

Jacobs Journal of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine

Research Article

Sexual and Mental Health in Compensated Dating in Youth in Hong Kong: An Exploratory Quantitative Study

LI M.H. Tim¹, WONG W.C. Paul^{1*}, CHAN Melissa², LAW Yik-Wa¹, FU King-Wa³, CHAU Michael⁴, YIP S.F. Paul^{1,2}

¹Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China (Hong Kong)

²HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China (Hong Kong)

³Journalism and Media Studies Centre, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China (Hong Kong)

⁴School of Business, Faculty of Business and Economics, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China (Hong Kong)

*Corresponding author: Dr. Paul W.C. WONG, Rm 511, Jockey Teaching Tower, The Centennial Campus, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong, China, Tel: (852) 39175029; Email: paulw@hku.hk

Received: 04-09-2015

Accepted: 05-06-2015

Published: 06-23-2015

Copyright: © 2015 Li T.M.H. et al.

Abstract

Purpose: Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase of youth engaged in dates with strangers in return for money and gifts. The aim of this exploratory study was to examine the correlates of compensated dating among youth in Hong Kong to inform feasible engagement and helping strategies for this recent phenomenon.

Methods: A cross-sectional telephone-based survey with 1,010 12–29-year-old participants in Hong Kong. The correlates of compensated dating were examined using univariate and multivariate binary logistic regression analyses.

Results: The lifetime prevalence of compensated dating in Hong Kong among the 12- to 29-year-old was about 3% (=27/1,010). Youths engaged in compensated dating included both males and females and had higher chances to experience sexual health problems, i.e., sexually transmitted diseases and abortion, and mental health problems, i.e., suicidal ideation, Internet addiction, social network and family stress (all $p < 0.05$). However, the compensated dating group was more motivated to seek help over the Internet such as accessing to online resources, than those without compensated dating.

Conclusions: Compensated dating has a strong relationship with a number of problematic behaviors among youths between 12 and 29 years. Youth in compensated dating are “difficult-to-be-identified” in reality but not “difficult-to-reach” in the virtual world.

Introduction

Compensated dating [1,2], also known as *enjo kosai* (in Japanese), assisted relationship [3], freelance teenage sex work [4], and casual teen prostitution [5], emerged in Japan in 1990s and has spread to other Asian societies including Korea [1], Thailand [6], Taiwan [5], Shanghai [7] and Hong Kong [2] in the early 2000s. The compensated dating phenomenon was considered similar to youth sexual exploitation, defined as the exchange of sexual activity for money or other consideration according to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [8]. However, some researchers have argued that compensated dating does not fit into any form of prostitution as another form of sexual exploitation [7,9] because compensated dating includes not only sexual transactions but also nonsexual social activities, such as having karaoke, meals, and movies together [9]. Besides, youth engaged in compensated dating seem to have free choice of clients (or as they called 'friends') and have large flexibility to choose how and where to "work" and "quit" without any agents [2,6].

Conceptualizations of compensated dating, however, vary between different societies. Compensated dating is seen as a transitional stage prior to youth prostitution in Korea and Hong Kong [1,2]; whereas compensated dating is seen as another form of sexual exploration and "professional" sex work with tangible and sizable profits in Taiwan [5]. From the youths' perspective, compensated dating is sometimes seen as a form of sexual exploration that helps them to achieve sexual excitement and experimenting with the various flirting and seductive behaviors and facilitates their self-actualization and improves self-esteem in that engaging in compensated dating has enlarged their social exposure by selling services to people with higher social status that they could not normally reach [7]; and some stated that compensated dating helps to affirm their sexual attractiveness by setting a price for their bodies [9]. Moreover, in low-income countries, compensated dating has been seen as a valid occupation for easy and quick money and material returns to support luxurious living expenses, hobbies, and trips [1,6].

