

## Research Article

# Perceptions of Parenting Behaviors and Adolescent Self-Esteem Outcomes in Kenya

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**Abstract:** This study examined perceptions of adolescents regarding their parents' behaviours such as guidance, punitiveness, monitoring and autonomy granting, and their influence on the development of adolescent self-esteem in Kenya. A standardized research instrument was used to gather data from a sample of 630 Kenyan high school students that ranged in age from 15 to 18 years and had a mean age of 16.3 years. The gender of these participants comprised of 35.7% males and 64.3% females. Standardized regression coefficients revealed that paternal guidance ( $\beta = .204$ ;  $p < .0001$ ) was a stronger positive predictor of adolescents' self-esteem compared to maternal guidance ( $\beta = .164$ ;  $p < .001$ ). On the contrary maternal punitiveness ( $\beta = -.184$ ;  $p < .01$ ) was a stronger negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem than that of paternal punitiveness ( $\beta = -.124$ ;  $p < .01$ ). However, paternal monitoring ( $\beta = 0.87$ ;  $p > .05$ ) and maternal monitoring ( $\beta = 0.61$ ;  $p > .05$ ) were not significant predictors of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem. Furthermore results revealed that paternal autonomy granting ( $\beta = -.020$ ;  $p > .05$ ) was a negative, but insignificant predictor of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem, while the maternal autonomy granting ( $\beta = 0.009$ ;  $p > .05$ ) had a positive but insignificant effect on adolescent self-esteem. The findings of this study may be useful for family life educators and family practitioners as they develop training materials on culturally relevant determinants of positive adolescent developmental outcomes.

**Keywords:** Adolescent Development, Self-Esteem, Parenting Practices, Parenting Behaviours, Kenyan Youth Development.

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## INTRODUCTION

There is limited research on the factors that influence development of adolescent self-esteem in Africa. Africa is exemplified by traditional, collectivistic, non-technological societies that emphasize respect for elders, close family ties, extended kin, and reverence for ancestors (Mbito, 2004; Mbito & Price, 1992; Price, 1996; Ngige, Ondigi, & Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006); Wilson, Ngige, & Trollinger, 2003). Chao (1994) has suggested that adolescent social competence in indigenous collectivistic African societies is different from most western countries, where individuals acquire gradual capacity to adapt to and effectively negotiate challenging conditions in their environments in concert with their social identity. Research conducted in USA and other western countries has shown that several parental characteristics are associated with the development of adolescent self-esteem. Parental affection and support, has been found to be positively related to adolescent self-esteem (Gecas, 1971, 1972; Hoelter & Harper, 1987; Litovsky & Dusek, 1985; Peterson, Southworth, & Peters, 1983). Research has established that parenting styles that avoid the use of

guilt, anxiety, and love withdrawal for controlling children's and adolescents' behaviour appears to have a positive relationship with the development of adolescent self-esteem (Litovsky & Dusek, 1985).

In this study, parenting behaviours comprised four indicators of child rearing practices namely: parental guidance, parental monitoring, parental autonomy granting and parental punitiveness in respect to the adolescent child. *Parental Guidance* was conceptualized as providing direction, information, guidelines and limits for children so that the young ones can learn culturally appropriate attitudes, values, behaviours, life skills and good judgment (Peterson & Hann, 1999). Parental guidance included support, warmth, sensitivity, responsiveness and conveying messages to the adolescent about their worth. The focus of parental guidance was on helping the child to develop talents, interests and hobbies that stimulate cognitive growth and academic achievement (Peterson, Rollins & Thomas, 1985).

*Parental Monitoring* was defined as providing firm control on children whereby the parents attempt to

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influence and manage their children's decisions, activities and peer interactions with the goal of trying to avoid situations where their children would become involved in delinquent behavior such as stealing, fighting, early sexual engagement or involvement in drug and substance abuse. Parental monitoring provides rules and sets limits without being punitive in the hope that the adolescent will develop self-discipline (Barber, Chadwick & Oerter, 1992)).

