

Parenting Stress and its Associated Factors among Parents Working in Hospitality and Services Industries of Macau

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Abstract

The changing social structure has led to complicate social issues, one of which is the aging population due to low birth rate. This is largely due to the parental stress of being a parent. Macau, after the liberalization of the gaming industry, has been top listed as one of the cities with the highest gross domestic product. The current research studied if employees in the hospitality and services employees also suffered from parental stress even under such a strong financial background. Based on past literatures, the independent variables of demographics, parental role and parenting competency were identified. Findings show that despite the rocket high economic situation, both fathers and mothers of the hospitality and service industries feel stressful at becoming parents, when mothers are found to be significantly more stressful than fathers at parenting. Good economic situation is not the final solution to the societal problem of parental stress. Contrariwise, increase in parenting competency can reduce parental stress. When parents are more knowledgeable on parental matters, they will have more confidence with less worries at becoming parents and at parenting.

Keywords: Parental stress; Parental role; Parenting competency; Parent; Parenting; Hospitality

Introduction

Parenting are part of the role sets of many adult workers. Similar to other developed regions and countries, living conditions and family structure of Macao have changed. More than 85% of women aged 25 to 29 are working women, and 65% of married women have jobs [1]. Although this phenomenon enriches the life of the mothers, it might lead to the mother's lack of time and energy to effectively parenting the child, especially when her child is young [2]. In Macau, about 21% of the workforce is engaged in the tourism and entertainment industry, and 85% of them need to work in shifts [1]. Parental responsibilities for both parents might add to the enlarging list of stressors, especially for those needing to do shift work.

Inadequate parental functions during infancy and young childhood may lead to physical and mental health and social problems for adolescents and adults, including emotional and social development [3], depression and anxiety disorders [3], and low self-esteem [4]. In addition, there might be other problems including poor school performance [5], substance abuse [6], criminal behavior [7], and even physical health issues such as obesity and diabetes [8]. In contrast, good parenting practices can enable children and adolescents to grow up healthily, improve their life satisfaction [9], high self-esteem [10], good academic performance and even academic achievements over the next 26 years [11], and good physical health [12].

Literature Review

Parental stress

Many health and psychosocial behavioral problems were noticeably proliferating among children and adolescents in today's Macau. For example, health related fitness measures of children and adolescents in Macao lag much behind peers in Mainland China. The rate of children who reached minimum level of health related fitness was among the lowest among 31 provinces and cities in the country; only 27.9% of the male students and 37.1% of the female students had a normal Body Mass Index; 50.4% of the boys and 46.4% of the females had lower than

normal weight at the same time 21.4% of boys and 16.5% of girls had a higher than normal weight [13]. In terms of psychosocial issues, about 20% of young people in Macau show signs of internet addiction, and drug abuse starts even at primary school age and the situation is getting worse [14]. It is understandable that parents are experiencing higher parenting stress than ever. Since people with different background such as age and education behave differently, we hypothesized that parents of different demographic factors might experience parenting stress differently. The current study will investigate six demographic factors of age, education background, marital status, occupation, family structure, and work nature.

Hypothesis 1a: The demographic factors have significant differences on the stress level of parents at becoming parents.

Hypothesis 1b: The demographic factors have significant differences on the stress level of parents at parenting.

Parental role and family structure

Parenting work division between male and female had always been quite different and clear in the Chinese culture. The tradition was like what Rousseau (1712-1778), in his book "Emile," Chapter 5 mentioned that the mother's duty is to "nurture" children, and the father's role is to "teach" children [15]. China had been a traditional male-dominant society. For many years in history, only men could receive education. Naturally, the educated father was given the task of "teaching." So mothers, in old days did not need to go to work and their main job was to take care of the daily life of the child at home. Obviously, these

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Received May 29, 2018; Accepted June 22, 2018; Published June 29, 2018

Citation: Chi LC, Xu HX (2018) Parenting Stress and its Associated Factors among Parents Working in Hospitality and Services Industries of Macau. J Tourism Hospit 7: 362. doi: [10.4172/2167-0269.1000362](https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0269.1000362)

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are no long true for many. Both parents are having different and more roles and responsibilities. The growing in popularity of education for both genders have also resulted in double income families, when both parents have an outside job has become a general trend. This is also a result on the growing prosperity of the economy, when families look for higher amount of disposal income. Would different parental roles lead to experiences of different levels of parenting stress? If so, different kind of supports would be needed. The following hypothesis are to be tested:

Hypothesis 2a: The role of parents has significant differences on the stress level of parents at becoming parents.

