

## Parental beliefs about parental roles and responsibilities in Chinese parents: Pioneer findings

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### Abstract

This study examined parental beliefs of 5,749 Chinese parents based on an indigenous scale developed in the Chinese context. Results showed that the scale and the subscales were internally consistent. Findings based on frequency analyses revealed that Chinese parents generally held positive beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in parenting. However, Chinese parents showed more conservative attitudes in educating children on sexuality issues. Some parents also did not realize the necessity of learning about parenting, implying that they may be ill-prepared for parenting. Further analyses revealed that mothers possessed stronger parental beliefs than fathers did. Parents with lower educational levels tended to be more conservative in parental beliefs. Family income and employment status were also identified to be predictors of parental beliefs. In general, parents with lower family income or being unemployed tended to hold stronger traditional beliefs about roles and responsibilities in parenting than did high-income or employed parents. The research findings underscore the importance of understanding parental beliefs in Chinese societies.

**Keywords:** Parental beliefs, Chinese parents, parenting, indigenous scale

### Introduction

Parental beliefs refer to parents' knowledge, attitudes, ideas, and concepts in parenting that are accepted to be correct which guide their parenting behavior (1, 2). Parental beliefs provide parents with cognitive frameworks which they can follow to set parenting goals, identify children's demands, use parenting strategies, and lay the base of parenting practices (1, 3). Previous research has demonstrated the positive effect of parental beliefs on child development, especially on children's academic performance and persistence (4).

Most research on parenting was conducted in the West or relied on frameworks developed in Western

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contexts. For example, parenting styles identified by Baumrind, including authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, traditional and rejecting-neglecting parenting (5), have been widely adopted as the theoretical framework of research on parenting. However, researchers trying to relate these styles in non-Western cultures often encounter difficulties when using this framework to interpret indigenous phenomena (6). Wang and Chang (7) suggested that Western concepts and frameworks can hardly capture the essence of parenting in non-Western cultures. The reasons are twofold. Primarily, some concepts developed in Western cultures could be unidentified, vague or even misleading in other cultures (8). Secondly, some indigenous phenomena in parenting practices, such as “training” (Jiao Xun) and “to love and to govern” (Guan) in Chinese culture, can be largely overlooked (8, 9). This echoes LeVine’s model of parenting, which identifies universal as well as cultural aspects of socialization goals of families (10). As the majority of the existing scales measuring parenting were developed in Western cultures and in English, researchers have been calling for the development of indigenous scales that fit specific cultural contexts (11, 12).

Different from parenting in Western cultures, parenting in Chinese societies is strongly guided by Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Shek and Sun (12) identified some characteristics of Chinese parenting, including strict parental control, little personal space for children, different gender role expectation, and strong emphases on harmony, obligations, filial piety, and continuity of the family name. As for parenting in contemporary Chinese societies, Shek and Sun (12) also noted the changing nature of parenting in the Chinese contexts over time. For example, changes in the gender parental role expectation have been observed. Traditionally, Chinese fathers were considered “the masters of the family” who set strict regulations on children’s behavior, while mothers were normally regarded as the “obedient one” taking care of the family and maintaining the harmony. However, mothers in contemporary China seem to be more involved in the socialization process and stricter than fathers do. Although researchers have been gradually aware of the importance of developing culturally sensitive instruments, many of them still

rely on concepts and measures derived from the Western contexts (13). Hence, there is a need to further examine parental beliefs in the Chinese context using indigenous scales.

Previous research has also highlighted the role of parental background socio-demographic characteristics in shaping parental beliefs. For example, as discussed earlier, gender differences between fathers and mothers have been observed. The role expectation of “strict father and kind mother” rooted in traditional Chinese culture may modify fathers’ and mothers’ parental beliefs (12). Educational level has been considered another influential factor affecting parental beliefs. It is suggested that well-educated parents may be more equipped with knowledge and skills in parenting, have a strong level of efficacy, and be less conservative in parenting. They may also hold more liberal attitudes toward human behavior, such as emphasizing gender equality and fair share in family responsibilities. Besides, family economic status is also believed to influence parental beliefs. Leung and Shek (14) pointed out that the primary mission of economically disadvantaged families is to get their children out of the poverty trajectory and to step into a more economically successful future. On the other hand, families with a higher economic status possess more educational resources, which may exert an impact on their parental beliefs. In the present study, gender, educational level, employment status, and family income were included as important parental socio-demographic characteristics. As few studies have examined beliefs about parental responsibilities in Chinese parents and the related correlates, this study attempted to examine the related normative profiles and the demographic correlates.

