

**AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF A PARENTAL SUPPORT GROUP ON
PARENT – ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS**

BY

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandparents

Kanickaram Matthew,

1932 – 1994

Mona Georgina Daniels

1932 - 1987

&

Johannes Douglas Daniels.

1930 - 1999

You will live on in my heart forever.

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DECLARATION

I, Danielle Roxana Matthew hereby declare that the work: “An evaluation of the effectiveness of a parental support group on a parent – adolescent relationship” is my original work. Sources consulted or cited are acknowledged in the text as well as in the list of references.

SIGNED.....

DATE.....

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a parent support group on the relationship between parents and adolescents within a church community. Subjects were referred to the group by the priest of the local Catholic Church. The group consisted of five married couples and the researcher, who adopted an observer – participant role. The group ran for seven sessions in total.

Motivation to begin such a group was prompted by the researcher's experience of working with parents and adolescents who had very strained relationships with each other.

Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative questionnaires. Results revealed that the parent support group was effective in improving relationships between parents and adolescents.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

The transition to the second decade of life can be an overwhelming experience for parents and adolescents alike. Social support and encouragement from parents during this stage of development is fundamental to healthy adjustment, defined as an absence of aggression, depression and the presence of sympathy (Field, Diego & Sanders. 2002). However, many parents experience tremendous difficulty in providing socially supportive and encouraging relationships. This difficulty may be due to their lack of knowledge or inexperience of positive/ supportive relationships. Personal growth and happiness, according to Hanna (1991) are by-products of positive relationships, she also mentions that nobody is born knowing how to relate. Human relations must be learned and cultivated.

The relationship between parents and adolescents are influenced by many factors, ranging from the media's stereotypical depiction of adolescents to the parent's own developmental issues. Adolescents are different from other age groups physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally. Like all people, they too are in need of support, affection and appreciation.

A support group for the parents of adolescents is geared towards providing parents with the support, encouragement, education and the experience of developing positive relationships with other members; enabling parents to emulate these positives in their relationships with their adolescent children. A support group is not perceived as a

- The researchers envisaged future personal promotion in academic status also contributed greatly to the motivation of this study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The evaluation of the effectiveness of a parent support group on the parent-adolescent relationship as perceived by both parents and adolescents.

1.3 Definition of terms

1.3.1 Adolescence

According to Louw (1995), adolescence is the life stage between childhood and adulthood. It is accompanied by various contextual and developmental changes, which include biological, cognitive, psychological and social changes (Holmbeck, Paikoff & Brooks – Gunn, 1995). Jaffe (1998) divides adolescence into three categories: early (11 - 13 years), middle (14 – 17 years) and late (18 – early 20s) adolescence.

1.3.2 Adolescent

According to Louw (1995) the term adolescent derived from the Latin verb, *adolescere*, which means, “to grow up” or “grow to adulthood.” An adolescent is defined as an individual within the life stage of adolescence. Other terms used synonymously with adolescent are teenager and youth.

1.3.3 Parent

Parent refers to the biological mother/father of an individual.

1.3.4 Relationship

A relationship is defined as the interaction between parent and adolescent, including both verbal and non verbal communication.

1.3.5 Support group

Kurtz (1997) describes a support group as a group that primarily aims at providing support and education.

1.3.6 Social support

Cobb and Jones (1984) refer to social support as a complex concept embracing three additional concepts, the subjective sense of support; the supportive behaviour of others and the network which connects these others to the focal person. For purposes of this study, social support is defined as supportive behaviours towards an individual from the community, family, professionals, friends and/or colleagues.

1.4 Aims of the study

The aims of the study are to:

- Elicit the needs of parents and adolescents in their relationships with each other.
- Form a parent support group.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the support group on the relationship between parents and adolescents.
- Improve the relationships between parents and their adolescent children.

1.5 Method

An action research, program evaluation design will be employed, where the researcher will adopt a teaching and participant observer role. Five volunteer married couples from the local community of Gingindlovu will act as co-researchers. All couples and their adolescent children will be pre-tested regarding the effectiveness of their current parent-adolescent relationship.

1.6 Hypotheses

A parent support group will improve the relationship between parents and adolescents (as perceived by parents).

A parent support group will improve the relationship between mothers and adolescents (as perceived by adolescents).

A parent support group will improve the relationship between fathers and adolescents (as perceived by adolescents).

1.7 Resume

As has been discussed in this chapter, the relationship between parents and adolescents is incurring strain due to the transitions that are occurring during this life stage. In order to establish a positive relationship with their children, parents need to support and encourage them. However, in order to do this, parents require exposure to support and encouragement themselves. As Hanna (1991) mentioned, nobody is born with the ability to establish good human relationships, it is a process of learning and cultivating. The introduction of support groups for the parents of adolescents aims to provide parents with the experience of support, encouragement, positive relationships and education in line with their needs.

Before the hypotheses are tested, a review of literature related to parenting, adolescence, relationships, parent – adolescent relationships, parent – adolescent conflicts, support groups and social support will be presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Introduction

Within this chapter the researcher reviews previous literature pertaining to the research topic. A literature review on parenting, adolescence, relationships, parent – adolescent relationships, parent – adolescent conflicts, support groups and social support will help to clarify ideas and learn about relative theories, methodologies and techniques.

2.2 Dynamics of relationships

There has been an astronomical amount of scientific literature which prove that relationships are vital in the lives of human beings and that positive relationships enable individuals to feel loved, valued and happy. On the other extreme relationships can cause feelings of isolation, loneliness, hurt and self- destruction (Buscaglia, 1984; Jaffe, 1998; Yeats, 1991).

