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Supporting parents of  
young people after social  
unrest in Hong Kong using  
mindfulness

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# A Stepped-Care, Multi-disciplinary, Evidence-based Approach to Strengthen Adolescence and Family Well-being after Social Unrest



## 復和 連繫

社會衝擊後復和 • 關懷支援中聯繫 • 靜觀裡滋養身心

復和  連繫

家長靜觀工作坊

THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY  
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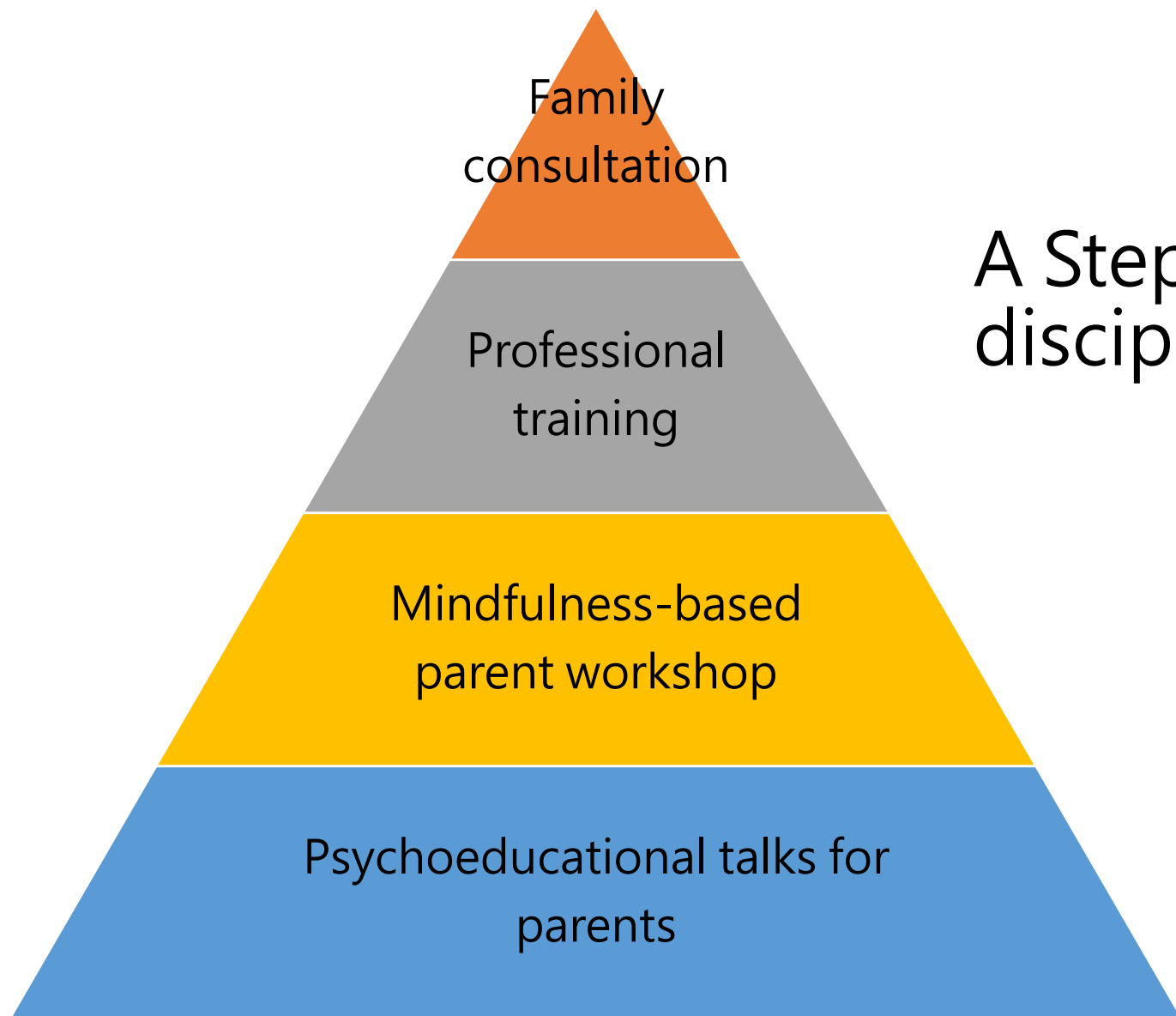
- 與家長一起練習, 互持互勉
- 學習七種靜觀技巧調節壓力情緒
- 培育家長安心, 靈活處理溝通衝突能力
- 工作坊為期四星期, 共八小時
- 2020年6/7月, 隨機編配上課時間 (最終安排可能隨疫情更動)
- 費用全免, 完成三次健康問卷可獲 200元超市禮券

