

**The Influence of Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Community Protective Factors on
Hong Kong Adolescents' Stress during Political Life Events and Their Mental Health**

個人、人際及社區保護因素對香港青少年處於政治生命事件所產生的壓力和其
精神健康之影響

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Abstract in English

In recent years, many countries and societies have been affected by precarious socio-political climates such as political conflicts, political violence, and other political crises. Hong Kong is no exception. In 2019, the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (“ELAB”) Incident and resultant protests in Hong Kong have spawned socio-political unrest that directly and indirectly affected the livelihood and well-being of locals [1, 2]. Although it can be said that the ELAB Incident has come to an end after the withdrawal of the bill by the Hong Kong SAR Government, the promulgation of the national security law, and the arrest of active politicians and protest leaders by the authorities, how the socio-political tension has affected young people’s psychosocial wellbeing remains largely unknown. There is thus an urgent need to examine how stressful socio-political contexts affect Hong Kong youth’s mental health. Moreover, to better understand Hong Kong youth’s experiences amid precarious socio-political contexts and to provide effective mental health support during challenging times, it is important to explore the protective factors that can buffer against the risks induced by such contexts.

To deepen our understanding of the current situation and the protective factors of youth mental health, a mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect and analyze the research data. Specifically, a sequential design with prior and follow-up focus groups complementing a quantitative survey was used. The present study involved four interrelated stages: (1) Prior focus groups with adolescents, (2) a quantitative survey of adolescents, (3) follow-up focus groups with adolescents, and (4) follow-up focus groups with parents, social workers, and school personnel. Through the adoption of a stratified random and purposive sampling method, a total of 1,435 senior secondary students from 6 coeducational secondary schools were recruited for this survey. Post-survey focus group interviews with youth, parents, social workers, and school personnel were also conducted to elicit ideas for supplementing the findings of the survey and drawing implications.

Overall speaking, the quantitative results indicate that high stress arising from political life events, low meaningfulness in life, low resilience, low social support, low youth empowerment in the community, and high civic engagement were related to high mental

distress among adolescents in schooling. However, none of the presumed moderators mitigated the relationship between stress due to political life events and mental distress. As shown in the qualitative findings, when adolescents are afraid to freely express or act based on their political stances due to a fear of the consequences, they experience a deep sense of powerlessness. Because stress arising from political life events differs from stress derived from other survival or developmental needs, how it affects adolescent mental health deserves further exploration in future studies.

The research findings can: (a) offer a knowledge base for an explication of the protective factors contributing to youth mental health and psychosocial functioning; (b) facilitate a deep analysis of adolescents' personal accounts of their participation in the political life events and their mental health; (c) help policy makers, healthcare professionals, and social service providers to support young people coping with the risks and consequences due to the current socio-political context; and (d) provide references for developing holistic approaches to policy and practical intervention.

Keywords: Youth mental health, Stress arising from political life events, Intrapersonal protective factors, Interpersonal protective factors, Community protective factors

行政摘要

研究摘要

近年來，不少國家及社會正受各種不穩的社會政治氣候所影響，例如政治衝突、政治暴力或其他政治危機等，而香港亦不例外。於 2019 年，香港的「反修訂逃犯條例事件」及相關的抗議行動所引發的社會政治動盪，直接及間接地影響香港居民的生活及福祉 [1, 2]。雖然有關事件在香港特區政府撤回修訂逃犯條例、宣告訂立港區國安法，以及拘捕積極參與事件的政治人物及示威領袖後可謂告一段落，我們對社會及政治張力如何影響青少年的心理健康卻所知不多。因此，就滿有壓力的社會政治環境如何影響香港青少年的精神健康進行研究顯得非常逼切。此外，為更深入了解香港青少年於不穩的社會政治環境中的經驗，從而能於面對挑戰時提供有效的精神健康支援，就可緩減環境所帶來的危機之保護因素的相關研究尤其重要。

為深化我們對青少年現況及其精神健康的保護因素之了解，我們採用了混合研究方法去進行資料搜集及分析。為此，研究團隊特別運用了序列設計的方法去進行前期及後續聚焦小組，以作為對量化問卷研究結果的補充。本研究包含以下四個相互連結的階段：(1) 針對青少年的前期聚焦小組；(2) 針對青少年的問卷調查；(3) 針對青少年的後續聚焦小組；以及 (4) 針對家長、社會工作者與學校教員的後續聚焦小組。透過分層隨機以及分層立意抽樣法，研究團隊從 6 間本港男女校高中成功邀請在學青少年 1,435 人參與問卷研究，同時也在問卷調查後進行對青少年、家長、社會工作者以及學校教員的後續聚焦小組，為問卷調查的結果提供借鑒與指引。

整體來說，量化研究結果顯示因政治生命事件所產生的高程度壓力、低程度生命意義感、低程度抗逆力、低程度社會支持、低程度社區青年賦權、及高程度公民參與，和在學青少年高程度精神困擾呈現相關性。然而，以上所有調節變項均未能緩減青少年因政治生命事件所產生的壓力和帶來的精神困擾。質性研究發現也顯示，當青少年因擔心自由表達或實踐自身政治立場而產生的後果時，他們會經驗深深的無力感。因政治生命事件所產生的壓力有別於源自其他生存或發展性需要而產生的壓力，前者如何影響青少年精神健康值得在未來進行更多相關研究。

本研究能達致以下成果：(a) 為了解青少年之精神健康及與之相關的保護性因素提供知識基礎；(b) 對青少年之主觀經驗及精神健康作深入分析；(c) 協助政策制定者及其他專業人員在當下社會政治環境中為青少年提供足夠的支援；以及 (d) 為社會政策的制定和社會介入提供證據支持。

關鍵詞彙：青少年精神健康、源自政治生命事件的壓力、個人保護因素、人際保護因素、社區保護因素

Layman Summary on Policy Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study can draw implications and recommendations for the development of public policies and social services to support young people with mental distress.

A. A Clear Policy to Guide the Development and Provision of Mental Health Support Programs for Young People

It is recommended that the government and related organizations should formulate a clear policy to guide the provision and development of mental health support programs with young people. More efforts should be made to consolidate the core position of comprehensive mental health support and education in schools, and advocate community-based and Internet-driven mental health support programs. More financial and human resources should be given to provide one-stop, tailored, and holistic services with young people in need as well as their families. With the funding support of the government and other funding organizations, more systematic program evaluation and research studies should be conducted with a view to improving the design and implementation of the related services.

B. One-stop and Holistic Mental Health Intervention and Prevention for Young People

It is suggested that one-stop and holistic mental health intervention and prevention programs for young people should be initiated to serve their needs. A holistic service should comprise the seven interrelated components: (1) a comprehensive needs assessment mechanism to aid in the exploration of young people's needs (immediate, short-term, and long-term) and the design of a tailored mental health and support program with young people; (2) individual counselling service and crisis intervention for young people with mental distress, (3) therapeutic groups and mutual support groups for young people with mental distress; (4) school- and community-based mental health support and education programs for young people and their families; (5) both basic and advanced training programs for helping professionals to equip themselves with attitudes, knowledge, and skills in helping young people on both casework and group work levels; (6) training programs for teachers and social workers to learn how to provide multifaceted mental health preventive and education programs with students and non-engaged youth; and (7) publications of evidence-based intervention and prevention manuals for knowledge transfer.

C. Strengthening the Capacity Building for Social Workers, Healthcare Professionals, and Teachers

The present findings suggest that more and different kinds of training programs should be provided for social workers, teachers, and other healthcare professionals. Owing to the limited number of professionally trained mental health counsellors and social workers in Hong Kong, it is very difficult to fully and effectively support young people with mental distress. Through capacity building, practitioners can learn how to explicate each dimension of assessment of youth mental health (such as neurobiological, psychosocial, family, school, and community dimensions, etc.) and its interrelationships, and thus formulate tailored and holistic plans to practical interventions.

D. The Significance of Early Identification and Crisis Intervention

Early identification and crisis intervention services should be strengthened to help young people with mental distress. The government and related organizations should design proactive outreach services to assist schools and community organizations in identifying youth who may be struggling with mental distress. Crisis intervention is also crucial to support these young people. Family, peers', teachers', and social workers' support should be solicited to enable young people to experience senses of belonging, understanding, and acceptance in coping with their mental distress.

研究項目對政策影響和政策建議的摘要

本研究的發現可為支援有精神困擾的青少年所提供的公共政策及社會服務帶來啟示及建議。

甲. 清晰的政策為發展及提供青少年精神健康支援服務作指引

研究建議政府及相關機構應制定清晰的政策以指引青少年精神健康支援服務的提供及發展。政府及相關機構應更努力鞏固落實全面的精神健康支援和教育在學校之核心位置，以及倡議區本和網上的精神健康支援計劃。更多的財政及人力資料應該用於提供一站式、度身訂造以及整全的服務予有需要的青少年及其家人。在政府以及其他資助機構財政支援下，應進行更多系統性的計劃評估及研究以改善相關服務的設計及執行情況。

乙. 一站式、整全的青少年精神健康介入及預防

我們建議應啟動一站式、整全的青少年精神健康介入及預防以滿足他們的需要。整全服務應包含以下七種相關要素：(1) 全面綜合的需要評估機制以協助探討青少年即時、短期、以及長期的需要，並與青少年一起度身訂造精神健康支援計劃；(2) 為受精神困擾青少年而設的個人輔導及危機介入服務；(3) 為受精神困擾青少年而設的治療性及互助小組；(4) 為青少年及其家人而設的校本及區本精神健康支援及教育計劃；(5) 為專業人士而設的基礎及進階訓練課程以協助他們於個案及小組層面上裝備支援青少年的態度、知識及技巧；(6) 為教師及社工而設的訓練課程以學習如何為學生及失業失學青少年提供多面向的精神健康預防及教育計劃；以及(7) 出版以實證為本的介入及預防手冊以協助知識傳遞。

丙. 強化社工、醫護專業人員及教師的能力

此研究結果支持及建議政府應為社工、教師，以及其他醫護專業人員提供更多不同種類的訓練課程。由於本港缺少受專業訓練的精神健康輔導員及社工，難以對受精神困擾的青少年提供全面而有效的支援。透過強化及提升能力，從業者可以學習到如何理解青少年精神健康評估中的每個層面(例如神經生理、心理、家庭、學校以及社區等層面)，以及層面間的相互影響，以制訂合適及整全的計劃與實務介入。

丁. 及早識別和危機介入的重要性

應強化及早識別和危機介入服務以協助受精神困擾的青少年。政府及相關機構應該設計主動出擊的外展服務以協助學校及社區組織識別受精神困擾的青少年。危機介入對支援這些青少年而言也是非常重要。政府應擴展學校、朋輩、教師以及社工的支援以讓青少年在應對精神困擾時，可以經驗到歸屬感、讓他們感到被明白及接納。

Introduction

Precarious political situations can manifest in the forms of uncertain political futures and political conflicts. Such forms of socio-political instability can take a mental toll on young people who are already dealing with the identity and existential issues that commonly occur during adolescence [3,4]. When youth fail to find meaning in their lives or struggle to cope with difficulties amid precarious socio-political situations, they may be confronted with an existential crisis or a sense of powerlessness, which are considered to be etiological factors of psychopathology [5]. Given the prevalence and unexpected nature of such circumstances, there is an urgent need to conduct research to examine the wellbeing of young people amid precarious political situations, and to investigate the socio-political, community, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors that may influence youth's mental health during major political life events.

