

Hosting a Chinese Parachute Kid: How Can We Increase Host Family Satisfaction

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Abstract

This research will examine the relationships between American host families and their international students who live with them. The challenges that the host families face including the lack of training and difficulties with accommodating to a different culture in the house that can cause turbulence in the family system. For the international students, learning to adapt to a new culture, education system, language and family dynamics can be extremely challenging as an adolescent.



Host family sisters and I at a concert



I got a pinata for my birthday as I wished, or the "horse hitting, candy falling" as I called it.

Goals

1. Present satisfaction reports from both the host family parents and the international students
2. Discuss common stressors for host family parents and international students
3. Provide suggestions for host family programs in the future.

Importance To Family

- Host families can potentially benefit as an entire family system and as individuals in the experience of hosting a PK. It is a difficult process of family integration, especially without the proper help and guidance that host families need. However, current studies have shown that through family inclusion and intentional relationship cultivation, success of positive host family/PK experience can be achieved.
- It is important for PKs to develop the mental, physical, emotional and relational capacities to overcome extraneous situations and hardships they face during their study abroad years. Living with an American family can positively contribute to those goals. Host families can provide a support system and help foster positive relationships that are needed for PKs to succeed.

I have personal experience with an American host family as a PK in high school. My host family truly took me in as their own family and included me in everything that happened. Their support and care eventually ejected me to a thriving life in the U.S. However, I realized that not all PKs and host families that I know have had positive experiences with each other. In hopes to find out what makes that experience enjoyable and beneficial for both parties, I began this research with Dr. Shera Jackson. We hope that with our qualitative study, valuable and effective suggestions can be made to host family agencies and programs to benefit future PKs and their host families.

Chinese Parachute Kids (PK)

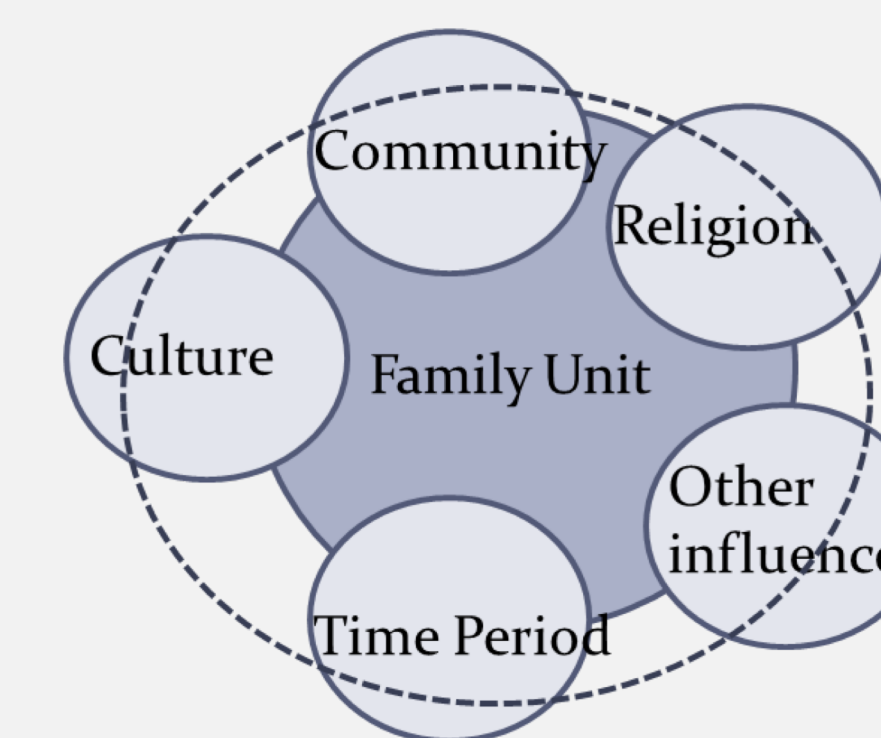
- PKs are Chinese adolescents who are enrolled in US high schools by themselves and living with an assigned American host family (Zhou, 1998). About 45% of all Chinese international students in the U.S. live with an American host family for the duration of their education (Chiang-Hom, 2004; Lin, 1998). Being away from their families of origin, it is very common for them to experience homesickness and loneliness (Huizinga, R., 2016). Among all groups of international students studying in the U.S., PKs are the fastest growing group (Cho, 2007, Farrugia, 2014, Zhang, 2012). PKs are classified to be in pseudo adulthood where they are taking on some adult responsibilities like managing their own money, doing house chores, providing care for younger siblings and mediating family relationships but still being under the age of 18 (as cited by Wu, 2016).

Host Families

- Based on the research articles, there are currently no clear regulations on American host families (Wu, 2016). Some possible negative outcomes can include the struggles with overcoming the diverse cultural differences in a single household and a lack of understanding of each other's motivation. Some host families and their international students view their relationship as "landlord-renter" (Mitchell, 2018). Another common negative feedback from host family programs is poorly-balanced meals or missing meals.
- However, some successful host family programs include characteristics like setting a clear expectations regarding English communication only, acting as the PK's family and supporting the PK, including the PK in family events and events, and encouraging PKs and host siblings to form friendships (Wu, 2016).

