

THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The study sought to assess the influence of authoritarian parenting on the psychosocial wellbeing of secondary school students.

Problem Statement: Psychosocial well-being among adolescents is a growing concern globally. In Kenya, many students experience stress, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and social withdrawal (Mburu et al., 2022). The Nairobi County Director of Education (2024) also reported poor peer relationships, isolation, and emotional distress. However, the relationship between these challenges and parenting styles remains unclear.

Methodology: This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The target population for the study was 30550 form three students, and 235 PTA chair persons. The study used stratified simple random sampling to select 24 out of 235 secondary schools. Purposive sampling was used to include all 24 PTA chairpersons from the selected schools. Stratified proportionate, and simple random sampling was used to select 397 out of 30550 form three students. Data was collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions for students, while an in-depth interview guide was used to collect data from Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Chairpersons. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics which were processed using Statistical Package for Social Science Version 29 and presented using tables. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis and presented in a verbatim form.

Result: Regression results show that Authoritarian Parenting had a positive and statistically significant influence on learners' psychosocial well-being ($B = 0.170$, $\beta = 0.110$, $t = 1.33$, $p = 0.003$).

Recommendation: Policymakers and education authorities integrate parenting education programs into schools and enhance psychosocial support services to promote responsive and communicative parenting.

Keywords: Kenya, Authoritarian Parenting, Psychosocial Wellbeing, Students, Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Promoting positive psychosocial wellbeing in students is crucial for their overall development, academic success, and mental health. As noted by Herman, et al. (2018), when students feel supported and confident, they are more likely to engage actively in learning, build healthy relationships, and develop resilience to stress. A study done in Pakistan by Haidar and Mohdad (2024) argued that a positive environment fosters self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social skills. Haidar and Mohdad further contended that, poor psychosocial wellbeing can lead to anxiety, depression, low academic performance, and difficulty in forming positive relationships. It may also contribute to behavioral issues, withdrawal, and a lack of motivation, thus hindering personal and academic growth. At the University of Kerala in India, Zebukumar and Pattamathu (2024) conducted a study to explore the relationship between gratitude, helping behavior, and psychosocial well-being among adolescent students. The study revealed that gratitude significantly predicted the psychosocial well-being of students, while helping behavior did not. The study further highlighted the importance of enhancing psychosocial well-being among adolescent students. The authors recommended further exploration of psychosocial well-being among students to uncover additional predictors of psychosocial well-being that were not addressed in their study, which revealed the need for the current study that examined how parenting styles influence the psychosocial well-being of students.

UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2021 highlights a growing global mental health crisis among adolescents, estimating that over one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 years live with a diagnosed mental disorder. Alarming, suicide ranks among the top five causes of death for this age group, with nearly 46,000 adolescent suicides annually worldwide (UNICEF, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, at least one in seven children and adolescents experience significant psychological distress (UNICEF, 2022), yet many are unable to access adequate care due to stigma, inadequate services, and limited resources. A meta-analysis of studies across the region reported pooled prevalence rates of 15.3% for depression, 11.8% for anxiety, 12.5% for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 9.8% for conduct disorder, and 6.6% for ADHD among those under 19 years (Cortina et al., 2023). These realities point to the need to strengthen mental health services in schools, increase psychosocial support, and address systemic barriers to care as essential steps to safeguard young people's well-being and educational outcomes.

The parenting style adopted by parents has a significant influence on an individual's well-being. Mendaz (2022) defined parenting style as the techniques and standards that parents use in raising their children. Kuppens and Ceulemans (2019) argued that understanding the influence of parenting styles on the psychosocial well-being of children is crucial for grasping how they

navigate their social and emotional worlds. Kuppens and Ceulemans further noted that parenting styles encompass broad approaches and attitudes, characterized by fundamental dimensions of control and warmth. Mukola (2022) emphasized that many psychosocial problems, such as depression and anxiety, can be traced to parental failures, particularly when parents do not provide adequate warmth and guidance, thereby negatively affecting children's psychosocial well-being.

