Mediating Effect of Problem Behavior on Parenting Practice and Academic Disengagement: A Case Study of Secondary School Students in Mombasa County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Disruptive behaviors such as arson attacks and violence are a common phenomenon in secondary schools. Problem behavior is a matter of concern among secondary school students and creates a vicious cycle as adolescents are likely to get involved in academic disengagement and ultimately drop out of school. The study investigates the relationships between parenting practices, problem behavior, and academic disengagement among adolescents aged 12–18 in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study utilized correlational design and quantitative methodology. The target population was all the 3286 students in Mombasa County at year two of study in secondary schools. Self-report questionnaires were used to collect data. Regression and mediation analyses were conducted to determine the interrelationships between parenting practices, problem behavior and academic disengagement. Parenting practice and academic disengagement have a negative and significant relationship, r (618) =-.266 ($p=0.015<0.05$). Parenting practices characterized by affection, support, effective communication, behavioral control, encouragement of autonomy was negatively associated with problem behavior. Problem behaviour and academic disengagement have a positive and significant relationship, r (618) = .483 ($p=.000<0.05$). Anxiety, anger, disruptive behaviors and aggression amongst other problem behaviors contribute to learner's conflicts with peers and teachers, disliking of the school, absenteeism, non-participation to co-curricular activities, rule breaking, and violence and bullying. Problem behavior mediates the relationship between parenting practice and academic disengagement. **Negative parenting** increases the likelihood of problem behaviors, which in turn **reduces school engagement**, leading to **academic disengagement** while positive parenting reduces the likelihood of problem behavior, thus enhancing academic engagement.

Keywords: Parenting Practices, Problem Behaviors, Problem Behaviors, Academic Disengagement, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Academic disengagement among adolescents has become a significant concern due to its long-term implications on individual development and national progress. Academic disengagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral disengagement includes actions such as low classroom participation, disruptive conduct, chronic absenteeism, and inattentiveness. Emotional disengagement reflects a lack of interest in schooling, marked by feelings of anxiety, boredom, and detachment from teachers, peers, and the school environment. Cognitive disengagement is demonstrated by minimal effort in academic tasks, lack of persistence, and low investment in learning processes (Sun, 2016).

Adolescents' detachment from academic life is closely associated with problem behavior, including delinquency, truancy, substance use, and acts of violence (Bally et al., 2014; Henry et al., 2015). Academic disengagement is not only predictive of poor academic outcomes but also of social maladjustment, including antisocial behaviors, teen pregnancies, job instability, and later life criminality (Tam, 2011). The phenomenon is particularly pronounced in many African countries, where dropout rates remain high due to poverty, inadequate educational infrastructure, and weak enforcement of compulsory education laws (OECD, 2012). Despite continental

similarities, significant variation exists between and within countries, highlighting the importance of contextualized investigations.

In Kenya, academic disengagement is evident in public secondary schools, where escalating incidents of delinquency, arson, and other disruptive behaviors have raised concerns about school safety and learning effectiveness (Steenberghs et al., 2021). These behaviors often mirror deeper psychological and familial problems, where students' disengagement becomes a coping mechanism in response to unmet emotional and academic needs (Shinali & Koech, 2019). The early adolescent years (ages 12–18) are a particularly vulnerable period for the emergence of such problem behaviors, underscoring the need for timely and effective interventions (Wang & Fredricks, 2019).

Among the most influential factors shaping adolescents' academic and behavioral outcomes are parenting practices. Effective parenting supports the healthy development of children's emotional regulation, moral reasoning, and academic motivation. Conversely, parenting practices characterized by unavailability, harshness, or inconsistency is associated with increased risk of behavioral problems (Pinquart, 2017). Research has shown that adolescents raised by authoritative parents, who combine warmth, responsiveness, and firm guidance exhibit fewer problem behaviors and demonstrate stronger academic engagement (Shute et al., 2011). In contrast, authoritarian, neglectful, or permissive parenting practices contribute to the development of behavioral disorders and school-related issues (Mutuku et al., 2019).In the Kenyan context, recent studies underscore the pivotal role of parental involvement in mitigating adolescents' behavioral problems. Wambugu and Karimi (2022) reported that paternal involvement in Nairobi County was negatively associated with deviant behavior. Similarly, Kiprop and Chepkilot (2011) emphasized the importance of regular parent-child interaction in promoting responsible behavior and academic responsibility. When parents closely monitor their children's academic progress and participate in school activities, adolescents are more likely to develop self-control and a positive attitude toward learning.

