

The Influence of Authoritative Parenting Style on Delinquent Behaviour among Primary School Children in Eldoret Town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract: Parenting style is widely theorised as a determinant of children's behavioural outcomes, yet evidence on whether authoritative parenting protects against delinquency is not uniform across contexts. This study examined the relationship between authoritative parenting style and children's delinquent behaviour among public primary school children in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Guided by Baumrind's parenting typology, the study adopted a descriptive survey design with a convergent quantitative-qualitative approach. Data were collected from 242 class seven and eight pupils using a Likert-scale questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82) and complemented by interviews with 24 teachers and 24 parents. Descriptive statistics showed that children generally perceived their parents as practising authoritative behaviours, most strongly in providing rational direction and guidance ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.31$) and sharing household responsibilities ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.32$). However, multiple regression analysis found no statistically significant relationship between authoritative parenting and delinquent behaviour (unstandardised $B = -0.017$, standardised $\beta = -0.019$, $t = -0.171$, $p = .865$, 95% CI $[-0.213, 0.179]$), and the null hypothesis was retained. The direction of the coefficient matched a protective association reported elsewhere, but the effect did not reach significance in this sample. The finding is discussed against a wider literature in which authoritative parenting's protective effect on delinquency is well established in some samples but not detected in others, including recent Malaysian and Kenyan evidence. Implications for parenting interventions and school-based guidance and counselling programmes in Uasin Gishu County are discussed, alongside recommendations for future research with larger and more geographically representative samples.

Keywords: authoritative parenting; children's delinquent behaviour; Baumrind's typology; primary school; Eldoret; Kenya.

I. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is the principal mechanism through which children acquire the self-regulation, social competence and moral judgement that keep antisocial conduct in check [1]. Diana Baumrind's typology of permissive, authoritarian and authoritative parenting remains the dominant framework for studying how caregiving style shapes these outcomes, and it continues to organise contemporary research on adolescent problem behaviour nearly six decades after it was first proposed [2]. Of the three styles, authoritative parenting, combining high warmth with reasoned, consistent demandingness, is the one most consistently theorised to protect children against delinquency, because it balances parental control with the child's growing autonomy and thereby fosters internalised, rather than merely externally enforced, self-discipline [3].

Recent longitudinal evidence lends empirical weight to this theoretical expectation. In a two-wave study of 1,066 Chinese adolescents, Xiong et al. [4] found that authoritative parenting negatively predicted both juvenile delinquency and crime

victimisation, with the effect partly explained by reduced mental health problems and weaker affiliation with delinquent peers. Similarly, Goering and Mrug [5], following 704 American adolescents from age 11 to 18, found that authoritative parenting predicted lower delinquency in part because it fostered empathy in early adolescence. These studies, both published within the last five years, support the view that authoritative parenting can function as a protective factor against delinquent behaviour.

The picture is less consistent once the lens narrows to specific populations. Amran and Basri [6], studying 187 Malaysian secondary school students, found a significant relationship between authoritarian parenting and delinquent behaviour but no significant relationship for authoritative or permissive styles. In Kenya, Onsando et al. [7] found that among convicted male juveniles at the Kamiti Youth Correction and Training Centre in Kiambu County, authoritative parenting, balancing warmth with supervision, was associated with the most favourable outcomes, while Lumadede et al. [8], examining parental characteristics and juvenile delinquency across Nairobi and Mombasa counties, reported that the relationship between specific parental attributes and delinquency in the Kenyan context remains only partially understood and is sensitive to how both parenting and delinquency are measured. This mixed pattern of findings, a well-supported theoretical expectation of protection alongside empirical results that do not always reach significance, is the point of departure for the present study.

In Kenya, concern about children's delinquent behaviour has translated into policy reform. The Children Act, 2022 [9] restructured the juvenile justice system around non-custodial and rehabilitative responses, including probation, reprimand, and placement in rehabilitation institutions, in place of the more punitive measures that previously governed children in conflict with the law [10]. This reform signals a national acknowledgement that punitive responses alone have not curbed delinquent behaviour among school-going children, and it strengthens the case for identifying the upstream, family-level factors, including parenting style, that could reduce the number of children entering the justice system in the first place.