The 2014 "Umbrella Movement" in Hong Kong is an information-rich case for the impact of mass socio-political movements on population mental health. After the "Umbrella Movement" there were high percentages of moderate to severe cases of anxiety (59.69%) and depression (22.48%) among Hong Kong people between 18 to 24 years of age [6]. A longitudinal study showed that Hong Kong citizens who were older, less educated, unemployed, and making a lower household income were more likely to demonstrate persistent moderate depression after the "Umbrella Movement." Interestingly, this study also found that those between 15 to 34 years of age demonstrated the lowest instances of persistent moderate depression (25.5%) [7].

Two other studies in Hong Kong closely examined how participation in the "Umbrella Movement" affected a person's wellbeing. The first study, conducted by Lau et al. [8], found that the three types of responses to the "Umbrella Movement" (i.e., worries about safety, negative emotional responses to media reports, and conflicts with peers about the Movement) and the emotional responses to local political situations were both significantly associated with mental distress. In contrast, personal participation in the Movement was not associated with any mental distress. The other study found that social resource loss on social media (e.g., losing friends or followers on social media) was associated with depressive symptoms

among those between 39 years of age and older. However, this did not hold for younger persons between 18 to 38 years of age [6].

Although previous studies demonstrate the importance of examining the psychosocial responses to political movements, they focus heavily on a psychosocial perspective that positions political tension as a structural factor of general public mental health [9]. This means that political conflicts are largely viewed as socially produced results that can negatively impact population mental health. There is, however, little consideration for how precarious socio-political contexts affect the overall functioning of youth and the specific, nuanced aspects of a young person's livelihood. Consequently, a purely psychosocial approach may overlook the variety of conflicts encountered by youth, ignore contextual factors, and ultimately neglect how young people's lived experiences in socio-political events may affect their mental wellbeing. In addition, these existing studies were not focused on adolescents. Because adolescents are currently increasingly active participants of socio-political actions, there is a great need to examine how youth are exposed to and affected by contemporary socio-political situations.

The 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill ("ELAB") Incident and resultant protests in Hong Kong spawned ongoing socio-political unrest that directly and indirectly affected the livelihood and well-being of locals [1,2,10]. This incident was caused by The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR Government")'s proposed amendment of the existing Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance. Believing that such amendment would have allowed people in Hong Kong to be extradited to Mainland China, massive demonstrations, protests, and serious confrontations between protesters and the police occurred in different districts of Hong Kong as a result.

After the announcement of the HKSAR Government's formal withdrawal of the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill, the promulgation of the national security law, and the arrest of active politicians and protest leaders by the authorities under the national security law, the ELAB Incident and its related protests came to an end. Nevertheless, how the socio-political tension after the ELAB Incident affected adolescents' mental wellbeing remains largely unknown. Since today's youth hold higher expectations of their political, civil, and social rights, the current socio-political environment has undoubtedly brought about massive

internal and external changes for young people in Hong Kong, all of which can severely impact mental health. There is thus an urgent need to investigate the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, and socio-political factors on adolescents' mental health after the ELAB Incident in Hong Kong.

Objectives of the Study

Objectives as per original application

1. To investigate adolescents' mental health during the current Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB) Incident;
2. To explicate the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, and socio-political factors on adolescents' mental health;
3. To examine the moderating effects of meaning in life, resilience, social support, perceived empowerment from the community, and perceived opportunities for civic engagement on the relationship between adolescents' stress during political life events and their mental health;
4. To explore the association between adolescents' subjective experiences or personal accounts of their participation in the ELAB Incident and their mental health;
5. To understand the perceptions of parents, teachers, and social workers toward young people's mental health during the ELAB Incident; and
6. To draw implications for public policy, practice, and research

Revised objectives (approved by PICO on 06/10/2020)

After the announcement of the HKSAR Government's formal withdrawal of the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the promulgation of the national security law, it can be said that the ELAB Incident and its

related protests have come to an end. As the research proposal was submitted in late November 2019 while various socio-political changes have occurred within the previous year, it was more accurate to revise the research objectives as follows:

1. To investigate adolescents' mental health after the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB) Incident;
2. To explicate the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, and socio-political factors on adolescents' mental health;
3. To examine the moderating effects of meaning in life, resilience, social support, perceived empowerment from the community, and perceived opportunities for civic engagement on the relationship between adolescents' stress during political life events and their mental health;
4. To explore the association between adolescents' subjective experiences or personal accounts of their participation in political life events and their mental health;
5. To understand the perceptions of parents, teachers, and social workers toward young people's mental health after the ELAB Incident; and
6. To draw implications for public policy, practice, and research.

Literature Review

The Effect of Stress Arising from Political Life Events on Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Upon review of previous research related to socio-political events in Hong Kong before the ELAB Incident, To [4] argued that socio-political instability may have negative implications on youth wellbeing. Protests and other forms of socio-political actions are also recognized as determinants of population's quality of life, even when they are non-violent [11]. There is thus an urgent need to examine how stressful socio-political contexts affect Hong Kong

youth's life outcomes. Moreover, to better understand Hong Kong youth's experiences amid precarious socio-political contexts and to provide effective mental health support during challenging times, it is important to understand the effect of stress arising from political life events on youth mental health and wellbeing.

Based on the notion that a person's perceptions of and reactions to stressful events are highly transactional and dynamic, Slone [12] argued that "adverse political life events" represent a unique category of life stressors because they are located within a particular historical and political context and thus can impact collective experiences and behaviours. Slone also developed the Political Life Events (PLE) scale to examine the subjective appraisal of youth towards politically stressful events. Her research challenged the preconceived notion that there exists a direct positive relation between the stressfulness of political life events and the mental distress of youth. For example, in a comparative study on Israeli children and Palestinian children aged 12 to 13, while Palestinian children reported greater exposure to political violence, the severity of such exposure led to reduced mental distress among this group [13]. Her findings show that children and youth may experience the surrounding socio-political events differently depending on their subjective appraisal.

Adopting a Socio-Ecological Perspective in Youth Mental Health

Traditional psychological models of youth mental health are criticized for their sole focus on a person's psychological problems, without much regard for contextual and social factors (e.g., [14]). Alternatively, a socio-ecological perspective considers youth and their surrounding environments as a unitary system, with particular attention on the relationships between the specific and unique social, cultural, and political contexts [15]. This perspective is premised on two core ideas. First, researchers should recognize youth and their surrounding social systems, and any reciprocal relationships between them. Second, researchers should use different levels of analysis and examine the transactions between risks and protective factors at different socio-ecological levels, such as family, peer, school, community, and other social levels [14]. By adopting a socio-ecological perspective, a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) can be established for investigating the individual-environmental transactions that affect adolescent well-being amid socio-political precarity [4]. Specifically, this framework can be used to examine the direct and moderating effects of

different intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors on the relationship between adolescents' stress arising from political life events and their mental health.

The Influence of Intrapersonal Protective Factors on Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing in Political Conflicts

Intrapersonal protective factors generally refer to an individual's inner perceptions or characteristics. Naturally, meaning-making may have a particularly important role for youth who are dealing with highly anxious and stressful experiences induced by precarious socio-political contexts [3,16-17]. Because one's construction of meaning operates at both personal and interpersonal levels and can be heavily influenced by his or her values and beliefs regarding current social or political events, exploring how a youth's mental health is influenced by his or her perceived meaning in life can greatly enhance our understanding of youth functioning, engagement, and coping during and after socio-political conflicts.

Resilience can be defined as the capacity, processes, or outcomes of successful adaptation in the context of significant threats to function or development [18]. Individuals with a higher level of resilience tend to possess the following: (1) belief in their competence to cope with stressful and challenging events, (2) the ability to deeply engage in or to commit themselves to their life tasks, and (3) the ability to view crises as opportunities for further development [19]. These characteristics are often associated with how individuals perceive and respond to potential stressors in severe political life events [20,21].

The Influence of Interpersonal and Community Protective Factors on Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing in Political Conflicts

Generally speaking, interpersonal and community protective factors consider an individual's functioning within a social environment, and can examine features such as social support and one's involvement in the community. Social support can be understood as resources derived from relationships between persons that can facilitate different psychosocial outcomes [22]. Ample literature indicates that young people acquire social support from family, peers, significant others, and institutional agents such as teachers and social workers [22]. Moreover, social support is identified as a major correlate of mental health [23]. It can also enhance one's functioning and protect them from adverse developmental outcomes because

the effect of stressful life events or adversities on a person's wellbeing is found to be affected by the amount of social support received [24].

Besides social support from close relationships such as family members, friends, and other adult support, Woolcock and Narayan [25] identified the significance of enhancing social capital that stems from distant relationships such as acquaintances, teammates, and people with different backgrounds. In terms of precarious socio-political contexts, Barber [26] found that being integrated in social settings such as religion can significantly moderate the association between being involved in conflict and problematic behaviours amongst Palestinian youth. A literature review also indicated that the collapse of one's social networks can lead to anomie, alienation, and poor social support, which has implications for mental disorders among those struggling amid unstable political situations [9].