Whether compensated dating should receive the same treatment as child pornography and child prostitution which are commonly seen as gross violations of children and youth rights and dignity has been debated, but the mental and health consequences of engaging in compensated dating should not be underestimated. Adolescents and youth are an important target population with respect to public health because of their rapid and multiple transitions into adulthood, during which health and sexual vulnerabilities are initiated and health resilience is established [10]. From a public health perspective, sexual exploitation among youth is a big concern because of its strong relationship with increased odds of HIV infection, sexually transmitted diseases (STD), depression and post-traumatic stress with lasting damage into adulthood. The mental and sexual health of youth in compensated dating should be examined to understand the consequences of this phenomenon and

prepare for the future youth healthcare services in Hong Kong and other Asian societies. Otherwise, the youth population will inevitably encounter multiple sex-related problems such as unintended teenage pregnancy and STDs or even AIDS [11].

Exact statistics of compensated dating are difficult to obtain probably because of its recent nature and diverse conceptualizations. In Tokyo, Japan, 4% of high school girls and 3.8% of junior high school girls was found to have participated in compensated dating [12]. In Taiwan, 2.1% of high school students have engaged in compensated dating⁷. In Hong Kong, less than 3% of grade 8 students have engaged in compensated dating [2]. Shockingly, in Busan, South Korea, 1 out of 4 high school students engaged in compensated dating [1]. Although the prevalence of compensated dating was relatively low in Chinese societies, there are concerns that it will intensify because of the decreasing age for first sexual experience [3] and the less conservative views on sexual activities especially youths in Asian societies [11,13].

Although compensated dating has raised public and academic concerns [14], there is limited research to examine compensated dating. A recent school-based study on compensated dating among grade 8 students has been conducted locally [2], but a more generalizable study with a wider age range using a community sample will help further understand the scope of this recent phenomenon in Hong Kong. The present study utilized a community sample and contrasted the sociodemographics characteristics of 12- to 29-year-olds who had and had not engaged in compensated dating. The relationships between compensated dating and other psychosocial and behavioral factors were examined to understand the mental and sexual health and help-seeking behaviors among youth with compensated dating.

Methods

Data collection

We conducted a cross-sectional telephone survey in Hong Kong between 23 January and 22 March 2013. A large sample of mobile numbers was randomly generated using the mobile numbers prefix data published by the Office of the Telecommunications Authority. The response rate was 35.4% resulting 1,010 respondents in the study. Details of the research methodology and measurements of the study were reported elsewhere [15]. Prior ethical approval was given by the Human Research Ethics Committee for Nonclinical Faculties in the authors' university.

Measures

We asked our participants "In your life time, have you met any new friend in any forms for the sake of making money or hoping to receive material items in return?" [2] Participants answered on a yes or no basis. The item was then used as a categorical dependent variable (presence vs. absence). Sexual transaction was intentionally avoided in the question to reduce the possi-

bility of underreporting due to a wide range of nonsexual and sexual activities that may be involved in compensated dating.

We classified the independent variables under study into five domains. First, sociodemographic characteristics included educational level, marital status, living arrangements, employment status and individual monthly income. Second, the psychological factors investigated in this study included health-related quality of life, measured using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) [16]. A higher score reflects a poor mental health quality. Third, the behavioral factors investigated included Internet addiction [17,18], lifetime risk behaviors [19], and off-and-online help-seeking behaviors. For those who reported one or more risk-taking behaviors, their help-seeking behaviors were also evaluated. The total number of sources from which help had been sought by the participants within the last month was used in the study. Fourth, we developed a list of locally relevant negative life event categories for use in the study. Seven life situations occurring over the month prior to the survey were evaluated including academic situation, job, finances, social networks, health, relationships with family, and relationships with spouse or partner. Fifth, the social communication and relationship variables investigated in the study included means of communicating with others, ways of expressing distress, and interpersonal relationships. The interpersonal relationships investigated here included Internet social support and the size of the participant's network in Facebook and Whatsapp. All measurements were administrated in Cantonese.

Statistical Analyses

There were two stages in the statistical analysis. First, binary logistic regression analyses adjusted for sex and gender were conducted. Socio-demographic characteristics and the other variables studied were analyzed to obtain both unadjusted and adjusted odds ratios and their 95% confidence intervals (CI). Second, multivariate binary logistic regression analyses adjusted for sex and gender were conducted with backward selection based on Wald statistic. The first model (model 1) examined significant variables in the first stage except particular risk-taking behavior items. The second model (model 2) examined significant risk-taking behavior items in the first stage to understand the relationships between compensated dating and particular risk-taking behaviors more thoroughly. The adjusted odds ratios and their 95% CI of the examined variables in the two models were presented. All data analyses were conducted using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 20, IBM Corporation).