Hypothesis 2b: The role of parents has significant differences on the stress level of parents at parenting.

Parental competency

Self-efficacy is a major determinant of behaviors, so another important factor relating to parenting stress is self-efficacy. Bandura [16] has defined self-efficacy as an individual's beliefs about their capabilities to produce desired behaviors. Low self-efficacy can also adversely affect behaviors through inhibiting the acquisition of new skills and suppressing existing skills [17]. Strong evidence found higher parental self-efficacy related to more effective parenting and better child outcomes [18]. In contrast, lower parental self-efficacy related to higher dysfunctional parenting, including laxness and over-reactivity [19], higher levels of maternal depression and lower levels of parental satisfaction.

Many existing studies have examined parenting stress and competency of parents of children with an intellectual or developmental disability, for example, there are studies indicate that the parenting sense of competence is negatively related to parenting stress [20]. In the knowledge era, changes come much faster than ever, including healthy environments and new illness, not only new virus but also new mental illness. For example, on the 18th June 2018, the World Health Organization announced "gaming disorder" as a new mental health condition to be included in the 11th edition of its International Classification of Diseases. Nowadays, parents are confronted on more challenges and stress than ever. Yet parenting competence is not a personality trait but skills and knowledge that were learned. This suggests that parental self-efficacy is a potential area of intervening. Parenting stress and competency among parents of young children without known disabilities deserve to be studied. Per the aforementioned, the following hypotheses are developed,

Hypothesis 3a: Parenting competency is negatively correlated to the stress level of parents at becoming parents.

Hypothesis 3b: Parenting competency is negatively correlated to the stress level of parents at parenting.

The aim of the present study was to get a better understanding of parenting sense of competence and stress among Macau working parents with young children having no known disabilities. Specifically, we will analyse the relations between parenting efficacy and stress, as well as its relations with the sociodemographic variables. The hypothesized model focused on the effect of three variables on parental stress, namely demographic factors, parental role and parenting competency (Figure 1).

Materials and Procedures

Participants

The service industry is common for long working hours and shift works. The current study investigated parents working in six types of service industries, including hotel and food & beverages, wholesale and retail, gaming and entertainment, medical health and social welfare, education, and as housewife/man. The work nature is further classified as on-shift or non-shift, and whether the family is single-income, double-income or single parent.

The inclusion criteria for the participants were: 1. infants and children up to 2 years of age; 2. the child was born full term and with no known disabilities; 3. the participant could read Chinese; 4. One of the parents works in the hospitality and service industries in Macau.

Sampling

In Macau, all children under 2 years of age are required to go for free regular developmental body checks, which can be done at child development center of either one of the two major hospitals in Macau. Participants were recruited in one of the centers using consecutive sampling method. That is, all eligible parents who visited the center during the set period of time, which were two weeks for the whole days, were invited to participate in the questionnaire survey.

Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used. To assess parenting self-efficacy, the Parenting Sense of Competence (PSOC) Scale is used [2,21]. PSOC consisted of two subscales, which could be scored either separately or combined for a total score, with higher scores indicating a greater perception of parenting competence. In this study, we used only the self-efficacy subscale. Parental stress is classified as the stress at becoming parents and at parenting, the raising and teaching of the children. To assess parental stress, we used a single item question on self-perceived stress relating to being a parent and to nurture a child. A total of 25 questionnaires were collected at the pilot study, the reliability of the data was tested, together with the clarity of the questions, and the effectiveness of the data collection method. The overall credibility of the data reached a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.825 [22-25].

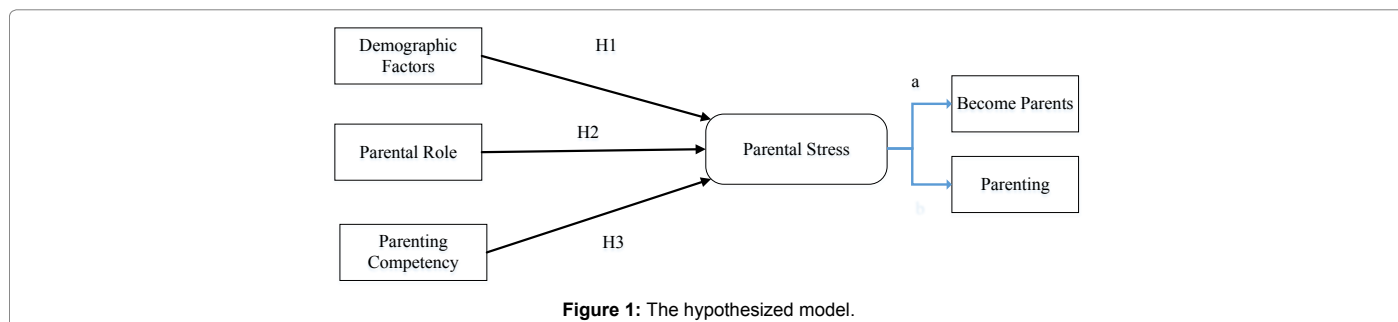


Figure 1: The hypothesized model.

