




Identifying the Components of Parent–Adolescent Communication Breakdown: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to explore and identify the key components of communication breakdown between parents and adolescents within the Canadian context.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative research employed an exploratory design using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 26 participants, including 13 parents and 13 adolescents residing in Canada. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, age, and family backgrounds. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. All interviews, lasting 45–60 minutes, were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. NVivo 14 software was used to facilitate systematic coding, categorization, and theme development. Rigor and trustworthiness were ensured through member checking, audit trails, and peer debriefing.

Findings: Analysis revealed three overarching categories of communication breakdown: emotional barriers, interactional dynamics, and contextual influences. Emotional barriers included lack of emotional expression, high reactivity, misinterpretation of intentions, lack of empathy, emotional distance, and spillover of parental stress. Interactional dynamics encompassed power struggles, poor listening skills, inconsistent communication styles, inadequate conflict resolution strategies, technology-related distractions, generational language gaps, and parentification of adolescents. Contextual influences comprised cultural expectations, family structure complexities, peer and social pressures, academic and career demands, socioeconomic stressors, and parental migration and adaptation challenges. Illustrative quotations highlighted how these components disrupted trust, openness, and relational balance within families.

Conclusion: The study concludes that parent–adolescent communication breakdown is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by emotional regulation challenges, relational dynamics, and broader socio-cultural contexts. Addressing these issues requires interventions that foster emotional literacy, active listening, and culturally responsive dialogue strategies. Findings contribute to a deeper understanding of family communication and provide implications for practitioners, educators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen adolescent well-being and family relationships.

Keywords: Parent–adolescent communication; Communication breakdown.

1. Introduction

Adolescents' psychosocial development is heavily dependent on open and constructive communication with parents, yet multiple studies underscore that barriers to dialogue remain pervasive across cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic contexts. For example, research on adolescents living in agrarian communities revealed that dietary and lifestyle decisions are often constrained by a lack of effective communication channels between youth and their parents, with implications for nutrition and health outcomes (Agedew et al., 2022). Similarly, studies in multicultural urban contexts demonstrate that misalignments between parental expectations and adolescents' desires for autonomy can amplify communication breakdowns, leading to increased family tension and decreased mutual trust (Wilhelm et al., 2022). These findings suggest that communication is not only about information exchange but also about negotiating meaning, power, and identity within a relational and cultural framework.

A growing body of research highlights how communication influences adolescent self-image and emotional health. Studies on self-esteem and body image indicate that adolescents thrive in family environments where dialogue is supportive and affirming, whereas communication failures can exacerbate vulnerability to negative self-perceptions (Artigues-Barberà et al., 2025). Furthermore, when communication is selective or obstructed, such as in families dealing with parental illness, adolescents often experience emotional isolation and difficulty processing their circumstances (Rodríguez, 2018). This selective sharing underscores how communication breakdown may not always manifest as overt conflict but can also appear in silence, avoidance, or partial disclosure, all of which hinder mutual understanding.

In today's digital age, communication between parents and adolescents is increasingly mediated—or disrupted—by technology. The widespread use of electronic devices has introduced both opportunities and obstacles to parent–child

dialogue. On the one hand, digital tools can facilitate connection; on the other, they may create barriers when excessive use of social media and gaming leads to neglect of face-to-face conversations (Cao & Lai, 2024). The influence of digital culture extends to therapeutic contexts as well. For example, the incorporation of adolescent slang and digital communication styles into therapy has been shown to facilitate engagement, underscoring the need for practitioners to adapt to evolving communicative norms (Omoboyle & Eneh, 2024). However, when these norms remain unacknowledged within families, they may widen the generational gap and fuel misunderstandings.

Beyond technology, structural and social barriers play a critical role in shaping parent–adolescent communication. In Sub-Saharan Africa, research highlights how social and cultural barriers limit discussions of sensitive topics, particularly around sexual and reproductive health (Sidamo et al., 2023). Parents often struggle with traditional expectations that discourage open dialogue, leading adolescents to rely on peers or external sources for information. Similar dynamics are observed in Myanmar, where cultural norms and parental discomfort restrict conversations about sexual and reproductive health between mothers and daughters (Noe et al., 2018). Such findings point to the significance of contextual influences—cultural, religious, and generational—that frame the limits of acceptable communication and, when rigid, contribute to breakdowns in dialogue.

