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# ***Influence of Parenting Styles on Teenage Pregnancy Among Girls of Ages 10-17 Years in Malava Sub- County, Kakamega County, Kenya***

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## **Abstract**

*Globally, teenage pregnancy hinders development and economic growth, driven by poverty and poor parenting. In Kenya's Malava Sub-County, absent guardianship and cultural norms escalate rates, perpetuating health issues and intergenerational poverty. Research into parenting's role is crucial for effective prevention strategies. Therefore, this study sought to assess the influence of parenting styles on teenage pregnancy. The study was guided by social learning theory by Albert Bandura (1925). The study was conducted in Malava subcounty, Kakamega County, Kenya. Mixed methods research design was used. The sample size for the study was 178 respondents from a target population of 321 based on Taro Yamane's sample determination formula. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were employed to select respondents for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the study. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guide. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the computation of means and standard deviations. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted to derive inferential statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed to identify key patterns and themes. Data was presented in tables, pie charts and graphs. Findings of the study revealed that parenting style and teenage pregnancy were significantly correlated ( $r=0.851$ ) with regression analysis revealing a coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.724 implying that 72.4% of the variance in teenage pregnancy was as a result of parenting styles. the study concluded that parenting styles significantly influence teenage pregnancy in Malava Sub-County, with neglectful (56.8%), permissive (40.6%) and authoritarian (34.8%) approaches increasing risks, while participatory parenting reduces them. The study recommended that the county government partner with elders and religious leaders to facilitate community-led dialogues on parent-child communication and implement social protection policies, like conditional cash transfers, to reduce economic-driven parental migration.*

**Key Words:** Parenting style, teenage pregnancy, teenager



## 1. Introduction

Globally, an estimated 14 per cent of young women give birth before age 18, a statistic that underscores a persistent public health emergency with devastating consequences for girls' education, health, and economic mobility (Lim & Lee, 2017). In regions like Kakamega County, Kenya, where teenage pregnancy rates soar to 18%, the urgency for effective, sustainable solutions has never been greater (County Health Department, 2023).

For decades, the predominant response to this crisis has been the promotion of school-based sex education (SBSE), positioning schools as the primary frontline for intervention. While SBSE provides crucial standardized information, its effectiveness is often hampered by inconsistent implementation, cultural resistance, and the fundamental limitation that it intervenes *after* a child's core values and behaviors have already been significantly shaped within the home. This over-emphasis on institutional solutions has inadvertently led to the neglect of the primary foundation of adolescent development: home-based parenting styles.

Extensive research confirms that the family environment is the first and most influential classroom. Parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful (Baumrind, 1991)—create the foundational framework for a child's decision-making, self-esteem, and risk perception. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and open communication, is consistently linked to lower rates of early pregnancy (WHO, 2023). Conversely, the neglectful parenting prevalent in Kakamega, driven by poverty and disrupted family structures, is a direct predictor of risky sexual behavior, with 60% of teen mothers citing a critical lack of parental supervision and guidance (Malava Youth Alliance, 2023).

Despite this evidence, a critical knowledge gap persists. Research and policy have disproportionately focused on school curricula, failing to adequately investigate the powerful and primary role of the home environment. This gap is especially pronounced regarding the influence of fathers, whose parenting styles remain almost entirely unexplored, and the cultural dynamics—such as taboos around discussion of sex and alcohol abuse—that paralyze effective parental communication (Were *et al.*, 2023; Alukagberie *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, this study is urgently needed to correct this imbalance. It moves beyond the well-trodden path of school-based interventions to critically investigate the primary influence of home-based parenting styles on teenage pregnancy. By specifically examining the underexplored role of fathers and the cultural barriers that inhibit effective parenting, this research will provide the evidence base crucial for developing targeted interventions that strengthen the family unit. Ultimately, empowering parents—the child's first and most enduring teachers—is not just complementary but is the essential, missing piece in the urgent fight against teenage pregnancy.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Kenya, a significant disconnect exists between policy intent and on-the-ground reality. While legal frameworks such as The Constitution of Kenya (2010), The Children's Act



(2022), and the National Policy on Family Promotion and Protection (2023) are explicitly intended to guarantee the rights and safety of children, they have not effectively mitigated the persistent problem of teenage pregnancy. This ongoing crisis underscores a critical implementation gap, revealing that the existence of legislation is insufficient to ensure ultimate care and protection for teenagers, particularly as these frameworks often fail to address the foundational role of parenting in adolescent development.

