

MAKING TEENAGERS SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE THROUGH EARLY COMMUNICATION TO COUNTER PEER PRESSURE AND CURB CRIME WAVE IN EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

Early communication involves engaging in dialogues with children at a very tender age. Engaging in conversation that teaches moral draws children closer to their parents instead of driving them away from home. This study investigated making teenagers socially responsible through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Ebonyi State. The objectives of the study were to: determine whether there is poor or no early communication strategies between parents and their teens; examine how early communication strategy can be used by parents in making their teenagers socially responsible. The study was anchored on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 3,046,287 which was drawn from the 2018 projected population of Ebonyi State based on the 2006 National Population Census. A sample size of 385 was determined using the Australian Calculator as provided by the National Statistical Service. Structured questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the respondents on whom copies of the questionnaire were administered to. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and summarized using frequency tables. Findings showed that most parents have heard of early communication and equally know that early communication involves transfer and exchange of meaning between them and their teenagers. Also, from the study, it was discovered that early communication is importance to teach teenagers moral behaviours, and that it assists children to develop good personalities while teaching them to be socially responsible. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher among other things recommended that parents should from infant start engaging in early communication with their children to teach them moral behaviours and make them socially responsible. Parents should make good use of communication as it is a vehicle of thought to help shape their teenager's thoughts and influence their decision taking and making.

Keywords: *Peer pressure, Teenagers, parents, Communication.*

Introduction

The alarming rate of crime in Nigeria is of great concern to parents, government and the society at large. A look around indicates that there are many contributory factors to that, one of which is the communication gap that has continued to widen between children and their parents, what could be referred to as generational gap. The quest to give children the very best in life has led many parents to work round the clock (almost 24 hours) at the expense of their children. Some leave the children at the mercy of the maid who know nothing about child upbringing and the family tradition. Some are left at the hands of care givers or their peer who lead them astray instead of giving them good moral (Atoyebi and Atoyebi, 2013). Jones, Zaslow, Churchill, and Halle (2016) affirm that cultural factors and peer pressure significantly influence even adolescents' decisions to engage in substance use. This communication gap and lack of mutual relationship between parents and their children have brought the greatest doom to many homes. Steinberg (2005) maintains that peer group influence children at an early age in their life and increase through the teenage years. The result is high rate of teenage pregnancy, abuse of substance, premarital sex, rape cases and other social vices which are on the increase. Families adopt different communication strategy to morally shape children's behaviours in the early stage of their life in order to make them socially responsible and good citizens of the land as Peers' influence behaviour can either have a positive or a negative effect on children (Esser, 2014).

Teenagers are children from the age of 13 to 19 years. Makgosa & Mohube (2017) say that peer influence is the extent to which attitude, believe, and action of an individual are influenced by peers. They argue that it is the pressure wielded by a group of people of same age group, sharing similar interest and or belonging to

same sociocultural category, on a person to alter his/her behaviour, attitudes, and values to be in conformity with the group norms. Making teenagers socially responsible citizens through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave will safeguard the future of our children and rid the society of crime. Communication builds and shapes personality and early communication helps catch children young and shape their behavior. A child's mind is like a clean slate and at that early stage, you can write whatever you like on it. A person's character can be shaped by inculcating good morale to the child early enough. Finkel (2018) points out that the influence of peers on a children's behaviour peak at fourteen just like people around them continue to influence their lives. Peer influence, is the ability of peers group to shape and reshape the attitudes and behaviours of the group member and make them to act in a directional behaviour, either good, bad or neutral behavior. Even teenagers with high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence are susceptible to peer pressure (Michell & Amos, 1997).

Communicating with teenagers can be difficult because you can neither classify them as children or adults, and that is why they sometimes have identity problem. Just like little children at this stage they can still learn values and moral standards from their parents and also older members of the family but what do we see in our society? We see teenager who are left on their own because parents are too busy pursuing wealth. They are totally left at the mercy of their peer groups who most often lead them to crime. Teenagers feel that they are grown enough to do what adults do what adults do. They copy so much from friends. When parents are not there for them they are affected positively or negatively by those they communicate with and when this happens; they consciously or unconsciously adopt lifestyle of those they encounter early in life (Anyakoha, and Eluwa, 2010).