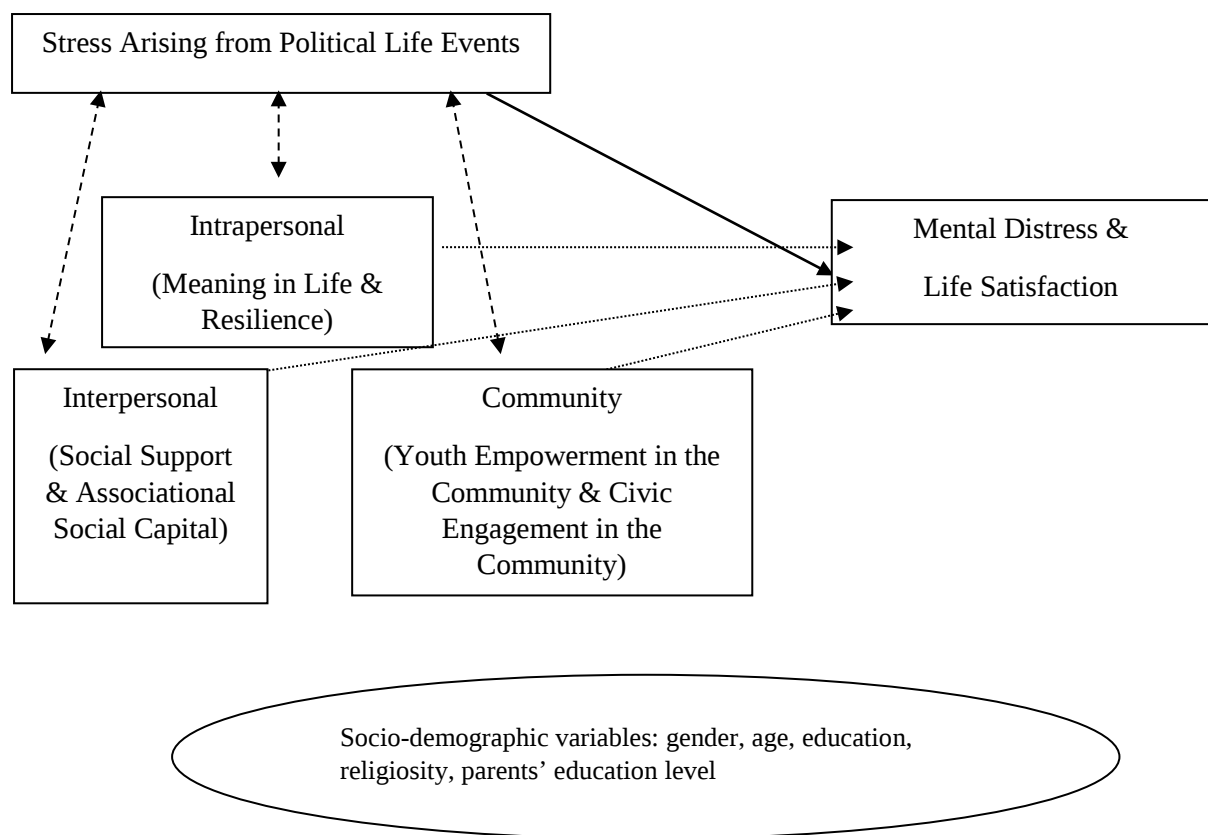
Because young people are a crucial part of any community, the community factor has garnered attention in studies examining youth's exposure to major political conflicts (e.g., [27]). Having fragmented ties to the community may predispose young people to mental distress in times of political conflict [28]. However, there are potential protective factors that can buffer against the adverse effects of various kinds of stressors in the community. For example, the perceived amount of empowerment an adolescent draws from his or her community can serve as an indicator of strengths-based community support [29]. A community level of youth empowerment can encourage young people to participate in community affairs and enhance their civic engagement, which can thus mitigate the sense of powerlessness among young people and promote positive developmental outcomes, especially amid an unstable socio-political environment [30,31]. Findings of an Italian study also indicated that it is important to provide adolescents with more opportunities to experience prosocial-oriented civic engagement in a community context in order to enhance the social wellbeing of Italian adolescents [32].

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Adopting a socio-ecological perspective, a conceptual framework was developed to investigate the direct effects of stress arising from political life events, meaning in life, resilience, social support and social capital, perceived empowerment in the community, and perceived opportunities for civic engagement on youth mental health in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, it also aimed to examine the moderating effects of meaning in life, resilience, social support and social capital, perceived empowerment in the community, and perceived opportunities for civic engagement in the relationship between adolescents' stress arising from political life events and their mental health. The basic premise of the study is that certain intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors may have moderating effects on the aforementioned relationship. This proposed framework can be illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



As shown in the diagram, the solid arrow indicates the direct pathway between the predictor variable (adolescents' stress arising from political life events) and the criterion variables (adolescents' mental distress and life satisfaction). The dotted arrow represents the direct influences of the moderating variables (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors) on the criterion variable. The dashed arrow represents the ways in which the moderating factors interact with the predictor variable and affect the criterion variables.

Based on this conceptual framework, the hypotheses of this study are derived as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Adolescents who have a higher level of stress arising from political life events will have a higher level of mental distress and a lower level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Adolescents who have a higher sense of meaningfulness in life will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Adolescents who have a higher level of resilience will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Adolescents who have a higher level of social support will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5: Adolescents who have a higher level of associational social capital will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 6: Adolescents who perceive they have a higher level of youth empowerment in the community will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7: Adolescents who perceive they have more opportunities to be involved in civic engagement in the community will have a lower level of mental distress and a higher level of life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 8: Meaning in life, resilience, social support, associational social capital, perceived youth empowerment in the community, and civic engagement in the community have moderating effects on the relationship between adolescents' stress arising from political life events and their mental distress / life satisfaction.

In addition to youth who were in schooling, non-engaged youth were also targeted in this study. Non-engaged youth is a social category referring to young people who are unemployed and not currently pursuing any education or training [33]. They are often regarded as at-risk individuals who experience multiple stressors in their lives, and exhibit attitudes and

behaviors deviating from social norms [34]. While previous research found that non-engaged youth are less interested and engaged in politics [35], the recent situation in Hong Kong may not be the same. Youth have played a salient role in the ELAB Incident and resultant protests [36]. The political participation of young people can be regarded as a collective endeavor of youth from different sociodemographic backgrounds, developmental stages, and even ethnicities [36]. Its aftermath has also taken a mental toll on all young people [4]. Thus, it was predicted that the aforementioned hypotheses would apply to both young people who are in schooling and non-engaged youth.

Research Methodology

To deepen our understanding of the influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, and socio-political factors on young people's mental health after the ELAB Incident in Hong Kong, a mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect and analyze research data. Specifically, a sequential design with prior and follow-up focus groups complementing a quantitative survey was used. Together, these guided the data collection process and provide interpretive resources for analyzing the research data. The present study involved four interrelated stages: (1) Prior focus groups with adolescents, (2) a quantitative survey of adolescents, (3) follow-up focus groups with adolescents, and (4) follow-up focus groups with parents, social workers, and school personnel.

Sampling and Participants

Two prior focus group sessions were conducted respectively to gather the opinions of 12 young people about the design of the quantitative survey and the content of the survey questionnaire, and to elicit their views on the design of the follow-up focus groups and the content of the interview guides. The survey questionnaire was finalized based on the feedback of the focus group participants.

Then, we administered a cross-sectional quantitative survey targeting senior secondary students because middle and older adolescence is a crucial time for exploring meaning-making, personal identity, and self-reflection [15]. All adolescents are offered three years of compulsory senior secondary education under the present education system in Hong Kong. In

the 2018/2019 school year there was a total population of 155,727 senior secondary students [37]. Using G*Power, we set the effect size to 0.10, alpha error probability to 0.05, power for the F-test to 0.95, number of the control variables and predictors to 12, and minimum required sample size to 270 [34]. However, we proposed a target sample size of 1,500 because, for a population over 150,000, a one percent sample could be regarded as representative [39].

A stratified random sampling method was first adopted to select 10 schools to be representative of the study population. The five greater districts of Hong Kong (i.e., Hong Kong and Outlying Islands, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, the New Territories East, and the New Territories West) were treated as different strata. Two coeducational secondary schools from each district were randomly selected. Invitation letters were sent to principals to solicit their support. If the responses of schools were not satisfactory due to the sensitive nature of this research and the possible disruptions caused by the pandemic, stratified purposive sampling would then be used. It was also planned to randomly select and recruit secondary four and secondary five students of Chinese nationality of each sampled school to be respondents of the survey. Nevertheless, after consulting the principals, secondary six students should be recruited to participate in the survey along with secondary four and secondary five students in order to fulfil the inclusion criteria of sampling, as secondary five students are normally under 18 years old and secondary six students are at around 18 years old.

Three rounds of random sampling were completed. A total of 60 coeducational secondary schools located in five greater districts were invited to participate in the survey. However, only one school responded to our invitation and agreed to join. Following the research plan, stratified purposive sampling was then adopted to select schools from different greater districts. The stratified purposive sampling was based on schools' locations, religious affiliations, and medium of teaching language. Five coeducational secondary schools from different greater districts agreed to join. As a result, a total of six coeducational secondary schools located in five greater districts participated in the survey. The plan was to recruit more schools to join the survey; however, due to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the Education Bureau's announcement of physical class suspension, the number of schools and students who responded to the research was less than expected.

From October 2020 to October 2021, 1,435 copies of the questionnaire were collected from senior secondary students (from secondary four to secondary six) of six coeducational secondary schools located in five greater districts. The response rate was 69.11%.

Furthermore, using the method of purposive sampling, youth aged 15-24 who were not in schooling at the time of data collection were also recruited to join this survey. In view of the difficulty in recruiting youth participants who are not in the education system, a total of 200 non-engaged youth were targeted in this study. Invitation letters were sent to districted-based Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams which provide counselling and developmental services for non-engaged or at-risk youth. Through the assistance from a total of 13 Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams from nine NGOs, 210 non-engaged youth participated in the survey.

After the quantitative survey, seven focus groups were conducted respectively for a total of 36 young people. They were recruited by a purposive sampling method from districted-based Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres with several criteria such as age, socio-economic status, educational level, location of school, and involvement in youth activities. Furthermore, three focus group sessions were organized respectively for 6 parents, 10 social workers, and 7 school personnel to generate ideas for explaining the findings of the survey and focus groups and to give recommendations for policy, practice, and research.

Measures of the Survey

The measures used in this study were adapted from a variety of existing scales in both Chinese and Western literature. Details of the measures are as follows:

2.2.1 Predictor Variable (Stress Arising from Political Life Events)

Based on two prior focus group sessions with adolescents to gather their experiences in political life events and their opinions of the content of the survey questionnaire, the authors developed a scale of 13 statements regarding stress arising from political life events. All 13 items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 (rarely/never) to 7 (always). Sample items included “I experience stress because of differences in my political opinions with those of my family members or relatives”, “I experience stress because of differences in

my political opinions with those of my friends or classmates”, and “I fear speaking up for my political stance under stress”. Total scores ranged from 13 to 91; a higher total scale score reflected a higher level of stress arising from political life events. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate this scale using AMOS Software Version 25. A variety of indices were examined to evaluate the goodness-of-fit, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The CFI and the TLI each ranged from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no fit and 1 indicating a perfect fit [40]. The RMSEA ranged from 0 to 1, with values less than .05 considered an exact fit [40]. The goodness-of-fit indices for this measure were found to be satisfactory (CFI = .96, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .04). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .927 in this study.

Moderating/Protective Variables

Intrapersonal Factors – Meaning in Life: The Meaning in Life Questionnaire - Presence of Meaning Subscale (MLQ-P), developed by Steger et al. [41] and translated by Chan [42], was adopted to measure adolescents’ sense of meaningfulness. The MLQ-P is a five-item scale including statements such as “I understand my life’s meaning”. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true), thus the total score ranges from 5 to 35. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .848.

Intrapersonal Factors – Resilience: The Resilience Subscale of the Chinese Positive Youth Development Scale (CPYDS), developed by Shek et al. [43], was used to assess adolescents’ capacity for adapting to change and stressful events in healthy and effective ways. A sample item included “When I face difficulty, I will not give up easily”. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true); thus, the total score ranges from 6 to 42. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .849.

Interpersonal Factors – Social Support: The Social Provision Scale (SPS), developed by Cutrona and Russell [44] and translated into Chinese and validated by To et al. [45], was used to measure young people’s perceived social relationships and social support. This is a 12-item scale containing statements such as “I feel a strong emotional tie with at least one other person”. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) for total scores ranging from 12 to 84. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .937.

Interpersonal Factors – Associational Social Capital: The Associational Social Capital Questionnaire (ASCQ), developed by Yuan and Ngai [46], was used to measure young people's perceived social cohesion, trust, and solidarity towards any associations or affiliations they are a part of. The ASCQ is a 10-item scale containing statements such as "People in this association help each other out". Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) for total scores ranging from 10 to 50. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .806.

