



Authoritarian Parenting Style and Deviant Behaviour among Students in Public Universities in Mount Kenya East Region, Kenya

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Abstract: In the recent years, deviant behaviours have been on the rise among university students, with examination malpractice, alcoholism, substance abuse, and sexual deviance being the most common. This not only hinders students' academic achievement but also their future careers. This study examines the relationship between parenting styles and deviance among university students. This study was anchored on the Parenting Styles Theory and utilized the correlational research design. Three hundred and eighty-three respondents participated in the study. Three hundred and seventy-five undergraduate students were selected using simple random sampling while eight Deans of Students and Students' Counsellors were selected using purposeful sampling. Data was collected using interview schedules and questionnaires. The validity of the instruments was confirmed by supervisors and experts from the Department of Education at Tharaka University. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.749$, deemed reliable. Data analysis was conducted by the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The study findings revealed that there is no statistical significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and deviant behaviours. of ($\beta = 0.066$, $p > 0.118$). This study established that authoritarian parenting style has no relationship with deviant behaviours among students in public universities in Kenya. One potential explanation is that authoritarian practices, though harsh, might be internalized as discipline in Kenyan households, reducing their observable negative outcomes. The study therefore calls for more research on aspects such as peer influence, institutional support, and individual traits which may influence behaviour.

Keywords: Authoritarian Parenting style, Deviant Behaviours, University Students, Mount Kenya, Examination

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1. Introduction

A study carried out in Pakistan found out that deviant behaviours have been increased in the tertiary institutions (Khan, 2021). Examination malpractice, one of the deviant behaviours, is on the rise with negligence from examination invigilators, fear of failure, impersonation and carrying of materials into the examination room being among the factors identified as contributors of malpractice. Examination malpractice, a major deviant behaviour has been labelled as a severe worldwide issue in our educational systems especially in the developing

countries. Other deviant behaviours include vandalism, drug abuse, truancy, sexual misconducts and favouritism by seniors. According to this study, truancy is greatly reflected in students' performance where those students involved in absenteeism exhibit lower performance than students who attend classes. Similar problems faced by the students may make them engage in drug abuse which in turn affects academics, family life and safety. Sexual misconducts involve behaviours such as sexual assault, sexual coercion, sexual harassment, and sexual favours in exchange for money or grades. Favouritism is shown

based on religious factors, socio economic status, gender or even physical appearance.

Drug abuse has been a major deviant behaviour among university students. Research conducted by Ngure and Omulema (2021) established that 48.6% of university students have used drugs in their lifetime and 37.9% of the students still use drugs with the most abused drug being alcohol. Caday (2017) conducted research in Philippines on the major causes of drug abuse among college students. The study established that peer pressure, family misunderstandings, lack of parental guidance, weak foundation on moral and spiritual values, frustration, lack of love and attention from guardians or parents and lack of prevention facilities were among the contributing factors to drug abuse among students in colleges. In as much as this study highlights limited parental guidance and lack of love from parents as causes of drug abuse, it fails to expound on what parenting styles are involved and how each specifically contributes to drug abuse. Consequently, a research conducted by Kumari et al. (2014) in Bhubaneswar India established that drug abuse was a prevalent problem among medical students. This study was undertaken to investigate what caused substance use among undergraduate medical students. It was a cross-sectional study that was done in three medical colleges with a sample size of 1163 respondents. Tobacco was the most abused drug, followed by alcohol, with males abusing drugs more than female. Some of the causes found out included curiosity, peer influence and family problems.

Research conducted by NACADA Kenya (2022) on the status of drug and substance abuse in Kenya established that one in every eleven youths which is a population of 632, 846 aged between 15-24 years of age were currently using at least one drug or substance of abuse. This study was carried out among people aged between 15-65 who were selected across the 47 counties in Kenya. According to the study, alcohol is the most abused drug among the youth with one in every twenty youths abusing the drug. The research further showed that one in every forty-five youths in this age bracket were addicted to alcohol. Majority of the youth in this age group happen to be students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions with the age of those in tertiary institutions being on the higher side which means therefore that university students are highly affected. Drug use may lead to other deviant behaviours such as failure to attend classes, failure in examinations, antisocial behaviours and also affects the overall health of an individual (Morley et.al., 2016).

