

Research Article

Quality of Daughter-father Communication Associated with Youth Externalizing/Internalizing Problems in Thailand

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Abstract

Quality of parent-youth communication has been studied as an important variable affecting youth mental health. However, the term “parents” in previous studies have been mixed both mother and father; or focused only on mother. Limited research has explored whether the quality of communication (positive and problematic) between youth daughter and her father is associated with daughter’s mental health. This study aimed to explore the association between quality of daughter-father communication and daughter’s mental health. The Circumplex model was guided the hypotheses: 1) There will be a negative relationship between positive of youth daughter-father communication and daughters’ externalizing/internalizing problems; 2) There will be a positive relationship between problematic of youth daughter-father communication and daughters’ externalizing/ internalizing problems.

Participants were 156 female youth from two high schools in Southern Thailand. Thai versions of Parent-adolescent Communication Scale measured quality of youth-father communication and Youth Self-report Checklist measured youth externalizing/ internalizing problems were completed by youth. A correlation and a series of hierarchical regression procedures were used to analyze the data after adjusting for covariates factors: youth stressful life events, father marital status, and socioeconomic status.

Significant positive associations were found between problematic of youth daughter-father communication and daughters’ mental health. However, there were no significant associations between positive of daughter-father communication and daughters’ mental health. Nurses and researchers working with youth and family can apply these findings to inform parents about the important of problematic communication between fathers and daughters toward daughter’s mental health.

Keywords: externalizing; father-daughter relationship; internalizing; parent-youth communication; youth

Introduction

The quality of communication between parents and adolescents is an important facet for youth growth, development, and health.¹ Studies have found that negative or problematic communication between youth and their parents significantly correlates with higher rates of youth externalizing and internalizing problems, whereas positive communication correlates with lower rates of youth externalizing/internalizing problems.²⁻⁶ Although the quality of communication between youth and parent is shown to be an important variable affecting youth mental health, relatively little research has explored the differences in the quality of communication based on the sex of the parent, most of findings of these studies have been reported from both parents or with mother.²⁻⁶ Limited study is focusing on quality of youth-father communication and its consequences.

People mostly believe that son-father relationship may have strong influence in a young boy's life than a young girl's life, however, it's equally important for daughters to have such a relationship as well. Research found that perception level of relationship in young daughters with fathers was associated with daughters' psychological behaviors such as self-esteem⁷, risky behaviors and illicit drug use⁸, and depression.⁹ Based on these findings, we can suggest that quality of daughter-father relationship has strong power for daughters' growth and development as well as mother. Thus, family-oriented scholars should pay more attention to this issue.

In Thailand, many studies have found that youth relationship with parents, specifically, parenting style, is a major factor associated with Thai youth emotional and behavioral problems.¹⁰⁻¹² Some Thai studies identified parent-youth communication as an especially important part of parenting style related to youth mental health.¹⁰⁻¹² For example, effective parenting communication was associated with lower

symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts for their off springs. However, the findings of these studies have been mixed and reported either from both parents or from mother only.

Based on review literature, there are several gaps in this line of research such as limited research has focus on whether the quality of communication (i.e., positive and problematic) between father and youth is associated with their youth mental health, specifically the daughter's mental health. Furthermore, there are also social and cultural differences between Thailand and Western countries that preclude generalizing the results of research conducted in Western countries to the youth and the relationship with parents in Eastern countries. This study aims to determine positive or problematic daughter-father communication is associated with daughter externalizing and internalizing problems. We hypothesized that 1) There will be a negative relationship between positive of youth daughter-father communication and daughters' externalizing and internalizing problems; 2) There will be a positive relationship between problematic of youth daughter-father communication and daughters' externalizing and internalizing problems.