Community Factor – Perceived Youth Empowerment in the Community: The Perceived Youth Empowerment Questionnaire (PYEQ), developed by Paxton et al. [47] and translated by To et al. [45], was used to measure young people's perceived empowerment in their community. The PYEQ is a 5-item scale containing statements such as "I am given chances to make my neighbourhood/community better". Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) for total scores ranging from 7 to 35. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .921.

Community Factor – Perceived Opportunities for Civic Engagement in the Community: The Behaviour Subscale of the Civic Engagement Scale (CES), developed by Doolittle and Faul [48], was adopted to measure the ways in which young people have opportunities to participate in the community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future. The CES is a 6-item scale containing statements such as "When working with others, I make positive changes in the community". Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = rarely/never; 7 = always), for total scores ranging from 6 to 42. A CFA was conducted to validate this scale since the CES did not have a Chinese-language version. The goodness-of-fit indices for this scale were found to be satisfactory (CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .925.

Criterion Variable

Mental Health: The Chinese Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), developed by Zigmond and Snaith [49] and translated by Leung et al. [50], was used to measure the degree of depressive mood and anxiety symptoms. This scale comprises 14 items, seven of which were designed to assess the degree of depressive mood symptoms and seven to assess the

degree of anxiety symptoms. Each item on the questionnaire is scored from 0 (e.g., not at all) to 3 (e.g., most of the time), which means a person can score between 0 and 21 for either anxiety or depression. Total scores range from 0 to 42; a higher total scale score reflects a higher level of mental distress. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .807.

Life Satisfaction: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener et al. [51] and translated by To and Tam [52], was adopted. Sample items include 'In most ways my life is close to my ideal' and 'The conditions of my life are excellent'. All six items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), for total scores ranging from 6 to 42. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .872.

Control Variables

Demographic Variables: The demographic data of participants, including age, gender, educational level, religiosity, and parents' education level, was collected as part of the survey. Previous research demonstrated the influence of these demographic variables on the relationship patterns described in the moderation hypotheses (e.g., [12,53]), so the effects of these variables were considered controlled when conducting the regression analyses.

Data Collection

We obtained ethical approval from the Survey and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of The Chinese University of Hong Kong prior to the study. We also obtained permission from the schools' principals to conduct research with the students, as well as obtained letters of consent from the students and their parents before the students' participation in the survey. We collected survey responses on school days in a classroom setting. Prior to administering the survey questionnaire, data collectors provided students with a clear explanation of the survey's objectives and the way in which the researchers would process data. In doing so, they highlighted the principles of voluntary participation, right of withdrawal, guarantee of anonymity, and the cautious use of research data. Ultimately, each participant filled out a questionnaire. The administrator collected the survey questionnaire immediately upon completion. For non-engaged youth, questionnaires were administered and collected by trained social workers of the Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams, who ensured that

participants received thorough explanations regarding the study's objectives and how the data would be processed.

Regarding the post-survey focus groups, upon receiving consent from the participants, the focus groups were audio-taped and conducted by the investigators. Abiding by research ethics, confidentiality was assured, where names and any identifiable information of the participants were anonymous. Some guiding questions regarding the research participants' subjective experiences and perceptions were predetermined in an interview guide based on the findings of the survey. Those questions served as a general framework, which means that the flow of these discussion was participant-focused rather than question-focused.

Data Analysis

To achieve Objective 1, descriptive statistics were performed in the first phase of data analysis to explore the participants' demographic characteristics. A series of analysis were conducted to explore whether the anxiety level and depression level of the respondents would exceed the cut-off point of 8/21 and thus demonstrate anxiety or depression symptoms [54]. Pearson's correlation analyses were also run to explore the correlations among all study variables, including demographic variables, predictors, and criterion variables. To achieve Objectives 2 and 3, multiple regression analyses and moderation analyses were conducted to test these hypotheses.

To achieve Objectives 4 and 5, the method of thematic analysis was adopted for examining the qualitative data. The researchers identified emergent themes by comparing and categorizing the meaning units derived from the data. The researchers listed the themes and made sense of any connections between themes. They examined whether these connections are reflective of the direct experiences of participants. Finally, major themes underlying the participants' lived experiences were summarized, together with participants' quotations that best support and illustrate the themes.

Quantitative Research Findings

Findings of the Quantitative Survey on Students

Participants

A total of 1,435 senior secondary school students were recruited for this study. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the 1,435 participants, 53.2% were male and 46.8% were female. Of the total sample, 26.3% were aged 15 or below, 63.1% were aged 16–17, 10.4% were aged 18–19, and 0.2% were aged 20 or above. Among the participants, 74.0% reported having no religious beliefs. In terms of education level, 30.4% were in 10th grade, 33.8% were in 11th grade, and 35.8% were in 12th grade. More than two thirds (70.2%) had a father whose highest education level was senior secondary school or above, and almost two thirds (66.2%) had a mother whose highest education level was senior secondary school or above.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics as a Percentage of the Sample (n = 1,435).

Demographic Characteristic	%
Gender	
Male	53.2
Female	46.8
Age	
15 or Below	26.3
16-17	63.1
18-19	10.4
20 or Above	0.2
Religion	
No	74.0
Yes	26.0
Education Level	
F.4	30.4
F.5	33.8
F.6	35.8
Father's Education Level	
Primary School or Below	9.9
Junior Secondary School	20.1

Senior Secondary School	18.3
Matriculation	29.9
College / University	15.6
Postgraduate	6.2
Mother's Education Level	
Primary School or Below	14.7
Junior Secondary School	19.1
Senior Secondary School	18.4
Matriculation	26.3
College / University	17.2
Postgraduate	4.3

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of all study variables and the zero-order correlations among the variables, which offer tentative evidence that the predictor variable (stress arising from political life events), most of the presumed moderators (meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, associational social capital, youth empowerment in the community, and civic engagement in the community), and the criterion variables (mental distress and life satisfaction) are significantly correlated. Moreover, it is noteworthy that while none of the demographic variables were found to be significantly correlated with mental distress and therefore no variables were controlled, four variables (age, religion, education, and mother's education) are significantly correlated with life satisfaction, and thus they were controlled when conducting the regression analyses.

Furthermore, the results indicate that around 52% of students (Mean=11.79; SD=2.65) reported that their anxiety level exceeded the cut-off point of 8/21 and thus demonstrate anxiety symptoms, while around 42% of students (Mean=11.00; SD=2.11) reported that their depression level exceeded the cut-off point of 8/21 and thus demonstrate depression symptoms [54].

Table 2: Correlations among Demographic Variables, Criterion Variables, Predictor Variables, and Moderating Variables with Means and Standard Deviations.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	M(SD)
1. Gender															
2. Age	-.061*														16.41 (1.039)
3. Religion	-.024	-.059*													
4. Education	.001	.737***	-.047												
5. Father's Education	-.018	-.048	.135***	.021											
6. Mother's Education	.017	-.110***	.128***	-.075**	.648***										
7. MH (DV)	-.002	.035	-.021	.043	-.024	-.037									16.601 (6.230)
8. SPLE (IV)	.005	.015	.076**	.093***	-.020	-.010	.175***								48.932 (16.348)
9. ML (MV)	-.041	-.009	.123***	-.010	.051	.035	-.331***	.004							21.847 (5.771)
10. RE (MV)	-.058	.074**	.065*	.075**	.005	.020	-.400***	.049	.448***						28.192 (5.943)
11. BSC (MV)	.078**	.022	.037	.056*	.027	.068*	-.348***	.120***	.316***	.481***					57.362 (13.261)
12. ASC (MV)	-.005	-.036	.076**	-.015	.013	.031	-.111***	.031	.101***	.153***	.155***				36.222 (3.007)
13. YEC (MV)	-.037	-.054	.025	-.108***	-.031	.000	-.135***	.138***	.130***	.226***	.223***	.121***			15.220 (5.933)
14. CEC (MV)	.123***	.057*	.119***	.074**	.090**	.068*	-.019	.345***	.152***	.230***	.228***	.127***	.377***		16.590 (8.001)
15. LS (DV)	-.047	-.073*	.085**	-.077**	.007	.071*	-.502***	-.017	.371***	.447***	.446***	.125***	.240***	.148***	23.702 (7.303)

Note. Gender was dummied as 0 = female, 1 = male; Religion was dummied as 0 = without religion, 1 = with religion. Education = year of study; Father's Education = year of study; Mother's Education = year of study; MH = Mental Health; SPLE = Stress Arising from Political Life Events; ML = Meaningfulness in Life; RE = Resilience; BSC = Social Support; ASC = Associational Social Capital; YEC = Youth Empowerment in Community; CEC = Civic Engagement in Community; LS = Life Satisfaction. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 3 reports the results of a hierarchical regression analysis for the relationship between mental distress, stress arising from political life events, and each presumed moderator. As indicated in Table 3, there is a positive association between stress arising from political life events and adolescents' mental distress. Hence, Hypothesis 1 is supported. The results also show that higher levels of meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community were significantly associated with lower levels of mental distress. Therefore, Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 6 were supported. However, civic engagement in the community was found to be positively associated with mental distress, which was contrary to Hypothesis 7. Furthermore, the results do not support Hypothesis 8, as no interaction effects could be found among the predictor variable and all presumed moderators.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Distress from Stress Arising from Political Life Events and all Levels of Protective Factors

Criterion			
Mental Distress			
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	<i>t</i>
Step 1			
Stress Arising from Political Life Events	.031***	.175	6.489***
Step 2			
Protective Factors	.233***		
Meaningfulness in Life		-.160	-5.986***
Resilience		-.235	-8.062***
Social Support		-.204	-7.372***
Associational Social Capital		-.034	-1.425
Youth Empowerment in Community		-.064	-2.467*
Civic Engagement in Community		.065	2.368*
Step 3			
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Protective Factors	.004		
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Meaningfulness in Life		.001	.019

Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Resilience	-.020	-.669
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Social Support	-.014	-.478
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Associational Social Capital	.028	1.153
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Youth Empowerment in Community	.048	1.826
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Civic Engagement in Community	.025	.943
Total R^2	.268	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