According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022), Kakamega County has a teenage pregnancy rate of 18%, significantly higher than the national average of 15%, with Malava Subcounty contributing disproportionately to this figure. A 2023 report by the County Health Department revealed that over 25% of girls aged 10–19 in Malava have either been pregnant or given birth, compared to the county's average of 20%. Early motherhood as a result of teenage pregnancy perpetuates cycles of poverty, as 60% of teenage mothers in the region do not return to school, limiting their future economic prospects (County Directorate of Education, 2023). The high prevalence rates of teenage pregnancy suggest potential gaps in how parenting is exercised and its effectiveness in influencing teenage behavior, indicating a systemic failure to translate legal protections into effective, day-to-day parental practices.

Despite the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Malava, few studies have quantitatively examined how specific parenting styles influence teenage pregnancy rates. Most interventions focus on school-based sex education rather than family-centered approaches, yet evidence suggests that parental involvement reduces risky sexual behavior by up to 50% (Biddlecom et al., 2018). This highlights a critical oversight in both research and policy, where the focus remains on institutional interventions rather than strengthening the primary caregiving environment, which is the very foundation the legal frameworks aim to support.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes observation, imitation, and modeling as core mechanisms of learning (Bandura, 1977). Individuals acquire behaviors by observing others and noting the consequences—a process termed reinforcement. Bandura further contends that effective learning requires motivation, fostered through recognition and praise, enabling the development of self-worth and realistic self-assessment (Brummelman et al., 2022). Applied to parenting, this framework elucidates how different styles create distinct learning environments influencing adolescent behavior. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and clear communication, aligns with social learning principles.

Parents serve as positive models, using reinforcement like praise to motivate children, cultivate self-worth, and encourage responsible conduct (Bandura, 1977). This approach supports open dialogue and informed decision-making. In contrast, authoritarian parenting relies on control and punishment, creating a negative reinforcement atmosphere. Adolescents may imitate out of fear, not understanding, leading to secretive behaviors as



they seek external validation (Brummelman *et al.*, 2022). Permissive parenting, with low demands, fails to provide necessary structure. Though nurturing, it lacks consistent guidance or reinforcement, leaving teenagers without clear models and making them susceptible to peer and media influences (Bandura, 1977). Neglectful parenting involves no engagement, resulting in a learning vacuum. Without parental models or reinforcement, adolescents seek guidance from alternative, often risky, sources (Brummelman *et al.*, 2022).

The theory's relevance is starkly evident in Malava Sub-County, where high teenage pregnancy rates indicate parental modeling failures. Many parents avoid discussions on sexuality due to cultural discomfort, depriving teens of positive models and reinforcement (Were *et al.*, 2023). This neglect inadvertently reinforces risky behaviors, while healthier choices receive no encouragement. Consequently, teenagers turn to peers or media that often glamorize unprotected sex, exacerbating pregnancy rates (County Health Department, 2023). Bandura's theory clarifies how parenting styles shape behavior and underscores the urgent need for interventions enhancing parental capacity to model and reinforce positive health choices.

### 3. Methodology

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed method research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The design allowed for simultaneous collection and analysis of numerical data alongside in-depth qualitative insights, enhancing the depth and accuracy of findings. The mixed method was particularly relevant as it helped address the limitations inherent in using either qualitative or quantitative methods standalone. While the convergent parallel mixed-method research design offers significant advantages by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches for enhanced depth and accuracy.

The study was conducted in Malava Sub-County, one of the 12 sub-counties in Kakamega County, Kenya. Malava Sub-County is an administrative region located in Kakamega County, western Kenya, approximately between longitudes 34°45' E and 34°55' E and latitudes 0°30' N and 0°40' N. Known for its fertile lands, favorable climate, and vibrant agricultural activities, the sub-county plays a significant role in the economy of the larger Kakamega region. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), Malava has a total estimated population of 235,000 people. It is a cosmopolitan and densely populated sub-county characterized by diverse socio-economic and cultural dynamics, making it an ideal site for studying parenting and teenage pregnancy trends.

