

Parental Attachment and Emotional Regulation among High School Students in Kikuyu Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between parenting attachment style and emotional regulation of secondary school students in public and private schools in Kikuyu County, Kenya. The study employed a quantitative method study design by combining correlational survey and phenomenological research designs. The study was guided by attachment theory and the process model of emotional regulation theory. The target population was 5003 high school students. A sample of 384 students was selected using simple random sampling. The study used questionnaires, and document analyses to collect data. Quantitative data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis

The findings revealed that. The study found that secure attachment negatively correlated with catastrophizing and other blame, while insecure attachment was positively correlated with rumination, catastrophizing, and other blame. Avoidant attachment was positively correlated with self-blame, while insecure attachment was negatively correlated with refocusing on planning.

The study suggests that schools should establish a comprehensive emotional support system, involving teachers, counselors, and parents. Regular parent-teacher meetings, resources, targeted interventions, and a safe space for students to calm down can help identify struggling students and promote academic and social development.

Key Words: Parental attachment Style, parent, student, emotional regulation

BACKGROUND

The article discussed the link between inadequate parental attachment and rising adolescent inappropriate emotional regulation. It highlights the impact on teenagers and suggests potential intervention and prevention solutions. The article also discussed the complex relationship between economic and social constraints, changes in family structure, and weakened attachment between parents and children in convectional households (Browning, 2013). Emotional and physical neglect negatively impacts children's psychological health and criminal behavior, while a lack of parental support leads to bad habits. The article also discussed the effectiveness of current initiatives and neighborhood-based programs in addressing parental attachment issues and preventing juvenile criminality. Adolescent emotional regulation was influenced by parental attachment, family dynamics, and economic disparities. Low-income children may resort to delinquent behavior or peer groups (Nisar et.al, 2015). Socioeconomic factors like poverty and limited resources also influenced this. Authoritarian parenting styles can hinder healthy attachment, while consistent, strict parenting leads to better outcomes. Family stability, single parents, and frequent caregiver changes also impacted bonding. Addressing emotional regulation requires comprehensive prevention and intervention initiatives to improve adolescent health outcomes.

Financial support often leads to a lack of parental affection and protection for teenagers, which led to frustration and discontent, potentially leading to criminal behavior. Factors such as inadequate supervision, lack of education, and lack of parental attention affected criminal behavior. Adolescent delinquent behavior was linked to family risk factors such as lack of parental supervision, conflict, separation, neglect, and abuse (Farington, 2014). Children from parents who didn't respect law and social conventions were likelier to engage in harmful behaviors. Poor parent-child relationships led to inappropriate activities and harmful traits. Norms suggested

that teenagers became evil individuals due to mental instability, aggression, and constant violence. Environmental changes like parental divorce, bad neighbors, and work issues also contributed to negative traits in teenagers (Kendler et.al, 2014).

Adolescent difficulties arose in families where parents prioritized financial gain over their children's well-being, leading to a cycle of reprimands or corporal punishment. High-standard families placed unrealistic expectations on their children, preventing them from disclosing their true selves and resulting in crime. Parents needed to address these issues to prevent further negative consequences for their children. Families who have alcoholic, depressed, or personality disorders often have unstable children, leading to increased instability and unspoken animosity (Jacobs et.al, 2018).

In China, teenage crime increased due to poor family management skills, early school dropout rates, and little affection for their children. From 2018 to 2021, over 10,000 juveniles broke the law, with 95% of cases being men (Brewer & Cadwell, 2021). Many young people were persuaded to engage in criminal activity without being aware that it might result in punishment. This is partly due to teenagers' lack of knowledge of legal requirements and partly because society, family, and schools are geared toward their age group. Children who break the law often lived in unhealthy environments, with parents showing no concern for them. The psychological damage caused by low self-esteem, guilt, lack of affection, poor learning and play environments, and poor management led to rebellious behavior and attraction to bad people. The study investigated the impact of parental attachment on high school students' emotional regulation skills, focusing on stable attachments enhancing emotion regulation and insecure attachments hindering it (Girme et.al, 2021).

Adolescent delinquency in Africa is a widespread issue, particularly in rural areas, causing significant devastation and suffering for children, families, and communities. Factors such as peer pressure, dysfunctional families, lack of education, poverty, and other issues contributed to juvenile delinquency. The negative consequences included damage, loss of property or life, stigmatization, and loss of reputation. The report suggested several methods to address the issue in the community, emphasizing the negative impacts on young people's development and future (Gootman & Eccles, 2018).