黃瓊妍醫生 (精神科專科醫生)  
(A班) 6月9日至6月30日 或  
(B班) 7月7日至7月28日  
星期二晚七時半至九時半  
中環區

黃婷博士 (臨床心理學家)  
(C班) 6月13日至7月4日 或  
(D班) 7月11日至8月1日  
星期六早上十時半至十二時半  
香港理工大學

社會衝擊後復和 • 關懷支援中聯繫 • 靜觀裡滋養身心

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Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office, 2020



## A Stepped-Care, Multi-disciplinary Approach



Depression & post-traumatic stress during major social unrest in Hong Kong  
(Ni et al., 2020)

- After a period of social unrest beginning in 2019, a population-based study reported a prevalence of major depression of 11.2%, compared with 1.9% during 2009–14 and 6.5% in 2017 after the Occupy Central Movement.
- Prevalence of suspected PTSD in 2019 was estimated to be 12.8%.

# Family support as a protective factor to public mental health

- About 6–20% of individuals develop post-traumatic stress disorder after a potentially traumatic event (Kahana et al., 2006). Other mental health issues including depression, anxiety, paranoid ideation, and aggression have been found in adolescents with extensive exposure to community violence (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2012).
- Studies have shown that social unrest and exposure to community violence have a strong detrimental impact on adolescent mental health (Vorhies et al., 2011).
- Mental health issues, particularly post-traumatic stress, are common in social unrest, but they are moderated by positive parental mental health and positive parenting (Dubow et al., 2012).

# Family support as a protective factor to public mental health

- in Northern Ireland, where a significant proportion of adolescents have been exposed to community conflict, emotional insecurity and family cohesion predicted subsequent adolescent delinquency and aggression (Cummings et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2016).
- Adolescents living with parents who have different life values and exert high psychological control may lack a buffer against the threat of mental health problems during social unrest. Thus, this age group is at the highest risk of developing chronic mental health issues after exposure to traumatic life experiences (de Jong et al., 2015).

# Applying Social identity theory in understanding Hong Kong families

- Earlier studies on intergroup dynamics focused on relationships between strangers, some recent research extends to more personal relationships, including families. The parent-adolescent relationship is often fueled by age group distinctions, as many parents experience challenges where peer relationships of their children overpower family influences (Soliz & Rittenour, 2012).
- Age differences can extend to the influence of birth cohort, and communication among members of different generations or birth cohorts can be problematic when the social status and economic resources of one cohort have conflicts with those of another (Hummert, 2012).
- In the context of social unrest, conflicts among generations within families that are characterized as major differences in essential goals, needs, and values, and are perceived as irresolvable may lead to an enduring and destructive mutual violence over time (Halperin, 2015).

# Family studies in the context of social unrest

- Ho et al. (2018) found intra-familial conflict and different levels of renegotiation in family relationships of active participants and bystanders in the political movement.
- Chan et al. (2018) found that lower relationship quality and lower congruence in political attitudes predicted more serious subsequent family conflicts, suggesting a close relationship between political and family life.



# Some observations about Hong Kong families

- Greater dissatisfaction has been reported among younger than the older generation (Wong et al., 2020)
- There is a trend for the younger generation's growing participation in the political movement for expressing their dissatisfaction with existing social and political structures (Lam-Knott, 2018).
- Traditional Chinese parenting principles expect total obedience of children and a lack of personal space to express dissatisfaction that are still common in many Hong Kong families (Shek & Sun, 2014).
- A reconsideration of the overemphasis on family harmony and strict parental control, and a search for parenting principles that balance younger family members' need for security and identity with continuing family bonding during this critical time is recommended.

