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Review Article

Parent-Child Communication Intentions and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour in The Assin South District, Ghana

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Abstract

Background: Most parents conceive that discussion sexual related matters are a bad practice and does not need to occur. This study investigates the parent-child communication intentions and adolescents' dating behaviour in the Assin South District, Ghana.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive design was employed with 400 participants which comprised parents age 30-59 and older adolescents age 15-19 years. Data were analysed using frequency distribution, Pearson's chi-squared test of independence and binary logistic regression.

Results: Parent-child dyad communication easiness was statistically significant related to adolescents' dating behaviour at p=0.036, (OR=2.504, 95%CI ([1.063-5.896]). Parent-child dyad do not discuss sexual health matters was statistically significant at P=0.046, (OR=0.429, 95%CI [0.187-0.985]). Parent-child dyad engage in talks for adolescents' positive social conduct was statistically significant at P=0.046, (OR=0.211, 95%CI [0.046-0.972]). Parent-child dyad engage in communication for adolescents' appropriate nurturing was also observed as statistically significant to adolescents' dating behaviour at p=0.047, (OR=0.223, 95%CI [0.051-0.978]). Parent-child dyad engage in communication to share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood among adolescents was also observed as statistically significant to adolescents' dating behaviour at p=0.030, (OR=5.988, 95%CI [1.192-30.088]).

Conclusion: Parents in Assin South District could guide adolescents to make informed decisions about dating if they (adolescents) choose to engage in or are already dating.

Keywords: adolescents; behaviours; child; communication; contents; dating; frequency; parent; parent-child dyad; predictors

Introduction

Globally, communication between parents and their children on sexual and reproductive health matters has been fractional (Edwards, Hunt Cope-Barnes, Hensel & Ott, 2018; Grossman, Jenkins & Richer, 2018; Koenig et al., 2020). Reported trends indicate very low incidences of open sexual communication between parents and children (Padilla-Walker et al., 2020; Pariera & Brody, 2017; Wilson, Jensen, Ballard & Taylor, 2022). Parents perceive it worrisome to talk about sexual and reproductive health topics such as sex, risky sexual behaviour, childbirth, condom use, infertility, and STIs (Azie, Bagrmwin, Ndanu & Aniteye, 2023) with their children. This is so due to scant knowledge, cultural beliefs, and fear of being judged as unfaithful (Letshwenyo-Maruatona & Gabaitiri, 2018). Whenever communication on sexual related matters ensues, it tends to fall short in the number of topics or occurrences (Edwards et al., 2018). Unfortunately, in Ghana, discussing sexual matters still seems to be a taboo, bad-mannered and unfitting, particularly, when it involves adolescents (Maimunah & Wibisono, 2024; Nyarko, Adentwi, Asumeng & Ahulu, 2014). Most parents conceive that discussion sexual related matters are a bad practice and does not need to occur. This awkward judgement has been developed among parents because the community lacks information about sexual issues, so the stimulus that parents get about sexual information is taboo that is unfitting to dialogue about with children (Maimunah & Wibisono, 2024). Most parents forbid talking about sexual related matters with their children because they feel embarrassed and are frightened of misleading their children to engage in dating (Amaliyah & Nuqul, 2017; Maimunah & Wibisono, 2024). Parents' reluctance to have the willingness and the intention to

propagate sexuality communication with adolescents is predicted to have an influence on the dearth of befitting and accurate sexuality information among adolescents (Maimunah & Wibisono, 2024; Motsomi, Makanjee, Basera & Nyasulu, 2016). Indeed, communication about vulnerable topics such as sex, dating and intimacy is thought to be one of the most important contributors to strong relationships (Jones, 2016). However, researchers endorse that such communication is not happening to the degree needed among this population (Wilson et al., 2022), potentially limiting relational depth and promoting sexual taboos (Jones, 2016). Hence, a trigger for increasing adolescents' dating behaviour in Ghana. It is noted that, parent–child intention to engage in sexuality communication is increasingly endorsed by researchers as a strategy for reducing adolescents' dating behaviour. A meta-analysis by Widman et al. (2015) showed that, overall, adolescents whose parents talk to them about sexuality generally exhibit safer sexual behaviours (e.g., more consistent condom use). Despite these overall trends, research and theory is unclear regarding the specific pathways (i.e., the mechanisms of change) that explain how parent–child intention to engage in sexual communication influences adolescents' dating behaviours. Parent–child intention to engage in sexuality communication can help reduce adolescents' dating behaviours. However, research and theory are less clear regarding the specific pathways by which this parent-child communication intentions (PCCI) work to reduce adolescents' dating behaviours. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the influences of PCCI on adolescents' dating behaviours in the Assin South District, Ghana by specifically examining: if the frequency of parent-child communication predicts dating behaviour among adolescents in the Assin South District; how contents of parent-child communication influence dating behaviour among adolescents in the Assin South District; the extent to which intentions behind parent-child communication impact adolescents' dating behaviour in the Assin South District; and lastly, whether the predictors of parent-child communication influence adolescents' dating behaviour in the Assin South District. The study further hypothesised that PCCI does not influence dating behaviour among adolescents.

