a secondary classmate whose parents are very strict in regulation. If my classmate hangs out with friends at night, her parents would give her non-stop calls and ask the name and telephone number of her friends. They would even call her friends to confirm whether she was really hanging out with them.”
(Miss E, youth)

Moreover, parents also track their children’s whereabouts and behaviors. With the advance of technology, they use the Internet to track the behaviors of their children. Madam M and Madam E had some observations on these parental behaviors:

“I have heard a mother requesting her daughter to do homework at home and then she went to the gymnasium. Surprisingly, she could check out at the gym room that her daughter was surfing the Facebook at home.” (Madam M, parent)

“I witnessed some parents who picked their children up after school though their children were already studying in secondary schools. Moreover, it was not a common practice that parents would accompany their children in school picnic in secondary schools, yet some parents would go to the destination to look for their children.” (Madam E, parent)

Theme 2: Intrusion of child’s life and direction

Both parents and youths agreed that parents who exercised overparenting intruded into the lives and direction of their children. Parents were particularly sensitive to the social circles of their children. They interfered their children in building relationship with peers. Here are some narratives from the parents:

“I witnessed a parent restricting her child to make new friends. In a dialogue, a boy told his mom ‘Mommy, I want to have lunch with a classmate.’ Then, the mother asked ‘How is the academic performance of that classmate? Does he have outstanding academic results? What is his academic ranking in your class?’ After the boy told his mother that his classmate was not good in the study, his mother said ‘Oh, you should not get along with him then. You should not make friends of low quality. You ought to find other good classmates to have lunch with you.’” (Madam I, parent)

“Just take hanging out with friends at night as an example. A Form 3 student wanted to have their social life and sometimes have dinner with his friends. However, his parents did not allow him to hang out with friends at night in order to protect him from getting along with delinquent friends. If the boy did not follow the rules, his parents may deduct his pocket money. I think this kind of behaviors would affect their children’s personal development and the chance to build up interpersonal relationship.” (Madam L, parent)

However, the youth informants discussed more deeply on parents’ interference of the choices of their study and career. They found that overparented parents would “impose” or “persuade” their desired choice of study and career to their children, regardless of their children’s will and interests. Here are some narratives from the youths:

“I remember that I have a schoolmate who chose to study science because of the pressure from her parents. When she was in Form 3, she had to choose the subjects of Humanities or Science for further study. I think she was fond of subjects of Humanities. After communicating with parents, she was requested to study science instead of humanities. Since she had no interest in science at all and encountered lots of unsolved studying difficulties, she could not get the entry ticket of university finally.” (Miss U, youth)

“I have a friend who got fair scores in the public examination and he was qualified to study bachelor of business administration in HKUST [Hong Kong University of Science and Technology] ... His mother wanted him to study Engineering aboard, despite the fact that my friend studied business in secondary school. My friend was very depressed at that time... My friend’s mother didn’t really care about the true choice of my friend.” (Miss D, youth)

To illustrate this point further, the conversation between the moderator and an informant is presented below:

(Y: Miss Y, youth; M: Moderator)

Y: Though I didn’t want to study in a secondary school for girls only, I had no choice but to do so since my mother already put the school at the first place in the application form. When I had to choose the study stream, I prefer to study Chinese history but my mother wants me to study Accountancy. At last, she successfully persuaded me to study Accountancy. However, I didn’t perform well in Accountancy. In my opinion, I am more suitable to study Arts subjects instead of Science and Mathematics subjects.

M: How did your mother persuade you to study a subject that you have no interest in?

Y: Actually, I don’t hate Accountancy. But I didn’t anticipate that it was a difficult subject and I had to learn complicated calculation. Since my mother said choosing a subject in both Art and Science stream is more beneficial for my future study path, I was convinced to follow her plan.

M: Did parents usually use the reason of practicality or career path to persuade their children when choosing the study subjects?

Y: Yes, they did. And they usually ignored the interest and ability of their children.

