

Perceptions of socially responsible behaviour amongst Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Based on 2,474 students recruited from 20 high schools in Hong Kong, this study examined students' perceptions of fifteen kinds of socially responsible behaviour amongst themselves and general Hong Kong adolescents. Results showed that students generally perceived themselves as showing socially responsible behaviour. Besides, their social responsibility scores were higher than those of Hong Kong adolescents in twelve areas, thus providing support for the self-enhancement effect in these areas. Further analyses revealed that age, grade, gender, and parental education were associated with adolescents' perceptions of their own socially responsible behaviour, while age, grade, and gender were found to be associated with adolescent perceptions of socially responsible behaviour of Hong Kong adolescents. Multiple regression analyses further showed that gender and maternal education were significant predictors of students' perceptions of their socially responsible behaviour.

Keywords: Social responsibility; adolescents; self-enhancement effect; Hong Kong; social perceptions

Introduction

Social responsibility is a character trait that is highly valued by the society and it is a set of values or personal commitment to improve one's community and society (1). Researchers have regarded social responsibility as a moral virtue, including respect, loyalty, self-control, and compassion (2). It is also an integral component of youth civic engagement (1, 3). Positive association between social responsibility and the development of moral identity (4) and moral traits (5) has also been proposed. In terms of behaviour, socially responsible behaviour refers "actions taken by individuals to enhance societal well-being or to avoid harmful consequences for the collective" (6).

Developmentally speaking, adolescence is a critical period for the development of social resp-

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onsibility such as proper citizen behavior. Young people learn to realize their membership in a society and they search for ideologies and images of the world such as ideals for social development (7). Meanwhile, moral understanding and self-identity facilitate the development of socially responsible behaviour congruent with one's self-concept (8). Previous studies found that social responsibility was closely related to psychological development such as well-being (9), positive youth development (10), prosocial and civic actions (1), as well as the long-term development of a civic society (11). From a societal perspective, following social expectations and rules promote positive youth development within both peer group and the family system (12, 13). For example, irresponsible behavior is linked with negative social evaluation leading to social exclusion (14).

Although adolescent social responsibility takes different forms in different cultures (15), it can be briefly divided according to different ecological domains. In the personal and interpersonal domain, adolescents have to follow rules and expectations that define student roles in the school context (16), such as rules reflecting cooperation and respect for others (16, 17). In the family, adolescents have to learn responsibilities to meet the instrumental and emotional needs of the family (18). In the societal domain, civic engagement is a major learning task for adolescents, which includes concerning about the welfare of others and promoting effective functioning of society (19). The National Standards for Civics and Government in the United States (20) stated that civic responsibility of students includes personal responsibility (family, peers, society, country), self-control, civility, honesty, respect of others, law and different views, critical thinking, care about the community, society and the nation, empathy, and loving one's country.

In the Chinese culture, Confucianism has deeply influenced social responsibility focusing on moral order and interpersonal harmony (21). For adolescents, having academic excellence is a fulfillment of personal responsibility (22). Moreover, maintaining harmonious relationships with others, self-control in expressing feelings and emotions, obedience, honesty, and respecting others especially the seniors, are considered socially responsible

behaviour. Similarly, family harmony is highly valued (23). In the societal domain, civic engagement is reflected in the participation of developing and maintaining a harmonious society and law abidance.

Although the importance of social responsibility had been promoted in both education policy and curriculum internationally, empirical research on socially responsible behaviour in adolescent remains sparse. For example, with reference to respect, Shwalb and Shwalb (24) pointed out that "respect and disrespect are topics that researchers and theorists have neglected, yet they are of great interest to the public and professionals in family and school settings. They are also ideal topics for both cross-cultural and mainstream developmental studies" (24). Malti, Peplak, and Zhang (25) further pointed out that "respect is an integral part of everyday life. It is a virtue central to the aim of living an ethically good life. Despite its importance, little is known about its emergence, development, correlates, and consequences" (25).