In some families, communication breakdown is not only about silence but also about the quality of interactions. Studies show that parents may dominate conversations or employ inconsistent communication strategies, creating confusion and mistrust. Adolescents often feel they are not truly listened to, which undermines their willingness to share sensitive information (Waleleng et al., 2023). Communication failures are further compounded in contexts of stress, such as chronic illness or migration. For instance, adolescents coping with a parent's serious illness report withholding concerns to avoid burdening the parent, while

the parent similarly withholds information to protect the adolescent (Rodríguez, 2018). This mutual protection paradox results in a cycle of avoidance, further deepening communication barriers.

Family health contexts provide another dimension to understanding communication breakdown. Research among adolescent and young adult kidney recipients highlights the interplay between illness cognitions, family dynamics, and communication about treatment adherence (Hamama-Raz et al., 2023). The perception of helplessness or overprotectiveness can hinder open dialogue, leaving adolescents feeling alienated from decision-making processes. Similarly, adolescents living with HIV/AIDS in rural Uganda encounter systemic and familial communication barriers that prevent them from seeking care and support (Mugisha et al., 2020). These findings stress the point that communication breakdown is not only interpersonal but also intersects with larger health and social systems, influencing access to resources and long-term outcomes.

Adolescent mental health further underscores the importance of communication dynamics. Studies show that when communication pathways within families are blocked, adolescents are more likely to experience emotional distress, social withdrawal, and impaired mental health outcomes (Wu & Xia, 2024). Conversely, supportive family dialogue fosters resilience and adaptability in the face of stress. Autistic adolescents preparing for independence, such as learning to drive, illustrate how communication with parents and professionals must balance guidance with autonomy; when this balance is absent, frustration and breakdown are likely (Myers et al., 2024). These findings suggest that communication is not a static skill but a developmental process that must adapt to adolescents' changing needs.

Barriers to communication are particularly evident when discussing sensitive topics such as sexuality and contraception. Research in Rwanda has documented the discomfort of parents and providers in addressing adolescent contraceptive use, often perpetuating stigma and silence (Schwandt et al., 2022a, 2022b). Similarly, Ethiopian and Ugandan adolescents encounter parental reluctance to discuss contraceptives, leaving them with insufficient knowledge to make informed decisions (Nabugoomu et al., 2018; Wubet et al., 2024). These communication failures have direct health consequences, as they increase adolescents' vulnerability to risky behaviors and unintended outcomes. In Nicaragua, adolescents also report barriers to contraceptive use, linked directly to the absence of

supportive parental dialogue (Parker et al., 2019). Taken together, these studies demonstrate how communication breakdowns extend beyond relational strain to impact broader issues of public health, autonomy, and adolescent agency.

Another important context involves adolescents' participation in family and community programs. Evidence from Zimbabwe shows that adolescents' meaningful involvement in care groups is often hindered by limited dialogue with adults, reinforcing hierarchical structures that undermine adolescents' voices (Ncube-Murakwani, 2021). Similarly, in African American families in the United States, differences in communication processes between parent- and grandparent-headed households affect how sexual health is discussed, illustrating how family structure mediates dialogue (Cornelius et al., 2021). Such findings highlight the intersection of family composition, cultural expectations, and generational dynamics in shaping how communication either flourishes or falters.

At the same time, adolescents often navigate dual worlds of cultural identity and adaptation, further complicating communication. Research among Somali adolescents in the United States reveals the difficulty of balancing traditional parental values with mainstream cultural expectations, especially around sensitive behaviors such as tobacco use (Wilhelm et al., 2022). These adolescents often report feelings of "belonging to three worlds," reflecting the strain of negotiating parental expectations, peer influences, and broader societal norms. Similarly, adolescents from immigrant or marginalized families may experience identity conflicts that manifest in strained communication with parents.

