



## **Influence of Family Constellations on the Psychosocial Adjustment of Regular Undergraduate Students in Universities within Nakuru County, Kenya**

Billy Runo, James Kay  
School of Education, Kabarak University, Kenya

James Muola  
Department of Educational Psychology, Machakos University, Kenya

### **Abstract**

University students are facing numerous challenges which affect their psychological and social adjustment. In view of the fact that the family and family structure play a significant role in the psychological and social development and adjustment of these students to university life. This study sought to assess the influence of family constellations on psychosocial adjustments of regular undergraduate students in Nakuru County, Kenya. The specific objectives were to determine the influence of family constellations on: self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, pro-social behaviour and social skills development of regular undergraduate Students in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study used a mixed-method research approach and adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The target population was 2862 Third year regular undergraduate students from five selected universities. A random sample of 307 students forming a 90.6 percent response rate was selected. Stratified random sampling was used to distribute the sample in the five selected universities. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaire and interview schedule, while secondary data was collected from existing documents about the topic under study. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) and inferential statistics (ANOVA and Chi Square test) with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21.0 for Windows; while qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic content analysis. The study findings indicate that majority of the respondents came from dual (nuclear) parent families. There was a statistically significant difference in the self-esteem and self-efficacy of regular undergraduate students from different family structures. The study recommends that there is a need for parents to maintain a unified family structure in order to encourage holistic psychosocial development and adjustment of their children in the universities. There is a need for parents to create a warm close and supportive relationship with their children in the universities. There is need to encourage university students to seek guidance and counselling services in order to effectively adjust psychologically and socially to the new university environment.

**Key Words:** Family constellations, parenthood, psychosocial adjustment

### **1.0 Background information**

Rahul (2013: 2014) view a family constellation as a group of people related by marriage, birth and consanguine who share a common kitchen and financial resources on regular basis. In relation to this Bansi (2014) outlines five major family constellations which include; nuclear family, single- parent family, extended family, step family/ reconstituted family and grandparents families who in some cultures play an important continuing role in the family life (Bansi, 2014). Each family structure has a unique set of family constellations, (dynamics) which influence members' development, ideas and the ways of behaving as well as how they interact with others. Even where there has been little contact within the family, members will have been influenced by the dynamics they experienced in



their early lives. Peoples' family constellations impact on how they see themselves in later life, influence their relationship and how they interact with the world as well as their well-being (Miles, 2015). The major change that influences the development of family constellations is family transitions. A family transition is either normative or non – normative. Normative transitions are expected and predictable based on biological, psychological or social norms. Non-normative transitions are statistically more unusual and often unexpected (Corvan & Corvan, 2015). They take place when a parent forms or dissolves a romantic relationship –this can involve marriage, separation, divorce, cohabitation, entrance into, or dissolution of a dating relationship (Kristin et al., 2015).

Family transitions are viewed as a threat to children's psychological function (Goodnight *et al.*, 2013). They are associated with poorer social emotional development (Lee & Mclahanahan, 2015), increased behavior problems, (Magnuson & Berger, 2009) and poorer academic achievement (Sun & Li, 2011; 2014). Family transitions impact on children across their lifespan being associated with less income, mobility, an increased risk of dropping out of high school, reduced likelihood of University completion and early family formation (Bloome, 2017; Hampden- Thomson & Galindo, 2015). Parents play a vital role in the emotional growth of children. They help them define who they are as human beings and influence how each adapts to societal norms. The home is the first place the children discover the importance of values and what it means to belong. From childhood, youth are conditioned to believe that the family is comprised of a mother, father and children (Encyclopedia Britannia online, 2017). Common non–normative transitions include parents' separation/divorce. Major factors influencing intra-family constellations in Kenya include; access to resources; low attachment (Gahler & Pamntag, 2015); income; ownership of matrimonial property; unequal sharing of matrimonial property in case of a separation or divorce; many children in the family; inferior parenting style and lack of conflict resolution skills among others (Njenga, 2016). Studies on other variables affecting university students and psychosocial adjustment have been undertaken but the influence of family structures on psychosocial adjustment of the third year students has not attracted researchers' interest in university students' psychosocial adjustment which the research seeks to address.