Conceptual Framework

The Circumplex model¹³ was guided the hypotheses in this study. According three central dimensions of marital and family systems: cohesion, flexibility and communication, the Circumplex model conceptualizes "*communication*" between family members as a critical facilitating factor which can have important impact to family functioning. This study focuses on one subsystem unit in family (daughter and father). We aimed to explore whether quality of communication as youth daughter perceive as a critical facilitating factor toward father is associated with daughter's mental health. The female youth in this study are early adolescent ages 10-14 years.¹⁴

Daughter-father communication refers to the quality of communication between female youth and their fathers based on the youth's perceptions toward their communication with fathers. The quality of communication can be defined as the character in a logical proposition of being affirmative (positive) communication or negative (problematic) communications²⁻⁶ which are believed to have associated with daughters emotional and behavioral problems or mental health problems. The quality of daughter-father communication can be measured in terms of the degree of "listening skills, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, continuity tracking, and respect, and regard".^{15 (p520)}

The outcomes (dependent variables) of the model are mental health problems in a non-clinical sample of youth which can be measured as group of externalizing problems involve dysregulation in behaviors, and internalizing problems involve on emotional problems based on Achenbach's system.¹⁶ The symptoms of externalizing problems are under-controlled behaviors which have a cause negative social impact,¹⁷⁻²⁰ such as physical aggression, verbal bullying, and rule breaking behaviors. The symptoms of internalizing problems refer to overly controlled behaviors which can have a negative personal impact,¹⁷⁻²⁰ such as social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and somatization problems. The study also included potential covariate factors: youth stressful life events, father marital status, and socioeconomic status in youth family, which may have associate with daughter's mental health.

Methods

This study was a cross-sectional, correlational study design. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards from Faculty of Nursing, Prince of Songkla University (ศบ. 0521.1.05/0027).

We also obtained permission from the two Thai school principals where participants were recruited.

Recruitment, Consent and Data Collection

Inclusion criteria consisted of female youth, ages 12-14 years old, living with their biological fathers, and attending one of the two participating high schools from two provinces in southern of Thailand (Pattani and Yala). Female youth ages less than 12 years or more than 14 years, not being able to read or write in Thai, and did not live with biological fathers were excluded. The target population in this study was Thai female youth living in Southern part of Thailand. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from two high schools in two provinces in Southern part of Thailand. The sample size calculation was based on the guideline recommended by Green²¹ for determining the regression sample sizes [$N > 104 + m$ (where m is the number of independent variables)]. A teacher at each recruitment site (two schools) screened potential youth participants based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Qualified youth met with the principal investigator (PI) /research assistant (RA) for a half hour during which we explained the study and give them recruitment packets to give to their fathers to review recruitment materials, sign the consent form (by checking a box indicating consent), and complete and return the questionnaires within 1 week. Their children delivered the packets back to the school. Then, another hour was scheduled for the PI/RA to meet with students whose fathers consented for their children to take part in the study. During that meeting, the PI/RA explained the study, obtained assent, and collected data from the youth. Female youth who took part in the study received 50 Baht for participation. Data were obtained from 156 female youth with return rate 51-53 percent from 1st and 2nd school, respectively.

Measures

Youth Externalizing and Internalizing Problems.

The female youth completed Youth Self Report (YSR) Thai versions²² which is based on the original English version by Achenbach and Rescorla.¹⁶ The YSR is designed to assess self-reports of emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents 11–18 years old. The assessments contain 112 items that use a 3-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 to 2, where 0=not true, 1=somewhat or sometimes true, and 2=very true or often true within the previous 6 months. The analysis for this study included only the 29 items related to two externalizing syndrome scales (Rule-breaking Behavior, and Aggressive Behavior) and the 30 items related to three internalizing syndrome scales (Anxious/Depressed, Withdrawn/Depressed, and Somatic Complaints). In this current study, internal consistency for YSR-Externalizing and Internalizing were .90 and .90. Permission for using the YSR-Thai version was obtained from Louthrenoo.²²

Youth-father Communication.

The Parent-adolescent Communication Scale Youth Form (YPACS) Thai version was used to measure the self-report assessments of the quality of youth-father communication. The Thai versions of YPACS was developed by translating the original version from English to Thai using backed translation methods and tested for construct and reliability by Pummanee.²³ Permission for using the YPACS-Thai version and was obtained from Pummanee.²³

In this study, the YPACS Thai version was used to measure quality of youth daughter-father communication. The YPACS was developed to assess “listening skills, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, continuity tracking, and respect, and regard”.^{15 (p520)} The YPACS was completed by the female youth to rate the quality of communication between herself and her father. The original version

of YPACS has 20 items and composed of two sub-scales.¹³ Ten items measure the degree of openness in family communication and another 10 items measure the extent of problems in family communication. Participants use a Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) to rate each item.