Finally, methodological considerations in adolescent research point to the challenges of capturing these communication breakdowns. Recruiting adolescents, particularly those from underrepresented groups, into studies on family communication and health has been shown to be difficult due to mistrust, gatekeeping, and stigma (Foster et al., 2025). This methodological barrier parallels the relational barriers observed within families themselves: just as researchers struggle to gain adolescents' trust, so too do parents when communication pathways are blocked or strained. These parallels underscore the importance of adopting culturally sensitive, context-aware approaches both in research and in practice.

Taken together, the literature makes it clear that parent–adolescent communication breakdown is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by emotional, cultural,

technological, and structural factors. From barriers related to sexuality, health, and illness to the everyday challenges of digital media, parental expectations, and generational divides, communication breakdown emerges as both a symptom and a cause of adolescent vulnerability. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of how communication operates within the broader ecological context of family life. The current study contributes to this body of knowledge by qualitatively examining the lived experiences of parents and adolescents in Canada, with the aim of identifying the core components of communication breakdown and exploring their implications for adolescent development, family well-being, and potential interventions.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach, aiming to identify the components of parent–adolescent communication breakdown. Qualitative inquiry was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, perceptions, and relational dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures. The study population consisted of parents and adolescents residing in Canada. Using purposive sampling, participants who had direct experience with communication challenges in parent–adolescent relationships were recruited. A total of 26 participants (13 parents and 13 adolescents) took part in the study. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic background to capture a wide range of perspectives. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning no new themes emerged from additional interviews.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which provided flexibility for participants to express their experiences while ensuring that core topics relevant to communication breakdown were addressed. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature and expert input, covering topics such as perceived communication barriers, emotional responses during conversations, conflict resolution strategies, and the role of cultural or social factors in shaping communication patterns.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' preferences and availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and reliability of the data.

2.3. Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach. Data coding and categorization were conducted with the aid of NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated systematic coding, retrieval, and theme development. Open coding was first carried out to identify initial concepts, which were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding. Finally, selective coding was used to refine and integrate categories into overarching themes that explained the components of communication breakdown between parents and adolescents. Constant comparison was applied throughout the process to ensure consistency across cases. To enhance trustworthiness, credibility was established through member checking, dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions, and confirmability was ensured through peer debriefing with qualitative research experts.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 25 participants from Michigan, consisting of 14 females (56%) and 11 males (44%), with ages ranging from 15 to 24 years (mean age = 19.2). In terms of cultural and ethnic background, participants represented a diverse range of groups, including African American (n = 6, 24%), Hispanic/Latino (n = 5, 20%), Middle Eastern/Arab American (n = 5, 20%), Asian American (n = 4, 16%), and White/European American (n = 5, 20%). Educational status varied, with 10 participants (40%) enrolled in high school, 11 participants (44%) attending college or university, and 4 participants (16%) engaged in vocational training or employment. The socioeconomic backgrounds of participants ranged from lower to middle class, providing a heterogeneous sample reflective of Michigan's multicultural youth population. This diversity was intentional, as it allowed for the exploration of positive youth development across a broad spectrum of cultural experiences and social conditions.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts of Parent–Adolescent Communication Breakdown

