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Growing Parents-Children Communication Gap: A Gender-Based Study in Discourse Analytical Perspective



Maryam Dilawar *

Uswa Aslam †

Muhammad Sabboor Hussain ‡

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Abstract: *This qualitative study investigates the challenges experienced by children while communicating with their parents and the impact of gender roles in communication. The population comprises 10 participants from two age groups: children aged 12-15 and adults aged 21-25. We conducted semi-structured interviews and explored the feelings, experiences and opinions of children and communication strategies employed by parents from a discourse analytical perspective. General questions were asked to find ways to overcome the communication gap and suggest healthy interaction strategies. Our findings revealed several communication challenges, including a dearth of emotional expressions, busy lifestyles, authoritarian parenting and undue pressure on daughters, as well as linguistic choices that can control children's interactions and suggested ways to bridge this gap. Suggestions include spending quality time together, giving children opportunities to express their views and shifting towards positive authoritative parenting. This study adds to the growing research on parent-child communication gaps for improved family well-being and relationships.*

Key Words: Parent-Child Communication, Communication Gap, Gender Roles, Discourse, Analysis, Parenting

Introduction

Background Study

Spending quality time with the family is a serious challenge in a chaotic life nowadays. Effective communication is fundamental for building strong relationships among family members. A communication gap exists between parents and their children; they need help understanding each other or understanding what is communicated. This lack of communication affects an individual's whole identity, affecting his social, personal and professional life. Moreover, the generation gap is considered synonymous with the communication gap in today's life. Generation gap is stated as differences in personal

choices, perceptions, parent-child disagreements and contradictions. Parents need to be more relaxed with their social lives and earn money to facilitate their children better. However, they neglect the importance of values and morals that shape their children's personality. Relationship at childhood age constructs a child's identity, values, and norms. Various communication patterns and emotional expressions depend on typical gender roles.

Gendered parenting plays a vital role in shaping a child's behaviour. Gendered parenting refers to parents' behaviour that marks how girls and boys behave socially. Communication patterns of mothers and fathers with sons and daughters also mark an

* Undergraduate Student (BS-English), Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Undergraduate Student (BS-English), Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Professor, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Sabboor Hussain (Professor, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: dr.muhammadsabboorhussain@uskt.edu.pk)

increasing communication gap. For instance, parents form expectations for their child's future when the child's sex is identified as male or female. They try to keep their child secure and make them socially successful. Therefore, with this objective in mind, parents get inclined to strict parenting, resulting in children's mental health problems, mainly low self-esteem. Thus, the communication gap between parents and children may lead to various outcomes like anxiety, depression, loneliness and other behavioural and social problems.

Statement of Problem

Parent children's communication gap has attained a special area of research for social scientists. This paper addresses the communication gap between parents and children due to misunderstandings and the need for more effective communication. Miscommunication and misunderstanding can lead to conflict, poor relationships, lack of trust, emotional distance, loneliness and depression in children, while parents also feel helpless to connect with their children. Gender role is also the factor that influences parents-children communication and interaction. Research needs to explore how children and parents can be open to each other, listen to each other's perspectives and be honest with each other to address this gap.

Gendered parenting impacts parent-child communication. We found a need to study how different age groups depict different communication patterns within a family. The research article investigates the gender roles of parents in communication patterns that impact family dynamics relationships and cause communication gaps, resulting in depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

Limitations & Delimitation

The study only focuses on the influence of gender expectations or stereotypes on female children. It is limited to a certain area and population. The sample size is small for qualitative analysis, so the findings would not apply to all other cultures. The obvious advantage of this is that it will open opportunities for other researchers.

This study does not address the impact of gendered parenting on males because Pakistani society already privileges men to some extent. The study assumes that gender stereotypes are unconscious, and when researchers ask the mother or father, "Do you treat your sons and daughters differently?" they are not

willing to answer correctly. This study excludes the male perspective, thus limiting it to only female participants.

Objectives & Research Questions of the Study

This article aims to explore the influencing factors of the communication gap between parents and children through gender-based perspectives. The following are the objectives of this study:

- To identify factors influencing the communication gap.
- To assess how gender plays a role in increasing the communication gap.
- To propose recommendations for bridging the gap between parents and children.

In line with these objectives, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- 1- What are the factors responsible for the parent-child communication gap?
- 2- How much do gender roles affect communication and interaction?
- 3- What are the recommendations that help bridge the parent-child communication gap?