Theoretical Framework

The study relied much on Bowen's (1978) family systems theory based on the fact that, it conceives the family as a complicated system comprised interconnected components and feedback mechanisms. This theory claims that families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation because, an individual's behaviour is caused by the interaction with other family members and the dynamics within the family system as a whole. This connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. Per the views of the founder of the theory, people solicit each other's attention, approval, and support, and they react to each other's needs, expectations, and upsets. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others (Bouchrika, 2024; Bowen Center, 2024; Davies, 2022; Lonne, 2016).

Although families differ somewhat in their degree of interdependence, it is always present to some degree. Heightened tension can intensify the processes that promote unity and teamwork, and this can lead to problems (Bowen Center, 2024). Therefore, for one to be able to understand adolescents' dating behaviour, it is imperative to investigate the family processes that include parent-child communication and the impacts it has on their thinking and behaviour. The study finds the theory useful since it helps in analysing the influences of microsystem factors on parent–child communication, as the family is clearly the child's early microsystem for learning how to communicate. The nature and quality of communication between child and parents can help influence a healthy behaviours and development of adolescents. As purport by the founder, the family is an active whole, comprised constantly changing interrelationships in which each person in the family impacts the others across generation (Segrin & Flora, 2005). The other important aspect of family systems theory is that, by focusing on power dynamics as we can better understand the rules that govern the boundaries between various dyads such as parental and sibling subsystems (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Thus, family systems theory can clarify why individuals from a family act the way they do in a given circumstance and how communication shapes the behaviour of the individual (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). Hence, the study chose to rely on this theory to look at the communication intentions between parents and children in the family and how this buffer adolescents' dating behaviours.

Conceptual Base of the Study

Based on the family systems theory, a conceptual framework was developed to ascertain how the connections among parent-child communication frequency, contents, intentions, and predictors buffer adolescents' dating behaviour (Figure 1). As Punch (2014) described, a conceptual framework is a representation of main concepts or variables and their presumed relationship with each other. Out of the countless factors which are related to parent-child communication intentions on adolescents' dating behaviour, the conceptual framework in this study focused on the factors that could be considered as most relevant to older adolescents who might be at risk of engaging in dating. Factors in literature which directly relate to PCCI such as contents, intentions, predictors as well as frequency were included in the conceptual framework.

As a starting point the conceptual framework in Figure 1 was used to show how PCCI factors (such as contents, intentions, predictors and frequency) and adolescents' dating behaviour could be related based on literature. In the conceptual framework, the most recognised three PCCI factors which might increase parents and children communication frequency (the mediator) to influence adolescents' dating behaviour are contents, intentions, and predictors were included and considered in the conceptual model as independent variables (IVs). Adolescents' dating behaviour depending on various dating attributes within the three indicators (have a date, number of partners dated and months or years of dating) was considered in the conceptual model as the dependent variable and was divided into dating, not dating, and both dating and not dating are dependent on the effects of the PCCI on children. The research questions in this study are only confirmatory. Therefore, a quantitative data was needed to help explain answers. As a result, the study adopted a quantitative method approach.

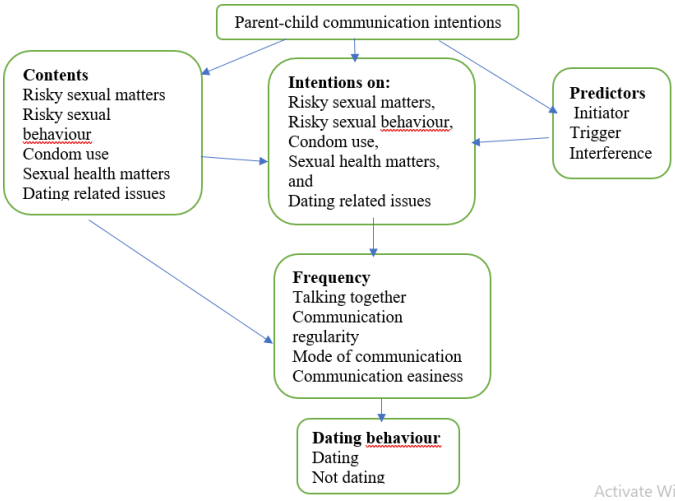

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the connections between parent-child communication intentions and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Source: Author's Construction (2024).

Methods

Study Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Assin South District (in the Central Region) of Ghana. The district was selected because it had the highest rate of adolescent pregnancies (19.6%,17.5%, & 18.5%) of births attributed to teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 years in 2015, 2016 and 2020 respectively (Ghana Health Service, 2015, 2016; Ghana News Agency, 2020; Owusu, 2021) while Awutu Senya East recorded the lowest rate of 7% pregnancies in the same region (GHS, 2016). Moreover, the Assin South district has not been spared from the global HIV and AIDS pandemic (Citi News Room, 2022; GSS, 2012). The prevalence of HIV in the district is 0.84% (Citi News Room, 2022). The statistics in the district qualify it for the study.

In the district, parents age 30-59 years and adolescents age 15-19 years were enrolled in the study. In all, 400 respondents were recruited for the study. However, after checking and cleaning the data, 354 respondents' responses with a return rate of 88.5% were used for the analysis.