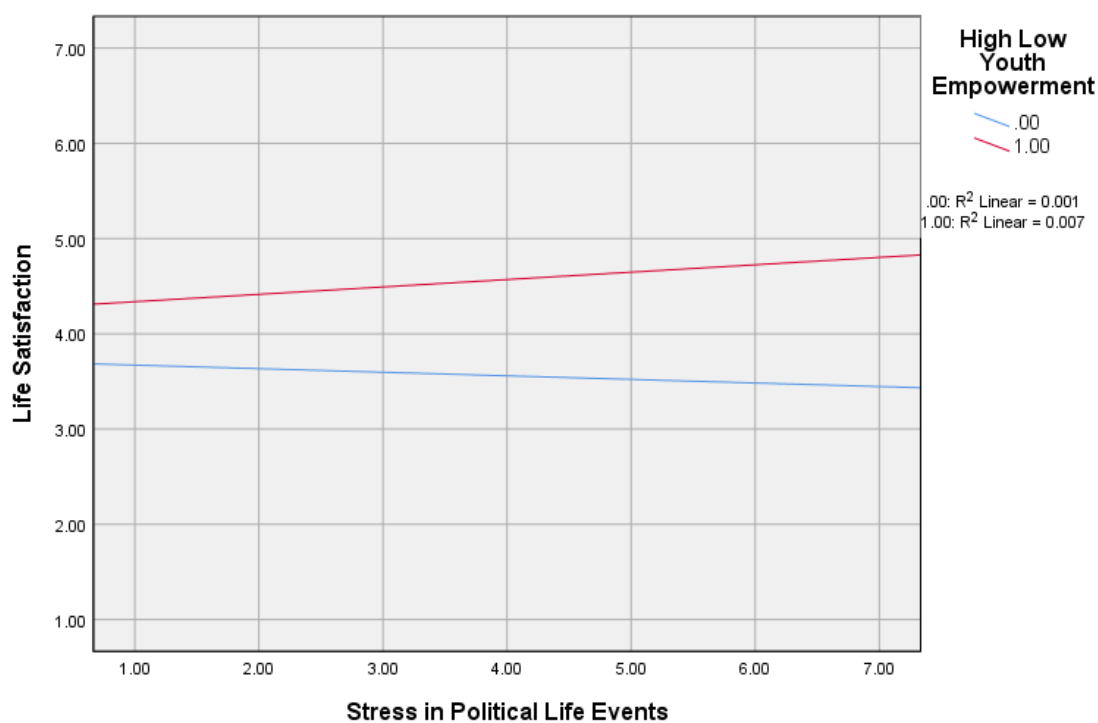
Table 4 reports the results of a hierarchical regression analysis for the relationship between life satisfaction, stress arising from political life events, and each presumed moderator. As indicated in Table 4, there is no association between stress arising from political life events and adolescents' life satisfaction. Hence, Hypothesis 1 is not supported. The results also show that higher levels of meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community were significantly associated with a higher level of life satisfaction. Therefore, Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 6 were supported. Furthermore, an interaction effect could be found between stress arising from political life events and youth empowerment in the community on life satisfaction. As shown in Figure 2, the associations between stress arising from political life events and life satisfaction differed according to the level of youth empowerment in the community. For participants who had a higher level of perceived youth empowerment in the community, there was a positive association between stress arising from political life events and life satisfaction; however, for those who had a lower level of perceived youth empowerment in the community, there was a negative association between stress arising from political life events and life satisfaction.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Life Satisfaction from Stress Arising from Political Life Events and all Levels of Protective Factors

Criterion			
Life Satisfaction			
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	<i>t</i>
Step 1			
Control Variables	.017***		
Age		-.003	-.059
Religion		.076	2.521*
Education		-.066	-1.527
Mother's education		.065	2.138*
Step 2			
Stress Arising from Political Life Events	.001	-.033	-1.098
Step 3			
Protective Factors	.312***		
Meaningfulness in Life		.170	6.066***
Resilience		.253	8.249***
Social Support		.247	8.507***
Associational Social Capital		.023	.926
Youth Empowerment in Community		.116	4.220***
Civic Engagement in Community		-.028	-.970
Step 4			
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Protective Factors	.008*		
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Meaningfulness in Life		.033	1.167
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Resilience		-.012	-.389
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Social Support		-.038	-1.304
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Associational Social Capital		-.039	-1.500

Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Youth Empowerment in Community	.078	2.764**
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Civic Engagement in Community	.020	.704
Total R ²	.338	
*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01; ***p ≤ .001		

Figure 2. Association between Stress Arising from Political Life Events and Life Satisfaction as a Function of Youth Empowerment in the Community



Findings of the Quantitative Survey on Young People who are not in Schooling

Participants

A total of 210 young people who were not in schooling were recruited for this study. Table 5 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the 210 participants, 38.1% were female and 61.9% were male. Of the total sample, 3.9% were aged 15 or below, 50.3% were aged 16–17, 34.6% were aged 18–19, and 11.2% were aged 20 or above. Nearly half of

the participants (49.8%) had a father whose highest education level was senior secondary school or above, and almost 46% had a mother whose highest education level was senior secondary school or above.

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics as a Percentage of the Sample (n = 210).

Demographic Characteristic	%
Gender	
Male	61.9
Female	38.1
Age	
15 or Below	3.9
16 – 17	50.3
18 – 19	34.6
20 or Above	11.2
Father's Education	
Primary School or Below	19.2
Junior Secondary School	31.0
Senior Secondary School	25.1
Matriculation	18.7
College / University	5.4
Postgraduate	0.6
Mother's Education	
Primary School or Below	23.6
Junior Secondary School	30.5
Senior Secondary School	19.2
Matriculation	21.7
College / University	4.0
Postgraduate	1.0

Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations of all study variables and the zero-order correlations among the variables, which offer tentative evidence that most of the presumed moderators (resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community) and the criterion variables (mental distress and life satisfaction) are significantly correlated. While it

is noteworthy that none of the demographic variables were found to be significantly correlated with mental distress, one variable (i.e., age) is significantly correlated with life satisfaction, and thus it was controlled when conducting the regression analyses.

Furthermore, the results indicate that around 62.4% of non-schooling youth (Mean=11.63; SD=2.34) reported that their anxiety level exceeded the cut-off point of 8/21 and thus demonstrate anxiety symptoms, while around 57.6% of non-schooling youth (Mean=11.15; SD=1.91) reported that their depression level exceeded the cut-off point of 8/21 and thus demonstrate depression symptoms [54].

Table 6: Correlations among Criterion Variables, Predictor Variable, and Moderating Variables based on the Sample of Youth not in Schooling

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M (SD)
1. Gender										
2. Age	-.124									17.541 (1.767)
3. Father's Education	-.060	.013								
4. Mother's Education	-.181**	.022	.532***							
5. Mental Health (DV)	.032	.065	-.034	.015						18.237 (5.947)
6. Life Satisfaction (DV)	-.027	-.137*	.052	.019	-.518***					22.814 (7.965)
7. Stress Arising Political Life Events (IV)	.011	-.014	.024	-.063	.125	.075				56.597 (17.065)
8. Resilience (MV)	-.068	-.114	.046	.045	-.319***	.418***	.128			28.938 (6.755)
9. Social Support (MV)	.044	-.115	.053	-.009	-.369***	.480***	.153*	.545***		58.512 (13.360)
10. Youth Empowerment in the Community (MV)	.074	-.038	.039	-.030	-.157*	.315***	.209**	.338***	.310***	18.963 (6.895)

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 7 reports the results of a hierarchical regression analysis for the relationship between mental distress, stress arising from political life events, and each presumed moderator. As indicated in Table 7, there is no association between stress arising from political life events and non-schooling youth's mental distress. The results also show that higher levels of resilience and social support were significantly associated with a lower level of mental distress. Furthermore, no interaction effects could be found among the predictor variable and all presumed moderators on mental distress.

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Distress from Stress Arising from Political Life Events and all Levels of Protective Factors

Criterion			
Mental Distress			
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	<i>t</i>
Step 1			
Stress Arising from Political Life Events	.016	.125	1.817
Step 2			
Protective Factors	.179***		
Resilience		-.168	-2.201*
Social Support		-.293	-3.857***
Youth Empowerment in Community		-.051	-.745
Step 3			
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Protective Factors	.011		
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Resilience		.082	1.012
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Social Support		-.067	-.901
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Youth Empowerment in Community		.058	.761
Total R^2	.206		

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Table 8 reports the results of a hierarchical regression analysis for the relationship between life satisfaction, stress arising from political life events, and each presumed moderator. As indicated in Table 8, there is no association between stress arising from political life events and non-schooling youth's life satisfaction. The results also show that higher levels of resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community were significantly associated with a higher level of life satisfaction. Furthermore, no interaction effects could be found among the predictor variable and all presumed moderators.

Table 8. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Life Satisfaction from Stress Arising from Political Life Events and all Levels of Protective Factors

Criterion			
Life Satisfaction			
Predictor	ΔR^2	β	<i>t</i>
Step 1			
Control Variables	.019*		
Age		-.137	-1.974*
Step 2			
Stress Arising from Political Life Events	.004	.066	.953
Step 3			
Protective Factors	.271***		
Resilience		.183	2.470*
Social Support		.335	4.570***
Youth Empowerment in Community		.144	2.202*
Step 4			
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Protective Factors	.005		
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Resilience		.087	1.092
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Social Support		-.029	-.399
Interaction between Stress Arising from Political Life Events & Youth Empowerment in Community		-.057	-.777
Total R^2	.299		

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

Qualitative Research Findings

The objectives of the post-survey focus groups were set to (1) gain a deeper understanding of the association between adolescents' subjective experiences or personal accounts of their participation in political life events and their mental health, (2) elaborate on and supplement the findings obtained from the survey, and (3) draw implications for policy, practice, and research. While the narratives of the participants revealed that each of them had unique understanding of the current situation, the repeated appearance of some messages showed an underlying attached meaning. The themes unravelled and summarized the reflections of the participants on the changing circumstances and experiences of young people's participation in and interpretation of the political life events in Hong Kong. It should also be noted that the themes uncovered are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their co-existence can explain the complexity and multiplicity of the participants' lived experiences.

Views on Stress Arising from the Current Socio-Political Environment

The first emergent theme centred on how young people, teachers, social workers and parents perceived the stress arising from the current socio-political environment. In contrast with their perceived high level of youth participation during the ELAB Incident, it seems that the youth respondents considered themselves as having low political efficacy and not being able to freely express their political views or act based on their political stances due to a fear of some consequences. The lack of political efficacy or their perceived inability to express their views freely may eventually arouse some negative emotions.

其實我只可以答你係 anytime，係為你自己講過嘅話變得更加謹慎，係呢個場合地方都唔係真係好影響，而係心裏面已經有條界線，因為你知道嗰條界線有幾模糊。… 避免囉，無可否認地會避免，因為你唔知幾時會講錯嘢，因為唔知幾時會畀人罰，所有嘢都係 unknown 嘅時候，你乖乖啲講嘢咁就安全囉。如果個場合唔係好適合講呢啲嘢嘅時候，咪盡量唔去談及囉。係好可惜… 有啲嘢叫無可奈何囉。(Youth Focus Group 7, Participant 2)

呢個社會未必容許你做呢樣嘢嗰時，你明知你唔講就冇人講嘅咁樣，即係你會有個覺悟就… 可能有個覺悟就係… 即係有陣時以前有人問過我啲好敏感問題，我以前… 即係嗰啲以前係個「鬼佬」老師問過我一個好敏感嘅問題啦… 依個真係唔講得出來，即係… 我嗰時係話 sorry 我唔想答啊咁樣囉，但係過… 即係經過左嗰啲事件發生之後，即我覺得… 點解唔講得，點解你… 係要揸住我？咁我以前係我揀唔講啫，依家係我想唔想講你都唔俾我講。(Youth Focus Group 6, Participant 5)

剛才 5 號說他有時用「說」的方法可以釋放壓力，對我自己來說，我覺得「說」也是沒有用的。說了出來，也沒法解決問題，壓力還是存在，沒法釋放，惟有接受。我個人來說是會想離開這裡，因為放眼望去好像改變不到政治[局面]，令我們的生活變成這樣。(Youth Focus Group 1, 3)

Echoing the voices of youth respondents, teachers, social workers and parents commented that many young people suppressed their stress and negative emotions in face of the current situation. They also demonstrated their awareness of the tension and challenges caused by the drastic changes in the socio-political environment and how these changes have reduced young people's willingness to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Because socio-political events can instigate young people's deep emotional responses that can hardly be suppressed, the psychological wellbeing of young people may thus be adversely affected.

