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How Adolescents and their Single-mothers Communicate in the South of Poland

Abstract:

Sixty-four adolescent girls and 35 boys, from single–mother families in the South of Poland assessed the quality of their communication with their mothers using the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS). ANOVA's were performed to link the scores to mother and family characteristics. Mothers with the highest educational level were assessed as the best communicators both by the sons and daughters, with their result depending on the mothers' age. It was the strongest for mothers aged 42 and younger where, with education increased beyond grade 10 through vocational to secondary or tertiary, a positive 45% increase in communication was observed at a significance level of $p<0.002$. With some exceptions, the best communication was reported by adolescents with the fewest siblings and those from towns.

Keywords: single–mother family; homogeneous dyad; heterogeneous dyad; inter–family relationships.

Introduction

Communication is probably the most vital feature of any human interaction, and is requisite in order to ensure a family environment that is advantageous to the psycho–social development of the children reared in it (Domachowski, 1991; following Grygielski, 1994, p. 66; Harwas–Napierała, 2006, p.29; Rostowska,

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2001, p.49; Soskin, John, 1963; Tyszkowa, 1991). The following two aspects are highly important: 1) the way communication shapes inter–family relationships and changes the attitudes of family members as well as motivates them to a variety of activities, and 2) its progress often requires a sufficient number of steps to be taken and sufficient time to elapse to be of value (Materska, 1975, following Rostowska, 2001, p.49). Through negotiation, communication exerts an influence over other people, such as family members, in ways that are socially acceptable, helping harmonious coexistence (Nęcki, 1992).

Inter-family communication offers an excellent opportunity for adolescents to practise and perfect social skills (Grotevant, Cooper, 1986). It becomes especially important when children reach adolescence, a period when a young person moves towards independence, autonomy, and a new, separate identity (Barnes, Olson, 1985; Collins, 1990; Hartup, 1979). They develop, among other aptitudes, interpersonal skills which foster personal growth (Chartier, Chartier, 1975; Cooper et al., 1982; following Grygielski, 1994, p.66; Nęcki, 1992). Researchers found that parent–adolescent communication affects the adolescent's psycho–social development (Grzesiuk, 1985; Jackson et al., 1998; Noller, Callan, 1990; Przetacznikowa, 1981), and when effective it is advantagoues to the offspring (Olson, Wilson, 1995).

Olson (1997), Grzesiuk (1985) and Mendecka (2003, p.127) specifically stressed open parent–adolescent communication as being essential to the adolescent's well–being, and therefore vital to their upbringing. A local southern Polish researcher Janukowicz (2009, p.85) diagnosed the important role of both verbal and non-verbal inter-family dialogue in fulfilling a child's emotional needs. Consequently she established this component as fundamental in accomplishing successful offspring upbringing. Openness and regular exchange of information and ideas is advantageous to shaping a young person's identity; and listening, according to Baumrind (1971), is as important as talking to them. An ideal situation exists when a child realises that their parent values their opinions, and that they are being taken into account when making important family decisions (following Bee, 2004, p.250). Bad parent–adolescent communication can be a manifestation of parent–adolescent problems, indicating that psychological intervention may be required (Houck et al., 2007).

A large body of literature exists that supports the view that better quality family communication correlates positively with an adolescent's good psycho-social development. It helps adolescents to maintain a positive approach in hostile situations both inside and outside the family, aids their decision-making in situations of disagreements, develops their ability to resolve conflicts (Koerner, Fitzpatrick, 1997), increases a feeling of self–worth, assists constructive coping behaviour (Chartier, Chartier, 1975), correlates positively with the adolescent's feeling of

satisfaction with the family (Barnes, Olson, 1985), leads to fewer depressive symptoms, to greater life satisfaction and higher self–esteem (Ackard et al., 2006; Jackson, et. al., 1998), helps to develop identity (Grotevant, Cooper, 1986), lowers levels and lessens serious cases of adolescent delinquency (Clark, Shields, 1997) and decreases self–harm (Tulloch et al., 1997). Perosa and Perosa (2001) found that for young adults a linear relationship exists between family cohesion as well as between adaptability and communication expressiveness within the family. They established that good parent–child communication was positively associated with cohesion, and negatively associated with conflict. Brage and others (1993) determined that good mother-adolescent communication correlated negatively with adolescent perceptions of loneliness.

