

# UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

TOPIC: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF PARENTAL EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE: A CASE STUDY OF KANGEMI SLUM VILLAGE, NAIROBI.

A project paper in fulfillment of the Masters of Arts degree course in Counselling.

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REG. No. C/50/P/7795/02

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## DECLARATION


I, the undersigned declare that this project is my original work and has not been submitted in any other University for a Degree Award.

Mudi Fredah W. .... Date .....

### Declaration by Supervisors

This project paper has been submitted for examination with our approval as the University Supervisors.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my two supervisors Prof. C.A. Odegi and Dr. P. Mutie for their guidance and patience without which I would not have completed this project.

I appreciate the contributions and all kinds of support extended to me by my friends throughout my study. To them all and particularly Gladys Waithaka, Pauline Njogu, John Makokha, Pamela Arunga and Mr. Simiyu, I say thank you.

I appreciate my parents, Mr. And Mrs. H. Musoga for their responsible upbringing and their decision to see me through Education to the highest level. I will forever be indebted to them. My sister Joyce Lugulu is not be left out for her encouragement.

Over and above all, I wish to record my gratitude to God, and my loving husband Chris Mudi who gave me the peace and strength to bring this work to a successful completion.

## **DEDICATION**

This project paper is dedicated to my husband Chris Mudi and sons  
Callis Anyika  
Oscar Lukunza  
Kevin Musoga

### **Abbreviations used.**

- ANPPCAN** - African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect.
- CREAW** - Centre of Rehabilitation and Education of Abused Women
- FIDA** - Federation for Women Lawyers
- UNICEF** - United Nations Children's Fund
- NGOs** - Non Governmental Organisations



## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed at investigating the damaging effects of parental emotional child abuse in Kangemi slum village. The study focused on parents' awareness of the children Act 2001, types of emotional abuse that we are presently unaware of, personality traits of the emotionally abused children and the roles schools, religious groups, NGOs, local leaders and universities can play to help curb the vice.

Emotional child abuse refers to parental patterns of interaction that are abusive to children. Terms for this type of abuse include: mental cruelty, mental injury, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, emotional maltreatment and psychological abuse. An occasional negative statement/interaction, while unpleasant for the child, does not constitute abuse. Abuse occurs when there are several abusive patterns and these negative interactions are repeated frequently. Psychological abuse includes all affective and cognitive aspects of child maltreatment, including both acts of omission and acts of commission.

Emotional child abuse by parents has been regarded as a problem that occurs all over the world. Globally, 69% of children were reported to suffer emotional child abuse in the eighties. Little is done by the legal authorities to stamp out the practice.

There was emotional child abuse in traditional Africa. In those days children were used as labourers to till their parents' "shambas" In fact, the more children one had the richer one was. Those children who were not able to work as hard as expected developed deep psychological problems because they were labeled as lazy bones. However they were counselled by kinsfolk, peers and respected elders of the community

Cases of emotional child abuse in Kenya are under-reported and often occur within the privacy of our homes. The few reported cases are in the form

of physical and sexual abuse and nobody bothers to investigate the invisible, long-lasting and injurious effects of emotional child abuse. Efforts should be made to detect and counter the former before it is too late, because it is the worst form of child abuse and goes undetected until much later in the child's life- when very little or nothing can be done by anyone to remedy or reverse the situation.

Emotional child abuse is not well recognized by the medical and legal systems. There has been difficulty and reluctance in addressing the issue of emotional abuse in children due to its invisible nature. This is unfortunate, because all cases of physical abuse contain a co-existing emotional component whose impact may persist long after physical injuries have healed. Furthermore children may suffer emotional injuries in the absence of physical or sexual attacks. Compared to physical child abuse, psychological maltreatment appears to be more prevalent and is generally viewed as more detrimental than other forms of child abuse

Most emotionally abused children suffer from stress and loose self-confidence to the detriment of their academic studies and life in general. It was established that most parents are oblivious of the Children's Act 2001 out of ignorance and low levels of education. This is an indicator that most Kenyans are not aware of The Children's Act 2001 hence the rampant practice of emotional child abuse.

Retrenchment (due to socio-economic and technological changes), single parenthood and individualism, make parents unable to control their anger. They suffer from emotional stress which they vent/project on their children by abusing them. The tossing of a child to and from one parent to the other, or from the paternal to the maternal homes results in emotional child abuse (Were, 1992: 9). Drawing from the findings, several recommendations to help curb the vice were made.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Emotional child abuse refers to parental patterns of interaction that are abusive to children. Terms for this type of abuse include: mental cruelty, mental injury, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, emotional maltreatment and psychological abuse (Oaks, 1990: 39).<sup>1</sup> This study must be prefaced by recognition that all parents occasionally lose control and say things to a child that they later regret. An occasional negative statement/interaction, while unpleasant for the child, does not constitute abuse. Abuse occurs when there are several abusive patterns and these negative interactions are repeated frequently. Psychological abuse includes all affective and cognitive aspects of child maltreatment, including both acts of omission and acts of commission.<sup>2</sup>

Emotional child abuse by parents has been regarded as a problem that occurs all over the world (Hamamarn, 2000:928). Globally, 69% of children were reported to suffer emotional child abuse in the eighties (Roberto, 1990: 896). Little is done by the legal authorities to stamp out the practice. An established factor which causes emotional child abuse is the parents' emotional disturbance (Beatie, 1987:49).

1. Oaks Judy Keith

2. Ibid (1990:40)

It should be noted that emotional child abuse is not a new phenomenon in Kenya, given that it existed as early as the 1920's when children between the ages of 12 to 17 years worked on European farms and houses. They were referred to as 'shamba' boys and kitchen 'totos' (Onyango, 1988:29). Few studies have been carried out by Kenyan scholars on emotional child abuse. Instead, a lot of emphasis has been put on child neglect, physical and sexual abuse. Onyango, (1988:21), Were (1992: 24) and Bwibo (1998:20) are among the Kenyan scholars who have clearly categorized emotional abuse as one of the forms of child abuse. They did not go beyond this point.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Cases of emotional child abuse in Kenya are under-reported and often occur within the privacy of our homes. The few reported cases are in the form of physical and sexual abuse and nobody bothers to investigate the invisible, long-lasting and injurious effects of emotional child abuse. Efforts should be made to detect and counter the former before it is too late, because it is the worst form of child abuse and goes undetected until much later in the child's life- when very little or nothing can be done by anyone to remedy or reverse the situation (Wolf, 1979: 4).

It should be noted that while emotional child abuse cannot kill, its effects are devastating and permanent (Tower, 1987: 19). We should also know that emotional child abuse is largely a multi-generational problem because of its hurtful patterns. It is passed on from one generation to the other, since emotionally abused children are likely, to abuse their own

children or other children around them (Beattie, 1987: 16). An illustration of this is to be found in Kenyan schools where bullying of new students is common (Gathiari, 2002:15).<sup>1</sup> Many children have lost their lives or felt alienated. The bullied tend to perform poorly in academic work.<sup>2</sup>

Emotional child abuse is not well recognized by the medical and legal systems. There has been difficulty and reluctance in addressing the issue of emotional abuse in children due to its invisible nature. This is unfortunate, because all cases of physical abuse contain a co-existing emotional component whose impact may persist long after physical injuries have healed. Furthermore children may suffer emotional injuries in the absence of physical or sexual attacks (Hamarman,2000:11). Compared to physical child abuse, psychological maltreatment appears to be more prevalent and is generally viewed as more detrimental than other forms of child abuse (Beattie, 1987:62).

1. Gathiari Florence
2. Ibid (2002:18) .

It is, therefore, not surprising that parents in Nairobi emotionally abuse their own children either directly or indirectly. Many of them are oblivious to the long-term devastating effects of the practice. This study is an inquiry into the damaging effects of parental emotional psychological child abuse.