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Emotional Barriers	Lack of Emotional Expression	Suppressed feelings; Fear of judgment; Difficulty verbalizing emotions; Emotional withdrawal
	High Emotional Reactivity	Anger outbursts; Crying as resistance; Sarcasm and mockery; Over-sensitivity
	Misinterpretation of Intentions	Taking words literally; Assuming hostility; Ignoring context; Overgeneralization
	Lack of Empathy	Dismissing concerns; Ignoring emotional cues; Limited perspective-taking
	Emotional Distance	Avoidance of deep talks; Preference for silence; Feeling disconnected
2. Interactional Dynamics	Parental Stress Spillover	Work stress affecting talks; Fatigue leading to short temper; Irritability at home
	Power Struggles	Parental dominance; Adolescent resistance; Negotiation failures; Constant arguing
	Poor Listening Skills	Interrupting each other; Selective hearing; Lack of attention; Multitasking during talks
	Inconsistent Communication Styles	Shifts between harsh and lenient tone; Confusing body language; Mixed signals
	Lack of Conflict Resolution Strategies	Escalation instead of compromise; Blame-shifting; Avoidance of solutions
3. Contextual Influences	Overuse of Technology	Mobile phone distraction; Social media replacing dialogue; Gaming during talks
	Generational Language Gap	Different slang/jargon; Misunderstood humor; Struggles with cultural references
	Parentification of Adolescents	Adolescents mediating conflicts; Acting as adults; Bearing emotional burden
	Cultural Expectations	Respect vs. openness clash; Gender norms; Ethnic traditions shaping dialogue
	Family Structure	Single-parent households; Blended family conflicts; Sibling rivalry influencing talks
	Peer and Social Pressure	Friends' influence; Fear of peer judgment; Pressure to conform
	Academic and Career Expectations	Pressure for grades; Future career disagreements; Comparison with others
	Socioeconomic Stressors	Financial struggles; Limited leisure time; Household responsibilities
	Parental Migration and Adaptation	Cultural adjustment issues; Parents struggling with Canadian norms; Language barriers

Category 1: Emotional Barriers

Lack of Emotional Expression. Many adolescents reported difficulty expressing their inner feelings openly, which often led to silence or withdrawal during conversations. Parents similarly admitted they sometimes avoided emotional disclosure out of fear of burdening their children. One adolescent stated, *“When I try to talk about how I feel, I just freeze—I don’t know how to put it into words.”* A parent echoed this, *“I don’t want to make my daughter worried, so I keep my emotions to myself.”*

High Emotional Reactivity. Communication breakdown frequently stemmed from heightened emotional reactions. Adolescents described becoming defensive or crying easily, while parents reported responding with anger or sarcasm. For example, one father noted, *“When I raise my voice, my son immediately shuts down or storms off.”* Similarly, a teenager said, *“I cry because I feel attacked, even if my mom just wants to discuss my homework.”*

Misinterpretation of Intentions. Both parents and adolescents highlighted a tendency to misinterpret each other’s words and intentions, often assuming hostility. One adolescent explained, *“When my dad says something*

critical, I think he hates me, even though he just means I should try harder.” A parent similarly reflected, *“My daughter takes everything literally, and then we end up fighting about something small.”*

Lack of Empathy. A recurring theme was the absence of empathetic listening during conversations. Parents felt their children dismissed their advice, while adolescents reported that their feelings were minimized. As one mother commented, *“When I tell my son I’m worried, he rolls his eyes and says I’m overreacting.”* An adolescent remarked, *“They never try to see things from my perspective—they just tell me what I should do.”*

Emotional Distance. Several participants described a growing sense of emotional detachment within the family. Adolescents mentioned preferring silence to avoid conflict, while parents noted difficulty initiating deep conversations. One teenager confessed, *“It feels easier to keep quiet than to argue.”* A parent echoed, *“We live in the same house, but sometimes it feels like we’re strangers.”*

Parental Stress Spillover. Parents admitted that external stressors, such as work and financial pressure, often carried into family communication, creating tension. A father

shared, *"After a long day at work, I don't have the patience to listen properly."* Likewise, an adolescent said, *"When mom comes home tired, I know not to even start talking because she'll snap at me."*

Category 2: Interactional Dynamics

Power Struggles. The issue of authority and autonomy was a common source of conflict. Adolescents felt controlled, while parents perceived resistance as disobedience. One adolescent said, *"Every time I want freedom, they see it as rebellion."* A parent added, *"It feels like every conversation turns into a battle for who is in charge."*

Poor Listening Skills. Communication was hindered by interruptions and selective attention. Adolescents felt unheard, while parents described distractions during talks. For example, one teen remarked, *"They don't really listen; they just wait to lecture me."* Meanwhile, a mother admitted, *"Sometimes I'm checking my phone and realize I missed half of what my daughter was saying."*