Literature Review

Recent Studies

Several researches have been done on the parent-child communication gap and gender parenting. Jessica [McNaughton](#)'s study, *Gender Differences in Parent-Child Communication Pattern*, in Block's (1983) literature review, reveals that females are more empathetic and can accurately show emotions from non-verbal cues than males. Mental models play a key role in interaction. According to Van Dijk (2015), there is no direct relation between discourse structures and social structures, but spoken discourse functions through a cognitive interface, which is the mental representation of language users as individuals and social members. So, the communication gap in early childhood can affect the language learning process of children.

The impact of gendered parenting can be traced in the study by Falk & Falk (2005). They gave theoretical types of family structures in which children could be brought up. One is autocratic, in which children are not allowed in decision-making. Second is an authoritarian structure in which children can participate and express their opinions, but parents make the final decision, and children cannot question

it. The only authority belongs to the parents. In addition, the parents and children are connected throughout their lives. Their relationship could be ruined due to problems that can widen the generation gap within the family (Kaufman, 1998).

According to the most prominent theories of social norms, such as the Theory of Normative Social Behaviour by Rimal & Real (2005) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen (1991), individual conduct is commonly shaped by significant others' behaviours and expectations. During childhood and adolescence, parents are considered critical resources of norms. Adequate social behaviour is learned through parent-child interactions (Maccoby, 1992). Therefore, effective communication at an early age is necessary to build a socially acceptable and personally valuable identity, and a communication gap at this stage can also affect a child's behavioural patterns.

A study by Martin & Szkrybalo (2002) states that as soon as a child's sex is identified, parents form expectations about their interests and behaviour, which appear in parenting practices. However, when researchers asked parents whether they would treat their sons and daughters differently, most were not inclined towards gendered parenting practices (Endendijk et al., 2013). Another article by Priyansha Singh Jadon and Dr. Shraddha Tripathi (2007) states that authoritarian parenting is very strict and rigid. Parents form rigid rules over their children, which they want to be followed by hook or crook. Children from such families are more prone to stress and depression. Authoritarian parenting is much observed in Pakistan. Parents are strict and form rigid rules and expectations, which a child cannot escape and falls straight into the generation gap paradigm.

The generation gap refers to personal choices, opinions and perspective differences. The generation gap has been widely studied in recent studies such as by Aggarwal et al. (2017). According to this, it is mainly the generation gap that contributes to the growth of the communication gap.

Research Gap

Many researchers have widely presented parent-children communication and communication patterns. However, the communication gap needs to be given more importance. The factor that hinders effective communication also needs to be addressed. This research has collected data on two areas: communication gap and the impact of gender roles.

This study bridges this research gap by focusing on the factors that cause an increase in the parent-child communication gap and tries to look for possible solutions through the lens of family communication patterns.

Theoretical/Conceptual/Analytical Framework

An interdisciplinary approach has been applied to this article, linking several fields together. The study is based on the social learning perspective, which focuses on how children learn behaviour from observing other people's behaviour. The biological perspective explores gender differences based on brain differences and psychological and social structures (gender, age, class, etc.) impact. There is also a cognitive perspective that illustrates how gender schemes developed in early life formulate rules that are appropriate behaviour for two genders. Family systems theory is the core of this research. This theory illustrates that knowing one's family story can help us know how they think, feel and behave. Moreover, RFCP (received family communication pattern) theory serves as the base for identifying families in which conflicts occur specifically. All the key constructs of these theories have been incorporated into the items in the tool for data collection for the analysis from a discourse analytical perspective.

Discourse is a vehicle through which communication takes place. Discourses are ways of thinking, believing, valuing and interacting. The term parent-children communication is a process of exchanging information between parents and children through verbal and non-verbal means. A communication gap occurs when parents and children do not understand each other and do not give value to their opinions. Furthermore, gendered parenting refers to a parent's behaviour: "how girls and boys behave socially." The study is based on a discourse perspective, helping to analyze communication patterns and structures, such as: How do parents use language persuasively? How do parents use language to convey meaning indirectly? How do men and women vary in their language use while interacting with children? How do social structures shape such a discourse?

The research focuses on the theoretical/conceptual framework mentioned above and its application to the Pakistani context. Semi-structured interviews of female participants have been conducted. Then, the article analyzes the collected

data, providing critical illustrations regarding the interactions among family members to find factors that impact parent-child communication and strategies to overcome the communication gap.