Emotional child abuse is related to severe medical problems such as bronchial, asthmatic and dermatitic conditions that take too long to heal as observed at the Kenyatta Hospital, Pediatric department and among Nairobi's street children (ANPPCAN 1988:21). Davids (1974: 90) observes that theoretically, a mother who cannot handle her child physically in a warm accepting way and has a good deal of hostility and resistance to the child can have a child with skin difficulties.

It is acknowledged that domestic violence is prevalent in Nairobi and Kenya as a whole as evidenced by both print and electronic media. The Centre of Rehabilitation and Education of Women (CREAW) in the Sunday Nation Newspaper 1<sup>st</sup> June 2003, noted that domestic violence is rampant in Kenya. Violence incidents take place with 93% of the children in Nairobi present, according to a baseline survey carried out in Nairobi (FIDA 1998). Such children are victims of domestic violence because they get emotionally stressed throughout their lives. Little is being done to curb domestic violence by the government, Kenya legal system and society. Laws are not mere ornaments in our statutes. They must be obeyed by all and the state is the supreme enforcement authority. The children Act (2001) clearly states the rights of the child and penalties for breach

including imprisonment and fine or both. The law states very clearly and in no uncertain terms that child abuse is a crime and lists four kinds of child abuse: physical, sexual and psychological /mental injury.

A survey carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wood, 1996: 41) on violence and rape revealed that 42% of Kenyan women are verbally or physically abused in the presence of their children who in turn suffer from effects of emotional stress. Studies also show that 80% of children who witness violence experience many of the same emotional and behavioral problems such as aggression that physically abused children experience (Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999:162). Aggression is witnessed in Kenya and Nairobi in particular in many children who end up in juvenile or children remand homes; and in Kenya secondary schools where bullying and strikes are a common trend (Gathiari, 2002: 87).

Retrenchment (due to socio-economic and technological changes), single parenthood and individualism, make parents unable to control their anger (ANPPCAN, 2000:14). They suffer from emotional stress which they vent/project on their children by abusing them. The tossing of a child to and from one parent to the other, or from the paternal to the maternal homes results in emotional child abuse (Were, 1992: 9).

Emotional child abuse is considered by some experts in research and treatment fields as Schakel, (1988:4), Lerna (1999:13) and Fortin (2002:2) as the primary causal agent for all forms of child abuse. If this assumption is correct, prevention and interventions in cases of emotional abuse may be the key to breaking the cycle of all forms of child abuse (Turgi and Hart, 1988:63).

### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study/General Objective**

The primary purpose of this study is to provide in-depth and adequate information on the magnitude of emotional/psychological child abuse by parents in Nairobi with a view to coming up with coherent, possible and holistic solutions to help in its eradication. The study will also describe the impact of emotional child abuse by parents in Nairobi on the child, the dynamics of the abusive families and the role that schools, religious groups, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local leaders can play to help emotionally abused children to redefine themselves as lovable, likable and capable people for the benefit of Kenyan Society.

#### **Specific Objectives**

- (i). To find out the level of awareness among parents on the provision of the children Act 2001.
- (ii). To explore other forms that emotional child abuse take.
- (iii). To investigate personality traits of victims of parental emotional child abuse.

### **1.4 Justification of the study**

This study will help and inform policy makers to detect and combat emotional child abuse a vice in Nairobi and Kenya as a whole, and avoid seeing physical and sexual abuse as the only dangers to the child. The study has also been necessitated by children's increased vulnerability to emotional stress at their parents' hands.



There have been few detailed and systematic studies on emotional child abuse in Kenya. Most of the existing literature is from western countries. The study will also be useful to the professionals working with the children, as it will serve as a guideline towards the formulation of strategies for preventing and protecting children against abuse. It will form a basis for further research as it may raise many questions in the process of trying to offer solutions to the issue of emotional child abuse.

Over and above all, personal experience has prompted the researcher to undertake the study on emotional child abuse by parents. The study will also be an inquiry into the damaging effects of parental emotional abuses.

### **1.5 Scope and limitation.**

This study will focus on psychological behaviors of children who have been emotionally abused by parents. This study will confine itself to Kangemi Primary and Secondary Schools in Kangemi slum village. The study is going to be small scale, indicative and exploratory. What is meant here is that the findings will not be conclusive but tentative pointing to areas and techniques of future studies on this topic.

### **1.6 Definitions of the key terms**

"Child" means any human being under the age of eighteen years (Republic of Kenya: 501).<sup>1</sup>

"Child abuse" includes: Physical, sexual, psychological and mental injury.<sup>2</sup> Emotional child abuse refers to acts that militate against adequate personality of the child Giovannoni (1971:11).

1. Republic of Kenya
2. Ibid (2001:502)

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Literature review will be discussed under the following sub-topics: definitions, symptoms of emotional abuse forms of emotional child abuse, characteristics of abusive parents, characteristics of the children who are likely to be abused, effects of emotional child abuse, theoretical framework and research questions.

### **2.2 Definitions**

Emotional child abuse has been defined in various ways by different authors but all agree on some basic facts such as the harm it inflicts on the children. Chege (1978:9) defines emotional child abuse as "Infliction of psychological trauma upon a child causing significant injury". To him, emotional child abuse is as a result of parents' or guardians' failure to give their children reasonable care, protection and provide them with the basics of life such as food, shelter, clothing, love and security.

A closer look at Chege's definition reveals one perturbing problem; it does not tell us what amount or at what level psychological child abuse is supposed to be considered as significant. The definition also fails to direct us on what type of protection of children is reasonable, since the term 'reasonable' can be relative. However he provides details on physical child abuse.

Giovannoni (1971:11) holds it that psychological child abuse are acts that militate against adequate personality development of the child. This may involve continual victimization, harassment and rejection of the child.

However, he does not specifically mention the perpetrators of emotional child abuse unlike his contemporaries.

UNICEF (1996:12) defines emotional child abuse as "the portion of harm to children that results from human actions or inactions that is proscribed, proximate and preventable."

Many scholars would have benefited a lot from this definition if it were more elaborate. Emotional child abuse should also be defined with such clarity and details so as to include the abusers and to apply to a range of situations in a variety of social and cultural contexts. Onyango (1988:6) defines emotional child abuse as "situations where children are maltreated by the family or society." This occurs when they are exposed to conditions of civil strifes, famine, racism, and poverty. This could also result from watching their parents ail and die from HIV /AIDS. Although she does not go beyond the definition, she exhaustively discusses physical and sexual abuse.

According to Roberto (1990: 896), emotional child abuse "is the total destruction of the spirit and a lose of the sense of self, a reflection of the ability to succeed and a barrier to interactions with people." He goes further to say that "this form of abuse focuses on denial of life experiences, discounting of the child, and invalidation of feelings and a displacement of blame for adults and family problems, leaving the child without the normal experiences that produce feelings of being loved, wanted, capable and secure.

Most emotionally abused children lack empathy and love for others and resort to anti social activities such as bullying (Beatie, 1987:111).

The emotionally abused children also suffer from low esteem and stress leading to poor performance in academic work (Mutie and Ndambuki,1999:52). Kempe and steel (1991:62) define emotional child abuse as "misuse or exploitation of the rights of the parents /guardians or caretakers to control and discipline children under their care".

All the above scholars apart from Roberto have not given emphasis on emotional child abuse in their studies but have dwelt in details on physical and sexual abuse. This could be due to many people being unaware of emotional child abuse as one of the forms of abuse, hence the existence of a gap the researcher intends to fill.