This study used simple random sampling, drawing participants from Malava Hospital's Maternal Child Health register, which contains client demographics and contacts. This study's sampling strategy extended beyond the health register to mitigate selection bias and enhance representativeness. By incorporating school registers and Community Health Volunteer (CHV) records, the research actively sought to include teenage mothers who delivered at home or never attended antenatal clinics—groups often missing from facility-based data. This multi-source approach captured a broader spectrum of experiences, reducing underrepresentation and strengthening the generalizability of findings to the wider



population of adolescent mothers in the region (Were *et al.*, 2023). Researchers contacted clients via phones to schedule appointments; for those without phones, caregivers were reached. The process of moving from an initial target population of 321 cases to a final sample of 155 participants involved a structured sampling procedure and expected attrition common in social science research. The first reduction, from the population of 321 to a calculated sample size of 178, was determined using Yamane's (1967) simplified formula for proportionate sampling to achieve a representative sample with a desired level of precision. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:  $n$  = required sample size

$N$  = population size (321)

$e$  = margin of error (0.05, representing a 95% confidence level)

Applying the formula:  $n = 321 / (1 + 321(0.05)^2) = 321 / (1 + 321 \times 0.0025) = 321 / (1 + 0.8025) = 321 / 1.8025 \approx 178$ .

Therefore, 178 was established as the minimum required sample size to adequately represent the population of 321. However, achieving this target is often subject to field realities. The subsequent drop from 178 sampled individuals to 155 actual participants—an attrition of 23 individuals is attributed to standard challenges in survey-based studies. This attrition is categorized as non-response, a common phenomenon where selected individuals cannot be reached, refuse to participate, or provide incomplete data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, the 23 drop-outs likely resulted from a combination of factors including refusals by some potential respondents to consent to the study due to mistrust, lack of time, or sensitivity of the research topic (Were *et al.*, 2023), and attrition where some initially listed individuals could not be located or had migrated from the study area by the time of data collection (County Health Department, 2023). A final response rate of 155 participants from a sample of 178 represents an 87% response rate, which is considered excellent and minimizes non-response bias in social research, as rates above 70-80% are generally deemed acceptable to ensure the validity of the findings (Babbie, 2020).

The study targeted 55 key informants, which comprised of 20 HCWs, 20 teachers and 5 chiefs and 10 parents. Malava Sub-County hospital was purposively sampled due to its first access to antenatal care clinics. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants. The quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics and key variables of the sample. Subsequently, inferential analyses, such as chi-square tests and logistic regression, were employed to examine relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses. Concurrently, the qualitative data were analyzed using a systematic thematic analysis approach. This involved transcribing the responses verbatim, generating initial codes, and identifying overarching themes to capture the nuanced perspectives of the participants.



## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Influence of Parenting Styles on Teenage Pregnancy

The study sought to establish the influence parenting styles had on teenage pregnancy in Malava Sub- County, Kakamega Kenya. This was achieved by conducting both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results are as shown in Table1.

**Table 1:** Influence of parenting Styles on Teenage Pregnancy

| Parenting Styles                                             | 4            | 3            | 2            | 1            | Mean | S. D |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|------|
| How does Participatory parenting influence teenage pregnancy | 14.8<br>(23) | 20.6<br>(32) | 38.1<br>(59) | 26.5<br>(41) | 2.96 | 1.43 |
| Does authoritarian increase teenage pregnancy                | 17.4<br>(27) | 18.7<br>(29) | 36.2<br>(56) | 27.7<br>(43) | 2.94 | 1.43 |
| Is neglectful parenting linked to teenage pregnancy          | 2.6<br>(4)   | 17.4<br>(27) | 56.8<br>(88) | 23.2<br>(36) | 2.30 | 1.09 |
| Does permissive parenting elevate teenage pregnancy          | 7.7<br>(12)  | 32.9<br>(51) | 30.3<br>(47) | 29<br>(45)   | 2.63 | 1.40 |

**Source: Research data, 2023**

The study found that only 14.8% (23) of respondents were frequently involved in family decisions, while 20.6% (32) were sometimes included. In contrast, 38.1% (59) were rarely consulted, and 26.5% (41) were never involved, which from the perspective of social learning theory suggests that most teenagers are denied the opportunity to observe and model the complex decision-making processes of their parents, increasing their vulnerability to early sexual activity as they have not internalized the cognitive skills for responsible choices. Participatory parenting, characterized by open communication, emotional support, and guidance, helps teenagers develop responsible decision-making skills by providing a consistent and supportive model for them to observe and imitate. Research indicates that adolescents raised in such environments are less likely to engage in unprotected sex, as they receive proper guidance on relationships and sexual health through this effective modeling process.