Results

The lifetime prevalence rate of compensated dating was 2.7% ($n=27$, 27/1,010; 95% CI 1.8-3.9). As shown in Table 1, there were no statistically significant differences between the compensated dating group and the comparison group in terms of sociodemographic characteristics. Table 2 and 3 present the

differences between the two groups of participants in terms of other studied variables. First, the GHQ-12 total scores of the individuals in compensated dating were around 3 points higher than those in the comparison group. Second, the compensated dating group had one more Internet addiction symptom than the comparison group. In addition, those in the compensated dating group reported at least one more lifetime risk-taking behavior, e.g., suicidal ideation, unsafe sex, infection of STDs, unintended pregnancy, abortion, binge drinking, bullying, and being bullied, than the individuals in the comparison group. Although those engaging in compensated dating had experienced more risk-taking behaviors, they were more motivated to seek help on the Internet than the comparison group when adjusted for sex and gender. Third, the compensated dating group had experienced more negative life events including social network and family problems than the comparison group. Finally, there were no statistically significant differences between the compensated dating group and the comparison group in terms of social communication and relationship variables.

In the multivariate regression analysis, significant variables including the GHQ-12 total scores, the number of Internet addiction symptoms, lifetime risk-taking behaviors, and online helping sources sought, negative life events including social network and family problems were examined. After backward selection, the GHQ-12 total scores and family problems were eliminated in the model. In model 1 (see Table 4), the compensated dating group had statistical significantly more Internet addiction symptoms, lifetime risk-taking behaviors and social network stressors than the comparison group. Besides, significant risk-taking behaviors including suicidal ideation, binge drinking, unsafe sex, infection of STDs, unintended pregnancy, abortion, bullying, and being bullied were investigated. After backward selection, binge drinking, unintended pregnancy, unsafe sex and bullying were removed in the model. In model 2 (see Table 5), individuals having infection of STDs, abortion, bullied by others, and suicidal ideation, had a 33.9, 15.0, 7.9 and 2.4, times higher risk of being in compensated dating than not, respectively.

Discussion

This exploratory quantitative study found that about 3% of the participants had ever engaged in compensated dating and this finding is consistent with the previous study among grade 8 students in Hong Kong [2]. The present study is also one of the very few quantitative studies on compensated dating reported in English. It is noteworthy that compensated dating is not just a young female issue. The number of male engaged in compensated dating was comparable to the number of the female. This phenomenon was also observed in the previous study by Lee and Shek [2]. In fact, researchers in the field have criticized that there is a lack of investigation of the male in compensated dating while more young men have been sexually exploited [3,5]. It has been suggested that the increasing trend of homosexuality and pedophilia activities may explain the male participation in the compensated dating phenomenon [11]. The

Variables	No (%) comparison (n = 983)	No (%) CD (n = 27)	Unadjusted OR ^a (95% CI)	Adjusted OR ^a (95% CI)
Gender				
Male	453 (46)	15 (56)	1	1
Female	530 (54)	12 (44)	0.7 (0.3 to 1.5)	0.6 (0.3 to 1.4)
Age				
16<	136 (14)	4 (15)	1	1
16-22	458 (47)	16 (59)	1.2 (0.4 to 3.6)	1.2 (0.4 to 3.6)
22>	387 (39)	7 (26)	0.6 (0.2 to 2.1)	0.6 (0.2 to 2.0)
Educational level				
Above Form 3	770 (79)	19 (70)	1	1
Form 3 or below	210 (21)	8 (30)	1.5 (0.7 to 3.6)	1.5 (0.7 to 3.5)
Marital status				
Never married	922 (94)	27 (100)	1	1
Separated/divorced	7 (1)	0 (0)	N/A	N/A
Currently married	52 (5)	0 (0)	N/A	N/A
Living Arrangement				
Lived with someone including parents	860 (88)	23 (85)	1	1
Lived with someone but not parents	95 (10)	2 (7)	0.8 (0.2 to 3.4)	0.8 (0.2 to 3.4)
Lived alone	21 (2)	2 (7)	3.6 (0.8 to 16.1)	3.7 (0.8 to 17.2)
Employment Status				
Employed	386 (39)	9 (33)	1	1
Unemployed	28 (3)	2 (7)	3.1 (0.6 to 14.9)	3.7 (0.7 to 18.5)
Economically inactive (Student)	569 (58)	16 (59)	1.2 (0.5 to 2.8)	1.2 (0.5 to 2.8)
Monthly Income				
HKD\$6000 or above	360 (37)	9 (33)	1	1
Below \$6000	12 (1)	0 (0)	N/A	N/A
No income	28 (3)	2 (7)	2.9 (0.6 to 13.9)	3.4 (0.7 to 17.3)
Student with no income	569 (59)	16 (59)	1.1 (0.5 to 2.6)	1.1 (0.5 to 2.6)