Empirically, there are some isolated studies examining adolescent social responsibility, mostly within the context of adolescent prosocial behaviour. Bacon (26) found that students viewed fulfilling work demand, obeying rules, paying attention, learning or studying, and trying to make an effort as responsibilities of students in learning. Bergin, Talley and Hamer (27) showed that standing up and encouraging others, helping and including others, being humorous, and facilitating emotional regulation of others were prosocial behaviour in junior high school students. Bugdayci (28) found that female students showed higher responsibility levels than male students, and students in Grade 5 and Grade 6 had higher levels of responsibility than Grades 7 and 8 students.

For family responsibility, Bowes, Chalmers and Flanagan (29) found that adolescents generally saw household work as a means to promote social responsibility and they viewed that the major value of doing housework was helping parents. Another qualitative study found the perception of participation in housework supported the general notion that "age brings responsibility" (30). However, Lam, Greene and McHale (31) found that amongst those families with weak family values, time devoted to housework positively predicted depressive symptoms but

negatively predicted school grades. Relatively, socially responsible behaviour in societal domains has received little attention, with some studies focusing on political awareness and participation in relation to civic responsibility (29).

Regarding adolescent perceptions of their behaviour relative to adolescents in general, past studies in moral character showed the existence of self-enhancement effect, which refers to the tendency to have a more favorable perception of oneself compared to the average population (32). A series of past studies on moral character traits showed the existence of self-enhancement effect found the self-evaluation on moral character traits commonly lies above the mid-point of a scale while the evaluation of others is more closely to the mid-point. For instance, Shek et al. (33) found high school students saw their moral traits to be more positive than those of the general adolescent population in Hong Kong. Another study by Shek et al. (34) investigating egocentric and materialism in Hong Kong adolescents showed similar results that students rated themselves as less egocentric and materialistic than did young people in Hong Kong. In fact, the study also collected parents' perspective and the results reflected that parental perceptions of their children were less negative in the areas of egocentrism and materialism as compared to average adolescents in Hong Kong (35). Similar to previous findings, we expected that the self-enhancement effect would appear in perceived socially responsible behaviour in Hong Kong high school students. Specifically, high school students would rate their fulfilment of socially responsible behaviour to be higher than their ratings for Hong Kong adolescents.

With regard to socio-demographic correlates of adolescent perceptions of socially responsible behaviour, the picture is still not clear. Regarding gender, some findings showed that adolescent girls tended to perform better than boys on social responsibility (28, 36, 37, 38, 39). Ford et al. (40) also found that males tended to have lower levels in social responsibility than that of females.

However, inconclusive results were found on age and grade. On the one hand, past studies suggested that seeing oneself as responsible was found to increase with age (41, 42, 43), where young people regard fulfilling responsibility as a central

characteristic in defining oneself as "adult" (44) and moral identity at adolescence predicted adult social responsibility (45). On the other hand, studies showed a decline of social responsibility from age 9 to 16 and increased in later adolescence (46). Bugdayci (28) also found that students in lower forms had higher levels of responsibility than did higher forms students. Kiefer and Ryan (47) found the importance of "responsibility" was at peak in adolescence and declined over time in the evaluation of factors associated with social success in adulthood. Regarding parental influence, the positive relationship between parental education and adolescent perceived prosocial behaviour had been reported (22, 48, 49).

With specific reference to Hong Kong, the Education Bureau (50) formulates policies on moral and civic education. Although the core values of respect, care, and responsibility had been promoted since 2001 (51), few studies investigated socially responsible behaviour in adolescents (52, 53). To fill the research gaps in this area, we addressed several research questions in this study:

- What are the perceptions of Hong Kong high school students of their own socially responsible behaviour?
- What are the perceptions of Hong Kong high school students of the socially responsible behaviour of Hong Kong adolescents?
- Are there any differences between students' perceptions of their socially responsible behaviour and the perceived socially responsible behaviour of adolescents in Hong Kong? With reference to the self-enhancement hypothesis and previous research findings, we expected that Hong Kong high school students would have better perception of their socially responsible behaviour relative to that of general adolescents in Hong Kong (Hypothesis 1).
- Are socio-demographic factors, including gender, age and parental educational level, related to perceived socially responsible behaviour in oneself and adolescents in general? Based on previous findings (54, 55), we expected that females would have more favourable perceptions of their own socially responsible behaviour (Hypothesis

2). Finally, as mothers play a more active role in parenting in Hong Kong (56, 57), we expected that maternal education would be related to perceived fulfilment of socially responsible behaviour of Chinese adolescents (Hypothesis 3).

