

## **Influence of Parenting Task on Psychological Well-being of Parentally-Bereaved Adolescents in Kiambu County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Parents must provide safety and sustenance, social-emotional support, instruction, supervision, and socialization to their children. The death of a parent alters parenting tasks and when the remaining parent remarries, adolescents in such families face additional challenges unique to blended families. The current study examined how parenting task influences the psychological well-being of parentally-bereaved adolescents in Kiambu County. Guided by Attachment Theory, the study adopted a descriptive survey design. Using snowball sampling, 132 parentally bereaved adolescents from reconstituted families and 10 key informants (social workers, clergies, and foster parents) were recruited. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires and FGD respectively. Pilot study helped in testing tool validity and reliability. The study used descriptive statistics, mean, percentage, frequency, and standard deviation, to analyze the quantitative data. Thematic analysis using a latent approach was used to analyze qualitative data. Findings indicated low levels of autonomy (mean score 2.47 and standard deviation 0.926) and self-acceptance (mean score 2.40 and standard deviation 1.048) as a measure of psychological well-being. The score on the parenting task was low as indicated by a mean score of 2.64, and a standard deviation of 0.934. The score of inferential statistics indicated a statistically significant regression model, predicting that parenting tasks influenced parentally bereaved adolescents' psychological wellness (Sig. value = 0.000). Regression analysis showed a strong and significant link between parenting tasks (coefficient value of .264, p-value of .013). Bereaved adolescents expressed low levels of psychological wellness and parenting task in such families strongly and positively related to low psychological wellness. The researcher recommends that the staff handling children and family matters in government and nongovernmental institutions including religious leaders, need to be guided by the study finding in creating intervention tools for psychological support for parentally bereaved adolescents.

***Keywords:*** *Bereaved Adolescents, Psychological Well-being, Autonomy, Self-acceptance, Parenting task, Kiambu County.*

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## **1.0 introduction**

Adolescents who exhibit psychological well-being show more positive emotions and fewer negative ones even after going through hard times (Muqodas et al., 2019). Psychological well-being is indicated by a positive outlook, good relationships with other people, self-acceptance, self-worth, autonomy, and a positive attitude toward life (Iqbal & Nishat, 2017). Adolescents depend on their parents for safety and sustenance, social and emotional support, instruction, supervision, and socialization; tasks that promote their psychological well-being (De-Juanas et al., 2020).

When a parent dies, an adolescent is required to adjust in many ways because the loss may mean grief, worsened family economic status, isolation from friends and some family members, change of residential areas, changes in family structure, as well as increased probability of inadequate childcare (Riina & McHale, 2014). As such, the current study sought to examine the role of parenting tasks on parentally-bereaved adolescents' psychological well-being in Kiambu County.

### ***Psychological Well-being of Parentally-bereaved Adolescents***

Evolutionary perspective defines psychological well-being in terms of quality of mental health that translates to quality of life. In this respect, quality of life is measured from a multidimensional perspective addressing the most significant dimensions of an individual's life. The perspective puts into consideration material and non-material aspects of life, such as physiological, safety, love, and sense of belonging, as illustrated in Maslow's

hierarchy of needs (Gallego et al., 2020; Muqodas et al., 2019; Sagone & Caroli, 2014). The indicators of psychological well-being include a positive outlook, good relationships with other people, self-acceptance, self-worth, autonomy, and a general attitude toward life (Iqbal & Nishat, 2017).

In examining how parenting tasks influence psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents, the study zeroed in on examining two indicators of psychological well-being; namely, the level of autonomy, and self-acceptance among the parentally bereaved adolescents in blended families. Self-acceptance is a central feature of psychological well-being and is characteristic of optimal functioning, self-actualization, and maturity (Misener, 2020). Life span theorists emphasize the significance of accepting the self, one's past and present life (Ryff & Singer, 2015).

