

Communication Patterns between Adolescents and their Parents

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Abstract

This paper attempts to understand the difficulties experienced by adolescents in communicating about different issues of their life with their parents. To recognise these issues data was collected by two methods; personal survey and by conducting a focused group discussion in Surat city. The data was analysed and important issues affecting the life of an adolescent were identified. Some suggestions have also been made for improving the communication between adolescents and their parents.

Keywords: Communication, Adolescents etc.

Introduction

We can divide the problems man faces into two classes, the non interactional or man-in-relation- to- nature, and the interactional or man- in- relation- to- man. This latter class involves human interactions which make it necessary to take into account the activities, thoughts and feelings of the others. We have made stunning progress with respect to the noninteractional class of problems, partly because they are stable problems. When it comes to the second class of problems, the human problems we have been incompetent. As social scientists we consider it almost obligatory to explore and illuminate these problems. The challenge lies in practicing as much as we know and in knowing as much as we could. This paper is a small attempt in knowing something more about a valuable human interaction between parents and adolescent offspring.

Communication is generally accepted as one of the most crucial facets of interpersonal relationships. Its prominence in theoretical construction of human and family interactions attests to the great importance attributed to the role of communication. Various researchers and theorists examining the concept of family have had communication at the core of their work. Despite the importance of communication between parents and adolescence, any research in this subject is very complex and presents some challenging difficulties. The main reason for communication between parents and adolescents being difficult is both categories belong to two different generations. Parents are often unable to keep pace with changing social and technical developments. So, they are unable to understand their

adolescent children. At the same time adolescents can't understand the mindset of their parents who they feel have a very traditional mindset. Communication is the only tool that can bridge the gap between parents and adolescents and also help in respecting each other's opinion.

Objectives

1. To understand the level of difficulty experienced by adolescents in communicating with their parents on different issues.
2. To get perception of adolescents about their communication with their parents.
3. To get parents perceptions on their communication with adolescents.
4. To know how often adolescents converse with their parents about events in life.
5. To identify whether adolescents are comfortable communicating with their mother or with their father.
6. To understand the level of difficulty experienced by adolescents and parents in communicating on issues relating to religious beliefs, politics, finance, lifestyle choices, career, emotional issues and interpersonal matters.

Research Methodology

Research Design, Sources of Data, Data collection instruments, sampling plan, data processing, data coding and analysis, limitations

Table No.1 Demographic details of the respondents

Education	Father's Education		Mother's Education	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Less than 12 th Std	306	60.47	348	68.77
Graduation	152	30.04	128	25.29
Post Graduation	33	6.52	26	5.13
Professional	15	2.96	4	0.79
Total	506	100	506	100

Table No.2

Occupation	Father's Occupation		Mother's Occupation	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Employed	134	26.48	25	26.48
Self Employed	324	64.03	25	26.48
Unemployed	13	2.57	451	89.13
Professional	35	6.91	5	0.988
Total	506	100%	506	100%

Table No.3 Time spent by boys and girls in communicating with their parents

	DAILY	ONCE A WEEK	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER	TOTAL
BOYS	111	43	77	7	238
GIRLS	181	32	50	5	268
TOTAL	292	75	128	11	506

Table No.4 Quality of communication between boys and girls and their parents

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	AVERAGE	POOR	VERY POOR	TOTAL
BOYS	74	129	31	2	2	238
GIRLS	97	135	34	1	1	268
TOTAL	171	264	65	3	3	506

Research Design: - The research design used to carry out this research is exploratory. Both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used to achieve the research objectives.

Sources of Data: - Primary data was collected through personal survey method and through focus group discussion method. Secondary data source was the literature that was reviewed during the research.

Data Collection Instruments: - A structured questionnaire was prepared relevant to the topic. The questionnaire was designed such it had fixed alternate questions that required respondents to select from a pre-determined set of responses. Since the survey was carried out personally and alternatives for response were stated so, data collected can be considered reliable.