Literature related to bad family communication is limited and tends to indicate that the main adverse effect is reticence (Kelly et al., 2002), adolescent delinquency (Clark, Shields, 1997), and avoidance of communication (Avtgis, 1999; Elwood, Schrader, 1998; Hsu, 1998). Vidovic et al. (2005) found a link between bad mother–daughter communication and occurrences of eating disorders in the daughters. "Nagging", a phenomenon adversely affecting parent–adolescent communication, which is often used by parents, was researched by Ellis and Nyet (1959). This form of destructive communication was considered sufficiently important by Barnes and Olson (1985) to be included in their Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) (item 18). Item 10 of that scale is related to another form of negative communication, the "silent treatment", which is sometimes used by adolescents to exert control over their parents. Lehman (www. empoweringparents.com) wrote about methods that parents can use to combat this problem. Houck et al. (2007) established that in families with a chronically ill father, communication between the mother and the adolescent suffers in a way that is similar to that when the youth experiences post–traumatic stress.

Parent–adolescent communication is especially crucial in single–parent families. These families seem to be at a pronounced disadvantage as far as the adolescent's well-being is concerned, due to additional stressors (Hartos, Power, 2000). Parents in these families can be burdened by an elevated load of parental duties, including communication. Data from the Polish National Census from 2002 indicate that 19.4% of families are single–parent ones, and the figure is on the increase (for instance that is an increase of 4% over 1998) (Miszczuk, Miszczuk–Wereszczynska, 2009). The same source indicates that mothers constituted 90% of single parents in 2002. Adolescents seem to have more intense communication with mothers; they tend to report more conflicts with mothers than with fathers (Montemayor, Hanson, 1985; Smith, Forehand, 1986), but express more openness in this relationship as well (Barnes, Olson, 1985), and this applies especially

to females (Napora, Schneider, 2010; Noller, Callan, 1990). Mother–adolescence communication was also found to be of more importance than the father–adolescent one by Jackson and others (1998), Lambert and Cashwell (2004), Youniss and Smollar (1985), as well as Noller and Callan (1990). This suggests that communication problems in single–mother families deserve to be treated as a priority.

Little work has been done to investigate the nurturing abilities of the single mother in regional Poland. A study conducted in 2009, and concerning one administrative region in Poland (Miszczuk, Miszczuk–Wereszczynska, 2009), found that single–mother families are isolated from the society, which manifests itself mainly by social inactivity in areas like employment, public and cultural life, participation in social and cultural activities, and health care. These effects are reinforced by the single mother's low socio–economic position as well her lack of support from family, friends, and public or non–public organisations. This can be expected to lead to poor parenting by single mothers and to a below-average perception of life satisfaction by the mothers and their offspring. The latter can result in adolescent depression, poor school performance, violence either within the family and outside, or even criminal activity (Buzi et al., 2007).

The aim of the project

This project studies mother-adolescent communication in single–mother families in the South of Poland. The adolescents self–assess their communication with their mothers using PACS; numerical scores are obtained that rate its quality. Selected mother and family related parameters are also gathered, and a series of ANOVA's are performed to establish any relationships that may exist between these parameters and the communication quality. In this way it is possible: 1. to treat the scores as an instrument for detectin the adolescent's psycho–social problems, 2. to establish which single–mother and family related characteristics are the source of these problems, 3. to advise ways to improve adolescent's psycho–social functioning by proposing effective coping techniques for mothers and adolescents and/or intervention approaches. In other words, this work examines the mother–adolescent dialogue, and if found to be deficient, endeavours to find methods to amend it to ensure that the adolescents brought up in single–mother families become better socially adjusted, and consequently will function as well adjusted adults. Borecka–Biernat (2010, pers. comm., 18 September) suggested that many factors related to a single mother and her family may affect communication with her adolescent offspring, and among others they could be the mother's age, her level of education, place of residence, the adolescent's age and sex, and the number of children in the family -- all of which were considered in the present study. Collins and Russell (1991), Jackson et al. (1998), Kulik (2005), Napora (2010), and Lamb (1981) indicated that com-

munication depends on the type of parent–adolescent dyad. Therefore the data were treated separately for girls and for boys.

Methods and Materials

To assess the quality of mother–adolescent interaction, as perceived by the adolescent, Barnes and Olson's approach (1985) was adopted in this study. They distinguished "Open" and "Problem" communication styles. "Open" style is related to trust and when used towards a particular family member, it underscores their importance. It is characterised by the free exchange of both factual and emotional information (Jimerson et al., 2003). "Problem" communication means that the child identifies strongly with the parent and accepts their authority at the expense of their own identity, and that stunts their development (Przetacznikowa, 1981). There is hesitancy to share information and reveal oneself. There can be a parental tendency to exercise control over the offspring, demonstrate superiority and to criticise, which is detrimental to the development of their trust, provokes aggression and is insulting to the child (Grygielski, 1994).

