

Mother-Adolescent Daughter Communication about Sex: Integrative Review

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Abstract

As sexual issues are taboo, it is considered inappropriate to discuss them directly and openly, especially communication about sex between mothers and daughters. Therefore, it is necessary to learn how communication between mothers and daughter about sexual topics can be improved to increase safe sexual behaviors. The purpose of this study is to understand the communication about sex between mothers and their adolescent daughters by conducting an integrative review of qualitative studies. An integrative review of qualitative research studies from 2000 to 2017 was undertaken. Systematic literature searches were carried out on electronic databases for journal articles and doctoral dissertations with full text focusing on mother-adolescent daughter communication about sex. Data was synthesized using thematic analysis. Seven qualitative articles were included in the synthesis, and five recurring themes were identified: 1) Mothers' attitudes towards talking about sex with daughters 2) Feelings of daughters towards sexual communication with mothers 3) The first-time mother starting to talk about sex with her daughter 4) Contents of sexual communication and 5) Successfulness of communication. Results suggest future research in developing programs to provide communication about sexual matters between mothers and their daughters effectively, including consideration of different cultures and social contexts, is necessary.

Keywords : mother-daughter communication, communication about sex, integrative review

Pre-marital sex is associated with negative and positive consequences. Sex in adolescents has more negative than positive consequences. If adolescents fail to use birth control, adolescents become pregnant, which increased the rates of unintended pregnancy, as well as an increased risk of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).^{1,2} Results from previous studies reveal that most parents tend to talk with their adolescents only about certain aspects of physical and reproductive development, such as menstruation and nocturnal emissions; however, discussion about other sexually related issues is limited. According to the study, they believe that talking about these issues will encourage sexual activity. They also believe that their children are too young, and need to concentrate on their studies, therefore adolescents are expected to delay sexual involvement, and they are encouraged to wait for the 'right time,' or until they are mature enough. Moreover, parents' lack of confidence, lack of communication skills and embarrassment are frequently cited as barriers inhibiting parents from talking openly about sexual issues with their children.²⁻⁴ These problems of discussion about sexual matters with parents are related to risky sexual behaviors among adolescents.

Traditionally in Thailand, it is considered inappropriate to discuss sexual issues openly and directly. Consequently, adolescents may not be comfortable in speaking about sex with their parents and may rely on other sources of information regarding sexuality, such as the internet, media, friends, books and magazines. Often adolescents draw misunderstandings from these sources.⁵ These

misunderstandings are a barrier to preventing negative consequences of sexual activity in adolescents. Sex education should not be limited only to school, the family also has a role to play. For the development of social skills that can be effective in the avoidance of negative outcomes and the reduction of dangerous sexual behaviors by adolescents, sexual education can be extremely helpful.⁶ In most cases, adolescents do not feel at ease about talking to their parents about sex-related topics. Particularly among female adolescents, the evidence makes it apparent that mothers are the primary influence in the lives of daughters. Mothers are much more likely than fathers to have frank discussions about sex and wellbeing with their adolescent daughters.^{7,8} Increased risk of negative sexual behaviors and activity among adolescent females can be directly linked to the lack of communication between mothers and daughters about sex. Therefore, mothers should advise their daughters on proper sexual expression to prevent sexual abuse, raise self-esteem and develop negotiating skills. Teaching about sexuality at this point should be undertaken to help daughters better understand female sexuality, delay sexual initiation and prevent other negative consequences of sexual activity in female adolescents.

The expected outcome for effective information concerning these aspects can be used by qualitative research, which can also create intervention programs. Certainly, integration of the findings from qualitative studies is required so as to notify policy making.⁹

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the communication about sex between mothers and their adolescent daughters by conducting an integrative review of qualitative studies. Our specific goals were to identify relevant studies; synthesize and identify common themes across studies; and inform an effective communication program about sex education for adolescent women.

Methodology

Systematic literature searches were carried out on electronic databases: CINAHL; MEDLINE; PubMed database; and the Cochrane library for journal articles and doctoral dissertations with full text, using key terms including “mother-daughter communication”, “mothers and their adolescent daughter’s communication”, “communication about sex”, and “sexual communication”. All databases were searched to identify qualitative studies published between 2000 and 2017. The following inclusion criteria were applied: 1) Primary source with full text, 2) Involved discipline of nursing, 3) Identified “Mother-adolescent daughter communication about sexuality” within the title or context of the abstract, 4) came from qualitative studies, 5) be published in English and 6) be published between 2000 to 2017. The screening and selection process is illustrated in Figure 1. Articles meeting criteria were reviewed in their entirety. Data was synthesized using thematic analysis.