Population: - BBA and B.Com students of Surat city. (Surat is the commercial capital city of the state of Gujarat. Surat is India's 8th most populous city and 9th most populous urban conglomeration. This city ranks 4th in a global study of fastest developing cities conducted by The City Mayors Foundation, an international Think tank on

urban affairs. It is the fastest growing Indian city in terms of economic prosperity.)

Sample Size: - The sample size of the study in this survey is 506 respondents. The demographic details of the sample is given in Table No. 1.

Sampling Plan: - Cluster sampling was used to get responses from the adolescents. Since B Com and BBA are two popular courses in Surat city so students of these two courses were selected from one campus.

Data Processing: - Data processing is a very important stage between data collection and data interpretation. Classification of data is an important step to categorise similar heading items together for ease in analysis. The questionnaire was classified into five categories namely a) religious, political and civic issues; b) career issues; c) inter-personal relationships; 4) life style issues; and 5) emotional issues.

Data Analysis: - For analysing the data the statistical package SPSS was used. Chi square test was used wherever applicable. Frequencies were calculated and suitable graphs were prepared with the collected data.

Qualitative Analysis:-In the second phase of the research a focus group discussion was conducted where selected parents and adolescents were invited to express their view points. There were 30 youngsters and 15 parents who enthusiastically participated in the discussion. The adolescents were divided into 3 groups of 10 students in each group and were encouraged to discuss on various communication issues they encounter with their parents. They were also encouraged to counsel each other on subjective problems. The 15 parents were then grouped and allowed time for discussion on what challenges they face in communicating with their adolescent children.

Literature Review

Good parents-adolescent relationships can hardly be sustained without open and healthy communication between parents and adolescent children. Parent-adolescent communication plays an essential role in family functioning throughout adolescence. (Collins 1990, Gecas and Seff 1990, Noller 1994, Sroufe 1991, Youniss and Smollar 1985).

Communication among family members is one of the most crucial facts of interpersonal relationships and the key to understanding the dynamics underlying family relations (Clark and Shields 1997)

Families with a good communication style help the adolescent develop a clearer sense of self (Barnes Olson 1985) effective communication at home helps clarify the role of adolescents within families and helps them develop the skill of empathy so that their personal identity effectively balances feeling of both individuality and connectedness (Grotevant and Cooper 1985) Good communication improves adolescents social skills that are positively correlated with self esteem, well being, coping and social support (Bijstra, Bosna and Jackson 1994)

Adequate communication between parents and adolescents can effectively mediate the stress that adolescents experience. They will be less likely to feel lonely and suffocated in the internal world when they know they are encouraged, supported and always have someone to count on at home (Marta 1997) Communication facilitates the process of family cohesion and adaptability development. Good communication facilitates the process of family cohesion and adaptability between parents and adolescents children leads to closer family relationships and helps them to be more loving and flexible in solving family problems. (Barnes and Olsen 1985) Open communication positive correlation with family satisfaction. (Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra and Bosna 1998)

Data Analysis and Discussion

The quantitative data collected has been explained with the help of tables and graphs and along with it the details of the focus group interaction has also been discussed

completing both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

From the demographic details we get an idea about the sample studied. The socio- economic background of the adolescents can be understood from the details collected. More than half of the parents (60% fathers and 69% mothers have studied less than 12th standard. Only 30% fathers and 25% mothers are graduates. 64% fathers are self employed which indicates that most of the respondents are from business families.

H₀: There is no difference in the amount of time spent by girls and boys in communicating with their parents

H₁: There is significant difference in the time spent by girls and boys in communicating with their parents

The p value obtained by applying chi square test is 0 which means that we may not accept null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the amount of time spent by girls and boys in communicating with their parents. From the table we can see that girls are spending more time the parents.

H₀: There is no difference in the quality of communication between parents and their sons and daughters.

H₁: There is significant difference in the quality of communication between parents and their sons and daughters.

The p value obtained by applying chi square test is .687 which means that we accept null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the quality of communication that sons and daughters have with their parents. Moreover from the data we can understand that most of the boys and girls perceive that the quality of communication that they have with their parents is good.