In Africa family instability was prevalent due to the separation of the wife and husband, with one parent taking custody of the children and covering expenses. Children were often sent to relatives or strangers for upbringing, school admission, or vocational training, aligning with the extended family's collective child-rearing methods. This practice led to an expansion of the criminal population in the African continent. Family and societal influences were often linked to deviant behavior, such as aggression, drug use, and psychiatric issues (McQueen, Greg & Brey, 2013). Parental attachment was a key determinant in a child's development, and poor parenting caused developmental delays and led to adolescent deviance. Family systems theory helped to understand the effects of insufficient parental attachment on abnormal behavior development. Adolescents who had strong relationships with their parents exhibited higher self-worth and less antisocial behavior compared to those with weaker attachments.

In Kenya, rampant burning of schools was witnessed across the country. Thirty schools were destroyed by fire in the nation in 2021, including those in Nairobi, Kiambu, Muranga, Nyeri, Busia, and Bungoma District. (Kenyans. co.ke, www). In October 2022 a dormitory was torched down in western Kenya (Omulo, 2023). On further enquiry experts pinned down the emotional well being as being an attribute to why dormitories was being torched down across the country. This led to in-depth research on the connection between parental attachment with the emotional regulation of the high school student. They deduced that their attachment style contributed a lot in the way students behave in schools. Adolescent delinquency in Kenya was a complex issue influenced by a lack of emotional regulation, economic difficulties, and limited education and career opportunities. The lack of attachment to parents and caregivers can lead to low self-esteem, sadness, and rage, which can result in delinquent behavior. Peer pressure can also increase the likelihood of seeking approval from friends, further increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. Factors such as lack of moral and ethical instruction, economic difficulties, and limited education and career opportunities contributed to teenage delinquency in Kenya (Gogo, 2020). Addressing these issues required addressing social and economic challenges, family support networks, expanding educational and employment opportunities, offering counseling and mental health services, and improving access to these services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to assess the relationship of attachment styles to emotional regulation among secondary school students in the Kikuyu sub-county, Kenya. It used a survey method to gather and examine quantitative data. A survey research design is a non-experimental method used to characterize a single person (Skogan, W. G. 2019). The study used a quantitative method research design. This design will allow the researcher to examine the relationships between the three study variables (parental secure attachment, parental insecure attachment, and parental avoidant attachment). It will also allow the researcher to examine the potential effects of these variables, either separately or in combination, on emotional regulation. Lastly, it will give the researcher information about the direction of the relationship between the two variables (Mertens, 2020).

Target population

The study targeted 5003 secondary school students in Kikuyu District (Enrollment Records, 2023). Students were purposely sampled for this study because they have in-depth information on their parents' attachment styles with their children and are better at expressing their emotions than anyone else. In addition, they are the ones who directly experience the positive or negative changes that occur in their emotions, the study targeted secondary school students during adolescence, when adolescents are undergoing major emotional changes as evidenced by the process model of emotional regulation theory by James Gross (Gross, 2015)

Sample Size

The practice of choosing several people or items from a population so that the chosen group includes components typical of the traits present in the full group is known as sampling (Levy, P. S., & Lemeshow, S. 2013). For detailed investigations, according to Kothari (2013), a size sample of 10% to 30% is required. Because there are 20 public schools and 4 private schools in Kikuyu, a sample of 5 schools was identified by calculating 20% of the total number in Kikuyu. Simple random sampling was used to select students from the sampled secondary schools. To get the sample size for the students, the researcher used Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967). The total sample size for this study was 384 student participants.

Research Instruments

A questionnaire involves asking questions through interactive activity to get responses which will be noted down in a log book. (Rea, L. M., & Parker, 2014). A questionnaire guide was used to retrieve quantitative data from students, and it included items to measure parental attachment patterns and emotional regulation levels of students in Kikuyu sub-county.