Findings and Discussion

Participants

Total 251 samples were obtained with a response rate of 70%. The participants were mainly 25-34 years old, graduated from college and bachelor degree, and are married. More than 60% of the respondents were from double income families, and 76% have to work on shifts (Table 1).

Parental stress

Become parents: More than 60% of the participants in all demographic groups have perceived stress at becoming parents and at parenting. Comparatively, more participants feel stressful at becoming parents than the concern on parenting, which involved raising and teaching the children. Amidst distinctive demographic variables, participant segments who are mothers (M=3.87, SD=0.95), aged 25-34 (M=3.87, SD=0.93), hold college or bachelor degree (M=3.85, SD=0.95), single (M=3.80, SD=1.10), work in the medical and social work (M=3.94, SD=0.93) and education (M=3.94, SD=0.83) sectors, and double-income family (M=3.86, SD=0.97) are found to be most stressful amongst their discrete segments at becoming parents (Table 2).

Fathers (F), compared to mothers (M), are feeling less stressful in both regards, especially for parenting (F, 69%; M, 79.0%). Mothers are ones that undergone the most obvious changes, when they are the ones being pregnant, with concerns on breast-feeding, changes in physical shape and normally are more attached to their own children because of the characteristics of females. They are also found to be more stressful (M=3.85, SD0.94) than fathers (M=3.49, SD=1.03) at parenting. While for high level of stress at becoming parents for those aged 25-34 years old, it may be due to lack of experiences that resulted in worry, financial concerns and the considerations of being a working mom or housewife. For college or bachelor degree holders, being more knowledgeable, they should have a better understanding on the difficulties that parents will face, so being more worried. Whilst for Master Degree holder, though assumed to be even more knowledgeable are in general having a higher capability to earn more income. This may trade off part of the stress when they are in a better position to afford external help, e.g. nanny or

helper, at taking care of their children. Single family parents in no doubt will encounter higher pressure, when they may not have their partner to discuss with at times of difficulties and sharing the burden of child care.

The high perceived stress for participants working in the medical health, social work and education industries is probably the result of their heavy workload and high expectations on their own parental roles. The medical and social work segment also perceived the highest level of stress in parenting (M=3.94, SD=1.00), while the education segment (M=3.47, SD=1.33) perceived the lowest amongst all occupational groups. The controversial stress levels of the education segment at becoming parents and at parenting is probably a result of their expertise and professionalism in educating the young generation. This provided suggestions on the effect of parental competency, when more knowledgeable parents are expected to have higher parental competency that will lead to lower stress at parenting.

Parenting: For the stress on parenting, the segment housewives perceived the highest level of stress (M=3.98, SD=0.70), followed by mother group (M=3.85, SD0.94), while the segment aged 25-34 is the third on the list (M=3.82, SD=0.91). To further investigate the situation, the significant differences between each of the demographic groups on parental stress at becoming parents and at parenting are studied.

Based on Table 3, only the role of parents (being father or mother) is found to have significant difference ($t=-2.378$, $p<.05$) on stress with parenting. No significant difference is found in other demographic groups, and not for becoming parents. The role of parents is further found to significantly correlate with parental stress ($\rho=0.17$, $p<.05$). This supported hypothesis H2b, while rejected the set of H1 and H2a.

Perceived parental competency

Ensuing parental stress at becoming parents and at parenting, the extent of perceived parental competency was investigated. As denoted in Table 4, the segment aged 18-24 (M=3.21, SD=0.66) is found to perceive the highest level of parental competency, followed by singled (M=3.20, SD=0.45). Conversely, segments aged 25-34 (M=2.99, SD=0.60) and ≥ 45 (M=2.86, SD=0.84) expressed a competency level of below 3. The difference between the 18-24 and 25-34 aged segments may be due to the awareness on the actual difficulties that parents have to face. The 25-34 age segment should have working experience and therefore being more mature than 18-24 segment, who may still stay with their parents whom will take care of their daily arrangement.