Table 1. Comparison of demographic characteristics of the classified individuals and unadjusted/adjusted parameter estimates from binary logistics regression

a N/A: OR was not obtained because of no subject in the category; Adjusted for gender and age; when OR=1, the category in a categorical variable is the reference group to the other category(ies); the comparison group served as the reference group for the dependent variable.

Variables	Comparison (n = 983) Mean (SD)	CD (n = 27) Mean (SD)	Unadjusted OR ^a (95% CI)	Adjusted OR ^a (95% CI)
Psychological variables				
GHQ-12 total score	22.4 (4.8)	25.3 (6.9)	1.1 (1.0 to 1.2)**	1.1 (1.0 to 1.2)**
Behavioral variables				
No. of Internet addiction symptoms	1.7 (1.7)	2.6 (1.8)	1.3 (1.1 to 1.6)**	1.3 (1.1 to 1.6)**
No. of lifetime risk-taking behaviors	1.4 (1.7)	4.3 (2.4)	1.7 (1.4 to 1.9)***	1.7 (1.4 to 2.0)***
No. of offline helping sources sought	1.2 (1.1)	1.2 (1.2)	1.0 (0.6 to 1.5)	1.0 (0.6 to 1.6)
No. of online helping sources sought	0.5 (0.7)	0.8 (0.8)	1.8 (1.0 to 3.2)	1.9 (1.0 to 3.5)*
Willingness to be approached online by professionals	2.9 (1.0)	2.9 (1.1)	1.0 (0.7 to 1.5)	1.1 (0.7 to 1.5)
Negative life event categories				
Academic	1.9 (1.1)	2.2 (1.4)	1.3 (0.8 to 1.9)	1.3 (0.9 to 1.9)
Job	1.8 (1.0)	1.8 (1.0)	1.0 (0.6 to 1.8)	1.1 (0.6 to 1.9)
Finance	1.4 (0.8)	1.7 (1.2)	1.4 (1.0 to 2.0)	1.4 (1.0 to 2.0)
Social networks	1.2 (0.6)	1.6 (1.0)	1.8 (1.2 to 2.8)**	1.9 (1.3 to 3.0)**
Health	1.3 (0.7)	1.4 (0.9)	1.2 (0.8 to 2.0)	1.2 (0.8 to 2.0)
Relations with family	1.2 (0.6)	1.6 (0.8)	1.8 (1.2 to 2.7)**	1.8 (1.2 to 2.7)**
Relations with spouse/partner	1.2 (0.6)	1.1 (0.3)	0.5 (0.1 to 2.8)	0.5 (0.1 to 2.7)
Social communication and relationship variables				
Internet social support	4.5 (1.1)	4.4 (1.1)	0.9 (0.6 to 1.2)	0.9 (0.6 to 1.2)
Means of expressing distress				
Face to face	2.9 (0.9)	2.9 (1.2)	0.9 (0.6 to 1.4)	1.0 (0.6 to 1.4)
Phone	2.8 (1.0)	2.5 (1.1)	0.8 (0.5 to 1.2)	0.8 (0.6 to 1.2)
SMS on mobile phone	1.7 (0.9)	1.6 (1.1)	0.8 (0.5 to 1.3)	0.9 (0.5 to 1.4)
Whatsapp	2.8 (1.1)	2.7 (1.3)	1.0 (0.7 to 1.4)	1.0 (0.7 to 1.4)
Instant message	2.1 (1.0)	2.2 (1.2)	1.1 (0.7 to 1.5)	1.1 (0.7 to 1.6)

Table 2. Comparison of psychological, behavioral, negative life event, social communication and relationship continuous variables of the classified individuals and unadjusted/adjusted parameter estimates from binary logistics regression.

a *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; Adjusted for gender and age; the comparison group served as the reference group for the dependent variable.

