

## Mothers and their teenage daughters' perspectives on the relationship between them

### Tayebe Ziaei (PhD)

Ph.D in Reproductive Health,  
Assistant Professor, Counseling and  
Reproductive Health Research  
Center, Golestan

University of Medical Sciences,  
Gorgan, Iran

### Maryam Ghanbari Gorji

Master's Degree Student of  
Midwifery Counseling, Counseling  
and Reproductive Health Research  
Center, Golestan

### Naser Behnampour (PhD)

Ph.D. in Biostatistics - Assistant  
Professor- Department of  
Biostatistics- Faculty of Health,  
Golestan University of  
Medical Sciences- Gorgan, Iran

### Masumeh Rezai (MSc)

Master of Clinical Psychology,  
Gorgan, Iran

### Corresponding Author:

Maryam Ghanbari Gorji

### E.mail:

[maryamghanbari136@yahoo.com](mailto:maryamghanbari136@yahoo.com)

**Address:** University of Medical  
Sciences, Gorgan, Iran

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**Background:** Adolescence is a very troublesome period involving many physical, sexual and psychological changes. Therefore, researchers maintain that adolescents need to make a good relationship with their parents and particularly their mothers to adapt to the changes at this age and be compatible with them. Hence, this study aimed to determine the mothers and their teenage daughters' perspectives on the relationship between them.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on 168 mothers and 13-15 year-old daughters who were provided with health services by health centers in Gorgan. The samples were selected randomly and had the inclusion criteria. Data were collected through a valid and reliable questionnaire of "general discussion between mother and daughter". Data were also analyzed using Chi-square and independent t-test at a significant level of 0.05 by SPSS 16.

**Results:** The mean score of general conversation between mother and daughter was 55.95 (74-38) from the mothers' perspective, and 52.30 (76-25) from the daughters' viewpoint. The difference between the two perspectives was significant ( $p$ -value<0.001). In addition, no significant difference was observed between the mothers and daughters' perspectives on the number of communications with daughters, the feeling of closeness to parents, and the responsibility to educate them.

**Conclusion:** The difference in the scores assigned to the general discussion between mother and daughter of their perspectives indicates the need for interventions aiming at increasing their communication skills to maintain and improve the girls' health.

**Keywords:** Perspective, Communication, Mother, daughter, Adolescent

## Introduction

The relationship between parents and adolescents seems to be a highly important predictor of adolescent development. Therefore, positive interaction between adolescents and parents can promote their cognitive and social development (1). When parents support adolescents, they, in fact, accept them. Therefore, they can reduce adolescent emotional problems, and can increase collaborative activities and assertive behaviors of their adolescents (2). However, if adolescents are rejected by their parents, they face difficulty in their social and peer relationships (3). The adolescents may engage in activities endangering their health and well-being (4). This issue may involve high-risk behaviors that can lead to problems such as drug addiction (5), infectious diseases, unsuccessful marriage, premature and difficult pregnancies, injuries, mortality, and ultimately physical and psychological problems (6). One of the most important solutions to these problems can be effective communication between parents and adolescents (7). Based on the results of the study by Kumpfer et al. [2003] and Kindap et al. [2008], parent support, particularly mother support positively affects adolescent self-esteem, and if there is a good relationship between mothers and adolescents, the social skills are promoted (8, 9). Hence, the type of relationship between parents and adolescents plays a crucial role in their emotional and social development, and inaccurate communication between parents and adolescents is one of the factors of deviance of adolescents in this period (10). Considering the physical, mental and psychological changes of adolescence (11), if the parents have a proper and reasonable relationship with the adolescents, they can help them to spend this period easily (12). However, the important issue is that the parents and children's perception of the conversation between them is different so that parents and adolescents are misunderstood in their daily communication, since each of them has the greatest focus on their individual goals and do not have the skills needed to create clear and unambiguous communications (13).

Since among the family members, mother is the first person with whom the child communicates, therefore, she is extremely important for the development of the child's spiritual and emotional characteristics (14). Thus, establishing a good relationship between adolescents and mothers can play an important role in their success and full development (15).