### **2.3 Symptoms of emotional abuse**

The child has distinctly different scores than non-abused children on psychological tests or may experience learning problems (Tseng and Jacobsen,

1988:61). This means that such children are easily distracted and find it hard to concentrate on their studies because they are normally preoccupied with the verbal abuse that they undergo regularly. Therefore they are always planning and looking for ways to escape it. They also incorporate the critical messages of the parent into their own "self talk" which further reinforces the feeling of worthlessness (Green 1985:39].

However few children are able to overcome the verbal abuse against all odds and manage to compete quite well against their peers who are not abused. Some even choose to survive by seeking to surpass other children in school (Mutie and Ndambuki,1999:77).

The child may appear extremely anxious or hyper vigilant especially during examinations and suggested contacts with parents by school personnel or upon anticipation of the rare parents' visit to the school (Betterlheim, 1994:16). Some resort to childhood habits that they had previously outgrown such as bedwetting. It is common for emotionally abused children to retreat to one part of the house when an abusive parent enters. It should be realized that the behaviours explained here could be due to other factors such as medical problems and shyness but more often than not, the culprit is emotional abuse. Shyness in children for instance is normally displayed towards strangers and not close family members such as parents.

The child exhibits low esteem and may describe himself as incompetent or a failure. A gradual decline in effort or grades may be observed. The child exhibits lack of confidence in his ability. This can lead to him/her being a loner or a social misfit. They also feel unloved by those who are important to them; parents (Mutie and Ndambuki,1999:80). However this could be overcome by the abused child being counselled.

## **2.4 Forms of Emotional Child Abuse**

The following are the forms that emotional child abuse takes:

There are situations where a parent rejects the child by refusing to acknowledge his/her worth and legitimacy of the child's needs. Rejecting behaviors include describing a child as a failure, refusing to show affection and acknowledging the child's accomplishments. It also include not calling a child by his name but just referring to him as 'kichwa majji' (watery head), "kichwa mbovu" (insane) or just "you" and so on. Such comments leave the child's spirit dented for life since he or she feels belittled or useless and concludes that everybody in the world hate him or her. Such negative attitude developed in a child can in the long run lead him or her in trouble since he or she can be easily abused by strangers who might show them fake appreciation. Parents who fail to meet their children's needs court trouble because anybody else would do it with strings attached.

According to Garbarino (2000:14), some parents cut the child from normal social experiences, prevent him or her from forming friendship and make the child believe that he is alone in the world. Isolating behaviors include not allowing the child normal contact with peers, not allowing him to participate in normal family routine and locking the child in the house. Treating children in the above mentioned ways is destroying their lives now and even in the future. Children should be allowed to socialize right from the early stage by being allowed to mingle with the others. Isolating them from their peers deprives them of acquiring vital life skills that one

needs to live in any society. At times, especially during the adolescent stage, children need to be carefully guided about choosing their friends by parents. What parents should avoid is to vet, interrogate and choose friends for them. Parents who lock their children in houses especially those that are handicapped are being discriminative and this is wrong because all children are equal (Republic of Kenya 2001:509).

A handicapped child deserves to be treated as every other child with no special favours except those related to his or her disability. (The Republic of Kenya, 2002: 509).

A parent who assaults the child, creates an atmosphere of fear, bullies and frightens the child and makes him believe that the world is capricious and hostile is emotionally abusing such a child. Terrorizing behavior includes threatening and frightening the child with whips, belts, knives and hangers (Roberto, 1990: 34). Such children develop phobias and this is not healthy for them. However a number of children outgrow the phobias through intensive counselling.

For one reason or the other some parents refuse a child to attend school, even when primary education is 'free'. Such parents are contravening the children's rights (The Republic of Kenya 2001:507). It is torturous for such children watching others go to school every morning. They feel rejected and develop a low self esteem and regard themselves as unworthy (Harmaman, 2000: 84).

## **2.5 Characteristics of Parents who Abuse their Children**

The following are characteristics of parents who are likely to abuse their children; Emotionally abusive parents do not provide consistent love, acceptance and praise that tell the child of his own self-worth (Beatie, 1987:101).<sup>1</sup> Rather the message is that he is lacking and bad. There is notable lack of affection, continuity of care, guidance concerning behavior and opportunities to learn and grow. Children abused in this way are not allowed to be independent beings; rather they are an extension of the parent and learn to be co-dependents from birth<sup>2</sup>. They grow up without a sense of security and live in fear of rejection or abandonment (Gravitiz and Bowden, 1985: 11).<sup>1</sup> The child will eventually respond in one of the two major ways:

- (i). He or she will increase efforts to placate the parent or will act rebelliously towards the parents.<sup>2</sup>
- (ii). Many eventually attempt to escape the abuse by running away from their homes or attempting suicide or taking drugs (UNICEF, 1996:16). This is true in Nairobi as evidenced by street children who have run away from their homes due to parental abuse. On the contrary, suicide cases are not common among abused children in Kenya. This could be due to under reporting.

Parents, who lack empathy or have low empathy for their children, emotionally abuse them. In fact some derive pleasure and satisfaction from the children's misery and hurt feelings (Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999:95).<sup>1</sup> Lack of or poor communication and social skills lead to parents emotionally abusing their children.



A good example is those parents who retort or snap when children ask them for anything<sup>2</sup>. In such situations children are left feeling bitter and unloved.

1. Beatie

2. Ibid 1987:102

1. Mutie and Ndambuki

2. Ibid 1999:94

1. Gravitz and Bowden

2. Ibid (1985:19)

Perhaps parents should opt to explain to the children why they cannot give them what they ask for instead of being rude. Parents experiencing economic and marital problems are likely to emotionally abuse their children (Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999:61). This is because they are unable to provide for them (their children) something that leaves them frustrated.

## **2.6 Children who are likely to be Emotionally Abused**

Orphaned children and those born out of wedlock are likely to be abused. They are abused in terms of failure of their guardians to provide them with parental love and material needs. Nobody can ever replace biological parents' love. In case of the latter (children born out of wedlock) they are discriminated upon both by the family and at school (Were, 2000: 9).

Those children who are products of abnormal pregnancies such as incest are deprived of parental love. In Kenya for example, such children are abandoned in hospitals and end up in children orphanages.

Disabled children are locked in bedrooms and have no interaction with the other children. They are denied opportunities to go to school or receive medical care (MOE, 2000:24). Most children who are slow learners are called names by their parents and forced to repeat classes and read continuously such that their time and lives revolve around books and no play. Such parents are not aware of emotionally abusing the children. Names such as "mshika mkia", meaning to come at the bottom of class are used for slow learners (Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999: 165).

Children whose parents leave them with a feeling of incompetence and insecurity, when they fail to live up to their expectations are emotionally abused. Some parents nag their children and create an unfavourable atmosphere at home. At times, the strained and unhappy relationships at home hamper progress in the children's study (Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999:23). There may be sibling rivalry (when parents compare or favour one child over the other), domination of elders, maltreatment of children and lack of a sense of belonging which could disturb the mental equilibrium of the young children resulting in poor achievement. In such cases expert guidance has to be provided to the children. However, this is not done in Kenya because parents do not consider such acts mentioned above as emotional child abuse but as a normal way of bringing up children.

Studies show that as a result of HIV / AIDS deaths, single parenthood, domestic violence and divorce have resulted to many families in Kenya to become dysfunctional and the most hit people are the hapless children who become emotionally abused.

Some children are naturally compliant while others are defiant. Defiant here implies deliberate acts of disobedience. The defiant / wilful child is difficult to control even when his parents handle him / her with great skill and dedication (Dobson, 1992:106). Perhaps parents can practice a little patience with such children in order to avoid emotionally abusing them. Being harsh and unkind to them can only make matters worse.