Variables	Comparison (n = 983) No (%)	CD (n = 27) No (%)	Unadjusted OR ^a (95% CI)	Adjusted OR ^a (95% CI)
Behavioral variables				
Lifetime risk-taking behaviors				
Consider suicide				
Absence	791 (81)	12 (44)	1	1
Presence	192 (20)	15 (56)	5.2 (2.4 to 11.2)***	5.1 (2.3 to 11.2)***
Injure self intentionally				
Absence	882 (90)	23 (85)	1	1
Presence	101 (10)	4 (15)	1.5 (0.5 to 4.5)	1.5 (0.5 to 4.4)

Drink > 5 drinks in one occasion				
Absence	711 (72)	14 (52)	1	1
Presence	271 (28)	13 (48)	2.4 (1.1 to 5.3)*	2.3 (1.1 to 5.1)*
>5 cigarettes per day				
Absence	884 (90)	23 (85)	1	1
Presence	99 (10)	4 (15)	1.6 (0.5 to 4.6)	1.4 (0.5 to 4.3)
Drug/substance use				
Absence	959 (98)	26 (96)	1	1
Presence	24 (2)	1 (4)	1.5 (0.2 to 11.8)	1.5 (0.2 to 11.7)
Gambling				
Absence	707 (72)	19 (70)	1	1
Presence	276 (28)	8 (30)	1.0 (0.5 to 2.5)	1.0 (0.4 to 2.3)
Debt problems				
Absence	925 (94)	23 (85)	1	1
Presence	58 (6)	4 (15)	2.8 (0.9 to 8.3)	2.7 (0.9 to 8.2)
Unsafe sex				
Absence	903 (92)	19 (70)	1	1
Presence	77 (8)	8 (30)	4.9 (2.1 to 11.6)***	5.4 (2.2 to 13.3)***
Sexually transmitted diseases				
Absence	980 (100)	26 (96)	1	1
Presence	2 (0)	1 (4)	18.8 (1.7 to 214.5)*	19.5 (1.6 to 240.0)*
Unintended pregnancy				
Absence	973 (99)	25 (93)	1	1
Presence	10 (1)	2 (7)	7.8 (1.6 to 37.4)*	11.2 (2.1 to 58.3)**
Abortion				
Absence	978 (100)	25 (93)	1	1
Presence	5 (1)	2 (7)	15.6 (2.9 to 84.6)**	24.9 (4.1 to 152.1)**
Bully others				
Absence	896 (91)	18 (67)	1	1
Presence	87 (9)	9 (33)	5.1 (2.2 to 11.8)***	5.3 (2.2 to 12.5)***
Bullied by others				
Absence	852 (87)	11 (41)	1	1
Presence	131 (13)	16 (59)	9.5 (4.3 to 20.8)***	9.7 (4.4 to 21.4)***
Legal offences				
Absence	958 (98)	25 (93)	1	1
Presence	25 (3)	2 (7)	3.1 (0.7 to 13.7)	3.1 (0.7 to 14.5)
Social communication and relationship variables				
Size of social network in Facebook				
150 friends or above	724 (77)	20 (74)	1	1
Below 150 friends	221 (23)	7 (26)	1.1 (0.5 to 2.7)	1.1 (0.5 to 2.6)
Size of social network in Whatsapp				
150 friends or above	137 (15)	5 (20)	1	1
Below 150 friends	781 (85)	20 (80)	0.7 (0.3 to 1.9)	0.7 (0.3 to 1.9)

Table 3. Comparison of psychological, behavioral, negative life event, social communication and relationship categorical variables of the classified individuals and unadjusted/adjusted parameter estimates from binary logistics regression.

a *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; Adjusted for gender and age; when OR=1, the category in a categorical variable is the reference group to the other category(ies); the comparison group served as the reference group for the dependent variable

Variables	Adjusted OR ^a (95% CI)
Behavioral variables	
No. of Internet addiction symptoms	1.3 (1.0 to 1.8)*
No. of lifetime risk-taking behaviors	1.7 (1.3 to 2.1)***
No. of online helping sources sought	1.8 (0.9 to 3.7)
Negative life event categories	
Social networks	2.1 (1.2 to 3.6)**

Table 4. Adjusted parameter estimates from multivariate binary logistics regression with backward selection: model 1.

a *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; Adjusted for gender and age; the comparison group served as the reference group for the dependent variable.