Communication with teenagers can cause conflict and stress especially if you do not understand their way of life. When the communication gap between teenagers and parents, they unlearn what they has been taught at home and they eventually develop values and beliefs that are totally different from those of their parents. They develop ideologies that often expose them to harm and by extension cause heart attack to parents and problem to the society. While this is a normal process of self-independence, parents need to help their teenagers through this process to influence and shape their thoughts and behaviours in order to make them socially responsible (Clark, 2015). Day and Padilla-Walker (2009) opine that an adolescent is a teenager or any person between the ages of 10 and 19. So, children between this ranges are classified as teenagers. It is a period between childhood and adulthood. MacMillan dictionary for Students MacMillan (1981) adolescence is the period of psychological, social and physical transition between children and adulthood. Why it is difficult to communicate with them is that children at this age push to pull away from their parents. At this stage they begin to assert their own independence, making decisions about things that have real life consequences; like choosing friends, school, the use of substances and sex; and that is why some of them end up being useless in life when they make the wrong choice. This makes things complicated for parents but that is only when communication is not effectively utilized to engineer and manage their emotions and thoughts. Teenagers are prone to risks, they are vulnerable and they make mistakes easily. They are rebellious, and easily distracted and most often very thoughtless. At this point of their life when teens need care and modeling by parents through early communication most parents are not always there for them (Doyle and Markiewicz, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Communication is the key determinate of character. How a person communicates says a lot about who they are. Behaviours are also shape with the use of communication. Children are the future of every society and they need proper guidance and mentoring to make them leaders of tomorrow.

With more parent pursuing wealth at the expense of their children, it became imperative to undertake this study to find out if this early communication still exists in families. With communication at home, teenagers will be made socially responsible through early communication and they can easily withstand and counter peer pressure which will eventually help to curb the crime wave in the Ebonyi State.

There is poor or no early communication strategies between parents, older ones or even the government and the teenagers in the state to help mold into better citizens. It is for this reason that study seeks to investigate and determine whether teenagers can be made socially responsible through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb the high rate of crime wave in the state.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this work is to determine whether teenagers can be made socially responsible through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Ebonyi State. Consequences follow the broad objective, the study also have the below objectives:

1. to determine whether there is poor or no early communication strategies between parents and their teens

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2. to find out the early communication strategy that can be used by parents in making their teenagers socially responsible.
 3. to determine how early communication can help teenagers counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. Are there poor or no early communication strategies between parents and their teens?
2. What are the early communication strategies that can be used by parents in making their teenagers socially responsible?
3. How can early communication help teenagers counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Ebonyi State?

Review of Related Literature

Communication and Teenagers Socially Responsible

Early communication involves engaging in dialogues with children at a very tender age. Engaging in conversation that teaches moral draws children closer to their parents instead of driving them away from home. It helps to define their roles and responsibilities and makes them more respectful to their elders. It teaches them how to solve problems without violence and points to them the dangers of certain juvenile behaviours like drug usage/abuse, illicit sex etc. in future. Teens are generally educated through early communication (Evans, 2004).

Most teenagers are difficult to control at this stage, so, to bring the best out of them and inculcate good moral in them, parents must cultivate the habit of

communicating with their before their teens. Such communication and teachings draw them nearer to whoever gives them listening ear and help them to unburden their mind on their daily experiences. Giving them listening ear makes they open to conversation. By listening attentively, parents can decide on the best words to use in replying or communicating with them. Through conversation at that early stage, the consequences of the healthy and unhealthy choices are laid before them. This can help them compare possible consequences of the wrong choices and guide them in seeking assistance from elders (Feldman and Gehring, 2008). Heidari, Mortezaee, Masomi, and Raji, (2016) aver that such early communication helps them develop self-esteem and self-respect, which enables them achieve set realistic goals. Communication is a binding force that gives them the ability to achieve their goals in life. It helps parent dictate when their teens make mistake and the opportunity to demonstrate a strong support while correcting them. Communication makes teens more comfortable in confiding in their parents or whoever gives them a listening ear. Parents may not decide who their friends are but constant communication will reveal such friends and the character they exhibit.

Olson (2000) states that it is not what you do for your teens that matters most but rather what you have taught them to do for themselves is what will make them socially responsible and successful individuals in life. Communicating freely with them early enough helps them to counter peer pressure later in life.. Remember that during adolescence, relationship with peers begin to take precedence over relationship with parents, this is when teens learn and adopt behaviour from their peers that are totally different from that of their parents and have these behaviours may life threatening consequences. Parents coaching at this age is highly important and essential so that their teens can learn to place priority on their

parents perception and values than that of their friends. Also consider that teenagers are vulnerable to negative peer pressure, the reason for effective communication with them about everything. Don't skip some topics believing they are too young to be exposed to such knowledge. When parents fail to or refuse to expose, educate and inform teens on topics like sex, drug abuse etc., and teens will learn from their peers and in a bad way.