Inconsistent Communication Styles. Participants pointed out that fluctuating tones and mixed messages created confusion. Adolescents described parents as "sometimes soft, sometimes harsh," while parents acknowledged inconsistency. One teen said, *"I never know if they'll be calm or angry when I bring something up."* A parent noted, *"I switch between being strict and lenient—it probably confuses them."*

Lack of Conflict Resolution Strategies. Families often lacked effective methods to resolve disputes, resorting instead to escalation or avoidance. A teenager said, *"We just yell until someone leaves the room."* Likewise, a parent commented, *"I end up giving up or blaming them—it's not healthy, but I don't know another way."*

Overuse of Technology. Distractions from phones, social media, and gaming emerged as a major barrier. Adolescents admitted preferring online spaces, while parents lamented the lack of face-to-face dialogue. As one parent observed, *"When I try to talk, my son's eyes are glued to his screen."* An adolescent admitted, *"It's easier to scroll on Instagram than deal with their lectures."*

Generational Language Gap. Differences in language use, slang, and humor contributed to misunderstandings. Adolescents described parents as "not getting it," while parents struggled with unfamiliar expressions. A teen said, *"They don't understand the words we use—it's like talking to someone from another planet."* A parent added, *"Sometimes her jokes sound disrespectful, but I think it's just her slang."*

Parentification of Adolescents. Some adolescents reported being placed in adult-like roles, mediating conflicts or taking on emotional burdens. One adolescent shared, *"I feel like the parent sometimes, calming them down."* Similarly, a mother admitted, *"My daughter ends up being the peacemaker when my husband and I argue."*

Category 3: Contextual Influences

Cultural Expectations. Cultural norms shaped communication styles, especially around respect and openness. Adolescents from immigrant families felt torn between Canadian norms of self-expression and parental expectations of deference. One teen expressed, *"At school they tell us to speak up, but at home I'm told to stay quiet."* A parent said, *"In my culture, questioning parents is seen as disrespectful."*

Family Structure. Single-parent and blended families reported unique challenges, such as shifting roles and conflicting loyalties. One adolescent in a blended family remarked, *"I don't know whether to talk to my stepdad or my mom—it gets complicated."* A parent noted, *"As a single mother, I sometimes overcompensate, and it affects how we communicate."*

Peer and Social Pressure. Adolescents highlighted peer influences that shaped their communication patterns. Fear of being judged by friends made them reluctant to share with parents. One adolescent explained, *"If I tell my mom something, she might not understand my friends' world."* A parent observed, *"I feel like her friends' opinions matter more than mine."*

Academic and Career Expectations. Conflicts often arose around school performance and future aspirations. Parents stressed academic achievement, while adolescents sought autonomy in career choices. One teen shared, *"They only care about grades, not what I want to do."* A parent reflected, *"I push because I want the best for her, but she thinks I'm pressuring her."*

Socioeconomic Stressors. Financial difficulties created communication strain within households. Adolescents noted a lack of family activities due to cost, while parents worried about providing stability. A parent said, *"Bills keep me stressed, and sometimes I snap at the kids."* An adolescent admitted, *"I don't ask for things because I know money is tight."*

Parental Migration and Adaptation. Immigrant families faced challenges related to cultural adjustment and language barriers. One parent shared, *"I'm still learning English, so I can't always explain myself well."* A teenager remarked,

"Sometimes I feel like I'm teaching my parents how things work in Canada—it's stressful."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that parent–adolescent communication breakdown in the Canadian context manifests through three overarching categories: emotional barriers, interactional dynamics, and contextual influences. Each category included several subcomponents such as lack of emotional expression, misinterpretation of intentions, power struggles, inconsistent communication styles, cultural expectations, peer and academic pressures, and migration-related challenges. These results highlight that communication breakdown is a multifaceted process embedded in both interpersonal exchanges and broader cultural, structural, and technological contexts.