## **Methods**

A total of 5,749 questionnaires were collected. After removing 42 invalid cases, 5,707 valid responses were used for analyses. Among them, 31% were fathers ( $N = 1,770$ ) and 65% were mothers ( $N = 3,710$ ). The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 97 years old (mean = 52.3 years,  $SD = 13.67$ ). Nearly half of the respondents (48.5%) reported having two children, 30.6% had one child, and 14.3% had three children.

As to the educational level, 14.2% of the respondents attained primary school education or below, 17.1% completed lower secondary education, 31.1% finished secondary school, 6.7% attained matriculation education, 24.2% completed university or higher education, and 4.7% finished graduate school or above. Regarding employment status, 45.7% of the respondents were full-time employees, 10.6% worked part-time, 17% were homemaker, 20.9% were retired, and 1.3% were unemployed. As to the monthly family income, 21% of the participants reported a family income lower than HK\$14,999, 46% were between HK\$15,000 and HK\$49,999, 27% of the respondents had a family income higher than HK\$50,000.

### Instruments

*The Parental Roles and Responsibilities – Chinese Parental Beliefs Scale* was administered in the present study. The initial scale contained 42 items. Participants were asked to indicate the degree of agreement with statements on parents' beliefs about their parental roles and responsibility on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). In the study of Lam, To and Kwong (13), the factorial validity of the questionnaire was examined by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirm-

atory factor analysis (CFA). The working sample was randomly split into two subsets. EFA was performed on one subset (N = 2,925), which resulted in a five-factor solution. Next, CFA was conducted on the second subset (N = 2,596). The results showed an acceptable goodness-of-fit indices of the tested model. Details of the development of the instrument, and the findings of EFA and CFA were reported in Lam, To and Kwong's work (13). The final solution constituted of 23 items, which were categorized under five factors (i.e. subscales): parental love and nurturing (7 items), parenthood as a normative life stage (4 items), readiness to relax and restrict parental control (4 items), parental guidance of the young (4 items), and fulfillment of children's needs (4 items).

### Data analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to generate percentage findings. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the relationships between parental beliefs (and the five factors) and the background socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, educational level, employment status, and family income. All analyses were performed using SPSS (Version 25.0).

**Table 1. Cronbach's alpha, mean inter-item correlations, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients amongst the five subscales and the whole scale**

Subscales	Cronbach's alpha	Mean inter-item correlations	Mean (SD)	Subscales				
				1	2	3	4	5
Parental love and nurturing (7 items)	0.866	0.489	4.28 (0.59)	—	—	—	—	—
Parenthood as a normative life stage (4 items)	0.599	0.375	3.02 (0.87)	.039	—	—	—	—
Readiness to relax and restrict parental control (4 items)	0.709	0.304	3.87 (0.68)	.392	.227	—	—	—
Parental guidance of the young (4 items)	0.739	0.437	4.40 (0.58)	.544	.138	.222	—	—
Fulfillment of children's needs (4 items)	0.749	0.427	3.62 (0.78)	.417	.394	.160	.453	—
38-item whole scale	0.847	0.223	3.90 (0.46)	.755	.556	.585	.674	.736

Note. N= 5,707. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

## Results

The scale showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .80$ ). As shown in Table 1, the five subscales also demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha s > .60$ ). The average inter-

item correlation of the entire sample yielded a value of 0.23. The inter-item correlations among the five factors showed relatively high inter-item correlation of each factor, ranging from .30 to .48 (see Table 1). Ferretich (15) suggested that for scales containing 10

or more items and with an alpha of .71, an average inter-item correlation of 0.2 is acceptable. These findings support the internal consistency of the scale. Cronbach's alpha, mean inter-item correlations, mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients amongst the five subscales and the whole scale are shown in Table 1.

### *Findings based on frequency data*

The details of the descriptive statistics and frequency data are illustrated in Table 2.

#### *Parental love and nurturing*

Most respondents showed a positive attitude in this domain ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = .59$ ). For example, 87.98% agreed that parents should always pay close attention to their children's emotions. Similarly, almost 90% of the respondents agreed that parents should spare time to accompany their children as far as possible. However, around 6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement "parents have to teach their children knowledge about sex" ( $M = 4.03$ ).

