

# The Relationship Between Parenting Styles and Oppositional Defiant Disorder. A case of Caregivers of Sunday School Children from Selected CITAM Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

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#### Abstract

One of the most prevalent categories of childhood disorders is behavioral and emotional issues. Using ineffective approaches to parenting can have detrimental effects such as behavioral issues. This study investigated the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) in Sunday school children in selected CITAM churches. The study adopted the Attachment Theory and Family System Theories. Being a correlational study, it employed a quantitative approach to gather and analyze data. This study used the Yamane (1967) and stratified random sampling procedure to select a sample of 314 parents of children aged 5-12 years from three selected CITAM churches including Valley Road, Woodley, and Karen. Data collection instruments included standardized questionnaires of Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Rating Scale (DBDRS). This study applied the SPSS version 27 software, to carry out quantitative data analysis using correlation analysis. The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive association between authoritarian parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), with results showing that higher levels of authoritarian parenting correlate with increased ODD symptoms in children (r = .297, p < .05, one-tailed). A similar trend was observed with permissive parenting, where a significant positive correlation (r = .272, p < .05, one-tailed) indicated that children raised in permissive environments are also more likely to exhibit oppositional and defiant behaviors. The study recommends that Parent Management Therapy (PMT) be incorporated to guide the parents on how they can support the children in avoiding conflicts with adults hence addressing oppositional behaviors.

Keywords: Parenting styles, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Sunday school children

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#### 1. Introduction

The many approaches that parents typically take when rearing youngsters are categorized under styles of parenting (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). The actions, mindsets, and psychological climate of caregivers that raise youngsters are all included in these approaches. Sanvictores and Mendez (2021) noted that a research investigation involving over one hundred preschool-aged children had been carried out in the 1960s by psychologist Diana Baumrind. Parental assessments, naturalistic investigation, and other methodologies for research were used to help identify certain key elements of parenthood. Interaction techniques, standards regarding authority and maturation, discipline tactics, tenderness, and nurture are some of the characteristics. Baumrind proposed that the majority of parents exhibit one of three styles of parenting by these metrics.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5-TR) defines ODD as a constant state of anger or irritability along with a tendency towards argumentative or defiant behavior, and a disposition towards vindictiveness directed at others (Aggarwal & Marwaha, 2022). Regarding oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), which is a behavioral illness prevalent in youngsters, its defining feature is a persistent sequence of rude, angry, and belligerent conduct against adult individuals. This pattern of behavior significantly impacts the child's relationships and functioning in various settings like the home, school, or social environments.

According to Namu (2022), the relationship between parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is significant. Parenting styles, such as authoritarian or uninvolved parenting, could make a child more likely to develop ODD. Authoritarian parents, who are strict and demanding without much warmth or responsiveness, can contribute to defiance and opposition in children. In a similar vein, inattentive parenting, which is defined as a lack of participation and responsiveness, may also be associated with ODD as children may not learn appropriate social behaviors or coping strategies. According to Elia (2017), if ODD cases are not handled during the formative years of a child, there is a likelihood that many years later, ODD-afflicted youngsters may also show signs of other problems, such as ADHD, anxiety, or depression. All said, 10% of youngsters with ODD diagnoses will go on to have a more persistent behavior condition, like a Disruptive Character condition.

Understanding the connection between parenting styles and ODD within church contexts necessitates investigation due to gaps in behavioral interventions. Churches heavily influence parenting based on cultural and religious beliefs, shaping ODD development uniquely and requiring tailored interventions. Despite being key support centers, churches may lack specific knowledge, leading to potential insufficiencies in aiding affected families. Exploring how religious approaches intersect with parenting styles is essential for interventions addressing emotional and spiritual needs (Kelley, Marks & Dollahite, 2022). Without this comprehension, interventions might not align with community values, risking reduced knowledge and awareness of ODD. Bridging this gap through research can enable culturally sensitive interventions meeting the needs of families in church environments dealing with ODD.