Regarding disciplinary approaches, 17.4% (27) of respondents reported often being consulted before punishment, while 18.7% (29) were sometimes involved. However, 36.2% (56) were rarely given a chance to explain themselves, and 27.7% (43) were never consulted. Authoritarian parenting, marked by authoritarian rules without explanation, fosters rebellion and risky behaviors because it models the use of unilateral power and control rather than negotiation and reasoned discussion, which teenagers may then replicate in their relationships or rebel against. Teenagers under such parenting may seek validation through early sexual relationships due to emotional distance at home because the model of interaction they have learned is devoid of warm, communicative reinforcement. Additionally, the lack of open discussions about sex and contraception leaves them unprepared to make informed choices, as they have no behavioral model to observe for these crucial conversations, increasing pregnancy risks.

A concerning finding was that 56.8% (88) of respondents said their parents were rarely

available when needed, while 23.2% (36) reported never having parental support. Neglectful parenting leaves teenagers unsupervised, which according to social learning theory means there is an absence of any parental model to observe for guidance, allowing them to engage in early sexual activity without having learned appropriate behaviors. Without proper monitoring or emotional support, neglected teens may seek affection through premature relationships, leading to unintended pregnancies because they are motivated to find reinforcement and models for behavior elsewhere, often from peers or media. Studies confirm that neglectful parents often fail to set rules or monitor their children's activities, which increases exposure to risky behaviors by failing to provide models for boundaries or consequences.

Only 7.7% (12) of respondents were often allowed to set their own rules, while 32.9% (51) were sometimes permitted. Conversely, 30.3% (47) were rarely given such freedom, and 29% (45) were never allowed. Parents who enforce rigid rules without warmth (authoritarian) model autocratic behavior that stifles independence, while those who are overly permissive model a lack of structure and fail to instill discipline; both parenting styles contribute to poor decision-making in teens because they provide ineffective or negative behavioral models. The findings highlight that most parents do not adopt a participatory approach, instead leaning toward authoritarian or neglectful styles. Authoritarian parents restrict open discussions, thus limiting the behaviors a teenager can observe, while neglectful parents provide minimal supervision and thus no model, both increasing teenage pregnancy risks. In contrast, participatory parenting, which balances guidance with emotional support, reduces risky behaviors by providing a positive and healthy model for teenagers to learn from through observation and imitation.

This study aligns with Prapoorna's (2021) research, which found that teenagers raised in participatory households develop better decision-making skills and self-discipline because they have observed and learned these behaviors from their parents. Conversely, authoritarian and neglectful parenting leads to emotional gaps, pushing teens toward early sexual activity as they seek out alternative models for relationships and reinforcement. To mitigate teenage pregnancy, parents should adopt a balanced approach encouraging open communication, setting clear expectations, and providing emotional support, thereby serving as positive role models from whom teenagers can learn. Policymakers and educators should also promote parental awareness programs to foster healthier parenting practices that are consistent with the principles of social learning theory.

#### **4.1.1 Authoritarian Parenting Influence Teenage Pregnancy**

The study sought to examine how Authoritarian parenting affects teenage pregnancy. The results are as indicated in Table 2.

The finding that 34.8% of respondents indicated authoritarian parenting makes teenagers become rebellious aligns with the theory's principle of vicarious reinforcement. Teenagers who observe that their parents use power and control to enforce authoritarian rules without explanation (a lack of two-way communication, noted by 22.6%) learn to model this authoritarian behavior themselves, rebelling against the authority as a learned response to a coercive environment. Furthermore, the 18.1% who cited low self-esteem and the 14.8%





who noted low interactivity demonstrate how the absence of a supportive model for open communication prevents adolescents from learning healthy interpersonal skills and building self-efficacy through positive reinforcement.

**Table 2:** Authoritarian parenting influence on teenage pregnancy

| Response                                        | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Lack of two-way communication                   | 35         | 22.6           |
| Teenager becomes rebellious                     | 54         | 34.8           |
| Low self esteem                                 | 28         | 18.1           |
| Low interactivity between parents and teenagers | 23         | 14.8           |
| Parents imposing their lifestyles on teenagers  | 15         | 9.7            |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | <b>155</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Research data, 2023**

The study illustrates that authoritarian practices, where parents dictate what is to be done—a method reported by 9.7% of teenagers as a way of imposing a lifestyle—create a home environment where adolescents feel unable to freely talk or find support. This compels them to seek validation externally, where they observe and imitate risky behaviors, ultimately making them easily lured into situations that can lead to pregnancy (Prapoorna, 2021). The barriers that lead parents to adopt this style are multifaceted and often intergenerational. A primary barrier is the cyclical nature of learned parenting practices, where parents unconsciously replicate the authoritarian methods, they themselves experienced as children, a process explained by social learning theory as the intergenerational transmission of behavior through modeling (Bandelj, 2020; Chen & Kaplan, 2023).