Sexual immorality has been on the rise in the universities. It involves issues of fornication, cohabiting, homosexuality, pornography, sponsors, promiscuity and LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual, Asexual and more). A study conducted in Kenya found out that sexual immorality is caused by factors such as living away from parents and

outside school, lawlessness of the students, drug abuse and low self-esteem. This in turn leads to cases of early pregnancies, abortions, HIV/AIDs, school dropout and poor grades (Ngesu, 2020).

Alonge and Adanikin (2020) found out that the society seems to be okay with immoral activities done by the young people. These immoral activities include nudity, prostitution and sexual intercourse. In addition, there is the urge of university students to live luxurious lives without minding how they get that money. The youth seem not to care about values such as integrity and self-control and therefore engage in social vices to finance their lifestyles. Ede (2023) identified sex for grades as a common practice in institutions of higher learning which in turn produces incompetent professionals.

According to Isiaka et al. (2020) cohabiting has become a common habit among university students. The study ascertained that young girls cohabit to avoid losing relationships while men cohabit for sexual purposes.

1.1 Problem Statement

Deviant behaviours have become a hinderance to students' achievement in universities in Kenya, yet education aims at moulding a holistic individual according to the national goals of education. According to the Competency Based Education (CBE) framework, education aims at producing learners that have values through parental collaboration. Parents should instil values in learners during the upbringing process. Deviant behaviours affect students' academic success as well as their future careers. School environment and peer influence have been confirmed as some of the factors that lead to deviance. However, scanty literature exists on the relationship between parenting and deviance. Therefore, this study intends to establish whether there is any relationship between authoritarian parenting style and deviant behaviours among university students in public universities in Mt Kenya East Region Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Johnson (2016) examined the association between parenting and delinquency in a U.S.A study. The study found out that authoritarian parenting style can be both effective and non-effective depending on how it is applied. Adolescents develop anger, discontentment, withdrawal symptoms, mistrust and frustration due to hostility and rejection by parents which fosters antisocial behaviour. However, if trust, communication, parental involvement and care is applied this parenting style may be effective and children develop confidence and self-esteem even though there exists difficulties in coping.

Samiullah (2016) states that authoritarian parenting style leads to child delinquency. This is according to a study that sought to investigate the influence of parenting styles on children's behaviour in Pakistan. The study

entailed quantitative research on a sample of 50 students and used a convenience sampling technique from a private school in Pakistan. Parents who use this dimension of parenting tend to be coercive and forceful and believe that children should obey and adhere to rules. As a result, this lowers the children's ability to develop coping mechanisms. The study however failed to unveil whether the behaviour continues throughout to adulthood or whether there is some point of change. The study was also carried out in a private high-school whereas the current study will be conducted in universities. The sample size for this study is a bit small whereas the current study will have a larger sample size.

Asiamah (2013) did a study on the effects of parenting styles on secondary school student's lifestyle. According to the study, authoritarian parenting style encourages indiscipline, discourages leadership skills and leads to pretension which may later cause rebellion according to a study done in Nigeria. These children do not also have a sense of belonging. This study agrees with a study done by (Hartini et al., 2022) which established a link between authoritarian parenting and aggressive behaviour. Aggressiveness which comes from the word aggression is a behavioural tendency to harm other people verbally, physically or psychologically. It refers to feelings of anger which result to violent or hostile behaviour and readiness to attack or confront. It can be manifested in fighting, killing, attacking, injuring others, punishing or damaging other people's property. This deviant behaviour is a menace among students in university whereby students that are unable to control their anger express it through aggressiveness for instance, killing due to frustration from issues of love. This study however majored on adolescents and according to (Brief, 2020), an adolescent is an individual who is between 10-19 years old.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the parenting styles theory developed by Baumrind (1966). The theory defines parenting based on two dimensions; parental demandingness and parental responsiveness. Parental demandingness refers to the demands that parents place on their children to mature

and become a part of the family unit through supervision, disciplinary actions, and a readiness to handle disobedient children. Parental responsiveness is on the other hand identified as parental supportiveness and warmth. This refers to the level to which parents actively encourage individuality, self-control, and self-assertion in their children by paying attention to, supporting, and complying with their demands and needs.

