

Abstract Title:  
(Abstract ID # 91774)

## Family dinner: What do we know about it beyond mental health and behaviors of adolescents?

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### Background / Introduction

Family dinner plays an important role in adolescent development and mental health in the family (Elgar et al., 2013). The association of family dinner with mental health and behavioral problems of adolescents is well recognized quantitatively (Musick & Meier, 2012; Meier & Musick, 2014) but studies on the experience of family dinner from the perspectives of adolescents is limited.

### Aims and Objectives

To explore the experience of adolescents during family dinner. The objectives are,

1. to discover what are the interactions and processes between family members and adolescents during family dinner, and
2. to reveal factors which may contribute to the quality of family dinner and mental health.

### Methods

Qualitative design: A interpretive descriptive study (Thorne, 2016)

Purposive sampling: 13 students (Y10 – 12) from a secondary school in Hong Kong

Data collection: Open interviews (semi-structured) on,

- feelings and attitudes about family dinner,
- experiences (stories) of family dinner, and
- what is an ideal family dinner?

Data Analysis (aided by nVivo):

- Digitally recorded interviews transcribed verbatim
- Thematic analysis based on Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach

### Findings (Fig. 1)

In the context of culture / tradition and existing family relationship,

**Main theme:** Family dinner is a common need of adolescents as individuals (to be with family altogether)

**Themes:**

- role formation
- ideal family dinner (**Sub-themes:** moments of enjoyment, harmony, freedom, & healthy eating)
- positive parenting (**Sub-themes:** emotional soothing, & growth), and
- negative parenting (**Sub-themes:** distanced relationship, & avoidance)

### Discussion

- Family dinner is about being altogether for sharing, interactions & connection (Cho & Allen, 2013; Fulkerson et al., 2010)
- Positive parenting during dinner: high-quality parent-child interactions (Fulkerson et al., 2006)

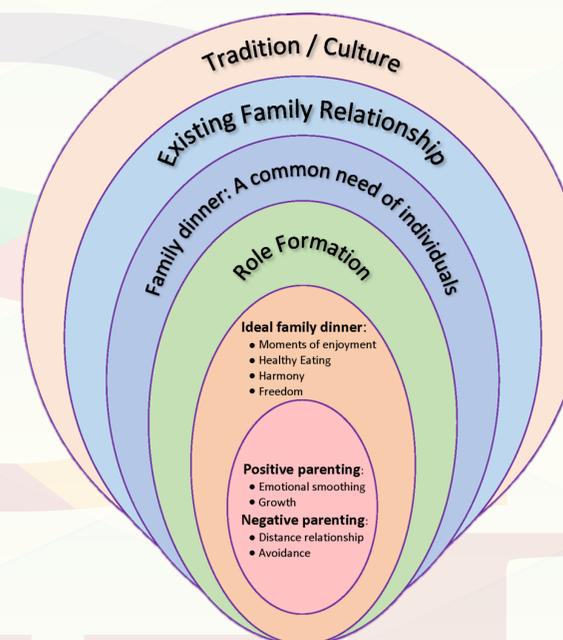


Fig. 1 Family dinner is a common need of adolescents as individuals

### Discussion (cont. ...)

- Family dinner is time of enjoyment (Cho & Allen, 2013), good food & nutrition (Sen, 2010; Fulkerson, et al., 2010) and social exchange, establishing coherence & solidarity (Hunt et al., 2011)
- Negative parenting during dinner: centre of conflict, a divisive element within family (Hunt, et al., 2011)
- Role formation: preparing food, cooking (actualizing roles in the family) (Hunt et al., 2011); filial piety driven
- Psychological & physical benefits: good connection / easing stress (Fulkerson et al., 2006), protection from depression & anger (Sen, 2010; Skeer & Ballard, 2013)

### Implications

Strategies

- Making family dinner a priority
- Keeping mealtime preparation simple, easy, and nutritious
- Involving children: sharing the dinner preparation with all family members
- Be flexible with the time or place of dinner
- Creating a relaxed setting for dinner (no TV, not answering phone, etc)
- Socialize and avoid topics likely leading to conflict (Story & Neumark-Sztainer, 2005)

Further studies

- Adolescent experience on family dinner across different cultures and ethnicities
- Studies from the perspectives of parents
- To investigate possible interventions that enhance communication / relationship for high-quality family dinner

### Conclusions

- Negative parenting may reveal during family dinner
- Ways in encouraging and enhancing parent-adolescent communication during family dinner may promote adolescent's well-being: consider the cultural aspect, e.g. filial piety

(References Available upon request)