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Influence of Parent-Adolescent Communication on Adolescent Peer Relations and Gender Implications

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ABSTRACT

This study was conceptualized against a backdrop of Kenya's a troubled secondary school system; characterized by incidences of students' unrests, drug abuse, examination cheating, school dropouts and other forms of indiscipline. Although literature points to the role of parent-adolescent relations in development of behavioural problems in adolescent period, the government of Kenya has not linked the problem situation in schools to parent-adolescent relations. This study therefore compared the influence of father- and mother-adolescent communication on peer relations of secondary school students. It also investigated the influence of gender on parent-adolescent communication. The research population comprised of Form 2 and 3 students from Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. It used correlational and causal comparative research designs. Stratified and random sampling techniques were used to select ten schools and 462 students. Questionnaires were used in data collection. The reliability and validity of the research instruments was established through pre-testing. The study found strong positive correlations between both mother- and father-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations, thus indicating that mother-adolescent communication had a greater influence on adolescent peer relations than father-adolescent communication. Gender also had a significant influence on father-adolescent communication, indicating that male students had a more open communications with their fathers than female students. However, gender had no influence on mother-adolescent communication. The findings may help enhance knowledge of parent-adolescent communication and may also be useful to stakeholders in education in developing communication skills training programmes to promote social competence in adolescents.

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1.0   Introduction

The Kenyan secondary school system has been for a long period of time characterized by incidences of students' unrests, drug abuse, examination cheating, school dropouts, immoral behaviour and other forms of indiscipline (Fadhili, 2005; Lucheli, 2009; Kigotho, 2009; Wasanga, 2007; Republic of Kenya, 2010). For instance, 250 schools had experienced unrest between the year 2000 and 2001 (Wangai Report, 2001) and more than 300 secondary schools closed down following students' unrest in the year 2008 (Kigotho, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009). These could be indicators of negative peer pressure, lack of interpersonal communication skills and problem solving skills, and inability of students to manage their situations.

The government of Kenya has responded to this unsatisfactory state in secondary schools by putting in place many policies with regard to management of education, such as introducing guidance and counselling programmes in the schools, banning corporal punishment in schools, and recommending various discipline practices in schools. This however, does not seem to have salvaged the situation as the problem has persisted. It is worth noting that although literature points to the role of parent-adolescent relations in development of behavioural problems in adolescent period (Demaray & Malecki, 2002), the government of Kenya has not linked the problem situation in schools to the home environment or to the parents-adolescent relations. Parent-adolescent relationships are often reflected in parent-adolescent communication.

Researches on family communication have traditionally focused on communication with mother (Musitu, 2005; Shek, 1999). However, some studies suggest that fathers and mothers may each separately contribute to psychological adjustment of adolescents (Estevéz, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005a, Veneziano, 2000). These studies posit that behavioural problems in adolescents may be attributed to the quality of mother- and father-adolescent communication.

Though some investigations have been conducted to study parent-adolescent communication and some adjustment variables such as stress (Lopez, Turner, & Saavedra, 2004), anxiety (Harris & Zakowiski, 2003), behaviuor problems, depression, low self-esteem (Houck, Rodrigue & Labato, 2006; Pederson & Revenson, 2005), few researchers have linked parent-adolescent communication and adolescent psychological attributes. Accordingly, indicators such as peer relations should be the focus.

Although some studies document the association between affect and behaviour in parent child dyad and young children's peer insights, fewer researches are available about links between adolescents-parent relationships (especially with fathers) and friendship qualities in adolescence (Updegraff, Madden-Derdich, Estrada, Sales, & Leonard, 2002). Furthermore, there has been no study giving insights on the connection between parent-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations.

The findings regarding adolescent gender in parent-adolescent communication have also been inconsistent (Jackson, 1998; Noller & Callan, 1991). Some studies have shown that gender differences become more pronounced in communication with parents during adolescence (Mendozal, Triana & Rubio, 2006) and hence the need to investigate the gender factor in communication. Taking into account all these factors, this study therefore compared the influence of mother- and father-adolescent communication on adolescent peer relations and also considered the gender implications.

