

Family Resource and Youth Development in North District

Abstract

The current research was conducted by the Breakthrough, entrusted by the North District Primary School Head Association and North District Secondary School Headmaster Conference. The objectives are (1) to investigate the psychological and behavioral patterns of adolescents among Hong Kong North District; (2) to investigate North District adolescents' connectedness with their families, schools, and peers; (3) to examine the utilization of community resources and connectedness with the community among North District adolescents; (4) to examine the association between community connectedness and psychological and behavioral characteristics; (5) to study the interactions between connectedness with family, school, peers, and the community; and (6) to evaluate the need of community resources among North District adolescents on the basis of the findings obtained. The current research employed a structured quantitative questionnaire, and by random selection collected valid data from 1237 students studying in primary or secondary schools in Hong Kong North District.

Findings of the current research are as follow:

The psychological and behavioral patterns of North District adolescents showed negative age trend. In particular, dissatisfaction with life, loneliness, and misbehaviors increased with age. For problem behaviors, the most frequently reported were relatively mild misbehaviors: about 40% of the sampled adolescents sometimes or often spoke coarse language, 13% sometimes or often gambled, 11% sometimes or often fought with others. A couple of deviant behaviors showed prevalence rates rather worth noting: 8.7% of adolescents had ever done self-destructive behaviors, and 7.6% had ever planed or attempted suicide. In addition, 5.8% of adolescents had ever sold illegal goods, and 7.2% had ever stole or robbed things. These suggest that a significant proportion of North District adolescents are at risk of suicide or juvenile delinquency.

The psychological and behavioral patterns of North District adolescents are related to their connectedness with families, schools, and peers. Family connectedness is especially important to adolescents' psychosocial development, in a way that it has pervasive influence on different aspects of psychosocial health. Moreover, family is not an isolated system but is interacting with the peer system. In particular, the findings show that, among adolescents with poorer family connectedness, good peer connectedness has a heightened protective effect against deviant behaviors. It hence appears that support from peers is particularly important for those who are less connected with their families but less important for those who have good relationship with the families.

Community connectedness was also found to be significantly related to the psychological and behavioral patterns of the North District adolescents. Among all community connectedness indicators, community resources, community support, and community activities were the most predictive of the psychological and behavioral characteristics. It suggests that for healthy development, the adolescents are in need of community resources (e.g. community services), sense of support from people in the community, and adequate venues and facilities for leisure activities in the community. However, at the moment we found that North District adolescents' perceptions to community resources were polarized: half of the adolescents viewed their community resources as accessible and useful, but the other half viewed their community resources as distant and not useful. It shows that as much as half of the North District adolescents could hardly benefit from the resources in the community to meet their need.

The impact of community on adolescents' development is by no means independent from other systems; in fact, the effects of community connectedness are mediated by connectedness with family and school, rather than are directly acted on the individuals. It suggests that good coordination between the community, families, and schools might be the key to effectively enhance healthy development of North District adolescents.

On the basis of our research findings, we suggest that the community should support the North District adolescents in three ways, i.e., *improving the community*, *supporting the families*, and *collaborating with schools*. In particular, we suggest:

- ◆ A harmonious and supportive community environment should be established, and adolescents should be well included into such community environment;
- ◆ Adequate and appropriate community resources and services should be ensured, and efforts should be made to promote understanding and positive attitudes to such resources and services among the adolescents;
- ◆ Venues and facilities for leisure activities that fit adolescents' needs should be increased, and such venues and facilities should be designed attractive to adolescents;
- ◆ Adequate and appropriate family services should be ensured, and parent education should be promoted;
- ◆ Family activities, in which parents and children participated jointly, should be encouraged and participated in the community, so as to strengthen both parents' and adolescents' connectedness with the community on one hand, and to strengthen family connectedness on the other hand;
- ◆ The community should collaborate with schools, in ways such as co-organizing after-school activities, or having the schools leading their students to participate in community building actions (like beautifying the community, and promoting social morality etc.), with an aim to collaboratively build a harmonious, quality community.