

*Career-Related Parental Behaviours and Senior Secondary Students' Career Development
in Underdeveloped China*

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Abstract

Parents are major socializers for senior secondary students' career development. Prior research has investigated parental influence and highlighted typical types of parental support. While parental support highly interplays with other career-related behaviour, limited research explores the career-related parental behaviour (support, intervention, engagement) on senior secondary students' career adaptability, especially in underdeveloped areas of China. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of career-related parental behaviour on career adaptability among senior secondary students in underdeveloped regions of China. Drawing on a sample of 838 senior secondary students in Meizhou, Guangdong Province (Mage=17.51, SD=0.89, 50.7% Female), this study adopted a person-centred approach to evaluate career-related parental behaviour and their corresponding influence on students' career adaptability. Results recognised two types of parents ("authoritative" and "warm and supportive") regarding their career-related behaviour. Senior secondary students in the "warm and supportive" group show higher career adaptability than those in the "authoritative" group, specifically in control, curiosity, and confidence. However, no difference in concern is found between the two groups. These results emphasise the value of the person-centred approach in understanding parents concerning their career-related behaviour in underdeveloped China. Furthermore, it suggests that although filial piety is valued in Chinese culture, parents need to let their children go. It will benefit senior secondary students more through active support and engagement in career development. With a new understanding of parents and their impact on senior secondary students' career adaptability in underdeveloped China, this study lays a foundation for future research and practical interventions.

Keywords: Career-Related Parental Behaviour, Senior Secondary Students, Career Adaptability, Underdeveloped China

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Introduction

Parents have a central role in senior secondary students' career development in the family context. Empirical research articulated that senior secondary adolescents rated their parents as one of the most important others (Ho, 2015) to discuss career-related topics (Otto, 2000). Besides, adolescents' career interests, intentions, and goals, as well as their career-related self-efficacy and outcome expectations are under the great influence of their parents through their daily interaction in the family context (Kenny & Medvide, 2013; Lent et al., 1994; Liu et al., 2015). Acknowledge the great impact of parents, prior research identified two types of influence in the family context: the structure variables (e.g., parents' education or occupation) and the process variables (e.g., parental aspirations, parental support, and parent-child relationships), with family process variables are suggested to shape youth's career decision-making self-efficacy more profoundly comparing with structural variables (Hargrove et al., 2005). However, parents are not simply influence their children through single and separate variable, instead through combined and interrelated behaviours. The understanding of career-related parental behaviours will provide a more comprehensive picture of the way parents are involved in their children's career development, contributing to guiding parents to support their adolescent children's career development. Therefore, this research delves into career-related parental behaviours as the process variable to get insight into the types of career-related parental behaviour, and their effect on senior secondary students' career development.

Senior Secondary Students' Career Development and Career Adaptability

Globalisation and technological development have led to a changing and uncertain world (Santilli et al., 2020). In this context, it is hard to predict an industry's future, contributing to the challenges for adolescents to make a career decision (Savickas et al., 2009). Accordingly, in the world characterised by frequent transitions, Savickas (2005) proposed a career construction theory, which explains individuals' behaviour in managing vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas (Savickas, 2013).

As a core assumption in the career construction theory, career adaptability denotes the psychological resources adolescents seek in constructing their careers and dealing with developmental tasks in frequent transitions (Savickas, 2005). Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that provides four sub-dimensions to evaluate adolescents' career development. The four sub-dimensions of the framework of career adaptability comprise career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence (Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career concern is the first and most important sub-construct that implicates individuals' orientation to future career acts and the awareness of planning for transitions. Career control refers to individuals' sense of control of the future and involves career decision-making skills. Career curiosity means curiosity about the self and the environment, involving information seeking about the self, the world of work, and the desired future. It appears when individuals think about themselves in different situations. Finally, confidence shows individuals' confidence in dealing with developmental tasks. It will aggregate during the exploration experience. As the world of work shifts from stable to ever-changing, career adaptability is viewed as a critical ability to face the challenges and uncertainties posed by the constantly changing society (Luthar & Brown, 2007; Rossier, 2015; Santilli et al., 2014). Empirically, career adaptability benefits individuals' career development (e.g., Rudolph et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2018), academic performance (Negru-Subtirica & Pop, 2016) and individuals' well-being (e.g., Wilkins et al., 2014; Santilli et al., 2020). Given that senior secondary students will soon face the transition from secondary

education to postsecondary education/employment and make their career decisions, investigating the antecedents of career adaptability will provide valuable implications to support their children's smooth transition.

