Socialisation Settings of Hong Kong's Preschool Children

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The present study identifies the major socialisation settings, as defined by both a physical environment and a major caregiver, of a sample of 947 4-year-old children. A cluster analysis of the findings resulted in seven distinctive clusters of settings and one residual cluster in the following order of importance: mother alone, grandparents, and both parents in child's own home, teacher or child care worker in preschool, maid in child's own home, grandparents and other relatives in relatives' home, and a variety of caregivers in a variety of settings. In terms of time spent with the sample children, mother at home has a predominant role whereas father plays a negligible part in the socialisation of young children in Hong Kong.

本研究從九百四十七名四歲兒童的樣本中鑑定出兒童之主要社敎化環境。社敎化環境在本研究中之定義為一個外在的物質環境及一位主要的看護人。團體變量分析的結果顯示社敎化環境可分為七個獨立的羣體及一個剩餘的羣體，其次序依重要性排列為：單獨與母親相處，與兒童同住之祖父母，兒童之雙親，幼稚園之敎師或幼兒園之護理人員，兒童家中之僱傭，在親屬家中住之祖父母，其他不與兒童同住之親屬，及在其他多種環境中不同之看顧人，如用與兒童相處時間的長短而論，香港學前兒童的社化過程，身為家庭主婦的母親擔任了最主要的角色，而父親在此過程中所佔的地位卻舉足輕重。

During the first few years of life young children acquire a variety of basic skills that will serve as the foundation for their later development and learning. This development is not achieved in a vacuum but is closely related to the child's environment. Human development is a product of interactions between the growing human organism and its environment. Particularly crucial during these early stages of development is the support and stimulation provided by the child's physical and social environments (van der Eyken, 1971). These combined physical and social environments constitute the immediate socialisation settings of early childhood that Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to as ecosystems.

Even as early as the preschool period, children already participate in a number of such ecosystems. The home with family members is perhaps the most important one but there are others, the preschool with the teacher, another home with grandparents or other relatives, the neighbourhood with relatives or friends. It is within these settings that childen learn the values, beliefs, demands, expectations, and acceptable behaviours of their culture, as well as the skills necessary for adult survival in the society in which they grow up (Newman & Newman, 1978).

These various ecosystems act as a filter through which children are socialized into a specific culture and its norms. Their influence will, however, vary depending upon family socioeconomic characteristics as well as the social role and gender of the major caregiver. Baumrind (1967a, 1967b) and Kohn (1979) found that blue collar parents value obedience, neatness and cleanliness in their children, whereas white collar parents place more emphasis on curiosity, happiness and self-control. Early research (Bernstein, 1964; Hess & Shipman, 1965) found that low income parents use more verbally restrictive practices that contribute to comparatively less enriched environments than those in higher income families where parents use more explanations and verbal praise. Katz (1981) believes that teachers and parents of preschool children need to have different styles of interacting with the children. Mothers need to be more spontaneous and responsive and teachers more intentional and deliberate towards young children. Brazelton (1981) and Kotelchuk (1976) found gender differences in parents' behaviour with infants. Fathers interact more playfully with their baby, mothers devote more time to caregiving routines. Although no empirical evidence is available on generation differences in child-rearing styles, it seems reasonable to assume that mothers and grandmothers also have different approaches towards rearing young children.

Who are the caregivers and what are the socialisation settings of young children in Hong Kong? Parents attach a great deal of importance to

early education. Eighty-nine percent of children aged 3 to 5 years go to kindergartens which commonly offer a 3-hour programme in the morning, and a further 9% of children of this age group go to day nurseries, often for the entire day (Education Commission, 1986). Preschools, both kindergartens or day nurseries, are therefore one important socialisation setting. When the child is in preschool the primary caregiver is the kindergarten teacher or the child care worker. Less well-known and documented are the complementary socialisation settings. Where and with whom do young children spend their time when not in preschool? The child's own home is one such setting. However, not all preschool children spend the time when not in preschool in their own home. There are alternative arrangements. Furthermore, the child's caregiver in the home may differ. For one child it could be the mother, for another the grandparent, for yet another the maid assumes this responsibility, and for some the father may even be the major caregiver for a certain part of the day. Each of these situations represents a different socialisation setting and different experiences for young children.

