

Toxic Parenting To Blame For Students' Discipline Problems In Secondary Schools In Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between toxic parenting and students' discipline problems in secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. This was in the light of concern that students' discipline problems had increased while school administrators were over-relying on parents to resolve discipline problems with little success. The study was guided by the Family Systems Theory, which states that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from other family members. The study adopted quantitative research method, correlation research design. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 344, form three students from 10 sampled secondary schools. A personal biographical data form, a toxic parenting and student's discipline questionnaire were used for data collection. Pearson's product moment correlation (r) at .05 confidence level was applied to test the hypothesis. The results revealed that toxic parenting had significant relationship on students' discipline. The higher the score on toxic parenting the higher the score on students' discipline problems. The study concluded that toxic parenting had a relationship with students' discipline problems. The study recommended that school administrators that should run a toxic parenting test prior to involving parents in resolving discipline problems in schools. If the test scores reveal toxic parenting, then such parents may be of little assistance. Alternative method of discipline can be used instead.

Keywords: Toxic Parenting, Students' Discipline Problems, Secondary School Students.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phrase 'toxic parenting' is a psychological construct that represents negative parenting strategies that some parents use in child rearing. Toxic parenting describes parents whose own negative behaviours, grossly inflict emotional damage on their children. Toxic parents lack emotional involvement so they reject and neglect their children, others verbally, physically or sexually abuse their children, while others are addicted to alcohol and drugs that they rely on their own children to care for them (Forward & Buck, 2017). The authors posited that the emotional damage that toxic parents inflict on their own children could contaminate their healthy development and social adjustments later in life. They argued

that, just like toxic chemicals would poison any environment, toxic parenting could contaminate children's sense of self and sense of realities of life.

According to Lancer (2018) Children of toxic parents learn to blame themselves for their parents' inadequacies, making them suffer low self-esteem and poor self-image. These parents do not treat their children with respect, never take responsibility of their actions and are very traumatising to children. In this study, toxic parenting referred to parents who were abusing alcohol or other drugs, those parents who rejected or neglected to provide children's needs; those who had physically, verbally or sexually abused their children and those parents who applied excessive control on their children. School administrators would sometimes get shocked and

astonished when some parents would fail to understand them and instead support their children who would be having discipline problems at school (Bowen, 2018). Other parents would change schools for their children if they interpret school rules to be too strict for their children (Richardson, 2017).

Students' Discipline Problems refers to situations where students fail to obey school rules, resist punishments and other behavioural strategies that are appropriate to regulate school routines, maintain order, and ensures safety (Kelly, 2019). In this study, discipline problems that were measured included aspects that interfered with learning and safety. They included; feelings of entitlement, lack of respect, hostility, skipping school, irresponsibility, lack of motivation, low self-esteem and unmanageable behaviours such as video game addiction, violent strikes, arson, theft, alcohol and drug abuse, improper sexual relationships, fighting, bullying, pathological lying, rudeness, shyness, lateness, making noise, low grades in class and use of graffiti. Schools all over the world need to maintain discipline in order to create an effective learning environment and also to offer security.

In Kenyan schools, students who found themselves involved in discipline problems were either expelled from school or suspended for a period of time. In case of suspension, the students would be required to report back to school accompanied by their parents (Magak, 2019). This was done in anticipation that the parents' intervention would assist the school administrators to change students' behaviour. The practice of involving parents to resolve discipline problems in Kenyan schools was based on cultural traditions, conventional wisdom and religious authority (Munyua, 2012). The degree to which toxic parenting was related to students' discipline problems was the reason that prompted this study. The study hypothesised that there existed a relationship between toxic parenting and students' discipline problems in secondary schools.

II. PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN SCHOOLS

Studies indicate that there are many parenting styles, they include attachment parenting, helicopter parenting, nurturing parenting, harsh parenting (Iannelli, 2019); authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, permissive parenting and uninvolved parenting styles (Baumrind, 2019); and toxic parenting (Forward & Buck, 2017). Famous psychological theorists on matters of parenting like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Rudolf Dreikurs (1897-1972), Eric Erickson (1902-1994), Diana Baumrind (1927-) and Susan Forward (1938-), support the idea that parenting styles determine the behaviour of children (Birichi & Rukunga, 2010). Most times, majority of parents aim at raising happy and successful children but not all children turn out right (Vanpelt, 2019). Other parents, like among African communities, aim at getting the greatest number of children regardless of the quality of life they offer them (Kweyu, 2019). This study focused on toxic parenting because discipline in schools has become a number one concern of teachers, administrators and parents.