#### *Parenthood as a normative life stage*

Respondents presented a neutral attitude of their perception of parenthood as a normative life stage ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .87$ ). The ratings ranged between 2.56 and 3.65. For example, 25.65% agreed that parenthood is developed naturally that there is no need to learn. If the number of neutral responses was taken into account, roughly half of the respondents did not feel the necessity to learn how to parent. Only 20.68% agreed that fostering children can allow the parents to be looked after when getting old.

#### *Readiness to relax and restrict parental control*

Participants showed a moderately positive attitude towards the four statements in this domain ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .68$ ). The ratings ranged between 3.21 and 4.27.

The majority of respondents agreed that parents should respect the wishes of their children (87.10%) and not to impose their wishes on their children (72.48%). However, the statement "parents have to accept their children's sexual orientation, no matter it is homosexual or heterosexual" yielded a relatively low rating ( $M = 3.21$ ). Almost one third of the respondents disagreed with this statement.

#### *Parental guidance of the young*

Most respondents presented a clear and positive perception of their roles and responsibilities in providing guidance of the youth ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = .58$ ). Among the four items, the lowest mean score was 4.21 and the highest was 4.57. For example, 91.44% of respondents agreed that when children do not meet the requirements, parents ought to provide appropriate guidance. In particular, around 93% of the respondents agreed that parents are responsible for preventing their children from getting into bad company.

#### *Fulfillment of children's needs*

The respondents reported a moderately positive attitude in this domain ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .78$ , range from 3.06 to 3.87). The majority of respondents would try to meet their children's needs but in a reasonable manner. For example, 65% agreed that parents are responsible to provide financial support for their children to complete university education. Besides, although 65.6% agreed that if financially possible, parents should provide the best resources for their children, only 31.4% agreed that parents should meet the needs of their children as far as possible.

#### *Relations between parental beliefs and background socio-demographic characteristics*

The relationships between omnibus parental beliefs scale (including the five subscales) and parent's gender, educational level, employment status, and family income were examined.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics and frequency percentage of the 23-item scale**

		1	2	3	4	5	Negative responses	Positive responses	
	Mean (SD)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Options (1-2)	Options (4-5)	
Subscale 1 Parental love and nurturing									
1	Parents should spare time to accompany their children as far as possible	4.45 (0.73)	18 (0.32%)	54 (0.96%)	517 (9.16%)	1863 (33.02%)	3190 (56.54%)	72 (1.28%)	5053 (89.56%)
2	Parents should remind their children the setbacks they may encounter in life	4.19 (0.79)	22 (0.39%)	111 (1.97%)	865 (15.36%)	2395 (42.52%)	2240 (39.77%)	133 (2.36%)	4635 (82.28%)
3	Parents should always pay close attention to their children's emotions	4.38 (0.75)	19 (0.34%)	65 (1.15%)	593 (10.53%)	2021 (35.87%)	2936 (52.11%)	84 (1.49%)	4957 (87.98%)
4	Parents should pay attention to their children's point of view about various matters	4.19 (0.79)	26 (0.46%)	103 (1.83%)	852 (15.12%)	2430 (43.13%)	2223 (39.46%)	129 (2.29%)	4653 (82.59%)
5	Parents should express their love for their children	4.41 (0.76)	19 (0.34%)	72 (1.28%)	614 (10.89%)	1829 (32.43%)	3106 (55.07%)	91 (1.61%)	4935 (87.5%)
6	Parents have to teach their children knowledge about sex	4.03 (0.95)	113 (2.01%)	219 (3.89%)	1130 (20.06%)	2097 (37.22%)	2075 (36.83%)	332 (5.89%)	4172 (74.05%)
7	Parents should start from their children's point of view to understand their feelings and needs	4.32 (0.77)	24 (0.43%)	76 (1.35%)	678 (12.02%)	2144 (38.01%)	2718 (48.19%)	100 (1.77%)	4862 (86.21%)
Subscale 2 Parenthood as a normative life stage									
8	Parenthood is developed naturally that there is no need to learn	2.59 (1.32)	1574 (28.04%)	1211 (21.57%)	1389 (24.74%)	835 (14.87%)	605 (10.78%)	2785 (49.61%)	1440 (25.65%)
9	Fostering children can allow the parents be looked after when getting old	2.56 (1.25)	1426 (25.33%)	1312 (23.31%)	1727 (30.68%)	615 (10.93%)	549 (9.75%)	2738 (48.64%)	1164 (20.68%)
10	Parenting should go naturally that there is no need to plan too much	3.29 (1.18)	473 (8.41%)	909 (16.15%)	1772 (31.49%)	1478 (26.27%)	995 (17.68%)	1382 (24.56%)	2473 (43.95%)
11	Parents have to keep the values of their own	3.65 (0.99)	188 (3.34%)	365 (6.49%)	1855 (33%)	2019 (35.92%)	1194 (21.24%)	553 (9.84%)	3213 (57.16%)
Subscale 3 Readiness to relax and restrict parental control									
12	Children's future development cannot be controlled by their parents	4.01 (1.01)	145 (2.58%)	262 (4.65%)	1168 (20.75%)	1872 (33.26%)	2182 (38.76%)	407 (7.23%)	4054 (72.02%)