1.01   Communication

Communication consists of information passing between groups of two or more people, or what Fogel (1993) describes as a "shared way of perceiving and comprehending each other". It is central to all forms of interactions. Although language is the primary means of communication, it is not the only means. Non-verbal communication which encompasses facial expressions, listening, touch, hearing, silences, gestures, and other non-language symbols and clues used by persons in giving and receiving information; is the other means of communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Van-Pelt, 1984).

Open communication refers to free flowing exchange of information between people, and the perception of lack of constraints and a degree of satisfaction experienced in the interaction. The components of open communication include good listening habits, freedom of expression, understanding, acceptance, support, trust, affection and conflict resolution (Huff, Widmer & McCoy, 2003;Barness& Olson, 1985).Problem communication on the other hand refers to absence of free flowing exchange of communication or hesitancy to share information, criticism, negative styles of interaction, presence of negative feelings and the selectivity of what is shared. Problem communication is characterized by poor listening habits, distrust, blame, conflict, criticism, sarcasm, constraint, lack of affection, lack of support, lack of acceptance and general dissatisfaction in communication (Huff et. al., 2003;Barness & Olson, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1994). In its extreme, problem communication may be accompanied by blatant attempts to harm, and elements such as yelling, arguing, abuse and so forth (Huff et. al., 2003).

Communication establishes the tone of each encounter. While good communication makes people feel accepted and understood, deficient communication within a family causes disappointment and misunderstanding and generally disturbs the emotional climate and functioning of the entire family. The words we speak and listen to end up carrying pleasure or pain, encouragement or disappointment, closeness or rejection, security and insecurity. And beyond words, other messages, such as looks, gestures and tones deeply affect others and us (Melgosa, 2008).

1.02   Parent-adolescent communication

The family is characterized by relationships that have depth of interpersonal communication. Communication in the family should ideally provide a conducive environment in which children (and especially when they reach adolescence and begin to develop their own sense of autonomy coupled with a tendency to seek out peers) can learn appropriate social skills that will enable them handle interpersonal situations effectively and build healthy relationships (Huff et. al., 2003; Noller, 1995). Research has established the central role of effective communication in facilitating both good family functioning (Shek, 2000) and adolescent development (Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story,& Perry, 2006; Musitu, 2005; Pederson & Revenson, 2005).Overwhelming evidence links problem communication to development of behavioral problems in adolescence (Demaray & Maleki, 2002; Estévez, Musitu & Herero, 2005a;Lambart & Cashwell, 2003).

At adolescence individuals begin to seek more association with peers. The reactions directed to them by significant others in their lives also impact them to begin building their own self-concept (Gibson & Jefferson, 2006). The adolescents' personal experiences from parent-adolescent interactions become the initial source that determines how adolescents will evaluate themselves and interact with others. In this regard, it is believed that the quality of relationship adolescents experience with their parents impacts both their self-concept and the type of relationships they will have with their peers (Wilkinson, 2004). However, there has been no study giving insights on the connection between parent-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations. Parents and peers have been historically treated as separate, and often competing, socialization influences once children reach adolescence. This has discouraged research on parent-peer linkages during this development period leading to paucity of information regarding the same (Cooper & Cooper, 1992). Nevertheless, it is believed that adolescents,

especially those with family experiences that equip them to establish and maintain friendships access the benefits of peer relations (Cooper & Cooper, 1992). This kind of a scenario necessitated the need to investigate on parent-peer linkages during adolescence.

Much research on parent-adolescent communication has been related to parental illness and communication about sex (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, Bouris, Holloway, & Casillas 2007; Houck et al., & Labato, 2006). Furthermore, most of the few researches on parent-peer linkages have focused on European American youth (Parke & Buriel, 1998).