Early Communication and Positive Attitude

Early communication do not start from the teen age. Communication with children should begin from the early childhood age to create an understandable relationship between the teenager and parents. Basically early communication with children is the transfer of meaning from parents to their children in a clear, precise and simple language to help the children develop effective communication skills. Early communication do not only aid parents pass meaning to younger ones but also help build teen mentally, assist teens develop good personalities, improve their moral reasoning, help their decision taking, guide their thoughts and choices, assist them in problem solving, build self-esteem and self-respect, regulate their thoughts towards portraying behaviours that are socially acceptable in the society and thus enable them to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave (Thakkar, and Sheth, 2014).

As one of the major developmental tasks in early childhood, learning to communicate is key for children to interact with the persons in their world and to have their needs met. Few tasks in early childhood are as important as this one! Communication development for young children includes gaining the skills to understand and to express thoughts, feelings, and information. Understanding communication begins before birth (during pregnancy) and continues through life,

as a child hears, sees, and interprets information from other people. The expression of communication or a child's language begins with head, eye, and body movements, as well as through simple vocalizations and hand motions. Language expression progresses to words, sentences, and conversations through many methods including gestures, spoken words, sign language, pictorial language systems, and communication boards. It is essential that a child have one of these functional means of expressive language before going to kindergarten. Bloom (1988) describes communication development as guided by the need for relevance (i.e., communicating what is important), discrepancy (i.e., seeking to establish consistency of information), and elaboration (i.e., learning more complex language skills). Communication is essentially a symbol-manipulating system that is present in very young children and that increases in complexity with age (Pinker, 1999). During the early childhood years, responsive families and teachers are critical for rich stimulation of children's communication skills. Appropriate stimulation helps all areas of children's development (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Conversely, limited stimulation can significantly hinder a child's development (Hart & Risley, 1995). Since this area is so important to children's development, let's consider what we currently know about KY children's communication and some resources that support this job important area.

A mother starts communication with a child while he or she is still in the womb. Such an intrapersonal communication may seem as if the woman is communicating with herself but right inside her womb the unborn child is enjoying a close relationship with his/her mother. The question then is, why can't such relationship continue between parents and children when the child is growing even up to adulthood? Intra-personal communication which is the communication that goes on within a person's mind is reflected on the outside in the person's behaviour

(Ford and Smith, 2007). There are so many definitions of communication but there's one thing common with most of them and that is that communication is the sharing or transferring of meaning by the use of language, symbols or gestures whether verbally or nonverbally. We need to understand that this meaning could be an idea, information, attitude, emotions, or behaviours.

It is difficult in trying to make a Teenager socially responsible because at this age, teenagers like to explore and assert their personal identities. They seek to assert who they are, their role in the society. It is a conflicting time of identity search and it demands proper mentoring and guidance by parents and elders in the society. To save these teenagers from identity crisis there is need for early communication or else they will pick negative identities which may cause their doom in future. Through communication especially in the early stage of a child's life, parents must actively share values and instill societal norms on the child, assisting him/her in decision making. Parents who are close to their children at this stage are more of guidance and friends to them. That way they win their teens because the more control parents have, the more rebellious teens become. Dialogue is important in every family especially where there are growing children (Noller and Fitzpatrick, 2003).

Early communication strategies includes:

Coaching approach: parents should from the very early age of their children be their coach and mentor. This early communication strategies should cover a large range of topics present guidelines to teens that helps them develop good skills both in communicating, carrying out tasks, solving problem (Andrews, Capaldi, Foster, and Hops, 2000).

Home Teacher communication strategy: this early communication strategy involved developing a home lesson time table and acting as a home teacher to the teens after school hours. Children who are used to their parents teaching them after school will tend to be mindful of their behaviour towards class lesson because they know that after school their parents will ask them questions about what they were taught, give them home work from it and go through those topics to educate them more; so they wouldn't want to miss classes in school. Home teaching should start a very early age of the child (Crede, Wirthwein, McElvany, and Steinmayr, 2015).

Friendly Conversation strategy: this early communication strategy shows no class between the parent and the teen. This conversation is open and happens as if the child is discussing with their peers or friends. It is highly important to develop friendly discussion with teens at the very childhood age to make them free and open to speak about their affairs without fear of criticism and hope of getting better advice. Instigate friendly discussion with your teens tell them how your day went, the choices you made, what transpired in your office, seek their opinions over those situations and allow them to speak freely. By doing this you are making open to you and more comfortable to discuss anything with you and also spend quality time with you than their friends. This will help shape their perceptions of life, you as a parent will influence them better this way and socially prepare them to have self-esteem, self-respect and counter peer pressure (Tella, 2003).