Study Design and Data Source

The study was conducted cross-sectionally and lends itself to the use of descriptive survey plan. The design was used because it provides a generalisable results from a representative sample to a larger target population (Omair, 2015) which eventually, permits systematic collection of data using questionnaire (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Separate questionnaires were used to elicit similar data from parents and adolescents from the field. The research instruments used for the data collection was developed based on literature and the conceptual framework of the study. Already developed and used survey instruments were also reviewed and those deemed appropriate to the study were integrated into the formulation of the research instruments.

Sampling Procedures

A multistage sampling procedure was utilised in the study. Stage one was the random selection of Assin South District out of the 22 metropolitan, municipals and districts assemblies within the Central Region. Stage two was the simple random selection of settlements out of the twelve (12) settlements in the district to form a study site for the study. Stage three was signing of respondents to each study site (settlement) selected. Finally, in stage four, a systematic random sampling approach was employed to select the respondents from each of the selected study location for the study.

Sample Size Estimation

The sample size was estimated at 400 with the help of Cochran's (1977) formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p (1-p)}{d^2}$$

n = sample size

Confidence level set at 95% (1.96)

The p-value was set at 0.05.

z = standard normal deviation set at 1.96

d = degree of accuracy desired at 0.05

p = proportion of parents aged 30-59years and adolescents aged 15-19years was 36%.

n = 1.962 *0.36 (1─0.36)

0.052 = 354.041, approximately 400

Sample size was, therefore, estimated at 400 respondents for the study. The extra 46 respondents were added to cater for refusal, and non-responses. The selection of the respondents for the study commenced on Wednesday, 15th of July, 2020 and ended on Friday, 31st of July, 2020.

Data Quality Concerns

To guarantee data quality, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was run on the PCCI and dating behaviour (DB) data collected from the field, it appeared Cronbach's alpha rated the data as acceptable with a reliability of $\alpha = 0.63$. As noted by Griethuijsen et al. (2014), a general accepted rule is that alpha of 0.6-0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability and that data is useful. As part of guaranteeing validity of data collected from the field, effort was made to pretest the questionnaires before the actual data collection. Also, standardised data collection instruments which were used in previous PCCI, and DB survey (Lezin, Rolleri, Bean & Taylor, 2004; Manu et al., 2015; Adam, 2017) were adopted.

Variables and Measurements

Measurement of PCCI dwells on intrusiveness [parent interrupts, dominates child's conversation], use of explanation and reasoning, frequency of talks, content of talks, intention of talks, spend time talking together, share thoughts and feelings, clarity of messages about risk behaviour and values, child's comfort discussing problems with parent, openness and listening (Lezin et al., 2004). Predictors [Event-driven, suspicion of child sexual activity, child asked a question, and parent's own initiative (sex education)] (Manu et al., 2015).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place on 23rd of June, 2020 and ended on 5th of July, 2020 at the Assin South District in the Central Region of Ghana with the help of four research assistants. In the field, two sets of interviews were conducted in each house for the parent–child dyad to avoid spying and to ensure openness and truthful responses. Generally, parents were first interviewed before the child.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 was used to process the data collected from the field after a thorough cross-checked for errors and re-coding of questions that requested respondents to choose more than one option as well as the open-ended questions to ease data entry had been accomplished. The study applied frequency distribution to summarise information on: demographic data, communication contents, communication intentions, communication predictors, and frequency of communication. The Pearson's chi-squared test of independence was utilised to test the statistical hypothesis postulated in the study to either approve it or disapprove it. However, the binary logistic regression analysis was also run to identify factors that predict adolescents' dating behaviour.

Ethical Consideration

On ethical consideration, participation was made optional and participants were given the option to withdraw at any time. In the field, oral informed consent was taken from both parents and adolescents aged 18-19years while adolescents below 18years old also assented after their parents have consented on their behalf. However, because verbal informed consent was sought from the participants, it was not documented but was witnessed by the participant's parents or any elderly person who directly related to the participant. The reason why adolescents less than 18years assented was that in Ghana according to the 1992 constitution, one becomes an adult and takes decisions for him/herself after he/she has celebrated the 18th birthday. So, without that, all decisions concerning adolescents are done by their parents. Hence, they are considered minors and have not reached the legal age to decide for themselves. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. During the fieldwork, all forms of identification including respondents' names, addresses and telephone numbers were avoided. In addition, ethical approval (with ID number UCCIRB/CHLS/2020/09) to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of participants. The study participants composed of 54.8% females and 45.2% males. About half (48.6%) of the parents in the sample were between the ages of 40 and 49 years while roughly a quarter (24.9%) were in the 30-39 age group. In terms of education, only 2.3% of the parents had tertiary education compared to 44% who completed primary school. Whereas self-employment was a dominant category of employment status constituting over half (50.3%) of the total participants, the employed category was the least (11.3%). Concerning religious affiliation, Christianity dominated (81.9%) and those without any religion affiliation were 1.7%.