For parental competency, contrarily, participants working in hospitality and food & beverages industries (M=2.97, SD=0.65), single parents (M=2.92, SD=0.71) and not working on shifts (M=2.98, SD=0.59) (Table 5) all expressed a competency level of below average. The demanding workload of the hospitality and food & beverages industries, with long working hours and the fact to endure all the burden as being a single parent maybe the reasons on the low level of perceived parental competency. The medical and social work segment also perceived the highest level of stress in parenting (M=3.94, SD=1.00), while the education segment (M=3.47, SD=1.33) perceived the lowest amongst all occupational groups.

The further investigation on the association between perceived parental competency on parental stress indicates that perceived parental competency has significant effect on parental stress at both becoming parents ($F=9.233$, $p<.05$) and at parenting ($F=6.6636$, $p<.05$) (Table 5), when they are negatively correlated at $\rho= -0.26$ ($p<.05$) for becoming parents and $\rho= -0.21$ ($p<.05$) for parenting. These supported hypotheses 3a and 3b.

Role	Percentage %	Double Income Family	Percentage %
Father	35.5	No	21.9
Mother	64.5	Yes	62.9
		N/A(Single parent family or others)	15.1
<u>Age</u>			
18-24	9.6	On-shift work	
25-34	70.1	No	24.3
35-44	17.5	Yes	75.7
45-54	2.0		
>=65	0.8	Occupation	
		Gaming & Entertainment	37.1
<u>Education</u>		Wholesale & Retail	21.1
Secondary or below	39.8	Housewife & Others	15.9
College and Bachelor	54.6	Hotel & Food and Beverages	12.7
Master or above	5.6	Education	6.8
		Medical health & Social Welfare	6.4
<u>Marital Status</u>			
Single	2.0		
Married	98.0		

Table 1: Demographics of participants.

Demographic Variables		N	Mean		Std. Deviation	
			Stress at become parents	Stress at parenting	Stress at become parents	Stress at parenting
Role	Father	89	3.64	3.49	0.99	1.03
	Mother	162	3.87	3.85	0.95	0.94
Age	18-24	24	3.42	3.33	1.06	1.17
	25-34	176	3.87	3.82	0.93	0.91
	35-44	44	3.68	3.57	1.09	1.09
	≥ 45	7	3.71	3.57	0.89	1.34
Education	Secondary or below	100	3.73	3.70	1.00	0.99
	College/Bachelor	137	3.85	3.74	0.95	0.97
	Master or above	14	3.64	3.64	1.01	1.15
Marital Status	Single	5	3.80	3.60	1.10	0.89
	Married	246	3.79	3.72	0.97	0.99
Occupation	Hotel & F&B	32	3.69	3.66	0.90	0.97
	Wholesale & Retail	53	3.83	3.74	0.99	1.00
	G & E	93	3.67	3.63	1.04	1.01
	Medical & SW	16	3.94	3.94	0.93	1.00
	Education	17	3.94	3.47	0.83	1.33
	Housewife & Others	40	3.98	3.98	0.92	0.70
Family Structure	Single-income family	55	3.60	3.69	0.99	0.90
	Double-income family	158	3.86	3.74	0.97	1.02
	Single parent	38	3.76	3.68	0.94	0.99
Job Nature	Non-shift work	61	3.79	3.62	0.93	1.04
	On-shift work	190	3.79	3.75	0.99	0.97

F&B=Food and beverages; G&E=Gaming and Entertainment; Medical=Medical health; SW=Social Welfare

Table 2: Mean and deviation of demographic groups on stress.

Stress at become parents	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	t / F	Sig.
Role	---	---	-1.802	0.073
Age	5.236	1.309	1.396	0.236
Education	1.103	0.552	0.583	0.559
Marital status	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.979
Occupation	3.942	0.788	0.833	0.527
Double income family	2.804	1.402	1.492	0.227
On-shift work	---	---	-0.018	0.986
Stress at parenting				
Role	---	---	-2.738	0.007
Age	6.967	1.742	1.819	0.126
Education	0.205	0.103	0.105	0.900
Marital status	0.075	0.075	0.077	0.782
Occupation	5.240	1.048	1.082	0.371
Double income family	0.161	0.081	0.083	0.921
On-shift work	---	---	-0.894	0.372

n=251; t, assumed equal variance; F, between groups; p (2-tailed) significant at 0.05

Role=Father, Mother; Age= 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, ≥ 45;

Education=Secondary or below, College and Bachelor, Master or above;

Marital status=Single, Married; Occupation=Hotel and Food & Beverages,

Wholesale and Retail, Gaming and Entertainment, Medical Health and Social Welfare, Education, and Housewife/man.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of demographic groups on parental stress.