Theme 3: Strong emphasis on child’s academic performance

The emphasis on children’s academic performance was salient in Chinese parenting. Indeed, overparented parents paid much effort to boost their children’s academic performance. They considered academic performance as the sole indicator to evaluate the future success of their children. There are some narratives from the parents:

“In my community, I know a lot of parents are very nervous about their children’s academic performance. They actively ask their senior students or students of the same grade [from different schools] for past exam papers in order to ‘train’ their children.” (Madam S, parent)

“I think parents who use academic performance as the only indicator to evaluate the success of their children belongs to a group of ‘monster parents’. Though some adolescents are not good at study, they have good potentials

and outstanding performance in other areas such as sports, art, music etc. However, there are many parents using academic results as the only indicator to evaluate their children. To ensure ideal academic performance, parents would help their children do everything in daily life such as feeding and washing clothes for their children. The only thing the children need to do is to strive for good academic results” (Madam E, parent)

The youth informants expressed their feelings and stresses when parents over-emphasized on their academic performance. Here are some narratives from the youths:

“Nowadays, students attend tutorial classes at a very early stage. I have a primary student [in my tutorial group] who started to have tutorials when he was only a K2 [studying Level 2 in a kindergarten] child... When the boy sometimes got poor academic performance, his parents would show him unhappy face and this made him much more stressful.” (Miss E, youth)

“I have a classmate who was very afraid of failing a test or exam since her mother must punish him in a very harsh manner.” (Miss Y, youth)

Theme 4: Frequent comparisons of child's achievement with peers

The parent informants observed that parents with overparenting used to compare their children's academic achievement and achievement with their peers. These parents expected that their children would stand out from the peers. They used the peers' results as the reference standard for their children. Here are some narratives:

“I witnessed many parents asking other students about their examination marks and used them to compare with those of their own children. I think the examination marks of other children is none of their business. The scores sometimes may not reflect the abilities of their children. What they should ask should be the difficulty of the examination paper but not the scores of others.” (Madam H, parent)

“There are comparisons among parents. Parents used to compare the academic results of their children with others. Though the parents claimed that they only wanted to have an idea about the range of the scores among the classmates,

they actually aimed to use the scores for comparison. In my opinion, this value [we need to compare with others] will pass to their children. The children would expect studying hard is for standing out from the rest of class rather than for the attainment of knowledge.” (Madam S, parent)

“A story happened in a primary school. Parent A thought his child's masterpiece was better than that of parent B's child. Parent A then came to the school and requested the teacher to add scores to her child's work. She even threatened the teacher if she did not do so, she would report the case to Apple Daily (a local newspaper) or seek help from Law Fan Chiu-fun (former Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau). I think almost all school personnel were afraid of parent A.” (Madam D, parent)

Theme 5: Anticipatory problem-solving

Parents who exercised overparenting actively “mowed” away any obstacles that might hinder their children's development. Sometimes they were aggressive in solving the anticipated difficulties that their children might encounter, which might offend others and weaken the problem-solving capacities of their children. Here are some narratives from the parent and youth informants:

“In some well-known secondary schools, parents of Form 3 students always ask Form 4 students for studying materials and past exam papers of the core subjects. You can see how active and aggressive the parents are, while their children stand beside and remain passive. I think this kind of parenting practices will nurture adolescents to become weak and passive in problem-solving. Also, it will hinder their personal development in the long run.” (Madam S, parent)

“I recognize a parent who liked complaining whenever she felt dissatisfied towards the school practices. For instance, when a teacher made a mistake in a speech in teaching and her child got the meaning wrongly, she would complain to the school principal and even report to the journalists.” (Madam M, parent)

“Because of the poor academic performance, my elder brother had to find a job after study. My mother not only helped my brother fill out job application forms, but also accompanied him to go for job interviews. I think this is an over-parenting practice...Once, I was requested to help my brother line up for a place of study in IVE [Hong Kong

Institute of Vocational Education] after the release of his exam results. I think my brother is mature enough to do it by himself ...” (Miss U, youth)

Theme 6: Overscheduling of child’s activities

As early as early childhood, parents started to prepare their children by scheduling different learning activities such as language acquisition, talent development, tutoring etc. The parents expected that these learning activities would help their children develop competitiveness in the future. These activities became essential so that the children can “win at the starting line.” Here are some narratives from the parent informants:

“One day, I was in a boutique and listened to a parent who has a child studying K1 [Level 1 in a kindergarten], saying that she felt worried about scheduling inadequate activities for her child. She said that some children in the kindergarten would have a schedule of learning different things every hour like dancing, music, abacus calculation etc.” (Madam R, parent)

“I witnessed a girl starting to learn English when she was only three years old. Her parents even hired a teacher to polish her English. The girl had to keep learning many things after school. She is now studying primary school. After school, she has to come back home to learn German and piano. She told me that apart from Friday night, other nights were occupied by different subjects.” (Madam G, parent)