Regarding parental figures, research has traditionally focused on communication with mother (Choo, 2000;Musitu, 2005;Shek, 1999) and the influence of mother on child development (Berg-Nielsen, Vika & Dahl, 2003). Few studies have been designed to examine the influence of father-adolescent communication in adolescent adjustment. Some recent studies suggest that fathers and mothers may each independently contribute to explanations of some behavioural problems in children (Estévez, Musitu & Herero, 2005b; Luk, Farhal, Iannotti, & Simmons-Morton, 2009; Veneziano, 2000). This study aimed to close these literature gaps by examining the differential contributions of mothers and fathers on adolescent peer relations in an African context.

1.03   Parent-adolescent communication and gender

Many studies have also tried to establish whether family functioning also varies with gender. Isley, O'Neil, and Parke (1996) study suggests that girls' and boys' experiences with their same sex parent may be particularly significant in influencing development of skills that carryover to their behaviours with peers. With regard to adolescent gender in parent-adolescent communication, Jackson (1998) found that adolescent boys perceived more open and less problem communication with fathers than girls. While other studies have found that girls communicate more with both parents than boys and that adolescents talk more with mothers than fathers. In some studies, daughters in particular reported stronger relationships with mothers than with fathers, while other studies failed to confirm these results (Jackson, Bistra, Oostra & Bosma, 1998; Steinberg, 1987; Updegraff, et al., 2002). These findings are thus inconsistent.

Some evidence also suggests differences between boys and girls in the type of information they communicate to parents (Noller & Callan, 1991). Mendozal, Triana and Rubio (2006) study to analyse time trends in the ease of parent-child communication in adolescence, indicates that gender differences are becoming more pronounced in communication with parents during adolescence and hence the need to investigate the gender factor in communication.

Concerning parental gender, Marta's (1997) study indicated that fathers and mothers do not exhibit differences in perceptions regarding adolescent gender. Choo (2000) and Berg-Nielsen et al. (2003) found that mothers enjoyed greater openness in communication with their adolescent children and parents are more positive about family communication than their adolescent children (Noller & Callan, 1991). Some studies have shown mothers as more open, understanding and supportive than fathers (Updegraff et al., 2002). According to Parke and Buriel (1998) European American fathers (as compared to mothers) interact with sons and daughters in a more "peer like" or egalitarian manner. In contrast, Kenyan African fathers' interactions with their children can be described as more formal, because of their traditional parenting roles that characterize African families. To the extent that European American fathers' more peer like interactions may increase the likelihood that young adolescents' skills and behaviours will carry over to their experiences with peers, the links between father-adolescent and adolescent peer may be magnified for European American youth. This study sought to establish the influence of adolescent gender on parent-adolescent communication in a bid to also establish if adolescent communication with Kenyan African fathers will be carried over to the adolescents' peers.

1.04   Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were therefore : (1) To compare the influence of mother- and father-adolescent communication on peer relations of secondary school students in Kenya. (2)To investigate the influence students' gender on mother- and father-adolescent communication.

2.0   Methods

This was a multi-method quantitative study which involved the use of correlation and causal-comparative research designs to achieve the objectives of the study. The causal-comparative design was used to investigate the influence of adolescent gender on parent-adolescent communication. The correlation designs to investigate the relationship between mother- and father-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations. Because both effects and the alleged causes had already occurred, they were studied in retrospect.

A quantitative approach used in this study involved collection and analysis of numerical data using statistical techniques. The researchers used questionnaires in data gathering because the study was mainly concerned with variables that could not be directly observed such as views, perceptions and feelings of respondents. And given the large sample size (N = 462) of this study, questionnaire was deemed ideal in reaching many respondents in a short time. The research population being secondary school students were largely literate and therefore did not have difficulties responding to questionnaire items. Moreover, this study was conducted during school hours when involving students in time-consuming open-ended interviews was considered prohibitive by the researcher.

