

Cross-Sectional Study

Perceived Maternal Expertise, Trustworthiness and Accessibility in Parent-Adolescent Communication Among Adolescents

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A B S T R A C T

Background: Proper maternal guidance, trust, and availability will foster adolescents' emotional growth, academic success, and social relationships. This study was conducted to determine the adolescents' perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 261 adolescents from 11th and 12th grades. Data were collected using baseline information forms and the Perceived Maternal Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Accessibility scale for adolescents.

Results: Most participants were in class 12 (62.1%), and 64.8% were female. Adolescents rated maternal expertise (M = 13.1801, SD = 2.6316) and maternal trustworthiness (M = 13.4253, SD = 2.5883) at relatively high levels. In contrast, maternal accessibility's mean was appreciably lower and its variance was larger (M = 11.9195, SD = 3.40097). The adolescents perceived maternal expertise and trustworthiness were strongly positively correlated ($\rho = 0.610$). Meanwhile, expertise correlated moderately with accessibility ($\rho = 0.339$), and trustworthiness correlated modestly with accessibility ($\rho = 0.310$). The adolescents perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility were significantly associated with the expectation of open communication from parents on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The findings confirm that mothers are broadly seen as expert and trustworthy but are less consistently perceived as accessible to adolescents. Moreover, adolescents' perceptions of maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility showed significant association with adolescents' expectations of open communication. Efforts to ensure real access with respect to time, space, privacy, and consistency are essential for strengthening healthy adolescent development and for open, meaningful parent-adolescent communication.

Keywords: Communication, Maternal Expertise, Trustworthiness, Accessibility

Introduction

Parental-adolescent communication has a significant impact on healthy development during adolescence. Effective communication within the families has a major role in adolescents' emotional well-being, reduction in risk-taking behaviors, and improved social competence. Adolescents who rated their communication with parents as better tended to report fewer mental-health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms, thoughts of suicide, psychosis-like symptoms, and problematic Internet or gaming use.¹ The quality of positive parenting and attachment styles by mothers exerts a strong influence on adolescents' life satisfaction.²

Teenagers who perceive their mothers as knowledgeable are more likely to seek their guidance. It facilitates decision-making, lowers risky conduct, and facilitates open discussion.³ Adolescent girls often demonstrate faith in their mothers' choices and viewpoints, while mothers expect their daughters to listen and trust them.⁴ Many mothers feel that they are approachable to adolescents.⁵ Central to this relationship are adolescents' perception of maternal expertise (knowledge and competence), trustworthiness (reliability and honesty), and accessibility (availability and approachability). The quality of parent-adolescent communication depends on not only parental behaviors but also how teenagers perceive their mother as competent, reliable, approachable, and honest.⁶

Adolescent emotional stability and independence are positively associated with trustworthy parenting, whereas adolescent aggressiveness has been linked to lower levels of maternal availability and reliance.⁷ Even higher levels of secret-keeping and disengagement coping among teenagers were linked to negative parent-adolescent interactions.^{8,9}

From the research it is found that adolescents often spoke about academic performance, friends, and personal feelings with their parents, particularly mothers. In contrast, topics such as romance, physical changes, substance abuse, and social media usage were met with reluctance due to shyness or embarrassment.¹⁰ Discussions on sensitive topics such as sexual and reproductive health (SRH) aspects are infrequent and mostly confined to puberty-related topics.¹¹

The mother-adolescent relationships' quality differed significantly by adolescents' age, school type, and area of residence.¹² Permissive behaviors of parents varied significantly with parents' age, education, and religious background. These sociodemographic and contextual factors shape adolescents' expectations about parental reliability and approachability.¹³ The changing family structures, such as increased migration and nuclearization, also reduced routine parent-adolescent interactions.¹⁴

Multiple challenges like academic expectations and peer and societal influence during adolescence increase parental stress. So maternal availability and trustworthiness are fundamental to engaging in meaningful communication with adolescents because maternal support can buffer negative external pressures from media and peers. In addition, many mothers expressed the need to acquire new communication skills and knowledge to remain effective.¹⁵

Identification of the interrelationships between perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility among adolescents can form specific interventions, such as adolescent support programs and parenting education initiatives, thereby enhancing mother-adolescent communication. Studies in this regard are very limited. Therefore, this study aims to assess adolescents' perceptions of their maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility and to compare these same constructs. The objectives of the study were to assess the adolescents' perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility among adolescents and determine the relationship between the adolescents' perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility.

Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 261 adolescents from 11th and 12th grades studying at selected higher secondary schools in Kottayam District based on the eligibility criteria. The sampling method used was the convenience sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were adolescents willing to participate and stay with mothers. The exclusion criteria were adolescents who had cognitive impairment and were absent during data collection. To determine the sample size, the means and standard deviations of perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility among adolescents by Guilamo-Ramos, V., Jaccard, J., Dittus, P., & Bouris, A. M.'s study on investigating the parental expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility in parent-adolescent communication and adolescent risk behavior,⁶ were selected. The sample size was 207 adolescents according to the following formula: $n = ((Z \cdot \sigma) / E)^2$.

In the above formula

- n = required sample size
- Z = z-value for confidence level (95% $\rightarrow Z=1.96$).
- σ = standard deviation (use the adolescent SD⁶)
- E = margin of error (here 0.20).

The largest required n among the 9 items were 186 for the 9th item in availability as it is difficult to find time. Assuming ~10% nonresponse, the calculated sample size is 207 adolescents.

Data were collected using a tool consisting of baseline information such as age, gender, class of study, fathers' and

mothers' occupations, type of family, place of residence, current status of communication, and a perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility scale for adolescents.

The Maternal Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Accessibility Scale is a standardized scale⁶ to assess both adolescents' and mothers' perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility. In this study the constructs of perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility for adolescent part with three items for each construct were used. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale and rated from score 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), with the accessibility items being reverse coded so higher scores imply higher levels of accessibility. The higher score reflects a higher degree of maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility. The internal consistency scores, measured by Cronbach's alpha for the expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility scale domains for adolescents, were 0.72, 0.82, and 0.73, respectively.

After obtaining permission from the head of the institutions and the institutional ethical committee, the data were collected using the self-administered questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained, and the questionnaires were distributed in the class, and students were asked to fill them out after taking assent from students and informed consent from parents. The confidentiality of their responses was assured.

The data obtained was coded and entered in a Microsoft Excel worksheet and analyzed using the statistical software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 27). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data. The correlation of perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility was done using Spearman rho. Pearson's chi-square test was used to analyze the

association between the adolescents' perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility for adolescents and baseline variables. The significance level was estimated with 95% confidence intervals and a p-value < 0.05.

Results

In the present study, a total of 261 adolescents participated. Participants were predominantly 17 years old (49.8%), followed by 16-year (35.2%), 15-year (13.0%), and 18-year (1.9%). Most participants were in class 12 (62.1%), while 37.9% were in class 11. Most of the participants (64.8%) were female and 35.2% were male. Most participants came from nuclear families (78.5%), while 21.5% belonged to joint families. The majority resided in rural areas (83.1%), and 16.9% lived in urban areas. (Table 1). A majority of fathers worked as daily-wage laborers (58.6%). More than half of mothers were unemployed (52.1%); others worked as health workers (14.2%), in office jobs (11.9%), as daily-wage workers (10.3%), as teachers (8.0%), and in business (3.4%). (Figure 1). Most adolescents reported that they expected open communication (89.7%) from their parents. Just over half of respondents indicated that they expect open communication specifically about SRH (54.0%), while 46.0% did not. The majority stated that the current communication pattern did not need to change (80.8%), whereas 19.2% (50) reported the need to change. (Table 2) In the suggested ways to change communication patterns, the most frequently mentioned was to understand while speaking (46%), followed by desire for open communication (22%). Very few participants mentioned that parents need to talk peacefully (8%) and indicated desires such as the need for having a good relationship with them, being listened to by them, or being spoken to in a good manner (each 6%). An even smaller percentage wanted their parents to think in a more modern way (4%) and the need to stop physical punishment when speaking (2%). (Table 3).