In Africa, longitudinal research was carried out in Butajira, southern Ethiopia to determine the severity of particular mental and behavior awareness in youngsters. Thirty-seven percent of youngsters who received interviews had either a behavioral disorder, such as disruptive behavior disarray, or a combination of mental illnesses (Pinquart & Kauser, 2017). According to Ghosh, Ray & Basu, (2017), in South Africa, studies among adolescent boys have



highlighted 12% rates of ODD are observed particularly among children affected by HIV, shedding light on the intersection of health disparities and behavioral challenges. Similarly, research in Nigeria has shown a significant prevalence of 8.3 % in oppositional defiant disorder in authoritarian parenting styles, alongside formal parental occupations, and higher socioeconomic status, contributing to the severity of oppositional defiant disorder (Kumuyi et al., 2021).

Sunday Schools have been a cornerstone of religious education for children and adolescents for centuries. Originating in the 18th century to address educational gaps, they provided religious instruction and basic skills, emphasizing moral values. Robert Raikes established the first Sunday School in 1780 in Gloucester, England. Today, these schools are still there, adapting modern teaching methods and materials to meet evolving societal needs and technological advancements. They remain fundamental in imparting religious education and moral guidance while nurturing spiritual growth within diverse faith communities, continuing their historical significance in shaping young individuals' upbringing (Leal, 2018; Cardona, 2022).

In Kenya, specifically in the Church context, limited research has been conducted on parenting styles and their relationship with oppositional defiant disorder, primarily focusing on adolescents rather than children (Erot, Oseko & Zigama, 2023). This study was conducted in selected CITAM churches to establish whether there is a relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) represents mental health concerns among children, characterized by a pattern of hostile, defiant, and disobedient behaviors toward authority figures. This disorder can severely affect various areas of a child's life, such as their academic performance, and relationships. As highlighted by Valera et al. (2013), inadequate parenting practices can lead to negative behavioral issues such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). According to Ghosh, Ray, and Basu (2017), the problem ODD presents among youngsters and adolescents is poor relationships with siblings, educators, caregivers, coworkers, and other people in authority. Other symptoms may include challenges in making and maintaining relationships, poor results in school unacceptable behavior, legal issues, impulse control problems, addictions to drugs, and self-harm among others. Lotfi and Vaziri (2017) state that most adolescent mental pathologies are behavioral and affective disorders. One of the things influencing how children develop their personalities is the parenting style they are exposed to where using ineffective methods can have a few detrimental effects, including behavioral disorders. Fostering affection and encouragement as well as creating norms are important aspects of parenting that have an impact on youngsters' growth which shows their achievement in school and relationships is greatly influenced by caregivers who demonstrate affection, straightforward interaction, and appropriate punishment.

Additionally, Fooladvand et al. (2021) argued that finding a balance between control and warmth, known as authoritative parenting, typically results in positive outcomes. Parenting styles have been linked to the development and manifestation of ODD. There is an opportunity for early intervention to identify, address, and prevent serious behavioral problems like ODD, ultimately making a significant positive impact on a child's life trajectory.

Globally, the connection between oppositional defiant disorder and parenting styles has been extensively investigated with many scholars concluding a significant relationship, especially



among children and adolescents. However, there exists a gap in understanding the specific relationship between parenting styles and ODD within the context of Sunday School children attending CITAM churches in Nairobi County, Kenya.

This study's main goal was to close this information gap by investigating the associations between various parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder in the Christian religious context. This study aimed to specifically highlight the association between parenting styles that are permissive, authoritative, authoritarian, uninvolved, and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) in Sunday school children attending particular CITAM churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. Such findings could be applied towards ultimately enhancing the ability to provide effective interventions and support for affected children and their families.

## 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by two theories, Attachment and Family system theories.

## 2.1.1 Attachment Theory

According to British psychologist John Bowlby (1969), Attachment theory is a framework that explores the significance of early emotional bonds between children and their primary caregivers in influencing the way they develop socially and emotionally. According to the theory, a stable bond with a caregiver during early childhood is essential for healthy psychological functioning and influences the formation of relationships throughout one's life.