In this study, the scores for YPACS were separated into positive and problem scale (10 items each) and separate composite scores were calculated with each scale.^{1, 24} Participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed to each statement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Higher scores indicated higher levels of open and higher levels of problematic in daughter-father communication. The current Cronbach alpha reliability of positive and problems subscale of the YPACS were .85 and .70.

Covariate Variables.

There are three covariates in this study. 1) youth stressful life events and changes (how many events and changes occurred prior to 12 months), was measured by the A-File Thai version by Pummanee and Trangchasombut²⁵ from original English version A-File by McCubbin, Patterson, Bauman, et al.²⁶ Permission for using the A-File Thai version was obtained from Pummanee and Trangchasombut.²⁵ The former internal consistency has been estimated to be .87.²⁵ For this current study, internal consistency was .77; 2) father marital status (couple and non-couple); and 3) socioeconomic status in youth family ($\geq 10,001$ or $\leq 10,000$ Bath per month).

Data Analysis

The 156 female youth data were screened for outliers and inaccuracies, and assessed for patterns of missing data. The missing values were imputed using the expectation maximization algorithm for multiple imputations.²⁷ The demographic data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Before statistical

modeling, a correlation matrix was calculated in order to examine bivariate relationship among the variables. Finally, a series of hierarchical regression procedures were used to analyze whether quality of daughter-father communication is associated with daughter externalizing and internalizing problems.

Results

Descriptive Results.

Table 1 provides sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. The female youth sample (N=156) comprised youth in grades seven or eight. Religious affiliations included Buddhism (68.6%),

Islam (30.1%), Christian (0.6%) and missing (0.6%). The mean age of fathers was 45.8 years old. Most fathers were partnered and married (87.8%), remarried (4.5%), or no partner and parenting child alone (7.7%). The religious affiliations for fathers were similar to their children. Most fathers were well-educated (30.1 % college level), and secondary high school (24.4%). Family incomes ranged from 10,001 to 20,000 Baht (27.6%), equal to or greater than 50,001 Baht (20.5%), 20,001 to 30,000 Baht (16.0%) and equal to or lower than 10,000 Baht (14.1%).

Table 1 Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Female Youth N = 156	Father N = 156
Age in years mean (<i>SD</i>)	12.64 (0.62)	45.81 (6.40)
12	68 (43.6%)	-
13	76 (48.7%)	-
14	12 (7.7%)	-
Grade Levels (%)		-
Grade 7 (Muttayom 1)	82 (52.6%)	-
Grade 8 (Muttayom 2)	74 (47.4%)	-
Religious Affiliation (%)		
Buddhism	107 (68.6%)	107 (68.6%)
Islam	47 (30.1%)	48 (30.8%)
Christian	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
Missing	1 (0.6%)	-
Highest education of father (%)		
Less than High school	-	24 (15.4%)
Primary High school (grade 7-9)	-	16 (10.3%)
Secondary High school (grade 10-12)	-	38 (24.4%)
Diploma or secondary vocational	-	21 (13.5%)
College	-	47 (30.1%)
Master Degree	-	7 (4.5%)
Other not specify	-	3 (1.9%)

Characteristic	Female Youth N = 156	Father N = 156
Father marital status (%)		
Married	-	137 (87.8%)
Re-married	-	7 (4.5%)
Single father	-	12 (7.7%)
Family income (Baht) (%)		
≤ 10,000	-	22 (14.1%)
10,001 -20,000	-	43 (27.6%)
20,001-30,000	-	25 (16.0%)
30,001-40,000	-	22 (14.1%)
40,001-50,000	-	10 (6.4%)
≥ 50,001	-	32 (20.5%)
Missing	-	2 (1.3%)

Before statistical modeling, a correlation matrix was calculated in order to examine bivariate relationship among the variables (see Table 2). The produced matrix revealed all significant relationship linking externalizing problems to positive YPACS ($r = -.189$, $p < .05$), problematic YPACS ($r = .229$, $p < .01$), and A-File ($r = .214$, $p < .01$). And internalizing problems to positive YPACS ($r = -.197$, $p < .05$),

problematic YPACS ($r = .259$, $p < .01$), and A-File ($r = .274$, $p < .01$). Other notable associations involved A-File with positive YPACS ($r = -.296$, $p < .05$), and problematic YPACS ($r = .177$, $p < .05$). And positive YPACS with problematic YPACS ($r = -.298$, $p < .01$); and externalizing problems with internalizing problems ($r = .631$, $p < .01$).

