

MATERNAL ATTACHMENT AMONG TEENAGE MOTHERS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Although teenage motherhood affects the entire spectrum of society, it is becoming increasingly evident that teenagers in rural urban areas are at high risk of becoming mothers. Maternal attachment in teenage mothers presents itself with adverse effects on the well-being of the teenage mothers and children. Existing literature shows that attachment styles of children born by teenage mothers have been perceived to be insecure. Existing studies have majorly focused on different attachment styles of children, but little is known on how teenage mothers perceive the attachment styles of their children in relation to their maternal attachment. The study aimed to establish the levels of maternal attachment among teenage mothers with children ages one to six years in Nairobi city county Kenya. The study was guided by attachment theory and psychosocial development theory. The study utilized a correlational research design to establish relationships. Research instruments were adapted from the Maternal Postnatal Attachment Scale by Condon (2015) and the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-RS) questionnaire by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000). The study's target population was teenage mothers with children one to six years, between ages

thirteen to nineteen years old living in Kibra, Nairobi City, County, Kenya. The study incorporated purposive sampling techniques to sample 156 participants based on Cochran's formula. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. Multiple regression model was used to control the influence of intervening variables in the association of maternal attachment and attachment styles. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. The research findings show that, maternal attachment among teenage mothers significantly influenced their perception of their children attachment styles. Mothers with secure attachment behaviours perceived their children as securely attached. The findings were significant to teenage mothers, the Ministry of Health, ministry of education and AMREF & SHOFKO clinics in formulating policies to help the teenage mothers on establishing a perception of teenage mothers on attachment styles towards their children.

INTRODUCTION

Maternal attachment refers to a teenage mother's emotional connection to the growing children. Maternal transition is a challenging developmental process requiring physical, mental, social, and cognitive preparedness. This transition to motherhood is even more complex for teenagers, who must navigate the intricacies of both the maturation process and their new parenting role (Michael & Shirvanian, 2023). Early motherhood is

considered a risk factor for establishing a healthy relationship between mother and child, which is vital for the child's subsequent development. The dual challenges presented by teenage motherhood place both mother and child at risk, primarily because adolescent mothers must confront potentially conflicting developmental tasks.

According to Graham and McDermott (2020), this newfound role demands nurturing a child and addressing both its physical and emotional needs. The combination of these overwhelming responsibilities can create a significant internal struggle for the young mother. Beldobel, Brumariu and Kerns (2023) indicated that teenage mothers often experience conflict between her desire for independence and her infant's intense dependency on her. This situation can lead to feelings of depression, parenting stress, and low self-esteem, which might negatively influence her relationship with her child. The implications of these challenges extend beyond the immediate period of early motherhood, potentially affecting the mother's long-term social relationships and her capacity to provide a nurturing environment for her child's healthy development.

Maternal attachment among teenage mothers is the emotional bond developed between a young mother and her child, which can be challenged by the teenage mother's ongoing developmental, emotional, and cognitive maturation. While teenage mothers are often at higher risk for insecurity due to stress or lack of support, many manage to develop secure bonds through increased interaction, specialized support, and, in some cases, by seeking emotional fulfillment from their children (Nadkarni & Vyas, 2023). However, teenage mothers frequently struggle with responsiveness and face significant levels of stress, potentially leading to insecure attachment. Beldobel, Brumariu and Kerns (2023) added that this insecure attachment can profoundly impact the child's cognitive and emotional development, making the role of the mother even more critical during this formative period. Positive, secure attachments are fostered through social support, enhanced motherhood knowledge, and consistent, nurturing interactions between mothers and infants.

There exists lower maternal attachment during pregnancy which is associated with lower post-natal attachment and poorer child attachment outcomes. The involvement of grandmothers or other caregivers can provide essential support systems. According to the WHO (2022), teenage mothers are those between the ages of 13 and 19. In the United States, research indicates that despite a decline in teen births since the 1970s, the number of teenage mothers is increasing. It is estimated that 1 in 6 women nationwide is likely to become a teenage mother. Eleven percent of all US births are to teenage girls. In 2020, 15.4 (births for every 1000 females aged 15-19 years). More than thirty percent of 19-year-old girls in South Africa are reported to have given birth at least once. (Torpey, Manu, Assefa & Tesfaye 2019).

