

Child Response Styles to Parenting and Mental Health among Adolescents in Embakasi East sub county, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Children's reaction to their parents is likely to have significant impacts on their mental health. Positive reactions to parents are prone to promote feelings of safety, security and trust which are essential for healthy development of a child. On the other hand, negative reactions to parents may tend to stimulate feelings of fear, uncertainty and anxiety which can negatively impact a child's mental health. Many studies have been carried out on how parents take care of their children. However, not much has been explored on the manner in which children react on the way they are being brought up. It is thus important to explore how children react towards their parents and the effects it has on their mental health. The study was anchored on Bowlby's attachment theory and employed a quantitative approach, descriptive research design. The sample population was 250 consisting of male, female and others aged 15 – 18 living in Embakasi East sub county, Nairobi County, Kenya. Convenience sampling technique was used to get the final sample from potential participants who were willing and met the requirements needed for participation in the survey. Data was collected using sociodemographic questionnaire, child response style by Egunjobi (2021) to evaluate child response styles to parenting and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) to determine their mental well-being. Data was coded in SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics. From the results, it was alluded that adherer was the most child response style ($M = 3.56$) followed by nonchalant response style ($M = 2.53$). The falser response style was at ($M=2.13$) and lastly the rejector response style was low at ($M=2.06$). The findings revealed that adolescents who are adherers generally have a high mental health ($M=3.14$) compared to those who have rejector, falser and non-chalant child response styles. The study also showed that there was a weak positive relationship between adherer child response style to parenting and mental wellbeing, [$r = .273, n = 250$]. Additionally, there was also a weak negative relationship between falser child response style to parenting and mental wellbeing, [$r = -.326, n = 250$]. The study therefore concludes that adherer child response style to parenting positively impacts the mental health of an adolescent compared with the rejector, falser and non – chalant child response style. The study recommends incorporating healthy practices in parenting styles that encourages children to be adherers hence minimizing mental health issues among adolescents. The study findings are useful to mental health experts, teachers and parents to understanding mental health of adolescents as a result of child response styles. The findings also draw attention to the gaps in knowledge on child response styles and mental health of adolescents. The study recommends further research child response styles to parenting and other variables.

Keywords: Adolescents, Child Response Styles, Mental Health, Parenting

INTRODUCTION

One of the development stages is adolescence. Adolescence is a critical period of rapid physical and mental development (Peng et al., 2021). Adolescence is a unique and formative time. It is a developmental phase marked with a heightened risk of inception of mental health disorders as a result of physical, emotional and social changes. Mental issues can occur because adolescent is a developmental phase marked by the process

of self-identity (Erikson, 1994). Baumrind(1991) expressed that if adolescents encounter deterred development processes, they are likely to experience psychological crisis and a variety of mental health problems. Young people are at elevated risk of mental health problems (Kessler,2007).Data from studies with adolescents indicate that anxiety, depression, eating disorders, bipolar disorders, personality disorders, psychosis, addictive disorders, substance abuse, suicide attempts and self -harm are all becoming more frequent among this demographic (Burstein et al., 2019).Parenting has its position in the growth of adolescents. Singh et al. (2021) echo that previous studies carried out ascertained the significant role of parenting and parenting styles in shaping an individual's personality. In this way, parenting is one of the most central segments of the environment a child is exposed to since birth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parents and children have a common bond. Carr(2015) points out family as one of the environmental factors which affect adolescent mental health. The goal for parents is to raise children who are happy, healthy, confident, cooperative and responsible. There is the need to form strong lifelong family relationships and help children grow into responsible adults (Nikstat & Riemann, 2020).Frosch et al. (2019) allude that among the many relationships that influence children's growth and development, perhaps the most influential is the one that exists between a parent and child. Psychology studies have been interested in family in order to understand how it works and how it affects children(Nocito et al.,2020).

Sadler et al. (2017)combined a series of surveys on trends in child mental health using available data form research that had been carried out. They revealed amplified levels of low wellbeing in young people. It has been opined that although a significant number of adolescents are free from mental illness, they live through poor mental wellbeing (Roberts et al.,1998).

Bell et al.(2019) conducted a study with the aim of investigating whether physical activity is associated with better mental wellbeing and reduced symptoms of mental health disorder in adolescents. They reveal that incidences of mental health disorders increase with age, especially emotional and conduct disorders, and psychosomatic problems.