Statement of the Problem

Academic disengagement among adolescents is a growing concern in Kenyan secondary schools, manifesting in behaviors such as absenteeism, truancy, disruptive conduct, and minimal cognitive effort. These issues are particularly acute in Mombasa County, where national and local reports highlight worrying trends. According to the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC-MLA, 2021), 42.6% of students in Mombasa County experience chronic absenteeism, and 18.4% are affected by substance use—both indicators of academic withdrawal. The high prevalence of these behaviors undermines educational attainment and contributes to broader societal challenges, including youth involvement in criminal gangs and increased school dropout rates (Ministry of Education, 2021).

National statistics indicate that 97.5% of students across 30 counties have engaged in some form of indiscipline ranging from lateness to truancy and substance abuse, regional disparities and gender are evident. Boys report higher levels of behavioral problems than girls with form two students appearing more vulnerable. In Mombasa, these challenges are exacerbated by socio-economic factors, such as the predominance of day schooling and limited parental supervision. Despite these alarming trends, a key factor often overlooked in addressing academic disengagement is the role of parenting.

Extensive research has shown that parenting practices significantly influence adolescents' behavioral and academic outcomes. However, much of this evidence is drawn from Western and Asian contexts, where family structures, cultural norms, and educational environments differ substantially from those in sub-Saharan Africa (Alvarez-Gracia et al., 2016; Levinthal et al., 2022). Comparative studies have highlighted that parenting styles may yield divergent behavioral outcomes depending on cultural context (Checa et al., 2019; Fleming et al., 2016), thereby limiting the applicability of foreign findings to the Kenyan setting.

Moreover, the existing body of local research often treats academic disengagement and problem behavior as separate outcomes, rather than exploring their interrelated dynamics. Specifically, the mediating role of adolescent problem behavior in the relationship between parenting practices and academic disengagement remains underexplored. This theoretical gap is significant, as parenting may influence school engagement not

only directly but also indirectly by shaping adolescents' behavioral dispositions.

Mombasa County provides a critical case for such an investigation due to its unique socio-cultural and economic context. The region's high rates of absenteeism, dropout, and youth criminality point to a breakdown in familial and institutional support systems. Given that early adolescence (ages 12–18) is a developmental window marked by identity formation and increased vulnerability to peer and environmental influences, understanding the family-level determinants of school engagement is imperative.

This study therefore aims to fill a critical gap by investigating how parenting practices influence academic disengagement among adolescents in Mombasa County, with particular attention to the mediating role of problem behavior. Generating localized, empirical insights on this relationship is essential for informing culturally responsive interventions that strengthen family engagement and reduce the risk of academic and behavioral failure.

Objectives

The objectives of the study was; to examine the extent to which problem behavior mediates the relationship between parenting practices and academic disengagement among form two students.

Hypothesis

H_{01}: Problem behavior has no mediating role in the relationship between parenting practice and academic disengagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Triadic Theory, Social Learning Theory and Problem Behavior Theory.

Triadic Theory

Triadic Theory, proposed by Flay and Petraitis (1994), offers a multidimensional framework for understanding health-related and behavioral outcomes by integrating intrapersonal, interpersonal, and sociocultural-environmental influences. The theory builds on earlier models such as Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, offering a more comprehensive explanation of how behaviors develop through different levels of causation—ultimate, distal, and proximal factors (Flay, Petraitis, & Hu, 1995).

In the context of this study, ultimate influences, such as cultural norms, societal values, and social bonding, inform the foundational environment in which adolescents are socialized. For instance, societal expectations in Mombasa regarding academic success and respect for authority may indirectly shape adolescent behavior by influencing parenting styles and community-level reinforcements. Distal influences, including personality traits and self-efficacy, help explain individual differences in adolescents' responsiveness to parenting practices, while proximal influences, such as peer interactions and parental discipline, have immediate and observable effects on behavior and engagement.