	Parents (n=177)	Adolescents (n=177)
Variable	**(%)**	**(%)**
Sex		
Male	45.2	45.2
Female	54.8	54.8
Age group in years		
30-39	24.9	
40-49	48.6	
50-59	26.6	
Age in years		
15		16.4
16		26.0
17		9.6
18		16.4
19		31.6
Educational level		
None	15.8	
Primary	44.1	1.1
JHS	15.3	29.4
Secondary	22.6	12.4
Tertiary	2.3	0.6
Still in school		56.5

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Almost a third (31.6%) of the adolescents were 19 years old while about 10% were 17 years old (see Table 1). More than half (56.5%) of the adolescents indicated that they were still in school. Out of the 20 parents who were identified as employed, about 5% earned more than GH¢1500.00.

Parent–Child Communication Intentions

The level of communication intentions between parents and their children on dating behaviour was assessed with 14 specific communication intention constructs. These constructs were used to ensure a comprehensive evaluation

of parent–child dyad's understanding of communication intentions about dating behaviour. Reports of both parents and children were evaluated separately.

Communication Frequency

To assess communication frequency among the participants, a global single-item (Yes/No) measure was used to ask parents whether they talk with children about dating behaviours or not and the result indicates that 83.6% of parents and 61.6% of adolescents reported that parents and children talk together. Parent-child dyad that indicated they communicate together were further asked several questions to analyse communication frequency. The questions covered mode, regularity, and easiness of communication and the results are presented in Table 2.

	Parents(n=148)	Adolescents (n=109)
Variable	**%**	**%**
Mode of communication		
Use of explanation and reasoning	7.4	11.0
Openness and listening	92.6	89.0
Communication regularity		
Often	100.0	57.8
Occasionally		42.2
Easiness of communication		
Very easy	50.0	29.4
Easy	50.0	70.6
Total	**100**	**100**

Table 2: Communication Frequency.

Source: Fieldwork, (2020).

When parents and children were asked to indicate the mode of communication, a majority of the participants (parents [92.6%] and adolescents [89.0%]) reported openness and listening (see Table 2). Assessment of communication regularity revealed that all the parents and 57.8% adolescents indicated that parent-child communication often goes on (see Table 2). The parent-child dyad was further asked to indicate whether they find it easy or difficult to communicate together and the responses show that 50.0% of parents and 70.6% of adolescents said it is easy to talk together (see Table 2). To ascertain the influences PCCI has on adolescents' dating behaviour, they were asked some specific questions regarding dating. The results are shown in Table 3.

Variable	Adolescents (%) (n=109)
Dating	
Yes	39.5
No	60.5
Total	**100.0**

Table 3: Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Source: Fieldwork, (2020).

Regarding dating, adolescents were asked to indicate if they date or not and the results showed that 60.5% adolescents do not date while 39.5% adolescents reported that they date (see Table 3). Among the 70 adolescents who were identified to have been dating, more than sixty per cent (64.3%) are dating 1-5 sexual partners, close to thirty-five per cent (34.3%) are dating at least 6-10 sexual partners while 1.4% are dating 11-15 sexual partners. Nearly ninety-six per cent (95.7%) of the adolescents have been dating for about 1-5 years whilst 4.3% started dating 6-10 months ago.

Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was conducted to analyse the relationship between communication frequency and adolescents' dating behaviour. The results are presented in Table 4. This analysis was run to test the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between communication frequency and adolescents' dating behaviour. Statistically significant relationships were not found between parent-child talk together [p=0.550], parent-child mode of communication [p=0.977] as well as communication regularity [p=0.892] and adolescents' dating behaviour. However, statistically significant relationship was found between children find it easy to talk to parents [p=0.041] and adolescents' dating behaviour.

Variable	Dating (%)	Not Dating (%)	Total n (%)	Chi-square	P-Value
Parent-child talk together				0.358	0.550
Yes	41.3	58.7	109(100.0)		
No	36.8	63.2	68(100.0)		
Mode of communication				0.001	0.977
Use of explanation and reasoning	41.7	58.3	12(100.0)		
Openness and listening	41.2	58.8	97(100.0)		
Communication regularity				0.152	0.696
Often	42.9	57.1	63(100.0)		
Occasionally	39.1	60.9	46(100.0)		
Communication easiness				4.185**	0.041

Very easy	56.3	43.8	32(100.0)		
Easy	35.1	64.9	77(100.0)		

Table 4: Relationship between Communication Frequency and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Note: Row percentages in parenthesis, Chi-square significant at (0.01) ***, (0.05) **, (0.10) *

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Binary logistic regression analysis was run to identify the various explanatory variables studied under communication frequency those that influence and those that do not influence adolescents' dating behaviour. The results are presented in Table 5.

Variable	Odds ratio	P-Value	95%CI	
Mode of communication (Use of explanation and reasoning =1.0)				
Openness and listening	1.067	0.919	0.309	3.686
Communication Easiness (Very easy =1.0)				
Easy	2.504**	0.036	1.063	5.896
Communication Regularity (Often = 1.0)				
Occasionally	1.334	0.483	0.597	2.979
Constant	**0.515**	**0.629**		

Table 5: Binary Logistic Regression Result on Communication Frequency and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Source: Field work (2020), significant at (0.05) **

It emerged in Table 5 that children that find it easy to talk with their parents was observed to be statistically significant related to adolescents' dating behaviour at p>0.036, (OR=2.504, 95%CI ([1.063-5.896]). This variable identifies adolescents to have 2.5 times more likely to engage in dating behaviour compared with adolescents that stated very easy.

