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## Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting Styles on Young Mothers in Kenya

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles among young mothers in Kenya, investigating how the parenting practices of previous generations influence the current generation. The research uses a quantitative design, grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and focuses on young mothers aged 18-35 from both urban and rural areas of Kenya. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, with a sample size of 384 participants calculated using Cochran's formula. Data were collected via structured questionnaires assessing authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses were applied to explore the patterns and relationships between childhood and current parenting styles. Results revealed that authoritarian parenting was the most common style experienced by participants in childhood (M = 3.76, SD = 0.576), followed by permissive (M = 2.75, SD = 0.398) and authoritative (M = 2.44, SD = 0.461) styles. Neglectful parenting had the lowest mean (M = 1.96, SD = 0.351). In adulthood, the most prevalent style adopted by the young mothers was authoritative (M = 4.08, SD = 0.377), followed by permissive (M = 2.63, SD = 0.834), with authoritarian parenting being less commonly adopted (M = 2.49, SD = 0.852). The correlation analysis showed weak to moderate relationships between childhood and current parenting styles, with significant negative correlations between childhood authoritative parenting and current authoritarian (r = -0.109, p < 0.05) and permissive parenting (r = -0.236, p < 0.01). No significant correlation was found between childhood authoritarian or neglectful parenting and current parenting styles. The regression analysis indicated that demographic factors, particularly area of residence, were significant predictors of current authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The study concludes that intergenerational transmission of parenting styles is present in Kenya, with cultural and socio-economic factors influencing parenting practices. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these influences and promote healthier parenting strategies.

**Keywords:** Parenting Styles, Intergenerational Transmission, Young Mothers, Kenya, Cultural Influence, Generational Influence, Child-rearing Practices

## INTRODUCTION

Parenting styles play a critical role in shaping children's emotional, social, and cognitive development, making the study of their intergenerational transmission highly significant. Parenting styles, defined as approaches to nurturing and disciplining children, are influenced by parental behaviors, attitudes, and the emotional climate within parent-child relationships (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, as cited in Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2018). These styles—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—affect children's outcomes in unique ways. For instance, Tripon (2024) emphasizes that democratic parenting fosters self-esteem, academic success, and social skills, while authoritarian parenting may hinder intrinsic motivation and decision-making despite promoting discipline.

Globally, intergenerational transmission of parenting styles is influenced by cultural and contextual factors. Brown (2017) demonstrated how mothers reflect on their upbringing to modify parenting approaches, highlighting intentional adaptation and personal growth as mediating processes. Similarly, Chen, Liu, and Kaplan (2008) found that early positive parental experiences contribute to constructive parenting, mediated by



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marital satisfaction and educational attainment. These findings underscore the cyclical and dynamic nature of parenting practices across generations.

In Africa, parenting styles are shaped by cultural values, communal practices, and historical influences. Kiambi (2021) noted that colonialism disrupted traditional child-rearing practices, while Wang'eri (2011) highlighted modernization's impact on Kenyan families, reducing the role of extended families and fostering maternal dominance in parenting roles. Research in Kenya, such as Igoki and Changwony (2019), further indicates that socio-economic status and religious beliefs significantly shape parenting approaches, influencing children's behavior.

This study examines how young mothers in Kenya replicate or adapt parenting styles they experienced, considering socio-economic and cultural factors. By addressing gaps in understanding intergenerational transmission within the Kenyan context, this work aims to inform evidence-based interventions for improving parenting practices.

## **BACKGROUND**

Parenting is a multifaceted process influenced by culture, socio-economic factors, and personal experiences. In the African context, communal child-rearing was traditionally the norm, with extended families playing a pivotal role in nurturing children (Setrana, 2023). This approach fostered shared responsibilities and strong community bonds. However, modernization, urbanization, and the shift towards nuclear family structures have redefined parenting roles, leading to tensions between traditional and contemporary practices (Wang'eri, 2011). These changes have introduced challenges such as reduced paternal involvement, increased maternal gatekeeping, and diminished support systems for parents.

Emerging concerns about the behavior and development of children highlight the need to examine these shifts more critically. Studies suggest that parenting practices have a profound impact not only on individual children but also on broader societal outcomes, including community cohesion, national development, and school performance (Rothenberg et al., 2022). Positive parenting practices promote emotional regulation, academic success, and social integration, while maladaptive practices often result in adverse outcomes such as delinquency and poor mental health (Chen & Kaplan, 2004).