Variables	Adjusted OR ^a (95% CI)
Lifetime risk-taking behaviors	
Consider suicide	
Absence	1
Presence	2.4 (1.1 to 5.9)*
Sexually transmitted diseases	
Absence	1
Presence	33.9 (2.2 to 520.5)*
Abortion	
Absence	1
Presence	15.0 (2.2 to 103.0)**
Bullied by others	
Absence	1
Presence	7.9 (3.3 to 18.8)***

Table 5. Adjusted parameter estimates from multivariate binary logistics regression with backward selection: model 2.

a *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; Adjusted for gender and age; when OR=1, the category in a categorical variable is the reference group to the other category(ies); the comparison group served as the reference group for the dependent variable.

study also demonstrates that the males and females engaged in compensated dating in Hong Kong are similar in terms of the studied variables.

The study shows that the compensated dating group had poorer mental health, more social network and family problems, and more Internet addiction symptoms compared to the comparison group. Youth in this situation may tend to immerse

themselves into the virtual world to escape from the lonely and empty reality. Since compensated dating becomes popular over the Internet, they may be exposed to compensated dating over different online platforms such as online games and web forums [20]. The wide range of compensated dating activities may mislead young people to think that compensated dating is a good way to search for passionate relationship [6] and warmth [5] and not necessary a form of prostitution. To illustrate, a young individual engaged in compensated dating may initially wish to build up a close relationship with his/her new "friend" when the feelings of security and dependence from someone, especially parents, is lacking in his/her life [7]. However, the young person engages in compensated dating may then be hooked or threatened by the 'friends' who took his/her naked photographs or videos to involve in intensified sexual activities.

Our study has found that compensated dating was significantly associated with some sex-related risk behaviors including unsafe sex, infection of STDs, unintended pregnancy, and abortion. This is consistent with what other researchers have suggested that earlier sexual experience of youth facilitates compensated dating [3]. Previous studies have also highlighted the risk for young girls to be sexually assaulted if they engage in compensated dating [9]. The study provides quantitative evidence to support these claims and the possible consequences of sexual exploitation in compensated dating. Furthermore, our study shows that 15% of the participants in the compensated dating group were younger than 16 years old. In many places such as Hong Kong, children cannot surrender their rights for protection and consent to their own sexual exploitation under the age of 16 for heterosexual and homosexual activities. Sex with minors is a serious crime in Hong Kong in which offenders can be subjected to penalty in a form of imprisonment [7]. Apart from the legal aspect, sexual transmitted diseases and abortion can be harmful to children who generally do not achieve sexual maturation²¹. Even worse, children, who may find it difficult to deal with the aforementioned emotional, sexual and reproductive problems by themselves and may then develop suicide ideation and use suicide as a way to solve their problems.

We found that participants in the compensated dating group were more likely to be bullied by others. We did not know whether the bullying experience happened before or after the individuals had initiated compensated dating; however, it seems that either of the two pathways leads to negative outcomes. Compensated dating not only fails to be an alternative way to develop positive social relationships for many individuals, we speculate that it also leads to more negative social experiences. Traumatic experience from family, such as family dysfunction, domestic violence, and incest, may trigger the children to practice compensated dating to search for affection, become independence from the parent's control, or

attract parents' attention [3,6]. However, since engaging in sex work is a highly unacceptable behavior in general, compensated dating youth may intensify their negative relationships with families. Not surprisingly, compensated dating youth may also be discriminated and bullied by their friends, classmates or colleagues. Besides, individuals, who seek for compensated dating, may not intend to develop social relationships but search for immediate pleasure from having companionships by young people or even deviant sexual fantasies [9]. If compensated dating youth cannot satisfy those clients, it is possible that the clients will rape and harm them during the compensated dating activities [7]. Indeed, a 16-year-old girl was chopped into pieces and her flesh was stripped off and flushed down the toilet and some of which was dumped at a local market where meat was sold by a 24-year-old man who sought for compensated dating in 2009 in Hong Kong [22].