2.01   Population and setting

The study was conducted in Eldoret Municipality which is a town situated in Rift Valley province of Kenya. Eldoret Municipality has a population is of multi-ethnic and multi-racial composition, typical of a cosmopolitan population. Such an area comprises adolescents from varied ethnic backgrounds, which translates to differences in parent-adolescent communication styles. Some secondary schools in Eldoret Municipality continue to report rising cases of students indiscipline (Kibet, 2008; Kipchumba, 2009), which may be a function of negative peer pressure, among other possible causes of indiscipline. This may be related to the variable under investigation- peer relations.

The research population comprised Form 2 and 3 secondary school students drawn from Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. However, the study only involved boys and girls in Form 2 and Form 3 who lived with both parents since the study was investigating the influence of both mother- and father-adolescent communication. Only Form 2 and 3 students were involved in the study because being in their adolescence makes them appropriate for the proposed study. Forms 4 students were excluded from the study since they were busy preparing for their final secondary school examination (KCSE) at the time of data collection. While Form 1 students were excluded because they had not stayed in the school long enough to give useful information concerning their peer relations.

2.02   Sample and sampling techniques

Eldoret Municipality has 30 schools consisting of 24 co-educational day schools and 6 single sex boarding schools. Stratified sampling technique was used to select one third (10 schools) of the schools to be included in the study, so as to include the different types of schools in their right proportions (two single sex boarding schools and eight mixed day schools).From the selected schools 30% of Form 2 and 3 students were selected using stratified and random sampling techniques. This gave a total of 462 participants. For the single sex boarding schools, random sampling was used to select 30% form 2 and form 3 students to participate in the study. The random sampling technique ensured that each member of the research population had an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample thus eliminating any form of bias. For the mixed day schools stratified sampling technique was used to select

both girls and boys in their correct proportions. A total of 30% form 2 and form 3 students were selected to participate in the study. The technique was preferred because it helped the researcher to account for the difference in subgroup characteristics, which is the number of girls and boys in their right proportions.

2.03   Instrumentation and procedures

Three data collection instruments developed by the researchers were used; a biographical form, Parent-adolescent communication inventory and Peer relations questionnaire. The biographical form generated data on students' gender, and whether or not they lived with both parents. It had items with choices which required the respondents to tick a response that was appropriate and applied to them.

Parent - adolescent communication inventory-Although many studies on parent-adolescent communication have used parent-adolescent communication scale (PACS)(Barnes & Olson, 1995), it was considered inappropriate for this study because it does not include items on trust, affection, blame and conflict resolution which are core to family communication. Also, since most studies that have employed it drew from the European and American sample, it may not have sufficient cross-culture equivalence. The Parent - adolescent communication inventory has addressed these shortcomings. It is best suited for adolescents of 14 years and above living at home with both parents. The inventory is an instrument developed to obtain a measurement of positive and negative aspects of parent-adolescent communication. It consists of 25-items which show a two factor structure referring to degree of openness and extent of problems in parent-adolescent communication. The two subscales combine to create a composite score for parent-adolescent communication.

The first scale (factor 1) referring to the degree of openness in communication (14 items) investigates freedom of expression in communication, support, trust, affection, comprehension and satisfaction about communication, as well as conflict resolution and the perception of lack of constraint experienced in interaction. The second (factor 2) scale deals with problem communication (11 Items) focuses on negative communication reflected in negative patterns of interaction, hesitancy to share concerns, lack of trust, selectivity and caution in what is shared. The Parent–adolescent communication inventory has two subscales (mother-adolescent and father-adolescent communication scale) which combine to create a composite score for parent-adolescent communication. The Cronbach's Alphas for these three subscales were .84 for openness subscale, .78 for the problems subscale, and .86 for the total scale for fathers, and .86 for openness subscale, .76for the problems subscale, and .84for the total scale for mothers, respectively. A pilot study showed a correlation (r) of test-retest to be .78. for Father-adolescent communication scale, and.81 for Mother-adolescent communication scale. The adolescents were asked to appraise communication with their mothers and with their fathers separately. The respondents used a five-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the items. The scores for items on the problem communication subscale were reversed in valence.