Based on these concepts Olson and others (1979) and Barnes and Olson (1985) developed the Parent–Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS), which was then translated into Polish by Radochonski (1987). It was used in that form in the present study to test adolescents' perceptions of their communication with their single mothers in a manner similar to that used by Napora and Schneider (2010). PACS is a simple questionnaire that enables positive and negative parent-adolescent self-reporting of and consists of 20 Lickert-like items. The two aspects, "Open" and "Problem" communication, are represented by two sub-scales, each consisting of 10 statements. The responses range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Examples of "Open" communication items are "I find it easy to talk with my mother" or "If I were in trouble I could tell my mother", while examples of "Problem" communication items are "I am sometimes afraid to ask my mother for what I want" or "I am careful about what I say to my mother".

PACS was administered to 99 adolescents, 35 boys and 64 girls, from single–mother families in the southern region of Poland, and the data obtained were presented separately for each sex, especially as some researchers believe that homogeneous dyads are advantageous (Lamb, 1981). However, there is little empirical evidence for a straightforward and definite conclusion that mother–daughter dyads are superior to mother–son ones concerning communication style (Russell, Saebel, 1997). Detailed studies rather point out to differences in areas such as topics and frequency. There is also a dependence on particular family circumstances

(Houck et al., 2007); so it would be an oversimplification to categorise mother–daughter communication simply as better than that between mother and son.

Subjects taking part in the present study were recruited from community centres supporting single–parent families in the south of Poland. Whenever possible tests were carried out after school hours, in a quiet location in the school building. The timetables of the meetings were organised according to a schedule agreed on both with the school authorities, as well as the participants and their mothers. Some data were obtained from the mothers before the tests were conducted, and both these as well as the filled-out questionnaires were kept in a secure place. The questionnaires were handed out to participants by trained staff, who after collecting the surveys, tallied the results and handled the filled out pages according to a prescribed procedure. Data related to the participants and their families are shown in Table 1.

Table1. Characteristics of the trial participants

No	Variable	Summary statistics	Homogeneous dyads		Heterogeneous dyads		All subjects	
1	Mother's Age	Mean Median SD Range	43.64 43 6.35 35-60		41.85 41 5.92 30-54		43.01 42 5.98 30-60	
2	Adolescent's Age	Mean Median SD Range	17.04 17 2.05 12-20		16.08 17 2.26 12-20		16.71 17 2.17 12-20	
3	No. of Children in Family	Mean Median SD Range	2.25 2 1.04 1-5		2.14 2 1.03 1-5		2.21 2 1.04 1-5	
4	The Number of Mothers with	One Child Two Children 3 or More Children	14 30 20	22% 47% 31%	10 15 10	29% 42% 29%	24 45 30	24% 46% 30%

No	Variable	Summary statistics	Homogeneous dyads		Heterogeneous dyads		All subjects	
5	Mother's Education Level	Post-Grade 10 Vocational Secondary Tertiary	20 35 9	31% 55% 14%	14 14 7	40% 40% 20%	34 49 16	34% 50% 16%
6	Place of Residence	Country Town	22 42	34% 66%	6 29	17% 83%	28 72	28% 72%

Based on their median age of 42, mothers were divided into two age groups: older mothers (more than 42) and younger mothers (42 or less). Based on their education, again they were placed into two groups: those with post–grade 10/ vocational education and the rest, which included mothers with secondary and tertiary education, as the two latter types of education have similar social status in the region. Three groups of mothers were distinguished based on the number of children they had: those with one child, with two , and those who had three or more. Based on the adolescents' median age of 17, two groups were established: younger (17 and below) and older (above 17).

Results

The selected PACS scores are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected statistical values of the mother–adolescent communication styles as assessed by adolescents

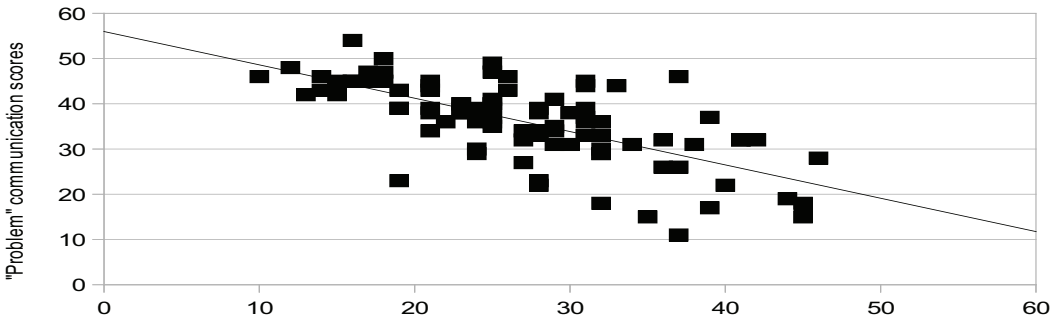
Communication style	Summary statistics	Female adolescents	Male adolescents
"Open" Communication	N Mean SD Mode Median Range	64 35.86 9.39 45 38 11-47	35 36.74 7.59 40 37 17-50