Investigating the studies conducted in Iran indicated that, although many studies were conducted on the relationship between mothers and daughters in other countries (16-21), there are few studies in this regard in Iran (22-24). No studies have investigated mothers and adolescents's perspective on the relationship between them.

Considering the importance of proper and constructive communication between mothers and adolescents, and since no study has examined the quality of the relationship between mothers and daughters from the perspective of both of them in Iran, this research aims to determine the proportionality of mothers and daughters perspectives' on their relationship in Gorgan.

## Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted on 168 mothers and 13-15 year-old daughters in Gorgan, Iran. Inclusion criteria for mothers included having only one daughter aged 15 to 13 years old and a biological mother, and the inclusion criteria for adolescents were the age of 13 to 15 and not being in a single-parent family. The common inclusion criteria for mothers and daughters included mastery of the Persian language, having at least the literacy of reading and writing Persian and lack of a known psychological illness with or without treatment.

The exclusion criteria included the incomplete filling of the questionnaire with a maximum of 5% of the questions.

The sample size was determined according to the study of Schuster [2008] (25) and with a power of 80% and a confidence level of 95%.

In this research, the samples were selected from 3 and 4 health centers of Gorgan according to the diversity of the population in terms of cultural, economic and social levels. First, the existing cases were investigated, and the families with qualifying criteria were selected based on the research objectives. Then, the samples were selected randomly, and after the phone call, mothers and daughters were invited to health centers and entered the study after explaining the study purpose and obtaining the written consent.

Data gathering tool was a demographic questionnaire and a general discussion of the mothers and daughters' perspectives. The questionnaires consisted of two parts: a demographic questionnaire at the end of which four questions were asked about the frequency of the relationship between the daughter and her mother and father, the daughter's girlfriend and

her closeness to the parents in daughters and mothers' perspective, and the 16-item Persian version of the questionnaire of the general conversation between mother and daughter was from the mothers and daughters' perspective. The two questionnaires were similar in content so that each question was identical for daughters and mothers, and only the verbs and pronouns of questions were different for them. Toriki [2014] evaluated the content and formal validity of the questionnaires, and its reliability was obtained as 0.72. The respondents' responses to the general conversation between mother and daughter is in the form of a 5-point Likert scale (fully agree = 5 and agree = 4, no idea = 3, opposite = 2 and completely opposite = 1), and questions 3, 4, 8, 9,

12, 15, and 16 have a reverse score, that is, fully agree (1) and completely opposite (5). The total score of the question varies from 16 to 80, changing the quality of the conversation in the form of a score of 0-49.9, a poor conversation and an average score of 50-74.9 as an average conversation. Additionally, a score of over 75 is considered a good conversation (26). These questionnaires were completed by mothers and daughters at the same time but in a separate environment.

Data were analyzed using SPSS16 software, and after confirmation of normality of the data, the independent t-test and chi-square test were used in the classified data. A level less than 0.05 is considered significant.

## Results

The mean age for daughters was  $14.13 \pm 0.75$ , for mothers  $39.99 \pm 4.20$  and for fathers was  $44.35 \pm 4.17$ . Regarding education, mothers and fathers were mostly academic (71.4% and 55.4%), and concerning occupation, most of the mothers were homemakers (64.3%) and fathers were clerks (57.7%). Forty-one point seven percent of the daughters were at the eighth grade and 72% of them had the first birthday (Table 1).

The results indicated that the mean score of general conversation between mothers and daughters was 55.95 (74-38), and from daughters' perspective, it was (52.30) (76-25), which was significant based on the results of the independent t-test ( $p$ -value  $< 0.001$ ).

In addition, the results of Chi-square test showed no significant difference between the mothers and daughters' perspectives on the number of daughter's relationship and their closeness sense to parents and the responsibility of upbringing their daughters. According to mothers and daughters' perspective, the frequency of the relationship between the daughter, mother and father, on a daily basis, in terms of the responsibility for upbringing the daughter, was considered to be on both parents, and the daughters felt more close to their mothers than to their fathers. (Table 2).