However, the children were found exhausted and stressful, and some of them did not feel interested in the activities at all. The youth informants shared their observations:

“Since many parents nowadays have higher income, they would like their children winning at the starting line. Therefore, they like to arrange many interest and tutorial classes such as phonics and Putonghua for their children. Though my students [in my tutorial group] sometimes got tired of having tutorials, he never speaks to his parents about this feeling. He is a very obedient boy.” (Miss E, youth)

“I was a tutor and I observed some parents arranged a lots of activities for their children every week. Even though their children said that they did not want to participate in

some interest classes such as dancing and piano, their parents still coerced them to join. I feel like those parents are controlling their children without consideration of their true willingness.” (Miss D, youth)

Theme 7: Excessive care

Parents expressed that overparented parents were over-responsive to the needs of the children and adolescents. Rather than training their children to become more independent and responsible for their own self-care, they performed the daily tasks for them, and ensured that their children were taken care of. However, their children were dependent to their parents, and failed to perform the age-appropriate tasks of self-management. Here are some observations from the parent and adolescent informants:

“When my son studied in Primary 6, he once stayed overnight in his friend’s house. His friend was excellent in academic performance in a famous school. But my son told me that he did not know how to wash his face and clean his teeth. His father helped him clean his face. He was 12 years old at that time” (Madam E, parent)

“I met a parent who kept taking lunch box to her child for six years in secondary school. The parent even sat beside the adolescent and helped him wipe his sweat off. She kept doing so for six years.” (Madam C, parent)

“I met some parents who were rich and thought that their [adult] children earned so little, hence they did not require their children to help out with the family expenses. The [adult] daughter got used to asking her mother for pocket money. Recently, she created a Facebook post related to a luxurious meal. She praised her mother and said ‘my mother earns money for me to enjoy this luxurious meal. Ha! Ha! Ha!’ I think it is too much ... The mother even allowed her daughter to stay at home without seeking a job for several years ... I think her parents were nurturing her to become a termite.” (Madam L, parent)

“I think my mother gave too much care to my elder brother. She always helped him tidy up the garbage in his room but never asking him to do it by himself. As a result, my brother lacks good self-care ability in his daily life.” (Miss U, youth)

Theme 8: Excessive affective involvement

Over-parented parents' emotions were easily overwhelmed by the emotions and behaviors of their children. Their over-reaction would exaggerate the consequences of their actions. Here are some narratives from the parent and youth informants:

"Some parents are very nervous and exaggerate minute things. When a child stumbles, just let him stumble. Actually, we get used to stumbling when we were young. There is no need to be so nervous. It is simple, the child learns to be more careful [in the future]. But they would scream, this is very extravagant." (Madam M, parent)

"My mom is very nervous of my elder brother [emerging adults]. For example, when my elder brother was going to have dinner with his friends, she was very worried and anxious." (Miss U, youth)

Discussion

In order to provide the best for their children and prepare them to win in the "rug rat race" competently, parents make great effort to "train" and "nurture" their children. Overparenting becomes the emergent parenting style that blossom across different ages, races, and regions (3,29). However, the study of overparenting is at preliminary stage (4,7). Moreover, culture plays a crucial role in shaping the ecology of parenting and child development (11). Hence, it is essential to understand and study the phenomenon of overparenting with reference to the cultural and contextual characteristics of the community. Against this background, the present study attempted to explore and understand the conceptions of overparenting from the perspectives of Chinese parents and youths in Hong Kong. This is the first known scientific study to understand overparenting in Chinese parents using a qualitative approach. Indeed, this study provides some insights on the understanding and conceptualization of Chinese overparenting, which enhance further studies of overparenting in the Chinese communities.

Based on the Western literature, overparenting is a multi-dimensional construct that parents exercise developmentally inappropriate parenting practices to protect their children from risks by "mowing away"

the problems that they anticipate, and intrude into their children's lives and daily routines (4). From the experiences and observations of the parents and youths in this study, overparenting comprises the themes of close monitoring, parental intrusion and anticipatory problem-solving. That is, rather than allowing more space for their children to explore, attempt and learn from trials and errors, overparented parents tend to solve the problems of their children and impose their preferences on their children's lives and directions. Moreover, overparented parents were supposed to be overprotective towards their children. They show excessive care and excessive affective involvement to their children. Echoed previous research that Chinese parents could be both demanding and responsive to their children (20), parents who exercise overparenting demonstrate close monitoring but at the same time show excessive care in their parenting practice.