### **1.1 Objective**

The study sought to determine the influence of family constellations on self-esteem of regular undergraduate Students in Nakuru County, Kenya

### **1.2 Research Hypothesis**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no statistically significant difference in the self-esteem of regular undergraduate students from different family structures in Nakuru County

### **2.0 Review of Literature**

Different authors have defined self –esteem in different perspectives; Rosenberg (1965) defined it as positive or negative orientation towards oneself; an overall evaluation of one's worth or value. Self – esteem, is only one component of the self – concept, which he defined as 'totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to his or herself as an object'. Blascovich & Tomaka, (1991) defined self – esteem as an individual's sense of his or her value or worth or the extent to which a person values, approves of , appreciates, prizes or likes him or herself. Self – esteem has been related to virtually every other psychological concept or domain including personality (e.g shyness) behavioural (e.g task performance), cognitive (e.g. attribution bias), social economic status, and clinical



concepts (e.g. anxiety, and depression) (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). In addition, it is also related to self-efficacy – an individual's sense of competence or ability in general or in particular domains (Bandura, 2001).

We understand the self-esteem level of the individual by looking at the discrepancy between how the individual perceives oneself and the self they would like to be (Pişkin, 2014). Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as negative and positive attitude of the individual to oneself. According to him, self-esteem arises in the result of self-evaluation of the individual. The judgment attained because of self-evaluation is indicative for the level of self-esteem. Shraddha & Surila (2015) posit that in today's world, there is tough competition to make one's position strong and then to struggle to maintain that position. Thus, having intelligence, wealth, a good house, a luxury car and a prestigious job are sources of self-esteem (Melgosa, 2010). Ulrich & Robins, (2014) study point to a self-centred motivation, more specifically the willingness to help others and the possession of ideals and cherished values. Empirical studies have shown that bolstering self-esteem in adults reduces anxiety (Nima, Rosenberg & Garcia, 2014).

Bornstein and Bornstein (2014) research generally linked authoritative parenting, where parents balance demandingness and responsiveness, with higher social competences in children. Children and adolescences with low self-esteem are at a greater risk of developing many severe mental health conditions or expressing suicidal ideation and to engage in risky behaviours such as drug use or delinquency (Xiuyun Wu *et al.*, 2016). High self-esteem prospectively predicts success and well-being in life domains such as relationships, work and health (Ulrich & Robins, 2014). In a successful developmental process, all children can develop and become well-adjusted, emotionally balanced individuals who have a positive perception of their self-esteem (Liv-Berit, 2017). Self-esteem is more connected with factors associated with physical appearance compared with body dissatisfaction (Dion, *et al.*, 2015). Features of the social environment, that is peers and family members considerably influence the formation of adolescents' self-esteem, which is directly associated with body image. A study by Ingvild (2017) demonstrates that clinically assessed adolescents with high self-esteem suffer fewer symptoms of anxiety/depression and attention problems over time, indicating that self-esteem acts as a resilience factor against such symptoms. Positive parent-child relationships increase adolescent self-worth (MacAdams *et al.*, 2016). In addition, active students have higher self-esteem and task orientation whereas inactive students showed lower self-esteem and higher ego orientation levels (Ahmed, Yanho, Rudolph, Morris, Elayaraja & Lee, (2017).

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Psychodynamic theory by Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) and Alfred Adler's theory (1927 - 1956). Psychodynamic theory's central idea is that unconscious forces shape human thought and behaviour. The unconscious is the motivating force of human behaviour. It holds memories that once were unconscious but were so unpleasant or anxiety – provoking that they were repressed. The unconscious also contains all the instincts, wishes and desires that have never been allowed into consciousness. He asserts that everybody is fixated to varying degrees at different stages of development which results to a large extent adult's conduct and abilities to react to situations. According to Adler, each person has a unique lifestyle that enables him or her to compensate for inferiority feelings and to strive towards superiority. The style of life can be roughly equated to a central theme that runs through the individual's personality. For some individuals, the style of life is centred on aggressive, manipulative and exploitive experience in which they take advantage of others. This is the person's characteristics style of striving for superiority. Adler pointed out that the position a child occupies in the family



strongly Influences his/ her personality development leading to some adjustment problems later in life.