Psychosocial well-being in students refers to their emotional, social, and psychological health, including how they handle emotions, form relationships, and interact with their environment (Eiroa, 2024). It encompasses their ability to cope with stress, their self-esteem, and their capacity for empathy and resilience. Positive psychosocial well-being enables children to navigate challenges, build healthy relationships, and achieve their potential, influencing academic performance, social skills, and mental health (Eiroa, 2024). Conversely, poor psychosocial well-being can lead to anxiety, depression, and difficulties in forming relationships. Dudija (2023) argued that parents can support psychosocial well-being by creating nurturing environments, providing emotional support, and promoting social skills.

Aikaterini and Wassilis (2023) revealed that parenting styles significantly influence children's well-being, finding that authoritative parenting accounted for 42% of the variance in resilience scores and was strongly correlated with higher self-esteem ($r = .58, p < .001$). In contrast, authoritarian parenting was linked to a 35% increase in reported emotional instability and 28% lower social skills scores, while permissive parenting was associated with 25% higher levels of behavioral problems. Supportive parenting practices that balanced guidance with emotional warmth were shown to predict 30% better psychosocial outcomes, helping children develop effective coping mechanisms and healthier peer relationships. While global discussions extensively link parenting styles to psychosocial well-being, there is limited research examining how these dynamics specifically influence the psychosocial well-being of secondary school students in Nairobi County. This gap highlights the need for the current study to investigate these relationships within the Kenyan context.

Kuppens (2018) contended that there are four parenting styles, including authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful. The authoritarian parent does not allow children to have much freedom to develop their choices. Authoritative parenting is also known as balanced parenting and shows the right balance between displaying authority and showing responsiveness to the children. The authoritative parent gives encouragement and thorough reasoning behind any rules that are set and other preferred methods of discipline that are implemented. This helps the children to understand that they are loved, but they must be punished if they violate any rules. The permissive parent does not impart a sense of discipline on a child but rather places emphasis on allowing the children to do whatever they want, regardless of the consequences. The neglectful or uninvolved parent simply fulfills a child's physical needs and is completely removed from any emotional or disciplinary guidance. While the study by Kuppens (year) looked at different parenting styles, it did not look at how these parenting styles are related to psychosocial wellbeing of students particularly in secondary schools, which prompted this study to fill the gaps.

Grusec (2019) argued that authoritative parenting, characterized by a balanced approach, involves setting clear and reasonable expectations while maintaining open communication with the child. This type of control fosters a supportive environment where children understand the guidelines but also feel comfortable expressing themselves. Authoritarian parenting represents high levels of control with an emphasis on strict adherence to rules and authority. Parents adopting this style often expect unquestioning obedience from their children. While this approach may instill

discipline, it can lead to potential negative outcomes, such as increased anxiety and a diminished sense of autonomy in the child. As asserted by Aikaterini and Wassilis (2023) understanding parenting styles is crucial for comprehending their profound impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of students. While authoritative parenting emerges as a positive influence, the contrasting effects of authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting underscore the need for further exploration. This study sought to unravel the intricate connections between these parenting styles and the psychosocial well-being of students, shedding light on ways to foster a nurturing environment conducive to healthy emotional and social growth.

During high school, adolescents undergo crucial psychosocial development, as proposed by Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages. The primary focus during this stage is on the conflict between "Identity vs. Role Confusion." Secondary school students grapple with the task of forming a coherent sense of self, encompassing their values, beliefs, and aspirations for the future. Parenting styles play a pivotal role in influencing the psychosocial wellbeing at this stage. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and reasonable expectations, fosters a supportive environment that encourages the exploration of identity. Adolescents raised in authoritative households are more likely to develop a secure sense of self and autonomy (Yan & Changa, 2024). Conversely, authoritarian or overly permissive parenting may contribute to identity confusion, as strict control or lack of guidance may hinder the development of independent decision-making.

Research in United States of America highlights the impact of parenting practices on children's psychosocial development. A study by Felton (2022) titled "Exposure to maternal depressive symptoms and growth in adolescent substance use: the role of delay discounting" found that maternal depressive symptoms can lead to increased delay discounting in adolescents, which in turn predicts higher substance use over time. This suggests that parenting influenced by depressive symptoms may affect children's ability to delay gratification, leading to negative outcomes such as substance misuse. Additionally, the study indicates that the ability to delay gratification is associated with better academic performance and lower tendencies toward violent behavior and substance abuse among adolescents. The study further found that students who reported a high propensity to delay gratification and low tendencies toward violent behavior and substance abuse obtained higher math scores on standardized tests. These findings underscore the importance of parenting practices that promote the ability to delay gratification, as they are linked to positive psychosocial outcomes and may help prevent behaviors such as substance misuse and aggression.

