

Evaluation Study on The Women's Foundation Life Skills Program 2013-14

Final Report

Submitted to

The Women's Foundation

By

Prof. TO Siu Ming (Principal Investigator)

Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Prof. TAM Hau Lin (Co-Principal Investigator)

Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies
City University of Hong Kong

Dr. THONG Yan Yee, Jenny (Co-Investigator)

Lecturer, Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

On

April 2015

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Executive Summary

The Women's Foundation's Life Skills Program was launched in 2011. The main goal of the program is to teach mid-late teens to question and challenge the status quo, to replace negative stereotypes with positive images, and to initiate positive changes in their lives. The curriculum covers important life aspects such as personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and life and career planning. Furthermore, in view of the importance of family and school in the socialization of children and youth into adulthood, this program also provides parent and teacher seminars to teach how to support their children and students to encounter life challenges and achieve positive development. In order to develop an evidence-based life skills program, The Women's Foundation commissioned this research team to conduct an evaluation study to assess the effectiveness of this program and to explore the essential factors affecting the feasibility of the program to tailor itself to the needs of adolescents in Hong Kong.

The present evaluation study adopted quantitative research methods to (1) assess the program in terms of its effectiveness in improving student participants' self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of loneliness, sense of meaningfulness, satisfaction with life, internal locus of control, gender stereotypes, and financial literacy; and (2) assess student, parent, and teacher participants' satisfaction with the program. Focus group interviews were also undertaken to examine student participants' perceptions of the program and their learning experiences.

The quantitative findings indicate that the student participants experienced substantial improvements in most of the aspects examined after joining the program. In sum, they gained a more positive evaluation of self-worth, a stronger sense of companionship, an enhanced sense of meaningfulness, a higher satisfaction with life, an improved sense of control over life events, and a greater willingness to take part in family financial matters. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of the student, parent, and teacher participants felt highly satisfied with the program contents, program effects, and performance of their instructors. Consistent with this positive feedback, many focus group respondents also expressed their appreciation for the program

impacts on their affirmation of self-worth, exploration of life purposes, acceptance of responsibility for life, and reflection on personal financial management.

The synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative research findings suggest that The Women's Foundation may consider the following recommendations for the sake of excellence. First, the Life Skills Program should maintain its rewarding effort in appreciating adolescents' determination and capability to take charge of their lives. Second, more effort could be put into improving the mutual understanding among adolescents, parents, and teachers, such as enhancing adolescents' communication skills and promoting positive parenting and teaching. Third, more work could be done in helping male student participants realize how the actualization of gender equality can benefit both genders, creating more reflection and discussion on the roles of males and females in the promotion of gender equality so as to foster more collaboration between them. Finally, the mentorship and peer ambassador schemes should be further enhanced in order to sustain the positive impacts of the program.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the evaluation research

Life skills training is a type of non-formal education designed to nurture young people with the positive qualities needed to deal effectively with life challenges (World Health Organization, 1997). The development of life skills can also enable young people to protect themselves from a multitude of vulnerable social environments and risk-taking behaviors (UNICEF, 2012). In response to the urgent need for providing life skills training for Hong Kong adolescents, The Women's Foundation's Life Skills Program was launched in 2011. The main goal of the program is to teach mid-late teens to question and challenge the status quo, to replace negative stereotypes with positive images, and to initiate positive changes in their lives. The curriculum covers important life aspects such as personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and life and career planning. Furthermore, in view of the importance of family and school in the socialization of children and youth into adulthood, this program also provides parent and teacher seminars to help them learn how to support their children and students to encounter life challenges and achieve positive development. In order to develop an evidence-based life skills program, The Women's Foundation commissioned this research team to conduct an evaluation study to assess the effectiveness of this program and to explore the essential factors affecting the feasibility of the program to tailor itself to the needs of adolescents in Hong Kong.

1.2. Research objectives

- To assess the effectiveness of the program in fostering students' psychosocial well-being.
- To examine the student, parent, and teacher participants' perception of the program.
- To explore the student participants' learning experiences.
- To investigate the factors conducive to the success of the program.
- To make recommendations for program improvements.

2. Literature review

The significance of life skills development among adolescents has been increasingly recognized in Hong Kong since its inception in the 2000s. Life skills development is commonly regarded as courses, programs, and activities provided by life skills training practitioners to enhance young people's attitudes, knowledge, and skills for the promotion of their personal, social, academic, and career development (Agochiya, 2010; American School Counseling Association, 2003; Yuen et al., 2003). It emphasizes equipping adolescents with self-knowledge, social and emotional skills, decision-making and problem-solving skills, time-management skills, and career planning skills to foster their whole-person development and prepare them for full participation in the community and society (Faculty of Education, CUHK & Department of Educational Studies, 2007; Watkins, 1998; Yuen, 2011). Metaphorically speaking, life skills development does not refer to a single subject but to a large family. Scholars from different disciplines are still exploring the theoretical foundation of life skills development and its relationships with life education (Faculty of Education, CUHK & Department of Educational Studies, 2007), positive youth development (Shek, Ma, & Merrick, 2007), and leadership development (Ngai, Cheung, Ngai, & To, 2012). From the perspective of mental health counseling, life skills development provides adolescents with rich learning experiences that emphasize the revival of the life momentum embedded in various life domains, namely family, school, community, and career (Gazda & Brooks, 1985).

Numerous overseas and local research studies have explored the effectiveness of life skills development and leadership training programs. Having adopted a randomized controlled trial for program evaluation, the study conducted by Graves, Sentner, Workman, and Mackey (2011) indicated that young females who received a life skills program increased their personal/self-sexuality expectations and improved some aspects of their parent-child communication compared to control group participants. Another clinical trial conducted by Campbell-Heider, Tuttle, and Knapp (2009) found that the mental health problems for high-risk male teens significantly reduced after their participation in the life skills training program. Lee

and Yim (2004) evaluated a leadership training group for secondary students and found an improvement in the group members in terms of self-understanding, interpersonal communication, decision-making, group maintenance, and leadership practice. Chan (2000) also reported that student participants rated themselves as having more qualities, characteristics, or abilities related to leadership after undergoing leadership training.

In the past, the government and welfare organizations put much effort into reducing the antisocial behavior of young people and helping them reach the expected norms of society. In recent years, a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to an orientation that seeks to address adolescents' lived experiences and potentials has been promoted (Leung, 1996; To, 2007). Echoing such a paradigm shift, a transformative learning approach was used to theorize a research framework for assessing the effectiveness and applicability of the Women's Foundation Life Skills Program. Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspective, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p.7). Inspired by transformative learning, life skills development should try to work with the life process of awareness in order to bring to adolescents the possibilities for richer and more meaningful experiences of self-enrichment, relationship enhancement, and community participation (To, Tam, Ngai, & Sung, 2014). This approach also reminds us that life skills development programs should comprise the following components:

First, life skills development should affirm that young people have existing reservoirs of strengths and resources to draw upon and have a distinct capacity for growth (Linden & Fertman, 1998). Life skills training should aim to facilitate young people to foster a positive self-concept, affirm their competence, and enhance their coping capabilities (Edginton, Kowalski, & Randall, 2005). Moreover, changes in knowledge and skills will not be consolidated unless personal meaning in life is found and owned (To, Tam, & Chan, 2013).

Second, this approach recognizes the fact that life skills are naturally interpersonal; thus, a crucial element is to enhance young people's communicative competence and practice of the self on interpersonal relationships (Johnson, 2003). Much emphasis should be placed on building connections with other people, acknowledging that the heart of life skills lies in getting others to cooperate and in making full use of their verbal and nonverbal communication skills in resolving relationship problems (Ngai et al., 2012).

Third, although transfer of knowledge and skills is significant, the most powerful source of influencing young people in a positive direction is the trainers' own living examples of who they are. Besides teaching knowledge and skills, trainers can share with participants about their reflections and practice wisdom derived from their real life experiences (Walters, 2008). Trainers should also maintain a collaborative relationship with participants, sincerely hear their voices, and generate meaningful dialogues between them (To, 2009).

Fourth, life skills development should go beyond the individual dimension. It should create chances for young people to express their concerns and participate in the civic lives of school, community, and society. Besides promoting constructive psychological development of young people through cultivating a positive self-concept, enhancing self-efficacy, and searching for life purpose, it should also contribute to the cognitive development of young people through critical assessment of social-life issues and the application of knowledge to respond to these issues (Ennis, 1993). Real experiences should also be provided to improve their sense of community and prepare them for full participation in social affairs (Claus & Ogden, 1999).

