

# GENDER MODERATES THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PARENTAL DIVORCE/SEPARATION AND ANXIETY AMONG HONG KONG YOUNG ADULTS

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## Background

- Parental divorce/separation is a relational trauma adversely affecting children's long-term mental health (Ritzema, 2025).
- Although parental divorce is increasingly prevalent in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2026), its gender-differentiated impact on anxiety remains insufficiently examined, particularly within Chinese cultural contexts where family intactness is highly valued (Zheng, 2016).
- The **main objective** of this study is to examine whether the association between parental divorce/separation and anxiety differs by gender among undergraduates, controlling for family income and age.

## Methodology

- A cross-sectional and quantitative design was used.
- Final-year undergraduate students (n = 528) from various Hong Kong universities completed a self-administered questionnaire via Google Forms.
- The inclusion criteria were Chinese final-year undergraduate students and were expected to complete their studies in the 2024–2025 academic year.
- Purposive and convenience sampling were employed, with recruitment conducted through social media and on university campuses.
- **Anxiety symptoms** were measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 questionnaire (Spitzer et al., 2006).
- **Parental divorce/separation** was assessed by asking participants whether their parents had separated or divorced before the age of 18 (yes/no).
- **Demographic information** including age and gender was also collected.
- A **two-way ANCOVA** tested the interaction between parental divorce/separation and gender on anxiety symptoms, adjusting for age and family income.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

- n =528 undergraduates (63.6% female)
- Mean age: 22.92 years (SD=2.06)
- Monthly family income < HKD 30,000: 51.5% (approximately USD 3,828)
- 22.9% reported parental divorce/separation before age 18.

### After adjusting for age and family income:

#### Main Effect

- Parental divorce/separation was significantly associated with higher anxiety levels,  $F(1,514) = 11.17, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ .
- Gender was significantly associated with higher anxiety levels,  $F(1,514) = 4.71, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$ .

#### Interaction Effect

- The **interaction** between gender and parental divorce/separation was also **significant**,  $F(1,514) = 12.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ .

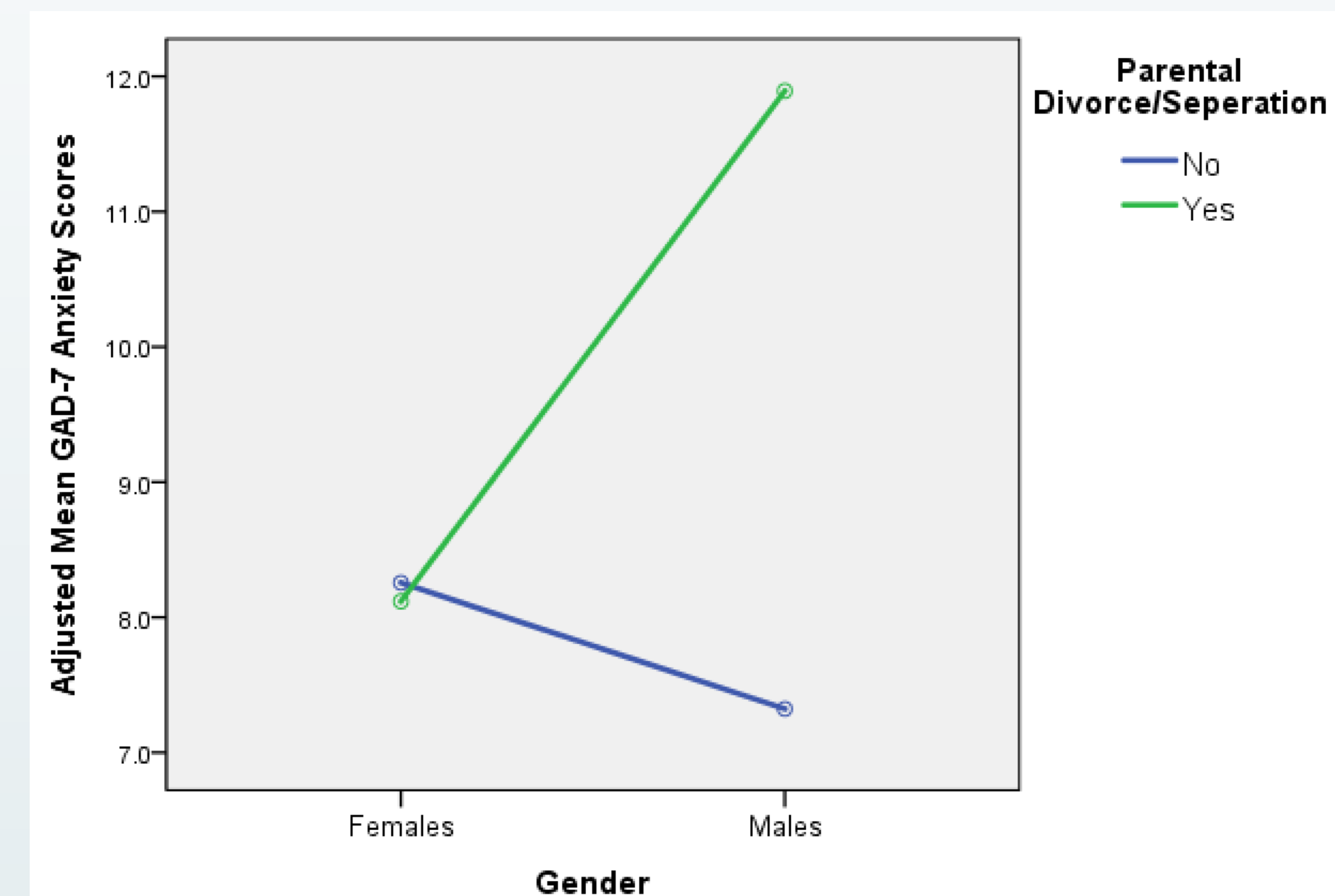


**Figure 1.** Adjusted mean GAD-7 anxiety scores by gender and parental divorce/separation status. Means are adjusted for age and family income.

#### Simple Effects Analyses

- Parental divorce/separation was associated with higher anxiety among males,  $p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , but not among females,  $p = .851$ .

## Conclusion

- **Parental divorce/separation was associated with higher anxiety among male undergraduates, but not female undergraduates.**
- This gender-specific pattern may reflect differences in coping, emotional expression, or help-seeking within Chinese cultural contexts.
- Findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive mental health screening and support for students from divorced/separated families.

## References

- Census and Statistics Department. Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics 2026; Jan: Marriage and Divorce Trends in Hong Kong, 1991 to 2024.
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