The amount of time spent with one or both parents may differ between children and this will undoubtedly affect the child's early socialisation. A child who spends most of his waking hours with the mother alone will presumably have rather different experiences from a child who spends most of his waking time with a maid, or a grandparent. In view of the crucial role that settings play in early socialisation, it is important to gain an understanding of where and with whom young children in Hong Kong spend their time.

The aim of the present study is to identify the major socialisation settings of a sample of 4-year-old children in Hong Kong and the extent of time spent in these settings. For the purposes of the present analysis a socialisation setting is defined as having both a physical and a social component, that is, a location and a major caregiver.

Method

The information on socialisation setttings was obtained from the parents of 947 children, 456 boys and 491 girls. A 2-stage strafication design was used to select a sample of 65 preschools. The statification measures were locality (Hong Kong island, Kowloon, New Territories), type of preschool (kindergarten, day nursery) and size of preschool (large, small). Parents of 15 randomly se-

lected children from each preschool were invited to participate in the study. The children had a mean age of 4 years 6 months, ranging from 4 years and 0 months to 4 years and 11 months. Since an equal number of children was selected from each preschool, regardless of its size, the children did not have an equal probability of selection. Consequently, weighting procedures were used in the analysis of the results.

Parents of these children were asked to fill in a form by providing for each of the 24 hours of the previous regular, normal week day the following two bits of information: (1) where their child was located; and (2) who was the primary caregiver.

The choice of *location* included the following eight environments: child's own home, preschool, relative's home, home of friend or neighbour, family day care home, public park or playground, parental workplace, shops, restaurants and public places. The choice of *primary caregiver* included the following persons: mother, father, both parents, sibling, grandparents, other relatives, maid/babysitter, teacher/child care worker, and friend/neighbour.

Preliminary findings indicated that the majority of the children spent approximately eight hours sleeping. The analysis was therefore carried out on the data for the 16 non-sleeping hours of each day between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

Results

A cluster analysis of the data produced 8 clusters, details of which are given in Table 1.

These clusters are described in more detail below:

Cluster 1: Mother alone in child's own home. In the first cluster, containing 48.3% of the children, the mother plays the major caregiving role. She is the sole caregiver of the child for almost 13 hours during the day. The children also spend about 3 hours in a preschool when the teacher assumes care responsibilities. Both parents share this responsibility for only 6 minutes. When not in preschool the child is at home with the exception of a few minutes in the park, or at the parent's workplace. The child's socialisation settings are thus, first and foremost, the home with mother, followed by the preschool with the teacher. Other settings plays a minimal socialising role for these children.

Cluster 2: Grandparents in child's own home. In the second cluster, containing 11.3% of the children, grandparents take care of the child in the

TABLE 1
Time Spent with Caregiver and in Setting by Cluster

	Time Spent with Caregivers		Time Spent in Setting	
Cluster	Caregiver(s)	Time Spent	Setting	Time Spent
1	Mother	12h42m	Own Home	12h42m
(48.3%)	Teacher	3h06m	Preschool	3h06m
	Both Parents	06m	Parent Workplace	06m
			Park/ Playground	06m
2	Grandparents	9h54m	Child's Home	12h54m
(11.3%)	Teacher	3h004m	Preschool	3h00m
	Mother	1h12m	Park	06m
	Both Parents	30m		
	Father	06m		
3	Maid	8h12m	Child's Home	12h54m
(5.7%)	Teacher	3h06m	Preschool	3h06m
	Mother	1h36m		
	Both Parents	30m		
4	Relatives	9h30m	Relatives' Home	8h42m
(2.4%)	Teacher	3h00m	Preschool	3h06m
	Both Parents	1h30m	Child's Home	3h06m
	Mother	1h12m	Park	06m
	Father	06m		
5	Teacher	8h18m	Preschool	8h18m
(6.4%)	Mother	2h42m	Child's Home	6h48m
	Both Parents	3h36m	Parent Workplace	36m
	Grandparents	24m	Relatives' Home	06m
	Father	06m	Park	06m
	Maid	06m		
6	Grandparents	9h48m	Grandparents' Home	10h00m
(2.9%)	Teacher	3h06m	Preschool	3h00m
	Mother	1h54m	Child's Home	2h54m
	Both Parents	1h06m	Park	06m
7	Mother	7h24m	Childs' Home	12h36m
(10.6%)	Both Parents	4h00m	Preschool	3h06
	Teacher	3h06m	Parent Workplace	06m
	Father	12m	Park	06m
	Siblings	12m		
8	Teacher	2h36m	Child's Home	8h24m
(12.4%)	Maid	1h30m	Preschool	2h36m
	Mother	1h00m	Friend's Home	47m
	Friend	1h004m	Family Day Care	12m
	Both Parents	42m	Parent Workplace	06m
	Other Relatives	30m	Park	06m
	Father	18m		
	Grandparents	06m		
	Siblings	06m		