Therefore, holding a positive attitude towards self is a significant characteristic of positive psychological well-being. When a parent dies, an adolescent deal with grief, and need to learn how to live in the absence of the deceased parent (Riina & McHale, 2014). Such changes have negative implications on life and affect how adolescents judge their satisfaction with changed life in the absence of one parent and the inclusion of a replacement; such as a step-parent when the remaining parent remarries. In some situations, the bereaved adolescents must accommodate step-siblings and half-siblings. The drastic changes in parenting tasks resulting from parental death and widowed parent

remarriage are likely to pose challenges in accepting self among adolescents (Seifter et al., 2014).

*“Self-acceptance is a central feature of psychological well-being and is a characteristic of optimal functioning, self-actualization, and maturity”*

Autonomy refers to a psychological demand that supports adaptive psychological well-being. An autonomous adolescent has qualities such as independence, and self-determination, and regulates behavior from within (Misener, 2020; Ryff & Singer, 2015). As adolescents transition from childhood to maturity, their need for autonomy grows. They are, however, dependent on parents for the provision of all their needs including support to develop autonomy in making significant decisions in life. Parents support the acquisition of autonomy in their children by encouraging age-appropriate independence in making choices, problem-solving, and basing actions and decisions on their interests (Cheung et al., 2016).

### ***Parenting Tasks***

The current study conceptualized the independent variable, parenting task, as the provision of physical, emotional, social, financial, and intellectual support to parentally bereaved adolescents by their parents. A parent’s demise disrupts the parent-child bond (Linkiewich et al., 2021; Lubenko & Sebre, 2010). Adolescents,

however, need parental guidance in making hard decisions such as about their sexuality, friends, alcohol, and drug use, as well as schoolwork (Draper & Hancock, 2011). Draper and Hancock, (2011) indicated a link between delinquency in adolescents and traumatic events like parent death and family reorganization. Pravitha and Sembiyan, (2011) indicated that depression among bereaved adolescents is not caused by the loss itself, but by factors related to the loss such as the quality of parenting care available after the death of a parent.

Reconstituting a family changes the structure of the family as well as its members (Bernardi & Mortelmans, 2018). In addition, adolescents who have lost a parent must compete with step-siblings and step-parents for the attention of their surviving biological parents (Blank & Werner-Lin, 2011). Also, they compare the step-parent to the deceased parent and the current family to the family that used to be there (Behere et al., 2017). Studies on bereaved children have shown that the effects of a parent's death on development of a child are linked to how well the child and the parent are doing, and how well the family stays together (Blank & Werner-Lin, 2011; Brent et al. 2012; Canary & Canary, 2013; De-Juanas et al., 2020; Sironga, 2018; Yu et al., 2022).

When a child idealizes the biological parent as loving and perceives the step-parent as the savior, and he/she acts so, then the step-relation is likely to be good (Canary & Canary, 2013). Couples who marry a spouse with children from past relationships face greater demands, which can lead to tension and conflict. A widower or widow who remarries may

face increased negativity, conflict, and fewer cohesive family relationships (Bretn et al. 2012). Step-parents' parenting tasks to stepchildren are most affected by these negative impacts (Hope & Hodge, 2006).

### ***Issues Affecting Adolescents in Kiambu County***

The 2015 survey of Kenya National Adolescents and Youth demonstrated that young people in Kiambu County exhibit diminished psychological wellbeing indicated by the presence of mental health issues, drug and substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases (National Council for Population and Development [NCPD], 2017). Diminished psychological wellbeing may have resulted from the absence or ambiguous parenting tasks when an adolescent loses a parent.

Since several studies have focused on the effects of parent death on adolescents and the effects of remarriage on children, a knowledge gap exists in understanding how altered parenting tasks in a blended family influences the psychological wellness of bereaved adolescents. The objective of this study was to examine the influence of parenting tasks on the psychological well-being of parentally bereaved adolescents in Kiambu County. The study's null hypothesis was, "There is no relationship between parenting tasks and psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents."