The theory directly informs the study's conceptualization of parenting practices as both interpersonal and sociocultural forces that can promote or deter adolescent problem behavior and academic disengagement. For example, poor parent-child bonding or inconsistent discipline may compromise self-control and value internalization, increasing the likelihood of school-related misconduct. Furthermore, as demonstrated in studies such as Bixter et al. (2020), triadic theory helps explain how early relational patterns shape self-perception and future-oriented behaviors, making it a valuable lens for exploring the developmental trajectory of behavioral disengagement in adolescents. Thus, Triadic Theory not only justifies the selection of parenting practices and problem behavior as key variables but also frames the hypothesized pathways through which these variables interact.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), posits that learning occurs within a social context, primarily through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. According to the theory, children and adolescents adopt behaviors by observing models in their environment particularly parents and interpreting the consequences of those behaviors. If a behavior is positively reinforced, it is likely to be repeated; if punished, it is likely to be avoided (Leff et al., 2009).

This theory is central to the present study's focus on how adolescents model problem behaviors and academic disengagement in response to parenting practices. In the Kenyan context, adolescents frequently interact within extended family structures and community settings where behaviors are readily observed and emulated. Parental warmth, conflict resolution styles, and disciplinary methods serve not only as direct influences but also as templates for how adolescents engage with authority figures in academic environments.

Social Learning Theory helps explain why adolescents exposed to harsh or inconsistent parenting may adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms such as truancy, defiance, or low academic motivation. As supported by Detweiler et al. (2014), children of less emotionally available parents are more likely to develop internalizing problems like anxiety and depression psychological conditions often linked with academic disengagement. Furthermore, Obwocha (2018) found that adolescents in Kenya subjected to ineffective parenting were more prone to antisocial behavior, reinforcing the theory's applicability to this setting.

The theory underpins this study's assumption that family-based socialization shapes behavioral tendencies, thus guiding both the formulation of research questions and the selection of observable behaviors associated with disengagement. It also highlights the importance of context-specific modeling, where adolescents might reproduce not just parental behavior, but also reactions to academic stress, societal expectations, and peer dynamics.

Problem Behavior Theory (PBT)

Problem Behavior Theory, advanced by Jessor and Jessor (1977), provides a holistic framework for understanding the emergence and co-occurrence of problem behaviors such as substance use, delinquency, and academic underachievement. The theory introduces the concept of Problem Behavior Syndrome (PBS), which suggests that these behaviors are not isolated but tend to cluster due to common underlying causes such as personality traits, social norms, and environmental conditions.

In this study, PBT is particularly valuable in contextualizing academic disengagement and problem behavior as interrelated outcomes influenced by multiple psychosocial domains. It emphasizes the interaction of risk factors (impulsivity, poor parental monitoring, peer influence) and protective factors (parental support, school attachment) in determining adolescents' behavioral trajectories. The theory is especially relevant for adolescents in Mombasa County, where socio-economic and cultural pressures may heighten exposure to both risk and protective influences.

By acknowledging that behavior varies across developmental stages, PBT explains why early adolescence (12–15 years) might exhibit higher vulnerability to externalizing behaviors, while older adolescents may display internalizing symptoms like withdrawal or apathy. As Bloom (1990) and Norman & Turner (1993) assert, these behavioral outcomes are also shaped by cultural norms, suggesting that PBS may manifest differently in African contexts. For example, Darvishi et al. (2022) found that perceived support reduced deviant behaviors, aligning with the present study's emphasis on parenting as a protective or risk-enhancing force.

PBT shapes this study's theoretical foundation by providing a mechanism for linking parenting practices to behavioral and academic outcomes, while also emphasizing the developmental and cultural context of the adolescents. It supports the hypothesis that disengaged students may not merely be unmotivated, but are potentially caught in a broader behavioral syndrome stemming from both familial and societal influences.

Empirical Review

Parenting practices significantly influence adolescents' academic engagement and achievement across African

contexts. Multiple empirical studies have reported that authoritative parenting characterized by a balance of warmth and control is positively associated with better academic outcomes. Mihret, Dilgasa, and Mamo (2019) found that Ethiopian adolescents who perceived their parents as authoritative reported the highest levels of academic motivation, while those with neglectful parents showed the lowest motivation. Authoritarian parenting styles had intermediate effects, sometimes showing moderate positive outcomes, though not as significant as authoritative parenting. Kugbey, Mawulikem, and Atefoe (2015) observed that parenting styles in Ghana, significantly influenced students' self-esteem and academic performance, with authoritative parenting again linked to the most favorable results. Sherr et al. (2017) demonstrated that good parenting defined by warmth, support, and absence of harshness predicted fewer educational risks such as school absenteeism and grade repetition. These findings suggest that positive parenting fosters stronger school engagement and academic progress.