Communication style	Summary statistics	Female adolescents	Male adolescents
"Problem" Communication	N	64	35
	Mean	26.11	28.23
	SD	8.65	7.07
	Mode	32	21
	Median	27	27
	Range	10-45	14-46
Reverse of "Problem" Communication	N	64	35
	Mean	23.89	21.77
	SD	9.78	7.07
	Mode	18	25
	Median	23	23
	Range	5-40	4-36
Total Communication as a sum of "Open" and reverse of "Problem" communications	N	64	35
	Mean	59.75	58.51
	SD	19.13	12.81
	Mode	79	67
	Median	58	62
	Range	20-86	28-82

As can be seen from Table 2, both girls and boys were moderately satisfied when they and their mothers communicated, with both girls and boys achieving almost the same mean total score (59.75 and 58.51 respectively). This is, however, considerably lower than the scores obtained in studies conducted by other authors. For instance, Jackson and others (1998) obtained total scores for mother-adolescent communication close to 80, with differences especially pronounced for "Problem" communication. The explanation can lie in the fact that our study concerned single-mother families, which are exposed to more stressors than the mainly two-parent families studied by Jackson and others (1998). Furthermore, adolescents in our study experienced some psychological problems as they had already turned to the centres that help troubled youth from single parents families, and that led to further lowered total scores.

An important issue is the accuracy of PACS as a tool for assessing single-mother and adolescent communication by the adolescent. The main advantage of PACS is that the questions are simple and the questionnaire is short and, obviously with less tedious tasks, the respondents' attitude can be expected to be more

conscientious and the responses more honest. A simple linear regression between "Open" and "Problem" communication scores of the adolescents tested is shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Correlation between "Open" and "Problem" communication scores

The correlation coefficient for the linear regression of the relationship between "Open" and "Problem" communication is 0.74, which, according to Guilford (1956, p.145) is a high correlation. This indicates that the respondents generally understood the questions, as well as the positive aspects of "Open" communication and the negative aspects of "Problem" communication, and that the questions applied to their situation.

To investigate how mother and family-related factors affected the communication quality in each dyad type, a series of two–way univariate analyses of variance was applied to the PACS questionnaires .

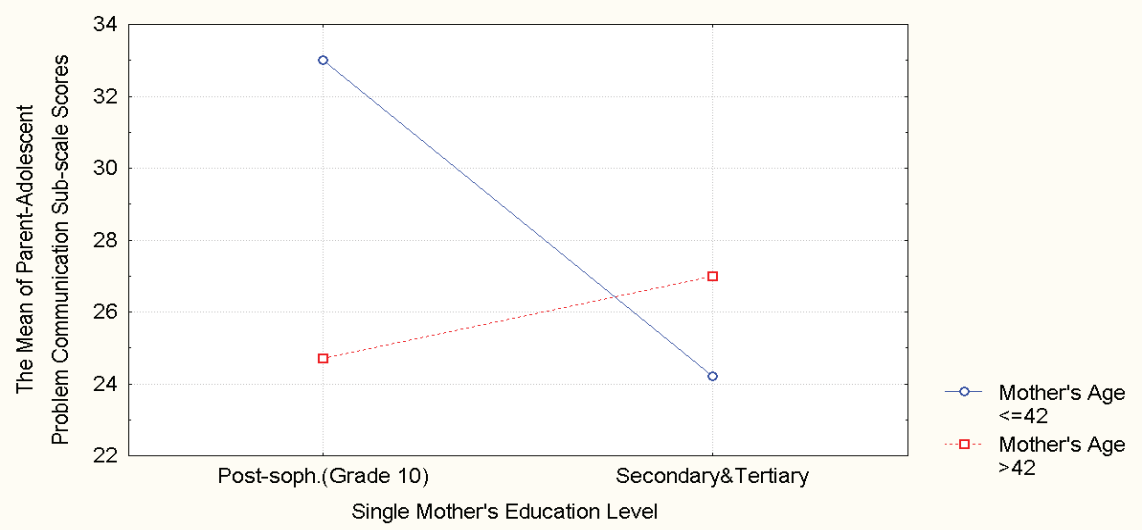
Single mother's age and educational level[2]

Differences among groups were assessed using 2 x 2 (age x educational level) ANOVA's for each of the sub-scales and dyad types.

Mother-daughter "Problem" communication

No significant main effect emerged for the single mother's age or educational level. However, the mother's education interacting with her age was significant ($F(1,60)=5.61$; $p<0.02$) which is illustrated in Graph 2.

[2] For necessary analysis in abstract, there were used author's results of single mother's communication in homogeneous dyads, published in the Polish Psychological Forum [Polskie Forum Psychologiczne] (Napora, 2012).