In a related study, Rameen (2022) investigated in Lahore, Pakistan, whether emotional intelligence predicts psychosocial well-being in young adults better than perceived parenting styles. The study found that while both maternal and paternal authoritarianism and maternal authoritativeness were significantly correlated with psychological well-being, emotional intelligence was the only significant predictor, accounting for 10.5% of the unique variance in psychosocial well-being. However, these studies, although related to the current study, did not directly address the psychosocial well-being of students.

A study by Liang (2024) in Iran explored the relationship between parents' anxiety, stress, and depression and their children's health-related quality of life and psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed significant positive correlations between parents' anxiety, stress, depression, and children's externalized behavioral disorders. Anxiety, stress, and depression were significantly linked to worse health outcomes in children. Specifically, depression and anxiety predicted 22% of the variance, while anxiety, stress, and age predicted 19% of the variance in externalized behavioral disorders. The study concluded that the mental health

challenges faced by parents during the pandemic were closely associated with negative psychosocial effects on children, including behavioral issues and poor health-related quality of life. This study however lacked a discussion on how different parenting styles influence psychosocial wellbeing which was the focus of the current study.

A study by Pillay (2017) in Ethiopia examined the relationship between perceived parental academic socialization and children's well-being in four domains: depression, self-esteem, school adjustment, and substance use. The results revealed that adolescents with higher levels of parental academic socialization reported 32% fewer depressive symptoms, 28% fewer school adjustment problems, and a 25% reduction in substance use compared to peers with lower levels of parental involvement. Additionally, these adolescents demonstrated a 30% increase in self-esteem scores, underscoring the positive influence of parental engagement on adolescent well-being. However, this study revealed a knowledge gap, as it offered limited discussion on the role of specific parenting styles. Addressing this gap, the current study seeks to examine how parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, shape students' psychosocial well-being, particularly in the Kenyan context.

A related study by Okon and Ngozi (2018) in Nigeria investigated the influence of parenting style on the psychosocial well-being of children, testing two hypotheses. The findings indicated a significant impact of domestic violence on psychosocial well-being ($F(1,198) = 15.62, p < .001$), with children exposed to high levels of domestic violence scoring 35% lower on psychosocial well-being measures than their peers. However, parenting style itself did not show a statistically significant effect ($F(3,198) = 1.47, p > .05$), and no interaction effect was found between domestic violence and parenting style in predicting well-being ($F(3,198) = 0.98, p > .05$). These results suggest that, in this context, domestic violence is a more critical factor influencing children's psychosocial health than parenting style, underscoring the urgent need for domestic violence prevention initiatives to safeguard children's mental health.

Olajide (2020) conducted a study on the perceived parenting styles and psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents in Osun State, southwestern Nigeria. The findings revealed a low level of psychosocial wellbeing among the adolescents, with reported prevalence rates of very low emotional wellbeing (16.9%), social wellbeing (22%), and psychological wellbeing (19.3%). The study identified patterns of parenting styles as follows: authoritative parenting style was associated with low (45.5%), high (41.6%), and very high (12.9%) levels; authoritarian parenting style with low (53%), high (30.7%), and very high (16.3%) levels; and permissive parenting style with low (64.2%), high (20.7%), and very high (15.1%) levels. No significant gender differences were observed in the psychosocial wellbeing scores of the adolescents, but a significant difference was found based on religious affiliation in relation to social wellbeing. Adolescents from public schools exhibited higher levels of social wellbeing compared to their counterparts from private schools. Parenting styles were found to significantly predict the level of psychosocial wellbeing among the adolescents. Neither family type nor family size had a significant influence on the level of psychosocial wellbeing. While Olajide's study highlighted the relationship between parenting styles and psychosocial wellbeing in Nigeria, the current study aims to determine if similar findings can be observed in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Mokoena and Lefa (2023) conducted a study to examine the interplay of gender, parenting styles, risk-taking, and self-harm behavior. Results indicated a significant impact of parenting styles on risk-taking behavior and highlighted a notable interaction effect between gender and parenting styles. The findings revealed that parenting styles substantially influence adolescents' risk-taking

and self-harm behaviors. However, while the study focused on university students, the present research sought to examine the influence of parenting styles on psychosocial well-being among secondary school students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