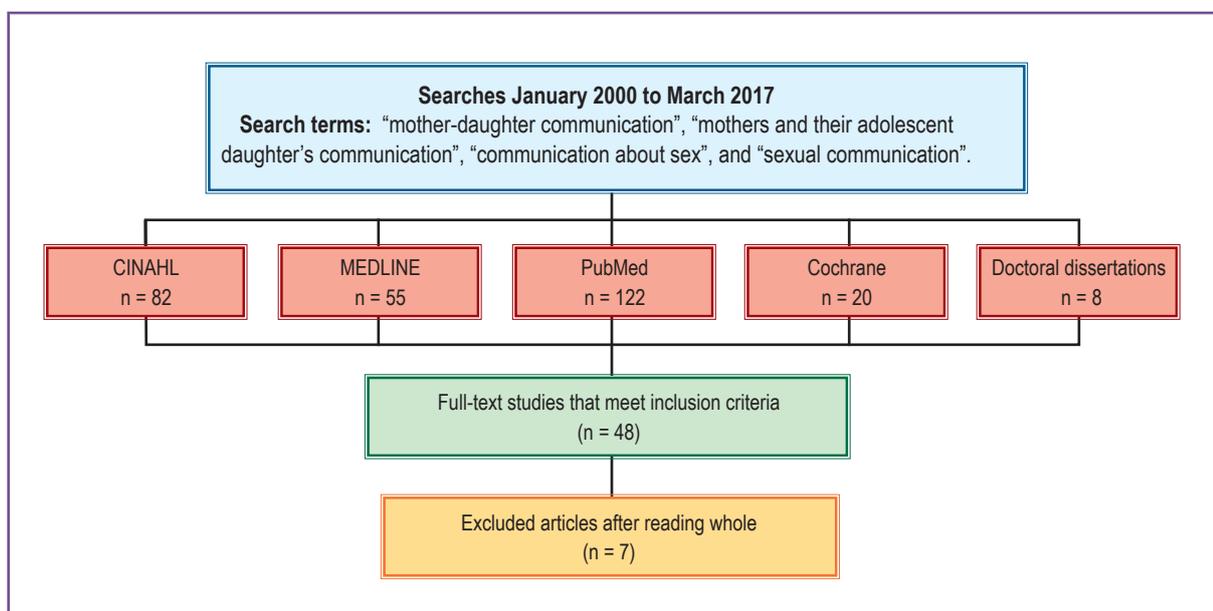


Figure 1: The screening process of systematic literature search.

Results

A total of seven studies were included in the review. Key characteristics of the seven studies in integrative review are shown in Table 1. There have been many studies about communication about sex between mothers and their

adolescent daughters in a variety of countries and each study used a different collection method, such as: Focus groups, Participatory Action Research, Semi-structured interviews, and In-depth interviews.

Table 1: List of included articles

No.	Author/ year	Title	Setting	Sample / details	Data collection	Aims
1	Aronowit and Agbeshie (2012)	Nature of communication: Voices of 11–14-year-old African-American girls and their mothers in regards to talking about sex.	USA	42 mother-daughter dyads (daughters: ages 11–14)	Focus groups and Participatory Action Research.	To explore what African-American mothers say to their daughters about sex, in what context the discussions occur, and how the daughters respond to their mothers' messages.
2	Kody (2008)	Mothers' and adolescent daughters' perceptions of communication about sex	USA	15 Mothers and 15 daughters from a major Midwestern metropolitan.	Semi-structured interviews.	To examine mothers' and adolescent daughters' perceptions of their communication about sex.
3	Noone and Young (2010)	Rural mothers' experiences and perceptions of their role in pregnancy prevention for their adolescent daughters.	USA	30 mothers of adolescent females.	Semi-structured interviews.	To explore rural mothers' experience and perceptions of their role in talking with daughters about pregnancy prevention.
4	O'Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, and Watkins (2001)	Mother-daughter communication about sex among urban African American and Latino families.	USA	72 African American and Latina mothers and 72 daughters representing two age groups (6-9 and 10-13).	Focus groups.	To examine social cognitions about sexuality among urban girls, 72 African American and Latina mothers and 72 daughters representing two age groups (6-9 and 10-13) participated in focus group sessions.
5	Shams, Mousavizadeh, and Majdpour (2017)	Mothers' views about sexual health education for their adolescent daughters: a qualitative study	Iran	28 mothers with daughters aged 12–18 were conducted.	In-depth interviews, Focus groups.	To explore mothers' perspectives regarding sexual health education for their adolescent daughters.
6	Thongpat (2006)	Thai mothers and their adolescent daughters' communication about sexuality.	Thailand	84 participants (mothers and daughters).	Focus groups.	To explore the timing, topics, barriers and facilitators in communication about sexuality between Thai mothers and their adolescent daughters.
7	Velcoff (2010)	Mother and daughter communication about sexual health in rural Kenya	Kenya	19 mother-daughter dyads (daughters aged 15 to 19 years).	In-depth interviews.	To better understand mother-daughter communication about sexual health in rural Kenya and its role in sexual risk reduction.