A general observation of the data collected shows that there is communication between parents and adolescents but there is scope for improving communication from both sides. We can observe that only a little over 50% of adolescents communicate with parents on a daily basis. Girls communicate more frequently with their parents.

We feel that communication among family members must happen on a daily basis for closer interactions and for family well being. But, due to hectic life schedules for both parents and youngsters this trend seems to be getting lost. If parents and children are investing quality time in their relationship the quantity of interactions is not very significant but for good quality interactions regular interactions is a necessity. An analysis of the quality of interactions between parents and adolescents reveals that most of the respondents feel that they are having very good or good quality communication with their parents. This is a positive revelation which can help in solving a lot of social problems. Yet, there are certain sensitive issues on which adolescents do not feel comfortable or do not want to communicate with their parents. Issues on which adolescents must communicate with parents has been identified and data relating to the

comfort level of adolescents on discussing these issues with parents has been investigated into.

Table No. 5a Difficulty level for adolescents in discussing about Religious and Political and Civic Issues with Parents

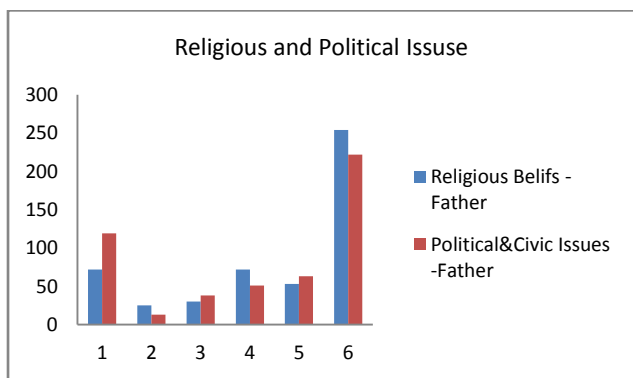
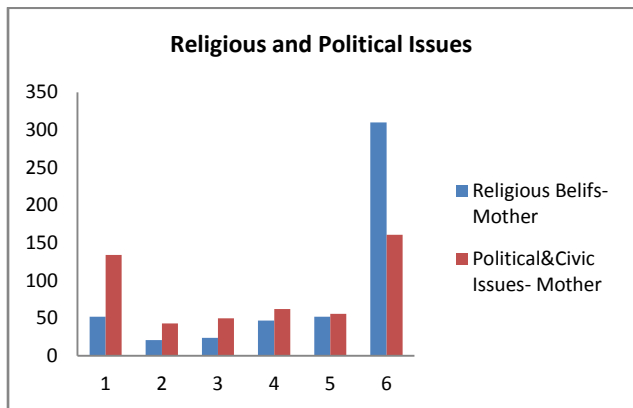


Table No. 5b

Note: (1 indicates no discussion about these issues, 6 indicates very easy to discuss these issues.)

Most adolescents are comfortable discussing with their mothers about religious issues more than they do about political and civic issues. Approximately 36% students do not discuss political and civic matters with mothers. Reason for this could be because most mothers of respondents are not highly educated due to which they may not take much interest in such matters such as politics and civic issues. With fathers too, most adolescents do not discuss such matters. Not discussing such issues restricts exchange of information and opinions among parents and adolescents. There are many positive effects of such discussions in families and in overall development of children. But, since most families do not understand its importance they do not make enough efforts in discussing about such matters.

Even though constitutionally India defines itself as a secular state, religion and caste are deeply entrenched in the identity of Indians across ages and plays a direct or indirect role in the daily lives of young people. In India religion plays a significant role in a young person's

cultural experience and is omnipresent. Most homes in India have a place of worship and youth do participate in a brief period of daily worship, most marked during examination weeks. Temples, churches, mosques and other places of worship are a regular feature of the local scene, and most families visit them and offer prayers to the several deities, at least during festivals. Religion is ever present in the lives of adolescents, though it plays more of a social than religious role in most cases. Adolescents have accepted the religious practices adopted by their families and most do not question its logic since there is always some fun added to every religious practice. But, when the religious beliefs are forced on the adolescents and some restrictions are enforced on them they do not like it and go against their parents too if the necessity arises.

