

# Relationship Between Parenting Styles and Behavioral Traits Among Pupils in Imenti North Sub-County; Meru County, Kenya.

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding a child's development, particularly during the early teenage years, is crucial for promoting positive behavioral traits. Parenting style play a significant role in shaping children's behavior during this phase. While numerous studies have explored the influence of parenting on children's growth and development, few has focused on the direct relationship between specific parenting style and behavioral traits, especially in regions like Imenti North Sub-County, Meru County. The study sought to explore how authoritarian parenting style relates to the behavioral traits of children in their early teenage years, with a specific focus on Imenti North. The region's unique socio-economic and cultural context offered an opportunity to study the local impact of authoritarian parenting style on children's behavior, an area where research was previously limited. The study adopted a correlational research design, grounded in Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969). The study targeted 400 pupils from five primary schools in Imenti North Sub-County, with the accessible population consisting of pupils in Grades 6 and 7. Simple random sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring fair representation and minimizing bias. A pilot study was conducted in Imenti South to test the clarity and reliability of research instruments. Data was gathered using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including pupil questionnaires and teacher interviews. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and multiple regression techniques through SPSS version 21.0. The results revealed that authoritarian parenting style was linked to anxiety, low motivation, and emotional withdrawal among children. The study concludes that authoritarian parenting style posed risks to pupils' emotional and academic adjustment. Based on these findings, the study recommends that parents adopt other less authoritarian practices, combining both warmth and structure to promote healthy development. Teachers were encouraged to identify and support at-risk pupils and collaborate with parents through forums and guidance programs. Policymakers are urged to integrate parenting education into community and school-based initiatives. Ultimately, the study contributes to critical insights into how parenting approaches influence early adolescent behavior in the Kenyan context and provides practical recommendations for strengthening home-school partnerships to support pupil development.

**Key words:** Parenting styles, emotional traits, behaviour traits, Authoritarian parenting.

## INTRODUCTION

Parenting style play a critical role in shaping children's behavioral traits, which is seen in observable patterns of actions, emotions, and thoughts that influence how children engaged with their social environment, peers, and authority figures. The parenting style a parent employs could significantly impact whether children are actively engaged in school work, maintain healthy social relationships, or develop positive traits such as self-discipline, respect, and resilience. (Akinsola, 2011).

Research shows that cultural contexts deeply influence parenting style, which, in turn, affects children's behavior traits differently across societies (Hayek, Metz, & Pinderhughes, 2022). For instance, Akinsola (2011), in their study in China, observed that although traditional values had shifted, parent-child relationships continued to emphasize love and communication within unique cultural norms. However, the authoritative parenting style, which combined responsiveness and demandingness, was often encouraged as it fostered traits like independence and strong social skills (McKinney, 2022). In contrast, Russell, Crockett, & Chao (2010) posited that authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict rules and high demands with little emotional warmth, could lead

to anxiety, withdrawal, and unhappiness in children, although it might also contribute to academic success in some cultures. In African contexts, authoritarian parenting style also shaped behavioral traits of children. For example, a study done in Botswana (Akinsola, 2011) pointed out that parenting practices, influenced by both cultural traditions and legal frameworks, significantly impacted children's social, psychological, and emotional well-being.

Authoritarian parenting is characterized by high expectations and low responsiveness, emphasizing strict obedience, discipline, and control over nurturing (García & Gracia, 2020). Cherry (2022) asserted that authoritarian parents focused more on enforcing rules and punishing mistakes harshly rather than fostering autonomy.

Hayek et al. (2022) posited that authoritarian parents demonstrated high demandingness but low support, which often led to children experiencing reduced happiness, lower social competence, and diminished self-esteem. A study of 600 Flemish families with children aged 8–10 years found that while authoritarian parenting created structured environments, it also resulted in less favorable child outcomes (Llorca et al., 2021).

Authoritarian parenting involves a high level of control and limited emotional responsiveness, focusing on rule adherence over self-regulation and independence (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). Recent studies (e.g., García & Serra, 2021) noted that such parents frequently used punitive measures rather than positive reinforcement, fostering compliance at the cost of emotional and cognitive growth. Research by Sorkhabi and Mandara (2021) confirmed that children raised in authoritarian households experienced structured yet rigid environments with limited opportunities for open dialogue and negotiation. This often led to heightened criticism, reduced self-esteem, and diminished social competence (Calafat et al., 2020; Guarnotta, 2023). Critically, authoritarian parenting was not always a deliberate choice but might have stemmed from parental upbringing or personality traits. Research suggested that individuals raised in authoritarian households were more likely to replicate similar parenting style (Child Family Studies, 2020). Children raised by authoritarian parents generally followed rules but struggled with self-discipline and independent decision-making (Denis & Bodma, 2018). Due to limited opportunities to make choices and experience natural consequences, they may have difficulty with self-regulation in the absence of strict parental authority. Recent studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2023) highlighted that such children often developed weaker social skills and lower self-esteem, impacting their overall behavioral traits.