In Kenya, a report by Kenya Population Situation Analysis (KPSA, 2019) The statistics on teenage motherhood are alarming. Globally, approximately 7.3 million births occur among girls aged 15 to 19, while 2 million births are recorded among those under 15,

with 90% of the younger group already married. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), Kenya is among the countries with the highest rates of teenage motherhood, with nearly three out of ten teenage girls becoming mothers. Additionally, the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) reports that 30% of teenage girls in urban areas conceive before the age of 15 (Envulada, 2022). All these statistics show that becoming a mother during teenage years is a global problem.

KPSA, (2022) shows that teenage mothers are associated with limited life opportunities. Such as, early school leaving, poor academic performance, and unemployment even in the unskilled labor industries. The dual risk faced by both mother and infant in teenage maternal attachment is associated with the challenge teen mothers encounter in managing conflicting developmental tasks. This dynamic can impact their interactions with their children, affecting their ability to nurture, provide emotional support, and meet their infants' physical needs. The struggle between a teenage mother's need for autonomy and the infant's intense dependency often leads to emotional distress, including depression and low self-esteem.

This has been associated with insecure and avoidant styles of attachment (Dutta, Naskar & Das, 2022). The authors, however, do not show how this happens hence the focus of this study. According to Groh & Narayan (2019), the type of attachment offered by teenage mothers to their children has been reported to be compromised due to cognitive, economic, and socio-emotional domains. Teenage mothers often have limited resources, reduced social support, and a greater likelihood of child abuse and neglect. These challenges increase the risk of weakened maternal attachment due to heightened stress associated with child-rearing.

Statement of the Problem

Despite global studies showing a decline in teen births, in Kenya teenage mothers are still on the rise. Teenage mothers have been characterized as being less responsive, less sensitive, and more detached towards their children. As a result, children born of teenage mothers have been reported to exhibit maladaptive behaviors at later age like, use of alcohol and substances, engaging in risky behaviors like unprotected sex, clinging to abusive relationships and marriages due to fear of abandonment (NACADA,2022). These could be due to insecure or avoidant styles of attachment. Existing research has primarily examined maternal attachment, yet there is a lack of definitive studies exploring the link between maternal attachment and the perception of children's attachment styles among teenage mothers. Consequently, this study sought to establish the levels of maternal attachment among teenage mothers with children ages one to six years in Nairobi city county Kenya.

Objectives of the study

To establish the levels of maternal attachment among teenage mothers with children ages one to six years in Nairobi city county Kenya

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Psychosocial Development

The theory of psychosocial development, formulated in the year 1968 by Erick Erickson and attachment theory formulated by John Bowlby's research offers the context needed to understand how these variables relate and lays the groundwork for analyzing and discussing the findings. The psychosocial principles of development were developed by Erick Erickson in 1968. The principles suggest that if the care and trust needs of infants aged 1 to 2 are not adequately met, they may become anxious and start to mistrust others. Furthermore, during the ages of 2 to 4, children need to develop a solid sense of self and gain control over their physical abilities as they work towards greater independence, thereby forming their own will (Syed, 2018).

Erick argued that when children have sufficient support systems, such as strong maternal attachment, they developed emotional and social well-being, enabling them to effectively navigate various psychosocial challenges throughout their development (Kroger, 2018). Based on this view, teenage mothers lacking maternal attachment raised children with mistrust issues resulting in different attachment styles of children. If children born to teenage mothers lacked sufficient social support and did not successfully navigate the first two psychosocial stages of development, they exhibited mistrust and lack a sense of self which impacted the attachment style they displayed.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory was formulated by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in 1979. This theory explained the attachment system, which described how individuals regulate their need for emotional security. McLeod, (2019) argued that attachment behaviors had developed to emphasize caregivers who protected infants from both physical and psychological threats, facilitated safe exploration of their surroundings, and supported the development of emotional regulation skills. Ainsworth observed that children naturally sort closeness to their primary caregivers, in this case, teenage mothers. This closeness fostered stability and security, which are vital for risk-taking, exploration, and the development of a balanced personality. A child's sense of security was determined by the availability, accessibility, and responsiveness of maternal attachment, making teenage mothers pivotal in shaping their children's attachment styles.

Ainsworth also noted that in adulthood, individuals shifted their attachment needs to other significant figures, such as close friends and romantic partners. Bowlby referred to this as the hierarchy of attachment figures, where different relationships served as sources of emotional support throughout life. However, if a proper foundation was not laid during childhood years, children grew up being clingy to abusive partners due to fear of abandonment. (Berry, Wearden, Barrowclough, Oakland, and Bradle, 2018). Therefore, early developments of various types of attachment styles in children influenced future relationships with friends and romantic partners. Therefore, examining the factors that influenced these developments was essential. Hence the study established the connection

between maternal attachment and teenage mothers' perceptions on children's attachment styles, focusing on children aged 1 to 6 years.