Intergenerational parenting is shaped by both continuity and change. Brown (2017) noted that mothers often reflect on their upbringing to refine their parenting approaches, while Rothenberg et al. (2021) found that cultural norms significantly moderate the transmission of parenting behaviors. Kenyan parenting practices reflect unique cultural and socio-economic dynamics. Kiambi (2021) emphasized the importance of reclaiming indigenous parenting practices, disrupted by colonial influences, to nurture communal values. Despite the persistence of traditional practices like communal child-rearing, urbanization and socio-economic pressures have significantly altered their application, as observed in urban settings such as Nairobi (Igoki & Changwony, 2019).

This study seeks to explore how young mothers in Kenya replicate or modify the parenting styles they experienced, shedding light on the intergenerational transmission of these practices. By addressing these questions, the research aims to identify strategies for fostering effective parenting in Kenya's evolving socio-cultural landscape, thereby contributing to individual, community, and national well-being.

## **METHODS**

**Research Design:** This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to explore the transmission of parenting styles across generations among young mothers in Kenya. The design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time, facilitating an analysis of how the parenting styles of young mothers correlate with those of their own mothers.

**Target Population:** The target population for this study consisted of young mothers aged 18-35 from different regions of Kenya, including both urban and rural areas. According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, there are approximately 4.96 million women aged 20 to 34 in Kenya, with population figures of



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2,020,998 for ages 20–24, 1,672,110 for ages 25–29, and 1,262,471 for ages 30–34. While the census does not specify the number of young mothers, the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) highlights that 22%, approximately 4.96 million of women aged 15–19 have begun childbearing, with higher rates in older age groups, suggesting that a substantial portion of women aged 20–34 are mothers. These young mothers were selected due to their direct involvement in parenting, allowing for the examination of how they adopt, modify, or reject the parenting practices of their mothers. The study sought to include mothers who had at least one child, ensuring that they had firsthand experience with child-rearing.

Sampling Technique and Size: Using Cochran's formula, the study recruited 384 young mothers, proportionally drawn from various regions to ensure balanced representation and sufficient statistical power for generalization. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, with the population stratified by geographical regions. Participants were proportionally selected from each stratum to reflect the population distribution, enhancing representativeness and capturing the diversity of young mothers across Kenya.

**Measures:** The study used a structured questionnaire to examine how parenting styles are passed down among young mothers in Kenya. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A collected basic information about participants, such as their age, marital status, education level, and occupation. Section B focused on the parenting styles participants experienced growing up, asking them to rate their experiences using a scale from Never to Always. Section C explored their current parenting styles, with similar questions tailored to reflect how they raise their own children. The questionnaire items were based on reliable, tested tools for measuring parenting styles, with 5-6 questions for each style to provide a comprehensive view of both past and present practices.

**Data Analysis:** The data was analyzed using SPSS version 25, where descriptive statistics helped summarize participants' demographic details and the distribution of parenting styles. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were used to explore the relationships between parenting styles and factors like age, marital status, education, and where the participants live. The regression analysis helped identify key factors that predict parenting styles.

**Ethical Considerations:** Approval for the study was obtained from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Department of Psychology. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights to confidentiality. Written consent was obtained before data collection, and participants were assigned anonymous ID numbers to protect their identities. Data was securely stored, with access limited to authorized personnel. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequences. No incentives were provided to ensure unbiased participation.

## **RESULTS**

## **Demographic Characteristics**

The study achieved a high response rate of 97.6%, with 375 out of 384 participants responding. This indicates strong participant engagement and enhances the reliability of the findings, ensuring that the data is representative and valid for analyzing the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles among young mothers in Kenya. Out of 375 valid responses, most participants were aged 26–30 years (45.3%), followed by those 18–25 years (40.8%). A smaller group was aged 31–35 years (13.9%). This shows that the study population is primarily young, with the majority between 18 and 30 years old. The majority of respondents had secondary school education (40.5%) or a college/university level (37.1%). A smaller proportion had completed TVET training (13.3%), while only 9.1% reported having primary school education. This indicates a fairly well-educated population, with significant representation from higher education levels. Most participants were married (50.7%), while 35.2% were single. A smaller portion were separated/divorced (10.9%), and a few were widowed (3.2%). This suggests that over half of the population has a stable family setup, while others are single or have experienced marital challenges. Among the participants, 46.9% were unemployed, making this the largest group. 31.2% were employed, 15.7% were self-employed, and 6.1% were students. This highlights unemployment as a key issue, with less than half of the respondents being engaged in formal or informal work.