Research Methodology

The research takes on an exploratory qualitative research design. It analyzes the data while addressing the frameworks mentioned above to explore influencing factors and communication patterns from female perspectives. The purposive sampling technique divides the target population into two age groups. The sample size is 10 participants, five from each age group.

The tools used in this research are semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed to serve the research objectives. The children selected for the interviews were academy students of different ages ranging from 12-15, and to conduct interviews with elders, we had to go to their houses. The interviewees were asked to share their feelings, opinions and experiences without hesitation, as their privacy would be respected. Natural conversations were formed by asking questions from their answers to make the data highly appropriate for discourse analysis.

Open-ended interview questions were structured by taking a guide from a questionnaire used to study "Received Family communication patterns". Some questions from their conversation were also asked to explore their views. Following were the fixed items in the semi-structured interviews to achieve the study's objective.

- How do you feel about sharing your feelings with your parents?
- How do your parents react to your decisions? Do they impose their choice of career on you?
- What type of bond do you share with your parents? Do your parents compare you with others?
- How often do you sit with your parents and siblings?
- Can you describe a time when you had to convince your parents about what really matters to you?
- What do you do when there is a difference between your and your parent's opinions?

The following questions were framed to cover the themes of responsible factors and challenges faced during the communication gap and interaction:

- Who makes a final decision in your home?
- How do you share your feelings with your father?
- How do your parents treat you and your brother?
- Can you describe a time when you felt you had no authority in your family? Do your father and brother impose restrictions on you?
- Who do you share your feelings the most, father or mother?
- Lastly, general questions were asked:
- How do you think your father or mother should treat you?
- How can we bridge this gap?
- What primary steps should we adopt to bridge the communication gap? (Children, as well as adults, were asked to suggest ways to overcome this communication gap).

Data was collected through audio recordings and taking notes. After collection, the data was analyzed through discourse analysis techniques to discover dominant discourses related to parent-child interaction. It examined how power dynamics and language choices influenced the construction of meanings. Thematic analysis was conducted to find the recurring ideas and patterns leading towards the communication gap, and narrative analysis techniques to explore more about the causes through the participants' experiences.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents key findings derived from the comprehensive analysis of interview data collection from a population of two age groups, children and adults. These findings shed light on the participants' shared perspectives and experiences, revealing valuable insights into factors responsible for increasing the communication gap between parents and children and the impact of gender roles in communication and interactions. Data revealed several recurrent key themes. These themes illuminate important aspects related to the growing Parent-Children Communication Gap and offer a deeper understanding of responsible factors for the increase in the communication gap.

Findings Section- Children

In the interview, children expressed feelings about the chance of sharing only limited ideas and emotions with their parents. They mentioned that their parents did not like their career choices and imposed their choices and opinions on them. Some participants highlighted the negative impact of communication gap-loaded parenting, saying they were scared of their fathers because they scolded them on their effort to reply to them on anything. They revealed the anger-driven nature of their fathers, who would always prefer to stay detached from them. They shared their feelings more with mothers than fathers. All the participants agreed on one point: Fathers made final decisions in their homes and implemented restrictions on them without explaining and taking them into confidence. Participants (females) also wanted to be treated with the same love as their brothers, be understood by their parents, or not be scolded by their fathers. The following themes and patterns were identified from the interview data of the children:

Communication Challenges

1. Chance to share only limited things (5/5)
2. Parents do not like their career choice (3/5)
3. Scared from father (4/5)
4. Father is short-tempered (4/5)

Gender roles' impact:

5. I love my brother more (3/5)
6. Share more with mother rather than father (5/5)
7. Father made final decisions (4/5)
8. Parents impose restrictions (3/5)

Suggestions:

9. Desire to be understood (5/5)
10. Desire not to be scolded (4/5)

After the interview of children, the above ten themes were identified and distributed across three main categories. There were four themes of communication challenges, four themes of gender roles, and two themes of recommendations that showed their desire about how they should be treated.

Description of Experience Expressed by Children

The most prominent theme was *the chance to share only limited things* (theme 1). Children do not feel comfortable sharing everything with their parents.

