

## **Relationship Between the Parent-Child Relationship and Sexual Attitudes Among Secondary School Students in Nairobi City County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

The goal of every family is to see the successful transition of their children in all stages up to adulthood. However, the nature of attitudes adopted by children towards sexual behavior may affect how they transition through these stages as expected. Studies have shown that risky sexual activities have been on the rise despite various measures being put in place to address them. This may detrimentally affect their educational attainment, bring about early pregnancies, abortion, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections, which are factors attributed to risky sexual attitudes. The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between parent-child relationships and sexual attitudes among public secondary school students in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This investigation implemented a correlational research design. The target population was 52,304, and a sample of 385 was drawn. Both the school administrators and teacher counsellors were selected purposively as they have information under study. This study sample size of 385 participants, was computed using the Cochran (1963) formula. Data was collected using standardized instruments. Data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. The data was analyzed using content analysis for the qualitative data (15 interview guides). Descriptive statistics were employed to depict the attributes of the gathered data. Correlation and regression analysis were used to determine the relationships between the research variables. Responses that align with numerical codes were assigned numerical values. Pie charts, bar graphs, and tables were all used to show the outcomes. The data was inspected and cleaned after it was collected to determine if any errors could be rectified. Results also showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students ( $\beta = 0.418$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). For connection and support, students who have strained relationships with their parents seek out romantic partnerships, which in turn offer the chance for an early sexual debut. When it comes to secondary sexual conduct, healthy relationships that are marked by a high degree of warmth and support may serve as a medium for parents to share their opinions or principles and assist young people in making decisions, which may have an impact on their engagement in risky behavior. The parents should also allow their children to discuss their fears and their concerns.

**Keywords:** *Parent-child relationship, sexual attitudes, family structure*

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## 1. Introduction

Family is one of the areas that has received great attention concerning risky sexual behavior among students. Family has been one of the strong agents for socialization, where children and adolescents use it for social control. Parents have a big influence on their children's lives, especially when it comes to their growth. In this instance, the examination of sexual attitudes among secondary school students is not possible without considering the manner in which their parents raised them. The sexual behavior and development of adolescents are significantly influenced by the actions and behaviors of their parents (Akanbi et al., 2019). Murry and Lippold (2018) indicated that adolescents from intact, married households cope better than those in other family structures, with greater detrimental results for students living in single families and blended families. These students exhibited more behavioral power problems, had an increased teen pregnancy ratio, and experienced increased academic difficulties than students living with two biological parents. This is due to the argument that intact (two-parent) families establish a system of checks and balances that enables parents to behave appropriately. Parents may exert pressure on one another to allocate time for their offspring. They can also supervise each other's discipline of the children and maintain positive relationships with their children. Consequently, the presence of two biological parents in the household enables each parent to play a more active role in the household and provide for their children (Akanbi et al., 2019).

When they graduate from high school, 20% of teenagers have had four or more sexual partners, and by the time they are 19 years old, 70% of adolescents worldwide have had sex. But of sexually active students, only half (54%) said they used a condom during their most recent sex (Gartland, 2023). Adolescents are at risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and social consequences, including reduced educational attainment (Steele, Simons, Sutton & Gibbons, 2020). The early sexual début of white adolescents in the United States was significantly influenced by family structure in comparison to that of black adolescents (Dufur, Hoffman & Erikson, 2018).

Risky sexual behaviors among adolescents in Kenya have emerged as a matter of concern (Njaramba 2018). A survey by Principal Component Analysis (2017) on reproductive health of adolescents disclosed that over seventy-five percent of Kenyan adolescents in the thirteen to nineteen years age group are sexually active. Given that the youth constitute the majority of the nation, this tendency is of serious concern. The family structure was found to be the major contributor to the sexual attitudes amongst the adolescents. In comparison to adolescents of single parents, children with parents were more adept at physiologically soothing themselves when they were distressed and were also more adept at regulating their negative emotions. They were assertive, able to focus more effectively, and exhibited fewer behavioral issues (Nyangoya, 2022). The present investigation endeavors to resolve the gap in the current corpus of research by conducting additional research to ascertain the extent to which the participation of adolescents in risky sexual activities is influenced by the parent-child relationship.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Parents have a big influence on their kids' lives, especially when it comes to their growth. Parental behavior and the examples they set for their children significantly impact the sexual behavior and development of adolescents. However, the nature of attitudes adopted by children towards sexual behaviour may affect how they transition through these stages as expected. Studies have shown that risky sexual activities have been on the rise despite various measures being in place to address them. This may detrimentally affect their educational attainment, bring about early pregnancies, abortion, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections, which are factors attributed to risky sexual attitudes.