Table 1. Distribution of adolescents based on baseline variables (n=261)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)	15	13.03
	16	35.25
	17	49.81
	18	1.92
Class of Study	11	37.9
	12	62.1
Gender	Male	35.2
	Female	64.8
Type of Family	Nuclear Family	78.5
	Joint family	21.5

Place of Residence	Rural area	217	83.1
	Urban area	44	16.9

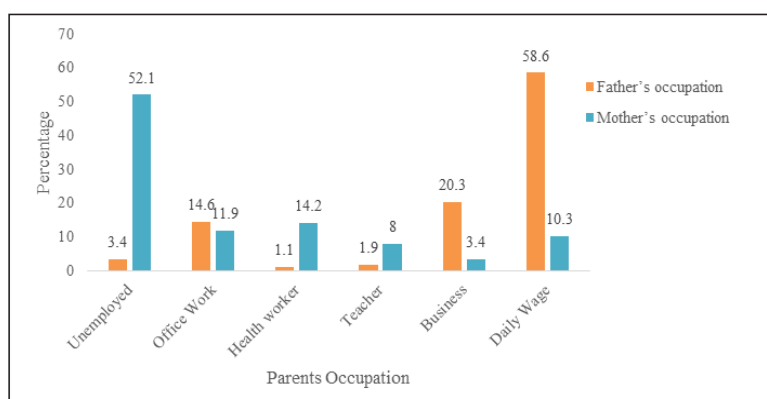


Figure 1. Distribution of Adolescents Based on Occupation of Parents (n=261)

Table 2. Distribution of adolescents based on communication (n=261)

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Expect open communication from parents	Yes	234	89.7
	No	27	10.3
Expect open communication on SRH from parents	Yes	141	54.0
	No	120	46.0
Need to change current communication pattern	Yes	50	19.2
	No	211	80.8

Table 3. Distribution of adolescents based on ways to change the communication pattern of their parents (n=50)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Understand me while speaking	23	46
Need open communication	11	22
Talk peacefully	4	8
Have more relation with us	3	6
Need to listen us	3	6
Speak in good manner	3	6
Need to think in modern way	2	4
Speak to us without beating like father	1	2

Maternal Expertise (M = 13.1801, SD = 2.63157) was interpreted as high on the scale, with most adolescents rated their mothers as knowledgeable and able to give sound advice. Maternal Trustworthiness (M = 13.4253, SD = 2.58828) was also in the highest-rated dimension. Adolescents generally perceived their mothers as honest and reliable. The standard deviation of both adolescents perceived Maternal Expertise and Trustworthiness indicated limited spread from the mean. Maternal Accessibility (M = 11.9195,

SD = 3.40097) was interpreted as lower than the other two dimensions, and found that adolescents perceived their mothers as less available for communication and had the larger standard deviation. (Table 4&5).

Spearman rank-order correlations were computed, as the data does not follow normality. Perceived maternal expertise and maternal trustworthiness were strongly and positively associated ($\rho = .610$), indicating that adolescents who rated their mothers higher in expertise also tended

to rate them higher in trustworthiness; this association was reported as statistically significant ($p < .05$). (Table 6). Maternal expertise and maternal accessibility were moderately and positively associated ($p = .339$), indicating that higher perceived expertise tended to co-occur with greater perceived accessibility; this correlation was reported as statistically significant ($p < .05$). (Table 6). Trustworthiness and accessibility were small-to-moderately and positively associated ($p = .310$), indicating that mothers perceived as more trustworthy were somewhat more likely to be perceived as accessible; this relationship was also reported as statistically significant ($p < .05$). (Table 6). Even though all relations were significant, the strongest link observed was between expertise and trustworthiness and weaker links involved accessibility.

The adolescents' perceived maternal expertise and place of residence, expectation of open communication ($p = .012$), and expectation of open communication about SRH ($p = .001$) were significantly associated. Age, class of study, gender, parents' occupations, and type of family were not significantly associated with perceived expertise ($p > .05$). (Table 7)

The adolescents perceived maternal trustworthiness and expectation of open communication ($p = .012$), expectation of open communication about SRH ($p = .001$), and need to change the current communication pattern ($p = .020$) were significantly associated with trustworthiness. Age, class of study, gender, parents' occupations, type of family, and place of residence were not significantly associated with perceived trustworthiness ($p > .05$). (Table 7)

The adolescents' perceived maternal accessibility was significantly associated with class of study ($p = .003$), gender ($p = .001$), expectation of open communication about SRH ($p = .023$), and need to change the current communication pattern ($p = .009$). Age, parents' occupations, type of family, and place of residence were not significantly associated with accessibility ($p > .05$). (Table 7)

Items reflecting adolescents' experiences of communication with parents, especially the expectation of open communication on SRH, were the most consistent correlates of perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility, whereas most demographic variables were not having significant associations.

