Parenting in a New Context: Threats and Opportunities for Immigrant Chinese Parents

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Parenting Stress

- Defined as stress experienced in the parenting role due to...
  - demanding child behaviours, difficulties with parenting tasks, challenging parent-child relationships, or parenting daily hassles, etc.

- Parenting stress has been linked to less optimal parenting and more and child behavioural and emotional problems.
Parenting Stress in the context of Immigration

- Are there aspects of parenting stress that are unique to the experiences of immigrant parents?

- **Acculturation process** – negotiate balance of identification with culture of origin and identification with new culture

- **Acculturation stress** – language learning, feeling pressured to assimilate, feeling marginalized

- Incorporate acculturation stress into the concept of parenting stress
Acculturative Parenting Stress

- Parenting stress specifically related to the demands of parenting in a new cultural context
- Combination of perceiving:
  - Incongruence between views of optimal parenting between two cultures
  - The new culture as a threat to child development
- Expect there to be greater challenge parenting across two cultures when there is greater cultural distance
Immigrant Chinese parents in Canada

- Chinese and Canadian cultures differ in many ways that are relevant to parenting
  - *Chinese values*: parental authority, lifelong obligation to the family, respect for elders, family harmony, achievement
  - *Canadian values*: individuality, autonomy, asserting oneself, self-esteem

- At risk for perceiving incongruence and threat
Adolescent developmental period

- Parenting stress most often studied in infancy and preschool years

- Adolescence –relative increases in children’s desire for independence & increases in parent-child conflict

- Different rates of acculturation between parents and children, on top of these developmental changes, may create even greater parenting challenge at this age in immigrant families
The Intercultural Family Study

Eligibility Criteria
- Self-identify ethnicity as Chinese
- Both parents immigrated to Canada after age 18
- Lived in Canada for at least 2 years
- Adolescent aged 12-17

Recruitment Procedures
- 67% randomly recruited
- 33% referred (participating families)
Family Demographics

- N=182 families

- Region of origin
  - People’s Republic of China (65.1%)
  - Taiwan (20.2%)
  - Hong Kong (14.7%)

- 93% were 2-parent families; 89% were married before immigration
# Parent Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>$M = 44.66$ yrs ($SD = 4.69$)</td>
<td>$M = 47.03$ yrs ($SD = 5.67$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of residence</strong></td>
<td>$M = 10.56$ yrs ($SD = 6.53$)</td>
<td>$M = 11.01$ yrs ($SD = 7.07$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest education</strong></td>
<td>High school (13.6%)</td>
<td>High school (11.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocational/college (32.7%)</td>
<td>Vocational/college (20.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University degree (33.3%)</td>
<td>University degree (27.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate/profess (14.2%)</td>
<td>Graduate/profess (33.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status</strong></td>
<td>Full time (51.1%)</td>
<td>Full time (64.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part time (17.6%)</td>
<td>Part time (13.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking employment (9.3%)</td>
<td>Seeking employment (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not in labour force (19.8%)</td>
<td>Not in labour force (4.9%)</td>
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Adolescent Characteristics

- Mean age of adolescents
  - 14.95 years ($SD = 1.70$)

- 52% female, 48% male

- Generational Status
  - 55% 1st generation
    - arrived after age 6
  - 45% 1.5 or 2nd generation
    - 1.5 generation: immigrated before age 6
Acculturative Parenting Stress

- Bi-cultural team developed a pool of questions, translated & back-translated, and pilot tested
- 15 items rated 1 to 4

Incongruence
- “My way of parenting is very different from that of Canadian parents.”
- “I feel pressure to change aspects of my parenting approach to be more ‘Canadian.’”

Threat
- “I am worried that my child will be too influenced by Canadian values.”
- “I encourage my child to be critical of Canadian values.”
Acculturative Parenting Stress (APS)

- Mother and Father \( r = .30^{***} \)
- No mean differences between spouses
- Unrelated to child gender or age
- Correlated with length of residence for mothers

### Table

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<tr>
<td><strong>Alpha</strong></td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean (SD)</strong></td>
<td>2.21 (.26)</td>
<td>2.18 (.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td>1.07 – 3.00</td>
<td>1.53 – 3.00</td>
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*** \( p < .001 \)
Construct Validity of APS

- **Acculturation Stress** (Mena et al., 1987)
  - Because of my ethnic background, I feel that others often exclude me from participating in their activities.

- **Parenting Efficacy** (Dumka et al., 1996)
  - I feel sure of myself as a mother/father.

- **Psychological Adjustment**
  - **Depressive Symptoms** (Radloff, 1977)
    - In past week, I felt sad.
  - **Self-Esteem** (Rosenberg, 1979)
    - On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
Construct Validity of APS

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<td>Parenting Efficacy</td>
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<td>Depressive Symptoms</td>
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<td>Self-Esteem</td>
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Controlling for length of residence

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
Contributors to APS

- Parent Resources
- Contextual Resources & Stressors
- Child Characteristics
- Acculturation Goals for child

Acculturative Parenting Stress
Contributors to APS

- **Parent Personal Resources**
  - Belief in own efficacy as parent
  - Canadian cultural adoption (beh, identity, values)

- **Contextual Resources & Stressors**
  - Acculturation Stress
  - Co-parenting support
  - Contact with Chinese community
  - Socioeconomic Status (composite of educ and $)

- **Child Characteristics**
  - Internalizing and externalizing problems

- **Acculturation Goals for child**
  - Child orientation to Chinese & Canadian cultures
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Correlates of APS

Acculturative Parenting Stress

Parenting Practices

Parent-Child Relationship Quality
Correlates of APS

The experience of stress can compromise:

- **Parenting Practices**
  - Warmth, reasoning, monitoring

- **Parent-Child Relationship Quality**
  - Congruence and Conflict
Mediation model

- APS
- Parenting
- Parent-child conflict
Mediation model – direct and indirect effects

APS -> Parent-child conflict

APS -> Parenting

Parenting -> Warm, Reason, Monitor

Dads/ Moms

*p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001"
Discussion

- Individual differences: variation among immigrant parents in their experience of Acculturative Parenting Stress

- Parents who reported more APS also reported less optimal parenting practices, lower parenting efficacy, lower self-esteem, and more strained parent-child relationships
Risk Factors for APS

- Shared by Mothers and Fathers
  - Stronger Chinese acculturation goals
  - Less supportive co-parenting relationship
Relationships within the family

- Co-parenting relationship quality and parent-child relationship quality consistently emerged as strong correlates of APS

  - efforts to strengthen ties within families might reduce parenting stress
  
  - efforts to reduce parenting stress might strengthen family ties

- How immigrant mothers and fathers come together to support one another in the parenting role is largely unexplored
What wasn’t related to APS

- **Socioeconomic Status**
  - APS is very specific type of stress; SES complicated in an immigrant population

- **Ethnic density of parents’ social network**
  - Potential support, problem solving, etc. counterbalanced by equal amounts of perceived pressure or judgment?
Limitations and Future Directions

- Data are cross-sectional
  - Longitudinal data to address the dynamic nature of acculturation and parenting stress

- Resilience models
  - Identify supports that mitigate the effects of stress (e.g., co-parenting support)
Acknowledgements

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