Buscaglia (1984) states that human relationships in present society are a challenge. Today people are encouraged to depend on their own strength, fight for individualism, independence and personal freedom. In support of Buscaglia's view Hanna (1991) adds that personal growth and happiness are being threatened by such pursuits (Buscaglia, 1984). It is evident that the struggle for power in our world is leading to the breakdown of human relationships, and a growing inability to relate one with the other.

In Erich Fromm's (1956) humanistic theory of personality he maintains that there is a need for relatedness. People need to care for, share with and be responsible for others in an effort to overcome their feelings of isolation. Scientific literature has proven that positive relations promote physical, psychological and mental health (Buscaglia, 1984).

Fromm (1956) expands on his theory by stating that if the need for relatedness is not fulfilled people become narcissistic, they respond only to their own selfish concerns and are not able to commit to others. The researcher supports that humans need to experience positive relations in order to experience well – being. However, the researcher questions whether a lack of relatedness will lead to narcissism. Hanna (1991) expressed that people do not have the innate ability to relate positively to others, human relations need to be learned and developed. Individuals should be motivated to take the time and make the effort to develop their relationships positively. Positive relationships provide individuals with positive attributes; a lack of it may lead to psychological disarray. Cobb & Jones (1984) describe a healthy relationship as being supportive, fostering fulfillment and happiness rather than the absence of pain and sorrow.

2.3 The parent - adolescent relationship

The parent – adolescent relationship as described by Becker (1992) should be one where both entities establish respect for each others separateness. Becker maintains that both should recognize each other's differences, and make an attempt to understand themselves and the other, contribute, take and learn from each other as they grow and change. Both

parties can learn and teach each other in a respecting, warm and caring relationship.

Factors that contribute to a healthy parent – adolescent relationship are generally applicable to relationships universally.

In order for the relationship to be positive it must possess positive qualities which include: love, respect, constructive discipline, good communication and problem resolution.

However, as Hannah (1991) mentioned, nobody is born knowing how to relate, relationships have to be studied and developed (Buscaglia, 1984). Therefore, it is expected that conflict will be experienced at some time or another within the parent – adolescent relationship. Theorists state that during early adolescence, conflict within the parent and adolescent is at its peak. However, it dissipates as adolescents move to middle adolescence and parents adjust to new parenting practices.

Researchers have asserted that the parent adolescent relationship is important (Jaffe, 1998; Yeats, 1991; Fine, 1979). Alfred Adler's individual theory of personality supports Jaffe's statement. He emphasizes that both parents are instrumental in the modeling of relationships for adolescents. The way in which parents relate to each other and others determines how adolescents will relate. Normal or healthy people are genuinely concerned about others and their goal of superiority is social, which incorporates the well being of others (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992). Jaffe (1998) is in support of Adler's theory. He stated that the parent child relationship is the main context within which socialization is supposed to occur. Accepting this as a reality, puts a lot of pressure on parents, implying that their ability/ inability to relate has a direct impact on their children's ability to relate.

Jaffe (1998) states that some parents are uncertain about how to establish positive relationships with their adolescent children. Times have changed! In today's society there are no guidelines about how adolescents are supposed to behave and what roles they have to take on, or what the status of the relationship between parents and adolescents should be like. The breakdown of culture as the societies become more westernized has robbed them of formal rites of passage. This is a ritual to help young people and others to clarify what will be expected of them as they take on more adult roles and responsibilities. The absence of formal rites of passage makes it difficult for parents and adolescents because there are no clear guidelines about what adolescents should do and how they should behave (Jaffe, 1998).

Researchers have shown that there are significant differences between mother – adolescent and father – adolescent relationships. Overall, mothers have invested more into their lives than fathers. Fathers engage in: “voluntary fathering.” Mothers are involved in care – giving; they are perceived by their children to be more understanding, open and accepting than fathers. Fathers of adolescents have been found to be preoccupied with their careers, consequently are less aware of their children's lives and schoolwork. Boys, are reported to talk to their fathers about their interests, sexual issues and general problems, whereas daughters find fathers very distant. Most adolescents, report that they understand their fathers love them but they feel closer to their mothers. Adolescents view mothers as being intrusive sometimes. Mothers state that their need to feel close to their adolescent children and to enjoy their company often goes unfulfilled. Mothers find themselves caring for adolescents who are withholding, prone to more

negative moods, and who sometimes direct the brunt of their displeasure on her (Jaffe, 1998; Holmbeck et al., 1995).

Grossman (2000) very eloquently describes the parent- adolescent relationship in terms of a dance. He asserts that both dance partners need to recognize, attend, value and respect their partners moves and style of dancing so that they can feel good about themselves as dance partners – in terms of their individual skill and interaction. Likewise, with the relationship between parents and adolescents he encourages parents to consider who their children are, and allow them freedom of expression, taking time to recognize, attend, value and respect them.

2.4 Parenting and its impact on the parent – adolescent relationship

There are innumerable factors that impinge on the relationship between parents and adolescents. The researcher discusses those that are most significant. Parents of adolescents are generally approaching or have already reached midlife (age 40 –50 years) and are experiencing intra – individual changes. Parenting style and role strain have a significant impact on the relationship between parents and adolescents (Jaffe, 1998).

2.4.1 Parents at midlife

Parents of adolescents are usually approaching or have already reached mid-life, which is a stage where focus is on issues of work, marriage and parenting. Jaffe (1998) asserts that an overload of stress in any one area could spill over and affect the relationship between child and parent.