Peer relations scale consists of 10 items measuring adolescent peer relations. The scale is unidimensional and has a two-factor (social competence and social incompetence in relation to peers) structure. The first (Factor1) describes the presence of high adolescent social competence, positive interactions, ability to make friends and fit well in the peer context, while the second (Factor 2) describe inadequate social competence or lack of it. The inability to interact with peers positively, inability to make friends or fit well in the peer context. The respondents used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree to indicate their agreement with the items. The scores on unfavourable adolescent peer relations statements are reversed in value. The Cronbach Alpha for the scale was .82 and the correlation (r) of test-retest reliability was.77 for peer relations questionnaire.

2.04   Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the National Council for Science and Technology and from the principal of the schools involved. The researchers explained to the participants the objectives of the study, the availability of the results and that their participation was voluntary. They were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

3.0   Data analyses

The data obtained from the students self-report questionnaires were manually coded, scored and accurately keyed into computer data file. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used in analyses both descriptive and inferential statistics. There were no missing data. This perhaps was because the researchers administered the instruments in person. Data collected was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. All data were tested at confidence level of 95% or $\alpha = .05$.

3.01   Parent-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations

The first objective was to compare the influence of mother- and father-adolescent communication on peer relations of secondary school students. To achieve this objective, secondary school students were asked to complete a biographical form which had items that generated data on class level and whom the student lived with. They were also asked to complete a parent-adolescent communication scale which had two sections, one for mother-adolescent communication and another for father-adolescent communication. The secondary school students were also asked to complete the peer relations scale. Their scores were computed. The analysis considered mother-adolescent communication separately from father-adolescent communication. These were correlated with scores on peer relations. To test the degree of association between mother- and father-adolescent communication on peer relations, Pearson product moment correlation (r) was computed. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Correlation between parent-adolescent communication and adolescent peer relations

		Parent-adolescent Communication	
		Mother-adolescent Communication	Father-adolescent Communication
Adolescent Peer Relations		.451**	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	462	462

The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between mother-adolescent communication and peer relations of secondary school students, $r(462) = .45$, $p = .000$. The analysis also revealed that there was a significant relationship between father-adolescent communication and peer relations of secondary school students, $r(462) = .42$, $p = .000$. The findings indicated that mother-adolescent communication had a greater influence on adolescent peer relations than father-adolescent communication. It was concluded that although both mother- and father-adolescent communication had a significant influence on the peer relations of secondary school students, mother-adolescent communication had a greater influence on adolescent peer relations than father-adolescent communication.

3.02   Gender and parent-adolescent communication

The second objective was to investigate the influence of student's gender on mother- and father-adolescent communication. To achieve this objective, secondary school students were asked to complete a biographical form which had items that generated data on gender, class level, and whom the student lived with. They were also asked to complete a parent-adolescent communication scale which had two sections, one for mother-adolescent communication and another for father-adolescent communication. The analysis considered mother-adolescent communication separately from father-adolescent

communication. The mean scores of the responses of mother-adolescent communication, father-adolescent communication, and students' gender were computed. The results obtained are presented in Table2.

Table 2: Gender and parent-adolescent communication

| | | Parent Adolescent Communication | | | |
| | | Mother | | Father | |
Gender	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Male	245	86.03	16.56	83.38	20.78
Female	217	83.91	17.44	79.69	17.04
Total	462	85.03	16.99	81.65	19.18

To find out whether the mean scores of mother-adolescent communication and students' gender were significantly different, independent sample t-test was used. The results indicated that students' gender had no statistical significant influence on mother- adolescent communication, $t(460) = 1.34$, $p = 0.182$. The mean score of the responses of father-adolescent communication and students' gender were also computed and a t-test was performed. The results showed that students' gender had a statistically significant influence on father-adolescent communication, $t(460) = 2.07$, $p = 0.039$. It was therefore concluded that while secondary school students' gender had no significant influence on mother-adolescent communication, it had a significant influence on father-adolescent communication. Male secondary school students had a more open and better communication with their fathers than female students.