Hangout and talk strategy: this early communication strategy is very essential and morally shape teens perceptions. This is how it happened, parents take their children out on dates or tour and expose to new knowledge and social life. Teenagers may want to hang out with their peers and by so doing pick up bad behaviours like smoking, drug abuse, sex abuse, violent, learn how to steal etc.

When they hang out with friends they want to do what their friends are doing because they are vulnerable at this age and unexperienced. So one of ways to make teenagers socially responsible to counter peer pressure and this early communication strategy. Take them out to cinemas, watch movies together, go to museums, tour tourist sites, or any fun and educational place you can go with them. Engage in conversations that looks friendly and tactically teach them values and how to do things the right way (Alika and Egbochuku , 2009).

Regular Education strategy: regularly educate teens, talk about bad habits and their consequences. Watch a bad movie and ask them what they have learnt from it. Allow them to present their opinions then shape the ones that were not properly presented or misunderstood. When parents do this, they rightfully influence the teen's thoughts and affect their judgment of life (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Rules Communication strategy: this communication strategy involves parents stipulating rules and ensuring compliance. In communicating rules make sure to be strict, consistent but not harsh, rude and violence in ensuring compliance. Study your kids and know the method that works. Be calm because most times shouting is not the best way to make them obey. Explain things to them and make them see reasons why they need to abide by the family rules. Also remember that you are a moral role model to your children therefore display good characters and lead by example. When stipulating rules consider that you as a parent will not break those rules (Barnard, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) started as the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s by Albert

Bandura. It developed into the SCT in 1986 and posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. Social learning theory also called modeling theory is based on the assumption that people learn how to behave by observing others (Rodman 2006). The unique feature of SCT is the emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. SCT considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviour, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behaviour

Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT) base on the above statements, is a learning theory which has come out on the ideas that people learn by watching what others do, and that human thought processes are central to understanding personality. By the mid-1980s, Bandura's research had taken a more holistic bent, and his analyses tended towards giving a more comprehensive overview of human cognition in the context of social learning. The theory he expanded from social learning theory soon became known as social cognitive theory. (Bandura, 1999). This theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting and changing.

One assumption of the theory is that people can learn by observing others. Learners can acquire new behaviours and knowledge by simply observing a model. A model is a person who demonstrates behaviour for someone else. For example parents are models for their children, the observer (teenagers) watched the models (parents) behaviours in order to learn from it. People can learn both positive and negative behaviors from observing the actions of people in their environment, or models. For example, being polite and courteous is often learned through models, as is behaving in an aggressive and violent way in gang-infested neighborhoods. Therefore, teenager's behaviours are adopted, cultivated and nurtured. There are

several factors that contributes to influence teenagers' characters. These include environment, family background, biological factors, communication, socialization proceed etc.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design as it is appropriate in eliciting information on the behaviour and attitudes of a defined population. The population of the study is 3,046,287 which was drawn from the 2018 projected population of Ebonyi State based on the 2006 National Population Census. The sample size for this study is 385, this was determined using Australian calculator. The Australian Calculator was adopted, using a confidence level of 95% and precision level of 0.05(5%). The study employed purposive sampling technique. The instrument of data collection was structured questionnaire. The area of the study is Ebonyi State. Data was presented in frequency tables and analyzed using simple percentage.

Data presentation and analysis

Section A

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to the demographic/personal attributes

Socio-economic variables		Frequency	
Percent (%)			
Gender			
Male	42%	162	
Female	58%	223	
Total		385	100
Educational qualification			

SSCE	136	
35		
BSc/HND	107	
28		
MSc	87	
23%		
Ph.D	55	
14%		
Total	385	100
Occupation status		
Civil servant	141	37
Self-employed	37	
10		
Students	125	
32%		
Traders	82	
21		
Total	385	100

Source: field survey 2018

Table 1 above shows that greater number of the respondents were female (58%). This shows that the female dominated the study. The result on table 1 above also shows that the respondent majority of the respondent had formal education and that majority of them are civil servants.

Table 2

Percentage distribution of the respondents on making teenagers socially responsible through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Cross River state.