In Tanzania, the psychosocial wellbeing of students has been a cause for concern among scholars. One of the concerns has been the occurrence of psychosocial distress among students, which has emerged as a significant public health problem, particularly among adolescents in both low- and middle-income countries. In response, Seidu (2020) analyzed risk and protective factors for psychosocial distress among in-school adolescents in Tanzania. The findings revealed that psychosocial distress affected 16.9% of the students, with similar rates observed for both males and females. The risk factors associated with psychosocial distress included hunger (OR = 1.57, $p < 0.001$), being bullied (OR = 1.92, $p < 0.001$), being attacked (OR = 1.31, $p < 0.05$), engaging in physical activity (OR = 1.33, $p < 0.05$), truancy (OR = 1.28, $p < 0.05$), and tobacco use (OR = 2.40, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that psychosocial distress is relatively prevalent among adolescents in Tanzania and affects both sexes similarly. However, the study did not address how psychosocial wellbeing is linked to parenting styles. The current study aimed to address this gap by exploring the relationship between parenting styles and psychosocial wellbeing among students.

A related study was conducted in Uganda by Lanyero (2021) to determine the influence of parenting style on the social behaviors of students in public secondary schools in Makindye Division. The results revealed a weak but positive relationship between parenting style and students' social behavior, which was not significant at the 0.05 level ($r = 0.175$, $p > 0.05$). However, a different analysis found a weak but positive relationship that was significant at the 0.01 level ($r = 0.337^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). This study highlighted that parenting style has a significant effect on students' social behavior and provided a basis for the current study that sought to explore how parenting styles affect the psychosocial wellbeing of students.

In Kenya, student violence is manifested in various forms, including bullying, physical fights, gender violence, and damage to school property during strikes. This violence has been attributed to poor psychosocial wellbeing among students.

In this context, Njogu (2018) explored the role of parenting styles in student violence in secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. The study, which surveyed 412 students and 56 teachers, found that 68% of students involved in violent incidents reported coming from homes with authoritarian or neglectful parenting styles. Additionally, 72% of teachers identified poor parental role modeling and inadequate guidance as key contributors to violent behavior. A chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between parenting style and student violence ($\chi^2 = 18.47$, $p < .001$), indicating that students from authoritarian and neglectful households were nearly twice as likely to engage in violence compared to peers from authoritative homes. Njogu concluded that parental behavior and engagement strongly influence student conduct and recommended that parents adopt positive role modeling and supportive parenting practices to promote their children's emotional well-being and reduce school violence.

NACADA's (2019) national survey on substance use among Kenyan secondary school students revealed that 23.4% (508,132 students) had experimented with alcohol or drugs during their lifetime. Specifically, 17% had used khat/miraa, 16.1% had used prescription drugs, 14.5% tobacco, 7.5% cannabis, 2.3% inhalants (glue, thinner, petrol), 1.2% heroin, and 1.1% cocaine. Among primary school pupils in 2018, 20.2% had used at least one substance, with current use

rates of 10.4% for prescription drugs, 7.2% alcohol, 6% tobacco, 3.7% miraa, and under 1% for cannabis and inhalants. These high prevalence rates suggest a pressing need to explore underlying psychosocial contributors such as parenting style to better understand and address these challenges.

Rono (2018) examined the link between the home environment and the psychosocial wellbeing of preschool children in the Mois-Bridge Zone, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. The study found that children in this area exhibited high levels of cognitive, social, and emotional development. It also highlighted a significant connection between the home environment and these developmental outcomes. Factors such as household conditions, family size, type of housing, parental education, income, and the availability of space and play materials were found to contribute to the children's psychosocial well-being.

A study by Ndeti et al. (2016) on upper primary students in Kenya reported that 37.7% had at least one DSM-IV mental disorder, with somatic complaints (29.6%), affective disorders (14.1%), and conduct disorders (12.5%) being most common. Similarly, Macharia et al. (2023) found that during COVID-19, 20.6% of in-school adolescents screened positive for depression and 19.1% for anxiety, while out-of-school peers reported higher rates, 36.0% for depression and 27.7% for anxiety, with 12.5% experiencing both. These findings highlight the high prevalence of psychosocial issues among Kenyan adolescents, yet it remains unclear whether parenting styles contribute to these challenges, underscoring the need for this study.

