

## **Perceived Effects of Parental Conflicts on Self-esteem of Pupils in Public Primary Schools in Igembe Central Sub County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Conflicts between parents are a global concern since it affects the mental wellness of the children. The urge for serenity and sobriety within households is a global trend that is seen as a means of attaining universal harmony. The family is the smaller unit of the bigger society which determines the uniqueness of the society. Parental conflicts affect marriages and also result in dysfunctional families that can lower children's self-esteem. Parental conflicts traumatize and deprive children of the joy of parental care and warmth. Parental presence and care contribute immensely to a child's self-esteem. Home environments have been blamed for challenges and problems in the sub-county's educational sector; and concerns have been raised about dropping out due to problems experienced at home. The population of the study was 4134 subjects comprising of 52 class seven parents' representatives, 100 class seven teachers and 3982 class seven pupils. A sample size of 374 respondents was obtained through stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers and pupils, while an interview schedule was conducted to gather data from parents' representatives. To ensure validity, research tools were presented for scrutiny by supervisors and research experts from Chuka University. To ensure reliability, research instruments were administered to a group of 40 respondents in a pilot study in one Primary School. Reliability was arrived at through split-half technique. The scores of the two groups were correlated using Spearman Brown Prophecy Formula. The technique yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78 as average in the questionnaires which was deemed appropriate. To collect data a research permit was acquired from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. Collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 for windows and results presented in percentages and frequency tables. The study revealed that parental conflicts affect pupil's self-esteem negatively by lowering it. The research findings are expected to benefit Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) working with families and schools to provide therapy to such pupils. The Ministry of Education (MoE) will use the findings in provision of life skills lessons and availing of professional counselors in public primary schools. Moreover, the results of this study are expected to sensitize school counselors, teachers and parents' to understand and help learners who come from families experiencing parental conflicts to cope better. Findings of the study may be used by marital counsellors and religious institutions to assist parents from conflict prone families to resolve their issues which lowers their children's self-esteem.

**Keyword:** Perceived effects, Parental conflicts, self -esteem, Therapy, mental wellness

## **1. Introduction**

Family is a crucial agent of socialization. It plays a major role in determining children's self-esteem. Tam CaiLian (2009) noted that self esteem develops from a child's experiences with success and failure. Value is ascribed to activities one succeeds or fails in and the feedback from parents about performance. The study pointed out that parents involved in conflict may not offer children the necessary support and feedback which can lead to development of poor self esteem. Joan and Robert (2003) as quoted by Salma, Sidra, Malik, Falak, Zorqa and Muhammad (2012) found that children exposed to parental conflict are likely to be hyper vigilant and suspicious of others. The study also noted that parental conflict interrupts crucial tasks of psychological development. Conflict changes the nature of parent-child relationship; creates anxiety and distress; over stimulates and frightens children; weakens parents' protective capacity and compromises the formation of identity. This state of affairs has potential to affect children's self esteem and emotional wellbeing.

Conflicts between parents in today's households are rampant. UNICEF (2007) declared parental conflicts a global problem. Therefore, the urge for sobriety within households is a global trend seen as a means of attaining universal harmony. Parental conflicts are defined as hostile physical or verbal confrontations that may occur between married couples living together with their children (Nijole, 2012). Parental conflicts may include physical abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, or verbal abuse among others (Gilligan, 1996; Bancroft, 2004). Bancroft and Silverman (2002) warn that although conflicts between parents may be occurring every day, they are surrounded by silence that renders them invisible, unacknowledged and unaddressed; thereby attracting little or no attention at all. This affects children's self-esteem after witnessing or even getting directly involved in such conflicts.