*Parental Autonomy Granting* was conceptualized as the extent to which parents allow their children to make their own decisions and to engage in activities of their choice without undue influence and control from their parents which contributes to the development of positive self-esteem (Peterson, Bush & Supple, 1999). *Parental Punitiveness* was conceptualized as excessive, irrational, arbitrary, intrusive, coercive and psychological control of adolescents which inhibits the development of positive self-esteem. In addition the parent may use threats, verbal abuse, physical punishment and love withdrawal in an attempt to control the adolescent behavior (Barber, Chadwick & Oerter, 1992).

#### **Adolescent Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is conceptualized as an evaluative belief about oneself and the extent to which one views himself or herself as worthy (Mbito, 2004). According to Rosenberg (1979), high self-esteem means respect for and a high rating of self, while low self-esteem refers to self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction and poor self-concept. Self-esteem is therefore the evaluative dimension of self-concept. Parenting behavior is critical to the development of adolescent self-esteem. Research in western countries has shown that parents who impart values and expectations to their young children during everyday family interactions have a bearing on adolescent self-esteem (Mbito, 2004). Research in USA has shown that parental affection and support has a positive influence on adolescent self-esteem, while excessive parental control has a negative influence on the development of self-esteem (Hoelter & Harper, 1987). There is little research done in Africa on the relationship between parenting behaviours and the development of adolescent self-esteem. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental behaviours and the development of adolescent self-esteem in Kenya as a representation of predominantly African society.

#### **Theoretical Perspective**

According to Peterson, Steinmetz & Wilson (2003), the family is a system of role relationships or symbolic interactionism between constituent members, including adolescents, where role is learned through engendering expectations for its members by other members. The family process in Africa if viewed from a systems perspective is a complex set of interconnected positive and negative feedback loops that combine to

provide both stability and change within a large network of relationships. Such networks include the extended family, kinship, community and social institutions. African societies emphasize interconnection, conformity to family norms, relational harmony, and protection of within-group interests. Therefore children are viewed as common pathways for diverse human actions conferring wealth, security, prestige, immortality and virtually everything valuable to parents (LeVine, Dixon, Richman, Leiderman, Keefer & Brazelton, 1994). There is limited research on the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent self-esteem in Africa. This purpose of this study was to explore whether parenting behaviours predict adolescent development of self-esteem in Kenya.

#### **Null Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

- 1: Perceptions of parental guidance does not predict self-esteem among Kenyan adolescents.
- 2: Perceptions of parental punitiveness does not predict self-esteem among Kenyan adolescents.
- 3: Perceptions of parental monitoring does not predict self-esteem among Kenyan adolescents.
- 4: Perceptions of parental autonomy granting does not predict self-esteem among Kenyan adolescents.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Sample and data collection procedure**

The sample consisted of 630 adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years selected randomly from four high schools that represented one national school and three county schools from different geographical regions in Kenya. Students in all schools were recruited from all over the country and therefore they represented the diversity of ethnic communities in Kenya. Teachers who had been trained in accordance with a standardized protocol administered the survey to participating students in the classrooms of the participating high schools. A total of 630 surveys were completed and returned. The questionnaire was written in English which is the official language and medium of instruction used in schools throughout Kenya.

##### **Measurement of variables**

Parental Behaviour Measures were adapted from Rollins and Thomas Parent Behaviour Inventory (Peterson, Rollins and Thomas, 1985). Measures of parental behaviours comprised four indicators namely: parental guidance, parental autonomy granting, parental monitoring and parental punitiveness. Adolescents responded to the various items in reference to each parent. The adolescent self-report strategy was justified based on previous research suggesting that youthful perceptions of parental behaviour are more strongly predictive of the adolescents' own self-perceptions than are parents' reports of their own child-rearing behaviours (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). Moreover, a distinct advantage of adolescent-reports of parental

behaviours and authority is that the assessment of parental behaviours directly from parents' raises the potential for response bias from parents who may attempt to conceal certain behaviours that the parent may perceive as being socially unacceptable, and to maximize their reports of more "socially desirable" parenting behaviours (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Peterson & Hann, 1999). A reasonable assumption, therefore, was to expect that aspects of adolescents' perceptions would be more likely influenced by their adolescents' constructions of reality and their perceptions of parental behaviour and authority than would their parents' conceptions of the same phenomenon (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986).