Communication Contents

To answer the second research objective, I examined responses regarding communication contents which covered risky sexual matters, risky sexual behaviour, condom use, sexual health matters, and dating related issues. The results are shown in Table 6.

	Parents (n=148)	Adolescents (n=109)
Variable	**%**	**%**
Discuss risky sexual matters		
Yes	100.0	58.7
No		41.3
Discuss dating related issues		
Yes	100.0	66.1
No		33.9
Talk about risky sexual behaviour		
Yes	100.0	74.3
No		25.7
Talk about condom use		
Yes	100.0	75.2
No		24.8
Talk about sexual matters		
Yes	100.0	65.1
No		34.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 6: Communication Contents.

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Parents and children were asked to indicate whether they discuss risky sexual behaviuor together or not and the results revealed that all parents and 58.7% adolescents answered in the affirmative. On assessing talks on dating related issues, all the parents and 66.1% adolescents confirm that they talk about dating related issues (see Table 6). Regarding if parent-child dyad discusses risky sexual behaviour revealed that all parents and 74.3% adolescents responded in the affirmative. Parents and children were asked to indicate if they talk about condom use and the results indicated that all parents and 75.2% adolescents reported that they talk about condom use. In reference to discussions on sexual health matters, all parents and 65.1% adolescents answered in the affirmative (see Table 6).

Presented in Table 7 are the Pearson's Chi-square test of independence on communication contents and adolescents' dating behaviour. This analysis was run to test the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between communication contents and adolescents' dating behaviour. Statistically significant relationships were found among two of the components namely; discuss condom use [p=0.082] as well as discuss sexual health matters [p=0.030] and adolescents' dating behaviour. However, there was no statistically significant relationships found between

the other components namely; discuss risky sexual behaviour [p=0.157], discuss dating related issues [p=0.479], and talk about risky sexual behaviour [p=0.803].

Variable	Dating	Not dating	Totaln (%)	Chi-square	P-Value
Discuss risky sexual matters				1.999	0.157
Yes	46.9	53.1	64(100.0)		
No	33.3	66.7	45(100.0)		
Discuss dating related issues				0.502	0.479
Yes	38.9	61.1	72(100.0)		
No	45.9	54.1	37(100.0)		
Talk about risky sexual behaviour				0.062	0.803
Yes	42.0	58.0	81(100.0)		
No	39.3	60.7	28(100.0)		
Discuss condom use				3.015*	0.082
Yes	36.6	63.4	82(100.0)		
No	55.6	44.4	27(100.0)		
Discuss sexual health matters				4.703**	0.030
Yes	33.8	66.2	71(100.0)		
No	55.3	44.7	38(100.0)		

Table 7: Relationship between Communication Contents and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Note: Row percentages in parenthesis, Chi-square significant at (0.01)***, (0.05)**, (0.10)* Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Table 8 presents results on binary logistic regression on the independent variables studied under communication contents. This analysis was run to ascertain among the explanatory factors those that predict and those that do not predict adolescents' dating behaviour.

Variable	Odds ratio	P-Value	95% CI	
Discuss risky sexual behaviour (yes =1.0)				
No	1.646	0.237	0.720	3.762
Discuss dating related issues (yes =1.0)				
No	0.766	0.543	0.323	1.812
Talk about risky sexual behaviour (yes =1.0)				
No	1.316	0.566	0.516	3.357
Discuss condom use (yes =1.0)				
No	0.490	0.130	0.194	1.234
Discuss sexual health matters (yes =1.0)				
No	0.429**	0.046	0.187	0.985

Table 8: Binary Logistic Regression Result on Communication Contents and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Source: Field work (2020), significant at (0.05)**

It emerged in Table 8 that, children that reported that they do not discuss sexual health matters together with their parents was statistically significant at P<0.046, (OR=0.429, 95%CI [0.187-0.985]). The variable revealed adolescents to have 0.57 times or 57 per cent times less likely to engage in dating behaviour relatively to the adolescents that intimated that they do discuss sexual health matters with their parents. Moreover, the rest of the variables studied under parent-child communication contents and adolescents' dating behaviour were not statistically significant which could be as a result of chance (see Table 8).

Communication Intentions

To assess the communication intentions among parents and children on adolescents' dating behaviour, several questions were asked to collect data from participants on the communication intentions. The questions span through communication aims on: risky sexual matters, risky sexual behaviour, condom use, sexual health matters, and dating related issues. The results are presented in Table 9.

Variable	Parents (n=148)	Adolescents (n=109)
Why discuss risky sexual matters		
For behavioural boundaries	25.7	24.8
For positive social conduct	31.8	29.4
For appropriate nurturing	22.3	27.5
For building child's charisma	20.3	18.3
Why discuss dating behaviour Spend talking together, and child's comfort discussing problems with parents	62.8	75.2

Share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood	24.3	15.6
Clarity of messages about risky sexual behaviours and values	12.8	9.2
Why discuss risky sexual behaviour		
Increase knowledge and delay sexual debut	54.1	78.9
Self-efficacy and sexual negotiation skills	26.4	14.7
Better interpersonal communication skills	19.6	6.4
Why discuss condom use		
For protection against STIs	75.0	77.1
For protection against unintended pregnancy	25.0	22.9
Why discuss sexual health matters		
Rejecting sexual permitting attitudes and risk taking	88.5	56.0
Talk to their partner about protective sex and safer sexual negotiation skills	11.5	0.9
Delay sexual debut		43.1

Table 9: Communication Intentions.