### **1.1 Research Problem**

Children are paramount continuity of any society; but familial instabilities tend to impede proper growth and development, realization and exploitation of their inborn potentials. The family unit is a very important socializing agent in the lives of children for it helps children to acquire the necessary psychosocial skills and attitudes in order to become intergrated members of the society. Families give children identity, direction, impetus and an idea of who they are and who they will be. Family lays the foundation for children's academic achievements. Parents play a crucial role in shaping character and mind of children. Parental interactions are critical in determining children's psychosocial wellbeing especially their self-esteem Since the home is the first school, and parents are the first teachers; whatever affects them negatively also affects children negatively. Parental conflict is a hindrance to a cohesive home environment necessary for full development of psychosocial and emotional capacities. Parental conflicts deprive the family of its essence, prestige and fundamental purpose of nurturing growth and development of children. Researches show that miraa was to blame for the violence in the Igembe , while Bururia and that miraa is major cause of conflicts in the family. Despite these observations no study had been done on the effect of parental conflicts on self esteem of their children. This study sought to establish the perceived effect of parental conflicts on self esteem of pupils in primary schools in Igembe Central of Meru County.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The chapter dealt with the methodology that was used in this study. The sub-sections highlighted are research design, location of the study, population of the study, sampling

procedures and sample size, research instruments, reliability and validity of instruments, data collection procedures, ethical considerations and data analysis.

### 2.1.1 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The respondents were class seven pupils, their class teachers and class seven parents' representatives. In order to guard against over representation or under representation among the above named categories of respondents; slots within the sample size were accorded in proportion to the number each category contributed into the population of the study.

Stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure unbiased gender representation into the study sample. Kathuri and Pals (1993) recommend that a sample size of 351 be drawn from a population of 4134 . To take care of non-respondents a sample of 374 respondents was used. To get the sample schools, researcher used stratified random sampling to select ten schools out of a total of fifty two primary schools with class seven. Those schools with more than one stream, the researcher randomly sampled one class. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select pupils in order to guard against gender bias to give a total of 354 pupils. Selection of class teachers from the ten schools involved stratified random sampling. Out of the 100 standard seven class teachers in the target population, a minimum number of 10 teachers, one from each school was selected. Attention was paid to include both male and female teachers into the study sample. Lists of names of class seven teachers in the selected schools were acquired from the deputy head teachers' offices. The names were sorted out according to gender; written on pieces of paper, folded and put in different containers. Then the researcher picked out ten teachers accordingly.

The class teachers were deemed crucial informants since they are charged with the duty of managing their classes, hence these teachers are expected to have knowledge of the pupils' academic performance, home background and the challenges or problems pupils may be facing at home. Therefore, class 7 teachers were best placed to give the information sought by this study about the effect of parental conflicts on pupils' psychosocial wellbeing and academic performance.

Class seven parents' representatives from the ten schools were selected into the study sample through stratified random sampling. They were deemed vital in the study because they are charged with the responsibility of being the link between school and home, in order to safeguard and oversee pupils' welfare. Ten parents were selected into the study sample because they were thought crucial in giving information sought by this study as they are fully aware of what happens in the homes where pupils come from.

Overall, 374 respondents formed the sample for the study (10 class teachers, 10 parents' representatives and 354 pupils); as shown in the sample distribution Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Matrix

Categories	Total Population	Sampling procedure	Sample Size
Teachers	100	Simple Random	10
Pupils	3982	Simple Random	354
Parents	52	Purposive	10
Total	4134		374

Source: Researcher (2017)

### 2.1.2 Research Instruments

The tools for data collection in the study were questionnaires and interview schedules; which were used to collect information from teachers, pupils and class seven parents' representatives.

The researcher used self-administered questionnaires to gather data from class 7 pupils and their class teachers. The questionnaires were divided into four sections. Section A gathered demographic information whereas section B was used to collect information on self-esteem. Section C sought information on interpersonal relationships while section D collected data on academic performance. Interview Schedule provided access to a respondent's attitudes and opinions. Interview schedule was used to gather data from parents' representatives because it assisted the researcher to get comprehensive information needed to meet certain objectives of the study and to access parents' attitudes and opinions about the perceived effect of parental conflicts on their children's self-esteem.

### 2.1.3 Validity and reliability

The researcher presented research tools to the experts in the Department of Education at Chuka University to assess the suitability. Upon the recommendations of the experts, the researcher made the necessary changes so as to improve on the validity of the research instruments. Reliability of the instruments was arrived after piloting where split-half technique was employed. Scores from the two groups were correlated using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained.