Table 1: Features of the qualitative demographic variables of mothers and daughters

| Variable                    | Variable levels          | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Daughter Educational Degree | Seventh grade            | 37        | 22         |
|                             | Eighth grade             | 70        | 41.7       |
|                             | Ninth grade              | 61        | 36.6       |
| Mother's education          | Elementary               | 6         | 3.6        |
|                             | Junior school            | 7         | 4.2        |
|                             | Secondary school         | 62        | 36.9       |
|                             | Academic                 | 93        | 55.4       |
| Father's education          | Elementary               | 2         | 1.2        |
|                             | Junior school            | 16        | 9.5        |
|                             | Secondary school         | 30        | 17.9       |
|                             | Academic                 | 120       | 71.4       |
| Mother's job                | Housewife                | 108       | 64.3       |
|                             | Worker                   | 1         | 0.6        |
|                             | Employee                 | 43        | 25.6       |
|                             | Etc.                     | 16        | 9.5        |
| Father's job                | Worker                   | 9         | 5.4        |
|                             | Factory or office worker | 7         | 4.2        |
|                             | Employee                 | 97        | 57.7       |
|                             | Self-employed            | 49        | 29.2       |
|                             | Etc.                     | 6         | 3.6        |
| Number of sisters           | Does not have            | 85        | 50.6       |
|                             | One sister               | 73        | 43.5       |
|                             | Two sisters              | 10        | 6          |
| Number of brothers          | Does not have            | 83        | 49.4       |
|                             | One brother              | 76        | 45.2       |
|                             | two brothers             | 9         | 5.4        |
| Birth order                 | First                    | 121       | 72         |
|                             | Second                   | 34        | 20.2       |
|                             | Third                    | 12        | 7.1        |
|                             | Fourth                   | 1         | 0.6        |
| Religion                    | Shia                     | 162       | 96.4       |
|                             | Sunnis                   | 6         | 3.6        |
| Nationality                 | Fars                     | 162       | 96.4       |
|                             | Turkmen                  | 6         | 3.6        |

Table 2: Comparison of the conversation manner of the daughter with her mother and father from the viewpoint of mothers and daughters

| Variable   | Variable levels  | Mothers   |            | daughters |            | Significant level with chi-square test |
|--|------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|--|
|  |                  | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |  |
| The number of conversation times between a daughter and mother | Daily            | 141       | 83.9       | 140       | 83.3       | 1                                      |
|  | Few hours a week | 20        | 11.9       | 20        | 11.9       |  |
|  | Weekly           | 5         | 3          | 5         | 3          |  |
|  | Each month       | 2         | 1.2        | 3         | 1.8        |  |
| The number of conversation times between a daughter and mother | Daily            | 94        | 56         | 92        | 54.8       | 0.940                                  |
|  | Few hours a week | 52        | 31         | 50        | 29.8       |  |
|  | Weekly           | 13        | 7.7        | 15        | 8.9        |  |
|  | Each month       | 9         | 5.4        | 11        | 6.5        |  |
| Responsibility of bringing up the daughter                     | Mother           | 59        | 35.1       | 48        | 28.6       | 0.387                                  |
|  | Father           | 3         | 1.8        | 4         | 2.4        |  |
|  | both             | 106       | 63.1       | 116       | 69         |  |
| The daughter's feeling of closeness to her                     | Mother           | 108       | 64.3       | 112       | 66.7       | 0.863                                  |
|  | Father           | 5         | 3          | 4         | 2.4        |  |
|  |                  | 55        | 32.7       | 52        | 31         |  |

## Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the appropriateness of the relationship between mothers and daughters in their perspective. According to the results, the average total score of the general mother-daughter conversation in mothers and daughters' perspective was at an average level. Certainly, the average score of the general mother-daughter conversation from the view of daughter was less than the mothers. In other words, it can be mentioned that daughters considered their relationship with mothers less than mothers' perspective. It can be argued that the difference between the mother and daughters' perspective in the present study is based on the findings obtained by Bicket et al. [2010], showing parents and adolescents' conversation about specific topics during the period of adolescence. In this regard, the parents' conversation with the adolescent in the early adolescence is expressed in a general and vague form, and the information is provided more precisely and more informatively to adolescents that their age and experience have increased. Therefore, it seems that what has led to the higher privilege of mothers than their daughters to converse between them is that the mother feels that this conversation is enough for her daughter at this age level, but it is not enough and convincing for her child (27).