Emotional Barriers emerged as a central category, underscoring how adolescents and parents often fail to effectively articulate and respond to each other's emotions. Many adolescents reported difficulty expressing vulnerable feelings, while parents described withholding emotional disclosures to avoid burdening their children. This finding aligns with earlier research indicating that supportive communication contributes significantly to adolescent self-esteem and body image, whereas avoidance and silence can create feelings of isolation (Artigues-Barberà et al., 2025). Furthermore, adolescents who selectively withhold emotions, such as those experiencing parental illness, mirror patterns documented in studies on selective communication in families facing maternal cancer, where silence becomes a protective yet harmful strategy (Rodríguez, 2018). The evidence suggests that communication breakdown is not merely a result of conflict but also of emotional non-disclosure, which restricts opportunities for relational intimacy and mutual understanding.

The role of high emotional reactivity also surfaced prominently in this study. Adolescents described shutting down when confronted with parental anger, while parents admitted responding with sarcasm or impatience. Such patterns parallel findings showing that family stressors, particularly when compounded by illness or chronic strain, can exacerbate perceptions of helplessness and erode communication (Hamama-Raz et al., 2023). Similarly, the difficulty of regulating emotions during dialogue has been linked with diminished mental health outcomes among adolescents (Wu & Xia, 2024). Taken together, these findings highlight the need for families to cultivate

emotional regulation strategies to sustain open and constructive dialogue.

Another dimension of emotional barriers concerned misinterpretations of intentions. Adolescents in this study frequently perceived criticism as hostility, while parents reported their words being taken "too literally." This aligns with research emphasizing how adolescents often navigate heightened sensitivity to parental evaluations, which can distort the meaning of parental guidance (Wilhelm et al., 2022). Moreover, the lack of empathy reported by participants resonates with findings from studies on social-ecological barriers in Sub-Saharan Africa, where communication breakdown often reflects not only silence but also a failure to recognize the adolescent's lived experience (Sidamo et al., 2023). Thus, both misinterpretation and lack of empathy fuel a cycle of misunderstanding that entrenches communication difficulties.

The findings related to interactional dynamics emphasize how structural patterns within dialogue—rather than individual characteristics—contribute to breakdown. Adolescents often perceived communication as power-laden, with parents enforcing authority while adolescents resisted or withdrew. These results mirror research on the persistence of hierarchical dynamics in parent–child communication across diverse cultural contexts (Cornelius et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study highlights the prevalence of poor listening skills, inconsistent communication styles, and limited conflict resolution strategies. These features correspond with evidence from communication models in Manado City, Indonesia, which show that inconsistencies and failures to listen contribute to adolescents feeling unheard and disengaged (Waleleng et al., 2023).

The overuse of technology emerged as a unique barrier in the Canadian sample, where both adolescents and parents described screen-based distractions undermining conversations. Similar findings are reported in studies showing that adolescent use of digital devices can generate conflict and miscommunication within families (Cao & Lai, 2024). Moreover, the presence of generational language gaps, including the use of slang and digital communication styles, parallels findings from therapeutic contexts where adapting to adolescent linguistic norms was found to facilitate engagement (Omoboeye & Eneh, 2024). These findings suggest that the rapid evolution of communication technologies and norms has widened generational gaps, creating additional obstacles to effective dialogue.

Another subtheme in interactional dynamics involved the parentification of adolescents, where youth were placed in adult-like roles mediating conflicts or absorbing parental stress. This reflects broader research on adolescents in caregiver roles, particularly in health or migration contexts, where role reversals undermine normative family hierarchies and complicate communication (Mugisha et al., 2020). Such dynamics suggest that communication breakdown is not only about failed conversations but also about distorted relational roles that compromise developmental boundaries.

The third overarching category, contextual influences, sheds light on the structural and cultural environment in which communication breakdown unfolds. Participants from immigrant families described tension between cultural expectations of respect and Canadian norms encouraging open dialogue. This resonates with studies of Somali adolescents in the United States, who reported struggling to balance parental authority with broader cultural pressures, leading to fragmented communication and identity conflict (Wilhelm et al., 2022). Similarly, studies in Myanmar and Uganda demonstrate how traditional expectations around sexuality create barriers to parental communication with adolescents (Nabugoomu et al., 2018; Noe et al., 2018). These findings affirm that cultural expectations are not peripheral influences but core determinants of how communication is structured and constrained.