The principles of attachment theory place a strong emphasis on the value of a child's emotional bond with their caregivers, especially in terms of offering a safe foundation for emotional control and exploration. A child's capacity to build relationships, control their emotions, and handle stress are just a few of the developmental features that can be impacted by the quality of the attachment relationship.

Within the framework of investigating the relationship between parenting approaches and ODD, attachment theory provides a valuable theoretical foundation. Parenting styles, as conceptualized by researchers like Diana Baumrind (2010), involve dimensions such as responsiveness, warmth, and control. Attachment theory suggests that the nature of these parenting styles can influence a child's attachment security and, consequently, their socio-emotional development.

The justification for using the Attachment theory is because it emphasizes how crucial a child's emotional connection is to their main caregivers and how they can have defiant behavior if there were no early attachments. In lieu of affecting the child's future connections, the interruption or extinction of this tie can have a mental and emotional effect on the youngster well into maturity attachment patterns and influencing the development of ODD in children.

# 2.1.2 Family System Theory

Family Systems Theory offers a multifaceted approach to understanding the relationship between parenting styles and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Philosophically, it conceptualizes the family as an interconnected unit where individual behaviors are shaped by family dynamics, emphasizing the interdependence among family members in influencing behavior, including the development of ODD, which is the focus of this study. Epistemologically, Family Systems Theory highlights the importance of systemic observation and research to uncover the complex interplay between parenting styles and ODD. The



researcher employed methods such as family assessments through parents and qualitative analyses to explore how different parenting styles contribute to ODD symptoms within the family system, recognizing the reciprocal influence between family dynamics and individual behavior.

# 2.2 Empirical Review

In the scope of child psychiatric disorders, behavioral and emotional issues stand out as prevalent concerns. Parenting styles wield significant influence over children's personality development, and the adoption of ineffective styles can lead to adverse outcomes, particularly in the form of behavioral problems. To explore diverse parenting styles and their associations with children's behavioral problems, Adler and Dreikurs Approach, Barclay's Parent Training Program, Kazdin's Parent Management Education Model, and the Positive Parenting Program are among the parenting techniques that are examined (Fooladvanmd et al., 2021).

Globally, there is a link in the way youngsters convey and elicit feelings correlated with methods of parenting, claim psychologists. Therapists can benefit youngsters better if they perform parents' therapy or specific guidance rather than dealing alongside them; a household's level of pressure and adaptability will determine how parents and professionals engage with youngsters (Fooladvand Nadi Abedi & Sajjadian, 2021). Parental responses to their children's behaviors, whether suitable or not, are a crucial element in the development and maintenance of healthy child behaviors, as evidenced by studies on learning ODD for youngsters (Chang'orok et al., 2018).

According to Granero, Louwaars, and Ezpeleta (2015), there is a clear correlation between a parent's approach to parenting and their child's conduct problems, particularly when it comes to ODD in the US. There is evidence of a direct link between ineffective parenting and troublesome conduct in early youngsters. Brutal parenting techniques, uneven punishment, and unfavorable emotional expression on the part of parents all have distinct and cumulative consequences on disruptive conduct in adolescents. According to Cruz-Alaniz, Martin, and Ballabriga (2018), research on how early parenting habits foresees signs of ODD afterward in life showed a negative correlation between maternal affection and ODD traits. ODD symptoms had been anticipated to have been caused by parental laxity and parent-rated aggressive conduct.

According to Lavigne et al. (2012), a study done in Europe revealed the connection between ODD in young children, parenting style, and parental instability. The relationship among depressive symptoms in parents and ODD in a neighborhood collection of preschoolers was investigated by Lavigne et al. (2012) who discovered that the child's personality traits (including adverse effects and tactile control) and the manner of parenting (severe animosity, a shortage of assistance, and a lack of scaffolding) caused this relationship.

A study done in Spain noted that youngsters in the oppositional defiant disorder category had a usual parenting style that is defined by the father's over-protectiveness and the mother's lack of concern, resulting in an affectionless, authoritarian parenting style according to Freeze, Burke, and Vorster (2014). Parenting with this approach was believed to elicit extreme control, poor emotional expression, little engagement with youngsters, and insufficient child oversight.

