

Verbal Communication of Adolescent Mothers to Their Parents

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Abstract

This study was designed for three purposes: (a) to provide a detailed analysis of adolescent mothers' verbal communication to their infants, (b) to determine adolescent mothers' beliefs about talking and other aspects of parenting, and (c) to determine if there were differences in communication related to the age (younger and older) of adolescent mothers.

Conclusions

Verbal communication of adolescent mothers with their 3– 19-month-old infants was investigated in the adolescent parents' home environment during the 20-minute audio-taped play period. Two age groups were studied, one from 14-15 years and another from 16-18 years. Also, an open-ended interview and the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) were used to assess attitudes. Measures for language variables included the mean length of utterance (MLU) in words, games, and the 10 longest utterances, the type-token ratio (TTR), functional language categories, and form categories. Conversational turn-taking behaviors were also tallied for mothers and infants.

Three major findings emerged:

- Adolescent mothers, irrespective of age, used language patterns which conformed to the descriptions in the literature of older (20 years and older) mothers' communication. These patterns include use of short sentences, highly repetitive speech, a large number of imperative and questions forms, a wide variety of pitch and timing patterns, and content which is restricted to the child's immediate world.
- Adolescent mothers did not believe that talking to the child would spoil the child.
- There were no statistically significant age differences between the age groups on use of language. However, major differences were seen between age groups on the AAPI. Older mothers consistently showed significantly healthier attitudes toward parenting, as compared to the younger group.