Conversely, adolescents from disrupted family environments or exposed to delinquent behaviors often struggle academically. Marenyenye (2023) reported in a qualitative Zimbabwean study that juvenile delinquency often emerging from domestic instability and violence was associated with declining academic achievement. These findings reinforce the notion that parental support and supervision are crucial for promoting regular attendance, homework completion, and sustained academic interest, while harsh or uninvolved parenting can result in academic disengagement, including absenteeism and school dropout.

Problem behaviors often serve as a mediating mechanism between parenting practices and academic engagement. That is, parenting indirectly affects academic outcomes by influencing adolescents' behavioral and emotional regulation. Sherr et al. (2017) found that positive parenting led to increased self-esteem and fewer behavioral problems, which in turn lowered educational risk. Specifically, emotional issues such as depression and trauma mediated the relationship between parenting quality and school engagement. Adolescents raised in warm, structured, and non-violent environments were less likely to develop externalizing behaviors, making them more likely to stay in school and perform well academically.

Marenyenye (2023) noted that youth engaging in delinquent behavior often rooted in poor family dynamics tended to experience diminished academic achievement. Although direct mediation analyses remain limited in African samples, studies from Ghana and elsewhere indicate that parental warmth buffers adolescents against the negative effects of adversity, thereby reducing aggressive tendencies (Huang et al., 2018). These reduced behavioral issues, in turn, support academic persistence. This behavioral pathway suggests that harsh or neglectful parenting elevates the risk of problem behavior, which can lead to academic disengagement. By contrast, authoritative parenting not only directly supports educational engagement but also indirectly enhances it by fostering emotional well-being and behavioral self-regulation.

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, correlational, and mediation-focused research design. The primary objective was to examine the relationships between parenting practices, problem behavior, and academic disengagement among adolescents, as well as to explore the mediating role of problem behavior in this relationship. A quantitative approach was appropriate as it enabled the collection of numerical data through standardized self-report questionnaires, facilitating the statistical examination of associations and predictive patterns.

B. Target Population

The target population comprised all Form Two students enrolled in 16 public day secondary schools in Mombasa County, Kenya, totaling 3,286 students (1,755 girls and 1,531 boys). Adolescents in Form Two typically range between 13 to 18 years of age. This population was chosen due to the developmental relevance of the variables under investigation at this stage of adolescence.

C. Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, involving stratified random sampling and simple random

sampling. Schools were stratified by type (girls-only, boys-only, and mixed) to ensure representation across different educational contexts. Two schools were randomly selected from each stratum, resulting in six schools. Within each school, simple random sampling was used to select 80 students, culminating in a total sample size of 640 participants. Gender representation was balanced as much as possible through proportional selection.

D. Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured self-report questionnaire, divided into four sections:

Demographic Information

This section collected background data including gender, age, socioeconomic status, and school characteristics.

Parenting Practices Scale (PPS)

The PPS, developed by Álvarez-García et al. (2016), consists of 24 items grouped into six dimensions: warmth and support, communication, behavioral control, psychological control, autonomy, and involvement. Each dimension contains four items measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = completely false to 4 = completely true). The scale was adapted with permission and scored by summing item responses.

Problem Behavior Scale

The 22-item scale was adapted from the Youth Self-Report (YSR) and Lau et al. (2019), covering internalizing (withdrawal, anxiety, and depression) and externalizing (delinquent and aggressive) behaviors. Responses were rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = not true, 2 = sometimes true, 3 = often true). Higher scores indicated more problem behaviors.

Academic Disengagement Tool (ADT)

Adapted from Stewart et al. (2015) and Chipchase et al. (2017), the 23-item ADT measures cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disengagement. Items are rated on a 4-point scale (1 = never to 4 = always). A total score above 72 indicated high disengagement.

Self-report questionnaires are effective for assessing internal perceptions, they are subject to biases such as social desirability. This study mitigated such risks by ensuring participant anonymity and emphasizing confidentiality in responses.

E. Validity of Instruments

Face and Content Validity

Face validity was established by piloting the questionnaire with a subset of students, who provided feedback on clarity and relevance. Content validity was supported by adapting instruments previously validated in adolescent populations.