child's own home for almost 10 hours. The children of this cluster also spend 3 hours in preschool. Presumably mother works since she only takes care of the child for 1 hour and 12 minutes and both parents share this responsibility for half an hour. Father alone takes care of the child for only 6 minutes. The major socialising agent for this group of children is therefore the grandparent, or grandparents, who spend the major part of the day with the child. Other important caregivers are the teacher, and the mother, either alone or together with father. Similar to cluster 1, the most important locations are the child's own home and the preschool.

Cluster 3: Maid in child's own home. In the third cluster, containing 5.7% of the children, the maid is the major caregiver. Similar to the two previous clusters, these children spend approximately 3 hours in the preschool, then return home to be taken care of by a maid for approximately 8 hours each day. As for cluster 2, mother presumably works since she only takes care of the child for one and a half hours alone, and one half hour together with father. The major socialising agent for these children then is the maid, followed by the teacher, and the mother, either alone or together with father. The most important locations are the child's own home and the preschool.

Cluster 4: Other relatives in relatives' home. In the fourth cluster, containing only 2.4% of the children, other relatives besides grandparents care for the child in their home. Unlike the previous three clusters, children of cluster 4 do not return to their own home after their half-day preschool but go to another location, the home of a relative, where they are taken care of by relatives for most of the remainder of the day. These children spend approximately 3 hours in their own home. During this time the caregiving responsibility is shared between mother alone for approximately one hour, and both parents for approximately one and one half hours. Presumably the mothers of these children also work. For these children the principal socializing agents are relatives, teacher and both parents. Their three main socialisation locations are another home besides their own, their own home and their preschool.

Cluster 5: Teacher in preschool. The fifth cluster, containing 6.4% of the children, represents those children who spend approximately 8 hours each day in the preschool and most of the rest of the day in their own home with a variety of caregivers. Presumably for these children too the mother works. She takes care of the child after work for 2 hours and 42 minutes and is helped in this task by the father for approximately two and one-half hours. Grandparents also share this responsibility for a short period of 24 minutes, probably either at the beginning or end of the day to cover the gap between preschool operating hours and the parents' work schedule. Father alone and the maid also take care of the child for short periods of 6 minutes each day. For these children the primary socialisation setting is therefore the preschool with the teacher, followed by the home with mother and father. Minor caregivers are the grandparents and a maid.

Cluster 6: Grandparents in grandparents' home. The sixth cluster, containing 2.9% of the children, respresents those children who, after half-day preschool, are taken care of by grandparents in the grandparents' home for approximately 10 hours each day. Mother is the caregiver for almost 2 hours alone, and approximately one hour with father. As with previous clusters 2 through 5, mother presumably works. For these children the major caregivers are the grandparents, followed by the teacher, and mother and father. Major locations are the grandparents' home, the preschool and the child's own home.

Cluster 7: Both Parents in child's own home. The seventh cluster, containing 10.6% of the children,

respresents those children where both parents share the responsibility for care for a longer period than in the previous clusters. Although mother alone is the major caregiver for almost 7 and one half hours, father shares this responsibility for an additional 4 hours. In addition, although the period is not too long, only 12 minutes, the father spends more time caring for the child alone than is found in the other clusters. Here the child's major caregivers are mother, both parents and teacher. Major locations are the child's own home and the preschool.

Cluster 8: Others. Finally, cluster 8 containing the remaining 12.4% of the children, is a residual cluster which includes children who do not fall into any clear pattern of settings or caregivers, or for whom the information provided is incomplete. These data have therefore been removed from subsequent analyses.