Methods

This study utilized cross-sectional data from a project titled “Character building – A shared mission for a better future” and the survey was conducted in 2017. The project was funded by Wofoo Foundation and it attempted to understand the moral character attributes, psychosocial life skills, socially responsible behaviour, and well-being of Hong Kong adolescents from the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers in Hong Kong (33, 35, 58, 59). The present study used data based on the responses of junior high school students.

The participants of this study were students in 20 socioeconomically and ethnically diverse schools in Hong Kong. In each participating school, students from three to five classes were randomly selected to join this study. Students in the participating schools were invited to fill a questionnaire to evaluate their moral character traits, behaviour, and well-being. Written consent was obtained from the participating schools, students, and their parents before the data collection and a trained research assistant administrated and observed the data collection process. A total of 2,474 high school students participated in the survey. The mean age of the respondents was 14.76 (± 1.82 years), and there were 1,123 boys and 1,271 girls who completed the survey.

Instruments

Based on the research conducted by the Centre for Governance and Citizenship (60), we developed the present measure of social responsibility. In the original study, students listed thirteen responsibilities were listed on the domain of self, interpersonal, family, society, country, the world, and religion. In our measure, religious responsibility was excluded

since it only applied to students with religious beliefs. Besides, items with two areas were divided into two separate items. For example, “care about the community and Hong Kong” was divided into two separate items “care about the community” and “care about Hong Kong” accordingly. Apart from the items extracted from the previous study, two more items, namely “maintain family harmony” and “maintain societal harmony,” were added to examine responsibility on family and society considering that harmony was a core value in Chinese culture. As a result, the Adolescents’ Responsible Behaviour Scale (ARBS) was formed with fifteen kinds of socially responsible behaviour. The 15 items were examined on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). The internal consistency of the scale was high in both sets of data (in self: $\alpha = .89$, inter-item correlation mean = .34; in adolescent: $\alpha = .93$, inter-item correlation mean = .46).

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of students’ perceived fulfilment of fifteen kinds of socially responsible behaviour in oneself. Briefly, students had positive perceptions of their fulfilment (“4” and “5” responses) on “respect others” (75.3%), “care about others” (69.8%), “keep promises” (66.4%), “abide rules” (66.2%), and “respect seniors” (62.5%). However, less than one-third of students reported they had fulfilled the responsibility of “care about the country” (27.6%) and “care about the community” (27.0%). In general, students had a moderately positive view of their fulfilment of socially responsible behaviour since the items mean was above the midpoint of the scale. Regarding students’ perceived social responsibility in Hong Kong adolescents, some observations on the percentages of positive responses deserved attention, including “care about Hong Kong” (41.3%), “study hard” (33.7%), “care about others” (30.2%), “care about the world” (30.1%), “care about the country” (22.4%), “self-control” (21.7%), and “maintain societal harmony” (21.6%). Moreover, 17.1% of the respondents perceived that Hong Kong adolescents were engaged in housework, which was the lowest among 15 items (see Table 2).

Table 1. Students' perception of fulfilment in socially responsible behaviour in self