Students discipline problems vary from one region to another. In developed countries and in extreme cases, students use guns. In developing countries, students use fire to cause damage. For Example, in USA, reports of mass shootings in colleges, campuses and schools have been making world news. In the year 2012, 20 school children and six teachers lost their lives at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, USA. In the year 2015, a student shot and killed nine colleagues at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, USA (Simkins, 2015). In the year 2018 at Stoneman Douglas High School a 19-year-old former student, shot and killed 17 students and wounded 17 others. At Santa Fe, High School in Texas, a student age 17, and using his father's gun, shoot and killed 10 students and wounded 10 (Fernandez, Fausset & Bidgood, 2018). Similar incidences like these were being reported and by the end of the year 2019, there had been over 45 shootings in schools in the United States of America (Nathaniel, 2018). Students discipline problems are experienced globally.

There was need to put effort in re-thinking the way schools responded to discipline problems. In many schools, measures like suspension and expulsion are being replaced with alternative strategies that aim at keeping students in classroom while addressing underlying issues like trauma, stress and developmental diseases. In Texas USA, therapeutic schools that offer nurturing environments to help children with behavioural problems have been established. Psychological counselling services are provided and restorative justice trained (Resolution Ranch Academy, 2020). In Japan, students discipline is part of parenting. Discipline is expected to be acquired through training like any other art or skill. Parents are expected to pass on their values to children. This type of discipline is referred to as supportive discipline (Nobuko, 2018). In England, many schools develop home and school parents contracts that explain disciplinary sanctions and consequences for breach of the contract. Parents are expected to agree to be responsible for their children's behaviour in school. Methods of discipline are non-violent. They include detention time after school or isolation hours. Other times parents are allowed to sit with their children in class (Wrightslaw, 2020).

A study by Iannelli (2019) established that children brought up by abusive parents developed feelings of guilt, shame and low motivational levels that could interfere with later behaviours, such are children who do unimaginable damage to property and other students. Another study by the National Institute of Mental Health in USA, NIMH (2010), connected abusive parents to those suffering from various personality disorders that may not be clinically diagnosed. The study highlighted the conditions to include alcohol and drug addiction, antisocial, bipolar, borderline, depressive, histrionic, obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic, perfectionists and rage-mania disorders. The study also reported that the behaviour of such parents would appear normal from the outside, but clinically would be classified abnormal. In Kenya, a National Survey was conducted by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund in 2010 on prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence emitted on children by parents. The study revealed that parent's sexual, physical and emotional violence on children had

reached worrying propositions. The survey also indicated that cultural traditional beliefs, inadequate investigations by law enforcers and inadequate communication technology had increased the problem of parental abuse on children (UNICEF, 2014).

Sometimes parents may use dysfunctional methods of discipline that may affect children negatively. For example, Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff, and Acker (2019) conducted a study in the year 1993 and developed a rating scale to measure dysfunctional discipline practices used by parents. They identified laxness, over-reactivity and verbosity as the three dysfunctional discipline styles parents use. Their study concluded that mothers of clinic children were more dysfunctional than mothers of non-clinic children. Majority of students who participate in discipline problems in school, have high probability of displaying similar behaviours at home. The Al-Anon (2019) established that children brought up with lies, excuses and secrets of parents with alcohol problems, believed that telling lies was the right way to live. Nugent (2019) noted that it was impossible for children who told lies to develop self-confidence and that such children felt invisible

Another study by Nkuba, Hermenau and Hecker (2018) conducted in Tanzania, examined the effects of parents' violence and maltreatment on students' mental health. The study established that there was prevalence of mental health problems among students who experienced maltreatment and violence. The study recommended non-violent methods of discipline. Rossow (2020) conducted a study in South Africa and concluded that involvement of youths in liberation struggles that ended in 1994, caused students to develop arrogance towards parents and educators. The arrogance became part of secondary schools' sub-culture. The study also argued that the lack of students' discipline hampered development in education among majority of youths in South Africa. According to the Tanzanians' Legal and Human Rights Centre, one of the countries in Africa, corporal punishment is legal. Teachers and administrators can deliberately inflict physical pain or discomfort as a response to undesired behaviour (TLHR, 2018). Due to its disadvantages corporal punishment was found to be less effective and was banned in many countries of the world, including China (Wu, 2016).