One participant said, "I find it hard to talk to my parents because they don't listen". Another participant said, "I am hesitant to share certain things with my parents, which makes me suffocated and tensed." One participant said, "I am not comfortable sharing many things with them, and I look for other options to have my catharsis". Theme 2, *parents do not like their career choice*, was expressed by three children showing frustration on their inability to choose their career path. One participant said, "I want to be a lawyer, but my parents always say you will be a doctor". Theme 3 and 4 reflect strict parenting patterns in families. Children are scared of their fathers, and the major reason behind it is the bad temperament of the father. One participant said, "I share a strong bond with my mother, not my father because he is an angry man."

After that, themes 5, 6, 7 and 8 reflect the impact of gendered parenting in increasing the communication gap. In almost all families, the father is the final decision-maker. No authority is given to children or make them feel that their opinions are valued. Some children say their parents love their brothers more and give more toys to them. Moreover, children feel that fathers impose restrictions on them, and they share more things and feelings with their mothers than with fathers. Again, the reason is the bad temperament of the father, lack of understanding and lack of democratic values in the family social institution.

Next, children were asked to share their views about how they should be treated, and themes 9 and 10 were observed. One participant said, "I want my father to treat me with love and not be angry with me".

Finding Section- Adults

In the interview, five adults, with a mean age of 22, expressed their feelings, experiences and opinions about the lack of communication between parents and children. They mentioned that they could not share everything with them. They only sit with their parents at family gatherings for a few minutes, depending on their parents' and siblings' time and mood. Their routines are busy. Participants expressed disappointment because of the unfulfillment of their desires due to employment restrictions. Some participants narrated their situations when they were angry and argued with their parents. All participants have expressed the common theme that they share more things with mothers than fathers. They also share that they have no family authority or are not

made part of decision-making; only authority belongs to the father.

Moreover, some participants also share that their family patterns received from their grandparents are followed in their families, so they have no choice but to follow what their parents say and restrict them from raising any voice. Even if they try to, their parents do not even bother to listen to them. Participants gave their opinions about active listening, not being judgmental, reducing social media use and expecting little beyond the children's capacity. Below are themes and categories identified in adults:

Communication challenges

1. Cannot share everything with parents (5/5)
2. Parents only sit for a few minutes with them daily (3/5)
3. Disappointment because of un-fulfilment of their desires (5/5)
4. Parents are always overwhelmed with anger (4/5)

Gender roles:

5. Share more with mother rather than father (5/5)
6. Father has the ultimate authority (4/5)
7. Employment choice restrictions by parents (3/5)
8. No authority or active voice in the family (3/5)
9. Slavish and undemocratic following of their parent's opinions (5/5)

Suggestions

10. Active listening (5/5)
11. Parents not to be judgmental (2/5)
12. Lessen Social Media Use at Home (4/5)
13. Parents must not expect too much from children (1/5)

Thirteen themes were identified and distributed across three main categories after interviewing adult participants. There were four themes of communication challenges (themes 1-4), four themes of gender roles (themes 5-9) and three themes of recommendation (themes 10-13) that show their opinion about bridging the communication gap.

Description of Experience Expressed by Adults

Theme 1, viz., *cannot share everything*, was the most prominent theme of all. Adults express that it is not possible to share everything with their parents. Parents

do not understand them. One participant said, "I cannot share everything with them because it is hard to convince them". Theme 2, *parents only sit for a few minutes with them daily*, was expressed by three participants. Then, they express that their parents' routine is very busy, and they only have a little time to sit with their parents. Even if they sit with them, they are busy with their work or social media. One participant said, "I only sit a few minutes with them because when I am free, they are busy, and when they are free, I am busy." Another participant said, "We live together in one house, but still, family gatherings depend upon the time and mood of everyone." Themes 3,4,7,8, and 9 were expressed through their stories. One participant stated, "Back in 2020 when I was in college, friends planned a day's outing. It was my final year at college, and I planned a lot that we would do this; we would go there. To my utter dismay, when I told my parents about the tour, they didn't permit me. I tried many times to convince them, but they hushed me by giving unconvincing reasons. I felt disappointed and overwhelmed by anger and could do any unwanted harm to myself, but with the passage of time, I followed their opinion because I had no other option."