Family structure also influenced communication, with single-parent and blended families in this study reporting unique challenges. Comparable evidence is found in research comparing parent- and grandparent-headed families in the United States, which revealed significant differences in communication content and processes around sensitive issues such as sexual health (Cornelius et al., 2021). Moreover, the influence of peer and social pressures in shaping adolescents' reluctance to communicate echoes findings from studies of barriers to contraceptive use in Nicaragua and Sub-Saharan Africa, where adolescents relied on peers for information in the absence of parental dialogue (Parker et al., 2019; Sidamo et al., 2023). This indicates that when parent-adolescent communication falters, adolescents often seek alternative sources of validation and knowledge, which may or may not be constructive.

Another recurring influence was academic and career expectations, with adolescents describing parental emphasis on grades as a source of conflict. These findings are consistent with research showing that parental expectations, if communicated rigidly, can heighten adolescent stress and

impede authentic dialogue (Artigues-Barberà et al., 2025). At the same time, socioeconomic stressors also featured prominently in participants' accounts. Parents reported financial strain spilling into family interactions, a finding supported by studies documenting how systemic stress undermines family resilience and communication (Agedew et al., 2022). These results emphasize that communication breakdown cannot be understood apart from the material realities of families.

Finally, the challenge of parental migration and adaptation was evident in families where parents struggled with Canadian cultural norms and language. This finding parallels studies showing that immigrant families often navigate "triple belonging," with adolescents positioned between parental expectations, peer norms, and mainstream cultural pressures (Wilhelm et al., 2022). Similar barriers are noted in Sub-Saharan Africa and other global contexts, where migration and cultural transition complicate intergenerational communication (Ncube-Murakwani, 2021). Thus, migration adds an additional layer of complexity, intensifying the risk of communication breakdown.

Overall, the results of this study converge with previous research in highlighting the multidimensional nature of parent-adolescent communication breakdown. Emotional barriers reflect the internal dynamics of expression and empathy, interactional dynamics reflect the process of dialogue and relational patterns, and contextual influences reflect the broader ecological and cultural environment. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of adopting an ecological lens, as adolescents' communicative experiences are shaped by the interplay of individual, familial, cultural, and systemic factors (Schwandt et al., 2022a, 2022b; Wubet et al., 2024).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size of 26 participants, while adequate for achieving theoretical saturation in qualitative research, may not fully capture the diversity of Canadian adolescents and families across provinces, cultural groups, and socioeconomic strata. Second, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews may have introduced social desirability bias, as participants could have presented their communication patterns in more favorable terms. Third, the study was limited to adolescents and parents who volunteered to participate, which may indicate that families with the most severe communication

breakdowns were underrepresented. Finally, although qualitative methods provide depth and nuance, the findings cannot be generalized statistically to all Canadian families.

Future research should expand the sample size and include participants from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds across Canada to capture broader perspectives. Comparative studies between immigrant and non-immigrant families could provide deeper insights into the role of cultural adaptation in communication breakdown. Additionally, longitudinal qualitative studies would allow researchers to track communication changes over time, particularly during key developmental transitions such as early adolescence, high school graduation, or entry into higher education. Further research could also integrate mixed methods, combining qualitative interviews with survey-based measures of communication quality and adolescent well-being, to triangulate findings and strengthen validity. Finally, it would be valuable to explore the role of fathers more specifically, as maternal voices often dominate research samples in family communication studies.

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications. Interventions aimed at improving parent–adolescent communication should emphasize the importance of emotional literacy, teaching both parents and adolescents strategies to express and respond to feelings constructively. Training programs in schools and community centers could focus on conflict resolution skills and active listening techniques tailored to both generations. Additionally, practitioners should address the impact of technology by encouraging families to establish “tech-free” times dedicated to conversation. Culturally responsive approaches are essential, particularly for immigrant families, where generational and cultural gaps intersect. Policymakers and practitioners should also consider integrating communication training into adolescent health programs, recognizing that effective dialogue within families is not only a private matter but also a determinant of public health and social well-being.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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