(Table 2 continued on next page)

		1	2	3	4	5	Negative responses	Positive responses	
	Mean (SD)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Options (1-2)	Options (4-5)	
13	Parents should respect the wishes of their children	4.27 (0.72)	17 (0.3%)	50 (0.89%)	660 (11.71%)	2551 (45.26%)	2358 (41.84%)	67 (1.19%)	4909 (87.1%)
14	Parents have to accept their children's sexual orientation, no matter it is homosexual or heterosexual	3.21 (1.31)	828 (14.74%)	753 (13.4%)	1578 (28.09%)	1329 (23.66%)	1130 (20.11%)	1581 (28.14%)	2459 (43.77%)
15	Parents should not impose their wishes on their children	4 (0.92)	89 (1.58%)	191 (3.4%)	1267 (22.54%)	2186 (38.89%)	1888 (33.59%)	280 (4.98%)	4074 (72.48%)
Subscale 4 Parental guidance of the young									
16	Parents' responsibility is to educate ( to teach and to nurture) their children; to teach is to discipline, to nurture is to provide them needs such as food and clothing	4.21 (0.95)	122 (2.17%)	195 (3.46%)	768 (13.63%)	1865 (33.11%)	2683 (47.63%)	317 (5.63%)	4548 (80.74%)
17	Parents are responsible for preventing their children from getting into bad company	4.57 (0.67)	13 (0.23%)	49 (0.87%)	335 (5.94%)	1565 (27.74%)	3680 (65.23%)	62 (1.1%)	5245 (92.96%)
18	When children do not meet the requirements, parents ought to provide appropriate guidance	4.48 (0.68)	11 (0.2%)	29 (0.52%)	442 (7.85%)	1940 (34.46%)	3207 (56.97%)	40 (0.71%)	5147 (91.44%)
19	If circumstances allow, parents have to provide resources and opportunities so as to lay a good foundation for their children	4.35 (0.76)	30 (0.53%)	73 (1.29%)	609 (10.8%)	2114 (37.48%)	2815 (49.9%)	103 (1.83%)	4929 (87.38%)
Subscale 5 Fulfillment of children's needs									
20	Parents should assist their children in preventing them from running into obstacles on important matters	3.68 (1.03)	161 (2.86%)	496 (8.81%)	1681 (29.85%)	1924 (34.16%)	1370 (24.33%)	657 (11.67%)	3294 (58.49%)
21	Parents are responsible to provide financial support for their children to complete university education	3.86 (1.03)	163 (2.89%)	319 (5.66%)	1485 (26.34%)	1861 (33.01%)	1810 (32.1%)	482 (8.55%)	3671 (65.11%)
22	If financially possible, parents should provide the best resources to their children	3.87 (0.99)	127 (2.26%)	303 (5.39%)	1508 (26.81%)	1939 (34.47%)	1748 (31.08%)	430 (7.64%)	3687 (65.55%)
23	Parents should meet the needs of their children as far as possible	3.06 (1.11)	536 (9.52%)	1050 (18.65%)	2278 (40.46%)	1095 (19.45%)	671 (11.92%)	1586 (28.17%)	1766 (31.37%)