其實佢哋好多嘢擺咗喺個心到囉，係喇，咁例如我自己… 我自己嗰班係中六嘅，係喇，咁好多呢係亦都係有啲同學係會行得比較前一啲嘅，之前呢佢哋都會好勇於去表達自己嘅意見嘅，但宜家礙於佢自己可能都驚喇，咁就開始呢係… 我形容佢哋係敢怒不敢言啦… 係喇，即係好多都唔敢再出聲喇… 咁但係你問佢係咪真係心悅誠服某一啲嘢呢… 我會形容佢哋係無奈囉！(Teacher 1)

個感覺佢哋就係收收埋埋咁… 即主要都係敢怒不敢言啦，或者佢哋真係有不滿佢哋都唔會講，即佢哋係… 我個感覺嘅話呢就係… 佢哋係壓抑住自己囉，但係佢哋亦都係有一個好清晰嘅方向例如佢到底… 我想走，屋企人唔俾我

走… 咁但係有啲咁嘅感覺就係佢哋其實係想講但係又徘徊喺想講唔想講之間。(Teacher 3)

嗰個 social political issue 之下其實個 wellbeing… 啲人只不過… 平穩係表面平穩… 其實嗰個漣漪呢係冇凹到㗎，係喇即係我望到啲環境安全望到啲人唔再掉野只係嗰個…即 physical 個感覺係舒服，但我相信大部份人經歷咗一九二零之後就算呢個 moment 我…我諗每一個裏面係未平…未平定到落嚟。(Parent 3)

Views on Interpersonal Conflicts Derived from Different Political Stances

The second theme emerging from the narratives of participants is centred on their perceptions of the interpersonal conflicts derived from different political stances. Some youth respondents found it especially difficult to avoid such interpersonal conflicts in face of the current socio-political environment. In their opinions, social media and online platforms may have become a battlefield for people with different political stances to attack and bully each other.

Therefore, they expressed frustrations when they experienced such kind of political conflicts.

都當然有嘅，我舉個例子，可能喺一個 post 入面，可能大家純粹講緊一件玩具，咁但係背後嗰一間商店係所謂藍店，然後大家都話「搞錯呀，幫襯藍店呀，唔好啦」，跟住又喺度鬧佢「無良知嘅先會幫襯藍店嘅啫」。但係其實大家講緊嘅話題係嗰一件玩具，即係其實可能可以係唔同嘅方向去講呢一件事，但係就可能係政見問題，影響到嗰個 post 入面嘅氣氛。我覺得呢樣嘢其實都避免唔到，畢竟嗰件事都已經成年幾之內都解決唔到，而且越嚟越嚴重嘅時候，我覺得係一件人之常情嘅事。(Youth Focus Group 3, Participant 2)

例如 Instagram，下面有啲人留 comment，咁嗰個人佢係用緊簡體字嘅，跟住啲人就會唔理佢講嘅嘢，「啊你用殘體字」咁去話返佢哋啦，就唔係去理嗰個人所發表嘅意見係啲乜嘢。咁我就會覺得令到個溝通更加困難，即係你唔去理人哋講咩，淨係 based on 人哋嘅字體，可能佢 icon 係國旗，跟住你就唔鍾意同佢講嘢，而唔係真正咁去溝通。(Youth Focus Group 3, Participant 4)

Nevertheless, some youth respondents considered that while differences in political stances were unavoidable, it would be better to make use of various platforms for both sides to communicate and to enhance mutual understanding.

其實我覺得政見係避免唔到嘅，但係其實唔同政見嘅人都可以好好咁樣去交流囉。所以我覺得呢個現象其實係好有趣嘅，而唔係無聊嘅。… 你唔覺得啖交好有趣咩？啖交先係個精華呀嘛！因為啖交所以兩邊個價值觀先可以交流。兩者價值觀個碰撞，所以成件事先會有趣。(Youth Focus Group 3, Participant 1)

For teachers, social workers, and parents, they were more concerned about the parent-child conflicts induced by diverse political stances. They have encountered various cases vividly illustrating the emotional turmoil and disconnection of family relationships as a result of such parent-child conflicts:

因為佢哋真係會講嘅，咁佢就係講呀係家長，即係好大嘅唔同甚至係真係要離家出走，係搬左去另一個人度住，因為屋企係直情係好唔撐一啲嘅固定嘅立場，佢又好唔認同，咁所以兩邊係拗得好勁，咁就離開咗個原生嘅父母屋企，咁就去咗姑姐定姑媽屋企住。(Teacher 3)

我有啲學生呢就比較緊要嘅，佢同爸爸嘅政見好唔同，鬧晒大交要搬離開屋企嘅… 係喇，即係去個親戚屋企住咁樣嘅，咁有啲就因為政見唔同就有講嘢，呢年幾都有講嘢… 係喇！(Teacher 4)

By contrast, in the context of youth affected by political conflicts, those who had high family connectedness and family support seemed to demonstrate a lower level of emotional distress and better mental health outcomes. The following quotation showcases the importance of a positive parent-child relationship, particularly when the youth was willing to share his thoughts and feelings with his mother:

咁我睇返我仔佢嘅 coping 或者佢現在嘅 state 咁我又覺得又唔錯㗎，所謂嘅唔錯係…咁我就諗呀究竟佢係咪受個樣嘢 political 個 impact 係唔係好大呀，唔係好細…佢係…係個 level 係咪…我唔知係幾多囉，還是佢都好有 impact 不過佢自己 cope with 咗囉，咁其中我睇到就係佢有時會講出嚟啦，雖然唔係好多，會爆下出嚟啦同埋我最意外就係頭先所講個情況就係原來即係…嗰日佢係作咗首歌填咗啲詞，然後喺個詞入面表達咗佢好多嘢咁，咁後尾佢亦都慢慢透露俾我聽然後佢寫咗好多唔同嘅歌曲幫佢去抒發㗎。(Parent 4)

Regarding the interpersonal conflicts caused by young people's different political stances, some parents were worried about the social isolation and negative emotions that young people may experience because of such conflicts. However, the teachers observed that young people became more careful in expressing political views in front of their peers; meanwhile, the current socio-political atmosphere also discouraged youth to initiate discussions on political issues with their classmates and friends.

佢可能同同學之間有唔同嘅政見之下，佢自己感覺到可能俾人排擠呀…即係嗰種嘅唔安全嘅感覺囉，即係可能俾人當係正正常常嘅友誼突然間可能大家睇法唔同，咁就會有人會…事無大小都會反抗佢，唔同意佢講嘅嘢，咁就突然間衍生左啲情緒上來…都會聽到佢會同我講一啲發生嘅事情啦，或者會比我睇到同同學間即係一啲嘅 message 呀，甚至聽到佢啲電話或者之後會喊呀，咁呢啲就會令我擔心嘅！(Parent 1)

學生與學生之間政見唔同嘅時候咁我諗…佢都知道大家咩人嘅時候咁亦都唔再多談囉…係呀咁…即係叫做我唔會影響你，或者你亦都唔會改變我，咁佢係依度影唔影響佢社交嘅時候咁當然…佢哋唔會話好明顯啦…佢係都 feel 到知道係咁樣樣唔傾㗎喇！(Teacher 5)

咁同學之間呢都…係呀佢哋比較少去好高調咁樣話啲有咩政見唔同呀咁樣呢，唔係好談論呢啲嘢㗎佢哋。(Teacher 6)

Views on Sense of Powerlessness among Young People

The third theme embedded in the narratives of participants converged on the sense of powerlessness that young people felt and were hardly to cope with due to the current socio-political environment. Furthermore, the joint effects on youth mental health induced by ongoing political changes and COVID-19, as well as young people's witness of their friends having left or planning to leave Hong Kong, may amplify such sense of powerlessness.

大家也很明白，那種無力感是很重的，只是看是不是表現得很直白，或者是壓抑在心裡。除了說出來之外…甚至很難說遲一些還能不能說，現在大家尚可坐在這裡說…好像沒有甚麼方法可以紓緩這種感覺。因為有很多事情我們也控制不了，有些事情我們也決定不了，就是這樣。(Youth Focus Group 1, Participant 5)

不論是因為疫情或再之前的事情，都會產生了一種無力感。或者是因為他面對著他想解決的問題，這一群青少年的聲音未必被別人聽得到，就會產生了一種無力感。就算知道問題存在，也沒有辦法解決。其實也會影響到他們，壓力會大了，也會懷疑自己是否做不到任何事情。這些背景累積起來，他們的精神[狀態] 就會差了很多，所以我們才會想透過計劃去紓緩一下。(Youth Focus Group 1, Participant 1)

咁即係同埋即係依家咁嘅大環境我係即係覺得，我做到啲咩？我係即係可能我係有啲負面嘅立場咁樣，但係我又唔可以話咩，即係有時會有個比較強烈嘅諗法… 走囉，即係不如努力啲讀書上大學之後移民囉… 即係有陣時係即係都好希望有抱有啲希望但係又… 但係有陣時個現實環境就話俾你聽…你算把啦你，即係有陣時仲要係唔止係自己咁諗，人地又同你咁講咁樣，又見到一個一個朋友走啦，我已經6個朋友已經走去其他國家咁樣… 即係，其實我係咪應該跟佢地一齊… 即係都不如走算啦咁樣，但係即係又放唔低對呢度咁樣… 即係依家係會有呢個感覺。(Youth Focus Group 6, Participant 5)

Some teachers and social workers further described the sense of powerlessness encountered by young people because the current situation is beyond their personal control and coping skills and cannot be easily relieved. Worse still, it is difficult for young people to trust someone and disclose their genuine thoughts and feelings with that person.

特別係我覺得去到而家嗰種無助感，或者嗰種冇乜希望嘅感覺越來越強嘅時候，覺得自己有咩可以做，我自己覺得呢種感覺對佢哋嚟講嗰種壓力更大。(Social Worker 3)

我覺得其實佢哋係有好多嘅無力感喺度，同埋係對於… 即係個社會現況係覺得係好無奈，即係… 我有覺得佢哋未必話即係如果係擁有其他嘢嗰時候可以抵受得到呢種嘅感覺，係喇… 同埋我覺得宜家… 即開始多嘅一個現象就係佢哋係連喺學校都唔敢講，對於老師都唔敢講，即係佢哋會好 alert 究竟呢個老師係咩人嚟嘅呢，信唔信得過㗎呢，即係個感覺好小心㗎，因為有時候你係即使係自己班其實個信任… 有時候當佢哋開始掂到啲敏感嘅話題，有啲同學會提佢，即係你諗諗講唔講得㗎… 即嗰啲咁樣囉，即我反而覺得佢哋係真係所有嘢都壓係個心到。(Teacher 1)

The Significance of Social Support

The fourth theme identified in the narratives captured the participants' perception of the importance of mutual support. Despite being unable to fully avoid a sense of powerlessness, many youth respondents emphasized the significance of having a trusted platform for them to ventilate their feelings and support each other.