Parents and Senior Secondary Students' Career Adaptability

Acknowledge the significance of career adaptability in a dynamic society, prior research has identified individual antecedents and relation factors of career adaptability. Individuals' hope, self-esteem, cognitive flexibility, and environmental exploration positively predict their career adaptability (Chong & Leong, 2017; Ginevra et al., 2016; Hui et al., 2018). Meanwhile, parents also play a profound role in shaping their children's career adaptability through interaction with children. For example, parental career support positively correlates with adolescents' career adaptability (Hirschi, 2009). Similarly, Lee (2018) investigated 581 Korean senior secondary students and found that parental career-related support mediates the association between students' family socio-economic background and their career adaptability. Besides, parental career expectation on their children has demonstrated an association with senior secondary students' career adaptability (Zhou et al., 2023). While parental structural variables (e.g., SES) and process variables (e.g., expectation, support) are pointed out to have a salient impact on adolescents' career adaptability, this research argues that the behavioural dimension is especially of value because it could inform career counsellors of the details understanding of how parents behave in their children's career development, contributing to providing interventions for parents to facilitate children's career development in the future.

Endorsing the importance of parental behaviours, Dietrich and Kracke (2009) identified three major components of parental career-related behaviour: support, interference, and lack of engagement. Parental support, which involves parental financial support, resources support, networking support (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006) and emotional support (Hou et al., 2010) for adolescents' career development, is widely investigated in existing research (e.g., Alfianto et al., 2019; Ginevra et al., 2015) and positively correlated with students' career development. Prior research articulated that greater parental support lead to students' higher career decision-making self-efficacy (Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Keller & Whiston, 2008), career self-efficacy (Turner & Lapan, 2002), career expectations (Zhou et al., 2023), career aspirations (Ma & Yeh, 2010), more career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009) and career certainty (Constantine et al., 2005), as well as lower career-related stress (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013) and career salience (Diemer, 2007). However, the consideration of parental support is accompanied by considering its type and the frequency. Besides, it also interconnects with other factors like time and resources. Some parents may also have barriers to engagement, such as a lack of time and knowledge to support their children's career development. Therefore, it needs further consideration of other interconnected factors. Previous research shows that some parents tend to place their views and expectations of individual career development on their children (Young et al., 2001), consistent with Liu et al.'s finding (2015) that parents try to influence their children's career aspiration by intentionally fostering children's career values, interests, attitudes, and even interpersonal skills rather than simply enforce their children to obey their views and expectation.

While empirical studies have recognized the pivotal role of career-related parental behaviours consisting of support, interference, and lack of engagement in shaping adolescents' career adaptability (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Guan et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2020), there is limited understanding of the profile of career-related parental behaviours received by senior

secondary students. Notably, Zhou et al. (2020) and Liang et al. (2023) have adopted a person-centred approach to identify different types of parents based on their career-related parental practices. However, few research focuses on the detailed impact on students' career adaptability and its sub-dimensions among students in underdeveloped areas in China. In case career and life planning education is limited available in the major cities in China (Xiao, 2018), senior secondary students from underdeveloped regions are vulnerable regarding their career development in China. Since family SES influence individuals' career development through parental career-related support (Lee, 2018), along with that parents are one of the social resources for senior secondary students' career development, parents' career-related behaviours for their senior secondary children in underdeveloped China may present different pattern as existing research. In view of the above literature review, the current study proposes the following two research questions guiding the investigation:

RQ1: What types of parents can be identified based on senior secondary students' perceived career-related parental behaviours in underdeveloped China?

