

Short Communication

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Insights from the Four-wave Longitudinal Study of Youth Identity Status in Hong Kong

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Introduction

There is no shortage of studies that examined the social, cultural or national identities of young people in Hong Kong (e.g., a Chinese, a Hongkonger, or Generation Z). Few studies, however, have examined various conditions of an identity (e.g., completeness, stability). The Four Wave Longitudinal Youth Identity Status Project was conducted by a multi-disciplinary research team of Hong Kong Shue Yan University from 2020 to 2023. Participants were recruited from secondary schools for students in the 15-17 age group, and post-secondary institutions/universities for students in the 18-24 age group. Data were collected at four time-points, spaced out in three six-month intervals. The final sample at Wave 1 consisted of 958 secondary school students and 882 post-secondary/university students. The DIDS (Dimensions of Identity Development Scale) developed by [1], consisting of five identity dimensions, was used to determine the various youth identity statuses (YIS) according to their degrees of commitment making, identification of commitment, exploration in breadth and depth, and ruminative exploration.

From Wave 1 data, six identity statuses were discovered, namely, achievement (identity formed and committed after exploration), foreclosure (identity and commitment formed without exploration), moratorium (identity not yet formed but actively

exploring), searching moratorium (identity not yet formed but having moderate commitment), diffused diffusion (identity not yet formed but ruminatively exploring), and carefree diffusion (lacking interest in forming identity). All the six statuses or clusters were found to exhibit differences in a number of psychosocial variables. For example, those in achievement and searching moratorium statuses have higher levels of prosocial behaviour, lower levels of deviance, lower levels of social media addiction, and higher levels of proactive career behaviour than other statuses.

In the analysis of all four waves of data, the secondary school subsample and the post-secondary school subsample were estimated separately in Malus 7.4 for youth identity groups using Quadratic latent class growth mixture models (LCGM), combining the R3STEP and BCH auxiliary function in Malus to estimate the associations between groups and the psychosocial indicators. The results show that while all the individual statuses/groups have remained rather stable in the secondary subsample, two transitional trajectories were found in the post-secondary subsample, namely, from "Foreclosure to Undifferentiated ("Undifferentiated" is a status showing that the scores for the identity dimensions are close to the means when all four waves of data are taken into account)," and "Diffused Diffusion to Carefree Diffusion". Four antecedents

(stressful life events, proactive personality, prosocial behaviour, and attachments to parents) were chosen for an examination of their influence on identity developmental trajectories.

Results show that, in both subsamples, those experiencing more stressful life events, having a proactive personality, engaged in more prosocial behaviour, and more attached to parents are more likely than others to belong to desirable statuses such as achievement. In addition, life satisfaction, social networking addiction, proactive career behaviour and deviant behaviour were chosen as four outcome variables. In terms of life satisfaction, for the secondary subsample, the foreclosure group has the highest level of life satisfaction, whereas in the post-secondary group, it was the achievement group that has the highest level of life satisfaction. In social networking addiction, members of the moratorium group were at the highest risk for addiction for secondary students, and for post-secondary secondary students, those in the diffused diffusion to carefree diffusion were more at risk for addiction than those in other groups.

For proactive career behaviours, members of the achievement group have the highest level of proactive career behaviours in both subsamples. Lastly, all groups have low levels of deviant behaviour in the secondary subsample, and the achievement group has the fewest deviant behaviour in the post-secondary subsample. Besides highlighting the psychosocial correlates of YIS, the research team also found that YIS plays the role of moderator between variables. For example, the effect of future orientation is greater for those in the searching moratorium and carefree diffusion statuses, and lower for those in the achievement and foreclosure statuses [2]. In another analysis of the relationship between YIS and deviant behaviour, YIS had moderation effects on the relationship between attachment to parents and deviant behaviour. Greater attachment to parents decreased the likelihood to commit deviant behaviour in all the statuses, except the diffused diffusion status [3].

As this is a pioneer study of YIS in Hong Kong, the Chinese version of DIDS has been validated for use in Hong Kong. It can also be validated for use in Macau, Taiwan, the Great Bay area (South China), and even the whole of China. The rich dataset of the study offers an opportunity to compare the trajectories of YIS and its psychosocial variables with other countries such as Japan

[4], South Korea [5], and Italy [6]. This study is a springboard for future research on youth identity status in Hong Kong and China. It also has practical implications for the sharpening of the DIDS and related instruments for the assessment of identity statuses of youths in Hong Kong, which can lead to the next step of designing intervention programs for NGOs and schools that can facilitate the development of desirable statuses (e.g., achievement) in youths in Hong Kong.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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