Our study has found that the compensated dating group was more likely to have sought peer support and/or professional help on the Internet compared to the comparison group. This implies that although compensated dating youth are "difficult-to-be-identified" in reality, they may not be "difficult-to-reach" in the virtual world. This finding hence sheds light on the potential practical implications for engagement and provision of helping strategies for compensated dating youth. High-quality educational websites, and Internet-based counselling and medical consultation can be provided to enhance their health knowledge, increase awareness of risks in compensated dating and facilitate deep self-reflection [23-25]. Although youth engaged in compensated dating attempt to minimize or avoid risks, for example, in Hong Kong they form collaborative networks to share their working experiences and precaution tips over the Internet such as how to make sure clients using condoms properly and identify if clients have STDs [26,27], the study shows that the group was still at higher risk compared to the comparison group. Since youth with compensated dating may not want to disclose their works to other people because of shame and embarrassment, they can seek help from nowhere when suffering from serious problems such as infection of STDs. A proactive online outreaching may be more effective to reach compensated dating youth encouraging medical checkup for STDs [28]. Internet, although increasing the risk of STDs through facilitating compensated dating, is also an engagement platform for at-risk individuals.

There are some limitations in this study. First, the telephone survey may be biased in several aspects. For instance, persons without a mobile phone were excluded while those with multiple phone numbers were more likely to be selected. However, the majority of individuals in Hong Kong have mobile phones and plans with almost unlimited calls, this limitation seems less problematic. Nevertheless, Hong Kong Chinese are very conservative and reluctant to discuss sex-related issues. Therefore, a telephone survey provides a physically invisible channel rather than a face to face survey and may be a more appropriate way to collect sensitive information such as a history of abortion or STDs. Second, there is no validated measurement

for compensated dating and hence we measured the presence of compensated dating by a single item. With the increasing commercialization of conventional interpersonal intimacy, sexuality and courtship rituals in modern times, the question may encompass not only compensated dating but also other modern relationships not studied in the literature. A more comprehensive set of questions including length, frequency, and rewards in compensated dating should be constructed in the future. Third, the compensated dating group in this study was small which may influence the interpretation of the results. Finally, this study and most previous studies focused on those who "offer" compensated dating services but not those who "receive" it [6]. Future study should explore the sexual behaviors of those who seek for compensated dating and the professional help they may need.

Conclusion

Compensated dating is a recent phenomenon and seems like a different but an overlapping issue with youth sexual exploitation. Adolescents and youth have strengths and abilities unique to cope with the complex changes of sex culture, but they should also believe that their future is worth protected. Future prevention work of youth sexual exploitation, especially in Asian societies, may need to monitor and include compensated dating in the child protection agenda.

Acknowledgment

This study was funded by ExCEL3 and the Azalea (1972) Endowment Fund, The University of Hong Kong. The writing of this article was partly funded by the approval of sabbatical leave to PWCW granted by the Faculty Human Resource Committee (FHRC) of the Faculty of Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong. We thank Dr Chu Sai Kwan Cassini and Miss Chan Ka Sin for giving their comments on the manuscript.

References

1. Kong M. Material girls: sexual perceptions of Korean teenage girls who have experienced compensated dates. *Asian J Womens Stud.* 2003, 9(2): 67-79.
2. Lee TY, Shek D. Compensated dating in Hong Kong: prevalence, psychosocial correlates, and relationships with other risky behaviors. *J Pediatr Adolesc Gynecol.* 2013, 26(3 Suppl): S42-S48.
3. Ueno C. Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan. *Inter-Asia Cult Stud.* 2003, 4(2): 317-324.
4. Lam OW. Why did enjo kosai anchor in Taiwan but not in Hong Kong? Or the convergence of "enjo" and "kosai" in teenage sex work. *Inter-Asia Cult Stud.* 2003, 4(2): 353-363.
5. Ho J. From Spice Girls to enjo kosai: formations of teenage

