

PERCEIVED SOURCES OF INTER – CONFLICT FOR ADOLESCENTS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS, GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at finding the perceived sources of inter – conflict for adolescents students in Senior High Schools. Descriptive research design was used. Stratified proportional simple random sampling was used to select subjects for the study. One hundred first year students, 100 second year students and 100 third year students in five selected Senior High Schools in Hohoe District of Volta region, Ghana were sampled for the study. A 53 – item questionnaire was used to collect data. The item yielded an internal reliability coefficient of 0.94. The research questions were answered based on available data using descriptive statistics while the hypotheses were tested using the independent t – test.

The findings of the study indicate that a good relationship between adolescents and adults in which the adolescent is given some amount of autonomy reduces conflict in the home. There is no difference in the perception of adolescent male and female with respect to the conflict they experience in establishing their self- identity. Adolescents from high socio – economic background with appropriate parenting styles experience less conflict with adults in homes and schools than adolescents from low socio – economic background. The types of peers with whom the adolescents move influence the conflict that may occur. Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that there is no difference between adolescent males and females about the sources of conflict they experience in school. Differences exist between adolescents from low socio economic background regarding the sources of conflict they experience with adults. Adolescents from low socio-economic background together with poor parenting style experience increase conflict between them and adults or parents. The main source of conflict between adolescent boys and parents at home are choice of friends while for girls it is the type of clothing they wear. Peers have influence on the conflict adolescents experience with adults. The recommendations were parents and teachers can help minimize the conflict by involving adolescents in decisions that affect their interest. Parents should make efforts to provide the basic needs of the adolescent. The school guidance and counseling coordinators have a role play to enable students to establish and realize their identity.

Introduction

The period of adolescence with its challenges and potentials is one that has attracted the attention of a lot of

psychologists. They have sought to explain why and how this period of transition affects the behavior of the adolescent. This period of life is characterized by friendship and fun but sometimes accompanied by a lot of stress and reflective thinking.

Adolescent inter – conflict involves disagreement between adolescents on one hand, parents, educational authorities and peers on the other hand. Ghanaian adolescents have adopted role behaviours that do not imitate the behaviour of the adults or parents as far as their needs and desires are

concerned. In Ghana, there is a great outcry about adolescent promiscuity and sexuality in the media (Clay 2003). A closer look at our senior high schools reveals that quit a number of students (adolescents) use and abuse drugs like marijuana, alcohol and valium. Some adolescents have become agents and transporters of illicit drugs.

According to Fieldman and Elliott (1990) different manifestation of adolescence emerges, depending on the particular group of adolescents being described. The problems faced by Ghanaian adolescents today involve idealized images of what an adolescent should be and society's ambivalent messages to the adolescents. It is normally assumed that parents and adults know their roles hence adults

have to put an appropriate role behavior to enable the adolescents to pass through this transitional period smoothly. Also the assumption is held that adolescents accept the role behaviours that their parents or adults show up as an aid to their development. However, several recent incidents, for instance in our institutions and homes do not support these assumptions. As a result Freiberg (1996;1997), indicates that adults have established myths for adolescents which are difficult to understand. Many adults have, therefore named the period of adolescence as menacing and rebellious hence conflict with adults. With the recent cultural and social evolution, the behavior of Ghanaian adolescents does not follow the expected behavior of adults or parents as far as their needs or desires are concerned (Clay, 2003). Adolescent issues if not tackled properly have the capacity of leaving an unspecified number of them in crises. Adolescent issues have the capacity of affecting life potentials hence they should not be shielded. What is needed therefore is the identification of those specific concerns, which relate to this special and critical phase of life. Some psychologists like (Hall, 1904) was certain that the period is full of rebellion and storm though others do not accept this assertion. This is an issue, which needs a comprehensive investigation (Muss, 1988).

The objectives of the study therefore were to ascertain the perceived sources of conflict experienced by adolescents in senior high schools. It was to examine in what ways the home contributes to conflict and to ascertain the extent to which the school environment promotes conflict among adolescents. It was also to ascertain the role of peer groups in generating and promoting conflict among adolescents. The study was also to find out whether male or female adolescent students and were vulnerable to perceived conflict the experience with adults. In addition, the study is to find out whether perceived socio-economic background can also contribute to conflict of the adolescent.

Conceptual Framework

The historical portraits of the perception of the adolescent are varied and confusing. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the scientific exploration of adolescence began (Muss, 1988). Harrison (1986) did a study of adolescents' views on who adults are in the American society. He concluded that the environment has substantial effects on the perception and attitudes of adolescents

about adults. These empirical findings buttress the assertion by the social approach learning theories that social factors influence the conflict adolescents experience with adults (Grinder, 1973).