Item(s)	1 n (%)	2 n (%)	1+2 n (%)	3 n (%)	4 n (%)	5 n (%)	4+5 n (%)	Mean ^a (SD)	n
1. Study hard	100 (4.1)	433 (17.6)	533 (21.7)	1198 (48.7)	598 (24.3)	132 (5.4)	730 (29.7)	3.09 (.89)	2461
2. Respect seniors	19 (0.8)	127 (5.2)	146 (5.9)	775 (31.5)	1135 (46.2)	402 (16.4)	1537 (62.5)	3.72 (.82)	2458
3. Self-control	56 (2.3)	339 (13.8)	395 (16.1)	907 (36.9)	897 (36.5)	258 (10.5)	1155 (47.0)	3.39 (.93)	2457
4. Respect others	14 (0.6)	54 (2.2)	68 (2.8)	539 (21.9)	1411 (57.4)	439 (17.9)	1850 (75.3)	3.90 (.73)	2457
5. Care about others	17 (0.7)	90 (3.7)	107 (4.4)	636 (25.9)	1242 (50.5)	472 (19.2)	1714 (69.8)	3.84 (.80)	2457
6. Abide rules	18 (0.7)	107 (4.4)	125 (5.1)	704 (28.7)	1170 (47.7)	456 (18.6)	1626 (66.2)	3.79 (.82)	2455
7. Keep promises	15 (0.6)	105 (4.3)	120 (4.9)	706 (28.7)	1191 (48.5)	441 (17.9)	1632 (66.4)	3.79 (.80)	2458
8. Do housework	159 (6.5)	448 (18.3)	607 (24.7)	871 (35.5)	670 (27.3)	306 (12.5)	976 (39.8)	3.21 (1.08)	2454
9. Care about the community	164 (6.7)	550 (22.4)	714 (29.1)	1078 (43.9)	514 (20.9)	150 (6.1)	664 (27.0)	2.97 (.97)	2456
10. Care about Hong Kong	125 (5.1)	455 (18.5)	580 (23.6)	966 (39.3)	663 (27.0)	247 (10.1)	910 (37.1)	3.18 (1.01)	2456
11. Care about the country	273 (11.1)	560 (22.8)	833 (33.9)	946 (38.5)	467 (19.0)	211 (8.6)	678 (27.6)	2.91 (1.09)	2457
12. Care about the world	133 (5.4)	393 (16.0)	526 (21.5)	945 (38.6)	685 (27.9)	295 (12.0)	980 (40.0)	3.25 (1.04)	2451
13. Maintain family harmony	60 (2.4)	177 (7.2)	237 (9.7)	811 (33.0)	952 (38.8)	455 (18.5)	1407 (57.3)	3.64 (.94)	2455
14. Maintain societal harmony	121 (4.9)	390 (15.9)	511 (20.9)	1154 (47.1)	590 (24.1)	194 (7.9)	784 (32.0)	3.14 (.95)	2449
15. Adhere to the principles of fairness and justice	36 (1.5)	148 (6.0)	184 (7.5)	988 (40.3)	918 (37.4)	362 (14.8)	1280 (52.2)	3.58 (.86)	2452

^a1 = very poor; 2 = bad; 3 = neutral; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

To evaluate differences in students' perception of the fulfilment of socially responsible behaviour in self and Hong Kong adolescents, we conducted several paired-sample t-tests. Overall speaking, students had a more favourable perception of fulfilment in self ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .57$) than did Hong Kong adolescents ($M = 3.02$, $SD = .63$), $t(2454) = 27.67$, $p < .001$, effect size = .56. Separately, students had a more favourable perception of fulfilment in Hong Kong adolescents than in their own on items "study hard" ($p < .001$) and "care about Hong Kong" ($p < .01$). The findings provided partial support for the self-enhancement effect that students had a more favourable perception of socially responsible behaviour in self (see Table 3).

Table 4 shows the correlations among socio-demographic factors and the perceived socially responsible behaviour in oneself and adolescents in general. Several demographic factors showed significant correlations with perceived socially responsible behaviour in oneself, including gender, age, grade, paternal education and maternal education. Besides, student's perception of socially responsible behaviour in the general population of Hong Kong adolescents was positively correlated with age, grade and gender. Furthermore, multiple regression analyses showed that perceived socially responsible behaviour in oneself was positively predicted by gender ($\beta = .060$, $p < .01$) and maternal education level ($\beta = .056$, $p < .05$) (Table 5). The findings supported Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Table 2. Students' perception of fulfilment in socially responsible behaviour in Hong Kong adolescents