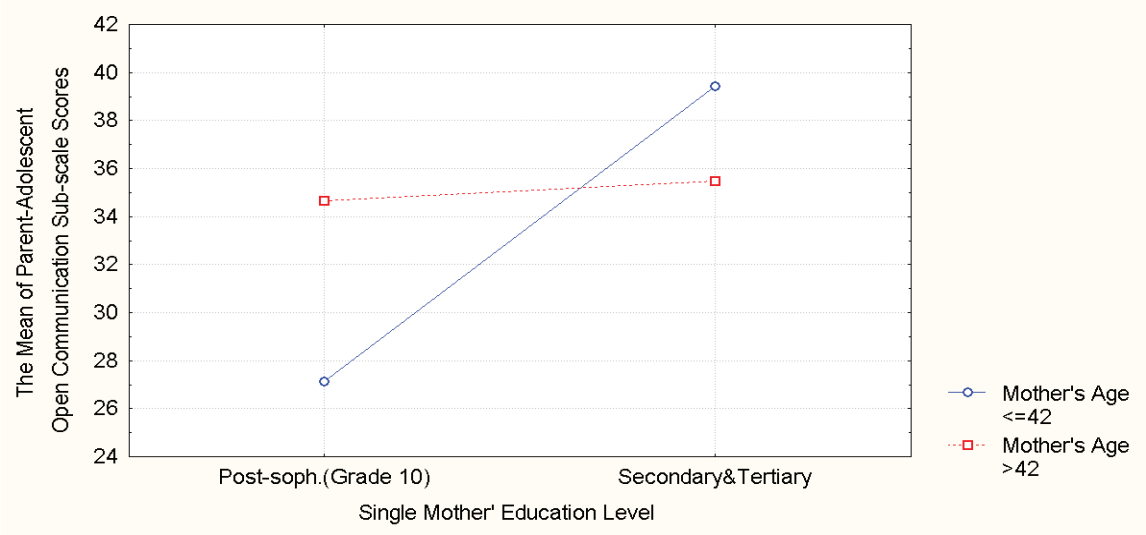


Graph 2. Mother-daughter "Problem" communication. Interaction of mother's educational level with mother's age.

The youngest mothers scored significantly higher on "Problem" communication if they had the lowest educational level (M=33.0, SD=7.50) than if they had the highest level (M=24.2, SD=5.86) ($p<0.02$). However, this effect was not significant for mothers in the oldest age group. The mean "Problem" communication score was comparatively low regardless of the mothers' educational level and not significantly different from that of the youngest mothers with the highest educational level.

Mother-daughter "Open" communication

A significant main effect emerged for the single mother's educational level ($F(1,60)=7.10$; $p<0.01$) with mothers having the highest educational level scoring significantly higher on "Open" communication with their daughters (M=37.4, SD=8.30) than the mothers with the lowest level (M=30.8, SD=10.09). Mother's education by mother's age interaction was significant ($F(1,60)=5.42$; $p<0.02$) (Graph 3).



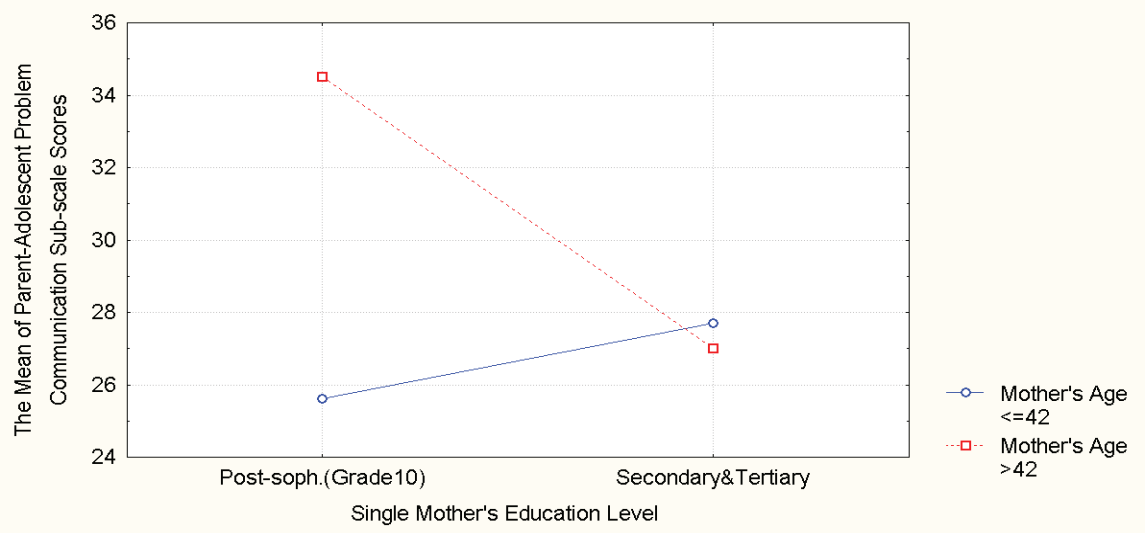
Graph. 3. Mother-daughter "Open" communication. Interaction of mother's educational level with mother's age.

