



The effectiveness of a parent-teenager relationship strengthening programme in South Africa

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Introduction

- The bond between primary caregiver and child is integral in how children form later relationships with peers, partners and own children (Belsky 1993)
- Poor parent-teenager relationships and communication contribute to IPV exposure
- Strengthening parent-teenager relationships and addressing parenting practices is central to preventing IPV before it happens

Objective

- To describe parenting practices and the effectiveness of a parent-teenager relationship strengthening intervention, aimed at preventing IPV among teens

Methods

- Qualitative Evaluation Design: 2013-2014



- 20 parent-teen pairs
- Grade 8 learners from two schools in Tshwane, Gauteng
- 107 IDIs in SePedi/Setswana
- Inductive thematic analysis
- Emerging themes: parenting practices, nature of parent-teen relationships, intervention experiences



Skhokho Supporting Success For Families (SS4F)

- Aim:
 - To strengthen parent-teen relationships to maximise their contribution to resilience
- Target :
 - Grade 8 learners aged 13-16 years and their parents
- Implementation :
 - 4 day workshop
 - Concurrent parent and teen sessions
 - Regular dialogue activities
- Intervention Development:
 - Participatory
 - Critical Reflection
 - Guided discussions, role plays, skill building, games
- Intervention Content:
 - Relationship and gender
 - Parenting goals, values
 - Concerns, risks facing teens
 - Teen development
 - Assertive communication
 - Positive discipline

IDI Participants

- 13 girls and 7 boys, aged 13-16 years
- 2 fathers and mothers, grandmothers, sisters, or aunts
- Family size, ranged from 3-7 members
- Food shortages due to unemployment

Parenting practices: communication

- At baseline, most pairs reported harmonious relationships
- However, parents and caregivers relied on a set of practices: didactic, instructive, and dictatorial
 - Ineffective communication
 - Telling children what to do
 - Expectations communicated after transgression
 - Rule setting reactionary
- Parents equated dating with sex and pregnancies
 - Discussion about dating and sex limited

Parenting practices: discipline

- Patterns of vicious cycle of parent-teen interaction
 - Parents often giving instructions - Teens breaking rules - Parents reacting harshly - Teens 'back-chatting' or quiet
- Disciplinary strategies
 - Shouting
 - Threatening
 - Physical beatings
 - Silent treatment
- Underlying these was parents' need for power

Positive feedback at follow up

- Pair: workshops were working for them

“What I liked about the workshops is that they taught us how to parent our children. They also enlightened us about the negative side of alcohol in children, drugs, nyaope* and other things.” (MamKoena)

- Stressed less

“I liked how (SS4F) helped us to handle and raise our children... We used to punish her too much and I have seen that this workshop has worked for me. I no longer have stress because (Laughs) truly you have helped us because we did not have that knowledge.” (MaSibeko)

Improved relationships

- Pairs reported improved mother-daughter relationships

“Our relationship is great now. I used to not listen to my mother a lot but now I do so. When I talk to my mother now she listens to me and gives me a lot of attention when I talk to her and this makes both of us great together. If there is a misunderstanding between us or I have done something that she does not approve of, she no longer just gets angry with me and not speak to me but we are now able to discuss what happened together and then we get along well” (Lungiswa)

Parents of boys

- Parents of boys also valued improved relationships with sons

“We were not talking, it was just hints. We were not that close but now we are more like friends. He can even ask for things and I now understand him better than before” (MaZondo)

Trust

- More trusting of their children
- Assumptions about dating had shifted

“I have learned to trust my child; during the dialogue we had with our children, we had a one-on-one session with them. I always accused her of dating but that day I realized that she does not have a boyfriend. I asked her and she told me and other people that she does not have a boyfriend. So I am open to the idea that there are friends who are boys, and it does not mean they are girlfriends and boyfriends, we are just making assumptions.” (MaSibeko)

Support

- House chores had been a source of conflict in many pair relationships
- More supportive with house chores