我會覺得，問題是沒有被解決，依然存在，但是和別人傾訴的過程，起碼不用壓抑在心裡。因為大家也知道，壓抑在心裡是很不舒服的。起碼有一個人可以聽到你說話，他未必能給你反應，但可以基於同理心，他知道你在說甚麼，也贊同你意見的話，你的心情不能說會非常舒服，但最少你也知道，有人和你一起關心這個問題。我會覺得，心情會沒那麼沉重。(Youth Focus Group 1, Participant 2)

Some youth respondents even recounted their experience in formulating action plans to identify the needs of other students and provide emotional support to them because they understood the inadequacy of school social workers in taking care of so many students.

學校的社工是比較被動一點的，很多學生的精神壓力也得不到紓緩。這些青少年需要別人觀察，有時候他們會收起自己，所以觀察他們是很重要的。但是，當學校社工是如此被動的時候，學校的同學，他們的問題就會解決不了。還有，我們的年紀相近，也不像那些社工那麼被動，坐在課室裡，也會看到身邊有不同的狀況。既然我們看到這些情況，學校方面雖然有支援，但是欠缺主動性，所以不如由我們去做吧。(Youth Focus Group 1, Participant 2)

The role of social support was also highlighted by teachers, social workers, and parents. For them, social support can be derived from different sources, but those from family members, friends, and social workers were regarded as most effective. Based on a constructive climate that facilitates close interaction and mutual support among young people, they can share their own inner struggles with each other. They can also explore how to understand themselves and their relation to the society together.

我只係覺得佢哋如果有個 social... 即係如果係 social support，即係可能唔同嘅地方嘅 support，其實佢哋會係... 可能係另類嘅壓力啦，就會 relieve 咗啦，即係我會覺得可能就係... 屋企人可能同佢係相近嘅政治諗法，或者政治光譜，咁佢哋係會易啲或者輕鬆啲啦我見到。(Teacher 3)

嗰讀書會就係由好基礎，探討返政治哲學啦，睇返一啲書譬如 1984 嗰啲咁嘅書。起碼大家有個空間，或者睇啲電影大家再討論返，起碼好似個氣氛呢，大家仲好似... 第一啱嘴形啲啦，原來仲有一班人同自己一樣嘅，同路嘅，同埋好似仲有啲人明下我。同埋以基礎做開始探討返，可能成件事重新思考下，究竟可唔可以有啲嘢自己可以實淨啲呢？(Social Worker 2)

我成日覺得呢即係個關係裏面就係… 就可能即時你會有一啲嘅反應，但係你時間呢… 其實大家點樣 adjust 呢… 可能係其實一個家庭關係唔單止係一時裏面覺得好定唔好呀，而係就係… 有好多面對一啲同佢唔同嘅嘢，面對甚至你唔認同佢，覺得佢做得唔好嘅一啲嘢，你用咩態度去面對呢，我覺得嗰啲嘢呢可能要一啲時間先睇得到而嗰啲嘢我相信係… 即起碼我自己依家都會相信係重要嘅… 或者係個家庭嘅關係… 佢點樣去… 佢點樣喺呢啲事裏面成長，佢點樣去面對嗰啲嘅壓力佢點樣回應，又會唔會可以有一個更加成熟嘅回應，即我會咁諗。(Parent 2)

The Significance of Having and Instilling Hope

Last, the participants contemplated their interpretation of the current socio-political environment in Hong Kong and the challenges faced by young people. Some youth respondents believed that the situation was not totally pessimistic because they could still express their views and cherish the possibility of initiating dialogues with other people. Such dialogues could promote an understanding of each other's subjective world, stimulated them to value each other's opinions, and reminded them to recognize the value of diversity in the face of contestation [55].

可能真係因為香港都係一個可以自由表達意見嘅城市啦… 咁我覺得，唔同嘅意見係可以同時存在嘅咁可能我哋就要珍惜呢一份仲有嘅自由囉，即係可能… 即係宜家我地可能都會話可以都比較自由表達意見，可能就，即係都係珍惜，咁第時嘅發展就即係可能我地宜家呢個年紀暫時唔可以做到啲乜嘢啦，就係… 比較珍惜宜家呢個暫時仲有嘅環境囉 (Youth Focus Group 6, Participant 3)

我認為只要大家嘅即係… 因為有衝突所以大家先會去進步，先會有… 先會有諗下點樣解決方法，點樣共融咁嘛，所以我覺得既然香港係一個自由嘅城市嘅話，咁大家有唔同嘅意見都係一件好正常嘅事，你整一樣嘢，大家都可能有唔同嘅諗法，所以只要大家… 就算大家有衝突嘅時候都可以尊重返大家嘅意見啦去慢慢討論我覺得都係一個香港好有特色，好有魅力嘅地方嚟嘅。(Youth Focus Group 6, Participant 1)

Some teachers, social workers, and parents shared their views that supporting young people to be engaged or re-engaged in their social roles can help them discover their strengths and resilience and enhance self-recognition, which may give them a sense of significance and purpose in life.

因為我哋做緊啲啲如果在學啲啲呢，其實佢有attachment，即係比較固定嘅attachment，有啲system，有啲support咁… 因為我哋最近有一個年青人，其實我哋話歡迎你搵個工作去試下，即係慢慢咁樣… 咁佢搵到啲下，原來「我都可以做呢樣嘢」咁，即係佢有左個身分，一個工作嘅身分，我係咩人咁樣。可能佢對身邊嘅人或者自己有個交代之後，佢似乎又好少少。(Social Worker 3)

佢哋係青年人，佢哋都知道其實我哋成年人都係面對緊啲啲，咪一齊行囉一齊去面對然後搵翻個希望啦，或者… 即係focus返翻嚟讀書囉叫佢哋即係返翻嚟宜家，咁然後睇下啲啲嘅事態再點樣發展。(Teacher 2)

我覺得個壓力下就會令人有另一個見到自己個能力出返嚟，…即係有時呢即係經歷好多嘅抵禦呀或者一啲嘅問題呀或者壓力呀或者係一啲嘅困局嘅時候，人原來有一啲係會自己有諗過係可以搵到個生存嘅方法或者係搵到一個出口，或者原來呀原來自己都幾勁㗎㗎，可以咁樣都捱過㗎，咁呢個就係佢唔係單靠佢之前即啲啲關係上面點樣強壯左，而係啲樣嘢反而係衍生另一個佢冇見到自己原來可以咁樣有呢啲咁嘅潛能走到出嚟。(Parent 3)

In sum, the recurring themes extracted from the participants' narratives reveal their lived experiences and interpretations of the challenges and opportunities faced by young people. Although most of the participants thought that young people could hardly insulate themselves from negative emotions and a sense of powerlessness, they could still support each other and negotiate their life choices amid the tensions and uncertainties in the current socio-political environment.

Discussion

This study examined the effects of stress arising from political life events and intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors on the mental health and wellbeing of Hong Kong adolescents. While the impacts of stress arising from political life events have rarely been investigated among adolescents in Hong Kong, the findings of the study contribute to mental health and youth literatures by suggesting that Hong Kong adolescents' subjective experiences in political life events are an important factor for mental distress. Moreover, because there is little focus on the relationship between youth wellbeing and political circumstances in Chinese societies, this study also highlights different levels of protective factors on mental health in the context of precarious political situations. Specifically, this study explicated the effects of meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, youth empowerment in the community, and civic engagement in the community on mental distress among Hong Kong adolescents.

The quantitative finding that a higher level of stress arising from political life events is associated with a higher level of mental distress is consistent with the findings of previous studies on the impacts of political conflict on mental health [13]. Existing literature indicates that a sense of uncertainty is related to anxiety [56]. Possibly, during precarious political situations, adolescents worry about the outcomes for their participation in political events or for their expression of their political positions. The worries, in turn, arouse feelings of uncertainty, leading to a high level of anxiety. It is also noted in literature that autonomy is an important factor for depression [57]. As supported by the qualitative findings, when adolescents are afraid to freely express or act based on their political stances due to a fear of the consequences or outcomes, their sense of autonomy is compromised, which might evoke a sense of powerlessness. Because stress arising from political life events differs from stress amid existential or survival issues, how it affects adolescent mental health deserves further exploration in future studies.

Moreover, the quantitative results indicate that there was no association between the stress arising from political life events and adolescents' life satisfaction; yet, an interaction effect could be found between the stress arising from political life events and youth empowerment in the community on life satisfaction. Specifically, for participants who had a higher level of

perceived youth empowerment in the community, there was a positive association between stress arising from political life events and life satisfaction; however, for those who had a lower level of perceived youth empowerment in the community, there was a negative association between stress arising from political life events and life satisfaction. The current results may suggest that youth who feel more empowered in the community may be more likely to perceive themselves as being in control of how they will tackle environmental risks through community participation [34]. Moreover, youth empowerment in the community can be perceived as a process through which young people can collaborate with adults in decision making and implementation processes as well as to engage in meaningful roles in their communities [58], which can help youth appreciate themselves as trying their best to cope with the stresses arising from political life events and in turn enhance their life satisfaction.

In contrast with the quantitative results on youth in schooling, no association can be found between stress arising from political life events and non-schooling youth's mental distress. There are two possible explanations. First, in Hong Kong, non-engaged youth is a broad social category referring to youth from 15 to 24 years old who are unemployed and not currently pursuing any education or training [33]. While some Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams helped recruit "at-risk" youth who experience difficulties in meeting conventional career and academic expectations to join the current quantitative survey, some teams particularly targeted youth who had a high level of participation in the ELAB Incident and resultant protests. As different groups of youth respondents may have different perceptions of political life events, mixed results may hence be found. Second, in addition to the influence of political life events, non-engaged youth may face other life challenges. For instance, the increasing prevalence of nonlinear school-to-work transitions, precarious career pathways, and disadvantaged family circumstances may be especially burdensome for non-engaged youth and adversely affect their mental health [59]. It is understandable that there are possible joint effects of stresses arising from political life events and other life events on non-schooling youth's wellbeing, which may lead to a non-significant result on the association between stress arising from political life events and mental distress.

In this study, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors were significantly associated with mental health of young people, as suggested by the existing literature [3,16,17,23,24,30,31,53,60]. However, none of these variables were found to be a significant moderator in the relationship between stress arising from political life events and

mental health. Although social movements periodically occur in Hong Kong, the ELAB Incident had the most severe conflicts and violent events among all political life events, and dramatically changed many aspects of lives for people in Hong Kong. Additionally, the Covid-19 outbreak severely negatively affected the mental health of Hong Kong residents [61]. Potentially, due to the drastic changes in the political environment and the considerable impacts of Covid-19, inconsistent with our hypotheses, those presumed protective factors were not able to buffer the impacts of stress arising from political life events on mental health. Studies examining the impacts of serious environmental or macro-social risks show the prevalence of mental distress and existential anxiety among young people with overwhelming traumatic experiences [4,5]; the stresses arising from fundamental concerns of how people and society would be profoundly changed by these events may not be easily dealt with or alleviated.