Parents within this stage are very vulnerable. They are coming to terms with the loss of their youthfulness and freedom. Research conducted by Steinberg and Steinberg (1994) revealed that parents, especially those who were overworked or stressed out, envied their children's popularity, youthfulness, and freedom. Parents, who do not understand the dynamics of the life stage of adolescence may mistake their children's striving for autonomy as a lack of appreciation and disrespect towards them. Some parents suffer from what Jaffe (1998) terms, "the empty nest blues." This is experienced when parents become aware that their children will soon be leaving home. Silverberg and Steinberg (1990) urge parents to view their children's increasing independence as an opportunity to spend time pursuing other areas of satisfaction, rather than as a loss. Parents at this age generally also have to face that they will lose their parents to death (Jaffe, 1998).

This life stage is very difficult for parents, as they are faced with the reality of loss on many levels: loss of their youthfulness, possibility of losing their parents and loss of their children to independence. This life stage can cause parents to display moodiness thereby, having an impact on the parent – adolescent relationship.

2.4.2 Parenting Styles

Jaffe (1998) describes parental style as a conglomeration of rearing strategies and personal qualities of an individual parent. Psychologist, Diana Baumrind cited in Louw (1995), described four parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative and rejecting – neglecting. Using the same terms, Maccoby and Martin (1983) devised a fourfold scheme where parents were classified as authoritarian – autocratic, indulgent – permissive, authoritative – reciprocal, or indifferent – uninvolved.

Authoritarian parents are highly demanding. However, they are not very responsive to their child's point of view. Children are expected to comply with rules, and are not permitted to make any demands on parents. This parenting style is characterized by low levels of nurturance and warmth. Permissive parents are reasonably responsive to their children in terms of nurturance and warmth. However, they avoid regulating the behaviour of adolescents. They do not impose many rules. They are lenient and avoid confrontation. Authoritative parents are termed "democratic" parents. These parents are warm, firm and involved. They enforce rules where necessary, encourage independence, exhibit respect towards their children and give their children the opportunity to be heard. They encourage self-expression. Rejecting – neglecting parents do not monitor or supervise their children's lives. The children are at liberty to do whatever they chose to do. The parent does not care (Holmbeck et al., 1995; Jaffe, 1998; Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000).

The different styles of parenting impinge on the relationship between parents and adolescents in different ways. Some display warmth, nurturance and respect, which are vital components of a healthy relationship. The authoritative style of parenting is the most conducive to a good parent – adolescent relationship. Seifert & Hoffnung (2000) maintain that parenting style and the quality of parent adolescent relationship can exert influence beyond the boundaries of the family. A study by Fletcher, cited in Seifert & Hoffnung (2000) revealed that adolescents who had authoritative parents were more academically competent, earned higher grades, spent more time on homework, reported lower level of delinquency and substance abuse. Children who experience authoritarian parenting usually have a low self – esteem and are less skilled in relationships. Some of these children appear reserved and some aggressive. Children growing up with a permissive parent are reported to be disobedient, irresponsible, and less mature in behaviour and attitude toward friends. Children whose parents are rejecting –neglecting tend to be impulsive and even antisocial (Louw, 1995).

The style of parenting is a very strong determinant of what kind of relationship a child and parent will experience.

2.4.3 Role strain

Role strain occurs when a parent has to occupy several roles that are conflicting simultaneously, in term of their timing, energy, and proficiency. Consequently, the individual is unable to perform any of the roles sufficiently and effectively.

In our current society, there are many demands that parents have to meet. This leads to role strain, which in turn can have a negative impact on the relationship between adolescents and parents because the parent - child time can be compromised in an attempt to deal with other demands. Parents are expected to be employee, caregiver, disciplinarian, comforter, husband or wife. Parents are often robbed of private time for their own needs. This could lead to a deterioration or inability to maintain positive relationships.

Having considered the most significant parenting factors and its impact on the parent – adolescent relationship, it is evident that improving or developing a positive parent adolescent relationship requires a conscious effort. In addition, time must be made available for the development of such a relationship amidst parental role obligations. Louw (1995) associates emotional support from both parents with healthy adolescent adjustment to new situations. Researchers emphasize that parenting is important and that it makes a lasting impression on children, and the relationship between child and parent. (Fine. 1979; Grossman, 1999).

2.5 Adolescence and its impact on the parent – adolescent relationship

Jaffe (1998) classifies adolescence into three categories: early, middle and late adolescence. The transition from childhood embraces many changes, which makes this stressful on both parents and adolescents. In families with good parent – adolescent relationships, adolescents share their feelings and seek guidance. Bronstein (1993) maintains that a close relationship with parents serves as a buffer for the pressures and problems that most young people experience indicating that a positive relationship with parents could help adolescents to deal with peer pressure in a more controlled way.

2.5.1 Cognitive development

According to Louw (1995), adolescents' cognitive ability develops both qualitatively and quantitatively. If parents are not aware of the cognitive development of adolescents, this could have a negative effect on the relationship. Parents can mistake their cognitive development for disrespect or a lack of appreciation. The adolescent's ability to formulate hypotheses or various possibilities may influence the parent – adolescent relationship in the following ways: adolescents want to make their own decisions when given choices. Adolescents may question parent's decisions and request explanations for decisions made. Jaffe (1998) states that if parents fail to give explanations or do not accept that adolescents have minds of their own, conflict may arise. Adolescents also

become aware of inconsistencies in what parents say and do. This can cause adolescents to rebel against parents.

2.5.2 Physical development

The onset of puberty is considered the beginning of early adolescence. During this stage the hypothalamus, pituitary gland and the gonads regulate hormone levels. This leads to the physical changes of puberty. The changes of puberty result in intra - individual changes that have an impact on the parent - child relationship (Holmbeck et al., 1995). A study by Brooks – Gunn (1984) showed that parent’s teasing about breast development angered girls. It is possible that such behaviour from parents and significant others lead to increased conflict, a decrease in trust and emotional distance.