RQ2: Are there differences in career adaptability among senior secondary students with different types of parents in underdeveloped China?

Methodology

Participants

This study adopted random sampling to obtain students' ratings of career-related parental behaviours and their career adaptability. In total, 838 senior secondary students ($M_{\text{age}}=17.51$, $SD=0.89$, 50.7% Female) from four public senior secondary schools in Meizhou in this study. Meizhou is a Hakka community on the border of Guangdong province, China. The GDP per capita income was less than half of the per capita income in China in 2020, indicating that it is an underdeveloped city.

Measures

The 15-item Parental Career-related Behaviors scale developed by Dietrich and Kracke (2009) is adopted to understand career-related parental behaviours. The scale comprises three sub-dimensions: support, interference, and lack of engagement. Each dimension consists of 5 items. As per the previous adoption by Zhou et al. (2020), this research adopted 5 points from 1 (does not apply at all) to 5 (fully perfectly) instead of the original 4 points. The reason for using the five-point Likert scale is its accuracy. The scale shows good validity and reliability (Zhou et al., 2020), and Cronbach's α in this research are .92 (support), .91 (interference), .90 (lack of engagement).

As for career adaptability, the Chinese version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale–Short Form (CAAS-SF) developed by Yu et al. (2019) is adopted in this research due to senior secondary students' heavy study task. It is a 12-item scale investigating concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Each sub-dimension consists of 3 items. It is also a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). The scale shows good validity and reliability (Yu et al., 2019), and the Cronbach's α in this research are .92 (concern), .87 (control), .87 (curiosity), .88 (confidence).

Data Analysis

To identify the types of parents in terms of senior secondary students' reported parental career-related behaviours, cluster analysis is used to obtain a distinctive cluster of parents based on the parental career-related behaviours. Cluster analysis has been widely seen and used as an appropriate technique to formulate clusters within data without explicitly label (Sun et al., 2017). It allows the identification of clusters of respondents according to the similarity of their responses to the given scale (Hair et al., 2014). This study first adopted hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's clustering method based on "Euclidean distance" to decide the cluster number. A following k-means cluster was run to group parents into two types.

To further compare senior secondary students' career adaptability between students with different types of parents, five independent-sample t-tests were run to compare the means of senior secondary students' overall career adaptability and the sub-dimensions, namely concern, control, curiosity, and confidence.

Results

The hierarchical cluster analysis results (see Table 1) reveal that the highest percentage increase in heterogeneity is observed between the last two stages, i.e. 837 and 836 (25.25%). Therefore, this study decided to cluster parental career-related behaviour into two groups. The descriptive data of the two groups indicates that parents could be categorised into "authoritative group" and "warm and supportive group (see Table 2).

Table 1: Summary-statistics of hierarchical Clustering

Stage	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Distance coefficient	No. of the cluster after the combination	Difference	% increase heterogeneity
835	1	571	15.53	3	0.31	2.46%
836	1	2	15.84	2	4.00	25.25%
837	1	21	19.84	1		

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of two groups of parental career-related behaviour

	Mean	
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Support	3.42	3.66
Interference	3.30	2.12
Lack of engagement	3.01 ^a	4.01 ^a

a. scores have been reversed.

The results of the independent-sample t-test reveal the differences in senior secondary students' career adaptability in Table 3. There are significant differences between authoritative group and warm and supportive group regarding senior secondary students' career adaptability, $t(836) = -4.06$, $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed), 95% CI of the difference between means = (-0.26, -0.09); career control, $t(836) = -4.78$, $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed), 95% CI of the

difference between means= $(-0.32, -0.13)$; career curiosity, $t(836) = -3.92, p < 0.001$ (two-tailed), 95% CI of the difference between means= $(-0.28, -0.09)$; career confidence, $t(836) = -3.53, p < 0.001$ (two-tailed), 95% CI of the difference between means= $(-0.26, -0.07)$. However, there is no significant difference in career concern between the authoritative group and the warm and supportive group, $t(836) = -2.41, p = 0.016$ (two-tailed), 95% CI of the difference between means= $(-0.23, -0.02)$.