Maternal Attachment Among Teenage Mothers

A teenage mother's capacity to recognize and respond to her child's needs effectively was essential for establishing maternal attachment. The maternal attachment was indicated by the maternal behaviors directed to the child. They manifested as positive traits, such as maternal responsiveness and sensitivity, or as negative ones, like maternal detachment (Fouts, Roopnarine, Lamb & Evans, 2022). According to National Vital Statistics (2023), in Germany as well as other industrialized countries, teenagers living in low socioeconomic status were likely to be mothers. These teenage mothers had been associated with child maltreatment, less maternal sensitivity, less empathy, and increased hostility toward their children. Low maternal attachment had been linked to child abuse and neglect, including physical and sexual abuse, as well as inconsistent parenting. According to WHO, (2022)., teenage mothers in Mexico had a higher likelihood of developing psychiatric disorders, including postpartum depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and personality disorders.

These teenagers with psychiatric disorders had been shown to possess low levels of maternal attachment (WHO, 2022). Psychiatric disorders may be explained due to teenage mothers trying to comprehend motherhood while experiencing cognitive limitations due to not being fully developed. This directly affected child-rearing practices. Although it was pertinent, the study did not demonstrate a link between maternal attachment and perception of children's attachment styles among teenage mothers. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2020), most teenage mothers belonged to low social economic statues where they lack social support and personal resources. Scarce personal resources and increased environmental stress weakened maternal attachment, hindering a mother's ability to adequately meet her child's needs. Teenage mothers frequently experienced maternal depression, which further diminished their level of maternal attachment.

These influences started during pregnancy, as teenage mothers begun to envision their children's appearance and caregiving, which in turn shapes the future mother-child bond. Moreover, those with stronger maternal attachment during pregnancy tend to exhibit greater sensitivity and emotional engagement with their children after birth. (Diniz, Volling & Koller, 2019; WHO, 2024). The level of maternal attachment was associated with the concept of familism. This meant the values and norms of a family of the teenage mother were thought to relate to ways of motherhood and supporting behaviors. East and Chien (2020) studied Chinese families with pregnant teenage mothers living in South America, exploring how familism values influenced family members' attitudes toward these mothers. They found out that familism supported teenage mothers and their children, hence enhancing maternal attachment. Davis, (2023) at the University of California conducted research that showed, during teenage years, individuals go through

separation and individuation while attempting to maintain a connection with their parents.

Teenage mothers increased their distance from their parents as a way of pursuing their autonomy. As a result of these beliefs and values within collectivistic based cultures, teenage mothers developed less autonomy, due to families guiding them. This had been shown to be negative on the autonomy of the teenage mothers but positive on the level of maternal attachment among the teenage mothers. Qualitative research done by World Health Organization, (2020) among low-income areas in Kenya suggested that teenage mothers rely heavily on levels of family support on ways of child rearing which in return increase maternal attachment with the children.

Research indicated that teenage mothers who received support experienced conflicting feelings about it. While such support was crucial and beneficial for managing the challenges of motherhood, it was perceived as compromising their independence. Consequently, family support inadvertently undermined the efficacy of teenage mothers KPSA, (2022). The benefits of family support depended on expectations rather than regarding the development of independence during teenage hood. Although studies had shown family support led to an increase in the level of maternal attachment among teenage mothers, they did not demonstrate a connection between maternal attachment and perception of children's attachment styles among the teenage mothers, hence focus of the current study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Correlation research design was employed to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between maternal attachment and the perceived attachment styles of children born to teenage mothers in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This design was appropriate since it allowed the researcher to establish a relationship, direction and intensity between naturally occurring variables without manipulating them. The design also provided a suitable framework for identifying and analyzing the variables objectively. The study's independent variable was maternal attachment, which comprised maternal responsiveness, maternal sensitivity and maternal detachment as indicators.

The study took place in the Kibra slums, located in the Langata sub-county of Nairobi City County. Kibra is one of Kenya's largest urban informal settlements and was globally recognized for having one of the highest concentrations of teenage mothers (KNBS 2019). Kibra recorded high prevalence of teenage mothers in Nairobi County. Kibra, Nairobi's informal settlements faced numerous socioeconomic challenges, including early sexual debut and limited access to reproductive health services. Kibra was characterized by high poverty levels unemployment and unstable family structures all of which are known risk factors for insecure attachment in both teenage mothers and their children (WHO,2022). Kibra had several maternal and child health clinics, community-based organizations that supported teenage mothers. This helped and facilitated in recruitment process. It ensured access to sufficient sample size.