Despite these concerns, there is limited research on how authoritarian parenting style contribute to these behavioral issues in this region. This study, therefore sought to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and the behavioral traits of early teenagers in Imenti North Sub-County. By addressing this research gap, the study aimed to provide insights that could inform better parenting practices and interventions to promote positive child development in Imenti North Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya.

The study was guided by the following hypothesis: *H<sub>01</sub>*: There was no statistically significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and behavioral traits of early teenage children in Imenti North Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. The findings of this study is hoped to benefit teachers, parents, pupils, counselors, school managers, and community stakeholders by providing valuable insights into the factors influencing children's behavioral traits both at home, in school, and within the community. The research targeted primary school pupils in grades six and seven. The study involved five primary schools in Imenti North Sub-County, with a sample size of 400 pupils, selected through simple random sampling. The study specifically examined authoritarian parenting and how its style influenced children's behavior, including their social interactions, stress levels and emotional well-being.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to pupils and interviews conducted with their teachers. The study assumed that: Respondents were able to provide accurate responses in the self-report questionnaires and that respondents gave honest information when called upon.

Attachment Theory, was chosen. This theory posited that attachment was a biological necessity, ensuring the survival of young children by keeping them close to their caregivers (Schore, 2019). Attached children were more likely to exhibit positive traits such as effective social skills, disciplined behavior, and emotional stability. In contrast, insecure attachment arose when caregivers were neglectful, inconsistent, or overly intrusive. This

form of attachment was associated with negative outcomes, including anxiety, low self-esteem, dependency issues, and antisocial behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a correlational research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2021), the main purpose of correlational research is to describe the relationship between variables and establish how the variables interacted to influence each other. This study was conducted in Imenti North Sub-County, located in Meru County, Kenya. The target population for this study included class teachers responsible for Grades 6 and 7 in public schools. The accessible population for this study was drawn from five purposively selected public primary schools in Imenti North Sub-County namely; Giaki, Gachua, Ciothirai, Kathirune, and Kambereu. These schools were chosen to ensure representation from both rural and urban settings, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of the relationship between parenting style and pupils' behavioral traits within the local context. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select five primary schools: Giaki, Gachua, Ciothirai, Kathirune, and Kambereu. This selection strategy ensured that findings were representative and generalizable within Imenti North Sub-County.

Simple random sampling was used to select pupils from Grades 6 and 7 at each of the five schools. A total of 40 pupils per grade were selected, resulting in 80 pupils per school and a total of 400 pupils across the five schools (Saunders et al., 2022; Kumar, 2019). In addition two class teachers from each school (a total of 10 teachers) were involved in the study. The sampling procedure, which combined purposive sampling for school selection and simple random sampling for pupil selection, was designed to ensure that the study captured a broad and representative sample of pupils and teachers, enhancing the reliability and applicability of the findings (Bell et al., 2023; Morin et al., 2023). To determine an appropriate sample size from a finite population, the Israel (2013) formula was applied:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- $n$  = sample size
- $N$  = population size (15,600 pupils)
- $e$  = margin of error (0.05 or 5%)

$$n = \frac{15,600}{1 + 15,600(0.05)^2} = \frac{15,600}{1 + 15,600(0.0025)} = \frac{15,600}{1 + 39} = \frac{15,600}{40} = 390$$

The computed minimum sample size was 390 pupils. To enhance representation and account for potential attrition or non-response, the researcher sampled 400 pupils in total, i.e., 80 pupils from each of the 5 selected schools.

Table 1:

### Sampling Frame

School	Grade 6			Grade 7			Class teacher	Total respondents
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
Gachua	22	18	40	24	16	40	2	82
Ciothirai	19	21	40	19	21	40	2	82

Giaki	27	13	40	26	14	40	2	82
Kathirune	15	25	40	17	23	40	2	82
Kambereu	14	26	40	27	13	40	2	82
Total	<b>97</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>410</b>

Data was collected using standardized questionnaires and interview schedules designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. Both the questionnaires and the interview schedule were pilot-tested and refined by experts to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Data collection involved the active participation of the researcher in administering questionnaires and conducting interviews. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the pupils across the selected schools. Pupils completed the questionnaires independently in their classrooms under the researcher's supervision.

The completed questionnaires were collected by the researcher after one week. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with 10 teachers—two from each of the five selected schools. In this study, validity was established by utilizing standardized research tools and seeking expert opinions during the development of the instruments. The instruments were aligned with the study objectives to ensure they accurately captured the desired information (Saunders et al., 2022). To establish reliability, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered adequate (Bell et al., 2023).

## FINDINGS

### Response Rate

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to Grade 6 and Grade 7 pupils in five primary schools, out of which 390 were returned fully completed, giving a response rate of 97.5%. In addition, 10 interview schedules distributed to class teachers (two per school) were all returned, yielding a 100% response rate.