In the 2022 report from the Ministry of Education in Kenya, 28.0% of males and 14.6% of females reported having viewed pornography, while 21.2% of males and 13.2% of females reported engaging in sexual intercourse. Furthermore, secondary school children engage in sexual activity at a young age. Many of them engage in sexual activities with multiple companions, and the majority do not use contraceptives. The government of Kenya has, however, tried to curb the risky sexual attitudes by introducing sex education. Despite all these efforts to curb risky sexual behavior, the sexual behavior among young people seems to be increasing, whereas the relationship between the parent-child relationship on sexual attitude has not been fully investigated. This study, therefore, explores the relationship between the parent-child relationship on students' sexual attitudes among secondary school students in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

To examine the relationship between the parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes among secondary school students in Nairobi City County, Kenya

### **1.3 Research Hypothesis**

H01: There is no statistically significant difference between parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The study was anchored on Family System Theory. Bowen (1913-1990) was the pioneer of family system theory. Bowenian theory was instrumental in comprehending the familial consequences of terminal illness. A family is a system that is interdependent and consists of interrelated elements that exhibit similar behaviors and engage in regular interactions. The entire system is affected by a modification to a single component. Members of a family are emotionally interconnected and significantly influence one another's thoughts, emotions, feelings, and behaviors. Each member receives approbation, support, and attention from their family members. Consequently, the entire family system is disrupted when a single family member experiences an issue within the system.

In the preponderance of cases, disease management is conducted within a family. The entire family is aware of the diverse impact that any disease, particularly cancer, has on each member. It is suggested that the patient is not the primary focus; rather, the other family members are also given significant consideration. Adapting to changes that affect the family and maintaining a sense of connection are feasible in a family where all members are encouraged to express

themselves and are supportive of one another (Aoun, 2005). Family caregivers' psychological, social, and financial well-being is permanently and substantially affected by terminal illness.

A modification to one component of the system has an impact on the other components, according to family system theory. In certain families, the boundaries are both rigid and confined, while in others, they are both diffuse and open. The operation of families that maintain rigid boundaries is nonadaptive and isolated. In families with diffuse boundaries, there is a lack of identity, chaotic functioning, and a limited sense of connection among members. Families can adjust to changes that affect the family system by providing mutual support and allowing one another to express their uniqueness (Kristjanson & Aoun, 2004).

Bowen (1978) posits that the primary motivating factor for each family is the anxiety associated with maintaining a balance between the connectedness and segregation of its members. Self-differentiation guides important strategies that can help reduce emotional distance among family members. In families, low levels of self-differentiation lead to emotional isolation, tension, triangulation, and conflict among family members (Bowen, 1978). Krycak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) conducted a study that found that individuals with reduced levels of differentiation experience more stress and psychological distress daily. Providing emotional support to caregivers is important because differentiation is related to psychological adjustment, self-control, and overall well-being.

This viewpoint suggests that the care providers' relational well-being and role performance should be enhanced through the preservation of self-differentiation (Lampis, 2016). The provision of family support and effective counseling interventions is necessary to prevent family caregivers from becoming emotionally reactive and isolated while providing quality care (Wei, Vigel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005).

Family System Theory emphasizes interconnectedness within families, focusing on key concepts like the nuclear family emotional system, the family projection process, and the societal emotional process. Nuclear Family Emotional System describes the four primary relationship patterns that govern where problems may develop in the family, including marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance. The Nuclear Family Emotional System (NFES) describes the patterns of emotional functioning within a family in a single generation, impacting how problems manifest, regardless of family type (intact, single-parent, etc). In this study, family type (Nuclear family, Single family, Blended family, Extended Family) is one of the factors that affect sexual attitudes.

Societal Emotional Process (SEP) describes how societal forces influence family dynamics and individual behavior, impacting parent-child relationships by affecting family stability and emotional functioning. This concept explains the parent-child relationship variable. Therefore, this theory informs this study as it explains the parent-child relationships in the study. The theory explains that the family has interrelated systems that exhibit similar behaviors. In this case, the theory explains the relationship between parent-child relationships and students' sexual attitudes.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Estrada-Martínez, Grossman, and Richer (2021) conducted research in England on the necessity of communication in the prevention of hazardous sexual behavior among Hispanic

adolescents. The analysis is based upon 474 Hispanic young people's responses to a school-based survey recruited from six New England high schools. The study's findings showed that while communication between teenagers and their parents is generally more equal between the sexes in small families, there are notable disparities in larger households. The study also demonstrates that the gender of the adolescent and the gender of the family members the adolescent went to for guidance affected how successful communication was as a deterrent against risky sexual conduct. The investigation was conducted in England, which demonstrates a contextual gap. The present investigation was conducted in Kenya.