## Definition of mindfulness

- “Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment non-judgmentally in the service of self-understanding, wisdom, and compassion.” ~ Jon Kabat-Zinn ~



Being mindful  
in our practice  
(Kabat-Zinn:  
2013:489)

*When you are willing to be secure enough in yourself to listen to what other people want and how they see things without constantly reacting, objecting, arguing, fighting, resisting, making yourself right and them wrong, **they will feel heard, welcomed, accepted, met.** ... In this way, your mindfulness practice can have a healing effect on your relationships.*

# Mindfulness benefits parents (Bögels, 2015:170)

...as mindful parenting facilitators,  
we lead the group...  
we are also present as parents  
who struggle to parent well,  
as opposed to professionals who have all the answers.  
We do not have the answers,  
but we can help by joining together in investigation  
and sharing our own struggles with the practice and  
our own suffering as human beings



# Potential benefits from mindfulness programs

- Some parenting interventions combine mindfulness skills with psychoeducation as a strategy for promoting security, connection, and emotion regulation (Chambers et al., 2009). Growing research suggests that strengthening mindfulness in parents results in enhanced compassion in children, and non-judgmental acceptance and greater emotional awareness in parents (Lo et al., 2018).
- Intervention targeted to resolve intractable conflicts involves successful emotion regulation that requires the motivation and skills in cognitive reappraisal and regulation of negative emotions (Gutentag et al., 2017).
- Goldenberg et al. (2017) found that parents who placed their values on family unity were motivated to regulate and compensate in high-intensity negative responses that can promote relationship quality. Parents need to adjust their perspective in managing their relationship with adolescent children and to learn emotion regulation strategies that can promote positive affective change and facilitate empathy and reconciliation in families and communities (Cehajic-Clancy et al., 2016).

# Literature review: Mindfulness-based programs

- A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of 25 mindfulness-based parenting programs for parents of adolescents reported a small, post-intervention reduction in parenting stress and youth outcomes (Burgdorf et al., 2019).
- a study from Israel showed that after being presented with anger-inducing information related to political conflict, 101 adult participants in a mindfulness workshop were more supportive of conciliatory policies, with the effects being mediated by a reduction in perceived threat and improvement in emotion regulation (Alkoby et al., 2017).

# Research questions

- The aim of the present study was to evaluate the effects of a mindful parenting workshop for parents of adolescents after social unrest in Hong Kong.
- Using a randomized waitlist control design, this study evaluated the effects of the mindfulness-based support program on the parents' depressive and post-traumatic symptoms, perceived family functioning, and changes in family conflicts.

# Methods

- recruited 124 parents of adolescents aged 12 to 30
- Open recruitment, promoting through collaborators, project facebook page
- Randomly assigned 90 parents to mindful parenting workshop or waitlist control
- A four-week program with 8 contact hours; Each session include mindfulness practice and psychoeducation
- organized in five locations which make parents could travel to these locations using public transportation
- Include a 3-month follow-up





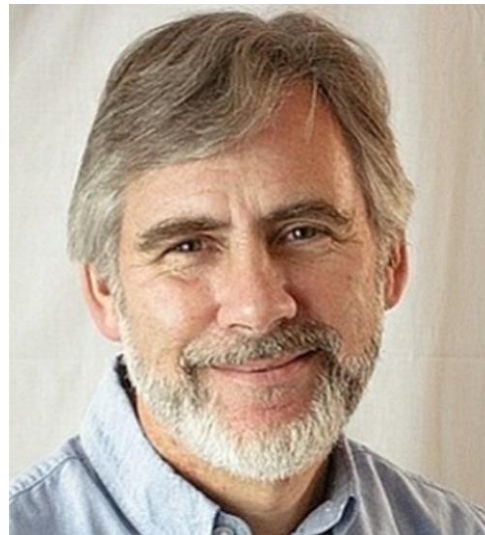
# Finding the ground

## An advanced practice suitable for COVID-19

But for some people, the breath may be a relatively uncertain anchor: the sensations of the breath don't feel quite strong enough to hold their attention. This is especially true if you have an asthmatic condition, or a history of panic attacks, or are experiencing symptoms of Covid-19.