### Independent Variables

The independent variables included parenting behaviour variables that were measured using four indicators namely: (a) parental guidance, (b) parental monitoring, (c) parental autonomy granting and (d) parental punitiveness. The survey asked adolescents to report on the parenting behaviours of both their fathers and mothers separately. The adolescents responded to each item of the questionnaire using a four point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" (4 points) to "Strongly Disagree" (1 point). The measures of internal consistency (Cronbach alphas) for parental behaviour items ranged from .77 to .88 as presented in Table 1.

*Parental guidance* consisted of nine items from a combination of parental support and positive induction/reasoning drawn from the Parent Behaviour Scale (Peterson *et al.*, 1985) concerning the degree that mothers and fathers were perceived by adolescents as explaining to adolescents how their behaviour affects others, and as being accepting, warm, and nurturant. A sampled item included, "this parent tells me how much he/she loves me." Perceptions of parental guidance was a combination of parental support and parental induction/reasoning which was measured with 10 items concerning the degree mothers and fathers were perceived by adolescents as being accepting, warm, and nurturant, as well as whether they explained to adolescents how their behaviours affected other people.

*Parental punitiveness* was measured by a nine items that assessed the extent to which adolescents

perceived their mothers and fathers as using verbal and physical behaviours in a coercive, threatening, and punitive manner. A sample item for coercive parenting was: "This parent will not talk to me when I displease him/her." Perceptions of *parental monitoring* were measured by six items that assessed the extent to which fathers and mothers supervised or closely managed adolescent free-time activities, friends, and how the adolescent spent their money. A sample item from the monitoring composite score was, "This parent knows where I am after school." Perceptions of *parental autonomy granting* was measured by seven items measuring the extent to which the parents were perceived as allowing adolescents to make their own decisions. A sample item for autonomy granting was: "This parent has confidence in my ability to make my own decisions."

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was adolescent self-esteem consisting of five items adapted from Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965 & 1979). The participants responded to the self-esteem items in terms of a four-point Likert scale which ranged from "strongly agree (4-points) indicating a high level of self-esteem to strongly disagree (1-point) indicating a low level of self-esteem." A sample item for adolescent self-esteem was: "I feel that I am a person of worth." The responses were then summed up into a composite score to represent adolescent self-esteem. The Cronbach alpha for the 10-item scale for adolescent self-esteem was .83.

### Analysis Procedure

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the four hypotheses, assessing the magnitude and direction of relationships between the independent variables (i.e., each of the parental behaviours) and the dependent variable (i.e., adolescents' self-esteem). Separate statistical models were conducted for the adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' parental behaviours as predictors of the adolescents' self-esteem to avoid the problem of multicollineality that might occur if their perceptions of both parents' behaviour were confounded by assessing both parents' together.

**Table 1:** Cronbach Alphas for Adolescent Self-Esteem, Paternal and Maternal Models

Variable Description	Fathers	Mothers
Adolescent Self-Esteem	.826*	.826*
Parental Guidance	.880	.771
Parental Punitiveness	.861	.801
Parental Monitoring	.808	.791
Parental Autonomy Granting	.770	.786

\*This is a constant measure for the adolescents' own ratings, not determined by the parent's gender.

The findings in Table 1 revealed that the measures of internal consistency (Cronbach alphas) for the four parental behaviour items ranged from .77 to .88 as presented in Table 1.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Sample description**

The Kenyan sample consisted of 630 adolescents selected from four secondary schools that ranged in age from 15 to 18 years and had a mean age of 16.3 years. The gender of these participants comprised 35.7% males and 62.5% females. In terms of religiosity, Protestants comprised 57.5% of the sample, Catholics, 37.0% and others 5.5%.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Four null hypotheses were formulated for this study stating that parental behaviours (parental guidance, punitiveness, monitoring and autonomy granting) did not predict adolescent self-esteem. The findings from standardized regression coefficients for paternal model and maternal model are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

**Table 2: Paternal Behaviours as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem**

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E. <math>\hat{\beta}</math></i>	$\hat{\beta}$
Paternal Guidance	.192	.049	.204***
Paternal Monitoring	.072	.041	.087
Paternal Autonomy Granting	-.019	.042	-.020
Paternal Punitiveness	-.133	.048	-.124**

*N* = 630 adolescents; *b* = unstandardized betas;  $\hat{\beta}$  = standardized beta; *S E  $\hat{\beta}$*  = Standardized error of standardized beta. \*\**p* < .01, two tailed; \*\*\* *p* < .001, two tailed.