Table No.6a Difficulty level for adolescents in discussing about Career Issues with Parents

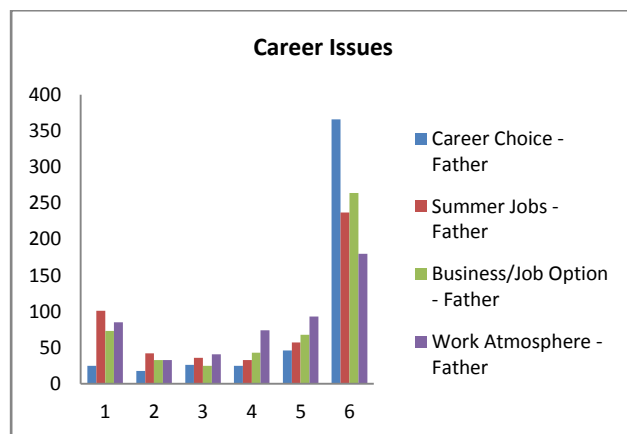
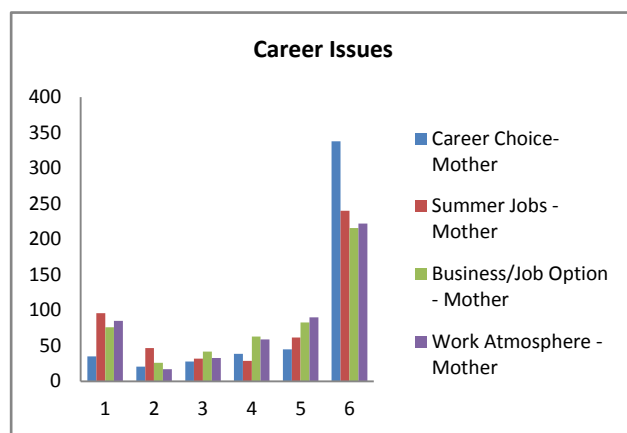


Table No. 6b

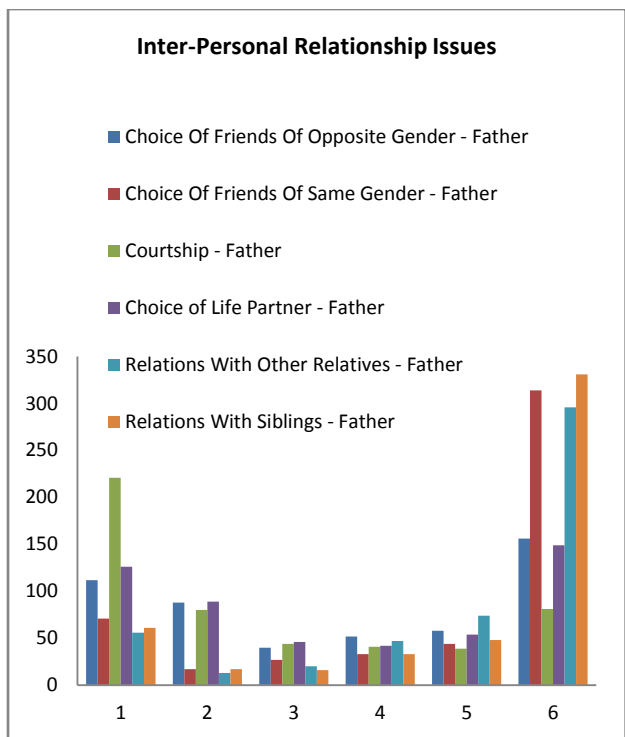
Discussions about career issues seem to be most easy with fathers for adolescents. Even with mothers adolescents are discussing their career aspirations. It is a heartening observation that parents are taking keen interest in the career of their children. While discussing career adolescents are able to discuss on a variety of related spheres like summer jobs, choice between business and taking up a job, work atmosphere where

applicable. Family processes of interaction, communication and behaviour influences what a child learns about work and work experiences. Since career choice is one of the primary developmental tasks of adolescents, it represents an important focus for constructive parent- adolescent engagement.