Mark Williams

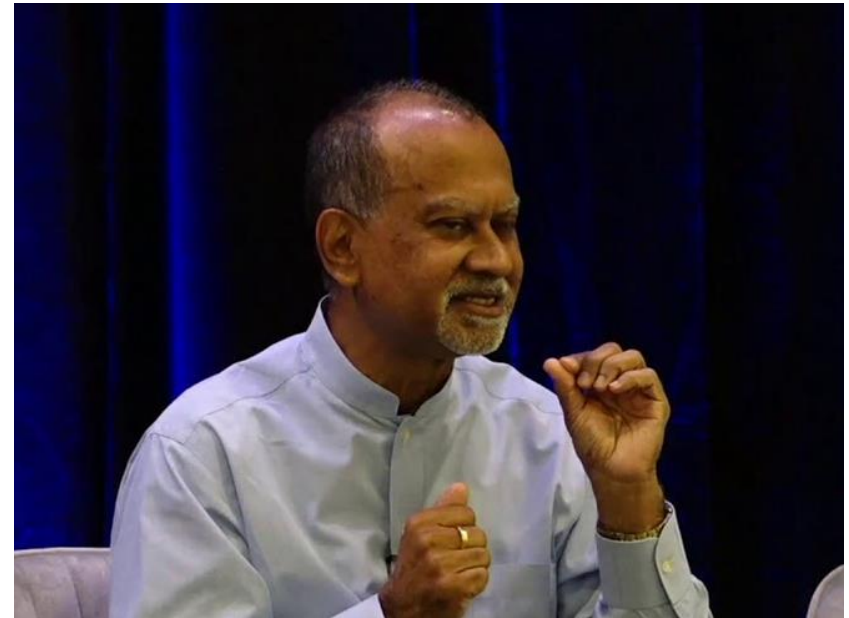
Founder, Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy



# Soles of the feet an advanced practice for anger

## Mindfulness on the Sole of the feet (SoF)

- An innovative practice that integrate mindfulness practice with behavioral analysis
- Very clear rationale, goals and techniques that can be used in one-to-one intervention
- Founded by Prof. Nirbhay Singh



# Measures

- **Negative emotions** Three prominent emotions about social unrest were measured by the items selected in a study by Halperin et al. (2017), including the intensity of hatred, anger, despair using Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very strong).
- **Depressive symptoms** They were assessed by the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9, Kroenke et al., 2001)
- **Anxiety symptoms** They were assessed by the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7, Kroenke et al., 2007).
- **Post-traumatic stress symptoms** They were assessed by the International Trauma Questionnaire (ITQ, Cloitre et al., 2009). It is a 6-item self-report measure of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress based on the parent's experiences in the previous one month, based on the criteria of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in ICD-11.

# Measures

- **Family functioning** It is assessed by the Family Adaptation, Partnership, Growth, Affection, Resolve scale (APGAR, Smilkstein et al., 1982). The 5-item scale uses a 3-point response scale (0 = hardly ever and 2 = almost always).
- **Family conflict** It was measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS, Straus & Gelles, 1979), a self-report measure of behavioral assault or psychological aggression among family members. Child initiated conflicts and parent self-initiated conflicts are assessed separately.
- **Mindful parenting** In this study, we selected two subscales Nonjudgmental Acceptance in Parenting (6 items), and Listening with Full Attention (4 items) which were more sensitive to intervention in previous studies (Lo et al., 2018).
- **Exposure to social unrest** measured by the modified Political Life Events Scale (Slone et al., 1998). The original scale has 20 items and we excluded 6 items which considered as unsuitable to the context.

# Preliminary results

## *Baseline*

- 90 parents randomly assigned to intervention group and control group.
- 14 of the parents had a PHQ9  $\geq 10$ , the cutoff score of a probable depression case, which represent 15.6% of the sample.
- The mean score of family functioning is 4.87 (SD: 2.72). The score is much lower than a survey conducted in 2017 (N=589) which was 6.22.