Eldoret town, the headquarters of Uasin Gishu County, has not been insulated from this concern. Public primary schools in the town have reported low completion rates, recurrent aggression by pupils towards teachers, and a visible increase in street children, alongside truancy, substance use and theft among children of primary-school age [11]. Existing local studies on delinquency in the area have tended to focus on the general adolescent population, street children, or the link between delinquency and academic performance, without isolating the specific contribution of parenting style. This gap motivated the broader study from which the present paper is drawn, which examined the influence of permissive, authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles on children's delinquent behaviour in nine public primary schools in Eldoret town.

This paper reports the findings for authoritative parenting specifically. The study was guided by the objective: to establish the influence of authoritative parenting style on children's delinquent behaviour among children in selected public primary schools in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis stated that authoritative parenting style has no statistically significant relationship with delinquent behaviour among children from selected public primary schools in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Baumrind's parenting typology [12], [13], which classifies parenting along two dimensions: demandingness, the extent to which parents set and enforce behavioural expectations, and responsiveness, the extent to which parents are warm, attuned and supportive of the child's individuality. Authoritative parents score highly on both dimensions: they monitor their children's behaviour, apply discipline judiciously, and encourage independent decision-making within a framework of clearly communicated rules [14]. Because authoritative parents combine control with warmth and explanation rather than control through coercion, children raised in this style are theorised to internalise behavioural norms rather than simply comply with them out of fear, which in principle reduces the likelihood of delinquent conduct even when direct parental supervision is absent [2]. Baumrind's framework was selected for this study because it specifies, in testable terms, how the same underlying dimensions of parenting predict divergent child outcomes, making it well suited to a study comparing three parenting styles against a single behavioural outcome.

B. Authoritative Parenting and Delinquent Behaviour: Global Evidence

A substantial body of research links authoritative parenting to reduced problem behaviour in children and adolescents. Milevsky et al. [15] found that adolescents raised by authoritative parents reported higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, and lower depression, than peers raised under permissive or authoritarian parenting. Zhou et al. [16] showed that children

of authoritative parents displayed greater empathy across both positive and negative emotional situations, a capacity later shown by Goering and Mrug [5] to mediate the pathway from authoritative parenting at age 11 to reduced delinquency at age 18. Xiong et al. [4], using structural equation modelling on longitudinal Chinese data, similarly found that authoritative parenting reduced delinquency indirectly, through improved adolescent mental health and weaker association with delinquent peers, in addition to a direct protective effect.

Not all evidence points in the same direction, however. Amran and Basri [6] found that while authoritarian parenting was significantly related to juvenile delinquent behaviour among Malaysian secondary school students, neither authoritative nor permissive parenting reached statistical significance in the same sample. The authors attributed this partly to the comparatively small sample size and to variation in how pupils interpreted parental warmth within a collectivist cultural setting. This finding is directly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that a theoretically well-supported protective effect can still fail to reach significance in a specific empirical sample, without this implying that the underlying theoretical relationship is false.

C. Authoritative Parenting and Delinquent Behaviour: African and Kenyan Evidence

Within Kenya, Malayi et al. [17], studying children aged 8 to 18 in Western Kenya, found a negative relationship between authoritative parenting and the acquisition of delinquent behaviour, in line with the protective hypothesis. Onsando et al. [7], working with 68 male juveniles at the Kamiti Youth Correction and Training Centre in Kiambu County, identified authoritative parenting, balancing warmth with supervision, as the style most consistently associated with favourable behavioural outcomes among the correctional population they studied, reinforcing the protective role of this style even among children who had already come into conflict with the law. More recently, Lumadede et al. [8], drawing on a mixed-methods study of parental characteristics and juvenile delinquency across Nairobi and Mombasa counties, found that the relationship between individual parental attributes and delinquency was neither uniform nor straightforward, with parental supervision and parental attitudes toward antisocial conduct emerging as more consistent predictors than parenting style categorised broadly.