Furthermore, parents may operate under significant socioeconomic pressures and chronic stress, which deplete cognitive and emotional resources necessary for employing more engaged, participatory strategies. Research indicates that economic hardship and associated psychological distress are significant predictors of harsh, coercive, and less nurturing parenting practices (Masarik & Conger, 2017). In such high-stress contexts, authoritarian parenting can be misperceived as a more efficient or immediate means of maintaining control and ensuring child safety in what is perceived as a risky environment (Vélez-Agosto *et al.*, 2023).

A lack of knowledge and skills presents another significant barrier. Many parents may simply be unaware of alternative, more effective disciplinary strategies that involve dialogue and explanation. Their parenting approach is not necessarily a conscious choice but a default based on their own upbringing and an absence of exposure to other models, underscoring how a limited behavioral repertoire is reproduced (Gershoff, 2023). This is often compounded by cultural and community norms that explicitly endorse authority-based parenting as a form of discipline and respect, vicariously reinforcing these practices within a community (Knight *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, underlying these behaviors can be a fear-based motivation where parents, aiming to protect their children from negative outcomes like academic failure or early pregnancy, believe that authoritarian, unquestioned obedience is the most reliable path to success and



safety. This fear can override more nurturing instincts, leading parents to prioritize control over connection, mistakenly believing it is in the child's best interest (Pinquart, 2023). Thus, these barriers—modeled behaviors from their own childhood, external stress, a lack of knowledge, cultural norms, and fear—collectively prevent parents from adopting a participatory style, inadvertently fostering the very environment that drives their teenagers to seek negative models and reinforcement outside the home.

This was supported by an interview with a teacher:

*In the past, authoritarian parenting was effective, with strict rules and physical discipline minimizing issues like teenage pregnancy. However, with the rise of human and child rights, such control is no longer viable. Modern parenting requires treating teenagers as equals, involving them in decisions, and addressing their concerns collaboratively. Today, even pregnant teens must be supported, often with families caring for their babies while they continue schooling. Thus, building trust and open communication with teenagers is essential to tackling challenges like teenage pregnancy (K.I.I, with a teacher at Malava Boys, 06/04/23)*

This coincides with Babbar & Dhankar (2021) which states that authoritarian parents use punishments instead of discipline. So, rather than teach a child how to make better choices, parents concentrate on making teenagers feel sorry for their mistakes.

#### 4.1.2 Neglectful Parenting Influence Teenage Pregnancy

The study further investigated how neglectful parenting influence on teenage pregnancy. The results are discussed in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Neglectful Parenting Influence on Teenage Pregnancy

| Response                     | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Lack of basic needs          | 56         | 36.1           |
| Lack of parental supervision | 48         | 31.0           |
| Lack of emotional support    | 51         | 32.9           |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>155</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Research data, 2023**

The results in Table 3 indicate that all the respondents agreed that neglectful parenting increases teenage pregnancy, with 36.1% attributing it to a lack of provision of basic needs, 31.0% reporting a lack of parental supervision, and 32.9% indicating a lack of emotional support. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, this absence of parental care creates a vacuum where teenagers are deprived of positive role models from whom they can learn healthy relationship dynamics and responsible life skills. With no available parent to supply needs, provide care, and offer guidance, teenagers are left alone to care for themselves and are forced to seek alternative models for support and reinforcement.

The study's findings on neglectful parenting are a stark demonstration of Social Learning Theory in a negative context, primarily illustrating the consequences of a complete absence

of positive models. The cases where a victim recounted that her grandmother's absence forced her to depend on her boyfriend, who impregnated her as "payment" for his support (KII, Butali Market, 5.6.2023), and another explained that a boda-boda rider provided transportation and material support but abandoned her after she became pregnant, while her mother, unaware due to late work hours, only discovered the situation later (Interview, Shivanga, 08/04/23), are direct results of this modeling vacuum. According to Bandura, individuals learn through observation, but in these scenarios, the primary models the parents or guardians are absent or unavailable. This lack of a parental model drives teenagers into exploitative relationships, as they are forced to seek alternative sources of support and, consequently, alternative models to learn from. They learn to imitate transactional dynamics where material support is exchanged for sexual activity, a behavior that is negatively reinforced by the immediate meeting of basic needs like food, security, and transportation, despite the severe long-term risks such as abandonment and pregnancy.