Inchleyet al.(2021) carried out a WHO collaborative cross-national study, to provide information about the health, well-being, social environment and health behavior of 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys and girls for over 30 years. The 2017/2018 survey collected data from over 220, 000 young people in 45 countries and regions in Europe and Canada. They express that research suggest that older adolescents may suffer a decline in mental health outcomes, with older girls reporting poorer mental health than older boys.

Frosch et al. (2019) assessed a parent-child relational health perspective on development putting weight on socioemotional outcomes in early childhood. The study highlighted obesity and eating behavior as a relationally informed health outcome. They express that characteristic of the child is a key factor in the quality of parenting and parent-child relationships.

Baumrind (1971) classified parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting results in children who are confident, responsible, and able to self-regulate(Morris et al., 2007).Based on Baumrind's research on parenting styles, children of authoritative parents tend to[?] have a good parent-child relationship. It is habitual for authoritarian parents to be less supportive but have elevated expectations with narrow levels of being accommodating. (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022).Children with authoritarian parents exhibit more behavioral problems or conduct issues and are prone to mental issues. Permissive parents set very few parental rules and boundaries and are reluctant to enforce rules. Leeman et al. (2014) express those children of permissive parents can be impulsive, demanding, selfish, and lack self-regulation. Lastly, parents who are neglectful do not set firm boundaries or high standards. They

are indifferent to their children's needs and are uninvolved in their lives. Children of uninvolved parents might have trouble controlling their emotions, less effective coping strategies, may have academic challenges, and difficulty with maintaining or nurturing social relationships (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019).

Sanvictores and Mendez (2022) mention that characteristics of a parent's upbringing style is prevalent in the child's behaviors and actions as they age. Egunjobi (2021) remarked on styles in which a children respond to their parents. He stated them as the adherer, the rejecter, the falser, and the nonchalant. He adds that each child has her/his overriding response style, not only to parenting, but also to life events. Egunjobi describes an adherer child as the one who tries to be like one of the parents and is always obedient to what the parents have impacted in him/her. According to Rosemind (2014) obedient children are much happier and emotionally sturdy than disobedient children. The rejecter child is poles apart from the parents. If the parents are authoritative, the child becomes permissive and on the other hand if the parents are permissive the child becomes authoritative. The falser child makes the parents believe that he is compliant when the parents are present but once the parents are away the child is defiant. Egunjobi makes it clear that the falser children are the ones whose parents are authoritarian. No one understands the nonchalant child. Much as they are mindful of what they are doing they seem not to be sensitive on how their parents bring them up.

A child's reaction to the parents can be influenced by a variety of factors, including their temperament, parenting style, cultural background and experiences with parents. Some children may be more compliant and respectful of parents while others may be more compliant according to the situation. Egunjobi (2021) alludes that not only do parenting styles alone influence how children behave but also relations of nature and nurture. He notes that siblings raised by the same parents may act or respond differently. According to Plomin (2011) raising children similarly results in little similarity in their behavior.

Temperament is one factor that influence the way children handle emotions, regulate behavior and feel around new people. Each child has an individual temperament. Thomas and Chess (1977) as cited in Nasvytien? and Lazdauskas (2021) expressed that one way in which temperament is hypothesized is a child's behavioral style. Nasvytien? and Lazdauskas (2021) clarify that temperament is a trait that comes up early in life within an individual, becoming constant over the school years. They further allude that temperament influences a child to interact with the environment in a specific manner way without swerving under any circumstance.

Heredity also affects the way a child grows. According to Zwir et al. (2020) human personality is 30–60% heritable. Certain behaviors run through a family and they are affected by genes. Children resemble their parents because of the genes they inherit which is nature (Ramos, et al, 2019). Genetic factors play a role in influencing mental health among youth (Kwong et al., 2019). It is also believed that behavior is inherited.

Others are of the opinion that behavior comes from a child's environment which are the people, places and events that a child experience. Egunjobi (2021) voiced that as the child learns about his or her environment, s/he begins to choose for her/himself. Each culture has different expected roles to boys and girls. According to Su (2018) different cultures have diverse impact on parenting, thus influencing child behaviors. Children get messages from adults about what it means to behave as a girl or boy. Chong et al. (2020) state that the manners of caregivers have a great significant in shaping a child's learning environment.

Lastly children develop at different rates. During the development stages they are expected to exhibit certain skills and behavior.

Mental health issues in children are delicate. A child's reaction to parents can be indicative of underlying issues. A child who is consistently defiant towards parents may be experiencing emotional or behavioral problems such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder. On the other hand, a child who is overly compliant and submissive may be experiencing anxiety or depression. Cherry (2020) alludes that being

obedient is a social impact that entails doing something as instructed by who is of a higher authority. It is worth noting that parents need not presume that all is well with obedient children. They could be abiding by what they are told because they have no option. Their being good is a necessity rather than a preference.