Another study sought to forecast aggression in children diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) by considering parenting styles and maternal patience. Conducted between 2020 and 2021 in Tehran City, this descriptive and correlational research included all mothers of children with ODD attending primary schools. Results revealed a significant negative



correlation between authoritative parenting style and mothers' patience with children's aggression, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles demonstrated a significant positive relationship. Stepwise regression analysis further indicated that authoritative parenting style, mothers' patience, and authoritarian parenting style jointly explained 48% of the variance in aggression among children with ODD (Jorshari, 2023).

Parental styles have a significant influence, but they have not been studied in Africa, despite knowing that they have been repeatedly linked to oppositional defiant disorder. The youngsters in the ODD category had a typical parenting style that was defined by the father's over-protectiveness and the mother's lack of concern, leading to an affectionless, authoritarian parenting style (Liu et al. 2018). High command limited emotional expression, young ones' engagement, and insufficient child oversight and evaluation are the outcomes of this parenting style.

Instead of discovering that ways of parenting had an impact on adolescent behavior, a Nigerian study conducted on teenagers in the central educational zone of Cross River State revealed that close connections between caregivers and teenagers reduced oppositional defiant disorders, family conflict caused by bad teenage behavior, anxiety, depressive disorders, and violence in the teenagers (Anake & Ada, 2015). According to Lavigne et al. (2012), a study done in Europe saw the connection between ODD in young children, parenting style, and parental instability. The relationship among depressive symptoms in parents and ODD in a neighborhood collection of preschoolers. Research on the impact of parenting on the defiant behavior of teenagers in Nairobi County, Kenya, revealed that the parenting style was statistically important when correlated with behavioral conduct levels (Gitonga, 2013). Although there have been a few research investigations on the subject, there are gaps in empirical evidence in Kenya. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to ascertain the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder among children and this makes the research reference crucial to the work since it addresses the emotional development of the children directly.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design, which is apt for examining the degree and direction of relationships without experimental manipulation. Using the views and observations of parents, the study attempted to quantify and examine the degree of associations between parenting practices and ODD symptoms. This approach facilitated systematic assessment, statistical analysis, and identification of patterns, allowing for a correlation of diverse parenting styles and variations in ODD symptoms across different age groups.

The target population for this study was 1450 parents, the study used Yamane (1967) formula and stratified random sampling procedure to select a sample of 314 parents of children aged 5-12 years from three selected CITAM churches including Valley Road, Woodley, and Karen. Data collection instruments included the standardized questionnaires of Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Rating Scale (DBDRS). Data was analyzed using correlation analysis.



#### 4. Results and Discussion

# 4.1 The correlation between parenting styles and ODD in Children attending Sunday School CITAM Churches in Nairobi County

The study was to determine the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder among children attending Sunday school at CITAM churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder.

		ODD	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive
ODD	Pearson Correlation	1			
Authoritative	Pearson Correlation	-0.029	1		
Authoritarian	Pearson Correlation	.297*	0.049	1	
Permissive	Pearson Correlation	.272*	0.043	.158*	1

#### Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, the correlation statistics show a 1-tailed positive correlation between permissive parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (r=.272). This implies that permissive parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder move in the same direction, meaning that children raised with permissive parenting style are likely to develop oppositional defiant disorder. Permissive parenting style is characterized by parents who are nurturing and warm but set few boundaries or rules for their children. It is such a parenting style where parents usually avoid confrontation with their children and thereby allow their children significant freedom to do whatever they like. Although this approach can foster creativity and independence, it may also lead to challenges in self-discipline and understanding limits. The result from the correlation statistical test implies that parental indulgence may contribute to behavioral issues, including tendencies associated with ODD, which can create an environment

The above is the Pearson correlation test showing the direction of the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder. As indicated in the Table, there was a positive correlation at 1-tailed between authoritarian parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (r=.297). The positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and ODD is interpreted as the higher the authoritarian parenting, the higher the presentation of ODD. It implies that the two variables move in the same direction. Therefore, children raised with authoritarian parenting styles are likely to present with oppositional defiant disorder.



where children struggle with boundaries and authority, potentially developing symptoms of defiance and oppositional behaviour.