In Kenyan schools, discipline problem behaviours manifested themselves in examination cheating, decline in quality grades in national examinations and poor academic performance (Matiangi, & Magokha, 2019), teenage pregnancies and early motherhood (Mutai, 2019; Omollo & Adwet (2017), alcohol and drug abuse as many students were being arrested in alcohol and drug taking joints (Kiumi, Bosire & Sang, 2017; Were, 2019; NACADA, 2016. Situations where students' unrests resulted in arson and theft were on the increase (Oduor & kajiwa, 2017). Another discipline problem was arson, in the year 2016, in a period of six months, more than 100 schools had dormitories and properties destroyed by fires (Wairagu, 2017). Disheartening incidences of students' bullying others were also widening (Oduor & Muthoni, 2017). Some students would get involved in murder of fellow students (Oginga, 2017a; Oginga, 2017b).

In extreme cases, unruly students would kill others while asleep by use of dormitory fires. In the year 2001, Some 67 students were burnt to death and 61 others injured, when

unruly students locked them in a dormitory and set it on fire at Kyanguli High School in Machakos, Kenya. At Bombolulu Girls School in Mombasa, Kenya, 25 students burnt to death in a dormitory fire. In September, 2017, at Moi Girl's Boarding School in Nairobi, Kenya, a 16year old student set fire in one of the dormitories that killed nine students. The reason being that her parents had refused to transfer her to another school (Wabala, 2017). Reports of discipline problems like these, left unimaginable grief and pain for those involved. In most of the cases, the parents of perpetrators have questionable behaviours.

The intensity of disciplinary measures applied to correct problem behaviours depended on the students' discipline problem, the teacher's personality and the tolerance of school and the country involved (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Some errant students are taken to approved schools for rehabilitative procedures. Such approved schools are known for strict disciplinary methods (Kiereine, 2019). Others are jailed, depending on the age of perpetrator (Oginga, 2017a). The Kenyan Ministry of Education had banned corporal punishments in the year 2001, and recommended that guidance and counselling services be adopted as the preferred mode of resolving discipline problems in schools. Guiding and counselling was believed to offer long lasting solutions to the students with discipline problems. However, some studies have revealed that until the year 2019, school administrators still preferred involvement of parents instead of sending errant students for guidance and counselling (Kaptich, Kiplagat & Munyua, 2019).

According to Kamau and Makana (2015), an abusive class of parents had emerged in Kenyan communities. The authors reported statistics regarding court cases involving defilement of children by their own parents and close family members. The report indicated that in the year 2014 a total of 6,101 cases of defilement of young children were pending in Kenyan courts. In the year 2015 a higher number of 7,727 cases of sexual abuse were reported from various parts of Kenya. A case in point was that of a father from Kapseret Sub-County in Uasin Gishu County who had been sentenced to 20 years in jail for sodomizing his six-year old son, and nine-year old daughter, infecting them with HIV (Ollinga & Koskei, 2015). A report by National Agency for Campaign against Drugs Abuse in Kenya, NACADA (2016), revealed that majority of parents with drinking problems were introducing alcohol to their own children even before start of schooling. Another study established that the manner in which a person was brought up and the environment that the person lived in, determined the basis of their mental health or ill-health (Kamau, 2015). Yet school administrators were expecting some of these abusive parents to be assisting in resolving students discipline problems. Students could sometimes be victims of their own parents' failures (Kigotho, 2019).

The common practice in Kenya was that majority of errant students were suspended from school for a period of time, probably two weeks, to report back to school accompanied by their parents. Parents are expected to be part of the disciplinary team (Ministry of Education, 2019). It had been argued that involving parents in the management of students' activities in school would also promote quality education for sustainable development. This was because

parents were believed to possess capacity to naturally inculcate appropriate values, behaviour and lifestyles (Republic of Kenya, 2008). The problem with this scenario was that, ironically, the more the students' discipline problems escalated, the more school administrators turned to parents to assist in resolving the problems.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was conducted because the researchers noted with concern that there existed over-reliance on parents to provide corrective measures for students found with discipline problems (Magak, 2019). It appeared that the more the school administrators relied on parents to resolve discipline problems, the more discipline problems increased in schools (Kigotho, 2019). The assumption of Kenyan society was that all parents possess the capacity to be responsible. That they can provide moral guidance, appropriate counselling, and act as role models. Therefore to school administrators would count on their assistance to deal with their children's discipline problems in schools (Ministry of Education, 2019; Kaptich, Kiplagat & Munyua, 2019). The assumption that parents could always be counted on to resolve students discipline problems prompted the researchers of this study to challenge it, and call for a careful assessment of the nature of parents to be involved. This aspect presented a research problem because without discipline in schools, crime and decline in socio-economic development would undermine personal and national developments. Students need school environments that can enable them to exploit opportunities depending on their aspirations.