Table 4. Mean and SD of adolescents perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness and accessibility (n=261)

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Maternal Expertise	13.1801	2.63157	-1.903
Maternal Trustworthiness	13.4253	2.58828	-2.359
Maternal Accessibility	11.9195	3.40097	-.910

Table 5. Mean and SD of items on adolescents perceived maternal expertise, trustworthiness and accessibility (n=261)

Dimension	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Maternal Expertise	My mother gives me good advice	4.4904	.97906	-2.327
	When talking about important matters, my mother's advice is helpful.	4.4138	1.01775	-2.135
	When I need good advice on important matters, I seek help from my mother.	4.2759	1.07799	-1.552
Maternal Trustworthiness	I trust my mother when we talk.	4.6322	0.93375.	-2.804
	My mother keeps the promises she makes to me	4.2375	1.08357	-1.618
	My mother is honest with me	4.5556	.98536	-2.489
Maternal Accessibility	It is difficult for my mother and me to find time to talk.	3.7931	1.43423	-.704
	When I want to talk with her, my mother is usually busy.	3.9195	1.37465	-.937
	My mother finds it difficult to make time to talk with me	4.2069	1.30800	-1.449

Table 6. Relation between Maternal Expertise, Trustworthiness and Accessibility (n=261)

	Spearman's rho	p value
Maternal Expertise and Trustworthiness	.610	<0.05*
Maternal Expertise and Accessibility	.339	<0.05*
Trustworthiness and Accessibility	.310	<0.05*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 7. Association between adolescents' Perceived Maternal Expertise, trustworthiness and accessibility and baseline variables (n=261)

Baseline variables	Maternal Expertise			Trustworthiness			accessibility		
	Chi square	df	p value	Chi square	df	p value	Chi square	df	p value
Age	.403 ^a	3	.940	1.299	3	.729	3.129 ^a	3	.372
Class of Study	.980 ^a	1	.322	1.531 ^a	1	.216	9.089 ^a	1	.003*
Gender	.002 ^a	1	.962	.014 ^a	1	.907	12.058 ^a	1	.001*
Father's occupation	8.242 ^a	5	.143	2.173 ^a	5	.825	4.604 ^a	5	.466
Mother's occupation	5.110 ^a	5	.403	1.586 ^a	5	.903	5.110 ^a	5	.403
Type of Family	2.129 ^a	1	.145	1.419 ^a	1	.234	.068 ^a	1	.794
Place of Residence	7.881 ^a	1	.005*	.001 ^a	1	.974	.405 ^a	1	.525
Expect open communication	15.618 ^a	1	.000*	6.352 ^a	1	.012*	.292 ^a	1	.589
Expect open communication on SRH	9.371 ^a	1	.002*	11.581 ^a	1	.001*	5.162 ^a	1	.023*
Need to change current communication pattern	1.980 ^a	1	.159	5.419 ^a	1	.020*	6.858 ^a	1	.009*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Discussion

The findings of the study provide understanding into adolescents' perceptions of maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility. The high ratings for both maternal expertise (M = 13.1801, SD = 2.63157) and trustworthiness (M = 13.4253, SD = 2.58828) showed that adolescents generally view their mothers as knowledgeable and reliable sources of information and guidance. These findings align with Guilamo-Ramos et al.'s study⁶, which identified expertise and trustworthiness as critical dimensions of parental credibility in adolescent communication. Studies reported that adolescents who perceive their mothers as high in acceptance during early adolescence exhibit a greater relative increase in emotional communications.^{16,17} The high ratings for maternal expertise and trustworthiness suggest that mothers continue to serve as important sources of guidance during adolescence and emphasize the ongoing importance of parent-adolescent relationships throughout developmental transitions.

However, lower ratings for maternal accessibility (M = 11.9195, SD = 3.40097) and the larger standard deviation

reveal substantial variation in adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' availability for communication. This finding is consistent with the study on identifying parental availability as a persistent barrier to effective parent-adolescent communication.¹⁸ The larger variance suggests that while some adolescents perceive their mothers as readily accessible, others experience significant barriers to maternal availability.