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

The study utilized descriptive survey design, and adopted quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Andrew Fisher's formula (Kibucha, 2021) was used to calculate the sample size. Using snowball sampling 132 parentally-

bereaved adolescents (aged 10 years to 19 years) in a reconstituted family setup and 10 key informants (2 clergies, 3 social workers, and 5 guardians of parentally-bereaved adolescents) were recruited for the study. All the study participants were recruited from Kiambu County. 132 participants successfully filled in the questionnaire and 10 key informants participated in focused group discussion.

A tailor-made tool was used to measure the independent variable, parenting tasks in their children's lives, and to guide FGD. A modified Ryff psychological well-being scale was used to measure the dependent variable, psychological well-being indicators (autonomy and self-acceptance). The questionnaires were issued to the population comprising of parentally bereaved adolescents living in reconstituted families, while participants in the FGD were clergies, social workers, and guardians of parentally bereaved adolescents. All the tools apart from the FGD guide were on a Likert scale, where participants were asked to choose on a scale of 1-6 options from strongly disagree (1.49 and below), Moderately disagree (1.5-2.49), Slightly disagree (2.5-3.49), Slightly agree (3.5-4.49), Moderately agree (4.5-5.49), and strongly agreed (5.5 and above).

Before analyzing data, negatively worded items (denoted by R) were reverse scored. The 14-item subscale for autonomy indicated an alpha of .83 and a correlation with the 20-item parent scale of .97 (Kafka & Kozma, 2002; Neuman, 2007). The 14-item subscale for self-acceptance has an alpha of .91 and a correlation of .99 (Kafka & Kozma, 2002). The FGD was led by self-structured and open-ended

questions. Pre-testing ensured that the research instruments covered the research constructs in terms of substance and details. The questionnaire was concise to increase the response rate and reduce ambiguity and time wastage.

No personal data was collected, which fostered free expression and accurate information sharing. To ensure validity, the study used a concise and clear questionnaire, administered the same tool to all participants, targeted a heterogeneous group of participants, and assumed that all respondents had a similar interpretation of the prompts. To ensure reliability, the researcher conducted a pilot survey involving five parentally bereaved adolescents. The survey consisted of 39 items and the value for Cronbach's alpha for the survey was  $\alpha$  0.82. The tool was, therefore, considered valid and reliable for the study.

The researcher used descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency) to analyze the quantitative data. Further, bivariate statistics comprising the ANOVA, model summary, and regression coefficients were performed. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using the latent approach. The study used textual and tabular presentation of findings obtained from the survey. The activities of the research were guided by various ethical guidelines. The researcher sought authorization from relevant institutions and sought participants' consent. Participants were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and non-maleficence. The researcher also adhered to the principle of beneficence. The participants were informed that the study's benefit was likely

to accrue for years in the future and not necessarily immediately.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

The study examined participants' demographic characteristics; namely, gender, age of bereavement, the period before remarriage, and gender of the deceased parent. The findings indicate that 59% of the participants were females and 41% were males. 63 (48%) were bereaved at the age of 0-5 years, 41(31%) at the age of 6-10 years, 27 (20%) at the age of 11-15 years, and one participant (1%) lost one parent after attaining 16 years. More findings were that 92 (70%) participants' surviving parents remarried within a period of 3 years of their widowhood, 26 (20%) within 4-6 years, 9 (7%) within 7-9 years, 4 (3%) within 10-12 years, and 1(1%) remarried within 13-14 years of their widowhood.

#### *Descriptive Findings on Independent Variable: Parenting Task*

The study examined the levels of parenting tasks, and the findings were as shown on Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that the mean score for all items was low at 2.67 (sometimes true) and a mode of 3. The findings imply that bereaved adolescents in blended families did not receive adequate parental guidance. Inadequacy in executing parental roles to parentally bereaved adolescents in a blended family was backed by the responses from the FGD participants. "*In-laws fight for the custody of the bereaved children because it is obvious that the step-parents never have good intentions of taking care of them,*" verbalized a foster parent and "*in-laws fight for the custody of the bereaved children to protect them from their step-parents,*" verbalized a social worker.

