



Self-Reported Risk and Delinquent Behavior and Problem Behavioral Intention in Hong Kong Adolescents: The Role of Moral Competence and Spirituality

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Based on the six-wave data collected from Grade 7 to Grade 12 students ($N = 3,328$ at Wave 1), this pioneer study examined the development of problem behaviors (risk and delinquent behavior and problem behavioral intention) and the predictors (moral competence and spirituality) among adolescents in Hong Kong. Individual growth curve models revealed that while risk and delinquent behavior accelerated and then slowed down in the high school years, adolescent problem behavioral intention slightly accelerated over time. After controlling the background socio-demographic factors, moral competence and spirituality were negatively associated with risk and delinquent behavior as well as problem behavioral intention across all waves as predicted. Regarding the rate of change in the outcome measures, while the initial level of spirituality was positively linked to the growth rate of risk and delinquent behavior, the initial level of moral competence was negatively associated with the growth rate of problem behavioral intention. The theoretical and practical implications of the present findings are discussed with reference to the role of moral competence and spirituality in the development of adolescent problem behavior.

Keywords: delinquent behavior, longitudinal study, developmental trajectory, developmental asset, Chinese adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is portrayed as a life stage full of "storm and stress." While most adolescents can successfully adapt to adolescent challenges, some young people have maladaptive problems (Cheung, 2014; Tsitsika et al., 2015; Calado et al., 2017). Adolescent problem behaviors not only hinder adolescents' current healthy functioning but also adversely impact their well-being in the long run. For instance, adolescents with higher probability of engaging in fighting and petty theft were more likely to report depression, substance abuse problems and dropping out of high school in early adulthood (Cook et al., 2015). A review based on studies published over a 25-year span showed that adolescents using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs frequently performed more badly

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