Children who come from families where emotional incest is practiced are likely to be psychologically abused by their parents. Emotional incest occurs when parents share adult secrets with the child. A good example is when a mother or father tells the child that "your father / mother is a drunk (mlevi) or a liar or even has mistresses and he is useless (Bure)". This in effect gives the problem to the child since he / she will feel the unexpressed pain of the parent (Tseng and Hammer 1992:218). This occurs, during the dysfunctional pattern of triangulation when direct communication between parents has been discontinued.

In families where one parent is dominant and in control of everything, children are likely to be emotionally abused. This is because they must have the same feelings and beliefs as the adult in charge (Norwood, 1991:142). While such families may appear to be very close, they are in fact "enmeshed".

Enmeshment destroys a child's sense of emotional separateness. These children upon reaching adulthood can become "emotional sponges" (Beatie, 1987:103).

Children whose mothers are terminally sick get emotionally abused because they are most often than not under the constant care of a relative or a caretaker who can misuse her / his position by exploiting them (Davids, 1994:114). Those children who are not biological offsprings of one of the parents (step children) are likely to be emotionally abused (Were, 1992:9).

Children who are born with low birth weight are likely to be emotionally abused because of their dependency nature and low intelligent quotient (ANPPCAN 2002:42). In some cases children born in large families are likely to be abused. This is so because their parents find it difficult to provide for their needs.

## **2.7 Effects of Emotional Child Abuse**

The following are the effects of emotional child abuse:

Emotional abuse impairs the child's capacity to develop appropriate emotional responses and can lead to life long emotional difficulties (Hamarman, 2000:12). Such children have problems socializing.

The child is confused because the parent is the one who is supposed to express love, yet the parent is inflicting maltreatment. Because the child is not allowed, culturally, to be angry with the parents or report them to the police, the message to the child is "don't feel". Feelings therefore must be denied. Since recognition of feelings is essential to normal living, the child slowly loses a sense of self. In such circumstances a child can become super sensitive to the needs and feelings of the parent (Briggs, 1977).

The emotionally abused child can become self-centered because he believes that his behaviour is the cause of all the family problems. He can develop an abnormal sense of self-importance. (Madison and Fossum, 1986:104). This exaggerated sense of importance is not to be viewed in a positive way. The parent is telling the child that he is to be blamed for problems. Such children begin to believe that they negatively affect

everything. They believe that if they could somehow change, their problems would be solved. They assume responsibility for all feelings and become so involved in their parents' needs, such that they have no real sense of their own feelings and needs. They live in an environment that lacks consistency and is very unpredictable. They live either trying to fix family problems or attending to the feelings and needs of the adult parent. The child is taught that he is responsible for or to blame for whatever the problems are – financial difficulties, parents' actions, unhappiness, poor health, fatigue or even parental rejection of him. Such children grow up with a core issue of unworthiness, a sense of badness, "a sense of shame". Their relationships are marked by ultra-sensitivity to the feelings of others and efforts to "second guess" people so that they can be ready to solve problems (Fossum and Madison, 1986:102).

Emotionally abused children constantly seek love. They are left with no sense of their "lovability" having never experienced unconditional parental love. They therefore believe that they must win or earn love (Beatie, 1987:49). Though with constant counseling, the children can be loving people unlike their parents.

Emotionally abused children are always apprehensive and always afraid of their own shadows. As infants, they suffer from extreme stranger anxiety and as adults, they become somewhat constricted grown ups who are timid, indecisive and withdrawn. Some however easily cling onto strangers and this is dangerous (Inglis, 1978: 26).

## **2.7 Theoretical framework**

**Psychoanalytical theory:** According to Sigmund Freud (1958:29) psychoanalytical theory looks at human beings as having been born evil and are driven by two major instincts: pleasure and aggression. He goes further to say that human beings are structured in such a way that they are related to their environments through their levels of consciousness (ego states) namely **id** (instinctual unconscious self), the **superego** (the moral socialized part of a person) or the **ego** (self-promoting part of a person). According to Freud, a lot of life expectations (especially negative emotions) are locked in our **id** and only what is acceptable to the environment is allowed out.

Freud notes the various episodes that exist when a child has problems within the first three years of development. The children who suffer childhood deprivation and abuse later become violent power seekers. Freud's theory helped the researcher to understand why parents become emotionally aggressive towards their children.

**The frustration-aggression theory-** views the expression of aggression either as a response to the emotions that an individual feels when some goal is blocked or as a response to frustration being the product of learning [Steinmetze, 1988:29]. In this theory violence is seen to be highly related to social stress such as poverty and job loss. When parents' ability to provide the basics for the children declines anger and frustration emerge and culminate into psychological/emotional/verbal abuse of children. When there is a breakdown between the superego and id, rage erupts within the person (parents) making him act violently.

**Social learning theory-**views violence as a learned phenomenon together with the role modeling theory, it assumes that children learn violent behaviors when they see their parents/guardians resolving problems by means of violence. When parents ridicule, verbally abuse and call them names the latter model

them (parents) and treat their peers in the same way. As adults such children would treat their own children in a similar manner.

The study focused on the selected theories that not only attempt to explain parents' behaviour, but also those that can be used to affect or change undesirable to desirable behaviour. A gap exists between the knowledge of these theories and their applications in a family setting and how the parents perceive the application of the theories. The study aims at filling such gaps.

### **2.8 Research questions**

1. Are parents' aware of the provision of The Children Act, 2001?
2. Could there be types of emotional psychological abuse that we are presently unaware of?
3. What are the personality traits of the victims of parental emotional /psychological child abuse?



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section outlines the research design that was used in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

### **3.2 Research setting**

The research was conducted in Kangemi Secondary and Primary Schools in Kangemi village (Nairobi). Kangemi village is situated off Waiyaki way and is about 6 km from the city center. Administratively, it falls in Westlands Division and experiences a cool climate. Its population is about 250,000 people (Kenya Bureau of Statistics 1999). Its inhabitants work in both formal and informal sectors in the city. Kangemi is heterogeneous in nature, its occupants come from various ethnic backgrounds in Kenya. It is representative of other slums or schools in Nairobi. Kangemi secondary school has three streams and a population of 480 students and 30 teachers while Kangemi Primary has four streams with 320 pupils in class 7 & 8. The two classes have eight class teachers. Kangemi village is accessible and familiar to the researcher. Site selection and that of the schools has been done purposively.

### **3.3 Target population**

This study gathered information from students, pupils, parents, religious leaders, teachers and local leaders such as the area chief and a health officer. A total number of ninety five (95) respondents participated in the study. Key informants, twenty students and twenty parents were being interviewed. Eight class teachers (for classes 7 & 8) twenty pupils, their parents and the Head teacher were included in the sample.

The class teachers were selected because unlike other teachers they interact with the pupils frequently and know their family backgrounds. Key informants were included in order to capture their perspectives on parental emotional child abuse. They were selected because they interacted with both the parents and children quite often.

### **3.4 Sample size and design**

According to Singleton et al (1988:137) sampling design refers to that part of the research plan that indicates how cases are to be selected for observation. The study used non-probability sampling techniques. The technique that was used was purposive sampling. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999:50) purposive sampling is a technique that allows a researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to objectives of his or her study. To start with, Kangemi village and schools were selected purposively to save on time and finance. This study was based on a sample of 40 students from both schools. This sample was considered a reasonable representative of the target population. The sample size has been arrived at with time and cost factors in mind.

The study design divided the students, pupils, their parents and key informants into three samples.

#### **Sample (1)**

The sample consisted of 10 students from Kangemi Secondary School whom the teacher counselor thought had been emotionally abused. They were talked to individually and requested to write essays about their families/themselves.

### Sample (2)

This sample had 10 other children whom the teacher counsellor thought came from ideal or non-abusive families. They were talked to and asked to write essays as in sample one. The same procedure was used for 20 pupils from Kangemi Primary Schools who come from abusive and non-abusive families, according to their class teachers. Their parents were interviewed to find out their levels of awareness as far as emotional child abuse is concerned.