**Table 1**

***Parenting Task and Adolescents’ Psychological Well-being***

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev	Mode
I live happily with my parents under the same roof.	2.64	1.225	3
My parents treat all my siblings without favoritism.	2.27	0.883	2
My parents provide for my needs (clothing and food) to their level best.	2.46	0.894	2
Most of my interactions with my parent are conflicting and associated with a state of anxiety.	2.86	0.966	3
My parents encourage me to study hard.	2.80	0.886	3
My parents check my schoolwork often.	2.96	0.894	3
My parents make me feel guilty when I perform poorly in school.	2.44	0.927	2
I discuss with my parents about my feelings.	2.63	0.886	3
My parents talk sternly (firmly) when I do something they disapprove.	2.73	0.987	3
We often celebrate birthdays and have fun as a family.	2.93	0.793	3
Average Score	2.67		3

The findings imply that parents in reconstituted families score low in executing their parenting tasks in such set-ups. The study findings corroborated results of a study by Anyebe et al. (2017) which indicated that extended family members play a part in hindering the successful adjustment process of the stepfamily when they disapprove or decline to accept the partner with whom a family member is joining to form a blended family (Anyebe et al., 2017).

***Descriptive Findings on Dependent Variable: Autonomy***

The study examined participants’ level of autonomy as an indicator of psychological well-being. The findings on the dependent

variable were scored on a Likert scale of 1 to 6; where (1.49 and below) indicated minimal autonomy and (5.5 and above) indicated high autonomy. The results were as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that participants scored low to moderately low on all indicators of autonomy with a mean score of 2.47 (Slightly disagree) and a mode of 2. The findings show that most of the respondents had low levels of autonomy. The FGD findings were that participants advocated aloofness among members of a blended family.

**Table 2**  
***Level of Autonomy***

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev	Mode
Sometimes, I change the way I act or think to be more like those around me.	2.13	0.984	2
I am not afraid to voice my opinions.	2.77	1.132	2
I tend to worry about what other people think of me (R)	2.59	0.753	3
Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.	2.64	0.974	3
My parents rarely talk me into doing things I don't want to do.	2.72	0.952	2
It is more important to me to "fit in" with others than to stand alone on my principles. (R)	2.54	0.911	2
I have confidence in my opinions even if they are contrary to consensus.	1.94	0.906	2
It's difficult for me to voice my opinions on controversial matters (likely to cause disagreement). (R)	2.49	0.961	2
I am concerned about how other people evaluate the choices I have made in my life (R)	2.52	0.927	2
I judge myself by what I think is important.	2.35	0.762	2
Average Score	2.47		2

The findings were similar the findings in research by Wairimu et al. (2016) that indicated that parental support for autonomy development positively correlated with self-esteem among adolescents in high school. Comparable results were found in the research by Feng and Lan (2020), which indicated three distinct patterns of parenting tasks, and educator support for student autonomy. These patterns were high parenting autonomy support and low educator support (n = 34), low parenting autonomy support and high educator support (n = 131), and high parenting autonomy

support and high educator support (n = 598) (Feng & Lan, 2020).

***Descriptive Findings on Dependent Variable: Self-Acceptance***

The study examined the levels of self-acceptance among the participants, and the findings were as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 showed that adolescents score moderately low on all indicators of self-acceptance with a mode score of 2, a mean score of 2.40 (moderately disagree), and a standard deviation of 1.048. The findings imply that the bereaved adolescents in

blended families exhibited a low sense of self-acceptance which translates to diminished psychological well-being. The findings on low levels of self-acceptance among the parentally bereaved adolescents in restructured families were further expressed verbatim from the FGDs. *“Some parents genuinely offer their best to*

*support their step-children, but they end up getting frustrated because these children express animosity.” “It’s common to find bereaved adolescents complain about their status even when they seem to be doing better than other children whose parents hardly provide for their needs.”*