Emotion regulation was checked by the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire – development (CERQ-Nadia Garnefski a, Vivian Kraaij b 2006) includes 36 questionnaires for 9 items. Each item is 4 questions. While parenting attachment style was checked by 27 questionnaires for 3 attachment styles, parents secure attachment, parents avoidant attachment, and parent insecure attachment. Each attachment style has 9 questionnaires.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained permission from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, followed by a research license from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) Kenya. The researcher also obtained research authorization from county commissioner Kiambu followed by deputy county commissioner Kikuyu sub-county. Consent from the schools and the participants was also obtained. The researcher gave respondents freedom of participation and respondents were treated fairly and equally to avoid biases (Herek et.al, 2013). To ensure anonymity, respondents did not write their names on the questionnaires. The principle of confidentiality was also maintained.

RESULTS

The age distribution of the 384 participants. The majority of participants, 308 (80.2%), were between the ages of 15 and 17 years old. The remaining 76 participants (19.8%) were between the ages of 18 and 20-year-old

Of the total 384 student participants, 157 (40.9%) were male and 227 (59.1%) were female. The percent valid and cumulative percent columns show that the percent add up to 100.0%, indicating that there were no missing values in the data

The majority of participants, 159 (41.4%), were in Form 4. The next largest group was 119 participants (31.0%) in Form 3, followed by 55 participants (14.3%) in Form 2, and 51 participants (13.3%) in Form 1.

Table 1: Parental Attachment Styles of High School students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Secure attachment	384	1.44	9.22	3.7416	.84924
Avoidant attachment	384	1.44	4.22	2.7193	.47064
Insecure attachment style	384	1.22	4.56	2.6369	.60463
Valid N (listwise)	384				

Table 1 Table 4.4 presents the described numbers for the attachment styles of the 384 high school student participants. The mean score for secure attachment was 3.74 (SD = 0.85), with a minimal score of 1.44 and a maximal score of 9.22. The mean score for avoidant attachment was 2.72 (SD = 0.47), with a minimum of 1.44 and a maximum of 4.22. The average score for insecure attachment style was 2.64 (SD = 0.60), with a minimum of 1.22 and a maximum of 4.56. All 384 participants had complete data for the attachment style measures.

Examine the statistics to determine typical parental attachment styles. The finding in Table 4.4 shows the greatest score of stable attachment (M = 3.74). It implies that parents and kids have a strong bond. There is cause for celebration for families residing in the Kikuyu sub-county. In addition, statistics indicate that avoidant attachment is nearly as high as insecure attachment (M = 2.71). The difference is only 1.03, with insecure attachment coming in second (M=2.63). There is barely a 0.08 difference between avoidant and insecure attachment. Maybe this explains why when students experience negative emotions, they frequently become irate, violent, or silent. due to their parents' hectic schedules. They are too busy to spend time with their Child.

Table 2: Levels of emotional regulation of high school students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Refocus on planning	384	1.00	5.00	4.1393	.82380
Positive reappraisal	384	1.00	5.00	3.9310	.86137
Positive refocusing	384	1.00	10.75	3.6445	1.04451
Acceptance	384	1.00	5.00	3.5169	.89914
Focus on rumination	384	1.00	6.00	3.4642	.90393
Putting into perspective	384	1.00	5.00	3.3848	.94491
Self-blame	384	1.00	13.75	3.2077	1.08123
Catastrophizing	384	1.00	5.00	2.7702	1.05900

Other-blame	384	1.00	5.00	2.5690	1.06179
Valid N (listwise)	384				

The table 2: presents the descriptive statistics for the emotional regulation strategies of the 384 high school student participants. The highest mean score was for refocus on planning (M = 4.14, SD = 0.82), followed by positive reappraisal (M = 3.93, SD = 0.86), positive refocusing (M = 3.64, SD = 1.04), acceptance (M = 3.52, SD = 0.90), and focus on rumination (M = 3.46, SD = 0.90). The lowest mean scores were for putting into perspective (M = 3.38, SD = 0.95), self-blame (M = 3.21, SD = 1.08), catastrophizing (M = 2.77, SD = 1.06), and other-blame (M = 2.57, SD = 1.06). All 384 participants had complete data for the emotional regulation measures.

Refocus on planning had the highest level of emotional management among students. Positive reappraisal came in second. Positive refocusing came in third. Acceptance was the fourth. The fifth was pay attention to ruminating. Putting things in perspective was the sixth. Self-blame was the seventh. The ninth was creating a catastrophe. Other-blame was the final one. Students with stable parental relationships therefore refocus on planning, favorable reevaluation, and positive focusing, they can live in harmony while accepting the differences in other people and their surroundings. Students who reside in families where there is an avoidant or insecure connection from parents, on the other hand, are more likely to dwell on self-blame or other forms of rumination.