Guide et al. (2021) states that in authoritarian parenting style, the parent is the only source of communication and they set rules which are to be followed without question. Punishment follows mistakes and parents do not even give an ear to their children. Children are relatively well behaved to avoid consequences (Anandari, 2016). However, they also tend to manifest aggressiveness which if not managed may result to anger issues. They are poor in decision making and have low self-esteem. On account of the strictness exhibited by the parents, the children may tend to rebel against them more so when they are away in the universities which negatively influences behaviour as they grow. They also become vulnerable to stress and depression (Estlein, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design. It was conducted in four public universities in Mt. Kenya East region, Kenya. The target population for the study was 28250 with an accessible population of 6000 from which a sample size of 375 was attained by simple random sampling using the Slovin's formula. Eight staff, two from each university also took part in the study. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. Pilot study was conducted in two universities in Mt. Kenya West. A reliability of $\alpha=0.7$ and above was deemed reliable for the study. Validity was determined by supervisors and experts from the department of education. Both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained from the study. Quantitative data was analysed using inferential and descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Data was analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel and presented using frequency tables, graphs and pie charts. Table 1 shows the sampling frame:

Table 1: Sampling Frame and Sample Size

Universities	Accessible Population	Sample size	Sampling Procedure
A	1753	110	Simple random
B	934	58	Simple random
C	2142	134	Simple random
D	1171	73	Simple random
Total	6000	375	

Source: Raw data

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: Relationship between Authoritarian Parenting Style and Deviant Behaviours

Variable	SD	D	N	A	SA
My parents/guardians are too harsh on me and that has made me rebellious	.409	-.380	.373	.239	-.028
My parents/guardians punish bad behaviour immediately which prevents me from engaging in deviant behaviour	-.115	-.338	.377	.277	.185
Rules set by my parents/guardians are to be followed without question therefore I cannot misbehave	-.124	-.305	.476	.374	.112
My parents/guardians do not care about my feelings but rather their own feelings which makes me seek validation from the wrong people	.412	-.474	.326	.204	-.058
My parents/guardians yell, scold and use physical punishment every time I don't impress them which has made me develop fear	.381	-.507	.292	.341	-.089
My parents/guardians constantly use the phrase 'because I am your parent' and 'because I said so' which leaves no room for dialogue	.372	-.314	.376	.391	.007
My parents/guardians expect me to perform well in my academics and do not understand when I don't which tempts me to cheat in my examinations to impress them	.368	-.294	.349	.340	.135
I fear my parents/guardians hence I cannot be undisciplined	.307	-.373	.361	.346	.08

The results of this study reveal that respondents generally held moderate and balanced perceptions regarding the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and deviant behaviours. Across the items measuring authoritarian traits, the majority of responses clustered around neutral and mild agreement, with relatively few participants choosing the extremes of strong agreement or strong disagreement. This pattern suggests that while young people recognize the presence of strict rules, harsh discipline, and limited dialogue within their families, these practices are not viewed as a straightforward or inevitable cause of deviant behaviour.

A slightly stronger tendency toward agreement was observed in statements highlighting the preventive role of authoritarian practices, such as immediate punishment or fear of parental consequences. This indicates that some respondents perceive firm discipline as effective in discouraging misbehaviour and maintaining order. Nevertheless, the fact that these agreements were generally mild underscores that such deterrence is not regarded as absolute and may depend on individual or situational factors.

Conversely, statements linking authoritarian parenting to negative outcomes—such as rebellion, academic cheating, or seeking external validation—elicited largely neutral responses. This points to a sense of ambivalence within the sample. Participants may acknowledge that excessive harshness or emotional neglect can create tension and pressure, yet they do not universally believe that these conditions lead directly to deviant acts.

Overall, the findings portray authoritarian parenting as a complex and context-dependent influence rather than a single, dominant predictor of behaviour. While strict rules and timely punishment may discourage certain forms of deviance, they do not necessarily provoke rebellion for most respondents. These results emphasize the importance of a balanced parenting approach, where discipline and guidance are combined with emotional support and open communication. Such a balance appears more likely to promote positive behavioural outcomes than either extreme harshness or complete permissiveness.

The mean score for authoritarian parenting style (AnPS) was 2.4503 (SE = ±0.04723), with a standard deviation of 0.89607. The positive skewness (0.734) and kurtosis (0.128) implies that authoritarian parenting was rated lower (disagree to neutral) by most students, and its distribution was near normal. This denotes that majority of the students did not strongly associate their upbringing with authoritarian tendencies.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

To respond to this objective, which sought to establish the relationship between authoritarian parenting style and deviant behavior, the null hypothesis was tested:

H0₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and deviant behavior.

A multivariate regression analysis conducted established that there exists no statistically significant relationship

between authoritarian parenting styles and deviance behaviors among the studied groups, $\beta = 0.066$, $p=0.118$.