This coincides with the words of Baumrind (1991) which state that a lack of basic needs and no emotional support forces teenagers to seek affection from somewhere else, thus leading to unwanted pregnancy. From a social learning perspective, this "seeking affection" is actually a search for reinforcement and a substitute model for behavior. The study confirmed that a neglectful style of parenting increases chances of teenage pregnancy since parents are absent and have left teenagers in the hands of others. This absence means there is no parental model to observe for learning healthy relationship norms or decision-making. Even when a mistake is made at home the parent reports the teenager at school, further demonstrating a failure to model conflict resolution or provide guided learning within the family unit, instead outsourcing discipline and thus further abdicating the parental modeling role.

Because most of the parents were busy most of the time and did not have time with their teenagers, the adolescents were not able to observe or internalize prosocial values and behaviors from them. This breakdown in the fundamental process of social learning where attention, retention, and reproduction are directed toward a trusted model leads them to seek reinforcement and learn from other, often risky, models in their environment, such as boyfriends or boda-boda riders, who provide immediate negative reinforcement for risky behaviors.

One of the chiefs during interview confirmed that;

*Neglectful parenting significantly contributes to rising teenage pregnancy, particularly in single-parent households. A mother, often busy working to provide, leaves teenagers unsupervised for long hours, increasing their vulnerability. While her situation is understandable, the lack of parental guidance leads to risky behaviors. Similarly, some parents migrate, leaving teens with elderly caregivers who lack authority, allowing unchecked freedom and resulting in early pregnancies (KII with a chief in Shirugu, 09/04/23).*

Unsupervised teenagers often fall into bad company, leading to drug abuse, risky behaviors, and early pregnancy. Schiff & Shelov (1997) note that neglectful parents provide little



guidance, enforce few rules, and fail to meet their children's needs. These parents are often unaware of their teens' activities, expecting them to self-regulate. Lack of nurturing and attention increases vulnerability to harmful influences and poor life choices.

#### 4.1.3 Permissive Parenting

The researcher examined the effect of permissive parenting on teenage pregnancy. The results are illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Influence of Permissive Parenting and Teenage Pregnancy

| Response                             | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Lack of control                      | 63         | 40.6           |
| Parent too soft to effect punishment | 59         | 38.1           |
| Teenagers make their own rules       | 33         | 21.3           |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>155</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Research data, 2023**

This study found that permissive parenting contributes to teenage pregnancy, as confirmed by all respondents. The lack of control was evident, with 40.6% citing minimal supervision, which means adolescents are deprived of observing positive behavioral models and are left to learn from potentially risky peer groups or media influences without corrective feedback. Furthermore, 38.4% noted overly less punishment, and 21.3% reported that teens set their own rules without consequences. This absence of consistent negative consequences for undesirable actions fails to provide the necessary vicarious reinforcement that discourages the adoption of risky behaviors. Respondents stated that permissive parenting allows teenagers to disregard rules, increasing pregnancy risks, because the teenagers learn through the consistent lack of repercussions that their actions have no serious outcomes, thereby reinforcing rule-breaking behavior.

Additionally, 60% of interviewed teachers linked permissive parenting often practiced by overprotective mothers to higher pregnancy rates. From a social learning perspective, this overprotectiveness does not model effective conflict resolution or assertive communication; instead, it models avoidance. Fear of confrontation led some parents to avoid authoritarian discipline, using ineffective, soft punishments. This parental behavior demonstrates that confrontation is to be evaded and that rules are not steadfast, lessons which adolescents then imitate in their own lives by avoiding difficult but responsible choices. This permissive enabled rule-breaking without significant repercussions, reinforcing the connection between permissive parenting and teenage pregnancy because the adolescent's learned behavior that there are no meaningful consequences for breaking rules is directly applied to their sexual decision-making, leaving them unprepared to navigate pressures and understand the serious ramifications of early sexual activity (Prapoorna, 2021).

#### 4.1.4 Participatory Parenting

The study sought to establish how participatory parenting influences teenage pregnancy. Results are as indicated in Table 5.



**Table 5:** Participatory Parenting Influence on Teenage Pregnancy

| Response                                           | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Good relationship between parents and teenagers    | 60         | 38.7           |
| Open and honest interaction                        | 57         | 36.8           |
| Teenagers are involved and feel part of the family | 38         | 24.5           |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>155</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Research data, 2023**

This study found that participatory parenting effectively reduces teenage pregnancy, as confirmed by all respondents, a finding that aligns with the principles of Social Learning Theory. According to Bandura (1977), individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling, particularly from influential figures like parents. The key factors cited—a strong parent-teen relationship (38.7%), open communication (36.8%), and teen inclusion in family matters (24.5%)—directly facilitate this process. Respondents emphasized that such parenting fosters guidance and early problem-solving, which provides teenagers with a constant model of effective decision-making and conflict resolution to observe and internalize. The honest discussions prevent misunderstandings by ensuring that expectations and consequences are clearly communicated and understood, allowing for vicarious learning.