# Results:

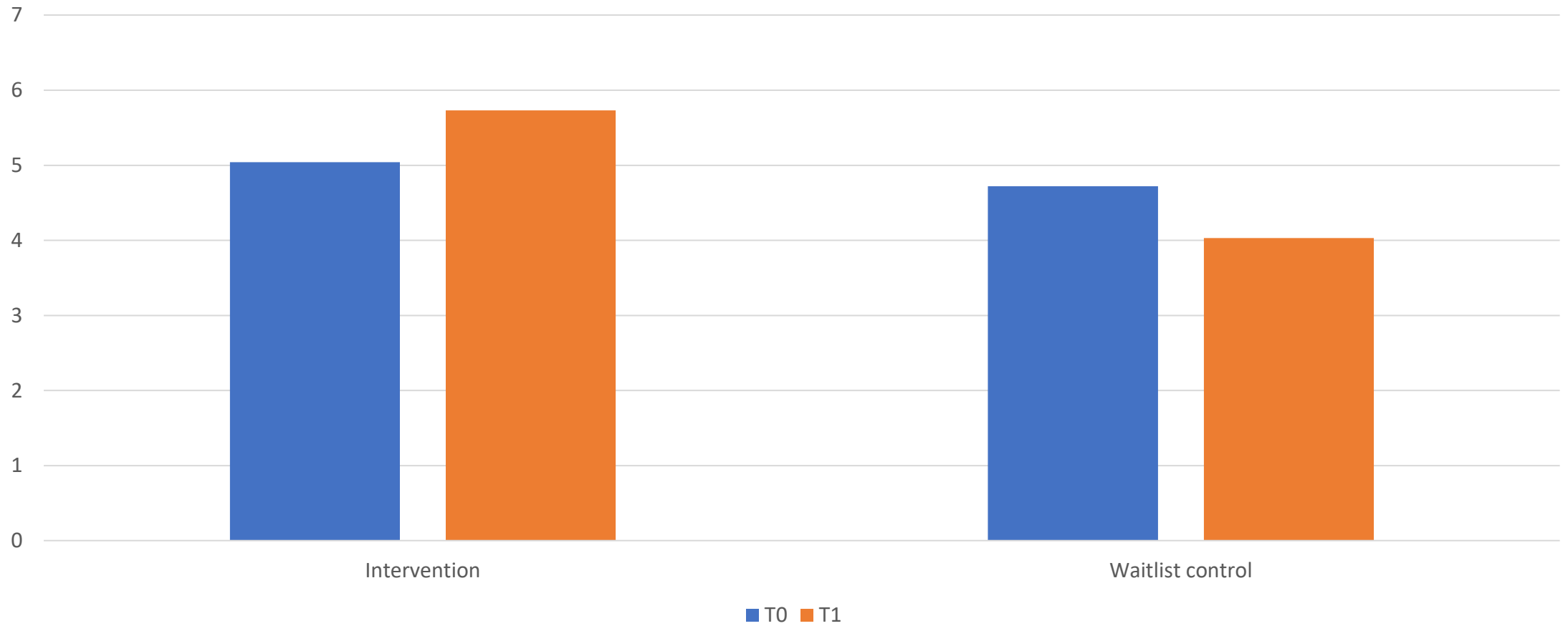
## *Attendance*



- Among the participants in intervention group, the average attendance was 81.1%, 3.24 sessions out of 4. 92.7% of the participants attended two sessions or more.
- It showed the overall satisfaction of the participants.

# Results

*Family functioning (APGAR) (PHQ $\geq$ 5)*



# Results

## *Depression (PHQ9)*

- We further controlled the child- and parent-initiated conflicts as covariates, a significant reduction of depression was found in the parents from intervention group, compared with the control group, with a moderate effect size.



# Results

## *3 month follow-up of intervention group*

- Significant improvements in family functioning and child-initiated conflicts were found.
- Small effect sizes were reported, respectively.