The physical maturation of adolescents may lead parents to expect more mature behaviour due their mature appearance. Parents also become more observant of socialization with the opposite sex, especially when the child is female. Fathers and daughters may feel uncomfortable relating to each other affectionately (Holmbeck et al., 1995).

2.6 Conflict within the parent – adolescent relationship

The media and society portray adolescence as a time of storm and stress, characterized by excessive conflict. This impression perpetuates conflict within the parent - adolescent

relationship, as parents view adolescents stereotypically. Adolescent literature has become replete with theories that view conflict as being normal and necessary, for the healthy adjustment of adolescents. In addition researchers have stated that the conflict within parent – adolescent relationships is not as excessive as media reports make it out to be (Yeats, 1991; Holmbeck et al., 1995; Becker, 1992)

It is possible that parents perceive relationships in terms of fairy tales. The fantasy of being in a loving relationship will solve all of life's problems, and they will live happily ever after. However, the reality of parent - adolescent relationships is that they are riddled with conflict, especially during early adolescence. Denis de Rougemont, cited in Buscaglia states, "Fallen myths can distil venom." This statement could on some level explain parents anger, hurt and resentment when they find their adolescent challenging them (Buscaglia, 1984; Holmbeck et al., 1995; Jaffe, 1998).

Yeats (1991) explains that no family can function without conflict; conflict is representative of differing personalities, differing needs, expectations, stress, ambitions that cannot be met, exhaustion and a host of other attributes.

Contemporary theorists see adolescents striving for autonomy as the most prominent reason for conflict within the parent – adolescent relationship. Adolescents want more freedom and parents want to prevent them from exposure to the dangers of the present society (Fine, 1979). Steinberg hypothesized that, "conflict within the parent adolescent relationship is a vestige of our evolutionary past, when prolonged proximity between parent and offspring threatened the species' genetic integrity" (Jaffe, 1998). This theory

states that the purpose of conflict between parents and adolescents is to encourage adolescents to leave home and seek sexual partners outside of home, so that inbreeding is minimized and genetic diversity maximized (Jaffe, 1998).

Some Freudians viewed *harmonious family relationship* as counterproductive to adolescent autonomy (Jaffe, 1998).

Contemporary theories have given new and more positive explanations of why conflict within the parent – adolescent relationship occurs. Parent – adolescent conflict has been viewed as serving an adaptive function. Conflict can play an information – providing role. It can alert parents of the need to reevaluate their parenting practices and modify it to fit in with the transformation to adolescence.

Conflict can be viewed as necessary for the healthy adjustment of adolescents. However, Becker (1992) states that the process of individuation can be more peaceful. There is no need for conflict (although it can happen in a healthy way, where the conflict is amicably resolved) if parents and adolescents take the time to understand and appreciate each other as separate entities.

The researcher accepts that conflict can serve as an adaptive function, in addition it also portrays the authenticity and expression of the adolescent. Parents, however, may find it difficult to view conflict within this light. A lack of knowledge about the dynamics of adolescents may result in parents taking the conflict personally and experiencing negative feelings.

2.7 Support groups

A frequent problem experienced by parents of adolescents is their isolation from others in a similar status. A service of importance therefore, is establishing contact with other parents so that they can secure support in improving their parent – child relationship.

Kurtz (1997) claims that support groups are a smaller and less complicated form of gathering and aims more than changing, to educate and support individuals. However, Kurtz states that this does not mean there is an absence of change.

In a study conducted by Tombs & Griggs (2000), changes were brought about by the introduction of a support group. The group aimed at helping parents to cope with adolescents. The support group helped to normalize parent's experiences. It decreased their sense of isolation, increased their understanding of adolescents and made them feel more supported.

Toseland and Rivas (1998) state that the distinction between support groups and other groups is its use of supportive intervention strategies as its primary goal.

It aims to assist members in coping with life events that can be stressful, help members revitalize and enhance their coping abilities so they can effectively adapt to and cope with future stressful life events. In a support group members share information, experiences,

and coping strategies, as a result there is a frequent disclosure of emotionally charged material (Toseland and Rivas, 1998).

Leadership in a support group is characterized by a facilitative approach that emphasizes helping members share their collective experiences in coping with stressful events.

Researchers have indicated that simply recounting events, ventilating feelings, and reflecting on efforts to cope can promote self-understanding and help in overcoming loneliness, isolation, and despair. The leader also helps members overcome feelings of alienation, stigmatization, and isolation by validating, affirming, and normalizing their experiences. A major role of the worker is to facilitate hope in the future and motivate members to improve their coping skills through self-help and mutual aid (Toseland & Rivas, 1998).

2.8 Parent support groups

Jaffe (1998) questions how parents are expected to know that the emotional needs of adolescents are so different from childhood, if they lack knowledge of the life stage. He further states that the unrealistic expectations and stereotypical views of each other can lead to conflict.

According to Wandersman, cited in Arosi (1992) the parent support group aims to make the difficult job of parenting less isolated and more rewarding for both parent and adolescents. The groups are not simply to address the parents issues in respect of

parenting but moreover to provide support for the parents own development of competence and adjustment.

Buscaglia (1984) exposes his concern for mankind's deterioration as a social being, he states that our inability to relate to one another is reaching frightening proportions.

Isn't it time that we forget our petty egos, give up our fear of appearing sentimental or naïve and come together in our universal need, one for the other? Why is it so difficult for us to embrace each other fearlessly and with passion and to say, "Human being, take my human hand"?