Exploratory Factor Analysis Construct Validity

(EFA) with Varimax rotation was conducted. All items were retained for analysis since they had factor loadings exceeding 0.4, indicating strong item correlations with the underlying constructs. The weakest loading is for Withdrawal (.410) and Psychological Control (.457), suggesting these dimensions are less strongly represented in the overall construct.

Table I Factor Loadings

Items	Factor Loading
Affection, Support and Communication	.628

Encourage Autonomy	.633
Behavioural Control	.592
Psychological Control	.457
Withdrawal	.410
Depression	.564
Anxiety	.463
Delinquent Problems	.520
Aggressive Behaviour	.545
Cognitive Disengagement	.621
Emotional Disengagement	.675
Behavioural Disengagement	.635

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Tests were conducted to determine whether the constructs in the research instrument have construct validity. All the constructs in the research instrument had p-values of .000, which is less than .05 ($p < 0.05$) in Bartlett's Sphericity implying that there were significant. KMO value of .810 indicates meritorious sampling adequacy while the Bartlett's test result confirms that the data is factorable.

Table II KMO and Barlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.810
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1610.865
	Df	66
	Sig.	.000

F. Reliability

The split-half method was preferred because of the large number of items in the research instrument. The Guttman split-half coefficient was .842 indicating high levels of reliability. The reliability statistics in Table III demonstrate that the instrument used in the study possesses excellent internal consistency**.** The coefficients are well above the accepted threshold of 0.7, the instrument is theoretically and methodologically sound for measuring parenting practices, adolescent problem behaviors, and academic disengagement. The strong reliability supports the validity of subsequent analyses and conclusions drawn from the data collected among adolescents in Mombasa County.

Table III Reliability Test

		N of Items	31[a]
	Part 2	Value	.836
		N of Items	30[b]
	Total N of Items		61
Correlation Between Forms			.728
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.842
	Unequal Length		.842
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.842

The reliability of each construct and item used in the study was verified using Cronbach's Alpha. As a general rule, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable, indicating that the constructs are reliable in achieving the study's objectives. The questionnaire's internal consistency was checked because the research instruments had been modified. To determine the scale's reliability, the split-half method was used. The questions were divided into two halves: even-numbered and odd-numbered questions. The scores obtained for both halves were correlated to obtain a reliability coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.836, indicating high levels of reliability of the scales. Table III represents the results.

Table IV Cronbach's Alpha

	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Parenting Practices	16	.795
Internalizing Behaviors	12	.757
Externalizing Behaviors	10	.872
Academic Disengagement	23	.896
Total	61	.837

RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive of Parenting Practice by Gender

Table V Descriptive of Parenting Practice by Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	50.6298	307	9.20091	19.00	64.00	1.610	-1.030
Female	49.3900	311	6.59871	27.00	64.00	.227	-.370
Total	50.006	618	7.45767	19.00	64.00	1.256	-.665

The results presented indicate that the parenting practice values for boys was 50.6298 with standard deviation of 9.2 while parenting practice values in girls were 49.39 with standard deviation of 6.59871. The lowest value in boys was 19 while the highest was 64, which was also the highest scale for girls. The lowest parenting practice value in girls was 27. There is no significant difference in parenting practices between boys and girls, this is in coherence with findings of Alvarez-Gracia (2016). The skewness values were -1.030 for boys and -.370 for girls. This implies, that students generally perceive their parents as supportive, which may have implications for behavioral outcomes. The kurtosis values are less than 2 indicating that the data has normal distribution.

Descriptive of Problem Behavior by Gender

Table VI Descriptive of Problem Behavior by Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	38.7348	307	13.57147	23.00	66.00	1.613	1.094
Female	36.3349	311	8.71372	23.00	61.00	1.091	.950
Total	37.5271	618	11.12687	23.00	66.00	1.688	1.240

The means for problem behaviour by gender for girls and boys were 36.3349 (SD=8.71372) and 38.7348 (13.57147) respectively. The maximum problem behaviour value was 61 for girls and 66 for boys. Both boys and girls had a minimum problem behaviour value of 23. The skewness values for boys and girls were 1.094 and

0.95. This implies that most students reported lower levels of problem behavior, with fewer reporting high levels. The kurtosis values were 1.613 and 1.091 implying that the distribution was normal distribution. The results are in coherence with findings of Lau et al. (2021) who established that boys exhibit high levels of problem behaviour compared to girls.