The study found a relationship between parental attachment types and students' ability to regulate their emotions. Based on statistical findings. Students with stable parent-child bonds and reside in a family had shown refocusing on planning (M= 4.13), positive reappraisal (M= 3.93), and positive refocusing (M= 3.64). These are examples of balanced emotional regulation in adolescents.

Students who with avoidance attachment to their parents had (M = 2.71) those who frequently had a tendency to accept (M = 3.51), concentrate on thinking things through (M = 3.46), and put things in perspective (M = 3.38).

Students with insecure attachment styles who reside in households (M = 2.63) frequently placed blame on others (M = 2.56), catastrophized (M = 2.77), and blamed themselves (M = 3.20)

Table 3: Relationship between attachment styles and the level of emotional wellbeing of high school student

Correlations

		Insecure attachment style	Avoidant attachment	Secure attachment	Self-blame	Acceptance	Focus on rumination	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Other-blame
Insecure attachment style	Pearson Correlation	1	.460**	-.419**	0.088	0.051	.160**	0.059	-.109*	-0.021	0.082	.243**	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0.085	0.323	0.002	0.252	0.033	0.678	0.109	0	0
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Avoidant attachment	Pearson Correlation	.460**	1	-.289**	.113*	0.066	.112*	0.001	-.162**	-0.06	0.09	.192**	.210**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0.027	0.195	0.028	0.989	0.001	0.237	0.077	0	0
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Secure attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.419**	-.289**	1	0.057	0.094	-0.077	.109*	.216**	.171**	0.035	-.101*	-.162**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0.263	0.067	0.133	0.033	0	0.001	0.491	0.048	0.001
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Self-blame	Pearson Correlation	0.088	.113*	0.057	1	0.064	.170**	0.042	0.045	0.009	0.059	0.099	-0.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.085	0.027	0.263		0.209	0.001	0.41	0.378	0.861	0.248	0.053	0.669
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Acceptae	Pearson Correlation	0.051	0.066	0.094	0.064	1	.218**	.140**	0.018	0.079	.193**	0.1	-0.018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.323	0.195	0.067	0.209		0	0.006	0.726	0.12	0	0.051	0.73
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Focus rumination	Pearson Correlation	.160**	.112*	-0.077	.170**	.218**	1	-0.021	.125*	.123*	.150**	.350**	0.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.028	0.133	0.001	0		0.675	0.015	0.016	0.003	0	0.528
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Positive refocusing	Pearson Correlation	0.059	0.001	.109*	0.042	.140**	-0.021	1	.429**	.318**	.105*	-0.039	0.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.252	0.989	0.033	0.41	0.006	0.675		0	0	0.04	0.447	0.176
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Refocus planning	Pearson Correlation	-.109*	-.162**	.216**	0.045	0.018	.125*	.429**	1	.527**	.109*	0.024	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033	0.001	0	0.378	0.726	0.015	0		0	0.033	0.641	0.558
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Positive reappraisal	Pearson Correlation	-0.021	-0.06	.171**	0.009	0.079	.123*	.318**	.527**	1	.213**	-.133**	0.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.678	0.237	0.001	0.861	0.12	0.016	0	0		0	0.009	0.551
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Putting into perspective	Pearson Correlation	0.082	0.09	0.035	0.059	.193**	.150**	.105*	.109*	.213**	1	0.019	0.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.109	0.077	0.491	0.248	0	0.003	0.04	0.033	0		0.716	0.056
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Catastrophizing	Pearson Correlation	.243**	.192**	-.101*	0.099	0.1	.350**	-0.039	0.024	-.133**	0.019	1	.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0.048	0.053	0.051	0	0.447	0.641	0.009	0.716		0
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Other-blame	Pearson Correlation	.256**	.210**	-.162**	-0.02	-0.018	0.032	0.069	0.03	0.031	0.098	.331**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0.001	0.669	0.73	0.528	0.176	0.558	0.551	0.056	0	
	N	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384

Table 3 presents the correlations between the attachment styles (insecure attachment, avoidant attachment, and secure attachment) and the various emotional regulation strategies among the 384 high school student participants.