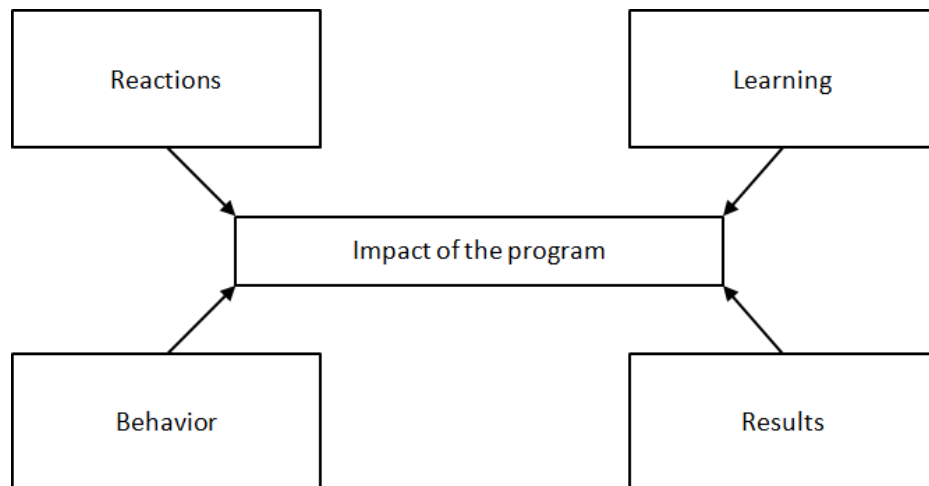
Finally, in contrast with a technical and one-way transmission of knowledge and skills, life skills development should be perceived as a process through which participants are aligned to support each other to apply what they have learned. Giving different perspectives also helps participants expand their personal narratives so they can move forward from a powerless situation to refocus on their capabilities to make personal transformation. This is also beneficial to the sustainability of the program and its generalization to other adolescent groups.

3. Research framework

Although past research has illustrated the significance of life skills development among adolescents, there is a paucity of research on its impacts on the holistic growth and life advancement of young people. Thus, more attempts have to be made to explore the change process and outcomes of life skills development and the factors conducive to its success.

In this study, Kirkpatrick's evaluation model (1977, 1979; see Figure 1) is adopted to develop our research framework. There are four interlocking domains of evaluation to be conducted, namely reactions (participants' perception of the program and their level of satisfaction), learning (change of values, attitude, and skills resulting from the program), behavior (transfer of learning to practice), and results (final outcomes of the program).

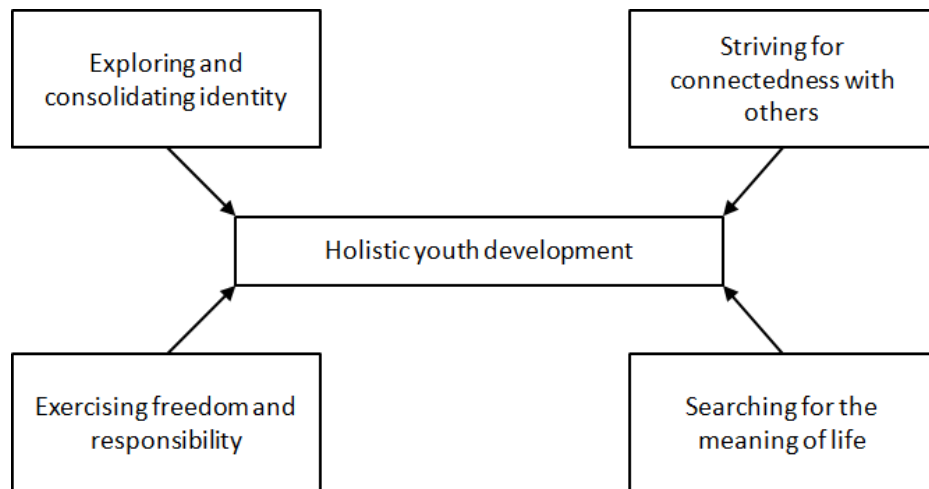
Figure 1: Kirkpatrick's evaluation model



In addition to Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, our research framework is also built on the existential approach to youth development (To, Ngai, Ngai, & Cheung, 2007; To & Chu, 2010; To, Lu Kan, & Ngai, 2013; To et al., 2014; see Figure 2). This approach offers a particular way of understanding the transformative process that adolescents may go through in life education and

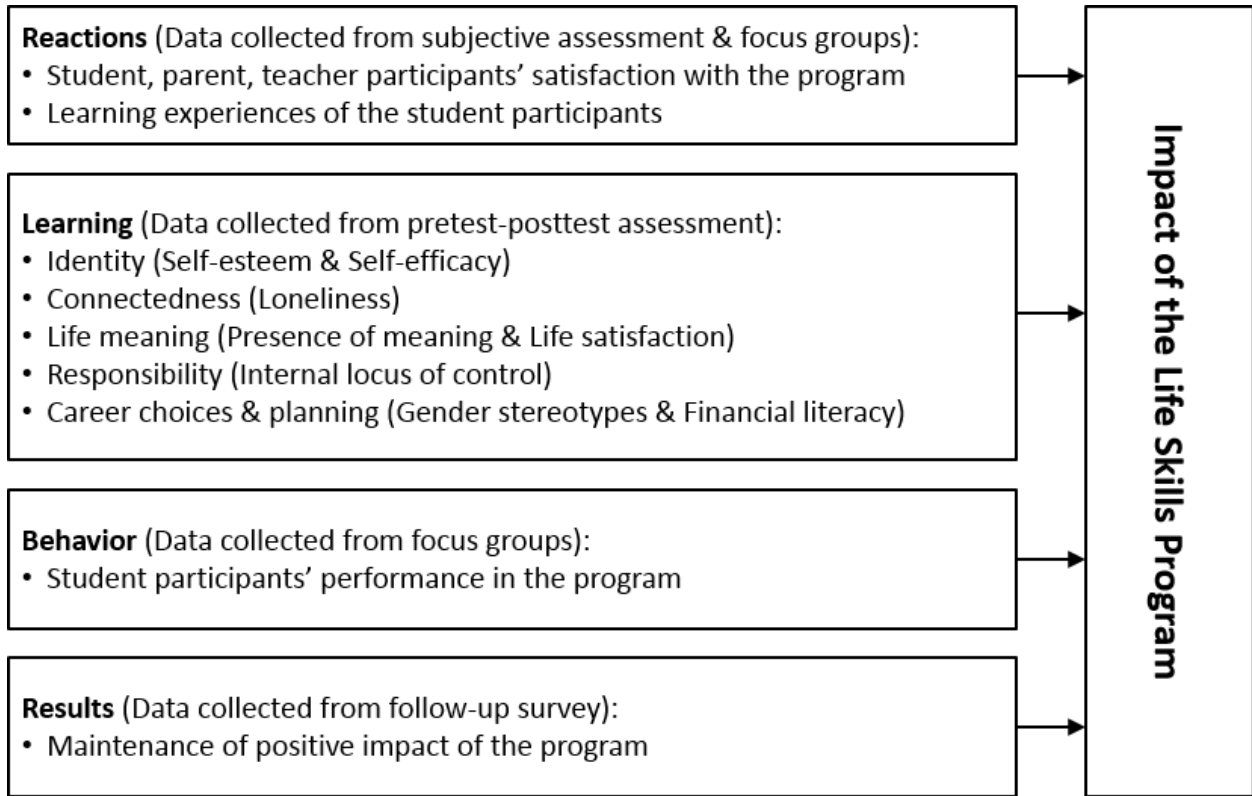
the possible outcomes of their participation. At this stage of life, young people are actively engaged in identity exploration and may indulge in risk-taking activities when they experience self-doubt and role confusion. They are interested in relating to other human beings, and their inability to establish an intimate relationship and acquire social support will lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Youth is also a period in which young people search for meaning in life, and the ones who feel trapped by the emptiness of life may become anxious and hopeless. Moreover, adolescents learn to exercise their freedom and meanwhile face the responsibility of controlling their own destiny. In brief, the fulfillment of these existential needs is the principal outcome of young people's engaging in life-enriching programs. This framework thus offers a heuristic tool to explore the experiences of the student participants in the program.

Figure 2: Existential approach to youth development



Synthesizing these two models, a research framework (see Figure 3) is developed for evaluating the program's effectiveness in enhancing the student participants' identity development, sense of responsibility, sense of connectedness, pursuit of meaning in life, financial literacy, and perception of gender equality, as well as to examine their experiences in the program. In addition, the student, parent, and teacher participants' satisfaction with the program will also be assessed.