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Regarding communication intentions, parents were asked to indicate their intention behind communicating with adolescents on risky sexual matters and the results revealed that 31.8% of parents and 29.4% of adolescents reported that, it is for positive social conduct while 20.3% of parents and 18.3% of adolescents said it is for building child's charisma (see Table 9). With respect to the intention behind communication on dating behaviour, majority of the participants (parents 62.8% and adolescents 75.2%) reported spending talking together and child's comfort discussing problems with parents while 12.8% parents and 9.2% adolescents cited clarity of messages about risky sexual behaviour (see Table 9).

Parents were further asked to indicate their intention behind the discussion of risky sexual behaviour with adolescents and the responses revealed that 54.1% of parents and 78.9% of adolescents said it is to increase adolescents' knowledge of the adverse effects on risky sexual behaviour and also help adolescents to delay sexual debut whilst, 19.6% of parents and 6.4% of adolescents indicated that it is for the establishment of better interpersonal communication skills (see Table 9).

In relation to parents' intention to discuss condom use among adolescents, majority of the participants (parents 75.0% and adolescents 77.1%) said that it is for protection against STIs. When parents were asked to indicate their intention behind the discussions on sexual health matters, 88.5% of parents and 56.0% of adolescents said that it was to help adolescents reject sexual permitting attitudes and sexual risk taking while 43.1% adolescents reported delay sexual debut (see Table 9).

Pearson's Chi-square test of independence was applied to determine the relationship between communication intentions and adolescents' dating behaviour. This analysis was carried out to test the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between communication intentions and adolescents' dating behaviour. The results are presented in Table 10. Statistically significant relationships were found among two of the variables namely; why parents talk about risky sexual matters with adolescents [p=0.063] as well as why parents and children discuss dating related issues [p=0.002] and adolescents' dating behaviour. However, there was no statistically significant relationships found between the other variables namely; why parents and children discuss risky sexual behaviour [p=0.945], why parents and children discuss condom use [p=0.215], as well as why parents and children discuss sexual health matters [p=0.487] and adolescents' risky sexual behaviour.

Variable	Dating	Not Dating	Total n (%)	Chi-square	p-value
Why discuss risky sexual matters				7.280*	0.063
For behavioural boundaries	48.1	51.9	27(100.0)		
For positive social conduct	50.0	50.0	32(100.0)		
For appropriate nurturing	43.3	56.7	30(100.0)		
For building child's charisma	15.0	85.0	20(100.0)		
Why discuss dating related issues				12.361***	0.002
Spend talking together, and child's comfort discussing problems with parents	42.7	57.3	82(100.0)		
Share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood	11.8	88.2	17(100.0)		
Clarity of messages about risky sexual behaviours and values	80.0	20.0	10(100.0)		
Why discuss risky sexual behaviour				0.113	0.945
Increase knowledge and delay sexual debut	41.9	58.1	86(100.0)		
Self-efficacy and sexual negotiation skills	37.5	62.5	16(100.0)		

Better interpersonal communication skills	42.9	57.1	7(100.0)		
Why discuss condom use				1.537	0.215
For protection against STIs	38.1	61.9	84(100.0)		
For protection against unintended pregnancy	52.0	48.0	25(100.0)		
Why discuss sexual health matters				1.439	0.487
Rejecting sexual permitting attitudes and risk taking	41.0	59.0	61(100.0)		
Talk to their partner about protective sex and safer sexual negotiation skills	100.0	0	1(100.0)		
Delay sexual debut	40.4	59.6	47(100.0)		

Table 10: Relationship between Communication Intentions and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Note: Row percentages in parenthesis, Chi-square significant at (0.01)***, (0.10)**, (0.05)*

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Further analysis was run using the binary logistic regression to determine how the respective categories of the explanatory factors under communication intentions drive adolescents' dating behaviour. The results are presented in Table 11.

Variable	Odds ratio	p-Value	95%CI	
Why discussing risky sexual matters (For behavioural boundaries =1.0)				
For positive social conduct	0.211**	0.046	0.046	0.972
For appropriate nurturing	0.223**	0.047	0.051	0.978
For building child's charisma	0.280	0.091	0.064	1.225
Why discussing dating behaviour (Spend talking together, and child's comfort discussing problems with parents=1.0)				
Share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood	5.988**	0.030	1.192	30.088
Clarity of messages about risky sexual behaviours and values	0.218	0.070	0.042	1.133
Why discussing risky sexual behaviour (Increase knowledge and delay sexual debut=1.0)				
Self-efficacy and sexual negotiation skills	1.813	0.335	0.541	6.072
Better interpersonal communication skills	0.695	0.692	0.115	4.194

Table 11: Binary Logistic Results on Communication Intentions and Adolescents' Dating Behaviour.