(Buscaglia, 1984: 13)

Heliman (1973) encourages parents to talk to other parents, verbalize their thoughts and expose themselves to probing. The benefits of speaking to other parents within a group is relieving because parents can get out, further it is comforting for parents to learn that their situations and responses are universal. Other parents also have difficulties with their adolescent children. Talking out the feelings helps to unearth the feelings behind the feelings. In addition, the talking about feelings, fears and anger helps to unmask the love and concern that parents have for their children. Parents helping each other makes parents feel good about themselves.

2.9 Support systems for parents

Today support is available to parents of adolescents from a multitude of sources. Media products and materials including; films, television programmes, compact disks, Internet, magazines, newspapers and books are available to parents (Jaffe, 1998). The Internet houses several web-sites that focus on assisting parents in their relationships with their adolescent children and providing support. Nawojczyk (1997) has provided parents with support on the Internet through his development of a resource guide to assist parents in the identification of gangster behaviour, and to aid them in improving the parent – child relationship.

Researchers have acknowledged that spouses, other family members and friends provide a wealth of social support. Crockenberg (1998) emphasized the importance of recognizing the positive impact of social support on parent's behaviour in her theory. Heilman (1973) states that parents can be supportive of each other.

2.10 Resume

The review of literature within this chapter has revealed that the relationship between parents and adolescents is very complex and many factors impinge on it. Models of conflict have posited that conflict has positive functions within the parent adolescent relationship and is important for the healthy adjustment of adolescents. However, other theorists argue that adolescents can attain autonomy in a peaceful way, without conflict.

However, researchers believe that this is more of an ideal than a reality. Literature reveals that in order for parents to establish positive relationships with their children, they must make a conscious effort to develop and study relating skills. Support for both parties contributes towards the improvement, development and/ or maintenance of positive relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aims of this study were to elicit the needs of parents; form and evaluate an ongoing support group and ultimately improve the relationship between parents and their adolescent children. This chapter discusses the procedures followed to accomplish these aims.

3.2 Subjects

The priest at the local Catholic Church addressed the congregation about the issue of parenting and the introduction of a support group. The priest referred married couples who had adolescent children and were keen on joining the support group. There were five married couples that joined the support group, amounting to ten group members.

3.3 Instruments

A short biographical inventory, programme evaluation questionnaire, and two Likert

scales measuring the relationship between parents and adolescents.

3.3.1 *Biographical inventory*

A short biographical inventory was constructed. It contained 10 items that targeted the following information from each participant:

- Identifying Data
- Occupational and Educational Status
- Number and ages of children (see Appendix A)

3.3.2 *A parent- adolescent relationship evaluation questionnaire(parent's perspective)*

This questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding the current status of the relationship between parents and adolescents, from the perspective of the parent. This questionnaire is a 10 – item Likert scale. The items targeted the following:

- parents knowledge of adolescence
- conflict
- respect towards the child
- Support / Love/ Affection
- Discipline
- Attitude toward developing the relationship
- Quality time together
- Decision making
- Communication
- Attitudes toward the relationship

3.3.3 An adolescent – parent relationship evaluation questionnaire(adolescent's perspective)

This questionnaire assessed the relationship between adolescents and their parents. It was a 10 – item likert scale. The responses ranged from, strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The items on the scale included the following:

- Respect from parents
- Freedom of expression
- Parent understanding
- Parent expectations
- Discipline
- Communication
- Support
- Decision making
- Affection
- Relationship

3.3.4 Program evaluation questionnaire

The programme evaluation questionnaire was used to evaluate the parent's subjective experience of the parent support group. The questionnaire was open – ended and

consisted of six items. The items assessed the parent's experience of the support group. In addition it gave parents the opportunity to evaluate the effect the parent support group had on the parent adolescent relationship.

3.4 Procedure

An action research, program evaluation design was employed in this study. Data was collected from parents and adolescents during the first parent support group session. Parents and adolescents were separated into two groups at the Gingindlovu Catholic Church hall. In order to facilitate an atmosphere of trust both groups were briefed on the academic status of the researcher, the nature of the investigation, the procedure for participant's selection and ethical considerations. Both groups were given the opportunity for further discussion on completion of the questionnaire. The order of completion regarding the questionnaires for parents were; (1) autobiographical questionnaire and (2) parent – adolescent relationship questionnaire (pre – testing). Thereafter, the group continued with the group session. Adolescents were given one questionnaire (pre – testing) and thereafter were entertained with music and games. The complete administration took approximately fifteen minutes with the parents, whilst with adolescents it was approximately 20 minutes.

Post – testing was done in the seventh session. Questionnaires were issued to the parent and adolescent groups separately. The parents were given two questionnaires, (1) parent – adolescent relationship questionnaire and (2) programme evaluation questionnaire, whilst adolescents were given the adolescent- parent relationship questionnaire. The complete administration took approximately thirty minutes with the parent group and approximately ten minutes with the adolescent group.

3.5 Parent support group sessions

The introductory session established the needs of parents concerning the parent – adolescent relationship, group boundaries, pre – testing, introductions and aims of the group. Adolescents were also present at the first session, once the pre – testing was complete they were entertained with music and games. After the parent’s support group session was completed, both parents, and adolescents were offered refreshments. Adolescents reported that they enjoyed their group and requested the researcher to consider the formation of a youth group.

In every session following, participants were given the opportunity to discuss their week or any thing they wished to share with the group. Thereafter, they were given information on a topic they had chosen a week in advance. Couples took turns to present on any topic they chose. Topics ranged from problems they were experiencing to the joys of parenthood. During each session supportive interventions were utilized.