Another participant said, "I was in university and wanted to do B.Com. I shared this with my parents, but they didn't allow me to do this because they wanted me to do the thing they wanted. I felt angry, but then I stopped arguing because I knew that my parents would make the final decision, and arguing was not fruitful anymore." Theme 5 was identifiable in almost all participants. They share more with their mothers as compared to their fathers. One participant stated, "Mostly, I share my feelings with my mother rather than my father." Theme 9 was observed in all participant's responses except one who said, "My father and mother make decisions together after discussing them with each other." All other participants expressed that only their father had the authority to make final decisions. All participants presented themes 10, 11, and 12. They gave suggestions: one participant said, "In my view, we can bridge children and parents' gap using active listening to listen properly, to give close attention to them that what they are saying. Give them dedicated time, and be present in the family mentally to listen to what they are saying. Moreover, they should be open to each other's opinions even if they differ from each other, not be judgmental but handle the situation with empathy and understanding."

Other participants shared their views about reducing technology and social media apps and giving quality time to each other. One participant has expressed that parents should not form high expectations from their children, especially at younger ages, because the children, in an effort to become perfect, lose their innocence and spontaneity. They start hiding their shortcomings in artificial ways and cannot open up with their parents.

Discussion

The value of this research project is due to the insight it has given us into the factors leading to the growth of the communication gap between parents and children. Discourse analysis helped examine dominant discourses in communication between them. Thematic and narrative analysis of the collected data elucidated the factors of no quality time spent between parents and children. According to "Received Family Communication Patterns Theory", families have low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation and are labelled protective families. Conflict in these families is perceived negatively because of the great emphasis on conformity (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Parents in protective families make all the decisions and see little value in explaining their reasoning to their children. In addition, these families lack the necessary skills to communicate productively and openly express disagreements. All the interview data confirms the protective family gathering norms and practices. Parents make final decisions for their children, and children are not allowed to go against them. The generation gap was another observed factor when one participant expressed: "In my opinion, they treat us equally. But there are some factors that lead to giving preference to my brother more than me. Because in every family there are grandparents and relatives who treat their children differently and also just the same things my parents do. That is the reason they treat us differently. It happens a lot, especially in Pakistani families". This family pattern from grandparents is observed in families, and the parents do the same, and it is hard to change their opinions and views about life. They are not ready to accept the change, and children in these families have little value in family conversations, and they start distrusting their own decision-making ability.

Similarly, power dynamics, like strict parenting, is another factor responsible for the increase in the communication gap. The Authoritarian Parenting Style

prevails in the social institution of the family. In these families, parents hold all the authority and impose rigid rules, and children are bound to follow these rules. Disobedience leads to the punishment. It hurts the self-esteem of the children and causes many unwanted and unpleasant social problems.

Moreover, the language choices of parents like, "My daughter is very sweet,"; "She will listen to me," "My daughter will be a doctor", and "You know your father will not agree to this, so don't do this", "You are a girl, you cannot go alone", and many more hurt the self-esteem of the children and cause many unwanted and unpleasant social problems. Parents use certain words to manipulate and control their children's minds. Then children hesitate to open up with their parents and hide things just to become perfect children. Ultimately, children start having mental disturbance and look for options where they can express their true selves and busy themselves with social apps, increasing the distance between parents and children.

To summarize, all the key findings, like factors of not spending quality time with each other, lack of active listening, time constraints and busy lifestyle, and lack of emotional expression and support, address the first research question. Then, the influence of strict or authoritarian parenting, communication styles and strategies, low conservative and high conformity orientation of parents, parents not expressing reasons behind decisions, and parental expectations and pressure towards daughters explore the gender impacts in communication and interactions— second research question. Lastly, children desire to be treated with love and affection, understand their points, spend quality time with each other, and not expect much from children to explore the ways to bridge this communication gap— the third research question. This research has taken only female views from "protective family patterns." Further investigation can be done by considering male perspectives and other family patterns to observe the conflicts in those families.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on our analysis, we have discovered that a communication gap between parents and children exists from an early age. The desires of both children and adults cause this gap. Children crave their parents' love and attention and want to be treated equally, just like their male siblings. They also want quality time

with their parents where they can receive undivided attention. Conversely, adults desire more independence to socialize with friends while still having family bonding and dialogue opportunities. They also want their parents to empathize with their viewpoints and allow them to make their own life choices.

Effective communication is essential to bridge this gap and strengthen relationships between parents and

children. It is important for parents to focus on their children's emotions rather than their behaviours and to listen to their children's views instead of imposing their own. Both parents and children should be willing to compromise to promote understanding and build stronger relationships. Parents and children can create a more receptive and understanding relationship by acknowledging, appreciating, and accepting each other.

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