# Discussion

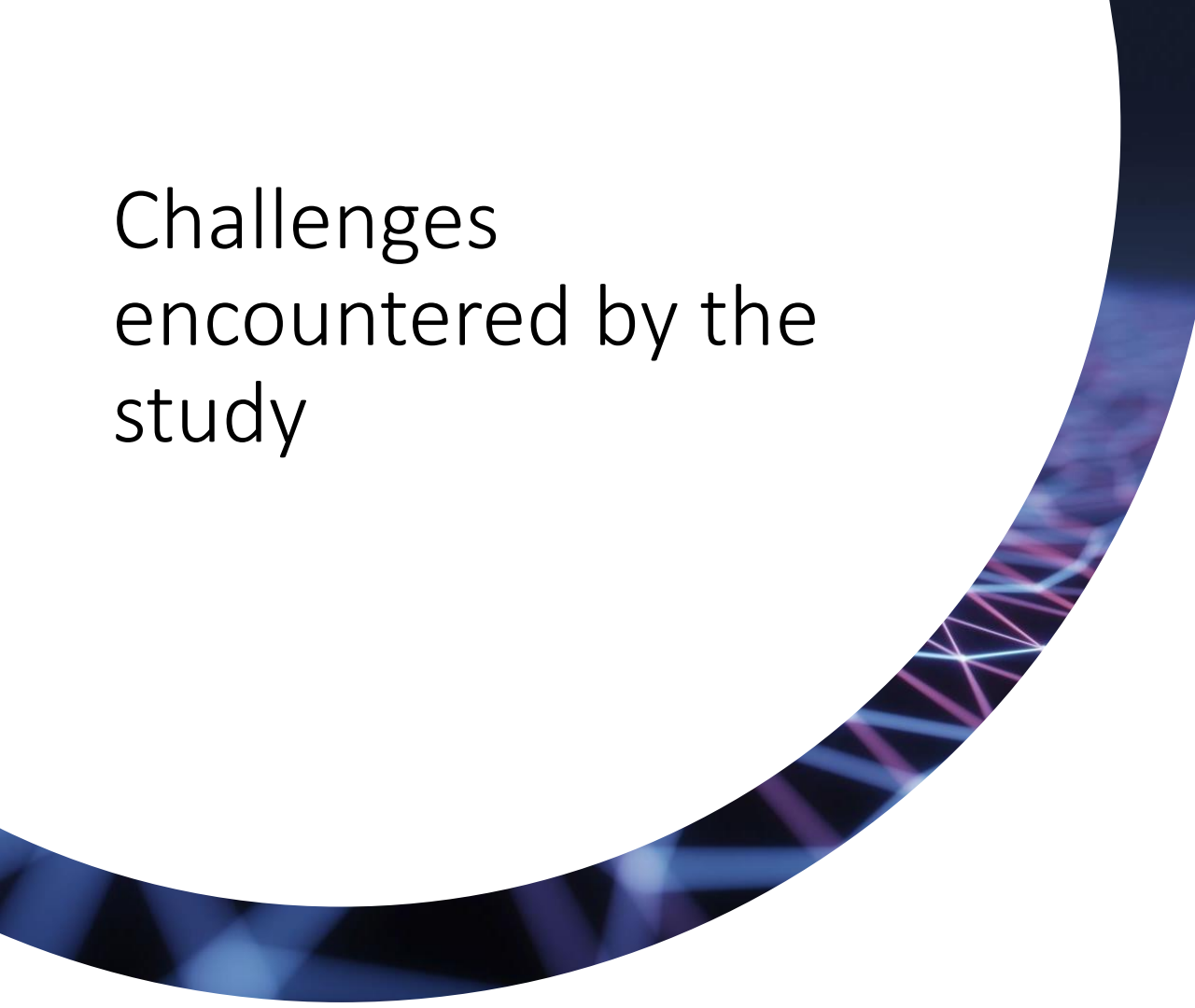


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There is increasing social unrest in many countries around the world, but few studies have been conducted to investigate whether a mindfulness-based program would support parents, particularly to strengthen their emotion regulation, promote better mental health, and reduce family conflicts.

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These results provide suggestive evidence that parents with depressive symptoms and family conflicts during social unrest could benefit from a brief mindfulness-based program.



# Challenges encountered by the study

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The social unrest aroused families' suspicion and sensitivity about data collection, and they were reluctant to reveal their personal data to the researchers. To manage this, we adopted a non-stigmatizing approach in the recruitment process and limited the information to be collected before the start of the intervention.

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Some parents hesitated to participate in a face-to-face program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A ban on gathering and social distancing created hurdles for the project team to recruit more parents to attend the workshops. Collaborators at secondary schools had been preoccupied with adjustment in academic study and placed less priority in arranging parent programs. The number of participants recruited for the study was much smaller than our planned sample size.

# Limitations and implications to further study

- The positive outcomes were relatively small in terms of effect size when compared to extant studies that used similar dosages of mindfulness-based programs (Lo et al., 2019; Lo et al., 2020).
- Such differences may be due to the context, when social unrest was experienced by the participants during the course of the study. Many parents and families anecdotally reported still being overwhelmed by the political protests and media coverage. In addition, the city was facing another wave of Covid-19 pandemic while the last set of data were being collected. These external contingencies resulted in limitations to the study design not only with regard to participant recruitment but also the extent of data that could be collected, both in terms of breadth of the information and the duration of the data collection period.

# Limitations and implications to further study

- Using a waitlist control design, this study does not permit multiple treatments to be assessed against each other and raises the possibility that the significant findings could have resulted from a general treatment effect.
- the waitlist-control group of parents had been informed that they will receive the mindfulness-based program after the completion of the intervention group. This inevitably means that these parents were not blind to the experimental and control conditions. Future research should include an active control condition that includes features that look like the mechanics of mindful parenting programs.
- Assessment of our study based on self-reported measures. Relying only on rating scales may lead to spurious correlations among the items measuring multiple constructs as a result of response styles, social desirability, priming effects which may be independent from the true correlations among the constructs being measured (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research should include multiple methods or instruments including direct observations, and performance measures.

# Acknowledgement

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