- girls' sexualities in Taiwan. *Inter-Asia Cult Stud.* 2003, 4(2): 325-336.
6. McCoy A. Blaming children for their own exploitation: the situation in East Asia. In: *ECPAT Report on the Implementation of the Agenda for Action against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.* Bangkok (Thailand), ECPAT International. 2004, 36-43.
7. Li JC. Adolescent Compensated Dating in Hong Kong: Choice, Script, and Dynamics. *Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol.* 2013.
8. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 1989.
9. Wakabayashi T. Enjokosai in Japan: rethinking the dual image of prostitutes in Japanese and American law. *UCLA Womens Law J.* 2003, 13(1): 143-184.
10. Uniting the world against AIDS. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004.
11. Shek DT, Keung MH, Sun RC. A brief overview of adolescent developmental problems in Hong Kong. *ScientificWorldJournal.* 2011, 11: 2243-2256.
12. Kadokura T. Chapter 4. Total value of boryokudan activities and the enjo kosai market. *Jpn Econ.* 2007, 34(2): 62-87.
13. Yip PSF, Zhang H, Lam TH, Kwok Fai Lam, Antoinette Marie Lee et al. Sex knowledge, attitudes, and high-risk sexual behaviors among unmarried youth in Hong Kong. *BMC Public Health.* 2013, 13: 691.
14. Kinsella S. Narratives and statistics: how compensated dating (enjo kosai) was sold. In: Goodman R, Imoto Y, Toivonen T, eds. *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From Returnees to NEETs.* New York: Routledge. 2012:54-80.
15. Wong PWC, Li TMH, Chan M, Law Y, Chau M et al. The prevalence and correlates of severe social withdrawal (hikikomori) in Hong Kong: A cross-sectional telephone-based survey study. *Int J Soc Psychiatry.* 2014.
16. Li WH, Chung JO, Chui MM, Chan PS. Factorial structure of the Chinese version of the 12-item General Health Questionnaire in adolescents. *J Clin Nurs.* 2009, 18(23): 3253-3261.
17. Young KS. The research and controversy surrounding Internet addiction. *Cyberpsychol Behav.* 1999, 2(5): 381-383.
18. Fu KW, Chan WS, Wong PWC, Yip PS. Internet addiction: prevalence, discriminant validity and correlates among adolescents in Hong Kong. *Brit J Psychiat.* 2010, 196(6): 486-492.
19. Lee A, Tsang CK, Lee SH, To CT. A YRBS survey of youth risk behaviors at alternative high schools and mainstream high schools in Hong Kong. *J School Health.* 2001, 71(19): 443-447.
20. Ma HK. Internet addiction and antisocial internet behavior of adolescents. *ScientificWorldJournal.* 2011, 11: 2187-2196.
21. Susman EJ, Houts RM, Steinberg L, Belsky J, Cauffman E et al. Longitudinal development of secondary sexual characteristics in girls and boys between ages 9 ½ and 15 ½ years. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2010, 164(2): 166-173.
22. China Daily. Man gets life for girl's grisly murder. 2015.
23. Simon L, Daneback K. Adolescents' use of the Internet for sex education: A thematic and critical review of the literature. *Int J Sex Health.* 2013, 25(4): 305-319.
24. Li TMH, Chau M, Wong PWC, Lai ES, Yip PS. Evaluation of a Web-Based Social Network Electronic Game in Enhancing Mental Health Literacy for Young People. *J Med Internet Res.* 2013, 15(5):e80.
25. Sommerhalder K, Abraham A, Zufferey MC, Barth J, Abel T. Internet information and medical consultations: experiences from patients' and physicians' perspectives. *Patient Educ Couns.* 2009,77(2): 266-271.
26. A study of youths involved in compensated dating in Hong Kong 2011. Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, 2011.
27. Suzuki LK, Calzo JP: The search for peer advice in cyberspace. An examination of online teen bulletin boards about health and sexuality. *J Appl Dev Psychol.* 2004, 25: 685-698.
28. Zou H, Wu Z, Yu J, Min Li, Muhtar Ablimit, et al. Internet-Facilitated, Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Clinic-Based HIV Testing among Men Who Have Sex with Men in China. *PloS one.* 2013, 8: e51919.