**Table 3**  
***Level of Self-Acceptance***

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev	Mode
I am pleased with how things in my life have turned out.	2.36	1.078	2
I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have. (R)	2.13	1.149	1
Given the opportunity, there are many things about myself that I would change (R)	2.51	1.037	2
I like most aspects of my personality (how I behave	2.50	1.102	2
I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.	2.43	1.086	2
In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life. (R)	2.42	1.049	2
For the most part, I am proud of who I am and the life I lead.	2.45	0.999	2
Many days I wake up feeling discouraged about how I have lived my life. (R)	2.41	0.908	2
The past has had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it.	2.36	0.990	2
When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.	2.42	1.085	2
Average score	2.40		2

The findings imply that adolescents in blended families express low self-acceptance, which contributes to lessened levels of psychological well-being. The results corroborate those of a study by Bretn et al. (2012) that found that bereaved

young people experienced greater employment challenges, peer attachment issues, and educational desire reductions. After controlling for the influence of pre-death variables, the study found that the consequences of grief were most typically



arbitrated through their effects on parental and caregiver functioning and family atmosphere.

***Inferential Statistics***

The researcher used inferential statistics to draw conclusions, generalizations, predictions, and estimations.

**Table 4**

***ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)***

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.889	4	5.722	12.34	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	.000	127	.000		
	Total	22.889	131			

*a. Dependent Variable: PSYW*

*b. Predictors: (Constant) PT.*

The findings, as indicated in Table 4, show that the model was statistically substantial with a P-value of sig=0.000, which implies a high significance. The model was statistically significant in that the difference between the independent and dependent variables mean was low (sig. Value 0.000<0.05). The finding rejected the null hypothesis that “There is no relationship between parenting tasks and

***Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)***

Table 4 represents analysis of variance test. The researcher sought to establish the significance of the model.

psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents.”

***Model summary***

Model summary analysis was performed to test the model fitness. The findings explained how variations in the independent variable explained variations in dependent variable.

**Table 5**

***Model Summary***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.589 <sup>a</sup>	.347	.312		.41623

Predictors: Parenting Task,

The value of  $R^2$  of 0.347 showed that the model was significant in predicting psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents in relation to parenting tasks. The model shows that 34.7% of the parentally bereaved adolescent's psychological well-being can be explained by the role of parenting task. This is an indication that parenting tasks played a significant role in determining

psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents living in a reconstituted family setup.

**Regression Coefficient**

Coefficient analysis was performed through regressing the IV (parenting tasks) against DV (psychological well-being). The findings were as presented in table 6.

**Table 6**

**Regression Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig./P
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	5.504	.897		7.032	0.000
PT	.264	.136	.481	4547359.152	.013

The simple regression analysis indicated a beta coefficient of 0.264 and a p-value of  $0.013 < 0.05$ , an indication of a statistically significant positive correlation between psychological well-being and parenting tasks.

A beta coefficient value of 0.264 implies that every time independent variable (parenting task) changes by one standard deviation, the dependent variable (psychological wellbeing) changes by 0.264 standard deviation on average. The p-value of 0.013 implies that there was a 0.13% possibility that the results were random. The findings, therefore, show a positive relationship between parenting tasks in a blended family and adolescents' psychological well-being. These findings

correspond with the study results by Cheung et al. (2016) which indicated that parenting tasks support the acquisition of autonomy, which indicates psychological wellbeing.

**4.0 Conclusion**

The study findings revealed a positive correlation between parenting tasks and psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents living in reconstituted families. However, the model could only explain approximately 31.2% of the variations in psychological well-being, which was associated with parenting tasks; hence an indication that other factors were in play in determining psychological well-being.

## 5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that professionals handling children and family matters in government and nongovernmental institutions including religious institutions, need to be guided by the study findings (parenting tasks influences psychological wellbeing among parentally bereaved

adolescents) while creating intervention tools for supporting parentally bereaved adolescents living in reconstituted families. To complement the findings of this study, more research needs to be done on other factors that influence psychological well-being among parentally bereaved adolescents in blended families.

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