Standardized regression coefficients for the paternal model revealed that paternal guidance ( $\hat{\beta}$  = .204; *p* < .0001) was a strong positive predictor of adolescents' self-esteem. On the contrary paternal punitiveness ( $\hat{\beta}$  = -.124; *p* < .01) was a strong negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem. However, paternal

autonomy granting ( $\hat{\beta}$  = -.020; *p* > .05) was a negative but insignificant predictor of adolescents self-esteem, while, paternal monitoring ( $\hat{\beta}$  = 0.87; *p* > .05) was not a significant predictor of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem.

**Table 3: Maternal Behaviours as Predictors of Adolescent Self-Esteem**

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E. <math>\hat{\beta}</math></i>	$\hat{\beta}$
Maternal Guidance	.167	.049	.164***
Maternal Monitoring	.054	.042	.061
Maternal Autonomy Granting	.008	.039	.009
Maternal Punitiveness	-.180	.043	-.184***

*N* = 630 adolescents; *b* = unstandardized betas;  $\hat{\beta}$  = standardized beta; *S E  $\hat{\beta}$*  = Standardized error of standardized beta. \*\**p* < .01, two tailed. \*\*\* *p* < .001, two tailed.

Standardized regression coefficients for the maternal model revealed that maternal guidance ( $\hat{\beta}$  = .164; *p* < .001) was a strong positive predictor of adolescent self-esteem while, on the contrary maternal punitiveness ( $\hat{\beta}$  = -.184; *p* < .01) was a strong negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem. However, maternal monitoring ( $\hat{\beta}$  = 0.61; *p* > .05) was not a significant predictor of adolescents' self-esteem while maternal autonomy granting ( $\hat{\beta}$  = 0.009; *p* > .05) had a positive but insignificant effect on adolescent self-esteem.

combination of both moral support and positive induction along with psychological assurances delivered verbally to the adolescent especially by their fathers.

The findings further revealed that parental punitiveness was a strong negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem. When paternal and maternal models were compared, results indicated that maternal punitiveness ( $\hat{\beta}$  = -.184; *p* < .01) was a stronger negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem than that of paternal punitiveness ( $\hat{\beta}$  = -.124; *p* < .01). This implied that maternal behavior of a punitive nature resulted in a lower levels of adolescent self-esteem compared to paternal punitiveness. The second null hypothesis stating that parental punitiveness was not a predictor of adolescent self-esteem was therefore rejected.

According to results presented in Table 2 and Table 3, support was found for parental guidance as a predictor of adolescent self-esteem in that both paternal ( $\hat{\beta}$  = .204, *p* < .0001) and maternal guidance ( $\hat{\beta}$  = .164, *p* < .001) were positive predictors of adolescent self-esteem. The first null hypothesis was therefore rejected. These findings revealed that adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' guidance was a stronger predictor of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem than that of their mothers. Kenyan adolescent self-esteem appears to be fostered best when parents use guidance, which is a

The standardized regression coefficient for parental monitoring as predictor of adolescent self-esteem was not found to be statistically significant. The results revealed that paternal monitoring ( $\hat{\beta}$  = 0.87; *p* >

.05) and maternal monitoring ( $\beta = 0.61$ ;  $p > .05$ ) were not significant predictors of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem. The third null hypothesis stating that parental monitoring was not a predictor of adolescent self-esteem was therefore retained.

The standardized regression coefficients for parental autonomy granting as predictors of adolescent self-esteem was not found to be statistically significant. The results revealed that paternal autonomy granting ( $\beta = -.020$ ;  $p > .05$ ) was a negative, but insignificant predictor of Kenyan adolescents' self-esteem, while the maternal autonomy granting ( $\beta = 0.009$ ;  $p > .05$ ) had a positive but insignificant effect on adolescent self-esteem. Therefore the fourth null hypothesis was therefore retained.