## 3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming and modeling data aimed at discovering useful information, suggesting conclusions and supporting decision making (Creswell, 2009). The collected data was cleaned, coded and entered into the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for windows. Martin and Acuma (2002) note that SPSS is capable of handling large quantities of data; and given its wide spectrum of statistical procedures that are purposely developed for social sciences, it is efficient. The study yielded data that required both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics which included frequencies and percentages was used to analyze quantitative data. Qualitative data realized from open ended questions was organized into themes and reported thematically in accordance

### 3.1. Results of the Research

#### 3.1.1 Effect of Parental Conflicts on Self-Esteem of Pupils

The paper sought to establish the perceived effects of parental conflicts on the pupils' self-esteem. The objective was based on the premise that pupils may have behavior problems, doubts in themselves and what they did. Such pupils are likely to always seek opinions and confirmations from other people. They may not be assertive and may seem to shy off from roles and responsibilities. To shed light on the problem, perceptions of pupils; class teachers and parents' representatives on the effects of parental conflicts on self-esteem were sought. The data collected using five level Likert Scale questionnaires comprised of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was analysed, categorized into themes, and summarized into three categories Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), Undecided (UD) and Disagree/Strongly Disagree (D/SD).

The results were illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Pupils' Response on Effects of Parental Conflicts on Self-Esteem

Themes	SA/A		UD		D/SD	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Negative self-value	255	72.9	41	11.7	102	24.0
Self-Blame	277	78.2	21	6.0	115	17.0
Self-hatred	308	87.0	31	8.7	106	22.3
Self-awareness	117	33.1	39	11.1	100	13.3
Self-doubt	298	84.2	35	10.0	112	16.3
Shame	258	72.9	12	12.3	45	15.0
Total	252	71.4	35	10.0	67	18.6

From Table 2, regarding self-esteem of pupils, the study established that 71.4% of the respondents agreed to all the statements that conflicts between parents affect self-esteem negatively, with 10% being neutral and 18.6% dissenting. Self-hatred (87.0%) and self-doubt (84.0%) rated highly among the statements and self-awareness (33.1%) rated lowest where pupils' self-esteem was affected by family conflicts. Table 2 further shows the results of data on low self-esteem that 72.9% of pupils indicated having felt ashamed and 72.9% had negative self-value. The findings are in support of Kiura (1999) who observes that children's dispositions, perspectives, perceptions and values are established gradually by what they observe and learn from home. When children see their parents interacting enthusiastically and affectionately, they feel confident that their parents love them and the opposite is true. Therefore, the atmosphere at home is important in determining pupils' self-esteem. The family helps pupils to discover who they are and what they can be. It gives a child the basis for overall positive evaluation of self. An individual's state of self-esteem is significantly influenced by the home environment the individual grows up in because children learn what they live with; and therefore most of their behavior problems can be linked to the home environment. This perspective is supported by Njenga (2010) who observes that children acquired troublesome habits through witnessing conflicts or violence at home.

Moreover, the perspective is also supported by Amato (2005) who argues that the family is critical in laying down the psychological, moral and spiritual aspects that govern all aspects of child development. Thus, families made dysfunctional by conflicts between parents affect pupils' self-esteem negatively. Ichado (2000) notes that families riddled with parental conflicts are characterized by disharmony, crisis, chaos, frustration and disillusion in children. As a result children may feel sad and unwanted and may lose self-concept prompting them to develop personality patterns that interfere with psychological wellbeing such as self-esteem. Self-esteem affects an individual's entire life, at home and in school. Erol and Orth (2010) note that positive self-esteem gives an individual strength and flexibility to take charge of life and grow from mistakes without fear of rejection. On the contrary, low self-esteem is a crippling condition that prevents individuals from realizing their full potentials; because someone with low self-esteem feels unworthy, incapable and incompetent. Therefore parental conflicts affect pupils' self-esteem adversely.