## **Analysis of Parenting Styles Experienced in Childhood**

Parenting styles greatly influence a child's growth and behavior. This section summarizes data from 375 participants about the types of parenting they experienced as children. The results, shown in Table 1, reveal patterns and differences in these parenting approaches and how they might affect a child's development.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for parenting styles experienced during childhood

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Authoritative Parent	375	2.44	.461
Authoritarian Parent	375	3.76	.576
Permissive Parent	375	2.75	.398
Neglectful Parent	375	1.96	.351

The descriptive statistics reveal that participants predominantly experienced authoritarian parenting, with a mean score of 3.76, suggesting an upbringing characterized by strict rules and high expectations, though possibly less emotional warmth. This style showed the highest variability (SD = 0.576), indicating diverse experiences among participants. In contrast, neglectful parenting had the lowest mean score (1.96) and least variability (SD = 0.351), suggesting minimal exposure to this style and consistent perceptions of caregivers as generally engaged. Moderate scores for permissive (2.75) and authoritative (2.44) parenting styles indicate that these approaches were somewhat experienced but were not dominant. Permissive parenting, characterized by high warmth and low control, showed the least variability (SD = 0.398), while authoritative parenting, combining high warmth and appropriate control, displayed moderate consistency (SD = 0.461).

## Analysis of Current Parenting Styles Adopted by Participants as Young Mothers

This section explores the parenting styles currently adopted by young mothers, focusing on how they approach raising their children. Table 2 provides a summary of the data from 375 participants, highlighting parenting styles and showing patterns in their choices and behaviors.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Current Parenting Styles Adopted by Participants as Young Mothers

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current Authoritative	375	4.08	.377
Current Authoritarian	375	2.49	.852
Current Permissive	375	2.63	.834
Current Neglectful	375	2.1179	.40488

The analysis of parenting styles adopted by young mothers reveals that authoritative parenting, with the highest mean score (4.08) and lowest variability (SD=0.377), is the predominant style, characterized by high warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate control, suggesting a balanced and effective approach. In contrast, authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes high control and low warmth, has a lower mean score (2.49) and the highest variability (SD=0.852), indicating it is less frequently adopted but varies widely among participants. Permissive parenting, with a mean score of 2.63 and variability similar to authoritarian parenting (SD=0.834), reflects a moderate tendency toward leniency, prioritizing emotional closeness over control. Neglectful parenting, with the lowest mean score (2.12) and moderate variability (SD=0.405), is the least adopted style, indicating that most young mothers actively engage with their children and avoid neglectful behaviors.



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# Relationships between the parenting style participants experienced in childhood and the one they have adopted

This section examines the relationship between the parenting styles participants experienced during their childhood and the styles they have adopted as young mothers. By analyzing these connections, Table 3 highlights how early experiences with parenting may influence current parenting practices, shedding light on intergenerational patterns and behaviors.

Table 3: Correlation between Childhood Parenting Styles and Current Parenting Styles Adopted by Young Mothers

	Current Authoritative	Current Authoritarian	Current Permissive	Current Neglectful
Authoritative Parent	r = 0.021	r = -0.109	r = -0.236	r = 0.006
Authoritarian Parent	r = 0.001	r = -0.013	r = -0.128	r = 0.053
Permissive Parent	r = 0.126	r = -0.105	r = -0.012	r = 0.041
Neglectful Parent	r = -0.048	r = 0.022	r = 0.099	r = 0.000

The analysis of the correlation between childhood parenting styles and current parenting styles reveals several key patterns. For individuals raised with authoritative parenting, there is a very weak and non-significant correlation with current authoritative parenting (r = 0.021), suggesting that childhood authoritative parenting does not strongly predict the adoption of the same style in adulthood. However, there is a weak negative correlation with current authoritarian parenting (r = -0.109), indicating that those raised with an authoritative style are less likely to adopt an authoritarian style as adults. A moderate negative relationship is observed between childhood authoritative parenting and current permissive parenting (r = -0.236), suggesting that individuals raised with authoritative parenting are less likely to adopt a permissive style in adulthood. There is no significant correlation with current neglectful parenting (r = 0.006), indicating that authoritative parenting in childhood does not predict neglectful behavior in the present. For those raised with authoritarian parenting, there is no relationship with current authoritative parenting (r = 0.001). The correlation with current authoritarian parenting is extremely weak and non-significant (r = -0.013), suggesting that authoritarian parenting in childhood does not predict the continuation of authoritarian practices in adulthood. A weak negative correlation with current permissive parenting (r = -0.128) implies that individuals raised in authoritarian households may be slightly less likely to adopt a permissive style. There is no significant relationship with current neglectful parenting (r = 0.053). Regarding individuals raised with permissive parenting, there is a weak positive relationship with current authoritative parenting (r = 0.126), suggesting that permissive parenting in childhood may slightly increase the likelihood of adopting an authoritative style as an adult. The correlation with current authoritarian parenting is weak and negative (r = -0.105), indicating that permissive parenting in childhood may decrease the likelihood of adopting authoritarian practices in adulthood. There is no significant correlation with current permissive or neglectful parenting. Finally, for those raised with neglectful parenting, no significant correlations are observed with any current parenting style, with very weak relationships found with authoritative (r = -0.048), authoritarian (r = 0.022), permissive (r = 0.099), and neglectful (r = 0.000) styles. This suggests that childhood neglectful parenting has minimal influence on current parenting practices.