Item(s)	1 n (%)	2 n (%)	1+2 n (%)	3 n (%)	4 n (%)	5 n (%)	4+5 n (%)	Mean ^a (SD)	n
1. Study hard	86 (3.5)	306 (12.5)	392 (16.0)	1234 (50.3)	724 (29.5)	103 (4.2)	827 (33.7)	3.18 (.83)	2453
2. Respect seniors	96 (3.9)	430 (17.5)	526 (21.5)	1272 (51.9)	588 (24.0)	65 (2.7)	653 (26.6)	3.04 (.82)	2451
3. Self-control	112 (4.6)	537 (21.9)	649 (26.5)	1270 (51.8)	483 (19.7)	50 (2.0)	533 (21.7)	2.93 (.82)	2452
4. Respect others	118 (4.8)	495 (20.2)	613 (25.0)	1177 (48.1)	594 (24.3)	65 (2.7)	659 (26.9)	3.00 (.86)	2449
5. Care about others	93 (3.8)	398 (16.2)	491 (20.0)	1220 (49.8)	649 (26.5)	91 (3.7)	740 (30.2)	3.10 (.85)	2451
6. Abide rules	113 (4.6)	411 (16.8)	524 (21.4)	1205 (49.2)	630 (25.7)	90 (3.7)	720 (29.4)	3.07 (.87)	2449
7. Keep promises	104 (4.2)	396 (16.2)	500 (20.4)	1272 (51.9)	594 (24.2)	85 (3.5)	679 (27.7)	3.07 (.84)	2451
8. Do housework	274 (11.2)	585 (23.9)	859 (35.1)	1172 (47.9)	369 (15.1)	49 (2.0)	418 (17.1)	2.73 (.92)	2449
9. Care about the community	169 (6.9)	476 (19.5)	645 (26.4)	1093 (44.7)	571 (23.3)	137 (5.6)	708 (28.9)	3.01 (.96)	2446
10. Care about Hong Kong	145 (5.9)	374 (15.3)	519 (21.2)	918 (37.5)	714 (29.2)	298 (12.2)	1012 (41.3)	3.26 (1.05)	2449
11. Care about the country	300 (12.3)	599 (24.5)	899 (36.8)	999 (40.8)	426 (17.4)	122 (5.0)	548 (22.4)	2.78 (1.03)	2446
12. Care about the world	183 (7.5)	461 (18.9)	644 (26.4)	1063 (43.5)	575 (23.5)	161 (23.5)	736 (30.1)	3.03 (.99)	2443
13. Maintain family harmony	100 (4.1)	346 (14.2)	446 (18.3)	1340 (54.9)	551 (22.6)	103 (4.2)	654 (26.8)	3.09 (.83)	2440
14. Maintain societal harmony	175 (7.2)	459 (18.8)	634 (25.9)	1283 (52.5)	444 (18.2)	84 (3.4)	528 (21.6)	2.92 (.89)	2445
15. Adhere to the principles of fairness and justice	124 (5.1)	358 (14.7)	482 (19.8)	1290 (53.0)	530 (21.8)	130 (5.3)	660 (27.1)	3.08 (.88)	2432

^a1 = very poor; 2 = bad; 3 = neutral; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Table 3. Differences between student's perceived fulfilment in each socially responsible behaviour in self and in Hong Kong adolescents

Item(s)	Students Mean ^a (SD)	HK Adolescents Mean ^a (SD)	t	p	Result	n
1. Study hard	3.09 (.89)	3.18 (.83)	-3.93	<.001	HK Adol > Students	2452
2. Respect seniors	3.72 (.82)	3.04 (.82)	32.38	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2448
3. Self-control	3.39 (.93)	2.93 (.82)	20.22	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2448
4. Respect others	3.90 (.73)	3.00 (.86)	42.42	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2446
5. Care about others	3.84 (.80)	3.10 (.85)	34.07	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2447
6. Obey rules	3.79 (.82)	3.07 (.87)	33.19	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2444
7. Keep promises	3.79 (.81)	3.07 (.84)	33.29	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2448
8. Do housework	3.21 (1.10)	2.73 (.92)	18.17	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2442
9. Care about the community	2.97 (.97)	3.01 (.96)	-1.62	> .05 (n.s)	HK Adol > Students	2441
10. Care about Hong Kong	3.18 (1.01)	3.26 (1.05)	-3.05	< .01	HK Adol > Students	2445
11. Care about the country	2.91 (1.09)	2.78 (1.03)	4.96	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2442
12. Care about the world	3.25 (1.04)	3.03 (.99)	9.01	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2435
13. Maintain family harmony	3.64 (.95)	3.09 (.83)	23.93	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2434
14. Maintain societal harmony	3.14 (.95)	2.92 (.89)	9.98	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2434
15. Adhere to the principles of fairness and justice	3.58 (.87)	3.01 (.88)	23.55	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2425
Overall	3.43 (.57)	3.02 (.63)	27.67	<.001	Students > HK Adol	2454

^a1 = very poor; 2 = bad; 3 = neutral; 4 = good; 5 = very good.