Based on the study results, despite the slight difference in the mothers and daughters' perspective, the findings indicate that the scores

of both are in an average range. As a result, the findings of this study are in line with those of some studies in this area. The results of the Plato Sidou et al' study, aimed to determine the effect of educational program on parents in enhancing emotional intelligence, communication, and family satisfaction of parents indicated that the relationship between parents and adolescents was at an average level (19). Kearney et al. [2015] their study aiming at determining the effect of adolescent-parent relationship on self-esteem in adolescents at the age range of 12-17, showed that the relationship between adolescents and parents was at an average level (18). In one study aiming at determining the effect of group counseling on strengthening the relationship between mother and adolescent, Erden [2015] also stated that the relationship between adolescents and their mother was at an average level before the intervention (16). The study findings are inconsistent with those of Nasiri [2001] (28) and Jess Haines [2016] (17). In the study of Nassiri et al. [2001] aiming at comparing adolescent communication problems with parents from the adolescents and parents' perspective in Isfahan, the relationship between adolescents and parents was very favorable from their perspective. Perhaps, the reason for this difference is the gender of the sample and cultural differences. In the study by Nassiri, girls and boys were asked that gender differences could affect the relationship between adolescents and parents (29).

In the study conducted by Jess Haines et al. [2016] investigating the performance of the family and the relationship between parents and adolescents, it can be observed that the majority of girls (64%) reported a strong relationship between mothers and daughters (17). The difference of this study with the present study can be cited as cultural and social differences. Owing to traditions, the culture of our country and the modesty of parents to teach the sexual issues related to the adolescence period lead to less conversation between parents and adolescents (30).

Regarding which parent was responsible for daughters' education, the majority of mothers maintained that both parents were responsible and their perspective was the same as the daughters' perspective. Nevertheless, the results of Wang's study [2009] showed that from adolescents' perspective, the majority considered mother responsible for their education (21). It seems that the reason for the differences between the results of this study and ours is the difference in inclusion criteria. In the study by Wang, adolescents who had one parent (dead or divorced father) participated in the study, but in the present study, single-parent adolescents did not attend the study. In addition, cultural-social differences could be the cause of the difference between this study and the present study.

The majority of mothers and daughters in our study stated that daughters felt closer to their mother. This was similar to the results of the study conducted by Wang [2009] (21) and Tsai [2013] (20). This similarity shows the effects of the similarity of the gender of the parent communicating with the adolescent in different cultures.

Children who have less relationship with their father than their mother will be less likely to have this connection during adolescence (31, 32). In early adolescence, owing to the emergence of critical situations and increasing adolescent's

tendency to independence, the interrelationship between the adolescent and her father decreases very much, leading to an increased emotional distance so that the teenagers felt less close to her father than her mother (33). When fathers' role is not as important as mothers' role in their daughters' lives, this can be one reason for daughters to be involved in high-risk behaviors during adolescence (21). The results of Mousavi's study [2003] showed that in families with addicted adolescents, the presence of the father was physically and emotionally very poor (34). Therefore, if fathers pay more attention to their daughters and have more intimate relationships with them, the probability of high-risk behaviors in their daughters is reduced (21).

### Conclusions:

The present study indicated that despite the difference in scores assigned to the general conversation between mother and daughter from their perspective, this conversation was in a medium range in the perspective of both groups and was far from good conversation. In addition, according to the perspectives of mothers and daughters, the role of father in relation to his daughter was very poor. Half of the country's teenage are girls and this period is the substructure and the beginning of the future course of their lives. This period of life directly affects on families and children. Therefore, an intervention is proposed to increase parents' communication skills with daughters to maintain and improve their health and prevent social harm.

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