Rice (1984) indicates that the focus of conflict which parents have with their adolescents may be in any five areas such as social and customs, individual responsibility, value and morals, family relationships and school work.

Ellis (1986) identified three major factors that create conflict between adolescents and adults.

- a. **Social change:** thus when parents (adults) and adolescents grow up in different worlds with rapid social change, a misunderstanding on both sides of the generation develops. The adolescents see themselves as modern and current while the adults are seen as old fashioned and obsolete. Each faction becomes confused and angry with the other. However, social change itself is not directly amendable to parental manipulation because social change is generally external to the family.
- b. **Parental control:** Adult – adolescent conflict is influenced by type and amount of parental control exercised in the home and school. Adolescent who come from authoritarian families where coercive control is used over the adolescents have been reported of having psychological and social problems. They experience emotional disturbances and feel unwanted. They have trouble getting along with parents hence their inability to achieve social competence. Adolescents who come from democratic families where parents exercise inductive control and encourage participation face less conflict with adults (Ellis, 1986).

- c. **Delay of Adult Status;**

Ellis (1986) explains the conflict comes as a result of social structure that denies older teenagers the adult status. If adolescents are not seen as adults marginal person's conflict occurs. The adolescent is physiologically mature to produce his / her kind. However, social cultural and economic factors prevent them from taking positions as adults with all the privileges, immunities and responsibility that adulthood can offer. The perception of not belonging may

produce rebellion against adult and social values. This is common when an adolescent is always rejected. It may also be an attempt on the part of the adolescent to lay claim to highly valued adult status and privileges.

Montemayor (1983), indicates that over the years, very little has changed in what parents and adolescents argue about. Adolescents today apparently have the same kind of disagreement with their parents that their parents had when they, themselves were adolescents. He argues further that in general, high levels of parent-adolescent conflicts are associated with a wide range of non-specific acting-out behaviors during adolescence. These include mundane family matters such as school work, social life and friends, home chores, disobedience, disagreement with siblings and personal hygiene. Parents and adolescents rarely argue about hot topics such as sex, drug, religion and politics.

The research of Montemayor (1982) establishes that by adolescent, parents would be in late thirties and forties -the period of midlife transition. The bodily changes of parents at this stage are accompanied with a rising concern about health, diminishing physical and sexual attractiveness and decreased energy. Fathers become irritated and cannot pass the adolescent without causing an outburst or constant nagging. A mother may get angry for no reasons against the adolescent. Atwater (1996) explains that these symptoms of menopause and climacteric (in the case of men) influence parents' behavior. Parents at this stage have reached a family life style where they have to play conflicting roles. Both parents and their adolescents are going through a type of identity crises which involves the same issues but of different meaning for each generation.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method of social investigation was adopted to collect data on perceived sources of inter – conflict for adolescents. The design was adopted because the study attempted to collect data from a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to the variable under investigation. The target population embraced all adolescent students in public senior high schools in the Hohoe District

in the Volta Region of Ghana which was about 4,800. The population consisted of both male and female students from mixed public senior high schools. The accessible population consisted of 3139 (1,105 first year 1,044 second and 989 third year) students in five selected senior high schools in the district. For a representative sampling, students from five out of the eight mixed public senior high schools in the district were selected for the study using stratified simple random procedure. This was made up of urban and rural senior high schools in Hohoe District.

The students in the selected schools were stratified by sex and a simple random procedure of a table of random numbers was used to select the male and female respondents for the study. Ten female and ten males from each form in a school were selected. The sample from each school was sixty students made up of thirty males and thirty females. This gave a total sample of three hundred students (150 males and 150 females).

Instrumentation

The sole instrument to collect data for the study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire had five sections. Section A was to collect demographic data on respondents. Section B was to collect data on perceived home factors that produce conflict for adolescents while in section C was to elicit information on the perceived causes of school related conflict for adolescents. Section D sample information on how peer group influences contribute to conflict between adolescents and adults. Section E was to find out how adolescents perceived socio-economic background of parents that contribute to conflict they face with adults. Some items in some sections were in Likert Scale while others were categorical statements. Few items were open ended for respondents to provide responses. The instrument was pilot tested in the University of Cape Coast Practice Senior High School to determine the reliability of the instrument. The instrument yielded an internal reliability coefficient of 0.94.

Analysis of Data

For statistical analysis of data, two types of data were undertaken. First was descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages were used to describe the research questions. Secondly, inferential

statistics specifically an independent t – test were used to test the two hypotheses formulated.

Results

The results of the analyses of data collected are presented and discussed. Table 1 indicates parent's consulting adolescents on issues that affect the interest of adolescent as a source of conflict.