Parents are the single most important influential factor in the career development and career choice made by the children. Parents have more influence over their children’s career than peers, teachers and other relatives. But parents are often not adequately informed how they must help their children. But, parents today are approaching different sources from where they can get more information for exploring career options for their children.

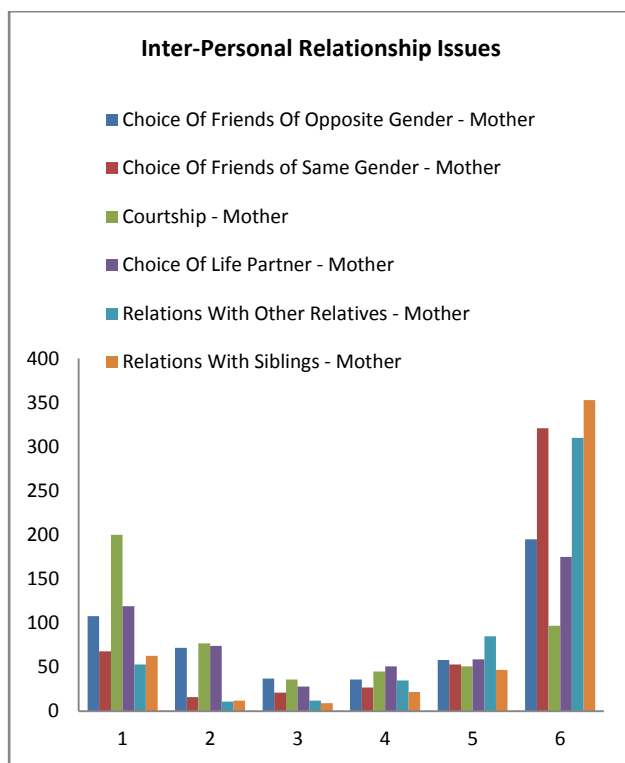
During the personal interaction with adolescents it has also been noticed that parents are not enforcing their unfulfilled career aspirations on their children. Adolescents are free to decide their career based on their area of interest and are also given the freedom to choose between starting a business or joining the family business and getting employment in an organisation. This is a very good sign for life satisfaction of adolescents in the long run.

Table No.7a Difficulty level for adolescents in discussing about Inter-personal relationships with Parents



Analysing the data about relationship issues we observe that though adolescents communicate comfortably about relationships with parents yet issues such as courtship, choice of life partner and choice of friends of opposite gender are not easily discussed. This shows that free and open communication is missing among parents and

adolescents on some issues which are very important in life. When youngsters are interacting with persons of the opposite gender being secretive about such relationships generally complicates relationships in the family.



(Table No. 7b)

Growing as a female in India carries with it the connotation of inferior status, and lesser privileges- as compared to the male child. It cuts across all social classes of the society and through entire lifespan. For a girl, the onset of puberty implies more restrictions on her movements, fewer interactions with boys and men, and more active participation in household chores.

Parent’s broad mindedness on all relationships fosters openness and trust in their children. Peer group interaction and attraction for friends of the opposite gender is a normal phenomenon at this age. Avoiding discussions on such matters could break communication channels between parents and youngsters. When parents show friendly attitude and ask questions casually without being very intrusive youngsters experience a comfort level to share their feelings on other significant relationships in their life with their parents. But in most cases youngsters are secretive and do not want to share their friendship with people of the opposite gender with their parents because they fear their parents will be critical about it. Moreover young girls are unhappy about the constant demands made by their mother and grandmothers to learn and help in household chores. Youngsters, especially girls revealed that often they have to answer queries of their parents when they chat over the phone with someone for a long time.