Table 3 is an illustration of the results of the data collected from class teachers which sought their opinions and perceptions about the effects of parental conflicts on self-esteem of pupils. The data was collected using five level Likert Scale questionnaires. Data was then analysed, grouped into themes and the five level Likert Scale was summarized into three categories; Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), Undecided (UD) and Disagree/Strongly Disagree (D/SD), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' Responses on Effects of Parental Conflicts on Pupil' Self-Esteem

Themes	SA/A		UD		D/SD	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Negative self-value	8	80.0	1	10	2	17
Self-Blame	7	70.0	2	20	2	18
Self-hatred	6	60.0	3	30	2	18
Self-awareness	7	70.0	0	00	2	18
Self-doubt	5	50.0	2	20	2	20
Shame	8	80.0	0	00	2	20
Total	7	68	1	13.3	2	18.5

The findings revealed that most of the teachers 68% agreed that conflicts between parents can affect pupils' self-esteem negatively, with 13.3% being neutral while 18.5 % disagreed. It is important to note the fact that majority of the teachers who participated in the study were of the opinion that parental conflicts affect self-esteem of pupils negatively. The findings of this study are in agreement with Ichado (2000) who observes that conflicts between parents affect children and that teachers described children from dysfunctional households as more anxious, fearful, hyperactive and distractible than pupils from homes where harmony reigns. In addition, Ilumoka (2010) argues that frequent parental conflicts impact negatively on a child's psychological well-being.

Table 4 shows the results of the analysis of data on signs of low self-esteem that teachers indicated could be observed from among pupils who witness conflicts between their parents. Table 4 is an illustration of the results of the data collected from class teachers which sought their opinions and perceptions about the effects of parental conflicts on self-esteem of pupils. The data was collected using five level Likert Scale questionnaires. Data was then analyzed, grouped into themes and the five level Likert Scale was summarized into three categories; Strongly Agree/Agree (SA/A), Undecided (UD) and Disagree/Strongly Disagree (D/SD), as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Teachers' Responses on Effects of Parental Conflicts on Pupil' Self-Esteem

Themes	SA/A		UD		D/SD	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Stigma due to parental conflicts	8	80	1	10	1	10
Take drugs due to parental conflicts	7	70	2	20	1	10
Lack Confidence due to parental conflicts	6	60	3	30	1	10
Pessimism due to parental conflicts	7	70	2	20	1	10
Delinquency due to parental conflicts	5	50	2	20	1	10
Total	7	70	2	20	1	10

As indicated in Table 4, 70% the teachers agreed that parental conflicts affect pupils' self-esteem negatively on all the signs that indicated low self-esteem. Upon analysis, 80% of the

teachers indicated that pupils who witness parental conflicts maybe stigmatized. Out of the sampled teachers, 70% indicated that pupils from violent families may take drugs and 70% may become pessimists. In addition, 60% of teachers indicated that pupils may lack confidence while 50% were of the opinion that pupils maybe delinquent. Data collected through interview schedules was analysed and summarized into themes in line with objectives of the study. Results from interviews with parents indicated that 70% of the parents agreed that parental conflicts affect pupils' self-esteem negatively, 25% disagreed and 5% were unaware.

The findings are in agreement with Wanjiku (2010) argument that pupils from violent households may not get all their needs fulfilled and therefore they may harbor negative attitudes towards themselves. This state of consciousness affects their self-esteem negatively. The findings are also supported by Bancroft and Silverman (2002) and Bancroft (2004) who in separate studies note that children from violent households whether abused or not often suffer emotionally and psychologically; and they are at risk of drug or alcohol abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and juvenile delinquency.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Pupils from violent households were found to have low self-esteem or self-value, hence parental conflicts impact negatively on pupils' self-esteem. During adolescence the two processes solidify into definite perspective; which impact on an individual's self-esteem negatively or positively depending on the home environment in which the individual grew up. This explains why most of the pupils have a mental picture of who they are and their value to the world even before they join school. Children build their self-esteem from what they live with at home. Parents involved in conflicts are unlikely to have quantity and quality time with children so as to offer guidance, emotional and physical support. Most pupils form a system of self-image or value depending on care and nurture received at home.

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