### Sample (3)

This sample consisted of key informants such as teachers, local leaders and a health officer. In-depth discussions were conducted by use of unstructured interviews. According to Singleton et al (1988:137), unstructured interviews involved general objectives, wide ranging discussions and individual questions that are developed spontaneously in the course of the interview.

## **3.5 Unit of analysis and unit of observation**

Unit of analysis was emotional child abuse while the unit of observation was the children, parents and key informants.

## **3.6 Type of Data**

Due to the nature of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted. The primary source of data were case studies of parental emotional child abuse in Kangemi village in Westlands division. Group discussions formed the key technique used in obtaining information in the study. Another technique used was key informant interviews. Secondary data was sourced from books, journals, periodicals, prints and electronic media, published and unpublished theses.

### **Group Discussions**

These were conducted with parents and children to rate their knowledgeability on the subject of emotional child abuse. The purpose of these group discussions was to share experiences on the subject of emotional child abuse.

The discussions were steered by the researcher and her team using discussions guidelines prepared prior to the interview. Notes were taken in the course of the discussions.

### ***Unstructured key informants interview***

The key informants were interviewed on their knowledge and perception of parental emotional child abuse.

### **Observation**

Observations were made to assess how children reacted towards the researcher and their parents. During the time the researcher was talking to individual parents, the children (individually) were allowed to come to the room to find out their reactions towards their parents. Notes were taken during the session.

## **3.7 Data analysis**

This is the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation of the collected data. This was done by analyzing the conversations, interpretation of essays and behavioral patterns. The analysis sought to make general statements on the relationships between thematic issues identified and study objectives.

The collected data was organized, clustered, interpreted and a conclusion drawn. This enabled valid generalization of the findings and a conclusion was made in the form of summary.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Data description and analysis

The findings in this chapter are based on a sample of 95 respondents living in Kangemi Slum village Westlands division in Nairobi. The chapter presents information regarding the demographic characteristics of the emotionally abused children and their parents. The study included 40 children, 40 parents and 15 professionals. The chapter presents and discusses the findings established from the study using insights from qualitative data such as case studies.

### 4.2 Social and demographic characteristics

#### *Ages of children*

It was established that most children (over 52%) in Kangemi slum village undergo emotional abuse at the hands of their own parents. Reasons given for the maltreatment ranged from the socio economic status of parents to the parents having been themselves abused as children. All the children interviewed were between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Table 1 illustrates this:

**Table 1: Age of respondents (children)**

<b>Children's age in years</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
13 – 14	10	25
15 – 16	23	57
17 – 18	7	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it is evident that children between ages 13-16 were the most emotionally abused (82%). This could be due to their vulnerability.

The study deduced that emotional child abuse is worse for children below age 16. It tends to decrease (18%), as the children grow older. This could be attributed to the fact that the children at age 18 are on the verge of maturity and tend to be rebellious as a result of emotional disturbances and this makes their parents to be careful when it comes to handling them.

#### **4.3 Educational level of parents**

According to findings, 60% of the parents had attained primary school education, 22.5% had gone up to secondary school level, while 10% had gone through education up to college level, and 7.5 were illiterate.

Most of the emotionally abused children's parents (67.5%) had not gone beyond primary school level. See the table below for details.

**Table 2 Parental Education Level**

<b>Parent's Education Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	3	7.5
Primary School (1-8)	24	60
Secondary School (Form 1-4)	9	22.5
College Level	4	10
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

A close look at the above table reveals that there is a significant relationship between parental level of education and emotional child (60%) abuse. Most of the abusive parents had attained or not completed primary school education, few (7.5%) were illiterate while (22.5%) had gone to school up to secondary level and 10% had managed to go up to college level.

What was interesting was that none of the abusive parents had gone beyond form two level of education. This could explain why such parents emotionally abused their children. This also explains why some of the emotionally abused children were in and out (secondary school) of school due to lack of school fees. Perhaps their parents do not see the need of them completing secondary school education.

#### **4.4 Parental marital status**

Out of a total of 40 parents interviewed, most (60%) were single parents. For details, see the table below.

**Table 3: Parental marital status**

<b>Parents marital status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Married	16	40
Single	24	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it is evident that 60% of the children from Kangemi slum village come from single parent families. This then explains the frustrations that their single parents face as they try to make ends meet and bring them up single handedly. Most single parents (51%) complained that they were unable to make ends meet given the hard economic times in the country. They also complained about instilling and maintaining discipline in the children. Those who were single due to widowhood, divorce or separation said that the situation was better when their spouses were around because they would help in the upkeep and upbringing of the children. Other parents who are single by choice resort to activities such prostitution to the chagrin of their children who may never meet or know their biological fathers. When this happens, the children said that they feel low and unwanted and are ridiculed by their friends who poke fun at the saying that they have too many fathers. The situation is made worse given the fact that most houses in Kangemi are one roomed and serve as the bedroom, sitting room and the kitchen.

Frustrations that Kangemi parents undergo explain why some parents emotionally abuse their hapless children who are likely to imitate them when they are grown ups, forming a vicious cycle of emotional abuse as implied in the frustration-aggression and social learning theories. However, it is not only the single parents who get stressed and vent their frustrations by emotionally abusing their children, some married parents (29%) were found to subject their children to emotional abuse.



#### 4.5 Ages of parents

Most of the parents interviewed were relatively young. 82.5% of them were below 36 years old and 17.5% were above 36 years of age. The study found out that young parents lack experience in bringing up children and are prone to temper tantrums or cannot control their tempers unlike older parents. See the table below for further information.

**Table 4 Parental ages**

Parents age in years	Frequency	Percentage
22 – 26	12	30
27 – 31	13	32.5
31 – 35	7	20.0
36 – 40	8	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, the study concluded that young parents (below age 36) are the majority in Kangemi village (and form 82% of the parents) lack older people who have experience in the bringing up of children, who can guide them on the same and whom they can also emulate. This could perhaps be attributed to individualism that characterizes urban areas, whereby nobody ever minds his/her neighbours' welfare. It then follows that when young parents are stressed, they do not have anybody to confide in and seek counsel from hence they abuse their children emotionally as a way of venting out their anger.

It is interesting to note that most parents in Kangemi got married at early ages and most dropped out of school. Through the interview, the parents attributed their dropping out of school to their parents' failure to pay their schools fees because they had many children or were poor. In fact a good number of parents said that their parents were too harsh to them and this made them run away from home to get married. The researcher at this point concluded that the parents themselves had undergone emotional abuse at the hands of their parents thus the vicious cycle of abuse.

The study also found out that, parents who had gone up to college level were likely not to emotionally abuse their children even if they were not aware of the Children's Act 2001.

**Table 5 Parental level of education**

<b>Parents educational level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Primary school	23	57.5
Secondary school	10	25
College level	7	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

The non-abusive parents preferred counselling their children to quarrelling them whenever they went wrong. When interviewed, the parents (non-abusive) reported that children tended to change positively when talked to in such a way that the consequences of their negative behaviors were discussed and the idea of them being responsible for their wrongs

emphasized. Many abusive parents reported that most of their children appear immune to emotional abuse such as verbal because they never seem to change in their behaviour and this made the parents continue hurling insults at them. In fact children when interviewed especially teenagers said that verbal abuse is equal to nagging and they hated being nagged by their parents. They confessed that they resorted to act as if they were mute and dumb and these made their parents incensed. Many children said they had learnt to ignore the naggings. This means that they benefited very little from such maltreatment contrary to the parents' view that (verbal abuse) is a normal way of bringing up a child. Frustrations that Kangemi parents undergo explain why some parents (39%) emotionally abuse their hapless children who may in turn imitate them, forming a vicious cycle of emotional abuse as implied in the frustration-aggression and social learning theories.