“She is all right. She is okay but I also show her... I do wash the dishes so that when she comes back she finds that there is no dish to wash and then she would just wash what she has used because I disliked washing dishes when I was young.” MaRapiya

Respectfulness

- Teens reportedly more respectful

“His behaviour [has changed], he has respect these days. He is not like before. He can now differentiate between a young person and an adult. He was bully. When you spoke to him he would be impatient” (MaNkwane)

- Teens also connected improved communication with being respect

“What helped me was that the facilitator taught us so many things and she was patient with us. She took her time and that taught me that I should respect my parents and that I should not talk back at them...” (Sipho)

Less harsh

- Parents were more reasonable and less aggressive
 - “Yes. If I am in a bad situation I do not react with anger. I am now a bit calmer. I try to be understanding on reasonable grounds in most cases” (MaThema)
 - “The way they did it, it was all right because the way we punish our children, like taking her pocket money, and it was not nice because at the end she has to eat. What would she eat” (Sesi)
- Teens confirmed this change
 - “My mother does not beat me or shout at me like she used to do before the workshop” (Thandile)

Adopting positive discipline

- Reflections on impact of certain discipline strategies

“Sometimes being too hard on your child will lead your child in engaging into wrong things like for an example if you take her phone as a punishment, she might get it from a boyfriend or get it from a friend. I now find other ways of punishing my kids” (MaZondo)

- Began to implement positive discipline strategies

“R: I now prefer withdrawing something that they like. It works for me and it does not cause much harm than the other methods.... It worked. (Unlike) Beating and shouting.

I: Why not?

R: It confuses the child and make them to be scared of you and become more stubborn and not listen to you.” (Masechaba)

Struggling with the change

- However, some parents adopted other ineffective communication or discipline strategies in attempt to change for the better

P: I do not shout at her all the time. There was a time like if I told her something and she does not do it that is when I would shout at her ... (Now) when I am talking to her and I see that she did not do what I asked and then I show her what she must do. I will not be harsh on her but I do it so that she can do it and after that she will be following me around so that she can come and help me.

I: Okay, so that means sometimes if she does not do what you asked her to do, you keep quite? ... She is the one who will feel that she has to do what she is being told?

P: Mm... Because I have discovered that if I talk... Even though they said that I am harsh, sometimes I talk... (Laughs) You see, I stand (do it myself) - and later I realized that I will end up killing my child. Its better I stand and do it so that she can see that 'mama told me'... I saw myself (what I was doing to my child)... (Laughs) (MaSithole)

Processes of change

- Degree of readiness to change – contemplation
- Critical reflection
 - A teen reflected on previous acts, becoming less aggressive and avoiding fighting
 - “R: I use to feel the pain, and something in me would tell me to talk back, and I would feel bad after talking back.**
 - I: What do you do now if someone swears or teases you in the streets?**
 - R: I ignore them, and not attack back.**
 - I: How do you feel about using that strategy, does it work for you?**
 - R: It helps me to avoid physical fights which might happen if I respond to them” (Sisanda)**
 - A parent realising that if she continued to be harsh, she would alienate herself from her children
- Support from family members

Barriers to change

- Fear of history repeating itself

I: And about talking about dating and sexuality?

P: That one is still heavy on me. Eish...

I: Do you think that you will be able reach that point?

P: I have to start to teach myself that this person one day... She will reach this stage and will I be able to accept? I don't know maybe I will accept... I always show them by myself that 'my son I made a mistake and had a child at the age of 20 and I saw it was wrong and I told myself that the second child I will have when I am married'... You see so to me 'history should not repeat itself' - I will accept but not when she is ... maybe when she is finished and she is 25 years..." (MaMpinga)

Discussion

- An emphasised power dynamic between parents and teens
- Equip parents to engage sensitive topics: dating and sex
- The recognition of ineffective communication and harmful discipline is encouraging
- Limited impact on ideologies regarding corporal punishment, but fewer parents were hitting children
- In-depth study of the processes of change is needed to interpret these findings

THANK YOU...

Acknowledging:

Our participants

Schools

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