Table No. 8a Difficulty level for adolescents in discussing about Life Style issues with Parents

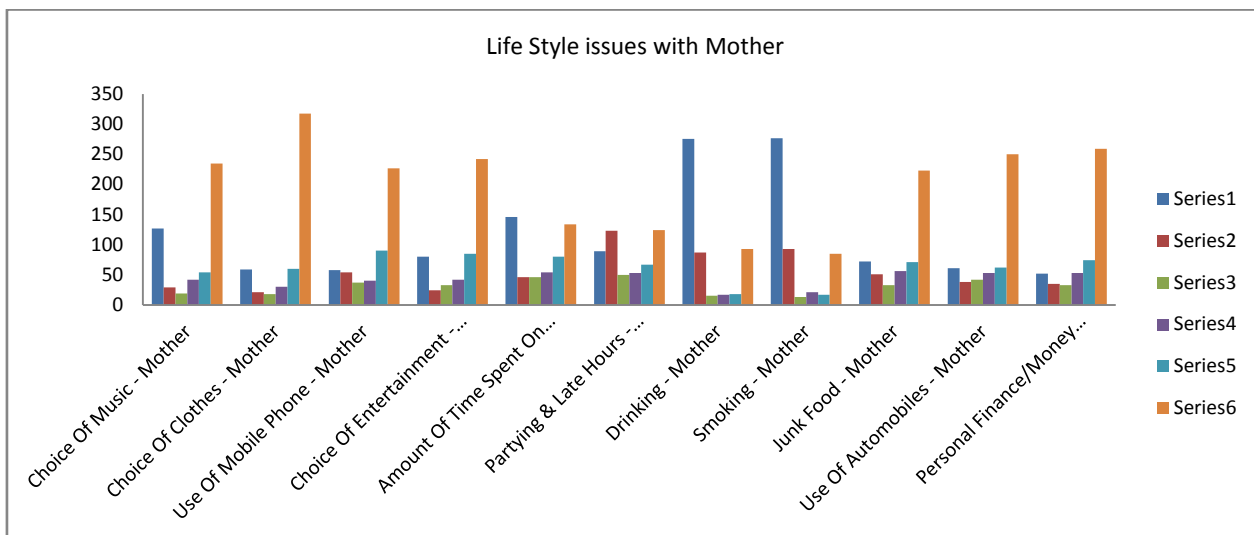
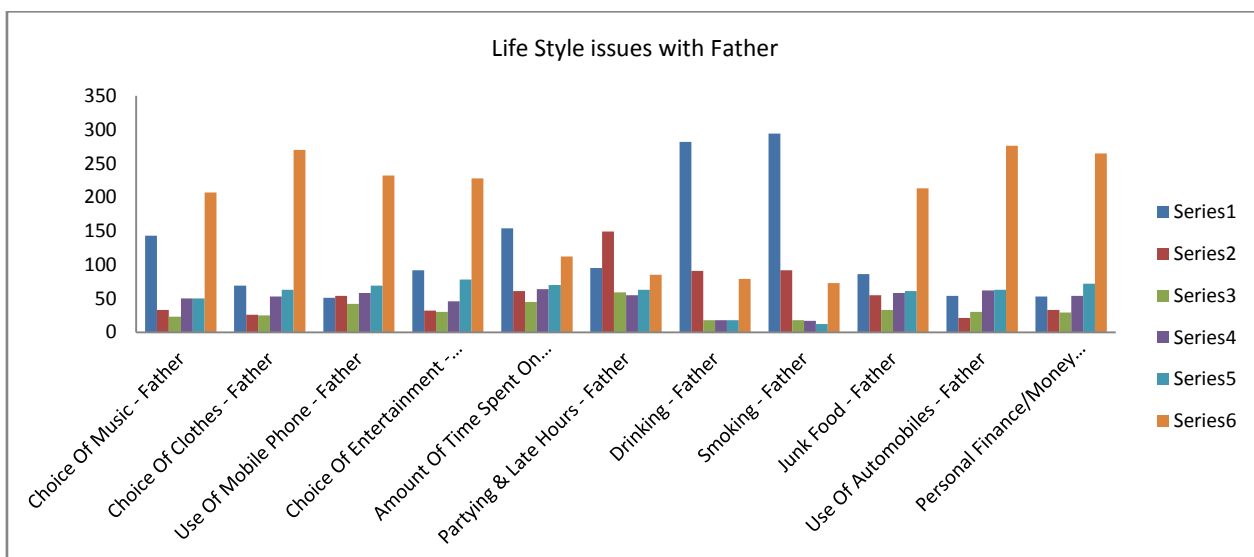