Interestingly, this study found a positive correlation between permissive parenting style and authoritarian parenting style (r = .158). Permissive parenting style emphasizes freedom and minimal control, whereas authoritarian parenting focuses on strict control and discipline. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are generally considered opposites in their approach to raising children, so a positive correlation between them is unlikely. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes strict rules, high expectations, and control, while permissive parenting is characterized by warmth, leniency, and minimal boundaries. These contrasting styles typically do not overlap in practice. However, the result of this study may suggest that parents may exhibit elements of different styles depending on the situation, which could create nuanced interactions between parenting approaches. For example, a parent might be authoritarian in certain contexts such as enforcing rules about safety, and at the same time permissive in allowing freedom in creative activities. This flexibility does not imply a direct positive correlation but rather a situational blend of styles.

# 4.2 Discussion

The study objective was to determine the relationship between parenting styles and oppositional defiant disorder among children attending Sunday school students at CITAM churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings revealed that there was a positive and significant correlation at 1-tailed between authoritarian parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (r=.297). The study findings agree with Roman, Makwakwa and Lacante (2016) who found that the youngsters who grew up with authoritarian parents felt distant from, suspicious of, and withdrew from them. The study findings also concur with Soria (2022) who found that authoritarian parenting styles correlated with opposition defiant disorder.

The correlation statistics also showed a 1-tailed positive and significant correlation between permissive parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder (r=.272). The study findings compare with Roman, Makwakwa, and Lacante (2016) who indicated that youngsters raised by permissive parents lack self-control, struggle to build connections, and are egotistical and needy.

Contrarily, the results found a negative though insignificant correlation between authoritative parenting style and oppositional defiant disorder. The study findings contrast with Sheraz and Najam (2015) who indicated authoritative parenting styles predicted oppositional defiant behavior in school and home settings.

## 5. Conclusion

The study found that authoritative parenting had a negative though insignificant relationship with ODD, meaning that children raised under this style exhibited fewer oppositional behaviors. Conversely, permissive parenting had a positive and significant relationship with ODD, implying that children raised with few behavioral boundaries and inconsistent discipline were more likely to exhibit oppositional behaviors. This reinforces the importance of maintaining clear rules and structured discipline in reducing defiant behaviors. Interestingly, the study also indicated that authoritarian parenting had a positive correlation with ODD. This suggests that some parents expect unquestioning obedience, often using punishment and threats to enforce rules, prioritizing order and discipline.



#### 6. Recommendations

Parents need to teach their children how to avoid arguments with adults. In addition, CITAM should incorporate Parent management therapy (PMT) in their programs. Parent management therapy (PMT) is the main treatment for oppositional behaviors. It teaches parents ways to change their child's behavior in the home by using positive reinforcement to decrease unwanted behaviors and promote healthy behaviors.

Different parenting styles have been found to have different impacts on the opposition defiant disorder amongst Sunday school children. Therefore, parents and caregivers need to be aware of the response styles and help children develop healthy coping strategies. This can include encouraging the child to talk about their feelings, helping them to identify and challenge negative thoughts, and teaching them mindfulness techniques. The CITAM management should come up with programs that will mentor parents on the most appropriate parenting styles to curb the development of opposition defiant disorder amongst the children. Parents could also be guided to avoid tasks that are beyond the child's ability. Keeping tasks within their given ability level, allows the teachers and the parents to still maintain control of Sunday school-going children. It is the responsibility of every parent to correct their children because they are the future leaders of tomorrow.

Parents should not stick to one type of parenting style but should consider the situation of the child. There are times that they can be permissive and other times can be authoritative. Parents must be dedicated, and committed and maintain a positive relationship with their children by establishing authority in a healthy

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