Descriptive of Academic Disengagement

Table VII Descriptive Statistics of Academic Disengagement by Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Kurtosis	Skewness
Male	35.3978	307	9.00227	25.00	80.00	1.690	1.354
Female	36.4218	311	6.89657	23.00	59.00	.155	.298
Total	35.9131	618	7.56814	23.00	80.00	1.217	1.251

The mean for academic disengagement for boys was 35.3978 (SD=9.002) while girls had 36.42 (SD=6.897). Girls had the lowest academic disengagement value of 23 while boys had the highest disengagement value of 80. The lowest value in boys was 25 while the highest value in girls was 59. The academic disengagement values in boys and girls were skewed towards low levels of academic disengagement. The kurtosis values reported for boys and girls were 1.690 and 0.155 respectively indicating normal distribution. The results showed slightly higher academic disengagement in girls than in boys. These findings align with regional studies suggesting that girls may face greater structural barriers to sustained engagement.

Table VIII Autocorrelation Test

Model	Durbin- Watson
1	2.057

Durbin-Watson test was carried out and the value obtained was 2.057 which is greater than the threshold of 2.0. This suggests that the residuals are independent and regression assumptions are met.

Table IX Multi-Collinearity

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
	Parenting Practices	.989	1.011
	Problem Behavior	.989	1.011

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of the parenting practices and problem behavior was calculated before being incorporated in the model to determine there was multi-collinearity. Table IX represents the findings, where VIF values for both parenting practice and problem behavior were 1.011, which is less than 5.0.This confirms that parenting practice and problem behavior are not strongly correlated, making them suitable for inclusion in the same regression model.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis of the study was;

H_{01}: Problem behavior mediates the relationship between parenting practice and academic disengagement among form two students.

When parenting practice and problem behaviour were regressed against academic disengagement, the model

obtained were:

$Y= 39.340-0.266X_1$

$Y= 23.105+0.483X_2$

$Y= 23.105-0.22X_1+0.486X_2$

Where Y is academic disengagement while X_1 is parenting practice while X_2 is Problem Behaviour

Each unit increase in problem behavior is associated with an estimated 0.486 unit increase in academic disengagement, holding parenting practices constant. The model shows that when problem behavior is introduced, the predictive power of parenting practice on disengagement becomes non-significant (p = .540). This supports partial mediation since parenting practice impacts academic disengagement both directly and indirectly through problem behavior.

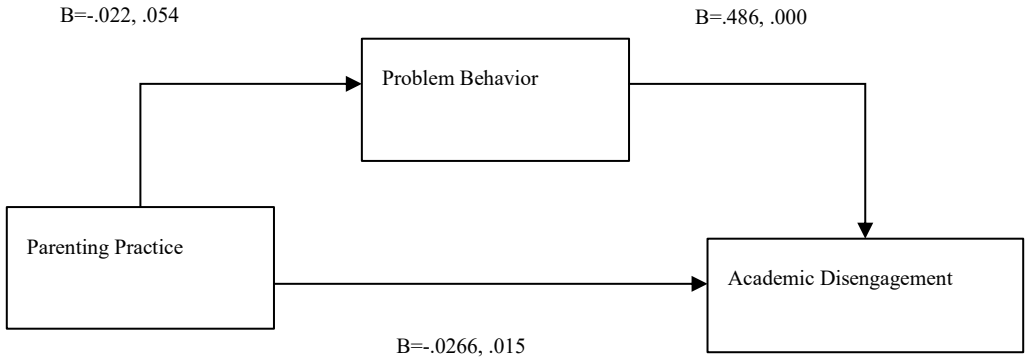

Figure 1: Mediation Analysis

Table X Beta Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	24.150	2.166		11.151	.000
	Parenting Practices	-.022	.037	-.022	-.613	.540
	Problem Behaviour	.351	.026	.486	13.456	.000

The results in Table X displays the beta coefficient when parenting practice and problem behaviour was regressed against academic disengagement. The beta coefficient for parenting practice was -.022 and p=.054 while that of problem behaviour was .486(p=.000), implying that problem behaviour has a positive and significant relationship with academic disengagement while parenting practice has a negative and insignificant relationship with academic disengagement. Inclusion of problem behaviour in the model reduces the significance of parenting practice on academic disengagement, this implies that problem behavior mediates the relationship between parenting practice and academic disengagement.

