

Early-Childhood Parenting Intensity, Child Development, and Intentions for Higher-parity Births in Hong Kong

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Contemporary East Asian societies face two parallel trends: persistently declining fertility rates and the widespread rise of intensive parenting, marked by increasing emotional, financial, and temporal investments in children. The extensive investment and associated stress have been cited as one of the most critical causes of the lowest-low fertility in these societies. However, little research has examined the extent to which, and which styles of parenting, are constraining fertility. Using a parental sample in Hong Kong who have had at least one child in early childhood, this study investigates how parenting styles are associated with higher fertility parity intentions and whether children's developmental outcomes mediate this relationship.

Drawing on baseline data from the Hong Kong Child Development Longitudinal Study (HK-CHILD, 2025), we identify parenting styles via k-means clustering, yielding five types: warm-engaged, intensive, ambivalent-stressed, relaxed-positive, and disengaged-anxious (reference). Results indicate that warm-engaged and intensive parenting are significantly associated with higher-parity intentions relative to disengaged-anxious parenting. Intensive parenting also exhibits the largest positive association with child development. However, children's developmental outcomes are not significantly related to higher-parity intentions, offering no evidence of mediation.

These findings partially challenge the view that intensive parenting is a barrier to higher-parity intentions: parents who invest most intensively do not express lower intentions to have additional children. Instead, warm-engaged and intensive orientations appear consistent with a consumption preference for children, valuing parenting as an intrinsically fulfilling life experience, and sustaining higher-parity intentions independent of measured child developmental outcomes.