The study focused on two key locations, African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) and Shinning Hope for Communities (SHOFKO) which offered primary health, handle gender-based issues faced by teenage mothers, and social services to teenage mothers who live in Kibra. This study concentrated on teenage mothers aged thirteen to nineteen years who had children between one to six years old, residing in the informal settlements of the Kibra slums. This was the age where many teenagers became mothers according to WHO, (2019). The statistical data from KNBS (2019) indicated Kibra was the highest number of teenage mothers. The research sought to enroll teenage mothers who attended the two selected clinics (Shinning Hope for Communities - SHOFKO and African Medical and Research Foundation - AMREF). According to KPSA (2022), 137 and 123 teenage mothers attended SHOFKO &AMREF clinics respectively. Thus, there was a total of 260 teenage mothers.

The study used non-probability sampling enabling the researcher focus on the target population, specifically employing a purposive sampling method to select Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Purposive sampling methods was employed to select AMREF and SHOFKO clinics, this was ideal due to its high efficiency. while simple random sampling was used to choose teenage mothers with children aged 1 to 6 years. This helped eliminate bias by reducing subjectivity and equal chance for respondents. The study focused on two key clinics, (AMREF and SHOFKO) because both offered complementary perspectives, holistic understanding and were relevant and ideal for access to diverse contexts, structured clinical health interventions (AMREF) and everyday lived realities (SHOFKO).

The decision to use a sample size of 156 participants for the study was based on Cochran's formula, a widely accepted method in social research for determining sample sizes. This formula calculated an appropriate sample size that balanced statistical accuracy with practical considerations. Using simple random sampling, a sample size of 156 was deemed statistically adequate for the study. providing a balance between accuracy and practical considerations. Systematic sampling procedure was used where every third teenage mother entering the clinics was requested to participate until the appropriate sample from each center was achieved. The sample size from AMREF was 74 and that of SHOFKO was 81. This generated a sample of 156 study participants.

This study adapted the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire (see Appendix II) to assess how teenage mothers perceive their children's attachment styles. The ECR-RS was a self-report instrument designed to evaluate attachment patterns across various close relationships and could be administered as an interview. It comprised of nine items that gauged different attachment styles. Prior research confirmed the instrument's internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha scores for the anxious attachment factor ranging from 0.75 to 0.91. This showed the high internal consistency of the items in the questionnaires and the fact that all measures had the same construction, making the instrument reliable for this study. The Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire and other data

collection instruments utilized in this study were validated through their application in similar population studies, thereby establishing their validity.

The study also modified the Maternal Postnatal Attachment Scale, a 19-item questionnaire designed to evaluate maternal attachment. The items were a mixture of forward and reverse-scored items. The 19 items showed adequate parameters of construct validity and reliability analyzed by composite reliability coefficient and showed an average (CR=0.72) which was considered reliable. There were two sections: section A collected data on bio-data information including age, marital status, level of education and others as indicated in the instrument. Section B contained questions focused on measuring maternal attachment and perception of attachment styles of children born by teenage mothers.

After data collection, the researcher reviewed all questionnaires to ensure proper completion. The data was cleaned and coded into SPSS Version 29 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied, with quantitative data summarized using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were utilized to determine the typical score from the collected data. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to make population inferences by testing hypotheses and estimating parameters, utilizing the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation which was used to establish relationship between the study variables. Both variables were measured using standardized psychometric instruments that yielded continuous scores that assumed normality and linearity. To ensure control of variables, multi regression model was used to assess and control effects of intervening variables.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Maternal Responsiveness among Teenage Mothers

Maternal responsiveness is an indicator of maternal attachment among teenage mothers. Majority of teenage mothers are not maternally responsive to their children with a small proportion of them being left out on this crucial development activity. These findings could be attributed to emotional and psychological factors i.e. teenage mothers are developing emotionally, which may affect responsiveness and patience to their children. From the findings most of the respondents reported that they were moderately confident and competent in interacting with the child. These views could be so due to lack of knowledge and experience in motherhood, hence making it harder to interpret the children's signals.