### **3.0 Methodology:**

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design using a mixed methods research approach. The study targeted all 2862 regular Third Year undergraduate students in both private and public universities in Nakuru County. Blowgun and Retile (2014: Kwela, et, al.,2016) posit that older students in Universities use more problem – focused and cognitive – restructuring strategies than younger students hence the choice of third year students who are older and mature. A multistage sampling procedure was used to distribute and select this sample of 339 from the five selected universities. In the first stage, proportionate stratified sampling was used to distribute the sample in the five universities. Lastly, purposive sampling was also used to select one counsellor from each selected university. From the above sampling procedures, the 339 students and 5 counsellors formed the final sample size for this study.

### **4.0 Findings and Discussions:**

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to the sample of 339 Third Year students targeting information on family constellations and psychosocial adjustment. In-depth interviews targeted counsellors from the five selected universities. Out of the targeted 339 students, 307 correctly completed and returned the questionnaires. Of the 307 sampled students, 51.1 percent (157) of them were male, while 48.9 percent (150) were female.

#### **Family Constellations of the Respondents**

The study was based on the type of family constellations that a child is socialized and brought up in is a strong determinant of the ultimate future behaviour and development. Family is the most direct and important environment for individual growth and socialization; the significant developmental tasks of individuals are resolved within the family. Each type of family constellation has its own unique influence on the character and behaviour of the child (Novilla, Barnes, Cruz, Williams & Rogers, 2006)). College students are in the transitional stage from late adolescence to emerging adulthood; although they depart from their families, they still have an emotional tie to their family, and the influence of the family on the individuals has not weakened. The parents–children relationship models constantly play a role on the psychosocial development and adaptation of the college students (Xie & Yang, 2015). And moreover, while the youth leave home, the family members should adjust their models of relationship. On one side, the college students need autonomy and independence to separate with their parents; on the other hand, they still need the close emotional bonding with their parents to feel safety when they explore their inner and external world (Li, An & Jia, 2009).

Majority (76.2%) of the respondents came from dual (nuclear) parent families with mother, father and siblings. The dominance of dual parent families suggests that the respondents had adequate family support of the parents and siblings to rely on in cases of social, economic, psychological and other challenges in their lives. To reinforce this argument, 214 out of the 234 respondents from dual respondents (91.5%) reported that that their dual parents were staying together while 20 (8.5%) were not. The presence of the two parents also shares family responsibility burden and increases the level of care and discipline of their children. This could be the reasons for the qualification and admission of the respondents to pursue university education. These findings support a study by Anderson, (2014) which reported that children from dual parent families have better, physical, emotional and academic well – being.



In addition, the remaining respondents were from single parent (18.9%), extended (2.3%), blended (1.6%), and no parent (1.0%) families. In such single parent, blended and no parent families, the parent combines work with the household chores and upbringing of children, which leaves little time for him or herself. Students from such families are more likely to have limited provisions and increased disciplinary challenges compared to their counterparts from dual parent families. Adolescents and young adults from such families have been shown to have lower grades and more absenteeism than adolescents and young adults of non-divorced families (Ham, 2004; Tillman, 2007). Additionally, Furstenberg and Teitler (1994) found adolescents of non-intact families were more likely to drop out of school and less likely to attend college than adolescents in intact families. These challenges are more linked to overwhelming burden on the remaining parent or care-taker. Given the magnitude of single parenthood as the second largest family constellation, the study went further to establish the gender of the single parent. Of the 58 respondents from single parent families 69.0 percent of the respondents came from female single-parent families while 31.0 percent were from male single-parent families. The 58 respondents also varied in the cause of single-parenthood of their families which included death, separation, divorce, desertion, never married and no idea. The cause will influence the upbringing and behavior of the respondents based on whether it has negative or positive effect on the functioning of the family and taking care of the children. The study established that the respondents also differed in their family size. On average the 307 respondents had a family average of 5.79 children with a standard deviation of 2.117, minimum of 1 and maximum of 15 indicating the cases of ideal family sizes in the country. The family size influences a number of issues in the family including ability to provide, control and take care of the family.