4.0   Discussion

4.01   Parent-adolescent communication and peer relations

This study compared mother- and father-adolescent communication influence on peer relations of secondary school students. The results showed that both mother- and father-adolescent communication had a statistically significant influence on adolescent peer relations. When mother- and father-adolescent communication influence on peer relations of secondary school students was compared, the results indicated that mother-adolescent communication influenced adolescent peer relations to a greater degree than father-adolescent communication. It was concluded that mother- and father-adolescent communication were both effective in influencing peer relations of secondary school students, and that mother-adolescent communication influenced adolescent peer relations to a greater degree.

Peer relations has been used in this study to refer to the way students interact with one another, either positively or negatively and their ability to make friends and fit well in their peer context. The finding point to the fact that adolescents acquire skills and behaviours during interactions with both fathers and mothers that are carried over to their peer relations. The finding is in line with the social learning theory which postulates that through modeling and observational learning, children acquire skills and behaviours during interactions with family members that carry over to their peer relationships (Schualtz & Schualtz, 2001). This would mean that adolescents who had a good and open communication with either fathers or mothers or both parents learnt some skills and behaviours from them which they employed in their interactions with peers thus boosting their peer relations. This makes a lot of sense given that adolescence is a period in life when young people begin to extend their social world, and to develop new forms of self-expression. It may also be a phase in life when parents create a significant impression on their adolescent children, and thus influencing a variety of areas of adolescent behavior.

While some studies have in the past found that adolescents' experiences with their same sex parents was particularly significant in providing opportunities to develop skills that carry over to their behaviours with peers (Isley et al., 1996), this study has not found any differences specific to either mothers and daughters or fathers and sons. The results showed that both father-adolescent communication and mother-adolescent communication influenced adolescent peer relations irrespective of gender. This was

an unexpected finding because in Kenya fathers' interaction with their children can be largely described as formal due to the traditional parenting styles that characterize African families. The finding can however be attributed to the fact that the sample was drawn from an urban setting where perhaps a lot of parents have discarded the traditional parenting styles and largely adopted the egalitarian manner of relating with their adolescent children. However, this should be further investigated to verify the findings.

This study has also shown that compared to fathers, the influence of mothers is greater for both sons and daughters. This finding is also surprising given that interactions between mothers and adolescents are often more difficult. This is because adolescents' interactions with mothers concerns such spheres as domestic duties, studying, and discipline at home which often lead to mother-adolescent conflicts. The finding can be attributed to the fact that mothers have more frequent contact with their children and hence have more opportunities to model behavior for adolescents.

The findings of this study support what Dekovic and Meeus (1997) established: That the degree of parental support received by adolescents was related to the ability of the adolescent to obtain healthy peer relationships. Further, adolescents who were found to have a more fulfilling relationship with parents had healthier relationships with peers. The finding of this study is also consistent with those of other studies that point to the influence of parent-adolescent communication on adolescents' social contexts. For example, Bijra, Bosma, and Jackson, (1994) found that good parent-adolescent communication improves adolescent social skills. Ruble and Martin (1998) found that adolescents' experiences with their same sex parents play a significant role in the socialization process, especially during the transition to adolescence. They established that mother-adolescent relationship quality was associated with girls' friendship experiences and that father-adolescent experiences were central to boys' friendship formations. Updegraff et al. (2002) found that father acceptance influenced European American boys' friendship intimacy but not for Latino boys, while both father's and mothers' acceptance was positively associated with girls' intimacy with their best friend.