Source: Fieldwork (2020), Chi-square significant at (0.05) **

It emerged in Table 11 that, for positive social conduct was statistically significant at P<0.046, (OR=0.211, 95%CI [0.046-0.972]). This variable revealed that adolescents that reported for positive social conduct are 0.79 times or 79 per cent times less likely to engage in dating behaviuor relatively to adolescents that intimated for behavioural boundaries. Nonetheless, for appropriate nurturing was also observed as statistically significant to adolescents' dating behaviour at p>0.047, (OR=0.223, 95%CI [0.051-0.978]). This identifies adolescents to have 0.78 times or 78 per cent times less likely to engage in dating behaviour compared with adolescents that stated for behavioural boundaries (see Table 11).

Share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood was also observed as statistically significant to adolescents' dating behaviour at p>0.030, (OR=5.988, 95%CI [1.192-30.088]). This classifies adolescents to have 6 times more likely to engage in dating behaviour compared with adolescents that stated spend talking together, and child's comfort discussing problems with parents (see Table 11). Moreover, the rest of the variables studied under communication intentions and adolescents' dating behaviour were not statistically significant which could be as a result of chance.

Communication Predictors

To analyse communication predictors, participants were asked some questions which covered communication initiator, communication trigger, and communication interference. The results obtained are presented in Table 12.

Variable	Parents (n=148)	Adolescents (n=109)
Is it a parent who initiates the talk		
Yes	100.0	19.3
No		80.7
Communication trigger		
Event driven, child asked a question and suspicion of child sexual activity	100.0	

Own initiative		100.0
Communication interference		
Adopting a cooperative orientation toward mutual communication	74.3	
Perceived self-efficacy of communication	3.4	2.8
Situational constraints	4.7	
Fear of encouraging sexual activity	3.4	
Embarrassment (within the category of necessary knowledge and skills)	14.2	97.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 12: Communication Predictors.

Source: Fieldwork (2020).

Regarding who initiates the communication on dating behaviour, all the parents and 19.3% adolescents cited that it is parents while 80.7% of the adolescents intimated that it is not parents. Whereas all the parents reported event driven, child asked a question and suspicious of child sexual activity as the predictors of communication, all the adolescents also cited their own initiative as the predictor of the communication on dating behaviour (see Table 12). Assessment of communication interference revealed that about 74.3% of parents indicated adopting a cooperative orientation toward mutual communication while child report showed that 97.2% children reported embarrassment (within the category of necessary knowledge).

Discussion

The study focused on understanding the influences of parent-child communication intentions on adolescents' dating behaviour. Therefore, the discussion is depended on the literature review, conceptual base of the study as well as the various selected variables studied under the dimensions of communication intentions. Namely: communication frequency, communication contents, communication intentions, and communication predictors.

Communication Frequency

On assessing the impacts of communication frequency on adolescents' dating behaviour unearthed that higher proportion of parents and children in the Assin South District communicate together about dating related issues. Both parent's and child's data indicate that overwhelming proportion of parents and adolescents consider openness and listening as their mode of communication. Both data revealed that this communication among parents and children goes on often with ease. The regular and easy talks, both parents and children have about dating related issues with openness and listing been the mode of communication signifies that parents and children fare better in the family. When parents adopt the habit of communicating with adolescents on dating related issues with openness and listening attitude makes adolescents have trust and comfort in them to also share their thoughts and feelings on dating matters bothering them for redress. When this happens, it goes a long way to equip adolescents to stay clear from dating prompts attitudes. This finding is in line with Vongsavanh, Lan and Sychareun's (2020) study that when parents have good listening skills, they will most likely motivate sons and daughters to talk to them on dating related issues.

The study revealed a statistically significant relationship between communication frequency and adolescents' dating behaviour, therefore, the null hypothesis was not confirmed. The inference of the result is that most parents in the Assin South District are aware that regular parent-child dyad talks is a key factor that influences the effectiveness of adolescents' self-efficacy to disassociate with peers that could feed them with negative information regarding dating related issues. Moreover, it could be that parents and children are aware that the continuous exchange of information among them in the family on dating related issues could address problems or obstacles adolescents might be going through promptly. This finding corroborates to Cabral and Pinto's (2023) study that perhaps frequent sexual health communication enhance perceived social support, which subsequently reduces negative views of sex or increases self-efficacy.

The binary logistic regression analysis on communication frequency revealed relationship between child finds it easy to talk with parents and adolescents' dating behaviour. This relationship had shown that when a child finds it easy to talk with their parents concerning dating related issues, it goes a long way to increase their odds of dating behaviour. This finding confirms Hurst et al.'s (2022) study that parent-child communication about sex is associated with youth's sexual risk attitudes.

Communication Contents

As the study attempts to understand the influences of communication contents on adolescents' dating behaviour revealed that parents discuss risky sexual matters, dating related issues, risky sexual behaviour, condom use as well as sexual health matters with their children. This confirms the assertion that parents are aware that if they fail to discuss dating related issues with their children, it might lead them sourcing information on dating issues from peers which could lead them to catastrophe. It could also mean that parents want to help nurture their children in a way that will help them know all that they need so that, if they accidentally find themselves in dating, they will be able to overcome all unanticipated happenings in it. This finding confirms Manu et al.'s (2015) study that parents had some point in time discussed sexual and reproductive health issues with their children.