Evidence from elsewhere on the continent similarly acknowledges authoritative parenting as generally protective while noting that its measurable effect can be modest relative to the effect of authoritarian or neglectful parenting. Changalwa et al. [18], in a study of Kenyan college students, found that authoritative parenting had a significant relationship with alcohol abuse in a direction that ran counter to the typical protective hypothesis, a result the authors attributed to the older age and greater autonomy of the college-going sample compared with school-age children. Kawira [19], studying paternal parenting styles among pre-adolescents in a private school in Nairobi, found a significant inverse correlation between authoritative paternal parenting and student problem behaviour ($r = -.319$, $p < .05$), lending further support to the protective hypothesis specifically among younger, school-going children rather than older adolescents or young adults.

D. Summary and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature supports authoritative parenting as a theoretically coherent and, in several samples, empirically confirmed protective factor against delinquent behaviour, operating through mechanisms such as empathy, adolescent mental health, and reduced affiliation with delinquent peers. At the same time, the relationship is not universally significant: it can be attenuated by sample size, by the age and setting of the population studied, and by cultural variation in how children interpret parental warmth and control. Most Kenyan studies on parenting style and delinquency have concentrated on correctional or university populations, or on parenting broadly rather than the authoritative style specifically, among primary school-age children in a defined geographic locality. This is the gap the present study addresses by testing the authoritative parenting-delinquency relationship among class seven and eight pupils in public primary schools in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design combining quantitative and qualitative data collection, conducted in 27 public primary schools across six educational zones in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The target population comprised 8,403 respondents: children in classes seven and eight, their parents, and class teachers. Using multistage, stratified, purposive and simple random sampling, nine schools were selected, yielding an accessible population of 2,415 class seven and eight pupils. A sample of 242 pupils (10% of the accessible population, following Borg and Gall's [20] guideline for populations under 10,000) was drawn using simple random sampling from class registers, together with 24 class teachers and 24 parents selected purposively, one of each per school.

Data were collected using a two-part questionnaire administered to pupils, comprising demographic items and a five-point Likert-scale section (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) addressing each parenting style, together with semi-structured interview schedules administered to teachers and parents to validate and enrich the questionnaire data. The instruments were piloted with 21 pupils in Iten Township, Elgeyo Marakwet County, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, above the 0.7 threshold Mugenda and Mugenda [21] recommend for reliability. This reliability estimate reflects the full 27-item instrument rather than the ten-item authoritative-parenting subscale reported in Table I, which could not be disaggregated from the archived thesis dataset and should be interpreted with this caveat in mind. Content validity was established through expert review by the study supervisor.

Quantitative data were cleaned, coded and analysed in SPSS version 22 using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and rankings) and multiple regression analysis. The regression model tested the influence of the three parenting styles (permissive, authoritative and authoritarian) on delinquent behaviour as the dependent variable, at a significance level of 0.05:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

where Y is delinquent behaviour, β_0 is the constant, X_1 , X_2 and X_3 are permissive, authoritative and authoritarian parenting respectively, and ε is the error term. This paper reports the coefficient for X_2 (authoritative parenting). Qualitative data from teacher and parent interviews were analysed thematically and are used to contextualise the quantitative results. Ethical clearance was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and from Mount Kenya University; participation was voluntary, respondent identities were anonymised, and parental consent was obtained for all child participants.

IV. RESULTS

Table I presents the descriptive statistics for the ten items measuring authoritative parenting. Children most strongly agreed that their parents provide direction and guidance in a rational and objective way ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.31$) and that responsibilities are shared at home ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.32$). Children were less certain, registering means in the neutral range, about whether parents take their opinions into account when making decisions ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.30$), the lowest-ranked item.

TABLE I: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING (N = 242)

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
Parents give direction and guidance in a rational and objective way	3.88	1.31	1
We share responsibilities at home	3.82	1.32	2
My parents discuss and give direction to my concerns	3.80	1.41	3
We hold family meetings and discuss family rules with my parents/guardian	3.72	1.44	4
My parents monitor my activities and behaviour	3.67	1.36	5
Our family has rules that cater for individual difference	3.51	1.33	6
My parents make decisions even if they hurt me	3.32	1.43	7
There is freedom of speech with my parents	3.31	1.50	8
I discuss homework with my parents	3.24	1.43	9
My parents take my opinion into consideration when making decisions	3.20	1.30	10

Parents holding family meetings to discuss rules ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.44$) and monitoring their children's activities ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.36$) were also endorsed by a majority of respondents, echoing Bernardo's [22] observation that authoritative parents define family rules while treating children as active participants rather than passive recipients of discipline. Interviews corroborated the questionnaire data: a parent from Kimumu Primary School described maintaining household rules on 'the dos and the don'ts' while involving children in completing homework, and a parent from Kamukunji Primary School described allowing children to 'freely present their opinions, concerns and grievances' as part of family decision-making.