### **Self-Esteem of the Respondents**

The objective of this study sought to determine the influence of family constellations on self-esteem of regular Undergraduate Students in Nakuru County, Kenya. This objective was based on the fact that college years is a developmentally crucial period. The college students are making the transition from late adolescence to emerging adulthood. During this period, the young people are faced with many challenges and have a wide range of needs. On one side, the youth will inevitably undergo many changes in their transition from high school students to college students. They need to cope with changes independently and manage their college life to adapt to the new environment. On the other side, they are confronted with the accomplishment of psychosocial developmental tasks in adolescence and coping with new psychosocial developmental challenges in early adulthood. Therefore, college students are prone to inner conflicts and troubles. In such cases, self-esteem plays a significant role in the motivation and success of a person throughout his or her life. Self-esteem is an important trait of the self-system, and it has a positive influence on the individual's mental health and personality development. Self-esteem is the emotional feeling of self-worth and self-confidence. Low self-esteem may hold a student back from succeeding at school because he or she doesn't believe himself or herself to be capable of success. By contrast, having a healthy self-esteem can help a student achieve because he or she navigates life with a positive, assertive attitude and believe he or she can accomplish his or her goals. However, this depends on the type of family constellation that the student comes from.

In this study, the level of self-esteem was assessed by the respondent students from a series of 10 statements seeking respondent's agreement or disagreement on the various indicators. The aim was to depict negative and positive attitude of the respondent individual to oneself. The study indicated that the respondents rated all the ten indicators of self-esteem above average (2.50). The respondents had a positive attitude towards self, had a





number of good qualities, are self-worthy, are not failures, are equal with others, are satisfied with themselves, they are good, they are proud of themselves and respect themselves. This suggests that the respondents had a positive self-evaluation of themselves including self-acceptance, personal appreciation, overall acceptance of the personality and self-love. They are more likely to demonstrate self-confidence, self-trust, self-discipline and self-care because they feel good about themselves and have concern for their well-being. They are likely to be assertive and openly talk about their likes, dislikes, preferences among others and can fight for their rights. They have good interpersonal skills hence they enjoy the healthy social relationship.

The individual statement scores were summed up to form a self-esteem index score for each respondent (reliability coefficient,  $\alpha = 0.715$ ). The index score varied between 10, indicating the least level of self-esteem, and 50, indicating the highest level of self-esteem. The higher the score, the higher was the level of self-esteem, and vice versa<sup>1</sup>. The index score had a mean score of 39.66 and Std dev. of 6.441 was later collapsed into three ordinal categories in order to differentiate between the levels of self-esteem among the sampled respondents<sup>2</sup>. This included a score of 10-23 (negative/low self-esteem), 24-36 (neutral/average self-esteem) and 37-50 (positive/high self-esteem). Table 4.5 summarizes the levels of self-esteem.

**Table 4.5: Levels of Self-Esteem among the Respondents**

Levels of self-esteem	Frequency	Percent
Negative/Low	6	2.0
Neutral/Average	69	22.5
Positive/High	232	75.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Self-Esteem and Family Constellations of the Respondents

After establishing the level of self-esteem among the respondents, the study went further to determine its relationship with the family constellation of the students. The objective was accompanied by null hypothesis one which stated that “There is no statistically significant difference in self-esteem of regular undergraduate students from different family structures in Nakuru County”.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test whether this hypothesis was significant or not. ANOVA is used to determine the differences in means (self-esteem index score) between one or more samples (types of family constellations) by examining the amount of variance within each of the samples, relative to the amount of variance between the samples

**Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics of Self-Esteem Scores across Family Constellations**

Family Constellation	N	Self-esteem mean score	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
Extended	7	42.29	1.380	.522	40	44
Dual parent	234	39.90	6.302	.412	11	50