Table 1. Response Rate

Instrument	Issued	Returned	Response Rate (%)
Pupil Questionnaires	400	390	97.5
Teacher Interview schedules	10	10	100

The high response rate was adequate for making generalizations about the target population and ensured the reliability of the findings. Gender distribution was nearly balanced, with a total of 210 boys and 190 girls.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Grade and Gender

School	Grade 6 (M)	Grade 6 (F)	Grade 7 (M)	Grade 7 (F)	Total Respondents
Gachua	22	18	24	16	80
Ciothirai	19	21	19	21	80
Giaki	27	13	26	14	80
Kathirune	15	25	17	23	80
Kambereu	14	26	27	13	80

<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>400</b>
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### Relationship Between Authoritarian Parenting and Behavioral Traits

This section presents findings related to Objective One: to examine the relationship between authoritarian parenting and behavioral traits of early teenage pupils. The theme underpinning this parenting style is strict rules, high expectations, low warmth, and emphasis on obedience. Data was collected from pupil questionnaires and analyzed alongside teacher interview responses. This is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pupil responses on authoritarian parenting

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>
Parents set strict rules that I must follow	52.3	30.8	8.6	6.3	2.0
Parents punish harshly	39.0	29.1	20.4	9.6	1.9
Parents expect me to obey without explanation	47.1	32.0	11.0	7.1	2.8
I am not allowed to express my feelings	43.0	28.7	15.5	9.2	3.6
Parents rarely ask for my opinion	45.3	34.2	10.5	6.4	3.6

The responses from the pupils indicate that a significant proportion of them experience strict enforcement of rules, limited emotional expression, and a lack of open dialogue with their parents. This suggests that many pupils are raised in environments where obedience is prioritized over emotional support; a characteristic of authoritarianism, which may contribute to anxiety and social withdrawal. The finding corroborates with an observation from Downey (2023) who suggested that apart from close parental monitoring that relates to higher achievement in schools, a child's overt behaviour may indicate internal problems such as anxiety, stress and silent depression.

The summary of teacher responses is presented below.

Table 4. Thematic Summary of Teacher Interview Responses on Authoritarian Parenting

<b>Theme Identified</b>	<b>Frequency (Teachers)</b>	<b>Response</b>
Pupils show signs of fear and emotional withdrawal	8 out of 10	<i>"They live in fear and show signs of withdrawal and low confidence."</i> — Teacher H
Pupils follow rules but lack expression	7 out of 10	<i>"They obey but cannot express their views confidently."</i> — Teacher C
Pupils experience stress and anxiety	6 out of 10	<i>"They suffer from anxiety due to lack of parental warmth."</i> — Teacher F

The findings reveal that authoritarian parenting, while associated with discipline and obedience, is also linked to emotional withdrawal, anxiety, and poor communication. Pupils raised under this parenting style often comply with rules but do so out of fear rather than understanding. The lack of emotional warmth and one way communication results in children who are cautious, hesitant to speak up, and emotionally reserved. This environment stifles their self-expression, undermines their confidence, and may hinder their ability to form healthy social relationships both in and outside school. These outcomes align with more recent findings such as



those by Pinquart (2017), who reported that authoritarian parenting is consistently linked to internalizing problems, lower self-esteem, and poorer social skills.

### Regression Analysis

To determine the extent to which authoritarian parenting style predicts behavioral traits among pupils, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The model used was:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

$X_1$  = Anxiety

$X_2$  = Low self esteem

$X_3$  = Emotional withdrawal

$X_4$  = Stress

$\alpha$  = Constant

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

Table 5. Regression Analysis of authoritarian Parenting Style on Behavioral Traits

Predictor (X)	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Anxiety	-0.221	0.068	-3.25	0.001
Low self esteem	0.342	0.057	6.00	0.023
Emotional withdrawal	- 0.342	0.067	-4.06	0.003
Stress	0.257	0.237	- 0.362	0.003

The regression model reveals that authoritative parenting has the strongest positive influence on behavioral traits ( $\beta = 0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). ( $\beta = 0.257$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) ( $\beta = 0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) ( $\beta = 0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) These results reinforce earlier descriptive findings and provide statistical evidence that authoritarian parenting positively is strongly related to behavioural traits of children and contributes to anxiety, low self esteem, emotional withdrawal and stress. This findings agrees with Wang et al.(2023) who observed that there is a significant positive correlation between authoritarian parenting and behaviour characteristics such as anxiety, stress and withdrawal behaviour traits.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Authoritarian Parenting was associated with obedience but also with emotional withdrawal, anxiety, and lack of open communication. Pupils reported harsh rules and minimal emotional support. Behavioral Traits, as the dependent variable, were strongest in social and academic domains when pupils received structured support at home. Regression analysis showed that authoritative parenting had the most significant positive impact on development of undesired behavioural characteristics among children.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that authoritarian parenting style significantly shape pupils' behavioral development. In contrast, authoritarian parenting hinder emotional well-being and affects

engagement in learning. These findings are consistent with previous international research, such as Pinquart (2017) and Kim & Kochanska (2022), which highlighted the emotional and behavioral advantages of authoritative parenting.

## Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

Policy makers and government entities should Integrate structured parenting education into national and community-based development programs to support child well-being and behavior.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could investigate the role of socio-economic status in moderating the effects of other parenting styles.

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