Theory – Family Systems Theory

- Family interactions create systems.
- If one component of the system changes, it impacts other parts
- Focuses on the interdependence within the family
- Adding a PK to the family requires changes in the family system
- Host families adapt to change by redefining wholeness, communication and interaction patterns.



Methods

- **Participants:** Including both host families and PKs ($N = 15$) currently participating in an international program in a west Texas community.
- **Procedures:** Program participants have been identified through interaction with researchers, local high schools and a host family agency.
- Researchers contacted international student counsellors in 4 different local high schools to send out questionnaires that includes demographic questions, valid and reliable satisfaction and depressive mood measures, scale questions (1- low/extremely dissatisfied to 5 – high/extremely satisfied) that address support (from school or program) and satisfaction (with hosting/host family and school/program), and open-ended questions to learn about the parents and students experience.
- In the email that went out to the school counsellors, we asked that they forward the survey link to their PKs and their host families. The survey was also posted multiple times on social media platforms like Facebook and WeChat to reach more target population.
- This survey was originally planned as an in-person interview that would be conducted with the investigator in a private setting. Due to the limitations of COVID-19 pandemic, researchers were not able to meet in person with participants as planned. Not all questions on the survey were made mandatory due to IRB concerns. Therefore participants were able to skip questions and not complete the full survey. Due to these constraints, some perspective participants and scale scores results were potentially lost.
- **Analysis:** This study is exploratory with a small sample size with a lot of incomplete data. The analysis is mostly descriptive and includes relationship analysis techniques to enhance understanding based on many qualitative questions.

Results

Students ($n = 9$)

No student reported feeling supported by the school. Results ranged from neutral to not at all. Feeling satisfied with their host family ranged from extremely to somewhat not, while feeling integrated with their host family ranged from somewhat to neutral ($n = 8$). A common complaint for the students included communication issues, forced to come out of their comfort zone, and food complaints including no consistent cooking for all meals by host family and feeling pressure about wanting to cook. Positive experiences included special events and completing fun activities as a family.

"They are nice to me. Have a birthday party for me every year vene (even) I don't want to. We celebrate all the festivities. They also remember some of my country's Big festivities too. We have at least one camping trip each year."

"Chinese cooked a lot in China, but my host family is lazy. Less than 50% of dinner time, they don't cook. They can eat cereal or a sandwich for dinner, no cooking. THAT IS INSANE! Because we have different cultures, I can not accept Their food sometimes. They don't want me to use their kitchen, but they said I could use the kitchen."

"They want me to get out of the comfort zone (be more socialized) when I am already thousands miles away from the comfort zone..."

Students also recommended that others not participate in an exchange program until at least 15 as well as recommendations for the school, program, and families.

"Introduce me to another person who studies in the US and for the first year I would rather be in a school with a couple Chinese/international students because this really helps in a brand new environment."

"...AND Wear a mask!!!"

"Introduce me to another person who studies in the US and for the first year I would rather be in a school with a couple Chinese/international students because this really helps in a brand new environment"

Host Parents ($n = 4$)

Host families reported the most common challenges were the students not wanting to come out and be part of the family. Families also reported challenges getting the student motivated for school, hygiene needs, and communication issues when the PK kids go to their parents first. Parents also struggled with the PK kids not wanting to spend time with the family and having to deal with the language barriers and tutoring. Families also reported that they love seeing the world from a different perspective, the different cultures, teaching the PKs about God, and seeing their personal growth.

"It was a challenge in the beginning to get them to come out of their room and join in with family activities. They would come out for meals and quickly retreat to their rooms. My kids are all in elementary school and non of them hang out in their room with the door shut. We had to have several conversations with the boys about not treating us like a hotel and that we WANT them to be a part of family life. It has been a slow process and [PK1] is definitely doing a better job of joining us on a regular basis than [PK2] is."

"We've had a relatively easy experience. The hardest thing was probably [PK1] throwing tantrums on the phone when he didn't like something but we are making progress in that area. Maybe it would be helpful for the students to be prepped while they are in China that American families like to spend time together and it isn't as widely accepted to stay in your room all day."

"keeping him off of his phone and computer, motivating him to push himself to learn English and study beyond the required homework, motivating him in his medical and hygiene needs, motivating him to eat healthy and exercise, he loses things and is very unorganized."

Conclusion

Our world is becoming more connected and integrated than ever before. With the rapid growing PK population in the U.S., this research provides insight on the host family/PK relationship and experience. The data collected from the surveys provides suggestions for host family agencies and programs on potential areas of improvement. Future trainings of communication and cultural lessons are recommended for host families and PKs. More researches and studies are needed to understand the factors that impact their experience and how each factor relate to each other.