<sup>1</sup>  $10 \times 1 = 10$  (Low level of self-esteem)

$10 \times 3 = 30$  (Average level of self-esteem)

$10 \times 5 = 50$  (Highest level of self-esteem)



(nuclear)						
Single parent	58	39.29	6.330	.831	24	50
No parent	3	36.00	8.718	5.033	26	42
Blended	5	31.20	11.454	5.122	12	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>39.66</b>	<b>6.441</b>	<b>.368</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>50</b>

Table 4.6 indicates that respondents differed in their mean scores with those from extended families having the highest mean score (42.29) compared to other family types, followed by dual parent families (39.90) while blended (step) family had the lowest (31.20). These differences in the mean scores may be attributed to the differences in the nature and quality of support from the family members. Respondents from extended families are more likely to have a wide network of support from parents, siblings and other members compared to blended families where the step parents may not have a strong and cordial relationship with the step children. However, in order to find out whether the above difference in the self-esteem mean scores among students from various family constellations was significant or not, One-Way ANOVA was used. Table 4.7 depicts ANOVA comparing students' self-esteem mean scores among the various types of family constellations.

**Table 4.7: ANOVA Comparing Self-Esteem Mean across Family Constellations**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	467.304	4	116.826	2.886	.023
Within Groups	12225.784	302	40.483		
<b>Total</b>	<b>12693.088</b>	<b>306</b>			

Means are significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  significant level ( $p < 0.05$ )

Table 4.7 indicates that the difference in self-esteem mean scores across students from different family constellations was statistically significant. Since  $p$  value (0.023) < 0.05 ( $F=2.886$ ), we reject the null hypothesis one and conclude that there was a statistically significant difference in the self-esteem of regular undergraduate students from different family structures in Nakuru County. This suggests that students' self-esteem significantly differed across family constellations of the respondents. These results supports previous studies which have shown that there was a significant correlation between the development of adolescents' self-esteem and parental bonding style, and the researchers have found that insufficient care and excessive control by parents lead to depressive symptoms and low self-esteem (Che, 2013). The above results using One-Way ANOVA were also corroborated by chi-square test using cross tabulation. Chi-square was used to compare the frequency of cases found in one variable in two or more unrelated samples or categories of another variable. It is preferred when dealing with variables that have been categorized, level of self-esteem (low, average and high) and family constellations (type of families). In order to calculate the Chi- square statistic, level of self-esteem was cross tabulated across type of family constellations. Table 4.8 shows a cross tabulation of self-esteem across family constellations.

**Table 4.8: Level Self-Esteem across Family Constellations of the Respondents**

Level	Negative	Count	Kind of family					Total
			Single parent	Dual parent	Extende d	Blende d	No paren t	
			0	5	0	1	0	6



of		%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	2.0%
self-	Neutral	Count	17	49	0	2	1	69
esteem		%	29.3%	20.9%	0.0%	40.0%	33.3%	22.5%
	Positive	Count	41	180	7	2	2	232
		%	70.7%	76.9%	100.0%	40.0%	66.7%	75.6%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>307</b>

$$\chi^2 = 15.226 \quad df = 8$$

$$p = 0.035$$

Table 4.8 suggests that there is a significant difference in the distribution of level of self-esteem across the type of families. It was observed that majority of the respondents in all types of families, except blended families had positive self-esteem.

### Conclusions

The concerned agencies including guidance and counselling office, university administration, parents and individual students could use this information to come up with long-lasting interventions to address maladjustment of students in the universities.