## **Predictive Power of Demographic Factors on Parenting Styles**

This section explores how demographic factors, such as age, education level, marital status, and socioeconomic status, influence the parenting styles adopted by participants. Tables 4 presents the results, highlighting the extent to which these factors predict participants' choice of parenting style.



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Table 4: Regression Analysis of Demographic Factors Predicting Parenting Styles

Parenting Style	Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Authoritative	Constant	4.000	.099		40.474	.000
	Age	.000	.029	.001	.015	.988
	Marital Status	.025	.026	.050	.965	.335
	Level of Education	003	.027	007	123	.902
	Area of residence	.030	.046	.040	.651	.515
	Occupation	002	.020	005	101	.919
Authoritarian	Constant	3.168	.217		14.588	.000
	Age	.044	.065	.036	.682	.495
	Marital Status	029	.058	026	504	.614
	Level of Education	.004	.060	.004	.067	.947
	Area of residence	416	.102	244	-4.072	.000
	Occupation	040	.044	046	907	.365
Permissive	Constant	3.329	.201		16.600	.000
	Age	.001	.060	.001	.017	.986
	Marital Status	.030	.053	.027	.566	.572
	Level of Education	.091	.055	.091	1.638	.102
	Area of residence	735	.094	441	-7.791	.000
	Occupation	.049	.041	.057	1.196	.232
Neglectful	Constant	2.184	.106		20.569	.000
	Age	.011	.032	.018	.339	.734
	Marital Status	009	.028	017	323	.747
	Level of Education	040	.029	082	-1.353	.177
	Area of residence	.021	.050	.026	.426	.670
	Occupation	.000	.022	.001	.023	.982

The constant value of 4.000 represents the predicted Current Authoritative Parenting Style score when all independent variables (demographic factors) are zero, serving as a baseline. The analysis shows that none of the demographic factors significantly predict the authoritative parenting style. Specifically, age has a coefficient of 0.000 with a p-value of 0.988, indicating it is not a significant predictor. Marital status, with a coefficient of



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0.025 and a p-value of 0.335, also does not significantly influence the parenting style. Similarly, level of education (-0.003, p = 0.902), area of residence (0.030, p = 0.515), and occupation (-0.002, p = 0.919) all have high p-values, suggesting they do not significantly affect the authoritative parenting style. As all p-values are above the typical significance threshold of 0.05, these demographic factors do not appear to have a strong influence on participants' current authoritative parenting style.

The results of the regression analysis show the relationship between various demographic factors and the Current Authoritarian Parenting Style score. The constant value of 3.168 represents the baseline parenting style score when all the independent variables (demographic factors) are zero. Among the factors, age (coefficient = 0.044, p = 0.495), marital status (coefficient = -0.029, p = 0.614), level of education (coefficient = 0.004, p = 0.947), and occupation (coefficient = -0.040, p = 0.365) do not significantly affect authoritarian parenting style, as their p-values are greater than 0.05. However, area of residence (coefficient = -0.416, p = 0.000) is a significant predictor of authoritarian parenting style, with a negative relationship. This means that participants living in certain areas may be more likely to adopt an authoritarian parenting style, and this effect is statistically significant. The only significant demographic factor affecting authoritarian parenting style is area of residence, while the others do not have a strong influence.