S/N	Question	Options (Respondents, percentage 100%)
1	Have you heard about early communication?	YES 330(86%) NO 55(14%)

2	Do you know that early communication involves transfer and exchange of meaning between parents and teenagers?	YES 348(98%) NO 37 (12%)
3	What is the importance of early communication behaviours with teenagers? develop good personality teenagers to be socially responsible above 385(100%)	A. Teach teenagers moral B. To assist teenagers C. To teach D. all of the
4	Can early communication help teenagers Counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Ebonyi State?	YES 364 (95%) NO 21 (5%)
5	Can teenagers be make socially responsible citizens through early communication to counter peer pressure and curb crime wave?	YES 372 (97%) NO 13 (3%)
6	What are other factors that can influence teenage behavior and reduce crime rate? background above 385(100%)	A. Environment B. Family C. Peer groups D. All of the

Source: Field survey 2018

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 2 above shows the responses of the sampled respondents. From the table, majority of the respondents are aware of early communication. On whether early communication involves transfer and exchange of meaning between parents and teenagers answered in the affirmative 348(98%) This indicate that early communication was well understood by the greater number of the respondents. On what is the importance of early communication with teenagers, 372(100%) of

the respondents answered that it teaches teenagers moral behaviours, assists teenagers develop good personalities, teaches teenagers to be social responsible while of the respondents answered all of the above. That means that early communication is very importance for socialization and the development into an acceptable member of the society.

The table equally shows the response of the respondents on can early communication help Teenagers counter peer pressure and curb crime wave in Nigeria. Table 2 above also mentioned other factors that can influence Teenagers' behaviour positively and help them reduce crime rate in the society. The implication is that good neighborhood, good family background, and good peer groups are the factors that equally influence good behaviour in Teenagers and reduce crime rate in the society.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of the data collected, presented and analysed, it was discovered most parents have heard of early communication and equally know that early communication involves transfer and exchange of meaning between them and their teenagers. The finding aligns with Thakkar, and Sheth (2014) who reported that early communication begins from the early childhood age to create an understandable relationship between the teenager and parents. Early communication helps to build teens mentally, assist teens develop good personalities, improve their moral reasoning, help their decision taking, guide their thoughts and choices, assist them in problem solving, build self-esteem and self-respect, regulate their thoughts towards portraying behaviours that are socially acceptable in the society.

Again, the findings also reveal that early communication is importance to teach teenagers moral behaviours, and that it assists children to develop good personalities while teach teenagers to be socially responsible. Theoretically, the findings above are in tandem with the social cognitive learning theory postulation proposed above. For instance, the confirmation of Bandura (1999) that people learn by watching what others do, and that human thought processes are central to understanding personality. Teenagers watch their parents do and say, and get influenced. This makes it important for parents to effectively adopt good early communication strategies to help make their Teenagers socially responsible and assist them counter peer pressure to curb crime wave in Nigeria. There are other contributing factors that helps teenagers develop good behaviour and become socially responsible; as reveal in the finding this factors include good neighborhood, good family background and good peer groups. This finding is in tandem with the statement of Meyer (2009) that Peer pressure has a chain reaction starting from the child, moving to towards pressure on the parents and eventually ending with a purchase to prove that the pressure was successfully making the purchase happen. She says that as a result, marketers exploit peer pressure opportunities. Mothers tend to take their children on a co-shopping experience giving them a greater input and freedom into the household shopping (Swann et al 2009).

Conclusion

Social responsibility is a moral obligation on a company or an individual to take decisions or actions that is in favour and useful to society. It is difficult in trying to make a Teenager socially responsible because at that age, teenagers begin to explore and assert their personal identities. Factors like environment, growth, family background, peers groups, religious beliefs and experience contributes

greatly in shaping teenagers behaviour and most times teenagers adopt negative characters that have real life consequences.

Early communication plays a more active role in influencing behaviour. At all levels of life from infant to teenage age and adulthood communication is active and continue to actively shape behaviour. Teenagers see their parents as role models and learn from them but most times since Teenagers are prone risks and vulnerable, they get influenced by their peers and adopt behaviours different from those of their parents.

Early communication is importance as reveal by the study to make teenagers socially responsible and help counter peer pressure to curb crime wave. Notwithstanding, the study also recognises other factors like good neighborhood, good family background and good peers groups that influence good behaviours and help reduce crime rate.

Recommendations

1. Parents should from infant start engaging in early communication with their children to teach them moral behaviours and make them socially responsible. Parents should make good use of communication as it is a vehicle of thought to help shape their teenagers' thoughts and influence their decision taking and making.
2. Parents should carefully study their teenagers and adopt effective early communication strategies that works. They should equally be good listeners and guidance not controllers because as discovered in this study teenagers tend to be rebellious and rude when their parents act so controlling.

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3. Parents and guidance should take into account other factors that influence good behaviours and employ them.

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