Mother-daughter communication about growing up in an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya
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1. Background

- Constructive parenting approaches, including parent-child communication, are associated with better health and behavioral outcomes in adolescents.
- However, while parent-child communication about menstruation and sex may promote positive development and prevent risky sexual behavior, in Kenya as in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, mothers often have inhibitions that make communication about menstrual and sexual issues with pre-adolescent or adolescent daughters difficult.
- Community-level factors such as urban poverty may also mediate the relationship between parenting practices and youth outcomes, in addition to their direct influences on youth outcomes in themselves.

2. Objectives

To explore mothers’ and daughters’ views about ideal kinds of communication about sexual maturation; their experiences with parent-child communication; and the challenges they face with communicating in practice.

3. Methods

Data for the study was collected as part of a broader research study on menstrual attitudes, practices and problems in Korogocho, an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.

Study population: The participants consisted of post-menarchal in-school and out-of-school adolescents aged 12-17 and women aged 18-49 years.

Data collection
- Data collection was carried out in May and June 2008.
- Participants recruited using purposive quota sampling.
- 29 in-depth interviews and 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted.
- Texts analyzed using content and thematic analysis.

Research Ethics: Ethical approval granted by Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) ethics and review board and study also approved by the City Council of Nairobi (CCN).

4. Results

Women’s and girls’ views on ideal communication
Most of the girls interviewed mentioned their mothers as their preferred source of information about menstruation. Girls also expressed a desire to receive reliable information from a variety of sources, at an early age and repeated regularly. These perspectives are also shared by some of the mothers.

Community-level factors such as urban poverty may also mediate the relationship between parenting practices and youth outcomes, in addition to their direct influences on youth outcomes in themselves.

Women’s and girls’ experiences with communicating about sexual maturation
- Despite the widely held perceptions that mothers should communicate with their daughters about sexual maturation and early enough, in reality, many girls have limited discussion with their parents.
- There was variation about whether girls speak to their mothers or friends, other relatives or teachers about sexual maturation.
- Information that is communicated tends to be limited to the practicalities of managing menstruation and avoiding pregnancy by not “playing with boys”. Almost none of the girls or women mentioned discussion about avoiding HIV and STIs, sexuality or safe sex, despite high rates of sexual activity among adolescent girls (27%) aged 10-19 years in the area.

5. Conclusion and recommendation
The study shows that girls and women face barriers to discussing sexual maturation.
- Gaps exist between perceptions about ideal mother-daughter communication and how this works in reality
- Much of the information that girls did receive was partial and sometimes ambiguous
- There is need for interventions to be developed in urban informal settlements in Kenya and other similar contexts to build parents’ knowledge, skills and awareness about discussing sexual maturation with their daughters and early enough.