Figure 3: Research framework for evaluating the Life Skills Program



4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

In order to generate a comprehensive picture of the impacts of the program and the participants' experiences, the mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect evaluation data from the following four areas:

Area 1: Objective outcome evaluation

- Due to the difficulty of random assignment of the student participants in the experimental and control groups, a single-group pretest-posttest design was adopted to evaluate changes in the student participants in terms of their self-esteem, self-efficacy, loneliness, presence of meaning in life, life satisfaction, internal locus of control, perceptions of gender stereotypes, and financial literacy.

Area 2: Follow-up survey

- A follow-up questionnaire was given to the student participants to assess the maintenance of positive changes resulting from the program.

Area 3: Subjective outcome evaluation

- A posttest-only design was used to evaluate the student, parent, and teacher participants' subjective assessment of the program outcome and implementation in the final session.

Area 4: Qualitative evaluation based on focus group interviews

- Eight focus groups were conducted for 63 student participants. The participants were recruited by a purposive sampling method. Selection criteria included school, gender, and willingness to share their experiences. In addition, an extra focus group was held for eight instructors. The selection criteria included gender, years of experience in life skills training, and willingness to share their experiences. Subjective experiences of the participants and instructors were explored in the interviews.

4.2. Measures

Valid and reliable tools related to the assessment of this kind of training program are not locally available. Therefore, efforts were made to search for a variety of existing scales in Western literature and to develop scales according to the goals and contents of the program.

Scales used in objective outcome evaluation and follow-up survey

- *Self-esteem*: Measured by the 10-item Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1962; Shek, 1992; Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a more positive global evaluation over oneself.
- *Self-efficacy*: Measured by the 7-item Self-efficacy Scale (Shek, Siu, Lee, Cheung, & Chung, 2008; Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger belief in one's competence in achieving goals.
- *Loneliness*: Measured by the 6-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (De Jong Gierveld, 1987; Leung, de Jong Gierveld, & Lam, 2008; Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of loneliness.

- *Presence of meaning*: Measured by the 5-item Meaning in Life Questionnaire Presence of Meaning Subscale (Chan, 2014; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of meaningfulness in life.
- *Life satisfaction*: Measured by the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Shek, 1992; Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a higher satisfaction with life.
- *Internal locus of control*: Measured by the 8-item Levenson's Internal Control Scale (Levenson, 1973; Lao, 1978; Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of control over one's circumstances.
- *Perception of gender stereotypes*: Measured by the 5-item Chinese Cultural Beliefs on Sexuality Scale (To et al., 2013; Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger belief in Chinese cultural gender stereotypes.
- *Financial literacy*: Measured by the 5-item Financial Literacy Scale constructed by the researchers (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger willingness to take part in family financial management.

Scales used in subjective outcome evaluation

- *Satisfaction with the program*: Drawing references from the Client Satisfaction Scale (Larson, Attkisson, Hargreaves & Nguyen, 1979), the authors constructed three scales to measure the student, parent, and teacher participants' satisfaction with the program, respectively (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94; .86; .93$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a higher satisfaction with the program.

- *Satisfaction with the instructor:* Drawing references from the Client Satisfaction Scale (Larson, Attkisson, Hargreaves & Nguyen, 1979), the authors constructed three scales to measure the student, parent, and teacher participants' satisfaction with the instructor, respectively (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95; .91; .94$). Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a higher satisfaction with the performance of the instructor.
- *Perceived improvements:* The authors developed two scales to measure parent and teacher participants' perceived improvements after attending the seminar (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94; .91$). Scale items were constructed according to the objectives and content of the seminar. Each item was rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strong agree). Higher scores indicate a stronger perception of improvement in parenting attitudes and skills or in the knowledge of students' resilience after joining the seminar.

Samples of semi-structured questions raised in focus group interviews

- What is your impression of life skills training in general?
- What was your experience in the Life Skills Program?
- What did you learn from the program?
- Which topics or activities were helpful for you and why?
- What impact did the program have on your values and beliefs?
- To what extent did the learning facilitate your inspiration on personal, social, and career development?
- To what extent did the program enable you to transfer the knowledge gained to your daily lives?
- How would you comment on the implementation and effectiveness of the program?

4.3. Data collection procedures

For the quantitative evaluations, the student participants filled in the self-administered pretest questionnaire (see Appendix 1) in the first session of the training program. Then, some subjective assessment items were added to the same questionnaire (see Appendix 2), which was given to them in the final session of the program. A follow-up survey was conducted six months after the final session. The parent and teacher participants' perception of the program was collected through a self-administered questionnaire given at the end of the seminar (see Appendix 3 and 4). Research assistants were present during data collection in order to introduce the survey, obtain written consents from the participants, and answer inquiries. All data was treated in the strictest confidentiality and no personal information was disclosed.

During the focus group interviews the student participants were encouraged to express their ideas freely. The researchers were aware of the importance of neutrality during discussion. The questions served as a general framework for the researchers, which means the flow of sharing was participant-focused rather than question-focused. The discussion processes of the focus groups were tape-recorded with the participants' written consent.

4.4. Data analysis strategies

As far as the outcome evaluation is concerned, a series of Repeated-Measure Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to ascertain the positive changes of student participants after intervention and the maintenance of positive changes after six months. A series of Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVAs) were also performed to test for differences among the student participants.

Regarding the qualitative evaluation, the contents of the tapes were fully transcribed after the focus group interviews. The researchers started analyzing the data by reading and rereading every line of the transcripts in search of "meaning units", rather than relying on prior

concepts to understand the data (Padgett, 1998). Codes were assigned to those meaning units and the codes were then categorized. After, researchers refined the codes and found different levels of meaning produced by the narratives and then sorted out similar narratives to form the major themes of this study (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

5. Findings

5.1. Quantitative findings

5.1.1. Demographics

Table 1: Demographics of student participants ($n = 1,813$)

| | Percentage % |
|--|--------------|
| School | |
| China Holiness College | 3.4 |
| Confucius Hall Secondary School | 1.5 |
| Delia Memorial School (Glee Path) | 7.0 |
| Holy Trinity College | 8.1 |
| Kwai Chung Methodist College | 7.3 |
| PLK Ho Yuk Ching (1984) College | 6.9 |
| PLK Lo Kit Sing (1983) College | 6.1 |
| PLK Ma Kam Ming College | 7.9 |
| PLK Tong Nai Kan Junior Secondary College | 8.8 |
| Pope Paul VI College | 7.7 |
| Shek Lei Catholic Secondary School | 7.8 |
| St. Catharine's School For Girls (Kwun Tong) | 8.1 |
| Tak Nga Secondary School | 5.3 |
| The HKMA K. S. Lo College | 8.6 |
| United Christian College | 5.5 |
| Gender | |
| Female | 60.7 |
| Male | 38.9 |
| Missing values | 0.4 |
| Age | |
| 16 or below | 29.7 |
| 17 | 39.8 |
| 18 | 18.9 |
| 19 or above | 11.2 |
| Missing values | 0.4 |
| Educational level | |
| F.3 | 9.3 |
| F.4 | 64.1 |
| F.5 | 26.1 |
| Missing values | 0.5 |
| Father's educational level | |
| F.3 or below | 38.5 |
| F.4 to F.5 | 23.9 |
| F.6 to F.7 | 18.7 |
| Diploma / Associate degree | 6.7 |
| Bachelor degree or above | 6.4 |
| Missing values | 5.8 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Mother's educational level | |
| F.3 or below | 41.6 |
| F.4 to F.5 | 24.3 |
| F.6 to F.7 | 19.4 |
| Diploma / Associate degree | 5.0 |
| Bachelor degree or above | 4.2 |
| Missing values | 5.5 |
| Number of sibling | |
| No sibling | 22.8 |
| 1 | 50.9 |
| 2 | 15.6 |
| 3 or above | 7.3 |
| Missing values | 3.4 |
| Religion | |
| None | 71.2 |
| Catholic | 2.1 |
| Christian | 18.5 |
| Buddhist | 4.3 |
| Others | 1.1 |
| Missing values | 2.8 |
| Monthly family income | |
| Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) | 5.6 |
| \$10,000 or below | 7.9 |
| \$10,001 - \$20,000 | 29.3 |
| \$20,001 - \$30,000 | 21.0 |
| \$30,001 - \$40,000 | 10.9 |
| \$40,001 - \$50,000 | 6.2 |
| \$50,001 - \$60,000 | 2.6 |
| \$60,001 or above | 4.6 |
| Missing values | 11.9 |

- Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the student participants.
- Around 60% were female.
- Over 90% were studying at the senior secondary level.
- There is a discrepancy between the sample size ($n = 1,813$) and the actual number of students involved in the program due to some invalid questionnaires and difficulties in matching the pretest and posttest cases.

| Table 2: Demographics of parent participants ($n = 352$) | |
|--|--------------|
| | Percentage % |
| School | |
| China Holiness College | 4.8 |
| Delia Memorial School (Glee Path) | 7.7 |
| Holy Trinity College | 20.7 |
| Kwai Chung Methodist College | 6.3 |

| | |
|---|------|
| PLK Lo Kit Sing (1983) College | 9.9 |
| PLK Ma Kam Ming College | 13.6 |
| PLK Tong Nai Kan Junior Secondary College | 7.4 |
| Pope Paul VI College | 10.8 |
| Tak Nga Secondary School | 4.3 |
| The HKMA K. S. Lo College | 6.8 |
| United Christian College | 7.7 |
| Gender | |
| Female | 75.0 |
| Male | 22.4 |
| Missing values | 2.6 |
| Age | |
| 21-30 | 0.6 |
| 31-40 | 19.6 |
| 41-50 | 61.9 |
| 51-60 | 14.8 |
| 61 or above | 1.1 |
| Missing values | 2.0 |
| Educational level | |
| F.3 or below | 27.3 |
| F.4 to F.5 | 40.9 |
| F.6 to F.7 | 6.5 |
| Diploma / Associate degree | 8.2 |
| Bachelor degree or above | 12.8 |
| Missing values | 4.3 |

- Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the parent participants.
- 75% were female.
- Around 60% were aged between 41 and 50.
- There is a discrepancy between the sample size ($n = 352$) and the actual number of parents involved in the program due to some invalid questionnaires.

Table 3: Demographics of teacher participants ($n = 258$)

| | Percentage % |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| School | |
| Delia Memorial School (Glee Path) | 14.3 |
| Holy Trinity College | 21.7 |
| Kwai Chung Methodist College | 12.8 |
| Pope Paul IV College | 19.8 |
| Shek Lei Catholic Secondary School | 21.7 |
| St Catharine's School For Girls | 9.7 |
| Gender | |
| Female | 65.7 |
| Male | 33.6 |
| Missing values | 0.7 |

| Year of teaching | |
|-------------------|------|
| 0-5 years | 18.4 |
| 6-10 years | 20.9 |
| 11-15 years | 14.8 |
| 16-20 years | 13.0 |
| 21-25 years | 10.8 |
| 26-30 years | 11.9 |
| 31 years or above | 6.9 |
| Missing values | 3.2 |

- Table 3 shows the demographic characteristics of the teacher participants.
- Around 65% were female.
- Around 40% had less than ten years of teaching experience while over 50% had more than eleven years of teaching experience.
- There is a discrepancy between the sample size ($n = 258$) and the actual number of parents involved in the program due to some invalid questionnaires.

5.1.2. Objective outcome evaluation

Table 4a: Comparisons among pretest, posttest, and follow-up test scores ($n = 1,813$)

| Indicators | Range of scores | Pretest mean (T1) | Posttest mean (T2) | Follow-up mean (T3) | T1 vs. T2 | T1 vs. T3 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Self-esteem | 10-60 | 38.77 | 39.75 | 38.73 | Improved | No difference |
| Self-efficacy | 7-42 | 26.83 | 26.97 | 26.54 | No difference | Dropped |
| Loneliness | 6-36 | 18.63 | 18.06 | 18.56 | Improved | No difference |
| Presence of meaning | 5-30 | 18.50 | 19.25 | 19.07 | Improved | Sustained |
| Life satisfaction | 5-30 | 19.02 | 19.70 | 19.16 | Improved | No difference |
| Internal locus of control | 8-48 | 32.06 | 32.64 | 31.86 | Improved | No difference |
| Gender stereotypes | 5-30 | 13.18 | 13.46 | 13.26 | No difference | No difference |
| Financial literacy | 5-30 | 18.28 | 18.79 | 18.42 | Improved | No difference |

Note: A p value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 4a shows the comparisons among pretest, posttest, and follow-up test mean scores analyzed by repeated-measure ANOVAs using the whole sample ($n = 1,813$).
- The student participants showed significant improvement in most of the aspects examined at the post-intervention time point, including their self-esteem, loneliness, presence of life meaning, life satisfaction, internal locus of control, and financial literacy. In other words,

they gained a more positive evaluation of self-worth, a stronger sense of companionship, an enhanced sense of meaningfulness, a higher satisfaction with life, an improved sense of control over life events, and a greater willingness to take part in family financial matters.

- No significant improvement was found in their self-efficacy and perceptions of gender stereotypes.
- The program’s impact on presence of life meaning could be maintained after six months. However, the improvements in self-esteem, loneliness, life satisfaction, internal locus of control, and financial literacy could not be sustained at the follow-up time point.
- Considering that most of the follow-up surveys were undertaken during the time when the Umbrella Movement took place in Hong Kong, it was questionable if this history effect might affect the internal validity of the single-group pretest-posttest research design (Neuman, 2000). Therefore, two repeated-measure ANOVAs were performed to explore the program’s impact on the student participants who completed the follow-up questionnaire before 28 September 2014 (when the Umbrella Movement started) and those who took part in the follow-up assessment afterward.

Table 4b: Comparisons among pretest, posttest, and follow-up test scores ($n = 396$)

| Indicators | Range of scores | Pretest mean (T1) | Posttest mean (T2) | Follow-up mean (T3) | T1 vs. T2 | T1 vs. T3 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Self-esteem | 10-60 | 38.37 | 39.23 | 38.55 | Improved | No difference |
| Self-efficacy | 7-42 | 26.62 | 26.57 | 26.32 | No difference | No difference |
| Loneliness | 6-36 | 18.78 | 18.34 | 18.39 | Improved | Sustained |
| Presence of meaning | 5-30 | 18.60 | 19.51 | 19.09 | Improved | Sustained |
| Life satisfaction | 5-30 | 19.16 | 20.05 | 19.68 | Improved | Sustained |
| Internal locus of control | 8-48 | 31.96 | 32.77 | 32.11 | Improved | No difference |
| Gender stereotypes | 5-30 | 13.40 | 14.36 | 14.09 | Dropped | Dropped |
| Financial literacy | 5-30 | 17.75 | 18.69 | 18.06 | Improved | No difference |

Note: A p value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 4b shows the repeated-measure ANOVA results generated from the samples ($n = 396$) who completed the follow-up test before the Umbrella Movement took place.
- While the student participants’ improvement in self-esteem, internal locus of control, and financial literacy could not be maintained six months later, the positive impact on their loneliness, presence of meaning, and life satisfaction could be sustained.

| Indicators | Range of scores | Pretest mean (T1) | Posttest mean (T2) | Follow-up mean (T3) | T1 vs. T2 | T1 vs. T3 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Self-esteem | 10-60 | 38.93 | 39.94 | 38.79 | Improved | No difference |
| Self-efficacy | 7-42 | 26.91 | 27.12 | 26.63 | No difference | Dropped |
| Loneliness | 6-36 | 18.57 | 17.95 | 18.63 | Improved | No difference |
| Presence of meaning | 5-30 | 18.46 | 19.15 | 19.06 | Improved | Sustained |
| Life satisfaction | 5-30 | 18.97 | 19.57 | 18.96 | Improved | No difference |
| Internal locus of control | 8-48 | 32.10 | 32.59 | 31.76 | Improved | Dropped |
| Gender stereotypes | 5-30 | 13.10 | 13.13 | 12.96 | No difference | No difference |
| Financial literacy | 5-30 | 18.47 | 18.83 | 18.55 | Improved | No difference |

Note: A p value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 4c shows the repeated-measure ANOVA results generated from the samples ($n = 1,050$) who completed the follow-up test after the Umbrella Movement took place.
- These findings are very similar to the findings generated from the whole sample, which indicate no maintenance of positive impact in most indicators.
- In sum, the findings shown in Table 4b and Table 4c provide more support for the potential influence of the Umbrella Movement on the student participants' thoughts and behaviors.