Table 2 Bivariate Relationship among Variables (N=156)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Externalizing	-				
2. Internalizing	.631**	-			
3. A-File	.214**	.274**	-		
4. Positive YPACS	-.189*	-.197*	-.296*	-	
5. Problematic YPACS	.229**	.259**	.177*		-
				-.298**	
Mean	.269	.369	2.24	4.01	2.88
SD	.171	.236	2.86	.577	.637

Note: A-File = Youth stressful life events and changes, Positive YPACS= Positive of daughter-father communication Scale, Problematic YPACS= Problematic of daughter-father communication Scale

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$,

A series of hierarchical regression procedures were used to analyze whether quality of communication between daughter-father (positive and negative communication) was associated with these two mental health outcomes of daughters; externalizing and internalizing problems. The first step included major independent variables, positive YPACS, and problematic YPACS then the second step added covariates variables: A-File, father marital status, and socioeconomic to test whether quality of daughter-father communication was associated with externalizing and internalizing problems after statistically controlling

for all covariates.

Regarding an analysis testing association between all variables and externalizing problems (Table 3), we found daughter-father problematic communication was associated with externalizing problems ($\beta = .189$, $p < .05$) but we didn't find association between daughter-father positive communication and externalizing problems ($\beta = -.133$, $p > .05$) in step 1. For step 2, we also found daughter-father problematic communication was associated with externalizing ($\beta = .178$, $p < .05$) after adjusted for covariates.

Table 3 Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Externalizing Problems (N = 156)

Variables	B	SE (B)	β
Step 1			
Constant	.281	.132	-
Positive YPACS	-.039	.024	-.133 ^{ns}
Problematic YPACS	.051	.022	.189*
Step 2			
Constant	.212	.135	-
Positive YPACS	-.026	.025	-.087 ^{ns}
Problematic YPACS	.048	.022	.178*
A-File	.009	.005	.156 ^{ns}
Father Marital Status	-.023	.050	-.036 ^{ns}
Socioeconomic	.023	.038	.048 ^{ns}

Note: A-File = Youth stressful life events and changes, Positive YPACS= Positive of daughter-father communication Scale, Problematic YPACS= Problematic of daughter-father communication Scale

* $p < .05$, ns= non-significant

Model 1 $R^2 = .068$, Model 2 $R^2 = .094$

Regarding an analysis testing association between all variables and internalizing problems (Table 4), we found daughter-father problematic communication was associated with internalizing problems ($\beta = .220$, $p < .05$) but we didn't find association between daughter-father positive communication

and internalizing problems ($\beta = -.131$, $p > .05$) in step 1. For step 2, we also found daughter-father problematic communication was associated with internalizing ($\beta = .195$, $p < .05$) after adjusted for covariates. We also found the A-File was associated with the internalizing problems ($\beta = .215$, $p < .01$) in the step 2.

Table 4 Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Internalizing Problems (N = 156)

Variables	B	SE (B)	β
Step 1			
Constant	.349	.180	-
Positive YPACS	-.054	.033	-.131 ^{ns}
Problematic YPACS	.082	.030	.220*
Step 2			
Constant	.024	.183	-
Positive YPACS	-.031	.034	-.077 ^{ns}
Problematic YPACS	.072	.030	.195*
A-File	.018	.007	.215**
Father Marital Status	.040	.068	.045 ^{ns}
Socioeconomic	.022	.052	.032 ^{ns}

Note: A-File = Youth stressful life events and changes, Positive YPACS= Positive of daughter-father communication Scale, Problematic YPACS= Problematic of daughter-father communication Scale

*p<.05, **p<.01, ns= non-significant

Model 1 R² = .083, Model 2 R² = .127

Discussion

This present study aimed to explore the specific gender of parent (father) and the youth (daughter) to know whether or not there were relationship between quality of daughter-father communication and daughters' mental health.