Table No. 8b



Lifestyles have drastically changes in Indian society post liberalisation. The respondents in this study are belonging to the post liberalisation age and have a very different lifestyle from that of their parents. The data reveals that most parents have adapted to the changing lifestyle and have given liberty to their children to discuss on various issues and life style choices life choice of clothes, music, entertainment, personal spending, use of automobile, mobile phone and consumption of junk food. Dressing up in the latest style is an important facet of self expression. The power of the media, especially electronic media like films and television has considerably influenced the youth. In matters of dressing and fashion youth seem to want to express their individuality and appear to be unconstrained by cultural norms.

Adolescents are still not comfortable discussing issues like hours spent on gaming, drinking and smoking. Smoking

and drinking among youngsters is on a rise but it is still a taboo subject to be discussed in families. Several studies have indicated that parents rarely provide the desired support to growing adolescents’ regarding biological and physiological changes as also the meaning attached to these. Taboos to access information and the lack of counselling services make youngsters turn to peers and other sources of information. We need to be aware that distorted information has consequences related to exploitation, abuse, mental health problems and risk of HIV/Aids. Providing awareness services and strengthening capabilities of institutions like family, community and school to act as sources of correct information are thus important and need to be given attention. Not discussing such issues with parents’ results in adolescents going on wrong paths due to distorted knowledge. Adolescence is regarded as a very crucial age implying the constant temptation to sexual misbehaviour and/ or other things

such as alcoholism or other attractive but delinquent activities (John Spiegel). This is true in all cultural settings and also the cause for many social problems. Communication with parents can greatly bring about clarity and a positive change in adolescents on such matters.

Table No. 9a Difficulty level for adolescents in discussing about Emotional Issues with Parents

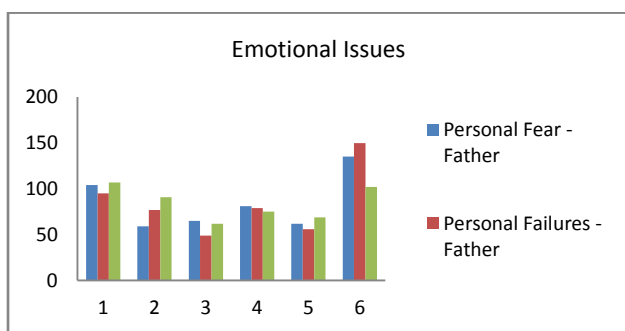
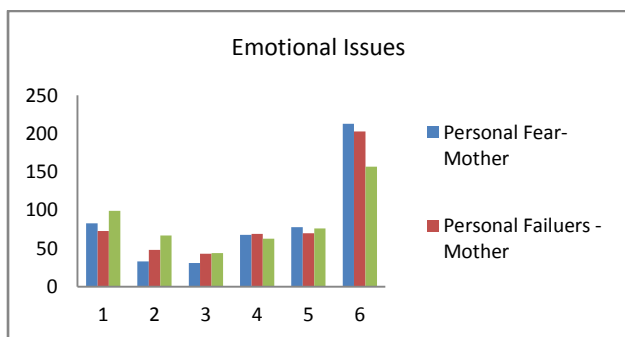


Table No. 9b

It is observed that adolescents are able to discuss emotional matters like personal fears and failure with mothers comfortably. In a patriarchal society like India fathers still assume the role of a disciplinarian and do not express his emotions openly. This has resulted in children also not expressing their emotional feelings openly with their fathers. In today's Indian society where nuclear families are on the increase inter-dependence of parents and children on emotional issues is a necessity and absence of this could lead to adolescents looking for other sources for emotional comfort which may hamper their self concept development in some cases.

Findings

- 1) Girls spend more time communicating with their parents compared to boys but the quality of communication with parents is rated as good by both boys and girls.
- 2) Adolescents in general are comfortable discussing most issues with their parents except some socially taboo issues like smoking, drinking and physical intimacy.