The regression analysis results show the relationship between various demographic factors and the Current Permissive Parenting Style score. The constant value of 3.329 represents the baseline permissive parenting style score when all independent variables (demographic factors) are zero. Among the factors, age (coefficient = 0.001, p = 0.986), marital status (coefficient = 0.030, p = 0.572), and occupation (coefficient = 0.049, p = 0.232) do not significantly affect permissive parenting style, as their p-values are higher than 0.05. Level of education (coefficient = 0.091, p = 0.102) also shows no significant effect on permissive parenting style, though it is approaching significance. However, area of residence (coefficient = -0.735, p = 0.000) is a significant predictor of permissive parenting style, with a negative relationship. This indicates that participants living in certain areas may be less likely to adopt a permissive parenting style, and this effect is statistically significant. The only significant demographic factor influencing permissive parenting style is area of residence, while others do not show a strong impact.

The regression analysis results show the relationship between various demographic factors and the Current Neglectful Parenting Style score. The constant value of 2.184 represents the baseline neglectful parenting style score when all independent variables (demographic factors) are zero. The analysis indicates that none of the demographic factors significantly influence the neglectful parenting style. Specifically, age (coefficient = 0.011, p = 0.734), marital status (coefficient = -0.009, p = 0.747), level of education (coefficient = -0.040, p = 0.177), area of residence (coefficient = 0.021, p = 0.670), and occupation (coefficient = 0.000, p = 0.982) all have high p-values, suggesting that they do not have a significant impact on neglectful parenting style. These demographic factors do not appear to be strong predictors of participants' current neglectful parenting style.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study revealed a notable shift from authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict rules and control, to authoritative parenting, which balances warmth, responsiveness, and structure. This transition is reflective of global trends where younger generations adopt more nurturing and emotionally supportive parenting styles, as highlighted by Li and Fung (2023). The shift aligns with research by Mazzuca et al. (2022), which found that individuals often adapt or modify parenting practices based on both past experiences and exposure to evolving societal norms.

In Kenya, this transformation is further influenced by cultural and societal dynamics. Traditional practices, while still significant, are increasingly integrated with modern parenting philosophies, as evidenced in studies by Mwiti and Kihika (2021). Education, access to digital information, and changing societal expectations have empowered young mothers to prioritize their children's emotional well-being and cognitive development over rigid authoritarian control. These findings resonate with Smetana et al. (2023), who emphasize the growing prevalence of communication and emotional connection in contemporary parenting.



Demographic factors such as age, marital status, and occupation were not found to significantly impact the parenting styles adopted by young mothers. However, the area of residence emerged as a critical factor, with urban mothers displaying more permissive tendencies compared to their rural counterparts. This observation is consistent with Kibet et al. (2024), who highlighted the influence of urbanization and exposure to diverse cultural practices on parenting behaviors.

The study also draws attention to the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles in Kenya, shaped by a dynamic interaction of traditional values and modern influences. While some maladaptive behaviors, such as neglect, persist across generations, positive practices emphasizing warmth and support are more consistently transmitted. This finding supports the research by Chen et al. (2023), which demonstrated that constructive parenting is often maintained across generations, particularly when reinforced by educational and social advancements.

Social Learning Theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), provides a robust framework for understanding these findings. Parenting behaviors are learned and adapted through observation and reinforcement, which explains the shift from authoritarian to authoritative approaches. The presence of new role models and exposure to evolving societal norms has allowed young mothers to reinterpret and modify the parenting behaviors they observed in their upbringing.

## **Discussion Limitations**

One limitation of this study is the potential for social desirability bias, where participants may have exaggerated positive behaviors or minimized negative experiences (Latkin et al., 2017). Additionally, the use of a crosssectional design limits the ability to track changes in parenting styles over time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how cultural and socio-economic factors influence parenting styles in Kenya, shedding light on their impact on child-rearing practices.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that young parents are increasingly adopting more balanced, engaged, and responsive parenting styles, contrasting with the authoritarian approaches prevalent in their own upbringing. This shift reflects a preference for authoritative parenting, characterized by nurturing and supportive behaviors, with a notably low incidence of neglectful parenting. These results underscore a strong commitment to responsible caregiving among young parents.

The findings correlated with the predictions and fail to reject the null hypothesis (H0) that demographic factors such as age, marital status, education, and occupation do not significantly influence parenting styles. However, the study rejects the null hypothesis (H0) regarding the influence of the area of residence, confirming its significance in shaping parenting practices.

This shift in parenting styles highlights the profound impact of past experiences, cultural norms, and societal expectations in shaping parental behaviors. These results emphasize the importance of addressing cultural and societal factors in designing interventions aimed at promoting positive parenting practices.

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