Table 4. Correlation between socio-demographic variables

Variable(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	-					
2. Grade ^b	.80***	-				
3. Gender ^c	.01	.04	-			
4. Paternal educational level ^d	-.02	.02	.02	-		
5. Maternal educational level ^d	.01	.06**	.05*	.62***	-	
6. Students' perception of their socially responsible behaviour	-.04*	-.06**	.06*	.07***	.08***	-
7. Students' perception of others' socially responsible behaviour	.07**	.07***	.08***	.03	.02	.26***

p < .05, *p < .01, ****p < .001;

^bJunior high school students = 1, Senior high school students = 2;

^cMale = 1, Female = 2;

^dThe 0-9 values of Father and Mother Education were recoded into three categorical values: Primary and below = 1, Secondary = 2, Above secondary = 3. The value "0" (Do not know) was recoded as missing value (999).

Table 5. Results of multiple regression analyses

Predictor(s)	Students' perception of their socially responsible behaviour			
	β	t	F	R ²
Overall model		23.39***	6.61***	.015
Age	.004	.105		
Grade ^b	-.059	-1.68		
Gender ^c	.060	2.865**		
Paternal educational level ^d	.044	1.653		
Maternal educational level ^d	.056	2.085*		

p < .05, *p < .01, ****p < .001;

^bJunior high school students = 1, Senior high school students = 2;

^cMale = 1, Female = 2;

^dThe 0-9 values of Father and Mother Education were recoded into three categorical values: Primary and below = 1, Secondary = 2, Above secondary = 3. The value "0" (Do not know) was recoded as missing value (999).

Discussion

This study sought to examine the perceptions of socially responsible behaviour in high school students and general adolescents in Hong Kong with several unique features. First, since there are few studies examining social responsibility in adolescents, the present study provided information on how high school students perceived their fulfillment in fifteen kinds of socially responsible behaviour. Second, as there are few studies examining perceived social responsibility in the general adolescent population, this study attempted to fill the research gap. Third, we compared the differences in perception of socially responsible behaviour amongst the participants and Hong Kong adolescents with reference to the self-enhancement effect hypothesis. Finally, we explored the relationships between several socio-demographic factors and perceived fulfillment of socially responsible behaviour.

The first observation is that students generally perceived a high level of their fulfillment of socially responsible behaviour. For example, more than a half of them considered they were self-controlled, rule-abiding, and accountable, and they believed that they well-performed in showing respect and care to others in interpersonal relationships. Second, less than one-third of the students reported that they studied hard. As diligence is highly valued in traditional Chinese culture (61) and past research also showed achieving excellent academic performance and studying hard were considered as fulfilment of academic responsibilities (22), the present observation suggests that there is a general decline in this value and/or there are difficulties for adolescents to fulfil this traditional cultural expectation.

Third, students showed a higher level of perceived fulfillment in maintaining family harmony but a lower level of fulfillment in doing housework. The findings aptly reflected that maintaining family harmony is still a very important concept for high

school students in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong students are very busy with their study and they frequently participate in extracurricular activities and attend tutorial classes, not all students have time available for doing housework. Moreover, as studies in gender stereotyping showed that housework is seen as “women’s work” and “training for girls” (62, 63, 64), parents or elders with traditional beliefs may hold the belief that “housework should be done by female members in a family”, hence discouraging their sons (or grandsons) from doing housework but focusing on study.

The fourth observation is that perceived fulfillment of responsible behaviour in the societal domain was not high. In fact, participants perceived a lower level of fulfillment in self and in Hong Kong adolescents on “care about the country” compared to other items. Past studies investigated the perception of national identity in Hong Kong adolescents always showed a stronger endorsement of Hongkonger identity than Chinese national identity (65). The present result may reflect the lack of sense of belonging to China in Hong Kong students, which was in line with previous findings. Hence, the findings suggest the need to understand the reasons behind and devise measures to promote the sense of national identity in adolescents in Hong Kong.