Table 2 demonstrates typical statements from primary studies were categorized by themes and concepts. Five themes emerged from these studies: 1) Mothers' attitudes towards talking about sex with their daughters, 2) Feelings of daughters towards sexual communication with mothers, 3) The first time to talk, 4) Contents of sexual communication, 5) Successfulness of communication. These themes include details as follows:

Theme1, "Mothers' attitudes towards talking about sex with daughters", consisting of 6 concepts: A daughter should have no secrets, Discomfort to talk, Fear, Necessary topic, Lack of sexual communication skills, and Lack of time. Theme 2, "Feelings of daughters towards sexual communication with

mothers" consisted of 3 concepts: Discomfort to talk, Negative emotions, and Necessary topic. Theme 3, "The first-time mother starting to talk about sex with her daughter" consisted of 3 concepts: Started puberty, Daughter interested in boys, and Right Opportunity. Theme 4, "Contents of sexual communication" consisted of 2 concepts: Bad consequences when having sex and Avoid all sexual contact/abstinence. Finally, theme 5, "Successfulness of communication" consisted of 5 concepts: Strong relationship, Mothers' knowledge, Comfort to talk, Privacy, and Respect for cultural and religious beliefs.

Table 2: Typical statements by themes

Theme	Concept	Statement
1. Mothers' attitudes towards talking about sex with daughters	1.1 A daughter should have no secrets	Mother said: "My daughter would definitely tell me ... there are no secrets with that." Another mom said, "She tells me everything I need to know when I ask her". ¹⁰
	1.2 Discomfort to talk	Mother said: "It's still a little bit of a comfort level thing. I have all the knowledge. It's not a knowledge-based thing at all. I don't know – time, privacy, willingness to do it, and for her once to hear it. I suppose it's definitely difficult to bring up the subject... You know, I don't want to make her uncomfortable or me uncomfortable, so that's kind of a whole bag, but I know I should do it". ¹¹ Mother said: "I am ashamed to say something about such issues to my daughter. My daughter also does not ask me because she does not feel comfortable with me". ⁴
	1.3 Fear	Mother said: "My biggest fear is that she would not advocate for herself and not be able to say no, not be able to recognize when a situation becomes bad and be able to get out of it. Sex is good and it's natural, but, unfortunately, in my perception, there's some bad too. It's not always a positive experience, depending on how it happens. It's hard to know how much of that to burden her with. I want her to know and be informed, so she doesn't let anything happen to her that she can control. It's just recognizing that she's growing up and sometimes it's hard to recognize that it's time to start mixing in more of the cautions or the negative side of things". ¹¹
	1.4 Necessary topic	Mother said: "Girls need to know everything. We had a fanatic family and received no training in sexual issues from our mother. But, nowadays the relationships of boys and girls are quite different, and girls may be quickly and easily deceived by boys. So, at least they have to be careful not to be deceived, receive emotional trauma, or get pregnant". ⁴ Mother said: "I think I teach my daughter because she is now 14-15 years old. She is still naive about sex. If we teach her now, she still listens to us. It's good for her to learn from us [mothers]. If we waited until she is 19-20 years old, at that time it may be too late to teach her. She may already know about it and has her own thoughts like an adult. So, if we don't teach her when she is young, she may make a mistake". ¹²
	1.5 Lack of sexual communication skills	Mother said: "My daughter needs to trust me and ask me about the sexuality issues. But, I don't know how I can listen to her, and speak about her concerns". ⁴
	1.6 Lack of time	Mother said: "I think time sometimes is an issue. She's very busy. She likes to be busy and schedules out her time. By the time she comes home, it's late at night and the last thing you want to do is have her thinking about this before she goes to sleep". ¹¹
2. Feelings of daughters towards sexual communication with mothers	2.1 Discomfort to talk	Daughter said: "I feel kind of nervous about asking her anything, because I feel like if I ask her about something she'll assume. Like if I ask her something she'll assume I'm doing something, not just because I'm curious. So, it's kind of weird. [Just] Because I'm asking about something, [she assumes] I'm planning on doing it, or I have been doing it, or I have done it, and stuff". ¹¹ Daughter said: "It's kind of different because with other things I'm more confident, but with sex it's a little more intimidating. But then I don't feel too scared that I can't talk about it. Like I can still talk about it with her". ¹¹ Daughter said: "Yeah, sometimes it is difficult. But when you're talking to your friends, it is not so difficult. Like when you're talking to your mom because you know you cannot just ask any questions to her. Yeah, but a friend you can ask anything to her". ¹³
	2.2 Negative emotions	Daughter said: ". . . you walk out of the house and go to school, don't say nothing' to her, she doesn't say nothing' to you. You don't communicate." "Kids will try to do the opposite [of what parents want], they don't like being told what to do". ¹⁰