**Table 3. Mean and ANOVA results: Parental beliefs and gender**

Scale	ANOVA	Mean	
		Father	Mother
Whole scale	$F(1,5450) = 9.62, p = .002$	3.86	3.91
Factor 1	$F(1,5345) = 35.85, p < .001$	4.21	4.32
Factor 2	$F(1,5353) = 4.92, p = .027$	2.97	3.02
Factor 3	$F(1,5358) = 24.31, p < .001$	3.81	3.90
Factor 4	$F(1,5376) = 1.2, ns$	4.41	4.39
Factor 5	$F(1,5367) = 7.26, p = .007$	3.65	3.59

Note. Factor 1: Parental love and nurturing; Factor 2: Parenthood as a normative life stage; Factor 3: Readiness to relax and restrict parental control; Factor 4: Parental guidance of the young; Factor 5: Fulfillment of children’s needs.

*Parental gender*

In general, mothers’ scores on parental beliefs about parental roles and responsibilities ( $M = 3.91$ ) were significantly higher than fathers’ scores ( $M = 3.86, F(1,5450) = 9.62, p < .01$ ). Compared to fathers, mothers tended to hold a stronger belief about loving and nurturing children, parenthood as a normative life stage and readiness to relax and restrict parental control. As to parental guidance of the young, no significant difference between fathers and mothers was observed. Different from other domains, fathers presented a stronger belief in responsibility in fulfilling children’s needs than mothers did. Details of the means and the ANOVA results are shown in Table 3.

*Educational levels*

Parents with higher educational level tended to report a lower level of parental belief about their parental roles and responsibilities than parents with a lower educational level ( $F(5,5556) = 17.05, p < .001$ ). The results of post-hoc analyses indicated that parents with primary education or less held significantly stronger parental beliefs of their responsibilities than did parents with other educational levels. As to the subscales, similar patterns were found in loving and nurturing children, parenthood as a normative life stage and fulfillment of children’s needs. No significant difference was found amongst parents with different educational levels regarding to their beliefs in guidance of the young. Interestingly, parents with a higher educational level tended to possess a stronger belief in the readiness to relax and restrict parental control more than parents with lower educational levels (see Table 4).

**Table 4. ANOVA results: Parental beliefs and respondent’s educational levels**

Scale	ANOVA	Mean					
		Primary or below	Lower secondary <sup>(a)</sup>	Completed secondary school <sup>(b)</sup>	Matriculate <sup>(c)</sup>	University/ Higher Education <sup>(d)</sup>	Graduate school or above <sup>(e)</sup>
Whole scale	$F(5,5556) = 17.05, p < .001$	4.02 <sup>abcde</sup>	3.91	3.88	3.90	3.86	3.81
Factor 1	$F(5,5448) = 12.9, p < .001$	4.16 <sup>abcde</sup>	4.25	4.28	4.30	4.36	4.33
Factor 2	$F(5,5457) = 151.77, p < .001$	3.69 <sup>abcde</sup>	3.13	2.94	2.92	2.76	2.67
Factor 3	$F(5,5464) = 2.29, p = .043$	3.86 <sup>c</sup>	3.83	3.86	3.94	3.89	3.94
Factor 4	$F(5,5480) = 1.88, ns$	4.46 <sup>bde</sup>	4.40	4.38	4.39	4.40	4.37
Factor 5	$F(5,5473) = 27.5, p < .001$	0.88 <sup>abcde</sup>	0.83	0.76	0.78	0.69	0.68

Note. Factor 1: Parental love and nurturing; Factor 2: Parenthood as a normative life stage; Factor 3: Readiness to relax and restrict parental control; Factor 4: Parental guidance of the young; Factor 5: Fulfillment of children’s needs. ns: not significant. abcde: Significant results of post-hoc comparison,  $p < .05$ .

### Employment status

The results of ANOVA revealed that parental beliefs differed among parents with different employment status ( $F(5,5520) = 28.08, p < .001$ ). Generally speaking, parents who were employed, including full-time and part-time workers, tended to hold a weaker traditional parental belief than parents who were retired or social security recipients. Employment status was also significantly linked to parental beliefs in all of the five subscales (see Table 5). The results and patterns found in parenthood as a normative life stage and fulfillment of children's needs were similar

to the findings derived from the analysis based on the whole scale. As to the domain on parental love and nurturing, full-time homemakers displayed the highest level of parental belief. Regarding the readiness to relax and restrict parental control, parents who were unemployed and retired showed a stronger belief than did parents with other types of employment status. As to parental guidance of the young, the biggest difference was found between parents who were full time employed ( $M_s < 4.36$ ) and retired ( $M = 4.51$ ). Details of the means and the ANOVA results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. ANOVA results: parental beliefs and respondent's employment status**