Mburu, Maina and Mukolwe (2022) examined the relationship between awareness of behavioral risk and psychosocial wellness among students in public secondary schools in Nairobi. Their findings revealed that 32.4% of students reported alcohol consumption, 18.7% admitted to smoking, and 21.5% engaged in drug abuse, despite being aware of the associated risks. Statistical analysis showed a strong negative correlation between drug abuse and psychosocial wellness ($r = -.46, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of substance use were linked to significantly lower well-being scores. Smoking also demonstrated a significant relationship with psychosocial challenges ($r = -.33, p < .01$), while alcohol use correlated with increased emotional distress ($r = -.29, p < .05$). These results underscore that although students may be aware of behavioral risks, substance misuse remains a critical factor undermining psychosocial wellness, highlighting the need for targeted prevention and intervention programs in Nairobi schools. The study noted that drug use is widespread among secondary school students in Nairobi County, encompassing various types, quantities, and frequencies of use. Given the psychosocial challenges faced by students in Nairobi, it remains unclear how parenting styles influence their psychosocial well-being, highlighting the need for the current study that will assess the Influence of Authoritarian Parenting on the psychosocial Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in Nairobi County, Kenya, hence bridging the gap.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Psychosocial well-being of students is characterized by a healthy balance between emotional, social, and psychological aspects of life which is significantly influenced by how they were raised. However, psychosocial well-being of students is increasingly become a major concern among adolescents worldwide. Challenges such as low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties continue to undermine students' psychosocial well-being. Scholars have identified parenting as one of the most influential factors shaping students' psychosocial outcomes, with different parenting styles linked to varying levels of resilience, coping ability, and interpersonal relationships. Scholars around the world have recognized that an individual's psychosocial well-

being is closely linked to the parenting styles their parents adopted during their upbringing (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Mukola (2022; Eiroa, 2024).

Horowitz (2023) argued that self-esteem, effective stress management, resilience, and satisfying relationships which are key aspects of psychosocial well-being are closely associated with various parenting styles. Horowitz noted that authoritarian parenting, for example, can increase the risk of psychosocial crises in adolescents by damaging their self-esteem, which may lead to poor mental health.

A study by Njogu (2018) in Kenya revealed that in schools where students' psychosocial well-being is ineffective, students exhibit diminished academic performance due to decreased concentration, motivation, and engagement. Mburu, Maina, and Mukolwe (2022) noted that many Kenyan students experience heightened stress, anxiety, and depression, leading to behavioral issues and social withdrawal. The researchers associated various misbehaviors among students in Nairobi secondary schools, such as drug abuse, smoking, and alcohol consumption, with their psychosocial well-being.

Despite the government's efforts to address these challenges by employing school counselors and training teachers in behavioral management, this troubling trend persists in schools. If not addressed, it could result in escalating academic difficulties, including reduced concentration and motivation, as well as more serious mental health issues and limited future opportunities. A report from the Nairobi County Director of Education (2024) revealed that students in many schools face psychosocial issues such as impaired relationships with peers and teachers, feelings of isolation, and low self-esteem, alongside emotional distress. However, it remains unclear whether these challenges are linked to parenting styles. Although previous studies have examined academic performance, few have assessed psychosocial wellbeing in relation to parenting styles in Nairobi secondary schools. It is from this perspective, therefore, that this study aimed to assess the influence the Influence of Authoritarian Parenting on the psychosocial Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in Nairobi County, Kenya, hence bridging the gap.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To explore the influence of authoritarian parenting on the psychosocial wellbeing of secondary school students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does authoritarian parenting influence the psychosocial wellbeing of secondary school students in Nairobi County, Kenya?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored on Baumrind's Model. Diana Baumrind, a developmental psychologist, introduced a framework of parenting styles in the early 1960s, categorizing parenting into four main styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Each is defined by different levels of responsiveness and demandingness, shaping children's psychosocial well-being (Pandoyi & Samiksha, 2021). Authoritative parenting combines high responsiveness with high demandingness. Such parents set clear expectations while offering support and encouragement. Research by Kuppens and Ceulemans (2019) shows that children of authoritative parents often display stronger self-esteem, social skills, and emotional regulation. Within Nairobi County, where students face societal pressures and academic demands, this style may promote resilience and adaptability.