The most significant person in the life of a child is a parent. The society values the job of parenting. Adolescence is a developmental phase that has many risks of mental health disorders. If mental health issues during adolescence is overlooked, it could be a pointer to the development of mental health problems in later life. According to Balistreri and Alvira-Hammond (2016) literature has highlighted how family functioning plays an important role in the health and psychological well-being of adolescents. Many studies that have been carried out have revealed that parenting styles influence children's overall adjustment and the development of various mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. It is equally important to understand how child response style affects the wellbeing of adolescents. This circumstance guides the researcher to examine the relationship between child response style to parenting and mental health among adolescents.

Objective

The focus of this research is to draw information on the association between different child response styles to parenting and the mental health of adolescents aged 15–18 years in Embakasi East sub- county, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study seeks to answer the following questions.

- What is the prevalence of perceived child response styles by adolescents in Embakasi East sub- county, Nairobi County, Kenya?
- What is the prevalence of mental wellbeing of adolescents in Embakasi East sub- county, Nairobi County, Kenya?
- Is there a relationship between perceived child response styles and mental wellbeing of adolescents in Embakasi East sub- county, Nairobi County, Kenya?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on attachment theory that originates from the seminal work of John Bowlby(1958) which suggests that the quality of the parent – child relationship shapes a child's ability to form close relationships and regulate emotions. According to Bowlby to sustain healthy development, it is important to concentrate on the emotional quality of the relationships within which the child participates. Children who have secure attachment with their parents are more likely to develop positive mental health outcomes such as resilience, self-esteem and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, children who experience insecure attachment styles such as avoidant or anxious are at higher risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using quantitative approach descriptive research design which will entails the collection and scrutiny of numerical data and identify relationships between variables (Sharma et al., 2023).The study was carried out in Embakasi East sub county. The study targeted 250 adolescents with age among of 15 to 18 years selected through convenience sampling from schools, market center, church and mosques. The researcher sought permission from the pertinent authorities. Data was collected by use of a questionnaire to assess their sociodemographic, child response style by Egunjobi (2021) to reveal how they respond to their parents and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) to evaluate their mental wellbeing. Child response style by Egunjobi(2021) consists of 21-items specially designed to detect child response style. It is a self-administrative questionnaire. The questionnaire has four subscales comprising of the adherer child with 6 items, the rejecter child with 6 items, the falser child with 4 items and

the non-chalant child with 5 items. The questions were evaluated on a Likert scale. The subjects would get 1 point if they select “Strongly Disagree”, to 5 points for “Strongly Agree” responses. WEMWBS is a 14 – item scale of mental well-being covering subjective well-being and psychological functioning, in which all items are worded positively and address aspects of positive mental health. The scale is scored by summing responses to each item answered on a 1 to 5 Likert scale. The minimum scale score is 14 and the maximum is 70. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation.

Ethical Statement

This study involved human participants. It was thus reviewed and approved by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya, Department of psychology. Participants were provided with written consent prior to completing the study questionnaires, having been informed of the purpose, confidentiality, and anonymity of the study. For participants who were below the age of 18, consent was provided by their parents or caregivers who also signed assent forms.

RESULTS

Demographics

123(49.2%) of the participants were female while 116(46.4%) of the participants were male. 11(4.4%) did not respond to the item. This gives a signal that there is an issue of gender identity among some adolescents in the study area. 214(85.6%) of the participants were in secondary school, 21(8.4%) were in tertiary level of education while 15(6%) were in primary school. This implies that majority of adolescents are in secondary schools. 210(84%) of the participants were Christians, 33(13.2%) were Muslims, 4(1.6%) was Hindu while 3(1.2%) chose others as their religion. This reveals that Christianity is the most dominant religion in Kenya.

Perceived response styles of participants

The perceived response styles to parenting were answered from the results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Adherer | 250 | 2.00 | 5.00 | 3.5593 | .66309 |
| Non Chalant | 250 | 1.00 | 4.80 | 2.5344 | .75230 |
| Falser | 250 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.1340 | .90350 |
| Rejector | 250 | 1.00 | 6.83 | 2.0613 | .75088 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 250 | | | | |

Perceived child response styles to parenting

The adherer child response was the most frequent (M= 3.56), followed by the nonchalant (M=2.53), the falser (M=2.13) and lastly the rejector (M=2.06). This shows that most participants in the study show respect to their parents, honor their parents’ ideas about what is best for them and show that they think their parents are worth listening to. These findings also imply that few of the participants in the study area act inconsiderately, are insensitive, deliberately offensive, impolite and violate rules given by their parents.