Table XI Summary of the Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.489[a]	.239	.237	6.62529

The results on coefficient of determination R-squared at 95% are displayed in Table XI, where the calculated value was .239 while the adjusted R-squared was .237 implying that the parenting practice and problem behaviour predicts a variance of 23.7 percent on academic disengagement. The results reinforce the model's reliability in estimating the academic disengagement for the broader population. However, 76.1% of the variance is unexplained, suggesting that other influential factors such as peer relationships, school climate, socioeconomic status, teacher engagement, or mental health are likely contribute to academic disengagement.

Table XII ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2393346.134	589	4063.406	92.573	.000
	Residual	1229.032	28	43.894		
	Total	2394575.166	617			

The findings in Table XII show the regressed sum of squares was 2393346.134 while that of residuals was 43.894, giving a total variance was 2394575.166. The F-test value calculated was 92.575, which is greater than the F-critical (1.562) at 95% confidence level. The strength of variation between problem behavior and academic disengagement was significant since the p=.000 which is less than .05. The F-test result confirms that the regression model significantly predicts academic disengagement, validating the inclusion of parenting and problem behavior as meaningful variables in your analysis, therefore we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that your model provides a significantly better fit to the data than a null model.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The intricate dynamics between parenting practices and academic disengagement are significantly influenced by the mediating role of problem behavior. Parenting styles characterized by psychological control can engender maladaptive academic functioning. Psychological control leads to emotional distress in children thus making them internalize negative feelings and experiences. Children subjected to psychological control may develop low self-esteem and a poor self-image, which can contribute to feelings of anxiety and depression. Students with internalizing issues may struggle to connect with peers, leading to social isolation. This can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and disengagement from both social and academic activities. parents exert high levels of psychological control inhibits them from developing autonomy and exhibit low levels of self-esteem. Children with low self-esteem have a high likelihood of adopting disruptive behaviors from their peers so as to conform to the group and avoid rejection. This interferes with their cognitive abilities making the learners to be cognitively disengaged. Adoption of disruptive behaviors so as to conform to the group dynamics leads to behavioral and emotional disengagement (Steenberghs et. al., 2021).

Parenting practices that involve warmth, responsiveness, and granting of autonomy are associated with lower levels of problem behavior (Carless, 2014). Warm and supportive parenting makes children feel valued, hence minimizes anxiety and self-doubt. Parenting practices that support autonomy reduces maladaptive academic functioning by promoting mastery goal orientations, thereby potentially mitigating academic disengagement. Autonomy support fosters emotional expression and regulation, helping individuals cope better with stress and challenges. Emotional regulation and high levels of self-esteem are associated with high levels of academic engagement.

Inconsistent or negative parenting can lead to the development of problem behaviors in children. For instance, children who experience neglect or harsh discipline may respond with defiance or aggression. Aggressive behaviors may lead to conflicts with peers, teachers and staff resulting in social isolation. Punitive and harsh discipline can increase adolescents' relational aggression. This relational aggression can then contribute to academic disengagement, as students become more focused on social strife than academic pursuits.

Parenting helps shape academic and behavior outcomes in adolescents. Ignorance, negligence and isolation from the side of the parent encourages the development of problem behavior and academic disengagement while

support and sensitive parenting practices encourages positive outcomes in adolescents since the children are greatly involved in school work, have high self-esteem and reduced levels of behavior problems (Llorca et. al. 2017).

Parenting practices that are based on mutual support, warmth and encourage autonomy were positively related to high levels of academic outcomes and negatively related to problem behaviors. These children are able to overcome various distractors such as peer influence in school and exhibits high levels of academic focus since they are able to regulate their behaviors. Ineffective limit setting, psychologically controlling and coercive parenting is positively related to problem behaviors and low academic outcomes. Children who experience negative parenting practices are high susceptible to heightened levels of anxiety, aggression, externalizing behaviors which in turn makes it difficult for them to interact with peers, follow school rules, be motivated to learn and exercise self-control (Checa et. al. 2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that parenting practices significantly influence adolescent academic engagement, both directly and indirectly through the development of problem behaviors. Specifically, warm and supportive parenting characterized by affection, open communication, and encouragement of autonomy was associated with reduced emotional disengagement and improved academic outcomes**.** This style of parenting fosters a sense of self-worth, reduces anxiety and self-doubt, and promotes mastery-oriented goals, all of which support sustained academic involvement.