5.1.3. Subjective outcome evaluation

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. This program reaches my expectations. | 4.21 (1-6) | 1.3% | 3.3% | 11.1% | 48.6% | 29.4% | 6.3% |
| 2. The program can satisfy my needs. | 4.16 (1-6) | 1.3% | 3.3% | 13.6% | 47.7% | 28.1% | 6.0% |
| 3. This program can help solve my problems. | 4.14 (1-6) | 1.3% | 3.6% | 14.4% | 47.2% | 27.0% | 6.4% |
| 4. Overall I feel satisfied with this program. | 4.51 (1-6) | 1.0% | 2.0% | 6.1% | 39.0% | 39.5% | 12.4% |
| 5. I would recommend this program to my friends who have similar needs. | 4.21 (1-6) | 1.7% | 3.9% | 13.4% | 43.6% | 27.7% | 9.7% |
| 6. This program offers me a clearer future direction for my studies. | 4.16 (1-6) | 1.5% | 3.5% | 15.7% | 44.3% | 27.7% | 7.4% |
| 7. This program offers me a clearer future career direction. | 4.16 (1-6) | 1.8% | 4.2% | 14.9% | 43.3% | 27.1% | 8.8% |

- Table 5 shows the student participants' satisfaction with the program.
- All items received a high level of positive rating (ranging from 79.2% to 90.9%), which reflected that most felt satisfied with the program.

Table 6. Student participants' satisfaction with the instructor

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. I think the instructor was well-prepared. | 4.87 (1-6) | 0.7% | 0.9% | 3.0% | 25.5% | 45.7% | 24.2% |
| 2. I think the instructor explained concepts clearly. | 4.90 (1-6) | 0.4% | 0.8% | 3.7% | 23.7% | 46.1% | 25.2% |
| 3. I think the instructor was responsive. | 4.91 (1-6) | 0.4% | 1.1% | 3.7% | 23.2% | 45.0% | 26.6% |
| 4. I think the instructor could arouse our involvement. | 4.90 (1-6) | 0.4% | 0.9% | 4.2% | 23.8% | 44.9% | 25.9% |
| 5. On the whole, I am satisfied with the performance of the instructor. | 5.01 (1-6) | 0.4% | 1.1% | 2.7% | 21.1% | 42.5% | 32.1% |

- Table 6 shows the student participants' satisfaction with the instructor.
- All items received an overwhelming proportion of positive ratings (ranging from 94.6% to 95.7%), which reflected their positive perception of their instructors' performance.

Table 7. Parent participants' satisfaction with the program

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. This seminar helped me learn more about positive psychology. | 5.22 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.6% | 0.0% | 9.4% | 57.2% | 32.8% |
| 2. This seminar inspired me in child discipline. | 5.12 (1-6) | 0.6% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 12.3% | 58.7% | 27.9% |
| 3. On the whole, I am satisfied with the seminar. | 5.32 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 6.7% | 51.7% | 40.6% |
| 4. I would recommend this seminar to my friends. | 5.31 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 6.7% | 53.9% | 38.9% |

- Table 7 shows the parent participants' satisfaction with the program.
- All items received a nearly 100% positive rating (ranging from 98.8% to 99.4%), which reflected that an overwhelming majority of them felt satisfied with the contents and impacts of the program.

Table 8. Parent participants' satisfaction with the instructor

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. I think the trainers were well-prepared. | 5.21 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 8.4% | 60.7% | 30.3% |
| 2. I think the trainers explained concepts clearly. | 5.23 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 7.8% | 60.0% | 31.7% |
| 3. I think the trainers were responsive. | 5.32 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 4.5% | 59.2% | 36.3% |
| 4. I think the trainers could arouse our involvement. | 5.27 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 6.1% | 58.7% | 34.6% |
| 5. On the whole, I am satisfied with the trainers' performance. | 5.12 (1-6) | 0.6% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 10.1% | 59.8% | 27.9% |

- Table 8 shows the parent participants' satisfaction with the instructor.
- All items received a nearly 100% positive rating (ranging from 99.4% to 100.0%), which demonstrated their great satisfaction towards the performance of their instructors.

Table 9. Parent participants' perceived changes after the seminar

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. I hope I can have a better understanding on how to be a parent. | 5.12 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 13.4% | 60.9% | 25.7% |
| 2. I hope I can understand more about the needs of my children. | 5.25 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.6% | 8.4% | 56.4% | 34.6% |
| 3. I learned more about how to build my children's resilience. | 5.12 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.7% | 16.3% | 53.7% | 29.3% |
| 4. The seminar has caught my attention on the development of my children's resilience. | 5.21 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.6% | 0.0% | 11.1% | 54.4% | 33.9% |
| 5. I wish to be a responsible parent. | 5.32 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 5.6% | 56.4% | 38.0% |
| 6. I have a better understanding on the importance of positive communication. | 5.34 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 5.6% | 55.1% | 39.3% |
| 7. I have a better understanding on the importance of positive emotions. | 5.29 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 9.0% | 53.4% | 37.6% |
| 8. I am more confident in assisting my children to articulate their purpose of life. | 5.03 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 17.4% | 56.7% | 24.2% |
| 9. I have a better understanding on the meaning of being a parent. | 5.10 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 13.5% | 58.4% | 26.4% |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 10. I know well how to help my children grow up to a healthy life. | 5.06 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 14.6% | 61.2% | 23.0% |
| 11. I treasure my role as a parent. | 5.10 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 1.7% | 15.2% | 55.1% | 28.1% |

- Table 9 shows the parent participants' perceived changes after the seminar.
- All items received a nearly 100% positive rating (ranging from 98.3 to 100.0%), which showed that nearly all participants perceived some positive improvements in their parenting attitudes and skills after joining the seminar.

Table 10. Teacher participants' satisfaction with the program

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|----------|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. This seminar offers inspiration on teaching. | 4.56 (1-6) | 0.7% | 2.2% | 9.1% | 29.1% | 46.2% | 12.7% |
| 2. On the whole, I am satisfied with the seminar. | 4.75 (1-6) | 0.0% | 1.5% | 5.1% | 24.4% | 55.6% | 13.5% |
| 3. I would recommend this seminar to my friends. | 4.48 (1-6) | 0.7% | 4.1% | 10.0% | 30.3% | 41.7% | 13.3% |

- Table 10 shows the teacher participants' satisfaction with the program.
- All items received a high level of positive rating (ranging from 85.3% to 93.5%), which showed that most participants were satisfied with the program.

Table 11. Teacher participants' satisfaction with the instructor

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|----------|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. I think the trainers were well-prepared. | 5.08 (1-6) | 0.4% | 0.0% | 1.8% | 15.3% | 54.0% | 28.5% |
| 2. I think the trainers explained concepts clearly. | 5.01 (1-6) | 0.0% | 0.7% | 2.6% | 17.2% | 54.0% | 25.5% |
| 3. I think the trainers were responsive. | 4.92 (1-6) | 0.4% | 0.4% | 3.7% | 19.4% | 54.6% | 21.6% |
| 4. I think the trainers could arouse our involvement. | 4.75 (1-6) | 0.0% | 1.8% | 5.8% | 23.3% | 53.5% | 15.6% |
| 5. On the whole, I am satisfied with the trainers' performance. | 4.92 (1-6) | 0.0% | 1.1% | 3.3% | 17.6% | 58.6% | 19.4% |

- Table 11 shows the teacher participants' satisfaction with the instructor.

- All items received a high level of positive rating (ranging from 92.4% to 97.8%), which demonstrated their great satisfaction towards the performance of their instructors.

Table 12. Teacher participants' perceived changes after the seminar

| Items | Mean (Range) | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1. This seminar enhanced my understanding about positive psychology. | 4.76 (1-6) | 0.0% | 1.8% | 2.5% | 26.2% | 56.7% | 12.7% |
| 2. This seminar raised my awareness about the importance of students' resilience. | 4.60 (1-6) | 0.4% | 1.8% | 5.5% | 31.9% | 50.9% | 9.5% |
| 3. This seminar enhanced my understanding about the ways to increase students' resilience. | 4.57 (1-6) | 0.0% | 1.8% | 7.3% | 32.2% | 49.1% | 9.5% |

- Table 12 shows the teacher participants' perceived changes after the seminar.
- All items received a high level of positive rating (ranging from 92.3 to 95.7%), which reflected that an overwhelming majority of participants perceived some improvements in their awareness of and knowledge about students' resilience after joining the seminar.