However, it is not only the single parents who get stressed and vent their frustrations on their children by emotionally abusing them but also some married parents (29%) were found to subject their children to emotional abuse.

#### **4.6 Number of siblings**

Evidence gathered from children and parents showed that most emotionally abused children were orphans or came from large families where parents were unable to cater for their needs due to economic hardships. The study found that 45% of the children were from families with 5 to 9 siblings.

Emotionally abused children from small families formed 25% while orphaned children made up 30%. The table below illustrates this fact: -

**Table 6: Number of siblings**

Type of family	Frequency	Percentage
From small family (with 4 siblings)	10	25
Orphaned	12	30
From large family (5 to 9 children)	18	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown from the above table, majority of the emotionally abused children (45%) are from large and (30%) orphaned families.

#### **4.7 Parents' awareness of children's act 2001**

The study found out that most parents were oblivious of the Children's Act 2001. The majority (70%) said that they had not heard about it while 23% said that they had heard about it but did not know what it entailed, only 7% knew what the Act says. On the forms of child abuse, 74% stated that they were aware of physical and sexual child abuse but not emotional child abuse. When emotional child abuse and its forms was discussed with the parents, most (79%) agreed that it was detrimental to the child although, they had hitherto looked at it as a normal way of bringing up or moulding a child. They insisted that emotional abuse did not cause physical injuries on the child and was not punishable under Kenyan law and therefore is 'harmless'. This observation confirmed the fear that most Kenyans are not aware of emotional child abuse whose effects are damaging. The table below illustrates this point.

**Table 7: Parental awareness of the Children's Act 2001**

<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	3	7
No	37	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

However, among the professionals, the level of awareness of the children's Act 2001 and the various forms of child abuse was high. See the table below for details.

**Table 8: Professionals awareness of the Children's Act 2001**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	11	68.6
No	5	31.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above, it was revealed that most professionals (68.6%) were familiar with the children's Act 2001 and are aware of emotional child abuse and its damaging consequences. This is an indicator that if professionals were empowered and well equipped, they could help create awareness of the children's Act 2001 among parents and Kenyans at large.

#### **4.8 Other forms of parental emotional abuse**

Children talked about other forms of emotional abuse. They stated, through the interview what they liked and disliked about their families. They singled out parents' squabbles and fights at home which made them (children) frightened. The children said that they felt their parents do not love them because, if they did, they would avoid quarrelling between themselves. Most children especially those in secondary school said that they would like their parents to correct their mistakes without humiliating them. Involvement in family decisions was pointed out as a form of emotional abuse since they felt excluded from family affairs. This was well articulated by secondary school children with the majority (71%) of them saying that their parents never involved them in making decisions affected their families even when the decisions directly affected them. Such decisions, they said, included how they should dress and spend their leisure times.

The study also found out that the secondary school children lived in perpetual fear about who would pay for their fees at college level. Actually, 39% of the students in Kangemi slum were in and out school every term due to lack of school fees while 10% had their school fees paid for by various organizations. They therefore argued that their parents strained to pay for them school fees at secondary school level and that the situation would be worse at college level. This spelt a bleak future for each one of them.

Through the area chief, the researcher found out that about 6,000 children in Kangemi do not attend school due to various reasons, chief among them being lack of money to cater for their needs such as food. Over 56% of families in Kangemi slum village have only one meal per day and that is supper. In this regard, children are unable to learn on empty stomachs. Most parents in Kangemi work as casual laborers in areas such as Westlands, Parklands and Loresho. They earn between Kshs. 2,000 and 3,000 per month. With the escalating cost of living, the parents said that they were unable to meet their children's basic needs. The study found out that most Kangemi dwellers (82%) walked to and from their work places, which are as far as Industrial area. This means that they walk for a distance of 30kms a day and by the time they arrive at home, they are very tired and have little time and patience for their children. They felt very frustrated that they could not provide for their children even after toiling for the whole day. Even with the 'free primary education', the parents were unable to keep their children in school. Case study 1 illustrates this point well.

Minimization was found, by the study, to be another form of parental emotional child abuse in the slum of Kangemi. This refers to downplaying or ignoring an event, which may evoke an emotional response that ~~he or~~<sup>she or</sup> she does not understand or totally refuses its existence. This was found out when teachers were interviewed. The teachers gave examples of children who indulged in anti-social activities such as the consumption of drugs and pre-marital sex. The study found out that when teachers report such misdeeds to the parents they (parents) simply do nothing to correct

the children or <sup>do not</sup> come to school to talk to the teachers so that they can work out strategies to counsel the affected children. They do not even talk to the child about the malpractice at home. What follows then is that the child grows up not knowing what is correct or not correct. The teachers are then left to single handedly talk to the child out of the negative behavior and this is normally met by resistance from the child because he/she does not see why the teacher, and not the parent, should disapprove his behavior.

The study, through the head teachers, found out that another form of parental emotional abuse is denigration. This happens when the parent(s) destroys the child's self-confidence by disregarding what the child says or by continually dressing down a child whenever or he/she seeks to express herself / himself. The danger of denigration is that it leads to dependency. The child always depends on the parents and other children when it comes to making decisions, however simple they may be. Other people whom the child interacts with can easily influence such in wrongdoing.

Through the area chief, the researcher found out that about 6,000 children who have attained the school going ages were out of school even with 'free' primary education in Kangemi This was attributed to various reasons, chief among them being lack of money to cater for their needs. Most parents in Kangemi work as casual labourers in areas such as Westlands, Parklands and Loresho. They earn between Kshs. 2000 to 3000 per month. With the escalating cost of living the parents, when interviewed, said that they were unable to meet their children's basic



needs. The study found out that most Kangemi dwellers (82%) walked to and from their work places, which are to be found in areas as far as Industrial Area. This means that they walk for a distance of 30km per day and by the time they arrive at home, they are very tired and have little time and patience for the children. They felt very frustrated that they could not provide for their children even after toiling the whole day. Even with the 'free primary education', the parents were unable to keep their children in school. Case study 1 illustrates this point well.

### **Case study 1**

K.S. is 16 years old and in class seven. He looks as if he is 13 years old. He has suffered stunted growth. The boy said that he had been in and out of school due to lack of school fees. He only came back with the inception of 'free' primary education. K.S.' father does casual work and has 8 other children to cater for. The boy said that whenever his father could not get work for a period of two months, he would send them to stay with their grandmother in the rural village. This was one of the reasons why K.S. was in and out of school. The boy is back in school but the parents are unable to provide him with the basics such as food, uniform a desk and pay funds to build and maintain school facilities. K.S. became a victim of being sent away from school for lack of where to sit and failure to pay school levies. K.S. said that whenever he would inform the parents about what his teacher wanted, they would ignore him. The boy hates to stay at home and watch others go to school. He would therefore return to school after staying at home for two or three days but just hang around the school gate the whole day watching other children play and go to class.

Whenever any teacher approached the gate, the boy would hide behind the school fence until one day, the watchman who had observed him for sometime noticed him and reported the case to the head teacher. Out of empathy, the headteacher allowed the boy to stay in school and bought for a desk. However, he cannot provide K.S. with food or exempt his parents from paying school levies. The boy said that he has learnt to do with one meal per day and sometimes carries left overs for his break. The teachers said that K.S. is an average boy although he looks miserable most of the time.

K.S's case illustrates that emotional abuse considerably affects physical development of a child. Most emotionally abused children are unable to thrive like their counterparts who are not subjected to emotional abuse. Besides, emotionally abused children's academic work is interrupted every now and then to the point of making them fail to excel in their studies and life in general. When this happens, the vicious cycle of child abuse continues. Furthermore, a society whose members have not received adequate education lags behind socially and economically. Most ill educated people engage in crime, to make ends meet and are ignorant about many vital issues in life.