The youngest mothers scored significantly higher on "Open" communication if they had the highest educational level (M=39.4, SD=6.60) than if they had the lowest (M=27.1, SD=10.44) ($p<0.002$). However, this effect was not significant for mothers in the oldest age group in which the mean "Open" communication score was comparatively high regardless of the educational level, and not significantly different from that of the youngest mothers with the highest level.

It seems that daughters see their communication with the best educated youngest mothers as well as with the oldest mothers, regardless of their educational level, as preferable to communication with the least educated youngest mothers. This effect emerged for both "Problem" and "Open" communication. However, the "Open" communication level showed improvement with the single mothers' increased educational level if they belonged to either the youngest or the oldest age group. The strongest effect for increasing the level occurred for "Open" communication among the youngest mothers. The difference in these mothers' scores was the highest as far as both its magnitude and significance were concerned (an increase of 45% observed at $p<0.002$).

Mother-son Problem communication

No significant main effect emerged for the single mother's age or educational level. However, mother's education-age interaction was significant ($F(1,31)=3.98$; $p<0.05$) (Graph 4).



Graph 4. Mother-son "Problem" communication. Interaction of mother's educational level with mother's age.

The effect was opposite to that observed for mothers of daughters. It was the oldest mothers of sons that scored significantly higher on "Problem" communication if they had the lowest educational level (M=34.5, SD=9.00) than if they had the highest level (M=27.0, SD=6.39) ($p<0.05$). And if they had the lowest educational level they also scored significantly higher than the youngest mothers regardless of their level ($p<0.02$). The younger mothers' mean "Problem" communication score was comparatively low regardless of the educational level and not significantly different from that of the oldest mothers with the highest educational level.

Mother-son "Open" communication

No significant main effect emerged for the single mother's age or educational level or the mother's education-age interaction.

Single mother's age and place of residence

Differences among groups were assessed using 2 x 2 (age x place of residence) ANOVA's for each of the sub-scales and dyad types.

Mother–daughter "Problem" communication

No significant main effect emerged for the single mother's age or place of residence or the mother's age-place of residence interaction.

Mother–daughter "Open" communication

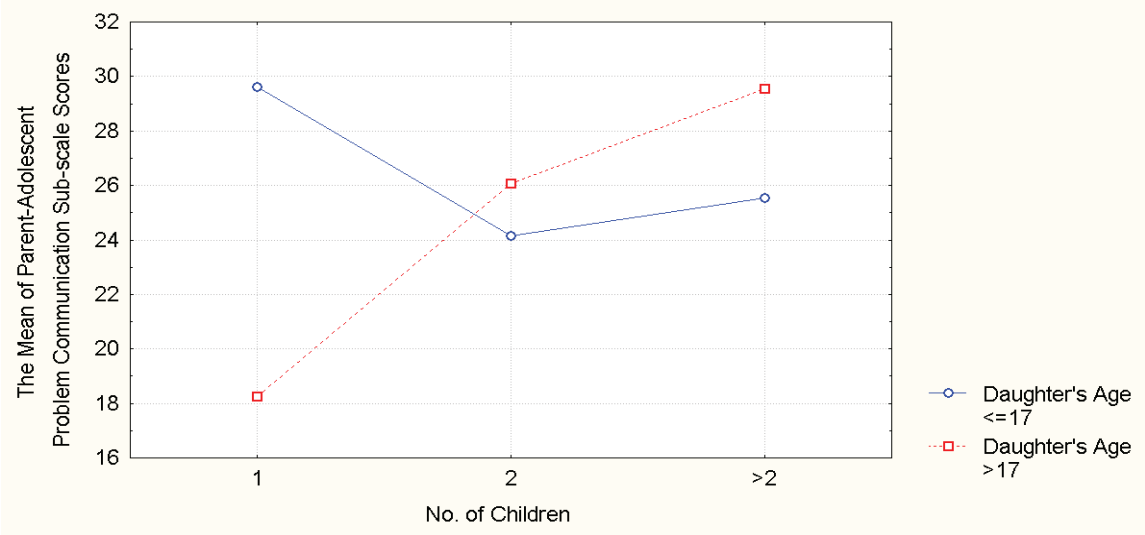
A significant main effect emerged for the single mother's place of residence ($F(1,60)=4.43$; $p<0.05$) with mothers living in towns scoring significantly higher on "Open" communication ($M=37.7$, $SD=8.30$) than mothers living in villages ($M=32.6$, $SD=10.22$). No significant main effect was observed for the single mother's age, and interaction between the factors was also not significant.