Tables 2 and 3 provide an overall picture of the time spent in different locations and with different caregivers. This table shows that as far as the amount of time spent is concerned, the major location for 86.7% of the children (clusters 1, 2, 3 and 7) is the child's own home, with these children spending almost 13 hours in this setting. Children of clusters 4 (Other relatives) and 6 (Grandparents), on the other hand, spend the greater part of the day in the home of another person. Cluster 5 children (Preschool) spend the largest portion of their day in preschool, but also spend about 7 hours at home when not in the preschool. Another major location is the preschool. All the children, with the exception of cluster 5, attend a half-day preschool for approximately 3 hours a day. Minor locations are the parent's

TABLE 2

Mean Time Spent in Locations for Clusters 1-7 (N=821)

Setting	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cluster						
1 (55.2%)	12h42m	0	3h06m	6m	6m	0
2 (12.9%)	12h54m	0	3h00m	6m	0	0
3 (6.5%)	12h54m	0	3h06m	0	0	0
4 (2.7%)	3h06m	8h48m	3h00m	6m	0	1h06m
5 (7.3%)	6h48m	6m	8h18m	6m	36m	0
6 (3.3%)	2h54m	10h00m	3h00m	6m	0	0
7 (12.1%)	12h36m	0	3h06m	6m	6m	0

1 = Own Home; 2 = Relative's Home; 3 = Preschool; 4= Park;
5 = Parents' Workplace; 6 = Family Day Care

workplace and family day care, as well as the park or playground. Interestingly, the children of all the clusters except 3 (Maid) spend approximately 6 minutes each day in a park or playground. Time spent in the home of friends or neighbours, or in public places is negligible and is therefore not reported here.

Table 3 shows a wider variety of arrangements for caregivers than that found for physical environments.

TABLE 3

Mean Time spent with Caregivers for Clusters 1-7 (N=821)

Caregiver	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cluster							
1 (55.2%)	12h42m	0	6m	0	0	3h06m	0
2 (12.9%)	1h12m	6m	30m	9h54m	0	3h00m	0
3 (6.5%)	1h36m	0	30m	0	0	3h0m	8h12m
4 (2.7%)	1h12m	6m	1h30m	0	9h30m	3h00m	0
5 (7.3%)	2h42m	6m	2h36m	24m	0	8h18m	6m
6 (3.3%)	1h54m	0	1h06m	9h48m	0	3h06m	0
7 (12.1%)	7h24m	12'	4h00	0	0	3h06m	0

1 = Mother; 2 = Father; 3 = Both Parents; 4 = Grandparents 5 = Relatives; 6 = Teacher; 7 = Maid/Babysitter

Mother is the major caregiver for clusters 1 (Mother alone) and 7 (Both parents), representing a total of 67.3% of the children. Other major caregivers are grandparents for 16.2% of the children, teacher for 7.3%, maid for 6.5% and other relatives for 2.7%. Father alone is the major caregiver for very short periods ranging from 6 to 12 minutes. Both parents take care of the child for varying periods ranging from 6 minutes to 4 hours. Similar to the findings for physical settings, friends and neighbours do not play a significant role in caregiving for young children and have therefore not been reported here.
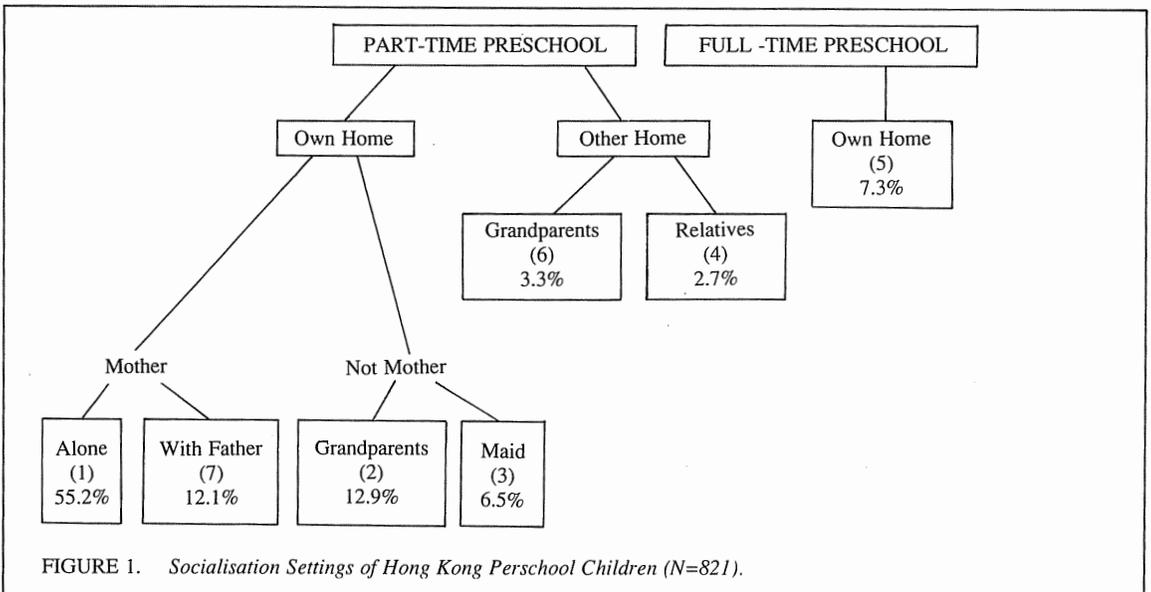
A summary of clusters 1 through 7 is given in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1.   *Socialisation Settings of Hong Kong Perschool Children (N=821).*