Regarding the self-enhancement effect, although the overall mean score of high school students was significantly higher than that for adolescents in general, reverse results were found on two items (“study hard” and “care about Hong Kong”). Hence, the findings provide partial support for the self-enhancement hypothesis. Interestingly, students saw themselves less hard working in study as compared to adolescents in Hong Kong. There are two possible explanations. First, in view of the highly competitive environment in Hong Kong, students may see that others are more hard-working. This is a defence mechanism in case they are relatively inferior in their academic results when comparing to others. Second, this finding may be explained by the emphasis on humility in Chinese culture. Regarding the higher level of perceived care about Hong Kong in adolescents in general, this finding can possibly be explained by the fact that high school students could not squeeze time to engage in community engagement work. As this is a pioneer study, future studies should

be conducted to further understand the mechanisms involved.

For the relationships between socio-demographic correlates (gender, age, grade, and parental education) and socially responsible behaviour, some significant findings with a small effect size were found. Primarily, there were gender differences in high school students’ perception in assessing their socially responsible behaviour (Hypothesis 2). This observation is consistent with previous findings that female students tended to perceive a higher level of fulfilment in socially responsible behaviour than males. The result was also supported by empirical studies in socially responsible behaviour and moral character (33, 54, 55). Previous studies found that gender stereotypes were related to prosocial behaviour (38, 66). Accordingly, girls are expected to behave in a nicer way which should be nurturing, expressive, and caring, while boys are expected to be competent by exerting instrumentality, assertion, and competitiveness (67, 68). In addition, more positive feedback would be given to girls than to boys in prosocial behavior engagement (66, 69) which promote the development of empathy in girls. Fabes et al (70) noted there may be an increased pressure for adolescents to act in ways that are consistent with gender-role expectations since adolescence is a time of personal and social uncertainty. More importantly, as studies found the self-image of girls was influenced by popularity, interpersonal communication (71), and appearance, it is possible that girls are more conscious about their self-image in popularity and therefore they had a higher rating of self-perception regarding their socially responsible behaviour.

Regarding parental education, the results revealed that higher maternal educational level was positively associated with students’ perception of their socially responsible behaviour (Hypothesis 3). In Chinese families, mothers usually spend more time and efforts interacting with their children due to the traditional family role. In most cases, mothers with a higher education level not only take care of their children in physical aspects but also educate and transmit knowledge and moral values to their children, which includes the importance of social responsibility. The results supported previous research on moral character traits (33, 53).

Conclusion

In summary, this study provided information on how students in Hong Kong perceived social responsibility in themselves and in Hong Kong adolescents, as well as the self-enhancement effect on the perception of fulfillment in socially responsible behaviour. Besides, we also examined socio-demographic correlates of perceived social responsibility in oneself and adolescents in general. In view of the paucity of studies in this area, the present study is pioneer in nature. However, despite the contributions of this study, there are several weaknesses in this study. First, as the data were collected by self-report measures, inclusion of perspectives of parents and teachers in the study would provide more information and support in understanding the problem area. Second, the results of the survey revealed a picture of social responsibility from students' perspective but without providing the reasons behind it. Qualitative data can provide more insights into the perceived social responsibility items and differences between social responsibility in students and Hong Kong adolescents. Third, this study focused on high school students. However, as the development of social responsibility is a changing phenomenon, longitudinal studies would help in obtaining the changes in the high school years. Fourth, this study used a unidimensional scale with 15 items only. Obviously, employment of more items involving different dimensions of social responsibility would be helpful. Lastly, replication of the present would be necessary which can strengthen the generalizability of the findings over time.

Ethical compliance

The authors have stated all possible conflicts of interest within this work. The series of studies on character and moral development in high school students in Hong Kong and preparation for this paper were financially supported by Wofoo Foundation. Informed consent was received from each individual, and this work was conducted in accordance with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki the related institutions' research ethics guidelines.

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