The study found a statistically significant relationship between communication contents and adolescents' dating behaviour, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding implies that, parents are with the mindset that the nature and quality of communication between child and parents within the family can help influence a healthy behaviour development among adolescents. Hence, could be a trigger to why parents talk about dating related issues with adolescents in the Assin South District. This finding affirms a study by Pariera and Brody (2017) that open and positive communication about sex from parents is believed to have a significant impact on children's perceptions and comfort regarding sexual topics.

The binary logistic regression analysis on communication contents revealed relationship between parents do not discuss sexual health matters with children and adolescents' dating behaviour. This relationship has indicated that when parents fail to make conscious effort to discuss sexual health matters with adolescents goes a long way to reduce their odds of engagement in dating behaviours. This finding corroborates to a study by Bushaija, Sunday, Asingizwe, Olayo and Abong'o (2013) that parents do not discuss sexual matters with the adolescents due to socio-demographic, cultural, individual and socio-environmental factors/barriers.

Communications Intentions

The assessment of communication intentions revealed that parent-child dyad does have similar intentions about the sex topics (risky sexual matters, risky sexual behaviour, condom use, sexual health matters, and dating related issues) they discuss. The reason for this finding could be that parents have it as an addendum to utter a suspicious sexual activity behaviour about their children and that wants them know all that they do not know about sexuality and its related issues. Mostly, these talks might be accompanied by vague warnings. Moreover, parents might think that having talks with children can positively affects the sexual outcomes. This finding confirms a study by Pariera and Brody (2021) that parents who identify their sons as gay or bisexual talked about more sex-related topics than parents of sons who identify their sons as straight. A statistically significant relationship was found between communication intentions and adolescents' dating behaviour, therefore, the null hypothesis was disapproved. This finding implies parent-child talks intentions about sexual related matters is associated with myriad positive sex-related outcomes for young people. It could be that parents have identified their talk intentions with adolescents on sexuality communication be a protective factor for adolescent sexual and reproductive health, including HIV infection. The binary logistic regression analysis on communication intentions revealed relationship between for positive social conduct and adolescents' dating behaviour. This finding has indicated that parents are aware that if they have good intentions to engage their children in communication, it might go a long away to help shape their life in the family. Parents might feel much pleased if they have their children well behaved and courteous. Again, the association found between for appropriate nurturing and adolescents' dating behaviour has shown that parents might expect their children to exhibit good behaviour so that people that matter in the life of children could say these children have been nurtured well. Moreover, the association between share thoughts, feelings and ensure stable relations during adulthood and adolescents' dating behaviour had open revealed that parents might be responsive to adolescents and that they do not want them to source information about dating related issues from peers or unreliable sources which can have debilitating effects on their lives and that, they do all they could to make adolescents share with them their thoughts and feelings and any other matter bothering them for redress.

Communication Predictors

As the study tries to ascertain among parent-child dyad who initiates communication on dating behaviour in the family revealed that parents are the initiators of the communication from parents view point. Parents were able to begin the communication on dating behaviour as a result of event driven, child asked a question and suspicion of child sexual activity. This finding is in line with a study by Maina, Ushie and Kabiru (2020) that communication was often reactive, sporadic, parent-driven, and authoritative, triggered by events happening in an adolescent's life or within their contexts. From child's view point embarrassment (within the category of necessary knowledge and skills) was the major condition that could interfere the communication. Parents ability to initiate dating behaviour talks with children could be that they were on alert and equal to the task that they will not lead their children astray which was while when they suspect any sexual activity among children, they try to engage them in dating behaviour talks to help them make informed decision in life. It could also mean that the parents have time to talk with children. Children on the other hand intimated embarrassment during such discussions could probably signifies that they have been witnessing it any time they engage in such talks.

Parents and children have exhibited a comprehensive knowledge about PCCI. It represents the cross-sectional perspective of parent-child dyad. It also sought to gain a holistic view of parent-child communication intentions at Assin South District, Ghana attempting to identify which of the parent-child communication dimensions such as communication frequency, communication contents, communication intentions and communication predictors exert much influence on adolescents' dating behaviour. A family systems theory was reviewed which served as a justification and foundation to the purposes of the study.

Three out of the four null hypotheses suggesting statistically significant relationships between communication frequency, communication contents as well as communication intentions, and adolescents' dating behaviour were disapproved. Association was not found between communication predictors and adolescents' dating behaviour therefore the null hypothesis was accepted. Parents in Assin South District could guide adolescents to make informed decisions about dating if they (adolescents) choose to engage in or are already dating.

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Declaration

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval (with ID number UCCIRB/CHLS/2020/09) to carry out the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Consent to participate in the Study

In the field, before a participant could take part in the study, a verbal consent was sought.

Consent to Publish

Participants were informed that the study was strictly academic and that the results would be published for the purposes of contributing to building academic literature.

Competing Interests

No competing interest existed.

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Availability of Data and Materials

The data is only available to the author hence it was a primary data.

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