Summary and Conclusions

The results of the cluster analysis shows even distinctive groupings of children. In six of these the children go to half-day preschool. When not in preschool, children from clusters 1, 2, 3 and 7 are in their own home, whereas children from clusters 4 and 6 spend the major part of the day in someone else's home. For the children of cluster 6, it is the home of the grandparents, whereas for cluster 4 it is the home of another relative besides grandparents, presumably an aunt or uncle. Although the children of clusters 1, 2, 3 and 7 are all in their own home when not in half-day preschool, their caregivers are not the same. For clusters 1 and 7, the major caregiver is the mother, either alone for cluster 1, or together with the father for cluster 7. The children of clusters 2 and 3, on the other hand, are mostly taken care of by grandparents or by a maid. The seventh cluster represents those children who spend the whole day in preschool. When not in preschool these children are in their own home taken care of by a variety of caregivers, of which the principal are the mother alone for 2 hours and 42 minutes, and both parents for approximately the same amount of time, 2 hours and 36 minutes.

Parents' Roles in Caregiving

It is clear from the findings that the home plays a crucial role in the socialisation process of young children. This agrees with the findings of Tizard and Hughes (1984) that the home constitutes a powerful learning environment for young children. Hong Kong parents do not, however, have an equal share of caregiving responsibilities. The mother plays the predominant role in caregiving while father makes a negligible contribution. Mother is the sole caregiver for the majority of children, 67% (clusters 1 and 7), and spends from 7 and one-half hours to almost 13 hours with the child. Presumably these mothers do not work. The findings also reveal that 33% of the mothers, representing clusters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, spend relatively little time alone with the child, ranging from 1 hour and 12 minutes for cluster 2 to 2 hours and 42 minutes for cluster 5. Presumably these mothers work full-time and have delegated care responsibilities to other caregivers during their working period. Additional time spent in joint care together with the father ranges from 30 minutes to 2 hours and 36 minutes.

Father on the other hand makes a minimal contribution to the care of the young child. He takes sole responsibility for the child in only four clusters (2, 4, 5, and 7) representing 35% of the children, for periods of time ranging from 6 to 12 minutes a day. When mother does not work, for the most part he spends no time alone with the child. The same situation obtains when children are primarily taken care of by a maid or the grandparents in the grandparents' home.

Father's contribution to joint care with the mother varies according to the situation. When mother does not work, there are two alternatives. Fathers of clusters 1 childre (55%) only spend 6 minutes together with mother taking care of the child, and as we have seen above, no time caring for the child alone. Fathers of cluster 7 children (12%), on the other hand, spend 4 hours sharing this responsibility with the mother. When the mother works the contribution of the father varies according to the location of care. If the child is taken care of outside the home by grandparents, teachers or other relatives during parent's working hours, the father shares almost equally the caregiving responsibility with the mother during the time the child is at home. However, if the child is taken care of by someone besides the mother in the child's own home, then father makes little contribution towards sharing the caregiving when he returns from work, only half an hour of shared responsibility.

This study has identified the major socialisation settings of 4-year-olds in Hong Kong and the extent of their usage. Not only are there a variety of physical settings, of which the most important are the child's own home, the preschool and the home of relatives, but also a variety of caregivers, the most important being the mother, the preschool teacher or child care worker, grandparents and a maid. These various settings undoubtedly result in differing experiences for the child, an aspect that was not investigated in the present study. What is needed now to complement the present study is research into the types of experiences and interactions that young children encounter in these differing settings which, combined with the present findings could provide a clearer picture of the socialisation settings and processes of young children in Hong Kong. It would also be interesting to investigate whether the patterns of socialisation settings discovered in the present study are related to socioeconomic or other factors.

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