Theme	Concept	Statement
	2.3 Necessary topic	Daughter said: "Because she knows how to save my life. I have a problem, but the problem is not my own. And it is about my friend and how to take her as your daughter. Because you know normally here, you have to help her. Now, as you know, it was difficult in a part, but you have to help her. Because if you don't help the girl, she is going to be in trouble". ¹³
3. The first-time mother starts to talk about sex with her daughter	3.1 Started puberty	Mother said: "I have to prepare her 'cause every day she's growing up. She's developing. I notice she's developed pubic hair at the age of 10; her bust was.... I said, "Hey! The change is gonna come soon." And so, I used to send her for the napkin, and she used to say, "What is it for?" and I used to explain it to her". ¹⁴ Mother said: "I told her since she had not had a period. I told her what the period looked like; it is blood that comes out from the vagina; if she has it, don't be scared, let me know". ¹² Mother said: "About menstruation I taught [daughter] a long time ago. At that time, she was in elementary school. She told me that her classmates had period, and she asked me what menstruation was; she told me she didn't want it. She was scared. She asked me to explain to her, so I discussed with her". ¹²
	3.2 Daughter interested in boys	Mother said: "Well, my daughter is 12 years old. I notice she already had several boys interested in her, you see? She's never told me, but I notice it. I know one of the boys. He comes to my house since he feels at home. But from this trust is where you find danger. So, I advise her, "Don't lose control because he won't be the first and only boy interested in you. You'll have many, many boyfriends. So, don't go crazy on me. He won't be the first and only". ¹⁴
	3.3 Right Opportunity	Mother said: "Well, my discussion with my daughter about sex has been a progress. When she was small, we took it one level. I taught her, you know, all about my body, you know, where did I come from? And so that's what she needed to know then, and then each year we added more and more". ¹⁴ Mother said: "Sometimes when we chat, my mother also taught me. When we were watching TV together, we would discuss about news that related to teens or women. Mother would tell me that women had to be really careful. Don't travel alone". ¹²
4. Contents of sexual communication	4.1 Bad consequences when having sex	Mother said: "A boy tells her how much he really likes her and, in return, she likes him. Then, she gets pregnant, and he says, "I'll never leave you. I love you." But after they have sex, he tells her, "I'll be right back, honey. I promise I'll be back. I'll never leave you." But he never comes back and leaves her all by herself to care for their child. And to survive, she has to rely on Welfare and all that stuff". ¹⁴ Daughter said: "She told me that sexual intercourse was real dangerous and [about] AIDS and HIV. She told me that. I have not had sex with a boy. It is very harmful and how maybe he [will] make me pregnant and then after while lose me or can transmit a disease to me". ¹³
	4.2 Avoid all sexual contact/abstinence	Mother said: "Your father shouldn't even touch you. If he does, you should come and tell me." I give my daughters my full trust to be open with me. I tell her, "No one should be touching you. No one. You can talk to boys to be polite, but no one can touch you. If they do, tell me immediately". ¹⁴ Daughter said: "She usually talks about the things you can't [do]. When you not married, it's not good. So now we are small, so we have to wait for our time. And God is going to give us the good husband so that now you can get married, it is okay. But for now, it is not good. Yeah, because she usually tells us to abstain until marriage. Because you know, if you fornicate it will bring you many problems". ¹³
5. Successfulness of communication	5.1 Strong relationship	Mother said: "I do think we have a good relationship. She called me at work one day after school, and she was very upset about what the kids were saying about her best