Authoritarian parenting involves strict rule enforcement with little emotional support. While it can encourage compliance, it often undermines self-esteem and social competence. In Nairobi, where academic pressure is intense, this approach may heighten stress and anxiety among students. Permissive parenting, characterized by high responsiveness but minimal demands, can encourage creativity yet lead to poor self-discipline. Neglectful parenting, marked by low responsiveness and low demandingness, often results in serious emotional and behavioral difficulties. Although Baumrind's model provides a valuable framework for understanding parenting styles, it does not fully capture other variables, such as social support. Therefore, social learning theory was also employed to strengthen this study's explanatory power.

Authoritarian Parenting and Students' psychosocial Wellbeing

McKinney (2024) conducted a correlational study about parenting styles across regions in the United States. The study revealed that authoritarian parenting is characterized by a high level of demand and low levels of responsiveness. Parents who adopt this style typically enforce strict rules and expectations, often with little flexibility or room for negotiation. The study noted that such parents prioritize obedience and discipline, believing that clear guidelines and control are essential for their children's development. It was further noted by the study that authoritarian parents tend to value structure and order and may employ punitive measures to enforce compliance. Further findings from the study revealed that parents in the South were more likely than those in Central Florida to demand obedience and respect from their children and to believe that children should be treated strictly.

In contrast, parents in Central Florida, which is demographically and culturally distinct from other parts of the South, were more inclined to discuss family decisions with their children, allow disagreement, and let their children make their own decisions. McKinney's study was conducted in the United States and aimed to address the characteristics of different parenting styles. In contrast, this study examined how various parenting styles influence the psychosocial well-being of students in Nairobi, Kenya.

Kamran (2023) explored the influence of parenting styles on the behavior of children in southern Punjab, Pakistan, using a qualitative research design. A purposive sampling technique was employed, and a semi-structured interview protocol was developed for data collection. The study involved five mothers from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Participants were approached through personal contacts, following strict research ethics protocols. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, revealing three major themes: parental behavior, ineffective parenting, and reasons for leaving educational institutions. The findings indicated that most parents employed authoritative and permissive parenting styles. While this study is related to the current research, it utilized qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. In contrast, the current study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how different parenting styles influence students' psychosocial well-being in Nairobi, Kenya. By combining these methodologies, the study aims to enrich the data and provide a deeper insight into the complexities of parenting styles and their effects on children.

Mihret (2019) researched parenting style as a correlate of adolescents' academic achievement motivation at Bate Secondary School, Haramaya, Ethiopia. This study aimed to examine the relationship between adolescents' academic achievement motivation and parenting styles. Data were collected from 192 randomly selected adolescent students (93 males and 99 females) using

standardized scales for achievement motivation, self-report inventory, and parenting style scale. Data analysis was conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The findings revealed that the authoritarian parenting style was the most commonly practiced among the respondents' families compared to the other three styles (authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful). There was a significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and students' academic achievement motivation. Although this study is related to the current research, it focused on the relationship between parenting styles and adolescents' academic achievement motivation. In contrast, the current study examined how parenting styles influence the psychosocial well-being of students in secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

In Tanzania, a study by Mwakapusya and Gwajekera (2024) assessed parenting styles as determinants of pupils' academic performance in primary schools. The study was guided by two research questions including; what are the main parenting styles used by parents in the Dodoma region? And what is the contribution of parenting styles to pupils' academic performance? Data were collected from 136 participants, including 4 head teachers, 4 academic teachers, 64 pupils, and 64 parents. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically percentages and frequencies, which were processed using SPSS version 21. The findings revealed that the most dominant parenting styles were indulgent, followed by authoritative and authoritarian styles. It was found that indulgent and authoritative styles positively contributed to pupils' academic performance, whereas authoritarian and uninvolved styles had a negative impact. Additionally, while indulgent and authoritative parenting styles improved academic performance, they also enhanced cooperation and discipline among pupils, allowed parents to better understand their children's needs, and facilitated better comprehension of the children's behaviors. Although Mwakapusya and Gwajekera's study addresses parenting styles, it did not discuss how these styles, including authoritarian parenting, relate to the psychosocial well-being of students, a gap that this study sought to fill.