Scale	ANOVA	Mean					
		Work full time	Work part time <sup>(a)</sup>	Full time homemaker <sup>(b)</sup>	Unemployed or between jobs <sup>(c)</sup>	Retired <sup>(d)</sup>	Social Security recipient <sup>(e)</sup>
Whole scale	$F(5,5520) = 28.08, p < .001$	3.84 <sup>bde</sup>	3.84	3.90	3.92	4.02	4.02
Factor 1	$F(5,5415) = 11.78, p < .001$	4.28 <sup>bd</sup>	4.27	4.39	4.32	4.19	4.27
Factor 2	$F(5,5426) = 95.56, p < .001$	2.87 <sup>cde</sup>	2.92	2.88	3.08	3.45	3.55
Factor 3	$F(5,5433) = 5.98, p < .001$	3.85 <sup>d</sup>	3.80	3.88	3.97	3.95	3.74
Factor 4	$F(5,5449) = 12.5, p < .001$	4.36 <sup>bd</sup>	4.33	4.42	4.38	4.51	4.44
Factor 5	$F(5,5439) = 37.08, p < .001$	3.53 <sup>de</sup>	3.55	3.54	3.59	3.87	3.92

Note. Factor 1: Parental love and nurturing; Factor 2: Parenthood as a normative life stage; Factor 3: Readiness to relax and restrict parental control; Factor 4: Parental guidance of the young; Factor 5: Fulfillment of children's needs. abcde: Significant results of post-hoc comparison,  $p < .05$ .

**Table 6. ANOVA results: parental beliefs and respondent's family income**

		Mean		
		Below HK\$ 14,999	HK\$15,000 - HK\$49,999 <sup>(a)</sup>	Above HK\$50,000 <sup>(b)</sup>
Whole scale	$F(2,5304) = 24.36, p < .001$	3.96 <sup>ab</sup>	3.86	3.86
Factor 1	$F(2,5206) = 10.85, p < .001$	4.23 <sup>b</sup>	4.26	4.33
Factor 2	$F(2,5220) = 142.61, p < .001$	3.32 <sup>ab</sup>	2.97	2.78
Factor 3	$F(2,5228) = 5.88, p = .003$	3.87	3.84	3.91
Factor 4	$F(2,5236) = 2.25, ns$	4.41	4.37	4.40
Factor 5	$F(2,5227) = 42.31, p < .001$	3.77 <sup>ab</sup>	3.58	3.50

Note. Factor 1: Parental love and nurturing; Factor 2: Parenthood as a normative life stage; Factor 3: Readiness to relax and restrict parental control; Factor 4: Parental guidance of the young; Factor 5: Fulfillment of children's needs. ns: not significant. ab: Significant results of post-hoc comparison,  $p < .05$ .

### Family income

Generally speaking, parents with a relatively lower family income (i.e. lower than HK\$14,999) tended to present a stronger parental belief about their roles and responsibilities than did parents with relatively higher family income (i.e. between HK\$15,000

and HK\$49,999, and above HK\$50,000),  $F(2,5304) = 24.36, p < .001$ . Post-hoc analyses revealed a significant difference between parents having a family income below HK\$14,999 and parents in the other two groups. As to parental guidance of the young, no significant difference was observed. However, high-income parents reported stronger beliefs about their

responsibilities in love and nurturing. Details of the means and the ANOVA results are shown in Table 6.

## Discussion

Based on the data collected from 5,707 parents in Hong Kong, the present study provides pioneer findings of Chinese parental beliefs about roles and responsibilities. Some unique features of the present study should be highlighted. First, this indigenous scale used in the present study is the first known scale developed using a “bottom-up” approach to explore parental beliefs in Hong Kong. As studies on parenting have recognized the tremendous influence of cultural context in shaping parents’ beliefs and behaviors (16), this culture sensitive measure of parental beliefs can help researchers pursue in-depth understanding of parental beliefs in Hong Kong, where the local culture is a mix of traditional Chinese and contemporary Western influence (13). Second, the large sample used in the present study contributed to the robust findings. In particular, the sample presented a good mix of different levels of socio-economic status. Third, this study collected survey data from both fathers and mothers. This fills the research gap that studies on parenting in Chinese societies primarily focus on maternal parenting (17, 18). Finally, the findings have theoretical and practical implications for parenting in the Chinese context.