Table 3: Summary-statistics of K-means Clustering

	Mean		SD		t
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
CA	3.55	3.73	0.63	0.63	-4.06***
Concern	3.40	3.52	0.72	0.77	-2.41
Control	3.62	3.85	0.69	0.68	-4.78***
Curiosity	3.59	3.79	0.70	0.70	-3.92***
Confidence	3.60	3.76	0.69	0.69	-3.53***

CA= career adaptability. *** $P < .001$.

Discussion

The Types of Parents

The k-means clustering analysis identified two types of parents, one shows intermediate support, interference, and engagement, while the other represents high-level engagement and medium-level support, as well as low-level interference. The former is similar to the authoritative parents, who are responsive and supportive but still maintain high control simultaneously (Baumrind, 1991). However, the later highly engaged and supportive parents expressed more warmth and presented less control with lower interference. While Meizhou city ranked as the last in Guangdong and only had half of the per capita income in China, students from Meizhou may be from socially disadvantaged backgrounds compared to their city counterparts. However, although prior research believes that parents' SES is linked to ideal parenting practices related to individuals' career and life development (Bryant et al., 2006), this research breaks the stereotype of parents in rural China to some extent. Although coming from geographically vulnerable areas, parents identified in this research show medium to high support and engagement based on senior secondary students' perceived parental career-related behaviours. Due to the underdevelopment of the Meizhou economy, there are few employment paths. The number of people employed by state-owned units accounts for a large proportion of the number of people employed by urban non-private units in the city, with 54.4% of people employed by state-owned units in Meizhou, which is stable and relatively easy to do (Meizhou Municipal People's Government, 2017). Therefore, they have more time and resources to invest in their children's development. Furthermore, despite the fact that more than half of the people work in state-owned organisations, they continue to value education, which allows their children to have a better development without being restricted by the underdeveloped region.

The Differences Between Students' Career Adaptability Between Students With Different Types of Parents

Independent t-tests confirmed the differences in senior secondary students' career adaptability, specifically career control, curiosity and confidence among senior secondary students with different parents in underdeveloped China. In other words, the results suggest

the impact of parental career-related behaviours on senior secondary students' career adaptability, except for the sub-dimension of career concern. The results are similar to previous research show different overall career adaptability among senior secondary students with different types of parents (Zhou et al., 2020). In terms of the insignificant differences in career concern among senior secondary students with different types of parents, it may be due to the overall relatively lower level of career concern among senior secondary students in China (e.g., Guan et al., 2015; Leung, 2022). Career concern refers to the consideration of future direction and planning awareness. Since students in the Chinese context are under great learning pressure and their major goal is to excel in the college entrance examination (Gaokao), thus they usually prioritise academic performance over career and life development. Even though parental career-related behaviours impact senior secondary students' career adaptability, parents also think education is a social ladder to move to a higher social status, contributing to the importance of academic performance in the Chinese context.

Conclusion

This study investigated the types of parental career-related behaviours and their impact on senior secondary students' career adaptability. The results categorised parents into "authoritative parents" and "warm and supportive parents". Senior secondary students with warm and supportive parents showed higher career adaptability, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. However, there is no significant difference in career concern among students with authoritative parents and warm and supportive parents. The findings suggest that senior secondary students benefit from their parents' active support and engagement in their career development. Parents supporting their children could consider reducing their control on children and letting children go appropriately to explore themselves and the external environment.

However, this study is limited in two aspects. Firstly, the differences between senior secondary students' gender were not explored in this research; Secondly, this study only examined the impact of parental career-related behaviours on senior secondary students' career adaptability, ignoring the potential moderating effect of parental' structural factors (e.g., parents' education background, parents' work statuses). Future studies could explore parental career-related behaviours for male students and female students. Future research could also consider the possible variables in senior secondary students' career adaptability in underdeveloped cities in China, for example, parents' work status and the differences between left-behind students and non-left-behind students.

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