### ***Effects of Parental Guidance***

Research findings showed that Kenyan adolescent perceptions of both their mothers and fathers guidance was found in this study to be a strong positive predictor of self-esteem. This finding is supported by Ngige, Ondigi and Wilson (2008) who found that African culture values children's self-subordination to parents, family and kin and also contain powerful affective bonds that emotionally knit children and parents together. The parent-child interaction in areas intended to guide children's conduct was found to have a positive influence on the development of adolescents' self-esteem.

### ***Effects of Parental Punitiveness***

Research findings showed that parental punitiveness was a strong negative predictor of adolescent self-esteem for both maternal and paternal models. Results indicated that maternal punitiveness was a stronger negative predictor than that of paternal punitiveness. This may be explained by the nature of African mother-to-child proximal and constant interaction compared to the minimal interaction between fathers and their young children. African children are socialized to respect and obey their parents, elders and significant others in their immediate environment, failure to which the child may receive physical punishment such as being caned. This may further influence the development of low self-esteem in adolescents. This finding is supported by studies in USA where excessive parental control results in poor self-image among adolescents (Barber, Chadwick & Oerter, 1992).

### ***Effects of Parental Monitoring***

Results revealed that parental monitoring behaviours were not significant predictors of adolescent self-esteem in this sample. This finding differs from other research done in western cultures where parental monitoring has been found to predict positive adolescent self-esteem (Peterson & Hann, 1999). The reason for this contrast may be due to the fact that in most African families, fathers are usually absent from

home due to their role as providers that forces them to seek for employment in urban areas away from their families. This in turn makes them absent fathers who only commute occasionally to visit their families. The focus of the African mothers is nurturant socialization of their children rather than playing the role of parental monitoring of their adolescent children's activities (Ngige & Wilson, 2005).

### ***Effects of Parental Autonomy Granting***

One of the key findings in the study was that parental autonomy-granting behaviour was not found to be a significant predictor of self-esteem of the Kenyan adolescents probably due to the fact that group interests militate against Kenyan parental encouragement of autonomy in their children. Such results suggest that Kenyan mothers and fathers do not foster their adolescent children's self-esteem with autonomy-granting behaviours. These findings support the assumption that African adolescents are expected to demonstrate qualities such as conformity, subordination of individual goals in favor of responsibility to others, and respect for family/group decisions (Lam, 1995; Triandis; 1989; Sessa, & Steinberg, 1991). According to this view, a Kenyan adolescent's sense of self is more of a product of his/her connections with others than a product of negotiating greater individuality (autonomy) in reference to one's parents and elders (Lam, 1995). These results are inconsistent with research conducted on samples of American adolescents (Allen, *et al.*, 1994) and Chinese adolescents (Cheung & Lau, 1985; Lau & Cheung, 1987), but are closer to findings from Mexican adolescents (Bush, Supple, & Lash, 2005; Peterson, Cobas, Bush, Supple, & Wilson, 2005).

Considering that parental socialization in a collectivistic African culture focuses more on producing family- and societal-focused outcomes in the conduct of their children, younger people in Kenya are expected to show respect for parents and elders rather than expressing personal interests in an autonomous inclination. In Africa, Adolescents' success or failure in life brings pride or shame to their family and kin rather than signifying personal achievement resulting from autonomy or independence by the youth. The results of the present study affirm the earlier assumption that Kenyan adolescents may be socialized to demonstrate high levels of conformity to and respect for their parents and significant others. In addition, they youth may be expected to conform to adult wishes rather than portray individualistic tendencies and autonomy (LeVine *et al.*, 1994; Haines, 1988).

### **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study showed that both paternal and maternal guidance were positive predictors of adolescent self-esteem, while on the contrary, both mothers' and fathers' parental punitiveness were significant negative predictors of adolescent self-esteem. The results also revealed that both parental

autonomy granting and parental monitoring were not significant predictors of adolescent self-esteem in the Kenyan sample. For future research, there is need to develop more culturally appropriate concepts of measuring parental behaviors and adolescent self-esteem from an African perspective. The results of this study may be useful for family life educators and family practitioners as they develop training materials on culturally relevant determinants of positive adolescent developmental outcomes.

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