Mother–son "Problem" and "Open" communication

No significant main effect emerged for the single mother's age or place of residence or mother's age-place of residence interaction.
Adolescent's age and number of children in the family
Differences among groups were assessed by using 2 x 3 (adolescent's age x number of children) ANOVA' s for each of the sub-scales and dyad types.

Mother–daughter Problem communication

The daughter's age interaction with the number of children in the family was significant ($F(2,58)=3.30$; $p<0.05$) (Graph 5). Mothers with young daughters as their only child scored significantly higher ($M=29.6$, $SD=9.18$) than mothers did with older daughter as their only child ($M=18.2$, $SD=6.55$) ($p<0.05$).



Graph 5. Mother-daughter "Problem" communication. Interaction of daughter's age by number of children in the family.

An increase in the number of children in the family significantly increased "Problem" communication of the oldest ($p<0.05$) but not of youngest daughters.

Mother–daughter "Open" communication

There was a trend that indicated the influence of the daughter's age on mother–daughter "Open" communication according to the number of children in the family ($F(2,58)=2.47$; $p<0.09$). Mothers of young daughters who had no siblings, scored comparatively low on "Open" communication ($M=31.7$, $SD=10.60$) and a similar situation existed for mothers of older daughters with more than one sibling ($M=31.3$, $SD=11.59$). However, mothers of the youngest daughters scored significantly higher if there were siblings in the family ($p<0.05$). This seems to be, in large degree, consistent with the results achieved in this category for mother–daughter "Problem" communication.

Mother-son "Problem" and "Open" communication

No significant effects emerged in this category for sons.

Single mother's place of residence and number of children

Differences among groups were assessed using 2 x 3 (place of residence x number of children) ANOVA' s for each sub-scale and dyad type.

Mother-daughter "Problem" and "Open" communication

No significant effects emerged in this category for daughters.

Mother–son "Problem" communication

Similarly, no significant effects emerged in this category for sons.

Mother–son "Open" communication

A significant main effect emerged for the single mother's place of residence in relation to "Open" communication with her son ($F(1,29)=4.53$, $p<0.05$), with mothers living in towns scoring higher on "Open" communication ($M=38.2$, $SD=6.66$) than mothers living in villages ($M=30.7$, $SD=11.93$). Another significant main effect was observed in relation to the number of children ($F(2,29)=3.35$; $p<0.05$). The lowest score was achieved by mothers who had two children ($M=34.6$, $SD=7.73$) and a similar situation existed for mothers who had more than two children ($M=35.8$, $SD=8.87$). Significantly higher scores were achieved by mothers who had only one son ($M=40.8$, $SD=5.05$). Interaction between the factors was not significant.

Discussion

The education level of single mothers seemed to be the most important factor influencing communication quality between them and their adolescent offspring, with the best educated mothers providing the most advantageous communication environment. There could be various reasons why high-level education aids communication. Better educated single mothers generally have better paying jobs, may need to work fewer hours than the less educated mothers, and therefore have more time for interacting with their children. Well paid jobs result in higher earnings and therefore in fewer stressors, which helps good communication. Well–off mothers with good jobs are likely to be more confident and less isolated from their society. These factors lead to more positive attitudes in life, thus making the mothers more open in their relationships with the children. Education aids rhetoric and this in turn helps the communication process.

In each dyad type, the educational benefits differ depending on the mother's age. Generally, the best educated mothers of any age have better "Open" communication with their daughters than the least educated mothers. However, this effect was stronger for mothers belonging to the youngest age group, both in terms of magnitude and significance. With increased education to the highest level, the youngest mothers showed a 45%increase in the "Open" communication at a significance level of $p<0.002$.

The youngest mothers with the highest education also had much less "Problem" communication with their daughters than the mothers in this age group with the least education, while the oldest mothers' "Problem" communication levels were low regardless of education and similar to those of the youngest, best educated mothers. A simultaneous effect took place in this situation for the youngest mothers: as "Open" communication resulting from better education increased, there was a decrease in "Problem" communication, and the effect is twofold.

The reason for the detrimental effect of the single mother's low educational level, especially in the youngest age group, could be a lack of knowledge, insight, and expertise to help answer the questions of their adolescent daughters who turn to them with their life dilemmas, doubts and problems and everyday difficulties. According to Obuchowska (2000) a child, in the difficult period of adolescence, experiences a strong need for parental emotional support. A girl of that age needs a wise authority figure who can provide credible and helpful advice. Instead, the youngest and the least educated mothers, due to their lack of education and experience and therefore insight, often insult and hurt emotionally their adolescent daughters. The oldest mothers may gain insight into their daughters' psychologi-

cal needs due to life experiences. As a consequence a higher educational level, even though beneficial, becomes less important in this age group.