5.1.4. Sub-group analyses

Table 13: Comparisons between the male and female participants

| Variables with significant results | Range of scores | Male mean | Female mean | Significant differences |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Internal locus of control | 8-48 | 32.98 | 32.29 | Male > Female |
| 2. Gender stereotypes | 5-30 | 15.67 | 12.24 | Male > Female |
| 3. Financial literacy | 5-30 | 19.14 | 18.50 | Male > Female |

Note: A *p* value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 13 shows the comparisons of posttest mean scores between male and female participants with the effect of their pretest mean scores controlled.
- Male participants had a significantly higher sense of control over life events and greater willingness to take part in family financial matters than female participants.

- Female participants held less bias towards the traditional roles of gender than did male participants.

Table 14: Comparisons among Form 3, Form 4, and Form 5 participants

| Variables with significant results | Range of scores | F. 3 mean | F. 4 mean | F. 5 mean | Significant differences |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 1. Loneliness | 6-36 | 18.77 | 18.25 | 18.05 | F. 3 > F. 4 ; F. 3 > F. 5 |
| 2. Life satisfaction | 5-30 | 18.75 | 19.78 | 19.44 | F. 4 > F. 3 ; F. 5 > F. 3 |
| 3. Internal locus of control | 8-48 | 31.82 | 32.61 | 32.60 | F. 4 > F. 3 ; F. 5 > F. 3 |
| 4. Gender stereotypes | 5-30 | 12.68 | 13.46 | 13.92 | F. 5 > F. 3 ; F. 5 > F. 4 |

Note: A *p* value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 14 shows the comparisons of posttest mean scores among Form 3, Form 4, and Form 5 participants with the effect of their pretest mean scores controlled.
- Junior secondary (Form 3) participants had a greater feeling of loneliness, lower satisfaction with life, and weaker sense of control over life events than the senior secondary (Forms 4 and 5) participants.
- Form 5 participants held a stronger bias towards the traditional roles of the two genders than Forms 3 and 4 participants.

Table 15: Comparisons between participants from low-income families and non-low-income families

| Variables with significant results | Range of scores | Low-income mean | Non-low-income mean | Significant differences |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Life satisfaction | 5-30 | 19.19 | 19.94 | Non-low-income > Low-income |

Note: A *p* value lower than .05 indicates a significant mean difference.

- Table 15 shows the comparisons of posttest mean scores between participants from low-income families and non-low-income families with the effect of their pretest mean scores controlled.
- Participants from low-income families (monthly family income lower than 75% of the median monthly domestic household income) had a significantly lower satisfaction with life than the better-off participants (from non-low-income families).

5.2. Qualitative findings

5.2.1. Background of focus group respondents

| Group (Type of participants) | No. of participants | Gender | Educational level | School |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------|----------------------|--|
| Group 1 (Instructors) | 2 | Female | Bachelor | -- |
| | 2 | Female | Master | -- |
| | 3 | Male | Bachelor | -- |
| | 1 | Male | Master | -- |
| Group 2 (Students) | 4 | Male | Form 4 | PLK Lo Kit Sing (1983) College |
| | 4 | Male | Form 4 | Shek Lei Catholic Secondary School |
| Group 3 (Students) | 4 | Female | Form 4 | Holy Trinity College |
| | 4 | Male | Form 4 | PLK Ma Kam Ming College |
| Group 4 (Students) | 4 | Male | Form 4 | Delia Memorial School (Glee Path) |
| | 3 | Male | Form 4 | PLK Ho Yuk Ching (1984) College |
| Group 5 (Students) | 3 | Female | Form 5 | China Holiness College |
| | 4 | Female | Form 5 | Kwai Chung Methodist College |
| Group 6 (Students) | 3 | Female | Form 4 | Pope Paul VI College |
| | 4 | Female | Form 4 | St. Catharine's School For Girls (Kwun Tong) |
| Group 7 (Students) | 4 | Female | Form 5 | Confucius Hall Secondary School |
| | 4 | Male | Form 5 | The HKMA K. S. Lo College |
| Group 8 (Students) | 4 | Female | Form 5 | The HKMA K. S. Lo College |
| | 4 | Male | Form 5 | Confucius Hall Secondary School |
| Group 9 (Students) | 2 | Female | Form 4 | Pope Paul VI College |
| | 2 | Female | Form 4 | St. Catharine's School For Girls (Kwun Tong) |
| | 2 | Female | Form 4 | United Christian College |
| | 1 | Male | Form 4 | Confucius Hall Secondary School |
| | 1 | Male | Form 4 | PLK Ho Yuk Ching (1984) College |
| | 2 | Male | Form 5 | Kwai Chung Methodist College |

- Table 16 shows the respondent compositions of the nine focus groups.

5.2.2. Student participants' perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program

a. Strengths and positive impacts of the program

Exploration of identities and life purposes

- Many respondents perceived that the Life Skills Program increased their self-understanding, aroused their reflection on their life goals, and facilitated them to carry out their life plans. These findings may echo the quantitative findings of an enhanced sense of meaningfulness in life.

"I think the whole idea of this program is to facilitate you to think about who you are. I think they've achieved this objective successfully. In every lesson, there were moments like... Oh that's true! Is this what I want? What should I do? So many questions would pop up in your head." (Student from Group 3)

"In the past, I thought chasing a dream relied solely on hard work... This program taught me a systematic approach to chase my dream, which involves goals, methods, and motivation. Before the lessons, I didn't have a concept about how to make my dreams come true." (Student from Group 2)

- An instructor articulated more about this positive impact. They found that while most participants had dreams, they simply lacked opportunities to think deliberately about their dreams or to get inspired through sharing their ideas with others. The program retrieved those important opportunities.

"I think they're not lacking dreams... What they lack is an opportunity to dream. This program can offer them opportunities to think about something more conceptual, more long-term... These conceptual yet important topics are rarely covered in the

school curriculum. Parents seldom talk about them as well... But it is my life and I am the only one who knows what is significant. So I think they need these opportunities to reflect on themselves... When they know what they want, they'll have the motivation to look for information that helps achieve their goals.” (Instructor from Group 1)

Affirmation of self-worth

- The program aroused the student participants' reflection on the meaning of success. They were facilitated to deconstruct the dominant discourse of material success and redefine their own standard of success.

“They once mentioned that success was not based on others' but on your own perception. This had a profound impact on me... We usually think that there are certain standards for defining a successful life. How others think seems more important than how we think. This program reminds us that we should focus on our own targets instead of the targets of others.” (Student from Group 3)

“Nowadays most people think that having a good occupation, making a lot of money, buying houses and cars and things like that represent your success. But I think everyone has his or her own definition of success... You can't use others' standards to measure your achievement. You have to be clear about your goals. You must think about it.” (Student from Group 3)

- Through redefining their personal meaning of success, they learned that their worth was not determined by others. As observed by the instructors, they started to recognize their personal value and gain more self-confidence. This may explain the quantitative findings of an enhanced sense of self-esteem, which refers to a more positive evaluation of one's worthiness.

“What kind of popular feedback have I received throughout the six lessons? I think there were several. First, they said they had thought about things that they had never noticed. Second, they said they had realized their strengths and dreams and had gained more confidence to go after their goals.” (Instructor from Group 1)

Acceptance of responsibility

- Consistent with the quantitative findings of an enhanced internal locus of control, some respondents shared how they were empowered to be responsible for the consequences of their life choices.

“I think this program is useful... They [the program] shared with us a real-life example of how a young person persisted in his dream of being a clown and finally became a clown supervisor at the Ocean Park. He could persist in his dream, why can't we? We've chosen to study some unpopular subjects. If we don't persist, no one can help us achieve our goal.” (Student from Group 7)

“I think I'm the one who decides which way to go and I'll be responsible for my failure. My parents want me to choose a professional occupation. I didn't argue with them. I said 'Just let me make my own decision. I'll assume all the responsibilities.'” (Student from Group 6)

Reflection on financial management

- Given that financial literacy is an important life skill and is crucial for life planning, effort was made to let student participants experience money management. Since many of the participants were still young, they had not yet managed their financial matters independently. They thought this experience allowed them to taste how difficult it was to become financially independent. They also reflected more on their ways of spending

money. This feedback may echo the quantitative findings of an increased willingness to take part in family financial matters.

“Before this lesson, I used to wonder why some people could not save up their money. I thought it was very ridiculous. I thought it was just them being too extravagant. But after the role-play game of financial management, I realize that there are lots of basic expenses in real life and the average salary is barely enough for them. This is something I did not know.” (Student from Group 7)

“I was very impressed by the lesson about financial management. It brought us to the real world. It told us how much we had to spend when living alone and how should we manage our money... I am not good at managing my money. I have a part-time job right now but I will spend all my salary every month. That lesson alerted me of my way of spending money... If I don’t want to rely on my parents in the future, I must change.” (Student from Group 6)

- An instructor further explained how the program made an impact on their financial management. The role-play games about financial management listed all of their income and expenditures, which created a clear picture for them to understand their decision-making process and consumption behavior. This facilitated them to start cultivating the think-before-you-spend habit.