Various studies have been conducted in relation to school discipline and parenting (Glasser, 2019; Bowen, 2018, Momanyi, 2011; NACADA, 2016), but no study had addressed the issue of toxic parenting and students discipline problems. It was clear that apart from having guidance and counselling services, school administrators and other stakeholders of education had resolved to involve parents as an alternative mode of dealing with student's discipline problems in secondary schools. Therefore, there was need to conduct this research to create awareness to the stakeholders in education about the existence of toxic parents. This awareness was intended to enable educationists to seek solutions without blaming the students every time maladaptive behaviour was identified.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted quantitative research method, correlational research design. The study population targeted all the students from Form one to Form four in all the 147 secondary schools in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. The researchers used stratified simple random sampling techniques to select an equal number of male and female participants. A representative sample comprised 344 Form three students from 10 sampled secondary schools. Data collection instruments included a biographical data form, document analysis schedule and students' questionnaire on toxic

parenting and students' discipline problems questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted in order to test the reliability of the questionnaire. A test re-test computations results revealed a reliability coefficient as follows; perception of toxic parenting questionnaire was $r = .80$, from discipline questionnaire was $r = .78$. The descriptive statistics analysis used were means, frequencies, percentages and standard deviations. and Pearson's product moment correlation (r) was used to establish the relationship between the variables.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographics of the participants was presented in Table 1

Type of School	N	Gender	
		Female	Male
Single sex boarding	180	109	71
Mixed day	164	63	101
Total	344	172	172

Table 1: Shows the number of students by type of school and gender

The researchers used a stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques to select an equal number of male and female participants. However, the male students were less compared to the number of female students in single sex boarding schools. This was because the numbers of boys in boarding schools were fewer than those of girls in Uasin Gishu County. The number of boys was higher in mixed day schools than girls. Revealing the reality, that girls were fewer in mixed day schools. The total number of boys was 172 and girls were 172. Total participants were 344. The study investigated the relationship between toxic parenting and students' discipline problems in secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. The research hypothesis stated that there was a relationship between toxic parenting and students' discipline problems. To test the hypothesis, the toxic parenting questionnaire and the discipline questionnaire were administered to the participants and their responses were scored. The scores of toxic parenting and students' discipline were correlated using Pearson's product correlation coefficient and the following results were established as shown in Table 2.

	Toxic Parenting	Students' Discipline Problems
Toxic Parenting	—	.64
Discipline	.64	—

Table 2: Toxic Parenting and Students' Discipline Problems

The results in Table 2, indicated that there was statistically significant relationship between students' scores on toxic parenting and students' scores of discipline problems, $r(342) = .64$, $p = .000$. From the results, the research hypothesis failed to be rejected. The implication of the results was that students' who experienced high toxic parenting exhibited discipline problems in schools. Students who scored high on toxic parenting had high scores on discipline problems. Therefore, the study concluded that toxic parenting increased students' discipline problems in secondary schools.

This finding supported the findings of Nkuba, Hermenau and Hecker (2018) and (Kamau, 2015).

These studies established that sometimes some students were victims of inadequate parenting styles. This was because children who experienced high toxic parenting could find it difficult to operate within set rules in secondary school. The students who scored low on toxic parenting also scored low in discipline problems. This could be due to the fact that students who did not experience toxic parenting were emotionally and psychologically balanced to be able to make informed choices. This finding was also supported by the studies of Birichi and Rukunga, (2010) and Kigotho (2019), Kweyu, (2019) and Iannelli (2019). These studies established that children who exhibited uncontrolled behaviour within set rules were those who had experienced unfair treatments in their families. This finding also confirmed Bowen's (1978) family systems theory that posited that individuals could not be understood in isolation from other family members since family is an emotional unit. Finally the researchers agreed with Kelly (2019), who suggested that schools should provide students with educational foundation to build successful, independent lives to enhance or dispute what parents do at home.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study therefore concluded that students who experienced toxic parenting were also found in discipline problems in secondary schools. Those who experienced low toxic parenting also scored low on discipline problems. Therefore, the study also concluded that the aspect of students getting involved in discipline problems could be a coping skill of expressing anger and frustrations from exposure to toxic parenting practices from parents. The study recommended that students who experience toxic parenting could be assisted by other means other than involving their own toxic parents. The study recommended that secondary school administrators should not over-rely on parents to resolve discipline problems. Some parents could be a contributory factor and therefore less helpful. The researchers suggested to school administrators that they should run a toxic parenting test, prior to involving parents in resolving discipline issues in schools. If the test scores reveal toxic parenting, then such parents could turn out to be of little assistance. Other alternative methods of inculcating behaviour change like psychological guidance and counselling could be adopted.

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