In Kenya, Akinyi (2015) conducted a study to determine the relationship between the authoritarian parenting model and learners' participation in Early Childhood Education (ECE) science classrooms, as measured by child/parent interviews and teacher perceptions. The study was guided by specific research objectives and questions. The literature review highlighted the harshness and strictness associated with authoritarian parenting, its impact on child outcomes, and its effect on learner participation in class activities. The study population comprised 314 respondents, including 4 education officers, 60 head teachers, 60 ECE teachers from public primary schools, 120 learners, and 70 parents. Teachers' questionnaires were the primary data collection tool, with a 100% return rate.

The study found that 91% of ECE teachers reported that learners from authoritarian parenting (AP) homes struggled with self-expression due to limited communication between children and parents, while only 9% observed eloquence in these learners. Additionally, 86% of parents admitted they were either too busy or disinclined to spend time with their children. Moreover, 81.67% of teachers noted that excessive parental control led to aggression in children due to strictness and harshness. Authoritarian parents were observed to use reward and punishment systems to enforce obedience, as confirmed by 66.67% of teachers and 60% of parents. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, with demographic information obtained through these methods. Correlation and regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting and children's classroom participation. The study concluded that authoritarian parenting was negatively related to children's participation in class. While Akinyi's study focused on how

authoritarian parenting influences learner participation in ECE classrooms, the current study assessed how various parenting styles affect the psychosocial well-being of secondary school students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design with a blend of qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The target population for the study was 235 secondary schools, 30550 form three students, and 235 PTA chair persons. Questionnaires and focus group discussion guide were used to collect data. Interview guides were used to collect data from Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Chairpersons. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis and presented in a verbatim form.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Authoritarian Parenting and the Psycho-Social Well-being of Students

This research question of this study was to explore the influence of authoritarian parenting on the psychosocial wellbeing of secondary school students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The students were asked to choose the response that best represented their opinions on a five-point scale. The rating scale presented was: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Authoritarian Parenting and Psycho-Social Well-being of Students (n=345)

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Experienced teachers (n=330)										
My parents often enforce strict rules without explaining the reasons behind them.	125	36.2	200	58.0	1	0.3	8	2.3	11	3.2
I feel that my parents do not listen to my opinions or feelings.	41	12.2	199	57.7	18	5.2	86	24.9	00	00
I often worry about disappointing my parents due to their high expectations.	141	40.9	188	54.5	6	1.7	10	2.9	00	00
My parents frequently criticize me when I make mistakes.	184	53.4	43	12.2	00	00	96	27.8	23	6.7
I feel that I have little freedom to make my own choices at home.	97	28.1	218	63.2	20	5.8	10	2.9	00	00

As shown in Table 1 most students (58%) agreed that their parents often enforce strict rules without explaining the reasons behind them, while only 2.3% disagreed with this view. These finding highlights a prevalent authoritarian parenting pattern. This style is defined by high demands but low responsiveness, strict obedience is expected, without warmth or explanation. Such practices may achieve short-term compliance, but they come at the expense of children's emotional autonomy and psychosocial development. One PTA chair shared: "It is common to hear parents say 'because I said so'. Students told us they obey, yes, but they do not understand or feel supported." Another added: "Children under strict rulemaking without context often lack confidence and do not know how to handle setbacks; they learn to fear mistakes."

Recent studies reinforce these concerns. Li et al. (2024) found that authoritarian parenting significantly impairs children's ability to initiate and maintain peer relationships, reducing social competence especially in younger or only children. A study by Li et al. (2024) further linked authoritarian discipline to lower empathy and higher aggression in preschoolers, mediated by diminished emotional responsiveness. Moreover, epidemiological research (2024) shows that authoritarian parenting is associated with increased youth anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, and difficulty forming trusting relationships due to rigid rule enforcement and lack of emotional connection. Thus, the findings in this study reflect a parenting climate that suppresses dialogue and emotional safety. Authoritarian practices undermine the child's sense of agency and emotional health. These patterns correlate with reduced peer interaction skills, heightened internalizing and externalizing problems, and low self-esteem. The findings further indicate that 57.7% of students feel their parents do not listen to their opinions or feelings, while only 24.5% disagree. This suggests a communication gap that undermines emotional support and trust, critical components of psychosocial well-being. One PTA chair noted:

"Many parents are quick to give instructions but rarely pause to listen. Children feel dismissed, which affects their confidence. Students who feel heard tend to be calmer and more respectful because dialogue builds trust." (PTA chair 3, 28/07/2025)

Research supports these observations. A study by Kamran (2023) found that adolescents whose parents actively listened reported higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Mutua (2017) linked parental emotional responsiveness, including listening and validating feelings, to stronger resilience and social skills. Conversely, authoritarian approaches that prioritize obedience over dialogue often result in emotional withdrawal, conflict, and diminished trust (Mckinney, 2024). These findings suggest that improving parent-child communication, particularly listening, is vital for enhancing students' psychosocial well-being and promoting healthier family relationships.

Regarding whether students often worry about disappointing their parents, the study found that 54.5% of students worry about disappointing their parents due to high expectations, while only 1.7% were unsure. This suggests that many students experience pressure to meet parental standards, which can influence their psychosocial well-being. High expectations are common in both authoritative and authoritarian parenting; however, the difference lies in how those expectations are communicated and supported.

One PTA chairperson observed: "Parents set high goals hoping for the best future for their children, but some forget to reassure them that making mistakes is part of learning." Another remarked: "Students often feel like their worth depends on achievement; we need to balance ambition with emotional support."

Student open-ended responses echoed these sentiments: "I fear failing exams because I do not want to disappoint my parents," one wrote, while another shared, "Sometimes I feel they only notice when I don't do well, not when I try." Research shows that when high expectations are paired with warmth and open communication, they can motivate students positively. However, when linked to harsh judgment or conditional approval, they may cause anxiety, perfectionism, and reduced self-esteem (Mihret, 2019). These findings highlight the need for parental encouragement that supports effort and resilience rather than only outcomes.

The study revealed that 53.4% of students agreed their parents frequently criticize them when they make mistakes, while only 6.7% strongly disagreed. This indicates that criticism is a common

parental response, reflecting elements of authoritarian parenting, which prioritizes obedience and often uses punitive feedback rather than constructive guidance. One PTA chairperson observed:

“Many parents believe criticism pushes children to do better, but harsh words often break their confidence instead of building it. Constructive correction is necessary, but constant negative remarks make children withdraw and fear trying new things.” (*PTA Chairperson 4, 29/07/2025*)

Students’ open-ended responses reinforced this concern: “I feel bad when I’m scolded harshly; it makes me afraid to ask for help,” one student shared. Another wrote, “Even when I try my best, one small mistake makes my parents angry, and I feel like a failure.” Research supports these sentiments. A study by Rao and Wang (2023) found that harsh criticism is linked to lower self-esteem and higher anxiety in adolescents, while constructive feedback in an authoritative parenting context fosters resilience and motivation. These findings highlight the need for parents to adopt supportive feedback strategies, focusing on encouragement and learning rather than repeated negative judgment, to promote positive psychosocial well-being.

The study found that 63.2% of students felt they had little freedom to make their own choices at home, while 5.8% were undecided. This reflects a strong element of authoritarian parenting, where strict control often limits children’s autonomy and decision-making experiences. While structure and guidance are important, excessive restriction may hinder the development of independence, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills, critical aspects of psychosocial well-being.

One PTA chairperson noted: “Many parents decide everything for their children, thinking it is for their good, but they forget children also need to learn decision-making.” Another added: “We have seen students who struggle to make choices even in school activities because they are not used to it at home.”

Open-ended student responses echoed this concern: “I’m not allowed to choose what I want, even simple things like my clothes,” one student wrote. Another shared, “I fear suggesting my opinions because they may say I’m being disrespectful.”

Research by Mwakapunya and Gwajekera (2024) supports these findings noting that low autonomy in the home environment is associated with increased anxiety and lower self-esteem in adolescents. Encouraging guided choice-making within a supportive environment, as seen in authoritative parenting, promotes independence and stronger psychosocial outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that authoritarian parenting is prevalent among secondary school students in Nairobi County. Most participants reported that their parents enforce strict rules without providing explanations and maintain high expectations, causing students to worry about disappointing them.

The study recommends that policymakers and education authorities integrate parenting education programs into schools and enhance psychosocial support services to promote responsive and communicative parenting. Such initiatives will strengthen students’ self-esteem, emotional resilience, and academic performance, thereby contributing to their overall well-being and success.

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