Table 1
Parents Consultation with Adolescents on Issues that affect Adolescents' Interest as a Source of Conflict

Consultation	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Source of conflict	62	20.7	20.7
Not a source of conflict	238	79.3	100
Total	300	100	

From Table 1, Majority of parents indicated that they consult adolescents on issues that affect the interest of adolescents.

Table 2 presents the perceived sources of conflict for adolescents in schools.

Table 2
Perceived Sources of Conflict for Adolescent in the School

Sources	Males Respondents Ranking order	Female Respondent Ranking order
Style of clothing	1	1
Consumption of alcohol	3	6
Smoking	2	5
Choice of style of hair cut	6	2
Flaunting school rules	4	4
Choice of friends	5	3

The results in Table 2 are obtained by ranking the sources of conflict in school with 1 (most serious) to 6 (least serious). Both male and female respondents ranked style of clothing as the greatest source of conflict with school authorities. All others however were ranked differently. Both male and female adolescents considered style of clothing as their greatest source of conflict with school authorities.

Socio-economic factors were perceived to be a source of conflict for adolescents. Some of the factors are occupational status of parent and educational levels of parents. Data collected indicates that parents' occupation partly or indirectly contributed to the conflict that the adolescent experience. Most of the respondents' parents were in lower class. Only 44 (14.7%) respondents' parents were in the upper class. This is presented in Table 3 overleaf.

Table 3
Parents/Guardians' Occupational (socio-economic) Status

Socio-economic status	Frequency	Percentage
Lower class	256	85.3
Upper class	44	14.7
Total	300	100

Table 4 presents the educational levels of parents. It can be deduced that respondents from low socio – economic status coupled with low educational levels of parents might complain of experiencing more conflict with parents.

Table 4
Educational Status of Parents

Levels	(Father/Guardian) frequency	Percentage	(Mother/Guardian) frequency	Percentage
Non	2	1.3	16	10.1
Basic	68	45.0	100	66.5
Sec.	50	33.0	28	18.7
commercial				
Teacher				
Nursing Training				
Polytechnic	12	8.0	0	0
University	18	12	6	4.0
Total	150	100	150	100

A closer look at Table 4 illustrates that majority of parents had elementary education only. In the case of women 66.7% had only basic or elementary education while 45% of men had elementary or basic education. Only 12% of male parents (guardians) had university degree while only 4% of female (guardians) had university education. In a follow up question about 32% respondents mostly from lower economic status indicated that their school fees were not paid on time hence were sent home often for schools fees. Some also said they did not have enough money to participate in club activities. One area of misunderstanding of adolescents with parents was inability of parents to provide their needs.

In order to find out whether the sources of conflict are the same for both female and male adolescent students, respondents were asked to rank (in order of 1 or most and 5 for least for) sources of conflict in the home. The results are presented in table 5.

Table 5
Sources of Conflict for Adolescents in the Home

Sources	Male Rank: order	Female Rank: order
Type of clothing	2	1
Choice of friends	1	2
Choice of entertainment	3	3
Choice of career	5	5
Time of going to bed	4	4

The female students ranked type of clothing they wanted to wear as the highest source of conflict with parents at home and choice of friends as the second while male ranked choice of friends as the highest source of conflict at home followed by type of clothing. All the other sources of conflict were given the same ranking by both male and females. In addition to the sources listed above respondents mentioned other reasons for feeling uncomfortable at home as too much restriction, refusal by parents to allow them express their views and parents treating them like children. In a follow up question, the achievement of clear sense of identity is a challenge to some adolescents and this sometimes creates conflict between them and adults. Majority of respondents perceived friends to accept their physique gender, height, colour, social relationship and academic ability. Identity formation by adolescents was not perceived to be a major source of conflict between adolescents and adults in this

study. On the other hand, peer conformity is very strong at this stage. When adults unnecessarily interfere with adolescents' association with peers (choice of friends) without reasons, conflict develops. Adolescents adopt the attitudes or behavior of others because of real or imagined pressure from them from the study. Adolescents strongly adhere to suggestions of friends and this if not understood and appreciated by adults will bring misunderstanding.

Testing of Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that there is statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the adolescents from high and low socio-economic background regarding the sources of conflict they experience. An independent t- test was employed to analyse the data or $p < 0.05$. (Responses to ten questions on the research instrument were used.)

Table 6
Mean Scores, SD and results of independent t – test of conflict experienced by Adolescents from low and high socio – economic Background.