The study also noted that K.S's parents were not aware that children were entitled to free basic education in accordance with the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child and that it is their responsibility and that of the government to ensure that this happens. The parents should also know that the government cannot shoulder such a responsibility alone.

## **4.9 Undermining children's attachment to the other parent**

Children at secondary school level from single families complained that custodial parents were blocking and undermining the children's attachment and visiting biological parents. A good number of the boys interviewed, (35%) said that they felt cheated and lost self-esteem when their mothers kept on being visited by various men in their houses. Some girls (59%) did not seem to have problems with the so-called 'uncles' so long as they brought home food. Admittedly, they said that they got confused with the many visitors and confessed that they had never known their biological fathers and were not bothered. Only a few girls said that occasionally, they had been able to meet their biological fathers and were happy about it.

### **4.9.1 Household chores**

The emotionally abused primary school children raised concern about their parents forcing them to perform household chores that the parents themselves were not willing to do instead of allowing them to play. Such chores included baby sitting, washing parents' clothes and cleaning the house. The study found out that most primary school children (54%) liked playing as is shown in case study 2.

#### **Case study 2**

P.A, Z.O and E.N are aged 14, 15, and 16. They are in classes six, seven and eight. P.A said that what she disliked most about her family was when her family made her to baby-sit on some schooldays and during the time she is free. She said that she is not allowed to join other children in playing but stay indoors looking after the baby. The only days she gets a chance

to play is in school, She feels that even at school the few minutes<sup>80</sup> allocated for games and physical education (P.E) twice in a week is not adequate for her. Matters are made worse at home.

Z.O on the other hand said that she is charged with the responsibility of cooking for the family of 7 during the weekend. Besides, she has to ensure that the one-roomed house is clean and utensils washed after the two meals they have per day. Z.O has to contend with her homework. She said that she would be a very happy girl if her mother exempted her from some of the household chores so that she would have time to play with her friends. Sadly, she said that her mother was adamant to listen to her since she argued that she needed to rest after toiling each day for 14 hours in order to fend for them. E.N said that he has no free time to engage in play since he has to help his father ferry and sell tomatoes in Kawangware. This happens during weekends and school holidays.

The three children mentioned in this case study have no time to be children. The researcher found out that the children are in situations that create emotional stress resulting in worry, anxiety, fear, frustration and boredom. Such children miss opportunities to interact with their peers in order to acquire social skills, which facilitate good interpersonal relationships within a community. Such skills include friendliness, communication skills, sensitivity, dependability, honesty to name but a few. The above skills help an individual to function effectively in different settings.

About 43% of children in secondary school preferred studying and participating in recreational activities such as sports, to doing household chores. These exercises, they argued, help them improve in their mental fitness and emotional stability.

#### **4.9.2 Spending more quality time with children**

The primary school children when interviewed also said that they would feel loved if their parents spend more quality time with them and not at the drinking dens for this would enable the parents to know what the children lack, provide them with adequate food and get concerned about their health, by taking them to hospital whenever they feel unwell. Their counterparts in secondary school too decried lack of adequate food.

#### **4.9.3 Poor communication**

The study also found out that lack of communication between parents and their children was a form of emotional abuse. When they talked about what they did not like about their families, the abused children stated that they could not remember the time when their parents ever talked to them in a sober manner. Most of them (59%) said that on many occasions, their parents, when drunk, engaged them in aggressive type of communication. This kind of communication is forceful and overbearing and one does not listen to the person that he/she is addressing. It includes name-calling and is not necessary if a healthy family situation is to be established. In such situations, children are denied their right of being heard as is enshrined in the children's Act 2001: 506.

It was also noted that children preferred being counseled to being called names and quarreled consistently.

The study found out that orphans had been turned into heads of families at tender ages. They had been deprived of an opportunity to be children by the deaths of their parents due to HIV / AIDS. A good example is that one found in case study 3 below:

### **Case study 3**

J.B. aged 18 years and in form two was orphaned after his parents died of HIV/AIDS. He was the first born in a family of 4. His younger brother L.M. is aged 14 years and in class six. JB said that after his parents' death, his paternal aunt came to live with them. She would look after them well, she saw them off to school and was there when they came back home in the evening. After a short while, the property that had been left for them by their late parents started disappearing one by one. The aunt told them that she had sold them to get money to meet their basic needs. When everything had been sold the aunt too disappeared leaving them behind. For a few weeks, neighbors provided them with food but could not pay for their house rent. J.B. confided in his guidance and counseling teacher about his predicament. The teacher in turn informed the school headmistress. When the headmistress talked to J.B., she discovered that the boy had been running errands for neighbors and collecting scrap metals to sell to get money for food for his brother and himself. The money was barely enough to pay for house rent leave alone buying them uniform. J.B was emotionally stressed and on the verge of depression.

The headmistress and her staff started feeding and paying house rent for J.B and the brother. Meanwhile the headteacher looked for a sponsor to pay fees for the boy and she was lucky to find one. The school has come up with the idea of offering JB part time work. He has been given odd jobs in the school such as watering flowers, cleaning the staff room and teachers' offices in the evenings. On Saturdays, between 9am ad 12.00 noon, J.B accompanies the school clerk to the market to buy foodstuffs for the lunch of the other students. The school in turn pays his rent, provide him with enough food for a month and give him 300/= pocket money. The boy is very grateful to the school. However, he complained that he felt too exhausted to carry out his studies in the evening.

#### **4.9.4 Exploitation**

Evidence gathered from the field showed that nearly 60% of parents with large families in Kangemi slum village exploited their children by expecting them to contribute to the families' incomes.

**Table 9: Number of siblings**

<b>Type of family</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Small (with 4-5 siblings)	16	40
Large (with 6-9 siblings)	24	60
Total	40	100

Such parents forced their children to drop out of school or work during their free time for a wage. Children collect scrap metals to sell and others work as house helps after school and during the holidays to supplement their families' incomes. This was evident in Kangemi secondary school

where one girl (C.A in the case study below) studied and worked. The girl said that she was unable to fully concentrate on her studies, because by the time she is through with the housework, she is tired and sleepy. See case study 4 for further details.

#### **Case study 4**

C.A comes from a large family in Kangemi slum village. She has 7 siblings and she is the eldest of them all. She has to work in order to help her parents make ends meet and help pay her school fees. Being 18 years old and in form 3, C.A said that she is the only one from her family to have gone to secondary school, three of her siblings dropped out of primary school due to financial problems. C.A said that in a way, she is lucky because she is able to work as a househelp (within Kangemi) and in turn, her employer pays her Ksh. 1,200/= per month. The money is used by her parents to supplement their incomes and also her school fees. However she said that housework is very tiring such that she is unable to concentrate on her studies. C.A said that she has to wake up very early every morning at 5.00 am. and prepare breakfast for her employer's children. She said that he employer is kind enough to help wash up breakfast dishes. However, dishes for lunch and supper have to be washed by C.A. she also has to ensure that the children's beds are made besides preparing supper for the entire family. She said that she is the last one to retire to bed at 11.00 pm. After doing her homework. In spite of all the difficulties she encounters in her role as a house help, she is determined to complete her secondary education.



It is worth noting that C.A's rights as a child have been violated by her parents who have denied her parental care hence she is fending for herself. In fact she has been forced to engage in child labor, which leaves her psychologically affected. She is aware that her situation is different from other children's she hardly has time to relax or even concentrate on studies, she has been denied the right to live with her parents [the children's Act 2001; 507]. It is not right for a child to live with strangers while her/his own parents are alive. C.A. is undergoing economic exploitation and this does not augur well with her mental and social development.

According to the findings, 68% of both primary and secondary children yearned for attention from their parents not only when they were on the wrong but also when they did something good. They pleaded for their parents' recognition of their positive behaviour.