Mental Well – being of participants

The second objective of the study was established from the results as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Wellbeing | 250 | 1.71 | 4.93 | 3.4100 | .56312 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 250 | | | | |

Mental Well – being of Adolescents

The results indicate a mean of (M=3.14) which is a high level of mental well-being among the participants. This finding is not in harmony with Sadler et al. (2017) who allude that there are amplified levels of low wellbeing in young people.

Correlation between Child response style to Parenting and Mental Well being

The third objective of the study was established from the results as shown in Table 2

Table 2

| | | Adherer | Rejector | Falser | Nonchalant | Wellbeing |
|------------|---------------------|---------|----------|---------|------------|-----------|
| Adherer | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.338** | -.534** | -.215** | .273** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .001 | .000 |
| | N | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |
| Rejector | Pearson Correlation | -.338** | 1 | .374** | .213** | -.099 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .001 | .119 |
| | N | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |
| Falser | Pearson Correlation | -.534** | .374** | 1 | .217** | -.326** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .001 | .000 |
| | N | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |
| Nonchalant | Pearson Correlation | -.215** | .213** | .217** | 1 | .021 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 | .001 | .001 | | .743 |
| | N | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |
| Wellbeing | Pearson Correlation | .273** | -.099 | -.326** | .021 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .119 | .000 | .743 | |
| | N | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the results, there was a weak positive relationship between adherer child response style to parenting and mental wellbeing (r =.273) based on n = 250 observations. It can be depicted that adherer child response style to parenting positively impacts on the mental health of an adolescent compared with the rejector, falser and non – chalant child response style. The finding is in line with Rosemind (2014) who expressed that obedient children are much happier and emotionally sturdy than disobedient children. The study also revealed that ,there was also a weak negative relationship between falser child response style to parenting and mental wellbeing,(r =.326) based on n = 250 observations.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of the present study, it is insinuated that children's response styles have an impact on their well-being. Adherer response style can contribute to the positive mental wellbeing of a child. When children adhere to their parents' guidance, they feel secure and safe in their environment, which can help build positive mental health. Adhering to parental guidance can help children form positive opinions of themselves leading to better mental health. Additionally, when children have secure attachments to their parents and experience consistent and nurturing parenting, they are more likely to develop a sense of self-worth, emotional resilience, and positive social skills. However, it is important to note that while adherence to parental guidance can have positive effects on a child's development and well-being, it is also influenced by various factors such as individual differences, cultural norms, parenting styles, and the overall family dynamics. Overly strict or controlling parenting practices can have negative effects on a child's mental well-being, such as increased stress, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem. It is important to consider that healthy parent-child relationships involve a balance between providing guidance and allowing children to develop their autonomy and independence.

The study also brings out that falser response styles can interfere with the child's mental health. It is worthy to note that it is not precise to make a blanket statement that all children who are obedient when their parents are present, but disobedient when their parents are away, will develop poor mental health. Falsar children do not inherently have negative mental health. Mental health is a complex issue influenced by a wide range of factors, including genetics, environment, social interactions, and individual experiences. It is possible that children who display such behavior patterns may be experiencing difficulties in coping with separation or adjusting to different environments. They might feel more comfortable expressing their true feelings or engaging in different behaviors when their parents are not around. However, this alone does not imply that they will inevitably develop poor mental health.

CONCLUSION

The adherer child response style has become apparent as the most excellent for adolescents' mental health. By supporting the child to be an adherer, parents and caregivers can help prevent the development of mental health problems and promote positive mental health outcomes. It is important for parents and caregivers to be aware of the response styles and help children develop healthy coping strategies. This can include encouraging the child to talk about their feelings, helping them to identify and challenge negative thoughts, and teaching them mindfulness techniques.

Relatedly, it is important for parents and caregivers to be aware of their children's reactions towards them and to monitor their behavior for signs of mental health issues. If a parent has concern about his/her child's behavior or mental health, it is recommended that they seek advice of a qualified mental health professional for a thorough evaluation and recommendation. By understanding the relationship between children's adherence to their parents and positive mental wellbeing, parents and professional can develop effective strategies to promote healthy parent-child relationships and support children's psychological health. The study recommends further research child response styles to parenting and other variables.

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