Theme	Concept	Statement
		friend. And she said, 'Should I call her and tell her what the kids are saying?' I said, 'No, don't do that. Let's talk about it when I get home.' She was, 'Okay, I just needed to know what to do.' So, she, I think, comes to me...when she is crying, she comes to me when she's happy. So, I think it's a good relationship, fortunately" ¹¹ Daughter said: "And we went, we sat, we talked...it was hard. It was hard, but I think that's when I started to know she's not just my mom she is my friend. She didn't go, "Augh, you were lying!" She very understood" ¹³
	5.2 Mothers' knowledge	Daughter said: "Yeah, about sexuality. I ask her some questions because you know she had all the difficulties that I've had...she was once there. So, they are just like the same struggles, or the sense of difficulties that I do. So, in every act about sexuality, I do talk with my mom" ¹³
	5.3 Comfort to talk	Daughter said: "Her not getting flinch about certain things and her just being able to ask me any question that she wants and thinks about, and her being totally comfortable with the situation and talking to me. Me being able to be totally honest about everything and not having it scare her or make her look at me differently. That would be it" ¹¹
	5.4 Privacy	Mother said: "Privacy would be good. That's what I'm going to try to do anyway this summer. I tried to talk to the two girls together last summer and have a major discussion. I thought we'd get all the books out and have this big deal. It didn't work. They just laughed, and it didn't work" ¹¹
	5.5 Respect for cultural and religious belief	Daughter said: "My culture, what it does it's very positive on us because it's what tells us is about marriage. It is good because my culture says sex before marriage is bad. So, what I chose is exactly what my culture says. I think the fact that, our culture is religious...You choose to abstain because [if] you get a certain disease, you might use protection to reduce the risk of disease. But I think that when you know that according to your faith that it's wrong to have sex before marriage. It doesn't say, "You can sex with a condom. It's all right, it's okay." It says no sex at all before marriage. I think that has helped a lot to keep me in check. Because, I'm Christian. I try to do what's right. I know that has really helped me remain abstinent" ¹³ Daughter said: "I would love to have been talked to by my mother. And I love my mom dearly . . . but I think those were things that weren't talked about then that much. I would have loved my mother to have said to me, "what the heck do you think you're doing?" ¹⁵

Discussion

The findings provide insight into the important roles that mothers play, a significant role in sexual communication with their adolescent daughters, and suggest scope for future research and the development of sexual communication interventions. The main results in this study shown that there were five important themes: mothers' attitudes towards talking about sex with daughters; feelings of daughters towards sexual communication with mothers; the first-time mother starts to talk about sex with her daughter; contents of sexual communication and successfulness of communication. The results from this review found that both mothers and daughters place emphasis on sexual communication as necessary but find it difficult to talk. Sexual education is therefore particularly important and is needed to assist female adolescents in developing social skills which can be used to avoid negative

consequences and reducing risky sexual behaviors.⁶ Therefore, communication about sexuality between mothers and their adolescent daughters could be improved and encouraged by open, direct and receptive communicating styles covering a wide range of sexual topics. Moreover, mothers' lack of sexual communication skills is a barrier inhibiting mothers from talking openly about sexual issues with their adolescent daughters. Teaching about sexuality should be undertaken to help daughters better understand female sexuality, delay sexual initiation and prevent other negative consequences of sexual activity in female adolescents.¹⁶

In addition, the results found that the first time in which the mother started talking about sex with her daughter was when her daughter stated puberty, became interested in boys and had the right opportunity. Therefore, when their daughters start puberty, mothers should begin to prepare them for

bodily changes and to understand the outcomes. Mostly, this is the time when mothers begin to discuss sexuality with daughters. They begin when they recognize physical changes in their daughter, or when their daughter informs them of changes such as bleeding from the vagina or enlarged breasts.¹² Mothers should use this opportunity to instruct their daughters on proper sexual expression to prevent sexual abuse, raise self-esteem and develop negotiating skills. To ensure the successfulness of communication about sexuality between mothers-adolescent daughters, future studies should be designed to provide knowledge and develop skills for mothers to communicate about sexuality to their adolescent daughters,

with emphasis on comfort to talk, privacy, strong relationship between mothers and daughters, and respect for cultural and religious beliefs in each country.

Conclusion

Our findings provide a better understanding of the communication about sexuality between mothers and their adolescent daughters, which could inform policy in planning future programs to develop mother's skills in communication about sexuality with adolescent daughters.

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