The study concludes that family structure and environment significantly influence the psychosocial adjustment of students in the universities. Secondly, it was established that the family is the most direct and important environment for individual growth and socialization; the significant developmental tasks of individuals are resolved within the family. Thirdly, Family structures significantly influences the self-esteem of undergraduate students in universities

### References

- Anderson, J. (2014). The impact of family structure on the health of children: Effects of divorce.
- Anderson, L.R, Sheppard P. Mondem, C.W.S (2018). Grandparent effect on educational outcome a systematic review. *Sociological science*5, 114-142.
- Bansil, M. (2014). Social norms and the role of the extended family: Institute for fiscal studies
- Bernstein, R. (2016). *Parenting around the world: Child-rearing practices in different cultures. Touro University Worldwide*. Health and Human Services.
- Bloome, D. (2017). *Childhood Family structure and intergenerational income mobility in the United Staes*. *Demography*, 54, 541-569
- Bornstein, L. & Bornstein, M. H. (2014). *Parenting styles and child social Development National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, USA 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed*. The University of Pennsylvania.
- Chiu, M., Rahman, F., Vigod, S., Lau, C., Cairney J. & Kurdyak, P. (2018). *Mortality in single fathers compared with single mothers and partnered parents: a population-based cohort study*. Doi.org./10.1016
- Covvan, P. A. & Covvan, C. P. (2015). *Normative family transitions normal family processes and healthy child development*. Research gate. Doi:10.4324/9780 203428436





- Hampdew-Thompson, G., & Galindo, C. (2015). Family structure instability and educational persistence of young people in England. *British Educational Research journal*, 41, 749-766.
- Harkonen, J. (2014). Divorce: Trends, Patterns, causes, consequences. The *Wiley-Blackwell companion to the sociology of families* (pp 303-322). Chichester: Wiley
- Kristin, H., Margret, A. Michael, U., Julie, G. & Lawrence, G. (2018). *Do changes to family structure affect child and family outcomes*. A system review of the instability hypothesis. *Journal of family theory and Review*, 10(1), 87-110
- Lafave, D., & Thomas, D. (2014). Extended families and child well-being. Colby College & Duke University
- Li B, An Q, Jia X. (2009). Influence of family marriage state on family function, self-esteem and the behavior problem of middle school students. *Chin J Clin Psychol* (2009) 17(3):295–9. doi:10.16128/j.cnki.1005-3611.2009.03.039
- Liv Berit, A. (2017). Self- concept and self- esteem among children and Young adults with visual impairment: A systematic review.
- Magnuson , K. & Berger, L.M. (2009). Family structure states and transitions: Associations with children’s well being during middle childhood. *Journal of marriage and family*.,71, 575- 591.
- Miles, J. (2015). *Family dynamics and the roles we play*. BACP accredited integrative psychotherapist, Listed Counsellor therapist
- Nima, H., Rosenberg. Garcia, (2014). Gender differences in positive emotion abstract. *Journal of arts*
- Nina,H., & Holly, R. (2014). *Sibling Relationships as a context for Learning and Development*. National Crime Research Centre Nairobi, Kenya.
- Rahul, S. (2014). *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*.>V. 2(4): Oct-Dec.
- Rahul, S. (2013). The family and family structure classification redefined for the current times. *Journal of Family Medicine and primary care*. 2(4),306-310.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescence Self-image*. PRINCETON, NJ: University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. FL: Robert E.Krieger.
- Shraddha S. & Agarwala, S. (2015). Self esteem among adolescents: An interventional approach. Dayalbagh, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- Sun, Y, & Li, Y. (2011). Effects of family structure type and stability on children’s academic performance trajectories. *Journal of marriage and Family* 73, 541-556
- Turumen, J. (2014). Adolescent education outcomes in blended families: Evidence from Swedish register data. *Journal of Divorce & Remarraige*, 55, 568-589



- Ulrich, O. & Robins, R.W. (2014).The development of self –esteem.Research Article Volume 23, issue 5.
- Xie A, Yang Y. (2015). Relationship between adult attachment and school adjustment of college freshmen. *Chin J Clin Psychol* (2015) 23(2):339–42. doi:10.16128/j.cnki.1005-3611.2015.02.034
- Xiuyun, W., Sarah, F.L., Kirk, A.O., & Veugelers, P. (2016). Health behaviours body weight and self- esteem among grade five students in Canada.springerplus.
- Xlaoying, Qi (2016). Family bond and family obligation: Continuity and obligation. *Research article vol.52, issue 1.*