Conclusion

Macau, after the liberalization of the gaming industry, has become the Las Vegas of the East, and became one of regions with the highest gross domestic product in the 21 century. The current research studied if parenting stress exists even in a city bearing such a strong economic and service oriented society. We found that parental role, parenting competency and the type of occupation

have an impact on parental stress. Findings show that despite the rocket high economic situation, both fathers and mothers of the hospitality and service industries feel stressful at becoming parents. Mothers are found to be significantly more stressful than fathers at parenting, when raising and teaching their children. This is probably contributed by the fundamental differences between female and male, when mothers are normally more attached to their child and in turn have higher concern on their growth. However, it reveals

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	Mother	162	3.01	0.60
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	35-44	44	3.11	0.62
	≥ 45	7	2.86	0.84
Education	Secondary or below	100	3.05	0.61
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	Master or above	14	3.00	0.68
Marital Status	Single	5	3.20	0.45
	Married	246	3.02	0.61
Occupation	Hotel & F&B	32	2.97	0.65
	Wholesale & Retail	53	3.13	0.56
	Gaming & Entertainment	93	3.02	0.63
	Medical & SW	16	3.19	0.40
	Education	17	3.12	0.60
	Housewife & Others	40	2.85	0.66
Family Structure	Single-income family	55	3.04	0.54
	Double-income family	158	3.05	0.61
	Single parent	38	2.92	0.71
Job Nature	Non-shift work	61	2.98	0.59
	On-shift work	190	3.04	0.62

F&B=Food and beverages; G&E=Gaming and Entertainment; Medical=Medical health; SW=Social Welfare

Table 4: Mean and deviation of demographic groups on perceived parental competency.

Parental Stress	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Become parents	16.342	8.171	9.233	0.000
Parenting	12.318	6.159	6.636	0.002

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for perceived parental competency on parental stress.

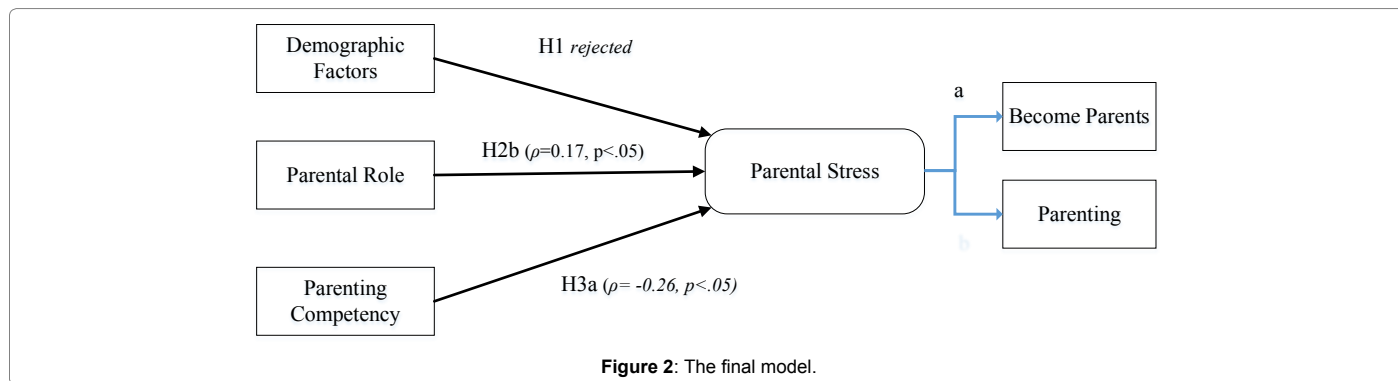


Figure 2: The final model.

that fact that good economic situation is not the final solution to the societal problem of parental stress (Figure 2).

Contrariwise, increase in parenting competency can reduce parental stress. When parents are more knowledgeable on parental matters, they will have more confidence with less worries at becoming parents and at parenting. This illustrates training and education courses can be provided to resolve parental stress problems. The courses should be structured and organized that can provide knowledge and skills that parents are looking for. Further studies should investigate the type of knowledge and skills that parents feel they are deficient in but necessary. Structured and organized courses should be developed, which will allow parents to easily access and learn, despite all the stress in time as parents.

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