The study examined the reliability and frequency percentage of Chinese Parental Beliefs Scale, and explored the relation between parental beliefs and their background socio-demographic characteristics. The findings showed that the scale and subscales possessed good internal consistency. Given that related psychosocial measures in different Chinese societies are rare, this measurement is shown to be a valid and useful tool measuring parental beliefs in the Chinese context.

The percentage findings showed that Hong Kong parents in general held positive beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in parenting. This is in line with Chinese culture which emphasizes parental responsibilities in raising, educating and guiding children to become respectable and functioning members of the family and the society. For example,

in the family instruction of Master Yan (*The Yan Shi Jia Xun*), one of the most influential Family Instruction books, parental strictness, dignity, and parental love are emphasized, as these factors will lead the children to the feelings of respect, politeness, and filial piety (19). This can be further explained by a Chinese saying, “It is the fault of the father if he only raises the child without teaching him” (*yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo*), which indicates strong parental responsibilities perceived by Chinese parents.

Although parents can be aware of their responsibilities in preparing their children to lead a worthy life and to become a good person (16), they seemed to be less affirmative about their role in providing knowledge and guidance of sex related issues. For example, the results indicated that almost a quarter of respondents did not regard teaching children knowledge about sex as parents’ responsibilities. Similarly, more than half of the respondents did not agree that parents should accept children’s sexual orientation no matter homosexual or heterosexual. Previous studies on sex education in Chinese societies revealed that Chinese parents tend to be conservative about direct discussion of sex related issues with their children or provide direct guidance to them (20, 21). Leung and colleagues (22) reviewed sexuality education programs in both Western and non-Western contexts, noted that the perception of sex as a “taboo” is still deeply rooted in Chinese cultures, and even school sexuality programs were covered by conservative materials in mainland China. Besides, roughly half of the respondents did not realize the necessity of learning about parenting. This may imply a lack of awareness of the importance of parenting skills and strategies on child development among some parents in Hong Kong. This finding suggests that some parents are not well-prepared for parenting, which would lead to parenting and parent-child relationship problems. In traditional Chinese culture, people held the belief that “God will help feed all the children that one has faith to bear” (*tian sheng tian yang*). Hence, Chinese people do not hold a strong belief that parenting education is needed for being a parent.

The results also revealed how parental beliefs vary among parents with different background socio-demographic characteristics. First, gender difference was observed, showing that mothers held stronger

parental beliefs than fathers did. The result is consistent with the gender expectations of Chinese society where men are often seen as breadwinner and women as housemakers. This finding also echoes some related empirical studies. For example, some cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have suggested that mothers scored higher on positive parenting qualities than fathers in Chinese societies (23, 24). Shek and Sun (12) pointed out that mothers were seen as more positive in parental control and parent-child relational measures, and are also more involved and stricter than fathers did in contemporary China.

Regarding the educational level, parents who had completed a relatively lower education level showed more conservative or collectivistic attitudes of parenting. The results also indicated that the retired or social security recipients tended to possess stronger parental beliefs than parents with other working status. Similarly, low-income parents seemed to hold stronger beliefs about parental responsibilities and roles than high-income parents. A possible explanation for these findings is that parents of low socioeconomic status may feel unable to fully meet their children's needs. Therefore, they may set a higher standard for themselves for being responsible parents. However, those with higher educational level tended to show a higher acceptance level for their children. They may also hold more liberal parenting beliefs.

Although the present findings are pioneer in nature, some limitations of the present study should be addressed. First, this culture sensitive scale was developed via a "bottom-up" approach based on interview data collected from 120 Hong Kong parents. Therefore, it is necessary to include other samples such as Chinese parents in Mainland and Macau. Second, existing scales can be used as validated external criterion measures to consolidate the validity of the scale. Third, as the sample was not randomly selected, obtaining a random sample of parents would be helpful to give a more representative picture of parental behavior in Hong Kong. Finally, besides sexuality, it would be illuminating to understand parental expectations of roles and responsibilities in different domains of child development, such as intellectual and interpersonal competence development.

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## 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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