- 3) Adolescents are equally comfortable discussing most issues with both parents. But, youngsters are more comfortable in discussing about civic and political matters and about business more with fathers. With mothers youngsters are more comfortable discussing about personal fears and failures.
- 4) Parents also expressed that they are aiming for more open communication with their children. But, find it difficult to discuss on some sensitive matters like choice of friends and personal habits. In general parents find today's youngsters to be very understanding and mature.
- 5) Parents expressed that they were not very happy with the spending habits of their children. They felt children are brand conscious and tend to spend more on products which they as parents don't feel is worth it.
- 6) Parents also expressed their concern about the number of hours their adolescent children spend on gadgets and expressed fear on some health hazards they may encounter in the future due to excessive use of gadgets.
- 7) Parents also expressed and were accepting to some extent the eating habits of their adolescents. Though they do not wholly approve of the fast food eating habits but they have accepted it because that is how it is everywhere.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Adolescence and young adulthood is particularly stressful and traumatic stage in the life of Indian youth. During adolescence, youngsters are striving to gain independence and develop their own sense of self, while at the same time needing a strong sense of connection to parents, other family members and peers. Studies have shown that the development of autonomy and attachment during this time is not something that the youngster is doing independently. In fact this individualisation is something that the parents and adolescents are co creating. Parents are actually helping youngsters develop self identity. There is a strong correlation between parent adolescent communication and several adjustment outcomes such as self esteem, achievement orientation and well being. More specifically adolescent adjustment with their environment has been linked with a balance of positive and negative discussions with parents.

In one way, youth in India desire emancipation and liberation from family but residing in the matrix of the extended family makes it difficult for them to assert themselves and exhibit any independence in thought, action or behaviour. Social changes are occurring but arranged marriages are still the norm and dating is still not allowed. Furthermore sex and sexuality issues are not openly discussed, inter-relationship with the opposite gender are still discouraged and sex education is not

easily available. In the traditional Indian family communication between parents and children tends to be one sided. Children are expected to listen, respect and obey their parents. Generally adolescents do not share their personal concern with their parents because their will not listen and will not understand their problems.

But, on the other hand Indian family has the advantage of its heritage with its well defined value system related to social relations and prescriptions of the ideal way of life. Adolescents across all sections of the society thus have family as an anchor that supports them to cope with challenges of transitions to adulthood. Family as an institution has a very crucial role to play in influencing adolescents and this can be done better through more open communication within the family.

Negative communication is a common cause of chronic conflict. Nagging, harsh criticism or yelling are all negative ways of communicating which will ruin all channels of communication between parents and adolescents. One of the most important aspects of parent adolescent communication is trust. Parents must strive to create an atmosphere in which all family members are free to discuss whatever topics they wish to discuss. Flexibility in family communication allows the adolescent to express himself or herself. Adolescents need an opportunity for open and honest self expression. By developing and using good communication skills, sensitive issues that arise during adolescent, such as sexuality, dating, smoking and alcohol use can be discussed with greater comfort and success. In fact research has shown that adolescent who shares more openly with parents are less likely to abuse substances and are more likely to be influenced by their parents concerning sexual relationships.

Parents must make an attempt to listen more attentively to their adolescent children and with a lot of care and love. Spending quality time together on a daily basis can make communication between them more effective and easy. Parents must also allow adolescents to enjoy their privacy and not interfere into every aspect of their adolescent children. Parents must give enough freedom to their children specially to take some decisions. This will help the adolescent to believe in themselves and their capabilities more. Parents must keep up with the interests of the adolescent and know about the adolescents' choice of music, books, sports, movies and fashion. Parents must also tell their adolescent children how much they are loved and valued. Parents must demonstrate love by using physical contact that their children are comfortable with. Parents must celebrate their achievements and forgive their mistakes, listen to their problems however silly it may be. Parents must support them in their problem solving strategies. Parent must enjoy fun activities with their young children and such good feelings help immensely in developing a good rapport.

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