Additionally, teens feel valued through family involvement, which improves self-esteem and reduces risky behavior. From a social learning perspective, this sense of value and belonging serves as a positive reinforcement, motivating adolescents to continue modeling the responsible behaviors demonstrated by their parents. Parents who engage in regular discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and emotional support create a supportive environment where teens can practice and reproduce these prosocial behaviors, steering them toward positive decisions. Overall, participatory parenting minimizes teenage pregnancy by strengthening bonds, which increases the teen's attention to the parent's model, and by encouraging open dialogue, which aids the retention and reproduction of learned values, thereby reinforcing responsible behavior through active parental involvement.

The perspective of a healthcare worker, who emphasized that participatory parenting is crucial as authoritarian approaches may lead to resistance, further supports this theoretical link. Social Learning Theory suggests that authoritarian parenting, which relies on control without explanation, models the use of power and force, which children may either submit to or rebel against. In contrast, building friendship, involving teens in family decisions, and recognizing their maturity, as recommended, provides a model of mutual respect. This approach allows teenagers to learn through participation and observation of democratic processes, reducing the likelihood of them seeking validation through risky behaviors like early sexual activity. The key informant's note that:

*The law acknowledges teens as growing adults underscores the need for parents to guide through inclusion rather than control (K.I.I with HCW, Malava Hospital,*





The finding that 72% of respondents believed parents should punish teenagers without discussion, while 28% favored dialogue before punishment, highlights a prevalent adherence to an authoritarian model, which Social Learning Theory predicts would be ineffective. A punitive approach without dialogue models aggression and fails to teach the reasoning behind rules, hindering the cognitive processes of attention and retention necessary for internalizing norms. Conversely, the minority who favored dialogue advocate for a method that allows teenagers to understand the cause and effect of their actions, facilitating better learning. The study's highlighted need to diversify disciplinary methods and reduce reliance on physical punishment alone is crucial for better effectiveness and acceptance because, as Bandura's theory demonstrates, learning is most effective when the model is credible and the process is explained, not merely enforced.

## 4.2 Inferential Analysis

### 4.2.1 Pearson Correlation Between Parenting Styles and Teenage Pregnancy

The results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Relationships between parenting styles and teenage pregnancy

| Variable Pair | Pearson Correlation (r) | Significance (p-value) | Sample Size (N) | Interpretation                                                              |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AP            | 0.416**                 | 0.001                  | 155             | Moderate positive correlation, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ .    |
| NP            | 0.522**                 | 0.001                  | 155             | Strong positive correlation, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ .      |
| PP            | -0.291**                | 0.001                  | 155             | Weak negative correlation, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ .        |
| PAP           | 0.797**                 | 0.001                  | 155             | Very strong positive correlation, statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ . |

AP= Authoritarian parenting, NP=Neglectful parenting, PP=permissive parenting, PAP= participatory parenting

#### Source: Research data, 2023

Table 6 highlights significant links between parenting styles and teenage pregnancy, explained through theoretical frameworks. Parsons' Theory of Action Systems reveals that authoritarian parenting ( $r=0.416$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) correlates with higher pregnancy rates, as rigid family structures hinder communication, pushing teens toward external validation. Neglectful parenting ( $r=0.522$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) further supports Parsons' idea of system interdependence, showing how disengagement weakens family protection and socialization.

Social Learning Theory clarifies the strong tie between permissive parenting ( $r=0.797$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and teenage pregnancy, emphasizing the need for boundaries and role modeling. In contrast, participatory parenting ( $r=-0.291$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) aligns with Baumrind's authoritative style and Parsons' adaptive systems, promoting family stability through balanced guidance.



These findings collectively demonstrate how parenting approaches shape teen behavior, with structured yet responsive care reducing pregnancy risks.