“Their pattern of spending is rather impulsive. They never calculate their spending... The game allowed them to visualize their pattern of spending by listing out their needs, wants, and financial status. Then they realized their limitations and started thinking about their habit of financial management.” (Instructor from Group 1)

Lively ways to transmit knowledge and skills

- Many respondents appreciated the interactive approach of the program. They felt that it would be easier for them to understand the messages and remember what they learned. This may echo the student participants' immense satisfaction with the program impacts found in the subjective assessment.

"This program uses a more relaxed approach to talk about your life. Our weekly assembly also talks about your life, but it is done in a traditional top-down and one-way transmission. This program uses a lot of means such as games to deepen your learning. I think their effectiveness is significant. It has a profound positive impact on me." (Student from Group 5)

"If you have fun, you can remember everything. For example, we played a game that required us to write our dreams on a paper plane and fly it freely. Some of us even opened the windows and flew our paper planes out! So much fun! Then the instructor taught us about goal setting and motivation. We could really concentrate and learn from his words." (Student from Group 7)

Instructors' use of self

- Many respondents felt that it was great to have an instructor whose age was closer to their generation so they could communicate better with them. Also, the life experiences of the instructors were valuable references for the participants. They appreciated the instructors' self-disclosure of experiences from which they could learn the practice wisdom. These findings are consistent with their great satisfaction with the performance of the instructor that was shown in the subjective assessment.

“Our instructor was a fresh graduate. We barely had any generation gap. We used a lot of internet slang in our conversation, but he could comprehend and join us. Then the whole class went crazy! And the instructor was very open-minded. Even though he knew that we were messing around, he showed his acceptance and patience... When we find the lesson and the instructor interesting, we can remember everything the instructor said.” (Student from Group 7)

“She [the instructor] shared with us that she performed badly in the public examination. But she did not give up. She studied many other programs and she finally became a teacher. Her experience... I don’t know... I just think it is a good real-life example. It lets us understand that all roads lead to Rome. There are numerous ways to achieve the same goal.” (Student from Group 3)

b. Weaknesses and limitations of the program

Obstacles to the elimination or minimization of gender bias

- Quantitative findings show that student participants did not have a significant improvement in their perceptions of gender role equality. Focus group findings may explore the possible reasons behind this. First, according to the teaching experience of an instructor, many female participants already had high awareness of gender inequality and did not stereotype themselves with the traditional roles of women. Therefore, the lessons about gender stereotypes became less helpful for this group of female participants.

“We talked a lot about gender issues in the first two lessons... But I think many of those ideas were rather elementary and common. It seems like we were talking about red for the girls and blue for the boys. These things are well-known actually. For example, the Forms 4 and 5 female participants that I taught showed virtually no gender stereotypes in their choices of occupation. In fact, many of them already have

a high awareness of gender equality but our program still remains at the level of awareness-raising.” (Instructor from Group 1)

- Second, while some female respondents expressed their resistance to gender stereotypes, some male respondents viewed gender stereotypes as a non-eliminable part of Chinese culture and tended not to challenge it. This may help explain why the quantitative findings reported stronger perceptions of gender stereotypes among male participants than those of females. This may also indicate that more effort has to be made to promote gender equality among male participants.

“When girls sit with legs wide open, people call us rude and ask us to keep our legs closed. But boys always sit like that! I think it is more comfortable to sit with legs open. Also, girls have emotion and may say dirty words too. But when we do, people will say that girls shouldn’t say dirty words. But why? Both boys and girls are humans.” (Female student from Group 3)

“Gender stereotypes do exist... Preference for males is a historical and social phenomenon among Chinese people. Nowadays the preference for males is still prevalent... Gender equality may receive more support in the Western societies. But as Hong Kong is a Chinese community, we still can’t eliminate gender stereotypes... It is very difficult to eliminate... Maybe we can try to reduce it. But it has been there for a long time already. I am used to it. Why don’t we just let it remain?” (Male student from Group 3)

- Finally, it is noteworthy that some respondents, including both males and females, took an active role in reinforcing gender stereotypes as they could take advantage of those stereotypes. Thus, they found it unnecessary to eliminate gender biases.

“We don’t have to eliminate gender stereotypes. Men need to be respected. If women take up most of the jobs, men will feel like they are being looked down upon... It is normal for men to work outside while having women take care of the domestic matters because women are more detail-minded... I think men need ‘mianzi’ [face]. Women should be more considerate of men’s need for mianzi and allow them to work outside. They shouldn’t force men to stay at home.” (Male student from Group 3)

“I don’t think it is necessary to eliminate gender bias... Actually girls are in a more favorable position... For example, people think that girls are weaker so boys will be responsible for all the manual work.” (Female student from Group 3)

“Girls have much more job opportunities than boys. For example, the service industry has a larger demand for female employees... If boys don’t study well, they will have to find manual labor jobs.” (Female student from Group 5)

Obstacles to the improvement of self-efficacy

- Quantitative findings show that student participants did not have significant improvement in their self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to reach personal goals. Focus group findings reveal that external factors, such as the expectations and discouragement from parents, teachers, and society, might have shaken their confidence and counteracted the program’s impact. Many respondents expressed how their dreams and ambitions were frustrated by their social environment.

“I like the Japanese culture and I really want to work in this field. But my parents don’t support me. They think I cannot make much money... They think I’m wasting my time.” (Student from Group 6)

“I told my mum that I wanted to be a social worker or a primary school teacher. I like these jobs. They can bring me happiness. But my mum said these jobs were useless... Whenever I talked about my future career planning, she discouraged me... I don’t want to talk about it anymore...” (Student from Group 7)

“I was in the handball team. But last year I spent too much time in playing handball and performed badly in the examination. Then, the principal forced me to quit the handball team... I had once thought of developing my career in sports... Now I can only focus on my studies... I can’t do anything. I must listen to what the teacher says.” (Student from Group 2)

“The government allocates little resources to the sports and creative industries. If you want to develop your career in these industries, you may have to spend a whole lot of time and effort... This makes people hang back. People would rather study harder and don’t dare to develop their strengths and hobbies.” (Student from Group 2)

- Overall, most respondents thought that their parents focused too much on the notion of economic advancement through receiving a higher level of education but neglected their personal preferences and the alternative paths for them to achieve their personal goals. In this regard, they suggested that it would be more helpful to raise parents’ consciousness of other options apart from getting into the university.

“Many people, especially parents, think that getting into university is our only option. But I think you [the program] should explain to them that there are actually many other alternatives. Many of us know that we will not be qualified to gain a place in university. But under the pressure given by our parents, we have no choice but to study until Form 6. If we know that we will end up failing the public examination and applying for the courses offered by the Vocational Training Council, why don’t we quit our secondary school study now and receive vocational training? Studying at the

secondary school is just wasting our time. I think it is very important to educate them about this.” (Student from Group 3)

“I think adults also need to join this program. You [the program] encourage us to chase our dreams, but society shows us that we cannot do so in reality...” (Student from Group 8)

6. Discussion and recommendations

An existential view of human development suggests that youth strive to meet four basic needs: identity consolidation, connectedness with other people, meaningfulness in life, and striving for a balance between freedom and responsibility (To et al., 2007). This study adopts the existential framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the Life Skills Program in helping the adolescent participants meet these existential needs as well as deal with their practical concerns over life and career planning.