Problematic Communication between Youth Daughter-father and Daughter Externalizing/Internalizing Problems

Overall, results supported the problematic daughter-father communication was positive relationship with daughter youth externalizing and internalizing problems after adjusted for covariates. These findings indicate that when youth daughters' retrospective perceptions of overall they have communicated with their fathers as problematics (i.e., less skills of listening, speaking, self-disclosure and respect) were higher, the mean score of youth daughter externalizing and internalizing problems were also higher. More specifically, these findings suggests that daughter youth more likely to have more externalizing when they perceived problematic communication with their father, regardless of their living within any type of family (either father has couple or

non-couple; either youth have lived within lower socioeconomic or higher socioeconomics; and either youth face higher stress or lesser events in life). Although we found youth daughter more likely to have more internalizing when they perceived problematic communication with their father similar to externalizing problems, daughter youth who have faced with higher stress events in their life were more likely to get more internalizing problems. These results show general consistency with previously literature.⁸⁻⁹

Positive Communication between Youth Daughter-father and Daughter Externalizing/Internalizing Problems

Positive communication between youth daughter-father was significantly negative correlated with daughter externalizing and internalizing problems. These findings indicate that youth daughters who have perceived communicated with their fathers as positive (i.e., more skills of listening, speaking, self-disclosure and respect) tend to have less externalizing and internalizing problems.

However, the association after testing regression between positive daughter-father communication

and daughters' mental health was non-significant. In general, the results for this particular hypothesis did not reflect the overall trend in the larger body of positive communication literature. Several researchers suggest that positive youth-parent communication is significantly and inversely related to youth mental health.²⁻⁶ Inconsistencies between the present study and prior studies may, however, be related to the present study's sample and setting. While all the reviewed studies measured mix gender of parents (either mother or father) and mix gender of their youth children, the present study explored specific parent gender (father) and specific youth gender (daughter). Furthermore, most of them explored in western culture, a few studies explored in Asian^{5,6} and Thailand.¹⁰⁻¹² These inconsistencies findings might be explained as cultural differences.

The findings against reviewed studies can be also explained as issue of gender difference between father and daughter. Because men and women are often raised differently and communicate differently, in particular men are being lesser communicate emotionally comparing to women,²⁸ as a result, daughters may not naturally expect or seek quality of positive communication from their fathers (i.e., more skills of listening). Whereas fathers are also find it difficult to communicate with their daughters,²⁹ specifically fathers may have more disconnected when their daughters become teenagers.³⁰ Due to this related difficulty, daughter-father positive communication might be unable to show a significant association with daughters' mental health.

Conclusion

This study provides an important gap in the literature by examining the association between quality of communication between daughter-father and daughter's mental health. Findings revealed that positive communication between daughter-father as

perceived by Thai youth daughters was not associated with daughter's mental health, whereas problematic communication between daughter-father was associated with daughter's mental health. This finding provides information that problematic communication between daughter-father may be a risk factor for daughters' mental health. Although overall results may partial support our conceptual frameworks which stated that quality of communication between female youth and father in family has significant impact to youth mental health, it is too early to summary these relationships. More research with other variables which may influence youth and father within family (such as number of family member, parenting style) are needed. Finally, study to explore how problematic communication between daughter-father gets impact to youth mental health may be recommended in the future.

Recommendations and Implications

Nurses who work with female youth and family can apply these findings to inform parents about the important of problematic communication between fathers to daughters toward daughters' mental health: externalizing and internalizing problems. As father problematic communication based on perception of youth daughter did associated with daughter youth mental health. It means that father should be careful in the way they communicate with their youth daughter, specifically problematic communication, because the more degree the youth daughter perceive the problematic communication with her father, the more likely to increase her degree of externalizing and internalizing problems. However, because this study is not a causal study, thus we cannot claim that problematic communication between daughter and father has an effect on youth daughters' mental health. Further study such as longitudinal, and cohort study may suggest to study in the future.

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