Supportive interventions included: the ventilation of feelings or stressful experiences within a supportive and non- -- threatening environment, the validation and affirmation of similar caregiving experiences, reinforcing parent's ability to cope with their situations, praise for being able to carry out their roles as parents, support and understanding during difficult situations and hopefulness for the future. The researcher used supportive interventions and encouraged other members to do the same. After each session, parents were given the opportunity to socialize over refreshments.

In the second session, parents gave feedback on the first session. This session focused on stress and stress management. Parents engaged in a few simple relaxation exercises.

During the third session, parents discussed their difficulty in understanding adolescents. Parents were encouraged to revisit their adolescence in order to promote an understanding of their adolescent children. Parents expressed their fears during their adolescence. Many parents who could now laugh about their adolescence, admitted that there were many difficulties experienced when they were in this life stage, adolescence. Parents were able to identify similarities and differences between themselves and their children.

The fourth session addressed the difficulties parents experienced with discipline. Several discipline techniques were discussed. Parents agreed that punishment was futile.

The focus of the fifth session was on stress management. Once again, parents expressed their need to manage stress more effectively. Many reported that they were stressed and needed another session on stress management and coping. Parents were encouraged to

try a progressive relaxation technique as well as visualization. Parents confirmed that they needed some time out for themselves.

The sixth session focused on communication between parents and adolescents. The session addressed: parents' expression of their feelings towards their children, spending time with them, respecting adolescents' private time, showing affection and giving the adolescent a chance to be heard.

In the seventh session, parents explored the activities they could engage in with their children, and post – testing was done with parents and adolescents. Adolescents and parent were given positive feedback regarding a youth group. Adolescents were very pleased.

3.6 Data analysis

The SPSS statistical program was used to analyse data in terms of t- testing for related samples.

3.7 Resume

This chapter discussed the procedure used to elicit the needs of parents and adolescents within their relationships, forming and evaluating the support group. The positive aspects of the research was that it provided parents with the opportunity to socialize with each other, and form meaningful relationships, as well as getting adolescents motivated to form a youth group.

Data obtained will be presented and analyzed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, themes that emerged from the meetings with parents of adolescents are presented, analyzed and discussed.

4.2 Presentation of data

Data is presented in a tabular form and a brief explanation is followed for clarity.

Frequency is depicted by f and percentage by %.

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4.2.1 Biographical inventory

Table 4.2.1.1 A table displaying the ages of participants.

Ages	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
46 – 50	3	30
36 – 45	6	60
25 – 35	1	10

All participants were above age thirty-four. The majority of parents were at middle – age, which according to Jaffe (1998) is between age forty and fifty.

4.2.1.2 A table displaying the educational status of participants.

Educational status	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Matric + tertiary	4	40
Matric only	1	10
No matric	50	50

4.2.1.3 A table displaying the occupation of participants.

Occupation	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Teacher	1	10
Businessman/woman	3	30
Other	2	20
Unemployed	4	40

Forty percent of participants were professional, whilst twenty percent occupied jobs where no tertiary qualifications were required and the remaining forty percent were unemployed.

4.2.2 Quantitative and qualitative analysis of data and results

Descriptive statistics were initially used to arrange and summarise data so that important characteristics could be described and communicated (Heiman, 1996). Inferential statistics were performed to deal with the possibility of sampling error. The hypotheses were tested using the t – test for related samples. The hypotheses were tested at the 0. 01 level of significance, the critical value of $t = + 2. 821$ and degrees of freedom = 9. The rejection area for the study was beyond $+2. 821$ and one - tailed on the sampling distribution.

4.2.2.1 The parent – adolescent relationship

In order to find out whether there was a change in the relationship, parents were tested prior to the initiation of the support group and after. Numerical values were assigned to their responses on questionnaires. These values were then compared using the t – test for related samples.

Table 4.2.2.1 A table displaying the results of change in the parent - adolescent relationship as perceived by parents.

Participant	Pre – test	Post – test	D	D ²
1	33	29	4	16
2	39	35	4	16
3	40	31	9	81
4	38	32	6	36
5	40	29	11	121
6	42	33	9	81
7	44	27	17	289
8	47	30	17	289
9	48	30	18	324
10	43	22	21	441
			116	1694

$$\begin{aligned}
t_{obt} &= \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{n \sum D^2 - \frac{(\sum D)^2}{n-1}}} \\
&= \frac{116}{\sqrt{10(1694) - (13456)/9}} \\
&= \frac{116}{\sqrt{387.11}} \\
&= 116/19.675 \\
&= 5.896
\end{aligned}$$

$H_0: \mu_D = 0$ Parent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group did not affect the parent – adolescent relationship

$H_a: \mu_D \neq 0$ Parent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group had an effect on the parent – adolescent relationship.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis

Conclusion: Parent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group made a significant improvement in the relationship between parents and adolescents.

4.2.2.2 The adolescent – mother relationship

Table 4.2.2.2 A table displaying the results of change in the adolescent - mother relationship as perceived by adolescents.

Participant	Pre – test	Post – test	D	D2
1	29	27	2	4
2	34	28	6	36
3	36	33	3	9
4	40	33	7	49
5	36	34	2	4
6	40	36	4	16
7	38	36	2	4
8	39	38	1	1
9	40	38	2	4
10	40	39	1	1
			30	128

$$\begin{aligned}
 t &= \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{n \sum D^2 - \frac{(\sum D)^2}{n}}} \\
 &= \frac{30}{\sqrt{10(128) - \frac{(900)}{9}}} \\
 &= \frac{30}{\sqrt{1280 - 900/9}} \\
 &= \frac{30}{\sqrt{380/9}} \\
 &= \frac{30}{\sqrt{42.22}} \\
 &= \frac{30}{6.50} \\
 &= 4.62
 \end{aligned}$$

Ho: $\mu_D = 0$ Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group did not affect the relationship between mothers and adolescents.