#### 4.2.2 2 Linear Regression Between Parenting Styles and Teenage Pregnancy

The study further conducted linear regression analysis as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Linear Regression between parenting styles and teenage pregnancy

##### Model Summary

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .851 <sup>a</sup> | .724     | .712              | .766                       |

a. Predictors: (Constant), AP= Authoritarian parenting, NP= Neglectful parenting, PP=Permissive parenting, PAP= participatory parenting,

##### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

| Model        | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|--------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 Regression | 227.007        | 4   | 37.835      | 64.540 | .001 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual     | 86.761         | 148 | .586        |        |                   |
| Total        | 313.768        | 154 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Teenage Pregnancy

b. Predictors: (Constant), DP= Dictatorship parenting, NP= Neglectful parenting, PP=Permissive parenting, PAP = participatory parenting,

##### Coefficients

| Model                   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients |        | Sig. |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|                         | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      | t      |      |
| 1 (Constant)            | .499                        | .348       |                           | 1.432  | .154 |
| Authoritarian parenting | .400                        | .094       | .305                      | 4.271  | .001 |
| Neglectful Parenting    | .524                        | .082       | .513                      | 6.385  | .001 |
| Permissive parenting    | 2.007                       | .153       | 1.419                     | 13.136 | .001 |
| Participatory parenting | -1.129                      | .078       | 1.072                     | 14.474 | .001 |

a. Dependent Variable: Teenage Pregnancy

#### Source: Research data, 2023

The results in Table 7 reveal significant relationships between parenting styles and teenage pregnancy, both supporting and challenging existing theoretical frameworks. A strong linear correlation ( $r = 0.851$ ) and high predictive power ( $R^2 = 0.724$ ) confirm Parsons' (1951) Theory of Action Systems, suggesting that family dynamics shape adolescent behavior predictably, particularly in the Kenyan context.

Authoritarian parenting showed a significant positive link with teenage pregnancy ( $B = 0.400$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), initially aligning with Baumrind's (1991) authoritarian parenting theory. In Malava, deep-seated taboos prohibit open parent-child communication about sexuality, deeming it a cultural transgression (Mohammed & Atieno, 2022). Furthermore, entrenched patriarchal norms absolve fathers of nurturing roles, enforcing a distant, authoritarian dynamic that leaves adolescents without accessible guidance (Kwena & Bukhala, 2021). However, its insignificance when other styles were considered suggests Western theories may require cultural adaptation, as Darling and Steinberg (1993) propose.



Permissive parenting had a dramatic effect ( $\beta = 2.007$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), strongly supporting Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory. The reported effect size for permissive parenting ( $\beta = 2.007$ ) is unusually large, suggesting potential statistical inflation. This likely stems from multicollinearity, where the measured parenting styles (e.g., permissive, authoritarian) are highly correlated and not independent. Consequently, the model may have overstated permissive parenting's unique effect, as its influence is conflated with other overlapping styles. This limitation necessitates caution in interpreting its singular impact. Conversely, participatory parenting was highly protective ( $\beta = -1.129$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), reinforcing Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory by showing that autonomy-supportive parenting improves adolescent decision-making, particularly in cultures valuing parental authority.

Neglectful parenting also had a significant impact ( $\beta = 0.524$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Belsky's (1984) process model, which stresses parental involvement in healthy development. The larger effect size may reflect weakening extended family support systems in some contexts. The overall model fit (*adjusted*  $R^2 = 0.712$ ) strongly validates Parsons' systems theory, demonstrating that analyzing multiple parenting dimensions together explains more variance than examining single factors in isolation. The study highlights the need for context-specific models to better understand parenting's role in preventing teenage pregnancy.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that parenting styles are a critical determinant of teenage pregnancy rates in Malava Sub-County, Kenya, yet its findings must be interpreted within the context of its limitations. A key limitation is the potential for multicollinearity between parenting styles, which may have inflated the perceived effect of permissive parenting. Furthermore, while sampling incorporated school and community health volunteer records to mitigate bias, the exclusion of teenage mothers completely disconnected from all these systems may affect the generalizability of the results. Despite these limitations, the findings hold significant value. Authoritarian and permissive styles, prevalent due to specific cultural and economic barriers, significantly increase adolescent risk. Cultural barriers include taboos prohibiting open parent-child communication about sexuality and patriarchal norms that absolve fathers of nurturing roles. Economic barriers encompass poverty-driven parental migration for work, which leads to absentee supervision. To address these, policy must move beyond individual-level interventions. Culturally, the county government should partner with religious leaders and elders to design community-led dialogues that reframe communication as a protective necessity. Economically, social protection policies are needed, such as conditional cash transfers for low-income families to reduce migration incentives. Effectively mitigating teenage pregnancy requires policies that simultaneously build parenting skills and dismantle the structural barriers that prevent their practice.

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