Conversely, negative parenting practices**,** such as psychological control, punitive discipline, and inconsistent behavioral regulation, were linked to the emergence of problem behaviors including aggression and delinquency. These behaviors not only strain peer and teacher relationships but also increase the likelihood of social isolation, school dissatisfaction, and disengagement from academic tasks. The study found that problem behavior partially mediates the relationship between parenting and academic disengagement, suggesting that the impact of parenting is partly channeled through its effects on behavioral development.

These results support the hypothesis that positive parenting mitigates academic disengagement, both directly and by reducing problem behaviors. Importantly, the study underscores that interventions aiming to reduce academic disengagement should target family dynamics, particularly by promoting supportive parenting strategies that reinforce autonomy and consistent behavioral boundaries.

Recommendations

Education stakeholders, including leaders of religious institutions, parent associations, and community-based organizations, should design structured awareness programs for parents. These programs should emphasize the importance of establishing a supportive home environment characterized by warmth, clear behavioral expectations, and autonomy support. Strengthening parent-child relationships through positive communication and consistent behavioral control can play a vital role in reducing problem behaviors and fostering academic commitment.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should consider developing policies that actively promote parental involvement in secondary education. These policies might include school-based initiatives such as parental engagement workshops, regular progress reporting systems, and family counseling services, all aimed at encouraging responsible and proactive parenting.

While the study found statistically significant gender differences with girls showing slightly higher levels of academic disengagement and boys displaying more problem behavior these patterns should be interpreted with cultural and contextual sensitivity. Interventions should avoid reinforcing stereotypes and instead adopt inclusive, evidence-based strategies. Schools should implement tailored mentorship and guidance programs that respond to the unique academic and behavioral challenges faced by both male and female students. For girls,

initiatives could focus on enhancing academic engagement and self-efficacy**,** addressing barriers such as gender-based expectations or socio-cultural limitations. For boys, targeted behavioral support programs, including peer mentorship, positive discipline models, and social-emotional learning, may help build self-regulation and prosocial behaviors.

Teachers and school counselors should receive ongoing professional development on adolescent behavioral dynamics, parenting influences, and early indicators of academic disengagement. This would empower educators to effectively collaborate with parents and implement responsive classroom strategies that promote engagement and positive behavior.

Further Research

The study advances the following recommendations for further research;

1. This study focused exclusively on individual-level factors (parenting practices and problem behavior) among Form Two students, without accounting for school-level influences such as institutional culture, teacher-student relationships, classroom climate, or school support systems. Future research should adopt a multilevel framework that integrates both individual and environmental factors. Including variables such as school ethos, peer dynamics, and teacher responsiveness could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ecological contributors to academic disengagement.

2. While this study analyzed global scores for parenting practices, problem behavior, and academic disengagement, future studies would benefit from a more granular, structural approach. Specifically, structural equation modeling (SEM) or path analysis could be used to investigate the unique and combined effects of sub-dimensions—such as behavioral vs. psychological control, or emotional vs. behavioral disengagement. This would allow for a more nuanced understanding of which parenting practices are most predictive of specific types of problem behavior and disengagement.

3. The current study was confined to students within Mombasa County. To enhance generalizability and examine regional variations in parenting styles, school culture, and adolescent behavior, future research should replicate the study across different counties and socio-cultural settings within Kenya. Such contextual replication can also uncover the potential moderating role of regional or cultural norms on parenting and adolescent adjustment.

4. Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, causal inferences cannot be made. Longitudinal research designs are recommended to trace the developmental trajectories of adolescents over time and examine how early parenting practices influence later academic and behavioral outcomes. Additionally, incorporating qualitative components—such as focus group discussions or in-depth interviews with parents, students, and teachers would enrich the understanding of contextual realities and lived experiences that underlie the quantitative findings.

5. The findings revealed gender differences in levels of academic disengagement and problem behavior. Future studies should explore these differences further by investigating gender-specific predictors and outcomes. Analytical models that test moderation by gender can provide more tailored insights and help design gender-responsive interventions.

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