Ha: $\mu_D \neq 0$ Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group had an affect on the relationship between mothers and adolescents.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis

Conclusion: Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group made a significant change in the relationship between mothers and adolescents.

4.2.2.3 The adolescent - father relationship

Table 4.2.2.3 A table displaying the results of change in empowerment as perceived by adolescents.

Participant	Pre – test	Post – test	D	D2
1	34	22	12	144
2	32	24	8	64
3	33	24	9	81
4	33	26	7	49
5	31	28	3	9
6	29	30	-1	1
7	35	34	1	1
8	37	35	2	4
9	38	36	2	4
10	38	36	2	4
.			45	361

$$\begin{aligned}
 t_{obt} &= \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{n \sum D^2 - \frac{(\sum D)^2}{n}}} \\
 &= \frac{45}{\sqrt{10(361) - \frac{2025}{9}}} \\
 &= \frac{45}{\sqrt{3610 - 225}} \\
 &= \frac{45}{\sqrt{3385}} \\
 &= \frac{45}{58.18} \\
 &= 0.773
 \end{aligned}$$

Ho: $\mu_D = 0$ Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group did

not improve the relationship between fathers and adolescents.

Ha: $\mu_D \neq 0$ Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group improved the relationship between fathers and adolescents.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis

Conclusion: Adolescent's perceptions revealed that the parent support group made a significant improvement in the relationship between fathers and adolescents.

4.2.3 Comparing variables

It is evident from the statistical comparison of variables that parent's perception of the impact of the support group on the parent – adolescent relationship (5. 896) was most significant. The least significant was the adolescent's perception of the impact of the parent support group on their relationship with fathers (3. 391). However, all t values obtained fall within the rejection area of the null hypothesis (beyond $t_{crit} = +2. 821$). Consequently, there is ninety nine percent confidence that the present research obtained positive results.

4.2.4 Evaluation of the programme

Sixty percent of the participants rated the programme as excellent, and the remaining 40% rated it as good. Parents reported that the programme promoted a greater understanding of relationships, their adolescent children, and their roles as parents. Further, many parents mentioned that they felt better that the problems they were experiencing were not unique, and there were resolutions.

Many parents stated that the sessions were too short; they felt too restricted in terms of time. Parent's suggestions for improvement of the programme included: introducing other forms of educational material, considering a translator for those of whom English is not their first language, inviting adolescents to a few sessions so parents and adolescents could work together on improving the relationship. Parents were very keen on starting a youth group for adolescents.

One hundred percent of the participants wanted the programme to continue.

4.3 Resume

Data collected has been presented and analyzed in this chapter. The analyses reveal that the support group had a positive impact on the parent – adolescent relationship. The following chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This is the concluding chapter of the present study. The findings of the study are discussed in depth and a summary of the entire research presented within this chapter.

5.2 Summary of findings

The biographical data questionnaire revealed that ninety percent of participants were approaching or already reached midlife. Observation within the group revealed that parents were experiencing developmental issues, in line with those discussed by Jaffe(1998). These issues included the “empty nest blues,” feeling unappreciated, and loss of youthfulness. The educational status of the group was somewhat limiting; discussion had to remain simple to accommodate the fifty percent of participants who had not matriculated.

Data analysis revealed that there was a ninety nine percent confidence of a significant improvement in the parent – adolescent, adolescent – mother and adolescent – father relationships. It was evident from the results that parents perceived the relationship between themselves and adolescents more positively than adolescents did; the parent –

adolescent relationship showed the highest pre – and post - test ratings. This indicates a difference exists between parent's and adolescent's perception of their relationship with each other. However, it is possible that this difference is due to parents overrating their relationships, or adolescents underrating it.

The following items showed most improvement in the parent – adolescent relationship:

(1) respect from parents (2) attitude about the relationship (3) discipline (4) communication (5) support and (6) decision making. This improvement can be attributed to the groups support, sharing of experiences and knowledge, and the parents own commitment to improving the relationship.

A comparison of the father – adolescent and mother – adolescent relationship revealed that the mother – adolescent relationship rating was higher, these results support the research that was discussed within this study. Research revealed that adolescents have a closer relationship with their mothers than fathers, also daughters perceive their fathers as very distant (Jaffe, 1998; Holmbeck et al., 1995). However, the father – adolescent relationship showed more improvement.

The programme evaluation interview and observations revealed that parent's understanding of their children increased, more positive relating were encouraged, parents felt more confident in their roles as parents, overall, parents reported experiencing more positive relations with their children. The parents increased understanding of their adolescent children helped to dissolve the adolescent stereotypes that parents had. The

parents practice of techniques and strategies at home helped in the breakdown of strain and tension within the relationship.

A limitation of the study was that all participants were from the Catholic Church; therefore, the results were biased. Another limitation was that all participants drew support from their religion. The limitations of this study makes it difficult to generalize the results as the subjects in this study are not representative of the South African population of married couples with adolescent children.

5.3 Recommendations

- This kind of group should be initiated within South African communities. It helps to improve relationships between parents and adolescents, ultimately leading to *fulfillment and happiness within the relationship*.
- The introduction of youth groups can support and educate adolescents in their relationship with parents.
- Group participants should be given leadership skills training, and sent out to establish a network of support groups for parents and adolescents.
- A study assessing the correlation between parents and adolescents subjective experience of their relationships can be useful.