4.02   Gender and parent-adolescent communication

The second finding of this study that adolescent boys had less problem and more open communication with their fathers than girls did, and that adolescent boys and girls did not communicate with their mothers differently is even more intriguing. This is because it conflicts with the popular belief that girls are closer to their fathers and boys to their fathers.

The findings of the present study can be attributed to the following four factors: That Kenyan fathers are stricter, more controlling and protective of daughters than sons. This may lead to more conflicts and more restrained communication with daughters. This explains why boys in this study generally had more open and less problem communication with fathers.

A culture like Kenya where roles in the society are largely defined according to sex is high on masculinity index. The different role expectations for boys and girls in the Kenyan culture may also explain this gender difference in adolescent communication with parents. Girls are likely to be engaged in tasks such as: cooking, washing dishes and clothes, and general cleaning once they get back home from school. As they help their mothers with household chores, they spend more time with mothers and lesser time with fathers. But the time spend with mothers may not necessarily be spent in quality communication since there may be frequent conflicts between them. Boys on the other hand, are not often expected to help with the household chores leading to less frequent conflicts with either of their parents. Boys also spend more time with fathers leading to more communication with them. This explains why boys generally had more open communication with fathers unlike the girls. The sample being drawn from an urban setting also means that the role expectations for boys in the home are less so the boys and their fathers may end up watching television and also going out together more frequently leading to quality communication between them.

That although mothers spend more time than fathers with their adolescents, mothers may be seen as more restrictive and vigilant in their monitoring of their adolescents thus leading to frequent conflicts with them. It explains why adolescent boys had less problematic and more open communication with fathers than with mothers.

These findings are contrary to the findings of Berg-Nelsen et al. (2003), Choo (2000),Noller and Callan (1991), and Xia, Xie, Zhou, Detrain, Meredith & Combs, (2004), whose studies indicated that mothers enjoyed greater communication with their adolescent children than fathers. They attributed their findings to the fact that mothers were the primary caretakers of children and are more involved in the everyday lives of their adolescents than fathers and hence spent more time with their adolescents.

However, this study's findings are consistent with those of Jackson et al. (1998) who found that boys have less problem and more open communication with fathers than girls. Jackson et al. (1998)attributed their findings to the fact that they drew their sample from a rural setting where fathers participate together in work activities with sons thus leading to quality communication between them.

It also indicates that adolescent gender has a significant influence on father-adolescent communication. Adolescent boys had less problem and more open communication with their fathers than girls did.

5.0   Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that adolescents' interactions with parents can be a context for learning specific social skills that adolescents can carry over to their relationships with their peers. It also indicates that adolescent gender has a significant influence on father-adolescent communication. Since parental support remains a vital resource for the adolescents, parents need to recognize the continued importance of their relationship with their teens.

The findings may help enhance knowledge of parent-adolescent communication and may also be useful to stakeholders in education in developing communication skills training programmes to promote social competence in adolescents.

Although this study did not put into consideration the role of siblings and extended family members in adolescent peer relations, it is possible that they play a great role given that Kenyan families on the average include extended family. It will be important to explore the role of other family members in the development of peer relationship skills in future work. And because of the correlational nature of this investigation, caution is advised in making causal inference on the basis of data available. A longitudinal study is recommended for further clarifications about the casual direction of influence.

5.01   Implication for policy makers

The findings of this study have significant implications for practice in Kenya where parenting and communication skills practice has not been a common practice of prevention and intervention. The study points for the need of the government to implement family life education and communication skills' training programmes. Through such programmes parents can be educated on some of the important elements of communication, and also be helped to implement these in their interactions with their teens.

The most common approaches to promoting peer social competence in adolescents in Kenya are school-based social skills training programmes (Disiye, 2007) the findings of this study suggest that including a parent component may be an additional strategy for promoting positive peer experience and may enhance such programmes.

The study also provides documented information that the government of Kenya and other policy makers can base on to offer solutions to the persistent student problems in schools.

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