Most of the respondents indicated that they usually try to prolong the time they spend with their babies. The respondents trusted their own judgement in deciding what their babies needed most of the time. Most of the respondents indicated that they are moderately impatient when they are with their babies. These findings denote that teenage mothers can be patient, but the levels of patience were influenced by their developmental stage, stress levels and support systems. Teenage mothers have been reported to struggle with self-regulation, poverty, stigma and interrupted schooling can cause frustration.

With little prior experience teenage mothers struggle with patience while the teenage mothers who receive support from their families tend to show greater patience because they are less overwhelmed and have time to rest.

Maternal Sensitivity among Teenage Mothers

Maternal sensitivity is another indicator of maternal attachment among teenage mothers studied. Most of the respondents reported that they rarely get the feelings that their children were deliberately being difficult or trying to upset them when caring for them. As such teenage mothers rarely see their children as deliberately difficult however their perception seems to be shaped with stress, lack of maturity due to limited knowledge on motherhood, projection of emotional struggles and cultural/family influence. The respondents indicated that they have had moderate affectionate feelings towards their babies in the recent past. The respondents indicated that very frequently they feel tense and anxious when they are with their babies, they frequently get a lot of enjoyment/satisfaction and they very frequently find themselves thinking about their babies when are not with them,

The respondents further indicated that they usually feel moderate pleasure for being away for a while. The study found that they felt resentful about the things that they have had to give up because of their babies a bit. From the findings, teenage mothers made huge sacrifices like; education and career opportunities, social life and peer relationships, personal freedom and leisure, romantic relationships and financial independence. All these have been observed by the researcher to lead to resentments, sadness, inadequate and ashamed in the teenage mothers. However, for the teenage mothers with social support and a strong support system seem to not have feelings of resentments or other negative feelings.

Maternal Detachment among Teenage Mothers

The study revealed that teenage mothers very rarely get feelings of annoyance or irritation when caring for their babies. Most of the respondents indicated that they occasionally feel proud and joyous of their babies. The respondents indicated that they have mixed feelings of both sadness and relief when leaving their babies. Feelings around leaving the child are not one dimensional; there is a fluctuation between love, responsibility, guilt, anxiety and need for personal space. Most of the respondents indicated that they thought of their babies as very much their own babies. From the findings, most teenage mothers indicated that they own their babies, but feelings expressed can vary depending with their level of maturity, support and circumstances. Some teenagers experience developmental conflicts that lead to confusion and overwhelm, hence low feelings about ownership.

Regression Analysis

The study conducted multiple regression analysis to establish whether, maternal responsiveness, sensitivity and detachment correlated as above on perceived attachment styles after controlling social economic statuses, social support and level of education.

Metrics included R-squared (R²), P-value, and Beta coefficients to show how the intervening variables were controlled. significance tests were performed using the F-statistic and t-statistic, with a 95% confidence level guiding the multi regression analysis. The overall model was significant Table 4.8 uncovers the study insights.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.854 ^a	0.729	0.718	0.0260

Source: Field Data, (2025)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Maternal responsiveness, maternal sensitivity and maternal detachment

The R squared value of 0.729 highlights a significant relationship between maternal attachment and perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Nairobi City County. This remarkable statistic shows that 72.9% of the differences in perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Nairobi City County can be linked to maternal responsiveness, maternal sensitivity, and maternal detachment. These results confirm a moderate association between independent and dependent variables.

The study incorporated the regression coefficient outcomes to demonstrate how alterations in the independent variable can impact the variation observed in the dependent variable. Regression coefficients are important because they indicate the relationships and direction of each independent variable towards the dependent variable.

Table 2: Model Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	1.415	0.384		3.685	0.0004
Maternal responsiveness	0.589	0.216	0.555	2.727	0.0076
Maternal sensitivity	0.727	0.241	0.201	3.017	0.0033
Maternal detachment	-0.412	0.174	-0.286	2.368	0.0199

The study had adopted a regression model in the form of:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where;

X1 represents maternal responsiveness

X2 represents maternal sensitivity

X3 represents maternal detachment

ε represents Error term.

β_0 = Regression constant or intercept,

β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 are the unknown coefficients of independent variables.

The optimal model of the study becomes

Perception of attachment styles = 1.415 + 0.589 (Maternal responsiveness) + 0.727(Maternal sensitivity) -0.412(Maternal detachment).

From the above findings, when key factors are maintained at zero, the levels of perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County would be constant. Further, maternal responsiveness plays a pivotal positive role in perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County. This is exemplified by a Beta value of 0.589 and a significance p-value of 0.0076 which is less than 0.05. The outcomes suggest that a unit increase in maternal responsiveness leads to a substantial 0.589 unit increase in the perception of secure attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County. From the results above, a unit increase in maternal sensitivity leads to a substantial 0.727 unit increase in the perception of secure attachment style of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County. The significant p-value of maternal sensitivity was 0.0033.