Table II presents the multiple regression coefficients for authoritative parenting. The unstandardised coefficient ($B = -0.017$, $SE = 0.100$) indicates that, holding other parenting styles constant, a one-unit increase in authoritative parenting was associated with a 0.017-unit decrease in delinquent behaviour, a direction that would fit a protective effect. However, the standardised coefficient ($\beta = -0.019$, $t = -0.171$, $p = .865$) did not approach the conventional significance threshold of $p < .05$, indicating negligible evidence against the null hypothesis in this sample. The null hypothesis, that authoritative parenting style has no statistically significant relationship with delinquent behaviour, was therefore retained. Collinearity diagnostics (tolerance = 0.471, VIF = 2.122) indicated that multicollinearity among the three parenting-style predictors was within an acceptable range and unlikely to fully account for the non-significant result, although a VIF of 2.122 indicates that authoritative parenting shares meaningful variance with the other two parenting-style predictors, which may still have attenuated its unique contribution.

TABLE II: MULTIPLE REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

Variable	B	SE	β	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Authoritative parenting	-.017	.100	-.019	-.171	.865	.471	2.122

Notwithstanding the non-significant regression result, qualitative accounts suggested that authoritative practices were nonetheless perceived by teachers and parents as behaviourally relevant. Teachers interviewed for the study associated households that combined clear rules with open communication with fewer instances of classroom defiance, although this observation was not tested statistically and should be treated as descriptive rather than confirmatory.

V. DISCUSSION

The central finding of this study, that authoritative parenting showed no statistically significant relationship with children's delinquent behaviour among primary school pupils in Eldoret town, sits alongside, rather than against, the wider literature on parenting style and delinquency. The direction of the unstandardised coefficient ($B = -0.017$) matched the protective effect reported in longitudinal studies elsewhere [4], [5] and with Kenyan evidence from correctional and school settings [7], [17], [19], but the relationship did not reach statistical significance in this sample. This pattern most closely mirrors Amran and Basri's [6] finding among Malaysian secondary school students, where authoritarian parenting was significantly related to delinquency but authoritative parenting was not, despite the theoretical expectation that it should be protective.

Several explanations, none mutually exclusive, may account for the non-significant result. First, delinquent behaviour among class seven and eight pupils in this sample was already comparatively low in absolute terms, and authoritative parenting may exert a stronger protective effect once children reach adolescence and are exposed to greater autonomy and peer influence, a pattern implicit in the age range (11 to 18) over which Goering and Mrug [5] detected their effect. Second, the descriptive data in Table I show that authoritative practices, while broadly present in the sampled households, were not uniformly strong: several items relating to shared decision-making registered mean scores in the neutral range, which may have reduced the variance available for the regression model to detect an effect. Third, because permissive and authoritarian parenting were entered into the same regression model, and both are theorised to operate on the same outcome through overlapping mechanisms of parental control, the unique variance attributable to authoritative parenting alone may have been smaller than its zero-order relationship with delinquency would suggest, notwithstanding the acceptable collinearity diagnostics reported in Table II.

The qualitative interviews offer a complementary reading. Parents and teachers described authoritative households in largely positive terms, as rule-based, communicative and monitored, which suggests that authoritative parenting was present and recognisable in this population even though its statistical association with the specific behavioural outcomes measured in the delinquency scale was not detectable at conventional significance levels. This divergence between a socially recognised protective practice and a null quantitative result echoes Lumadede et al.'s [8] observation that the relationship between parenting characteristics and juvenile delinquency in the Kenyan context is sensitive to how each construct is operationalised and measured, rather than being a straightforward, uniformly linear relationship.