The results showed that insecure attachment was positively correlated with focus on rumination ($r = 0.160$, $p < 0.01$), catastrophizing ($r = 0.243$, $p < 0.01$), and other-blame ($r = 0.256$, $p < 0.01$). Insecure attachment was negatively correlated with refocus on planning ($r = -0.109$, $p < 0.05$).

Avoidant attachment correlated with self-blame positively ($r = 0.113$, $p < 0.05$), focus on rumination ($r = 0.112$, $p < 0.05$), catastrophizing ($r = 0.192$, $p < 0.01$), and other-blame ($r = 0.210$, $p < 0.01$). Avoidant attachment was negatively correlated with refocus on planning ($r = -0.162$, $p < 0.01$).

Secure attachment was correlated with positive refocusing ($r = 0.109$, $p < 0.05$), refocus on planning ($r = 0.216$, $p < 0.01$), and +ve reappraisal ($r = 0.171$, $p < 0.01$). Secure attachment was negatively correlated with catastrophizing ($r = -0.101$, $p < 0.05$) and other-blame ($r = -0.162$, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The secure attachment is the most important for students. A study conducted in Brazil, Gross (2019). explores the attachment system's development from early childhood to adolescence, highlighting how emotionally abusive parenting can lead to abnormalities like rejection, overbearing, hostility, and frightening behavior. Attachment types significantly influence high school kids' emotional and psychological growth, with secure attachments promoting higher self-esteem and strong relationships. The results agree with Krochek's (2019) study in Egypt which found that a child's growth relies heavily on parents, highlighting the need for parenting education and programs. Eventually, the results are also supported by John Bowlby's attachment theory, which has significantly advanced our knowledge of interpersonal connections and human development. (Bretherton 2013). Secure Attachment: Because of this solid foundation, they are more adept at managing their emotions. Those with insecure attachments are uneasy and struggle with emotional regulation. Avoidant Attachment: it causes a youngster to become reliant on the capacity of a carer to meet their emotional requirements. This theory related to research that has found results in students having secure attachments was independent, focused on planning, and positive reappraisal. Students with avoidant and insecure attachments are often self-blame and catastrophizing.

The findings of the current study supporting by a research conducted in Mexico by Tani, (2018) which found that emotional regulation skills were crucial for psychological and social wellness.

Parents who provide optimal parenting improve emotional regulation for their children Parental overprotection was less associated with emotion management skills than perceived parental caring. The study highlights the impact of family dynamics, parenting philosophies, peer dynamics, and emotional control techniques on a child's emotional growth.

The findings disagreed with a study conducted by Dulark (2019) in Indonesia who reported that high school students' emotional control and parental connection were significantly influenced by cultural factors. Effective strategies to support their children's emotional growth through cultural factors. Also, a study conducted in Egypt by Abdalla (2018) found emotional regulation as a complex issue influenced by peer pressure, parental expectations, academic stress, and cultural standards, leading to chronic psychiatric difficulties among students.

Correlation between attachment styles and the level of emotional well-being of high school student. These findings of the current study suggest that insecure and avoidant are linked with less adaptive emotional regulation strategies, such as increased focus on rumination, catastrophizing, and other blame. In contrast, secure attachment is linked to more adaptive strategies, such as positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, and positive reappraisal.

A study conducted in Ghana by Hapunda (2019) supports the findings of the current study. It was reported that teenagers' perceptions of parent-child relationships vary based on their culture. Ghanaian teenagers were more

likely to view their relationships as avoidant; those who believed their parents avoided them were less likely to use cognitive evaluation for emotion regulation.

The study conducted in Ethiopia by Mohanan and George (2022) agrees with the findings of the current study, which examined the relationship between parental styles, educational success, and school adoption among Ethiopian high school students. The study showed a strong positive link between academic achievement and authoritarian parenting.

CONCLUSION

The study on parental attachment and emotional regulation among high school students in Kikuyu, Kenya, reveals that while most students use adaptive strategies like planning and positive reappraisal, a significant portion engage in maladaptive behaviors like self-blame and catastrophizing. Gender differences were minimal, but older students and higher graders exhibited more maladaptive strategies. Secure attachment styles are prevalent, with strong, positive emotional bonds with parents contributing to emotional and social development. Insecure and avoidant attachments result in less adaptive strategies. Effective strategies for emotional regulation include music therapy, open communication, and validation of emotions. A holistic approach involving students, teachers, and parents is needed to foster healthy emotional regulation among high school students (Mahoney et.al, 2021).

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