5.4 Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of a parental support group on the relationship between parents and adolescents within the Gingindlovu Catholic Church community. The group consisted of five married couples with adolescent children and the researcher, who adopted a teaching and participant observer role. The groups ran over seven weeks. Motivation to initiate the support groups was due to the researcher's experience of many strained relationships between parents and adolescents, and parent's stereotypy of adolescents.

Limitations of the study make it difficult to generalize the results amongst the South African population of parents of adolescents. However, whilst being aware of the limitations, the feedback obtained from the parents who took part in the group was encouraging and would suggest that such a group warrants further exploration. The results confirmed that a support group is a useful tool in the improvement of parent - adolescent relationships. The support group was successful in supporting, educating and empowering parents. The positive outcome of the support group programme on the parent – adolescent relationship should encourage further research and the implementation of other groups of this kind within South African communities. The support group reported that the sense of support, imparting of knowledge, sharing of experiences and stories was a new experience for them. The group members have decided to extend the support group by inviting parents from the Gingindlovu community to join them. In addition, they have decided to recruit single parents into the group.

The results yielded from parents and adolescents conveyed that the support group programme was successful in achieving its aims, which included eliciting the needs of parents, initiating a parents support group, evaluating the effect of the support group on the parent adolescent relationship and ultimately improving the relationship.

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APPENDIX A
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME	
AGE	
SEX	
OCCUPATION	
EDUCATION STATUS	
NO. OF CHILDREN	
AGES OF CHILDREN	
ADDRESS	
CONTACT NO.	

APPENDIX B

AN EVALUATION OF THE PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP

This questionnaire aims to evaluate the relationship that exists between you, the parent and your adolescent. Your participation in this study will be appreciated. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. All of your details will be kept confidential. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with.

1. I understand the changes that my child is experiencing as an adolescent.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

2. My child and I argue often.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

3. I respect my child as a person, and allow him/her to express their concerns, ideas and views.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

4. I show my child that I support him/her.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

5. I discipline my child in a constructive way, so that he/she can learn from previous mistakes.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

6. I believe that a parent-adolescent relationship needs to be nurtured in order for the relationship to develop positively.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

7. I enjoy the time that we spend together.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

8. I consider my child's feelings before making a decision involving him/her.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

9. My child frustrates me all the time.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

10. My child and I have a good relationship.

☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree

APPENDIX C

AN EVALUATION OF THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP

This questionnaire aims to evaluate the relationship that exists between you, the adolescent and your parent. Your participation in this study will be appreciated. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. All of your details will be kept confidential. You are not obligated to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with.

1. My parent respects me as a person.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
2. My parent allows me to express my views, concerns and ideas.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
3. My parent doesn't seem to understand me.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
4. My parent expects too much from me.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
5. My parent disciplines me in a way that I can learn from my mistakes.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
6. I am afraid to speak to my parent about many issues.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
7. My parent shows me his/her support.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
8. My parent considers my feelings before making a decision involving me.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
9. My parent is affectionate towards me.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree
10. My parent and I have a good relationship.
☐strongly disagree ☐disagree ☐neutral ☐agree ☐strongly agree.

APPENDIX D

PROGRAM EVALUATION-INTERVIEW GUIDE

(From Dhlomo, 2000)

Please evaluate the program as sincerely as you can. I would like you to tell how you feel about and think of it. Feel free to express your views as

1. How would you rate the program?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Why? _____

2. Do you think the program was helpful to your parent-adolescent relationship?

Yes	
No	

3. What would you say were the main problems of the program?

4. Would you like the program to continue?

Yes	
No	

5. What suggestions would you give to improve the program?

6. Give a qualitative evaluation of the program

APPENDIX E

SCORING KEY-AN EVALUATION OF THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP (Likert scale)

The items on this scale are all reverse scored. The scores are added to give a raw score.

1. My parent respects me as a person.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

2. My parent allows me to express my views, concerns and ideas.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

3. My parent doesn't seem to understand me.

5-strongly disagree 4-disagree 3-neutral 2-agree 1-strongly agree

4. My parent expects too much from me.

5-strongly disagree 4-disagree 3-neutral 2-agree 1-strongly agree

5. My parent disciplines me in a way that I can learn from my mistakes.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

6. I am afraid to speak to my parent about many issues.

5-strongly disagree 4-disagree 3-neutral 2-agree 1-strongly agree

7. My parent shows me his/her support.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

8. My parent considers my feelings before making a decision involving me.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

9. My parent is affectionate towards me.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

10. My parent and I have a good relationship.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

APPENDIX F

SCORING KEY- AN EVALUATION OF THE PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP (Likert scale)

The items on this scale are all reverse scored. The scores are added to give a raw score.

1. I understand the changes that my child is experiencing as an adolescent.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

2. My child and I argue often.

5-strongly disagree 4-disagree 3-neutral 2-agree 1-strongly agree

3. I respect my child as a person, and allow him/her to express their concerns, ideas and views.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

4. I show my child that I support and love him/her.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 24agree 5-strongly agree

5. I discipline my child in a constructive way, so that he/she can learn from previous mistakes.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

6. I believe that a parent-adolescent relationship needs to be nurtured in order for the relationship to develop positively.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

7. I enjoy the time that we spend together.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

8. I consider my child's feelings before making a decision involving him/her.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

9. My child frustrates me all the time.

5-strongly disagree 4-disagree 3-neutral 2-agree 1-strongly agree

10. My child and I have a good relationship.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

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Table 4.2.1.2: Educational status of participants

Table 4.2.1.3: Occupation of participants

Table 4.2.2.1: Parent - adolescent *relationship*

Table 4.2.2.2: The adolescent – mother relationship

Table 4.2.2.3: The adolescent – father relationship