Table 3: Multi variate regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	2.907	.235		12.398	.000
AnPS Score	.066	.042	.084	1.569	.118

4.3 Discussion of Findings

While authoritarian parenting is generally viewed in literature as contributing to deviant behavior due to its harsh and controlling nature, the current study did not find a statistically significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and deviant behavior among university students. This contrasts with numerous studies reviewed.

According to Samiullah (2016), authoritarian parenting is distinguished by low warmth and high control, leading to adverse outcomes such as emotional withdrawal, deviance, and social maladjustment. Hartini et al. (2022) similarly reported that children who are reared in households with authoritarian parents had a higher likelihood of expressing aggression or rebellion, especially during adolescence. Equally, Asiamah (2013) reported that authoritarian parenting was linked with passivity and resentment in Ghanaian children, which later translated to antisocial behaviour during youth.

Multiple reasons could contribute to differences between findings from the reviewed literature and the study findings. One explanation could be the relatively low prevalence of authoritarian parenting in the sample (Mean = 2.45), which might have reduced statistical power. Secondly, students raised under authoritarian structures may outwardly conform during their upbringing, suppressing deviance until they enter freer environments like universities. At this point, any delayed effects may be masked or confused with peer influence.

Additionally, university students may develop autonomous behavioral norms that diverge from those instilled by authoritarian parents. As Mugenda (2018) notes, the academic environment plays a substantial role in modifying attitudes and behaviors, potentially weakening parental influence. Furthermore, the authoritarian model, though generally harmful, might still instill discipline and self-restraint in some students, subject to the cultural framing of authority in Kenyan families. Finally, there is a likelihood that respondents underreported deviance or misclassified parenting styles, further diluting observable patterns. While authoritarian parenting has clear theoretical risks, its effects might be context-dependent, requiring further qualitative

exploration to clarify its true impact in Kenyan universities.

4.4 Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings from the study affirmed the association between authoritarian parenting style and deviance particularly to first year and second year students. Remarks such as “...students with very strict parents tend to hide things or become rebellious,” echoed findings from Asiamah (2013) and Hartini et al. (2022), which highlight how authoritarian parenting may inadvertently push students into covert deviance or psychological distress. Data from deans of students and student counsellors across four public universities showed a unanimous consensus that parenting styles significantly influence student behaviour, despite the statistical results not confirming the same. Authoritarian parenting style was cited as a major contributor to rebellion, poor coping, and risk-taking. Interestingly, the interviews consistently emphasized the early university years (first and second years) as the peak period for deviance, citing factors like peer pressure, lack of parental monitoring, romantic entanglements, and financial hardship.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The results from this study challenge dominant academic literature, which has often portrayed authoritarian parenting style as central to behavioral development. The discrepancy likely arises from the nature of university life, where autonomy, exposure to new social groups, and institutional culture dilute the influence of earlier parental practices. In addition, authoritarian practices, though harsh, might be internalized as discipline in Kenyan households, reducing their observable negative outcomes. The qualitative data, however, reaffirmed the association between strict parenting and covert rebellion, indicating a possible delayed effect not captured quantitatively.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the call for strategic interventions at both the institutional and family levels to address deviant behaviour among university students. First, institutions, in collaboration with government education departments and community-based organizations, should conduct periodic parent–university engagement forums, family counselling, and workshops on balanced parenting approaches. These forums would promote the benefits of sustained parental guidance, especially during the early years of university life when students face the highest vulnerability to external influences.

In addition, there is an urgent need to strengthen student mentorship, mental health support and onboarding programs. As the study established that first- and second-year students are particularly susceptible to deviant behaviour, universities should establish structured programs that pair these students with mentors (either peers or academic staff) who guide them on academic, social, and behavioral matters. These initiatives can foster early responsibility, peer accountability, and resilience against harmful influences. Students from authoritarian family backgrounds often struggle with identity, emotional regulation, and discipline thus mental health programs may identify students at risk through indicators such as low academic performance, recurring absenteeism, or minor disciplinary infractions and help them navigate through.

5.3 Recommendation for Further Research

This study recommends that future studies explore other variables such as peer pressure, social media influence, academic stress, religious background, or financial hardship as possible predictors of deviant behaviour. A multidimensional study could provide a more comprehensive understanding of behavioral dynamics at the university level.

Given the discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative findings, where interviews suggested strong parental influence while statistical tests failed to confirm significant relationships, it is advised that future researchers use mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. These approaches could capture the deeper, long-term effects of parenting on behaviour that might not be immediately evident in cross-sectional surveys.

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