The results of this study reveal robust and statistically significant positive relations among adolescents' perceptions of maternal expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility. The strongest correlation exists between adolescents' perceived maternal expertise and trustworthiness ($\rho = .610, p < .05$). This finding closely aligns with the study conducted by Guilamo-Ramos et al. on parental expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility with respect to parent-adolescent communication and adolescent risk behavior.⁶ The perceptions of expertise were highly correlated with perceptions of trustworthiness, and the estimated correlation was 0.96 ($p < 0.01$). This suggests adolescents who see their mothers as having expertise also tend to see their mothers as being trustworthy.

There was a moderate relation between perceived maternal expertise and accessibility ($p = .339$, $p < .05$) and a small-to-moderate relation between perceived maternal trustworthiness and accessibility ($p = .310$, $p < .05$). These correlations connect to existing literature on parent-adolescent dynamics, where higher adolescent ratings of parental expertise and trustworthiness were associated with increased communication frequency and lower engagement in risky activities,⁶ mirroring the strong expertise-trustworthiness correlation in the present study. A study on parental monitoring, parent-adolescent communication, and adolescents' trust in their parents in China by Ying, L. et al.¹⁶ reported positive associations between parental monitoring, communication, and adolescents' trust in parents, with trust mediating behavioral outcomes.

Adolescents perceived maternal expertise was significantly linked to expectations of open communication ($p = .012$) and open communication about SRH ($p = .001$) but not to age, gender, class of study, parents' occupations, or family type ($p > .05$). Trustworthiness showed similar associations with expectations of open communication ($p = .012$), SRH communication ($p = .001$), and the need to change current communication patterns ($p = .020$), with no significant ties to demographics. When trust exists between parents and adolescents, communication becomes both more frequent and more open.¹⁹ The findings of the study were also consistent with the study on exploring mentalization, trust, communication quality, and alienation in adolescents, which found that trust and communication quality were significantly positively correlated with respect to adolescents' relationships with both parents.²⁰ Accessibility was associated with class of study ($p = .003$), gender ($p = .001$), expectations of SRH communication ($p = .023$), and the need for communication changes ($p = .009$), but not with other demographics.

These patterns suggest that attitudinal factors like communication expectations are more influential than sociodemographic factors in shaping credibility perceptions, though accessibility appears more sensitive to developmental stage (e.g., class) and gender differences. The limitations of the study were the cross-sectional and correlational design, which restricts claims of causality; the study's reliance on adolescent self-report; and the limited generalizability.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that adolescents perceive their mothers as highly competent and trustworthy, whereas perceived maternal accessibility tends to vary. Adolescents who view mothers as more expert also tend to view them

as more trustworthy. The moderate correlations between expertise/accessibility and trustworthiness/accessibility indicate that perceived competence and honesty are related to perceived availability. Adolescents may recognize mothers as reliable advisers but still experience limits in actual conversational access. Adolescents' experiences with communication highlight the importance of fostering open, supportive, and responsive dialogues between mothers and adolescents, especially on sensitive topics like SRH. The nurses should develop practical strategies for building stronger family connections, such as family-based and school-based educational interventions that should be designed for aiming at enhancing maternal communication skills, emotional availability, and responsiveness to adolescent needs, which can support adolescents' psychosocial development and decision-making.

To further explore these relationships, longitudinal and mixed-method studies are recommended to examine causal links between perceived maternal dimensions and adolescent outcomes over time and also evaluate the effect of intervention programs for parents in effective communication strategies and relational competence. Such evidence-based initiatives may strengthen parental trust, increase accessibility, and promote adolescents' openness, leading to improved family communication climates.

Declarations: None

Conflict of interest: None

Source of Funding: None

Ethics approvals and consent to participate

Ethics code: CN/A/NR/34/2025 received on 23rd August 2025. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured of the confidentiality of their information, and participation was entirely voluntary. The principles of research ethics were followed.

Highlights

What is the current knowledge?

The quality of parent-adolescent communication depends on perception of adolescents on their mother with respect to competent, reliable, approachable and honest.

What is new here?

The adolescents perceived maternal accessibility was interpreted as lower than maternal expertise and trustworthiness dimensions. A strongest link was observed between maternal expertise and trustworthiness and weaker links involving accessibility. The study showed that adolescents generally view their mothers as knowledgeable and reliable sources of information and guidance but as less available for communication.

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