In South Africa, Agudile, Okechukwu, Subramanian, Langer, and Geller (2020) studied the relationship between adult sexual behaviour and parental social support. The study was longitudinal. The study used data from Waves 1 and 3 of the Cape Area Panel Study (a longitudinal study of adolescents and young adults aged 14-22 years and living in the Cape Town metropolitan area) to investigate the associations between parental social support and young adult risky sexual behavior in South Africa. The current study found that young adults who did not have meals with their parents never discussed sexual behaviour with their parents and had risky sexual behaviour. Furthermore, those who never received money from their mothers tended to engage in an unprotected first sex encounter. The study does not directly focus on family structure and sexual attitudes, but it shows that parental communication may affect the attitudes of adolescents towards sexual behaviour. The current research was conducted in Kenya, whereas the previous study was conducted in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area.

In India, A qualitative study by Anyanwu, Akinsola, Tugli, and Obisie-Nmehielle (2020) explored the influence of family dynamics on adolescents' sexual risk behaviour within an area affected by migration. The study was descriptive. Using thematic analysis, we processed data collected from 13 adolescents and 10 parents. The findings indicated that financial constraints, delinquent parents detached from the adolescents, affected their sexual behaviour, exposing them to early sexual debut, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies. This study only shows the effect of family dynamics in a migrant community, but does not single out a specific family structure. The current study singles out specific family structures and how they impact adolescents' sexual attitudes.

Maina, Ushie, and Kabiru (2020) conducted a study in Kenya that investigated the nature and content of parent-child communication regarding sexual and reproductive health issues. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Thirty-two parents and 30 adolescent boys and girls aged between 11 and 13 years participated in narrative interviews in a resource-poor urban setting in Nairobi, Kenya. The findings showed gender differences in parent-child communication. Moreover, girls reported having communicated with their parents more in comparison to boys. The communication was mainly one-sided, authoritarian, reactive, and mostly initiated by parents. This study shows that parents may contribute to their children's attitude towards sex, but it only focused on communication rather than which family structure affected the adolescent sexual attitude and in what way. This study aimed to address this lacuna by investigating the influence of family structure on the sexual attitudes of adolescents.

### **3. Methodology**

This investigation implemented a correlational research design. The target population was 52,304, and a sample of 385 was drawn. Both the school administrators and teacher counsellors



were selected purposively as they have information under study. This study sample size of 385 participants, was computed using the Cochran (1963) formula. Data was collected using standardized instruments. Data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. The data was analyzed using content analysis for the qualitative data (15 interview guides). Descriptive statistics were employed to depict the attributes of the gathered data. Correlation and regression analysis were used to determine the relationships between the research variables.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement on parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes. Descriptions of parent-child relationships are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Parent Child Relationship**

statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	std. dev
I have been able to get sex education from my parent	52.00%	12.20%	13.90%	15.20%	6.80%	2.12	1.37
There is good communication between me and my parent	8.80%	2.00%	16.20%	34.10%	38.90%	3.92	1.19
My parent are loving	5.40%	3.70%	13.90%	56.10%	20.90%	3.83	0.98
I am comfortable sharing anything with my parents	3.70%	14.50%	16.90%	49.00%	15.90%	3.59	1.04
My parents punish me when am wrong	2.40%	15.50%	9.50%	45.90%	26.70%	3.79	1.08
I don't feel neglected by my parents	36.50%	29.70%	9.10%	14.20%	10.50%	2.32	1.37

The results showed that the majority of the respondents who were 64.2% disagreed with the statement that they had been able to get sex education from their parents (mean=2.12, std.dev=1.37). This shows that most students have not been able to get sex education from their parents. Results also showed that the majority of the respondents who were 73.0% agreed with the statement that there is good communication between them and their parents (mean=3.92, std.dev=1.19). This shows that most of the students had good communication with their parents.

Further results showed that the majority of the respondents who were 77.0% agreed with the statement that their parents were loving (mean=3.83, std.dev=0.98). This shows that most secondary students had loving parents. In addition, results showed that majority of the respondents who were 64.9% agreed with the statement that they are comfortable to share anything with their parents (mean=3.59, std.dev=1.04). This shows that most of the students had a good relationship with their parents.