The finding should not be read as evidence that authoritative parenting is unimportant. Rather, it indicates that, in this specific sample of primary school-age children in Eldoret town, authoritative parenting alone was not a statistically sufficient explanation for variation in delinquent behaviour, once permissive and authoritarian parenting were accounted for in the same model. This is consistent with the broader uncertainty in the literature: authoritative parenting is one of

several interacting family-level influences on delinquency, and its detectable effect appears to depend on the age of the child, the specific behaviours being measured, and the presence of competing or interacting parenting influences within the same household.

A. Practical Implications

Even where the statistical relationship falls short of significance, the descriptive and qualitative findings carry practical weight. The items on which children registered the least agreement, having their opinions taken into account in decisions ($M = 3.20$) and discussing homework with parents ($M = 3.24$), point to specific, actionable gaps in authoritative practice rather than a wholesale absence of it. School-based parenting workshops in Uasin Gishu County could reasonably prioritise strengthening these two dimensions: inclusion of the child's voice in family decisions and parental engagement with schoolwork, given that both are core components of the responsiveness dimension in Baumrind's model and are supported as protective in the international literature [5], even where the present study's aggregate regression coefficient did not reach significance.

For teachers and school counsellors, the finding suggests caution against treating authoritative parenting as a sufficient, stand-alone explanation, or remedy, for delinquent behaviour in individual pupils. Since authoritarian parenting was the style most strongly associated with delinquency in the wider study from which this paper is drawn, counselling interventions with families are likely to be more productive if they address the coexistence of authoritative and authoritarian elements within the same household, rather than assuming that encouraging authoritative practices in isolation will be sufficient to reduce delinquent behaviour.

B. Limitations

The sample was confined to nine public primary schools in a single town, which limits the extent to which the null result can be generalised to other parts of Uasin Gishu County or to Kenya more broadly; the significant findings reported elsewhere in Kenya [17], [19] were drawn from different populations, a private school in Nairobi and a rural sample in Western Kenya respectively, and direct comparison should be made cautiously. Delinquent behaviour was also measured through self-report by children aged approximately 12 to 16, which may under-represent more serious or stigmatised behaviours that children were reluctant to disclose on a questionnaire, even an anonymised one. Finally, the cross-sectional design cannot establish the direction of any relationship between authoritative parenting and delinquent behaviour; it is equally plausible that parents adjust their parenting style in response to a child's existing behaviour as it is that parenting style shapes subsequent behaviour, a limitation shared with most of the descriptive survey literature this paper reviewed, other than the longitudinal studies by Xiong et al. [4] and Goering and Mrug [5].

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to establish the influence of authoritative parenting style on children's delinquent behaviour among public primary school pupils in Eldoret town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. While descriptive data indicated that authoritative parenting practices, namely rational guidance, shared responsibility, and rule-based family structure, were reasonably well established among the households sampled, multiple regression analysis found no statistically significant relationship between authoritative parenting and delinquent behaviour ($\beta = -0.019$, $t = -0.171$, $p = .865$). The null hypothesis was retained. This finding, read alongside mixed results from Malaysia [6] and variable Kenyan evidence [8], [19], suggests that the protective effect of authoritative parenting on delinquency, while theoretically well supported, is not guaranteed to be statistically detectable in every population, and is likely to depend on the child's age, the specific measures used, and the presence of other parenting styles within the same household.

These findings point toward a few concrete next steps rather than a single blanket conclusion. School-based guidance and counselling programmes in Uasin Gishu County should continue to promote authoritative parenting practices, such as rule clarity, monitoring and open communication, given their consistent association with positive child outcomes in the wider literature, even though this study did not detect a significant direct effect on delinquency specifically. County education and children's services officers should also treat authoritative parenting as one component of a broader family-support strategy rather than a stand-alone intervention, since this study's results suggest that its effect on delinquency may be conditional on the presence or absence of authoritarian and permissive practices in the same household. Future research should replicate this analysis with a larger, multi-county sample and with adolescent, rather than only primary school-age, participants, to test whether the protective effect of authoritative parenting strengthens with the child's age, as the international longitudinal

evidence suggests. Given the small effect size detected here ($\beta = -0.019$), such replications should be preceded by an a priori power analysis to determine the sample size needed to detect an effect of this magnitude with adequate statistical power, rather than relying on convenience-based samples of a few hundred pupils.

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