Status	N	X	SD	t	p
Low socio – economic	256	2.70612	1.13843	4.84610	1.960
High socio – economic	44	1.78125	1.32913		

$p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows that adolescents from low socio – economic status have higher mean sources in the conflict they experience. The t – value $t(300)$ of 4.84610 and a p value, 1.96000 $p < 0.05$ shows that there is statistically significant difference in the conflict experienced by adolescents from low socio-economic status and adolescents from high socio – economic status

Table 7
Mean performance, SD and t-value of conflict experienced by Adolescents Boys and Girls in school.

	N	X	S D	t	p
Boys	300	2.36342	1.12694	0.17950	1.960
Girls	300	2.31692	1.13137		

Table 6 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the conflict experience by adolescent boys and girls in schools at $p < 0.05$. We therefore fail to reject the hypothesis 2 that there is no significant difference in perception of adolescent males and females regarding the sources of conflict they experience at school.

Discussion

The major sources of conflict between adolescents and adults identified in the study at school are style of clothing, choice of hair cut, consumption of alcohol and choice of friends. The results have shown that sources of conflict are slightly different for both sexes. The difference is due to the fact that gender roles and expectations differ and therefore what might become conflicting to one sex might not be so to the other sex. The major sources of conflict between adolescents and parents at home are type of clothing, choice of friends, choice of entertainment, time of going to bed and choice of career.

The findings are in line with previous studies. Montemayor (1983) referring to other researcher, indicated that adolescents conflict with adults generally occur over every day mundane family matters such as home chores like type of clothing adolescents should wear, school work like punishment for flaunting school rules, social life and friends. Over the years there has been little change in what parents, teachers and adolescents disagree or argue about.

The results show that the socio-economic background of respondents' parents influenced conflict situation. The availability of facilities at home greatly influence adolescents' perception of home as well as the way members of the family relate to each other. Parent adolescent conflict seems, to be higher in families with ineffective parenting skills than those with effective parenting skills. It has been noted by Bell and Avery (1985) that parents with low socio – economic status tend to be interested in obedience, politeness and respect from the adolescents while those in the upper class

are more concerned with independent and developing creativity and therefore less conflict occurs in homes of high socio – economic status. There is more respect for the parents who provide for the needs of the children. In contrast, parents who are unable to provide for the needs, experience more conflict with adolescents. The findings indicated that there is no marked difference between the sources of conflict for male and female adolescents at school. Rice (1984) indicated that both male and female adolescents face the same challenges in school. This has been supported in the study. Anytime adolescents fall for below the expectation of teachers and parents then conflict develops.

The study also established that most of the adolescents who accepted all peer statuses establish good relationships with peers but this created conflict with school authorities, teachers and parents. The study confirms Grinder (1973) assertion that peers facilitate young people's transition from reliance on their families to relative freedom in adolescence and new patterns of responsibilities in adulthood. On the issue of information, one important finding is that 66.7% of respondents agreed that, often peers give them the best solution to problems (questions) concerning sex with peers. Edjah (1999) argued that attitudes need to change about sex and contraception to reflect the reality of modern times.

It was hypothesized that there was statistically significant difference in perception of adolescent males and females regarding the sources of conflict they experience in school. The result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between adolescent males and females.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that there is no difference between adolescent males and females about the sources of conflict they experience in school. Differences exist between adolescents from low and high socio economic backgrounds regarding the sources of conflict they experience with adults. Adolescents

from low socio- economic background together with poor parenting style experience increase conflict between them and adults or parents. Based on the findings of the study the main sources of conflict at school for males are clothing, drinking and flouting school rules while females had sources of conflict which were based on type of clothing they wear, haircut and their choice of friends. The main sources of conflict between adolescent boys and parents at home are choice of friends while for girls it is the type of clothing they wear. Finally, the study established that peers have influence on the conflict adolescents, experience with adults.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions drawn in this study the following recommendations were made.

1. Parents and teachers can help minimize the conflict that sometimes characterizes the stage of adolescence by involving adolescents in decisions that affect their interest.
2. Parents should make efforts to provide the basic needs of their adolescent. This will promote good and harmonious relationship that should exist between adolescents and

parents at home.

3. The findings indicate that both sexes go through the similar developmental challenges in establishing their identity. Apart from some physical needs that may vary due to gender differences, both female and male adolescents should be given the same social and psychological support in establishing their identity. This also means that the school guidance and counseling coordinators have a role to play to enable students establish and realize their identity.
4. A good relationship between adults and adolescents in which the adolescent is given some amount of autonomy to choose type of clothing and friends will reduce conflict that occurs in the home. Parents and school authorities therefore should improve their relationship with adolescents. This will help them better understand adolescents and relate with them in the most appropriate way that will minimize conflict and ensure the proper development of adolescents into responsible adults.

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