First, the program impact on participants' identity consolidation can be reflected from their changes in self-esteem and self-efficacy. The quantitative findings show that the participants had a significant improvement in their self-esteem, which means they could realize and affirm more of their inner strengths and resources after joining the program. The qualitative findings also indicate such a positive impact, as focus group respondents reported their perceived enhancement in self-knowledge and self-affirmation after the program. However, no significant improvement in their self-efficacy was found. As revealed in the focus group interviews, external factors might counteract the program's impact. Although most participants gained a better understanding of who they are and what they really want in life, some were still doubtful about their ability to achieve personal goals as their parents and teachers often over-emphasized the importance of material gains and discouraged their realization of non-material interests. From an existential perspective, social pressure of conformity may confuse adolescents' search for identity and have a negative effect on their existential well-being (Wong, 2009). This implies that life skills training should extend beyond its individual-level intervention to include the promotion of positive parenting and strengths-based teaching among parents and teachers in order to amplify and sustain its impact on adolescent identity development. In fact, The Women's Foundation recently started offering seminars on positive parenting and strengths-based teaching for parents and teachers, respectively. These seminars can play a significant role in conveying messages that recognize young people's efforts and potential. Given that social support from parents and teachers contributes to adolescent self-efficacy (Adler-

Constantinescu, Beșu, & Negovan, 2013), it is suggested that The Women's Foundation should continue to promote relevant programs for parents and teachers. Currently, a posttest-only design was adopted to evaluate parent and teacher seminars. While their subjective assessment results are highly encouraging, it is suggested that a pretest-posttest design could be employed in the future in order to collect more evidence for the effectiveness of these seminars in assisting parents and teachers to identify helpful ways to foster adolescent positive development.

Second, the program impact on participants' connectedness with other people can be reflected from the change in their sense of loneliness. The participants reported a reduced sense of loneliness in the objective outcome assessment, which means they felt less isolated and more attached to others after joining the program. The narratives of focus group respondents supported this finding, as the respondents showed appreciation towards the opportunities to have a deeper understanding of their classmates' needs and life experiences through the experiential activities. Besides, the program theme about dream chasing aroused ongoing reflections and discussions among participants after the lesson. In other words, the program successfully addressed some common concerns among peers (e.g., self-development opportunities and career options), which helped connect the participants and generate mutual support and collective coping in the face of challenges and stresses. However, it is noteworthy that connectedness with other people is not limited to peers and definitely includes family members (To et al., 2007). As mentioned, many focus group respondents did not feel understood by their parents when it came to their life and career planning. Some of them also felt discouraged when discussing with their parents about their life and career planning. Thus, apart from offering seminars on positive parenting for parents, it is also worthwhile to consider adding themes of self-differentiation and effective communication with parents in the Life Skills Program. Participants should be facilitated to develop a healthy self-differentiation with which they can maintain authenticity while maintaining a good relationship with their parents and being flexible enough to adjust themselves in face of rejection, criticism, and conflict. They

should also be equipped with effective communication skills to interact better with their parents and to foster mutual understanding.

Third, the program impact on participants' life engagement can be reflected from the changes in their sense of meaningfulness and life satisfaction. Significant improvements could be found in both aspects, as the quantitative findings indicate that participants gained an enhanced sense of meaningfulness and a higher level of life satisfaction after the program. Focus group respondents also found the program helpful in facilitating them to identify their life purposes and motivating them to achieve their personal goals. These findings are very encouraging as they provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of the program in achieving its ultimate goal of helping adolescents find a purposeful life. Besides, a sense of meaningfulness is a main component of existential well-being (Shek, 2012), while life satisfaction is the primary indicator of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Both variables play an important role in positive youth development. Hence, The Women's Foundation should maintain their great effort in meeting adolescent needs for meaningfulness and directedness. In addition, the sub-group analysis found that participants from low-income families had a lower life satisfaction than those from non-low-income families. This may indicate that extra effort is required for assisting disadvantaged participants in coping better with life challenges. Helping disadvantaged adolescents ascribe meaning to life can bring about better coping skills for stress (To et al., 2014). In the future, program designers may consider adding a theme about meaning-making, under which participants are facilitated to share their difficulties and make constructive meaning of their experiences. Instructors are also encouraged to share their life experiences and demonstrate how meaning-making has helped them go through stressful life challenges.

Fourth, the program impact on participants' exercising of freedom and responsibility can be reflected from the change in their internal locus of control. Participants showed a significant improvement in this aspect, which means they perceived more control over life challenges. Adolescence is a transitional period to adulthood. In this period, young people are, on the one hand, gaining more freedom to choose their actions and, on the other hand, learning to assume

responsibility for their choices. Focus group respondents demonstrated their autonomy and readiness for bearing consequences of their career choices. These findings support that the program was able to establish a constructive environment for participants to reflect on their choices. Continued effort should be made to appreciate adolescent's determination to take charge of their lives and to encourage them not to give up when they feel powerless and hopeless (To et al., 2007).

Fifth, as financial education is regarded as a promising tool for enhancing adolescents' capabilities to make well informed financial decisions and facilitating them to reach their life goals, this program has placed much emphasis on equipping participants with knowledge and skills in financial management. The findings of the objective outcome assessment indicate that the program could achieve this goal by enhancing the financial literacy of the participants. Most of the focus group respondents found the module of financial management insightful and helpful. Perhaps more discussions about how participants perceive their role in family financial management and how they can apply this knowledge and skill in the future could be induced so that program designers can gain a better understanding of their needs and come up with an even better pedagogical approach.

Finally, with a mission to promote gender equality, The Women's Foundation is devoted to the elimination of gender stereotypes. Given that gender stereotypes may limit young people's career options and hinder their social mobility, much attention has been paid to participants' perceptions of gender roles. However, participants showed no improvement in this aspect after joining the program. Taking a closer look at the sub-group analysis results, one can notice that the male participants held a stronger agreement with gender stereotypes than the females. Consistent with these quantitative findings, qualitative findings reveal that male participants tended to believe that gender bias was a non-eliminable part of Chinese culture and were inclined to maintain the status quo. On the other side, most female participants already had high levels of awareness and resistance towards gender bias before the program, so this theme became less important to them. Oftentimes the promotion of gender equality focuses

more on empowering females. Yet, findings of this research support the idea that practitioners must not neglect the involvement of males in the project. It is recommended that the program increase its efforts in helping male participants realize that the achievement of gender equality will not only benefit girls and women but also boys and men. Males also bear significant costs in terms of their stress and work pressure under the current patriarchal ideology. By eliminating gender stereotypes, males can free themselves from the dominant discourses of masculinity and fulfill more of their affective needs, which will benefit their physical and psychological well-being. It may also expand their career options and facilitate them to realize their full human capacity (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005). Furthermore, the program can arouse more reflections and discussions about the roles of males and females in the promotion of gender equality so as to foster more positive collaborations.

Regarding the maintenance of program's positive impact, the quantitative findings show that only one (presence of meaning) out of the six outcome indicators could sustain its improvement in the six-month follow-up assessment. While this is a rather disappointing result, one should take external factors into consideration. Due to the difficulty of having a control group, a single-group pretest-posttest design was adopted in this evaluation study. Such an evaluation design is subject to the history effect, which refers to any external or historical event that occurred during the course of the study that may account for the impact on participants (Neuman, 2000). Most follow-up surveys were conducted during October 2014 to January 2015 when the Umbrella Movement took place in Hong Kong. This was undoubtedly a significant event that had a tremendous impact on young people. During that period, many of them might have experienced role confusion, instability in relationships, and uncertainty in life, which might have influenced how they responded to the follow-up survey questionnaire. Further analyses reveal that the program impact on presence of meaning, life satisfaction, and loneliness could be maintained among those who completed the follow-up test before the Umbrella Movement, whereas those who took part in the follow-up test afterward demonstrated less sustainable positive impact (only on presence of meaning). These findings indicate that the history effect might have counteracted the program's impact to a certain extent.

For the future direction of the program, it is recommended that the government and related organizations should formulate a clear policy to guide the development of life skills among young people. More effort should be put into consolidating the core position of life and career planning in school curriculums and advocate school-based and community-based life skills programs. More resources should be allocated for establishing social support networks among adolescents, and offering intensive and quality programs for them, their parents, and teachers. Furthermore, mentoring has become a popular form of intervention, and constructive adult role models can be used to broaden young people's life experiences and enhance their social capital. These mentors can also witness and support young people to develop a positive identity, consider their life goals, and choose different life trajectories. Furthermore, peer life ambassadors can also be recruited and trained to equip themselves with knowledge and skills in providing peer-led life skills programs in their own schools and communities. In training programs for life ambassadors, more work should be done to heighten their personal awareness and their awareness of the direction of life skills enhancement. In addition to professional knowledge and skills, they should also learn how to illustrate and share their daily life examples and stimulate mutual support among other participants. Last but not least, more systematic program evaluation research should be conducted with a view to improving the design and implementation of the life skills program.

Overall, the Life Skills Program was found to be effective in achieving most of its objectives. It is also noteworthy that an overwhelming majority of the participants positively rated the program and the performance of instructors in the subjective assessment. It is our hope that The Women's Foundation can gain insights from our findings and recommendations, make improvements, and strive for excellence.

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