Further results showed that the majority of the respondents who were 72.6% agreed with the statement that their parents punish them when they are wrong (mean=3.79, std dev=1.08). This

shows that most students were disciplined by their parents. In addition, results showed that the majority of the respondents who were 66.2% disagreed with the statement that they don't feel neglected by their parents (mean=2.32, std dev=1.37). This shows that most students are not neglected by their parents. The study findings agreed with Estrada-Martínez et al. (2021), who found that communication between teenagers and their parents enhanced positive sexual behavior.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the association between the independent variable (Parent Child Relationship) and the dependent variable (sexual attitudes). Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Results for Parent-Child Relationship and sexual attitudes

		Sexual attitude	Parent-Child Relationship
Sexual attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Parent-Child Relationship	Pearson Correlation	.681**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

Further results showed that the parent-child relationship had a positive and significant correlation with sexual attitudes (r=0.681, p=0.000). This shows that students with a good relationship with their parents had a positive sexual attitude. The study findings agreed with Estrada-Martínez et al. (2021), who found that communication between teenagers and their parents enhanced positive sexual behavior.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is conducted in research to understand and quantify the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Essentially, it helps determine how changes in one variable (parent-child relationship) impact sexual attitudes. The study performed simple regression models to estimate the relationships between the parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes. The study results are tabulated in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3: Model Summary parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.681a	0.463	0.461	0.443306

Results showed that the R-squared was 0.463. This infers that parent parent-child relationship explains 46.3% of the variations in the dependent variable, which was sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students.

To determine the family cohesion as a predictor for parent-child relationship among Nairobi City County secondary school students, ANOVA was computed. Results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Analysis of Variance for parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	49.847	1	49.847	253.646	.000b
Residual	57.777	294	0.197		
Total	107.623	295			

The study results further revealed that the ANOVA model of parent-child relationship predicted sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students significantly well ( $p=0.000$ ). This was further supported by F F-statistic of 253.646. This indicated the statistical significance of the regression model that was run, and that the overall parent-child relationship significantly predicted the sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students (it was a good fit for the data). Regression of coefficient results is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Regression of the Coefficient of parent parent-parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.775	0.191		4.064	0
family type	0.834	0.052	0.681	15.926	0.000

$$Y = 0.775 + 0.834X_1$$

Where;

Y = Sexual attitude

$X_1$  = Parent-child relationship

Results also showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between parent-child relationship and sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students ( $\beta=0.834$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This meant that parent parent-child relationship significantly influences the attitude of students towards sex. The study findings agreed with Agudile, Okechukwu, Subramanian, Langer, and Geller (2020), who found that young adults who did not have meals with parents never discussed sexual behaviour with parents and had risky sexual behaviour.

#### 4.4 Qualitative Analysis

The respondents were further asked to indicate the effect of the parent-child relationship on the sexual attitudes of students in secondary schools. Results indicated that parents who communicate with their children about sexual issues are likely to engage in healthy sexual behaviour, whereas those who do not engage their children in communication on sexual issues are likely to be involved in risky sexual behavior. However, students who have negative relationships with their parents turn to romantic relationships for intimacy and support, which subsequently provide the opportunity for an early sexual debut. The following were some of the responses;

*Teacher 3: Parents who communicate with their children about sexual issues are likely to engage in healthy sexual behaviour*



Teacher 6: *Students who have negative relationships with their parents turn to romantic relationships for intimacy and support, which subsequently provide the opportunity for an early sexual debut.*

The study findings agreed with Estrada-Martínez et al. (2021) who found that communication between teenagers and their parents enhanced positive sexual behavior.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concluded that parent parent-child relationship has a significant and positive effect on sexual attitudes among Nairobi City County secondary school students. Students who have close parents are less likely to become pregnant, have sex at all, and make their sexual debut early. For connection and support, students who have strained relationships with their parents seek out romantic partnerships, which in turn offer the chance for an early sexual debut.

## 6. Recommendations

Parents should monitor media exposure, teach body safety and consent, respond calmly to inquiries, prioritize open and age-appropriate communication, seek professional advice if concerns arise, and maintain a supportive and trustworthy environment to effectively address their child's sexual behavior. The study encourages secondary school students to strive to engage in in-depth discussion with their parents and guardians pertaining to sexual issues and interest, hence shaping their perceptions and reducing the urge to engage in risky behavior out of curiosity. Parents should also establish as strong bond with their children by planning regular family meals, engaging in shared activities, and celebrating milestones together.

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