For sons, communication with the best educated mothers belonging to any age group was assessed as causing the least "Problem". However, when mothers with the least education were considered, sons had, in contrast to daughters, more problems communicating with their least educated single older mothers than with the least educated single younger mothers.

The reason for this effect could be that parents tend to be more "strict" with their male offspring. This tendency to discipline a boy can become stronger when a parent, in this case a single mother, is older, believes she is "life-wise", and therefore craves domination. The best educated oldest mothers would not take up this approach, but the least educated ones, who have the least psychological insight, might like to be more controlling, uncompromising, and inflexible. Harwas–Napierała (2006) mentioned in her work the problem of one–way information flow that arises if the dominant participant lacks communication skills, and especially lacks patience in concentrating on information that is disclosed by the other, less dominant party. The least educated oldest mothers may have a tendency to behave this way since they may perceive themselves as more "important" than the children. They may not see themselves as equal partners or "friends" of their male children, and disregard their problems. Hence "Problem" communication may be experienced by adolescent boys of the oldest mothers with the least education, while the best educated single mothers always had fewer communication problems with their sons regardless of their age.

The conclusion for both homogeneous and heterogeneous dyads is that educating single mothers would considerably benefit communication with adolescents. It is therefore recommended as the first measure to improve the mothers' educational level in order to improve adolescent psycho–social well–being.

The adolescent's age by the number of children in the family did influence the quality of communication in the mother–daughter dyad but not in the mother–son dyad. Especially vulnerable as far as "Problem" communication was concerned were the youngest adolescent girls who were only children and therefore could not share their problems with siblings. This agreed with the result obtained by the youngest adolescent girls with one sibling who gave higher "Open" communication scores to their mothers than the youngest adolescent girls who were only children.

The explanation lies in the fact that a sibling substitutes for the mother when she cannot spare time for her young adolescent daughter and in fact a sibling might be a better confidant for these young girls. A mother for a daughter of that age can still be seen as an authority figure and therefore emotionally distant. This effect

disappears as the girls become older and the mother becomes more of a partner than an authority figure. Therefore the oldest daughters, who were only children, also assessed positively their mother's "Open" communication, especially as the mother could devote the time to an only child, enabling the older daughter to discuss their convictions without any feeling of embarrassment. "Open" communication deteriorated in families with several children, regardless of the child's age. This is only to be expected as a single mother busy with several children will never be a good listener. The oldest daughters who had more than two siblings also experienced "Problem" communication with the mother, as they are probably expected to take care of their brothers or sisters resulting later in the mother blaming the daughter for neglecting her duties or burdening her for the overall family situation.

The conclusion is that in order to help adolescent girls, single mothers should take better care of their young daughters who are only children as well as not burden their oldest daughters with family problems, while young girls who have siblings should turn to them if their mothers are not very attentive. Adolescent sons who were only children had better "Open" communication with their single mothers than if there were more children in the family, which is understandable as a mother with more children has less time to attend to the needs of her offspring.

Both sons and daughters gave higher scores for "Open" communication for mothers coming from towns than those coming from villages. This confirms the finding of Sikorski (2000) that children are better nurtured by parents living in cities. Such parents strive more to make sure that the child, for instance, has higher academic achievements. Dryll (2001) points out the willingness of such parents to reply honestly to the child's questions and their willingness to see the child's point of view.

Summing up, the assessment of the single mother's communication quality depends on the child's sex , but there are some common factors that can be identified that might help or hinder communication regardless of the dyad type. The single mother's educational level seems to be the most important element that would create advantageous conditions for the adolescent's psycho–social development regardless of their sex, but it seems that girls might especially profit from living with a well–educated mother. Mothers living in cities also nurtured their children better as well as mothers having only one child, although an exception is the case of younger daughters who are only children and do not get sufficient attention, probably as the mother does not see in her an equal partner to communicate with. This effect did not seem to apply to an only son regardless of his age. The explanation may lie in the fact that the mother treats the son as a replacement of her partner and pays full attention to his views and convictions.

The final conclusion is that it would be most beneficial, as a first measure, to enhance the psycho–social development of adolescents from the south of Poland to invest effort in educating single mothers. This subject needs further investigation to assess other factors that might be conducive to communicating in the geographic area studied, such as the mother's and adolescent's amount of free time or the type of work performed by the mother. Issues that influence the degree of family isolation, such as the number and type of the mother's friends will also affect single mother–adolescent communication, especially when the youth is an only child, also need further study.

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