Moreover, as previous studies indicated the differences in emotional outcomes from different types of political conflicts [62], another possible explanation for the insignificant moderating effect is that stress arising from political life events for Hong Kong adolescents is so unique and challenging that its effect on mental health may not be mitigated by the formerly mentioned protective factors. For example, even though freedom of speech, the press, association, assembly, and demonstration are guaranteed in the Basic Law, there is a heated debate on whether such kinds of freedom are threatened by the ELAB Incident and the promulgation of national security law. The qualitative findings also indicate that the stress amidst the ambivalence of whether or not and/or how to express one's political views, as well as how political conflicts influence personal lives, might be a new and daunting challenge for Hong Kong adolescents. As the protective factors in our study fall in developmental domains, they could be limited in moderating the impact of stress in political life events on mental distress.

Although civic engagement in the community is insignificantly negatively associated with mental distress at the bivariate level, it became positively associated with mental distress when controlling other protective factors (i.e., meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, associational social capital, and youth empowerment in the community) in our study on adolescents in schooling. The result is conflicting with previous study findings [32]. As indicated in Table 3, those with higher levels of meaning in life, resilience, social support, and empowerment in the community were more likely to have civic engagement, suggesting

that there could be overlapping effects on mental health between civic engagement in the community and other protective factors. Hence, it is possible that when the effects of the above-mentioned protective factors are controlled, having a higher level of civic engagement in the community may induce burnout and frustration and, in turn, increase the level of psychological distress. The nature of civic engagement in the community and how it associates with other protective factors in explaining its relationship with mental health should be further explored in future studies.

Last but not least, both the quantitative results and focus group interviews show that social support is a crucial factor conducive to the creation of meaning amid environmental risks and stresses among young people. It seems that the need to belong is particularly important for youth in face of stress arising from political life events. One of the possible explanations is that feelings of loneliness and isolation may surface when youth experience a deep gulf between how they want to live and how they perceive the current circumstance. Numerous studies have been undertaken in academia on the negative relationship between social support and mental distress [63]. As young people tend to explore their own inner strengths and mobilize social resources in social networks, connections, and relationships, it is clear that a stronger sense of social support can help young people cope with the adverse effects of stress arising from political life events.

There are several limitations for this study. First, for the quantitative survey, as this is a cross-sectional study, it may limit the causal inference for the results. Longitudinal studies should thus be undertaken to examine causality and directionality of the relationships of the variables. Furthermore, the generalizability of the quantitative results remain speculative at best, due to the absence of a representative randomized sample. Second, as the data was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic, the impacts of the outbreak were not counted in this study. Third, the responses could be biased due to social desirability since political stance was a sensitive topic during the data collection period. Fourth, it is noteworthy that our focus group study recruited and interviewed youth participants with better mental wellbeing and relatively positive experiences in youth activities and community participation. Future qualitative studies should thus target and recruit young people with a higher level of mental distress and more negative life outcomes.

Policy Implications & Recommendations

This study has generated a quantitative data set comprising of a sample of 1,435 adolescents in schooling and 210 youth not in schooling, which has become one of the most up-to-date studies on youth mental health after the ELAB Incident. A qualitative data set has also been produced to highlight the lived experiences of adolescents, parents, social workers, and school personnel. Together, these data sets and findings can draw implications and recommendations for the development of public policies and services to support young people coping with the risks and consequences due to precarious socio-political situations.

A Clear Policy to Guide the Development and Provision of Mental Health Support Programs for Young People

Whereas the results indicate that around 52% of students (and 62.4% of non-schooling youth) reported having anxiety symptoms and around 42% of students (and 57.6% of non-schooling youth) reported having depression symptoms, it is recommended that the government and related organizations should formulate a clear policy to guide the development and provision of mental health support programs with young people. This echoes to the proposed action with regard to the youth development strategy that “More focus should be given to enhancing the mental wellbeing of young people, amid the pressure they experience in education and in other facets of life,” which is stated in the Public Engagement Report of Youth Development Strategy for Hong Kong [64]. More effort should be put to consolidating the core position of comprehensive mental health support and education in school curriculums and advocate school-based, community-based, and Internet-driven mental health support programs. More financial and human resources should be given to provide one-stop, tailored, and holistic services for young people in need as well as their families. More systematic program evaluation and research studies should also be conducted with a view to improving the design and implementation of the related services.

One-stop and Holistic Mental Health Intervention and Prevention for Young People

Based on the findings of this study that meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community are inversely related to mental distress, interventions and preventions aimed to enhance the aforementioned factors should be taken into

consideration in youth mental health services during or after political life events. In view of the comprehensibility of these enhancement factors, it is suggested that one-stop and holistic mental health and intervention programs with young people should be initiated to serve their needs. A holistic service should comprise the following seven interrelated components: (1) a comprehensive needs assessment mechanism to aid in the exploration of young people's needs (immediate, short-term, and long-term) and the design of a tailor-made mental health and support program with young people; (2) individual counselling service and crisis intervention for young people with mental distress, (3) therapeutic groups and mutual support groups for young people with mental distress; (4) school- and community-based mental health support and education programs for young people and their families in general; (5) both basic and advanced training programs for helping professionals to equip themselves with attitudes, knowledge, and skills in helping young people on both casework and group work levels; (6) training programs for teachers and social workers to learn how to provide multifaceted mental health preventive and education programs with students and non-engaged youth; and (7) publications of evidence-based intervention and prevention manuals for knowledge transfer.

Strengthening the Capacity Building for Social Workers, Healthcare Professionals, and Teachers

The present findings suggest that more and different kinds of training programs should be provided for social workers, teachers, and other healthcare professionals. Owing to the limited number of professionally trained mental health counsellors and social workers in Hong Kong, it is very difficult to fully and effectively support young people with mental distress. As current mental health assessment and services do not include a political dimension, our findings suggest that assessing stress related to political life events is necessary in enhancing adolescents' mental health. Besides life and developmental dimensions in general (such as neurobiological, psychosocial, family, school, and community dimensions, etc.), it is important to clearly articulate and fully understand the impact of precarious social-political climates on adolescent wellbeing. Moreover, an explication of each dimension of analysis and its interrelationships can provide deep insights into how to formulate thorough assessments of youth mental health as well as holistic plans to practical interventions.

The Significance of Early Identification and Crisis Intervention

Early identification and crisis intervention services should be strengthened to help young people with mental distress. The findings generated here can help the government design proactive outreach services to assist schools and community partners in identifying youth who may be struggling with mental distress [65]. As exemplified in the narratives of the participants of focus groups, young people suffering from mental distress may be unwilling to talk about their experiences. The present findings suggest that crisis intervention is crucial to support young people with mental distress to narrate their experiences regarding their functioning and engagement in the social or political tensions [4]. By showing their understanding of how young people construe their life challenges, practitioners can build the rapport with these young people and help them make their own narrations and life choices. For example, practitioners can guide youth in engaging in reflexive inner dialogues about their perceived sources of frustration or sense of powerlessness, reflecting on the impact of such challenges on youth's day-to-day functioning, and exploring their strengths, resilience, and growth during and after social or political tensions [4]. Family, peers', teachers', and social workers' support should also be solicited to enable young people to experience senses of belonging, understanding, and acceptance in coping with their mental distress.

In sum, the findings of the present study offer significant references for policymakers and practitioners to reconsider the direction of mental health intervention and prevention. It is recommended that a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to an orientation that seeks to holistically address youth people's life concerns, meaning-making, resilience, social support, and community engagement in coping with stress arising from political life events should be promoted.

Details of the public dissemination held and to be held

A. Article submitted to international peer-reviewed academic journals

Two articles have been submitted to international peer-reviewed academic journals. One titled "The influence of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community protective factors on Hong Kong adolescents' stress arising from political life events and their mental health" has been published in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18,

9426, DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18189426. Another titled “Civic engagement, social support, and sense of meaningfulness in life of adolescents living in Hong Kong: Implications for social work practice” has been submitted to *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* and is now under review.

B. Public seminars

Two seminars were organized to disseminate the research findings, to initiate intellectual exchange, and to discuss the implications for policy and practice. In collaboration with The Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong, one seminar for 31 school personnel (such as principals and vice-principals) and 28 school social workers was held on 30 October 2021. Moreover, in collaboration with The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, another seminar for 53 social workers / people from the field of social service was held on 24 November 2021.

C. Op-ed to local newspapers

Two articles have been submitted to local newspapers. Below please find the link of one article that has been published. Another article is forthcoming.

<https://www.hk01.com/article/702183/>

D. Presentation of findings of the study to collaborating schools and organizations

Six school reports were sent to the collaborating secondary schools. A presentation of the research findings was made in a meeting of social workers of District Youth Outreaching Social Service at the Hong Kong Council of Social Service on 18 October 2021.

E. Conference presentations

Two conference presentations will be made to disseminate the research findings. The first invited presentation will be made by the Principal Investigator in the National Youth Research Seminar (YOURS’ 21) organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Malaysian government on 30 November 2021. Another keynote presentation will be made by the Principal Investigator in the “Hong Kong Dialogue”, which is an annual initiative of Youth Co:Lab co-led by United Nations Development Programme and Citi Foundation on 3 December 2021. Hong Kong Council of Social Service is the host of the event this year, where a 2-day conference was held on the theme of Youth Wellbeing and Mental Health,

with a view to examining the mental health needs and wellbeing of young people amidst of the current socio-economic contexts. The target audience of the conference are mainly policy makers, youth work practitioners, young people, and other relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, stress arising from political life events is a potentially important factor for mental distress among Hong Kong adolescents in precarious political situations. Several protective factors - such as higher levels of meaningfulness in life, resilience, social support, and youth empowerment in the community - were found to be related to a lower level of mental distress. The findings indicate the importance of assessing and alleviating stress arising from political life events among Hong Kong adolescents in precarious political situations. These findings can help us better understand how to address the recent socio-political tensions and respond to future stressful situations that may affect the wellbeing of youth. In addition, efforts aimed to address the aforementioned protective factors are potentially helpful for promoting mental health for Hong Kong adolescents. Further studies to understand how stress arising from political life events and certain protective factors contribute to better mental health are necessary.

The findings of this study underline the importance of studying both positive and negative forms of youth functioning in the current socio-political environment and exploring young people's perceptions of stress as a result of political life events. Likewise, by looking at the enhancement and protective factors of youth mental health, as well as the influences of socio-political events on youth's wellbeing, this will allow authorities, healthcare professionals, and social service providers to broaden and deepen their understanding of youth mental health and thus develop policies and practices that can truly strengthen and impact the psychological and social functioning of adolescents.

In brief, this research has clear implications for public policy, community practice, the development of interventions and services, and the prevention and early identification of mental health problems. Given that youth's voices serve as a crucial reference point for policy-makers and practitioners who are trying to conceptualize the life challenges encountered by youth [64], the current study has profound value for future policies and services that effectively respond to the needs of young people in Hong Kong.

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