The results further show that maternal detachment bears a negative and significant effect on the perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County. The data reveals that maternal detachment had a beta value of -0.412 and a significant value of 0.0199 which is also less than 0.05. This suggests that increased maternal detachment by one unit leads to 0.412 units decrease in perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers in Kibra sub-county in Nairobi City County.

Conclusions

The findings from this study provided insights into maternal attachment and perception of attachment styles of children among teenage mothers. On the level of maternal attachment among teenage mothers, teenage mothers were seen to display varied levels of maternal attachment towards their children. These are shaped by both developmental and contextual factors. The levels of maternal attachment showed to be influenced by emotional maturity, social support, economic challenges and previous attachment experiences. Hence, level of maternal attachment in this study is shown to range from secure to vulnerable based on interplay between personal social and environmental conditions.

The perception of children's attachment styles reflected both on developmental stages and their quality of life. Some teenage mothers identified secure attachment characteristics like ability to seek comfort when they experienced supportive environment and stable caregiving routines. However, common challenges like socioeconomic pressure, emotional strains and limited knowledge on motherhood shaped a perception of insecure attachment styles. This means the teenage mothers would

interpret their children's behaviours through a lens influenced by their own attachment histories.

From this study, a meaningful relationship has been established between maternal attachment and children's attachment styles. Teenage mothers who experienced strong maternal attachment, demonstrated strong attachment towards their children hence perceiving their children to be responsive, emotionally connected and securely attached. While those the teenage mothers with lack of support, limited knowledge on motherhood, socioeconomic strains interpreted their children's behaviours as avoidant, resistant and difficult. Hence the children termed as insecure anxious avoidant attachment style and insecure anxious ambivalent attachment style.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Health should integrate attachment screening into teenage maternal services e.g. a 10-minute checklist with a short depression/anxiety tool for visits of teenage mothers in antenatal and prenatal clinics. This will help in early detection of insecure attachment perceptions and help in timely guide on psychosocial support. This can be achieved by the ministry training both the nurses and midwives to administer the tool and also set a standard referral pathway to counseling. The Ministry of Health (MoH) should offer/emphasize teenage-friendly attachment focused counseling to Mother Child Health (MCH) clinics that address mother child bonding, responsive caregiving and maternal mental health.

This is so due to the limited knowledge and experience of the teenage mothers on motherhood. This will help in improving maternal responsiveness and sensitivity hence secure attachment styles on the children. MoH should screen and treat maternal mental health problems like postpartum depression/ anxiety at pre-natal visits and referral on site treatments. This is so due to maternal attachment severely undermining the attachment of mothers towards their children. Emphasize on use of tools like PHQ-9 and link the positive screens to counseling, psychosocial support and where necessary psychiatric units that should be within every hospital.

Creation of peer support groups led by trained facilitators on either weekly/biweekly for teenage mothers focusing on attachment, child care, social support and general coping strategies. This will help in reducing isolation, enhance responsive caregiving and normalize seeking help. The organizations should introduce home visits and more community outreach for high-risk dyads by trained community health volunteers. The volunteers should be able to Identify insecure attachment perceptions and any other risk like depression. Be able to offer tailored coaching on mother child interaction and offer clear referral protocols. They should also partner with cash transfer or livelihood programs to economically empower the teenage mothers. This will help eradicate stress and the major barriers to sensitive caregiving. Design couple friendly appointments and sensitization campaigns to foster responsibility from involved parents.

The ministry should emphasize reentry to school with motherhood friendly policies. For instance, ensure that the teenage mothers can return to school with flexible timetables, childcare support or day care links. Education will help improve maternal self-efficacy and long-term child outcomes. This can be done through collaboration with county education and schools to formulate catch up programs. Including education on motherhood and attachment styles in both primary and high school curriculum. Maybe short modules on child development, attachment styles, caregiving in teenage mothers. This will increase understanding before and after childbirth. This can be achieved by working hand in hand with curriculum developers.

Nairobi City County Kenya should produce guidelines that integrate screening, referral and teenage mother friendly services into MCH. Formal policies ensure resources training and accountability. The county should equally fund trainings in attachment informed care for frontliners. For instance, short courses to community workers, midwives, nurses, teachers and social workers in attachment theory, identification and the interventions.

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