Besides, from the qualitative findings based on the Chinese parents and youths, some distinctive features of overparenting were identified, including strong emphasis of academic performance, frequent comparison of child's achievement with peers and over-scheduling of child's activities. These features reflect the emphasis of children's academic performance and personal achievement by the Chinese parents. Exemplary performance in school has been regarded as a familial obligation in compliance with the Chinese socialization value of bringing honor to the family name (30, 31). Chinese parents generally believe that parents play a vital role in the school success of their children by offering parental sacrifice, investment and involvement in the children's learning and schooling (32, 33). Besides, parents used to compare the academic results of their children with their classmates, expecting that their children would excel among the peers. This echoes with the Chinese saying of "*wang zi cheng long*" (i.e., expecting the son to become dragon), with dragon represents "superiority" in the Chinese culture (34). These features would be more prominent in overparenting when parents are more obsessed with children's academic success.

There are theoretical and practical implications of the study. Theoretically, as overparenting is an emergent concept of parenting that is under-researched, especially in the Chinese context, this

study revealed the concept and dimensions of Chinese overparenting from the perspectives of parents and youths in Hong Kong. The findings provide important insights for family researchers and scholars in the conceptions and themes of this emergent parenting style, which may be different from the Western conceptions of overparenting. This helps us develop an indigenous model of Chinese overparenting in the social science literature.

Methodologically, the conceptualization of Chinese overparenting may help researchers develop an indigenous measurement in assessing overparenting applicable to the Chinese communities. Yang (35) suggested that in constructing a new measurement of overparenting, there is a need to do a qualitative pilot study to capture the native meanings and features of phenomenon. As such, this study taped the indigenous views of overparenting from parents and youths, which facilitated the construction and development of a measurement of Chinese overparenting. The availability of a validated indigenous measurement would further enhance future research on examining the relationships among overparenting, family dynamics and adolescent development in the Chinese contexts.

Practically, the themes extracted from the qualitative findings provide important cues for family practitioners and helping professionals to identify families that exercise overparenting and provide timely responses and service for the families. In fact, there are studies in the United States showing that overparenting negatively influenced psychological wellbeing (6) and positively predicted depression and anxiety (5, 9, 36) of emerging adults. Besides, there is empirical evidence that overparenting had adverse effects on parent-child communication, which in turn decreased the family satisfaction of adolescents (4). Hence, it is important for the family practitioners and helping professionals to enhance the awareness of the parents through parental education programs.

Although this is a pioneer study on the structure of over-parenting in a Chinese context, there are several limitations of the study. First, the study was based on the qualitative data collected from focus groups of general parents and youth in Hong Kong. It would be more insightful if parents and youths who were involved in overparenting were recruited. They would provide more information on their actual

experiences on overparenting. Second, only one group of youths (all were females) was recruited in the study. Besides, there is a need to explore the views and experiences from the male youths. Similarly, as most parent informants were mothers, the perspective from fathers on overparenting is indeed important and insightful to understand the concepts of overparenting because parent gender differences were commonly found in the scientific literature (37, 38). Third, parents and youths were recruited in Hong Kong. There may be contextual differences between Hong Kong and other Chinese communities (e.g., mainland China and Chinese communities in the United States). Hence, further studies should be conducted in other Chinese communities. Last but not the least, more qualitative data collection techniques such as case interviews can help to understand the subjective experiences of the informants more deeply.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide of the focus group

1. What does “overparenting” mean to you? What are the features that you perceive in “overparenting”?
2. Have you experienced (exercised) overparenting in your family? What are the practices? Can you illustrate the practices with examples?
3. Have you ever observed parents who exercised overparenting? What were the practices? Can you illustrate the practices with examples?
4. Who used to exercise overparenting, father or mother or both? Are there any differences between paternal overparenting and maternal overparenting? What are the differences?
5. What were the responses of the children on overparenting?

6. What are the possible outcomes of the children when parents exercise overparenting?
7. What are the factors that contribute to overparenting?
8. What are the general demographic characteristics of the families that exercise overparenting? Does overparenting happen mostly in families having high socioeconomic status, and/or in families with lone child?

Ethical compliance

The authors have stated all possible conflicts of interest within this work. The authors have stated all sources of funding for this work. If this work involved human participants, informed consent was received from each individual. If this work involved human participants, it was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. If this work involved experiments with humans or animals, it was conducted in accordance with the related institutions' research ethics guidelines.

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