The emotionally abused children also said that their parents should not subject them to threats or accusations, or naggings but instead engage them into healthy discussions whereby they (children) can openly express themselves. Through the interview, the children said that they needed to be treated with respect and dignity; something that was deliberately being down played by their parents. They said that they hate and felt annoyed because of the constant naggings from their parents. The study noted that parents have abdicated their responsibilities of correcting and guiding their children but subject them to verbal abuse.

#### **4.9.5 Personality traits of the emotionally abused children**

The study found out that the emotionally abused children suffered from posttraumatic stress syndrome. They are unable to find a correct role model in their immediate environment to emulate. They also fail to develop any idea that their behaviors are 'abnormal'. This became clear through the interview with the class teachers, teacher counselors and head teachers when they commented on the way the abused children interacted with other children. It was noted that when emotionally abused children found themselves in a non-abusive environment, they were unable to cope and would disrupt such an environment in order to have one that they were familiar with (abusive environment). Such behavior alienated them further because other children found it strange and kept off.

From the teachers' comments, it is clear that some of the emotionally abused children got involved in frequent threats of physical or verbal assaults towards their peers, teachers or other school personnel. Other emotionally abused children became more overt in the stated activities to the point of actual assaults to others.

The emotionally abused children find it hard to form healthy positive relationships with others and therefore always kept to themselves. Some become introverts making their peers treat them as subjects of fun and ridicule. This make such children become loners who most often that not, commit suicide or have suicidal tendencies. A majority of them become social misfits.

The study found out that emotionally abused children demonstrate fewer positive behaviours such as verbal and non-verbal affection and can even have problems being spontaneous and having fun.

Children who had been emotionally abused by their parents were observed and found to exhibit compulsive, oppositional or precocious, behaviour patterns.

According to findings, behaviors such as rocking of the legs, failure to sit still and biting of fingernails among girls are common. Stammering among boys was evident in some of the children. These behaviors are undesirable since they could land the children into more trouble such as being sexually and physically assaulted by strangers and even by their own parents. Some of the children could not adequately and confidently express themselves. This is well explained in case study 5.

### **Case study 5**

LY is 17 years old and in class eight. She was unable to express herself but only uttered few words when interviewed. She was extremely shy and could not look at the researcher in the eyes. She kept on biting her fingers and shaking her bare footed legs. The other classmates said that that was how she behaved when talking to people. She said that she hardly talked and always hid in the corner of their one roomed house whenever her father arrived home from his 'changaa' (local brew) den. LY said that whenever she tried to talk at home, her mother always ignored what she

said and therefore she had decided to talk less since nothing good ever comes out of her mouth. The father on the other hand when drunk liked hurling abuses at her and her mother for hours on end. She said that she has been forced to listen to what others say and had learnt to take instructions wholesale without asking questions. She looked timid and walked clutching part of her uniform. She hardly raised her face throughout the interview even when she was requested to. When she finally hurriedly walked away, her eyes were downcast.

The study found that a number of emotionally abused children (35%) were seen to wear pitiable expressions. They suffered from apathy and their teachers said they had very few friends.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Summary**

To sum up, I have looked at various issues associated with parental emotional child abuse. I have looked at the ways children view emotional child abuse and its effects on them at present and even in future. The study found out that most emotionally abused children suffer from stress and loose self-confidence to the detrimental of their academic studies and life in general.

The study also has established that emotionally abused children become anti-social and are likely to be abusers themselves when they became adults, hence the vicious cycle of abuse. It was established that most parents are oblivious of the children's Act 2001 out of ignorance and low levels of education. This is an indicator that most Kenyans are not aware of The Children's Act 2001 hence the rampant practice of emotional child abuse.

It is surprising that 74% of parents recognized physical and sexual abuse as the only forms of child abuse, since there have physical signs, but looked at emotional child abuse as a normal way of bringing up children. This attitude is dangerous and spells doom for children unless something is done to arrest parental emotional child abuse in Kangemi slum village and Kenya at large. It is clear that single parenthood, large families, deaths of parents and financial constrains among other factors contribute to the parental emotional child abuse. Other forms of parental emotional abuse too have been dealt with in this chapter.

The study also established that emotionally abused children develop personality traits that are likely to subject them to physical and sexual forms of abuse.

The children's opinions on how they should be treated when they go astray <sup>have</sup> ~~were~~ been looked into in this chapter. The study also found out what children consider themselves as being loved by their parents if the former provide them with adequate basic needs and spend quality time with them.

It should be noted that children expressed the fact that they preferred being counseled to being quarreled and called names. It was found that the intangible nature of emotional trauma makes medical and legal interventions unattainable and troublesome, especially when similar provoking <sup>actions</sup> are sometimes classified as "bad parenting" by some people and "abuse" by others. It was observed that neither the judicial system nor the government ~~has~~ been able to give adequate directions to child protective agencies.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study aimed at investigating the damaging effects of parental emotional child abuse in Kangemi slum village. The study focused on parents' awareness of The children Act 2001, types of emotional abuse that we are presently unaware of, personality traits of the emotionally abused children and the roles schools, religious groups, NGOs, local leaders and universities can play to help curb the vice.

Thereafter, pertinent recommendations in regard to parental emotional child abuse were be outlined.

From the responses given by 95 respondents, the study concluded that a majority of parents were not aware of The Children Act 2001. In addition, they did not recognize emotional-psychological abuse as one of the forms of child abuse. It is important that copies of the children's Act 2001 be made available to them alternatively, public awareness of parental emotional child abuse should be carried out to sensitize Kenyans.

It is also clear that there are numerous forms of child abuse that most Kenyans are not aware of. It has been confirmed that parents do not deliberately set out to emotionally abuse their children.

In response to the third objective on the personality traits of the emotionally abused children, the study established that parental emotional abuse has damaging effects hence on the children and these could lead to negative consequences such as psychological disorders, recurrence of abuse and trauma among many effects making a child fail to fully develop as an all rounded member of society who can positively contribute to its welfare. Drawing from the findings, I offer several recommendations to help curb the vice.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

- Schools through which almost all children pass can be described as the most appropriate places to provide prevention and intervention services to children. However, several critical issues need to be addressed. First, school personnel must be trained to detect signs and

symptoms of emotional child abuse in order to identify children who are being abused. They must be familiar with Kenyan law and the requirements to report suspected abuse to relevant organizations such as childrens' department, the chief and even the police. Training of such personnel can be provided in both pre-service as well as in-service programmes.

- School counselors should be posted to both primary and secondary schools. They should specifically be trained to provide guidance to parents suspected to be emotional child abusers and give individual counseling to the abused children.
- Churches, local leaders should be involved in curbing of emotional child abuse by sensitizing the parents on the same. Chiefs 'barazas' (chiefs meetings) should address the problem and if possible avail the children Act 2001 to the parents or even discuss it in details with them.
- NGOs should liaise with schools to financially help the abused children by paying their school fees. They should also organize seminars and workshops to sensitive the public on the damaging effects of emotional child abuse.
- Teachers should undergo training in classroom management to ensure that children are empowered to protect themselves and develop positive self-esteem. The classroom may be the best environment in which some children have to experience and practice healthy interpersonal relationships. However, it must be realized that teachers being human beings who may have been emotionally abused by their own parents as children, have the potential of continuing the abuse



cycle in the classroom. It is therefore vital that the teachers, who act as surrogate parents, participate in therapeutic interventions. Such teachers should constantly be guided by their older colleagues on how to handle the children.

- Teachers' expression of disapproval, use of isolation, detention of poor performers, or reading out low achievers' names on assembly, rejecting of the child's work, unequal treatment of high and low performers, level of ability of children, unfair criticism, verbal abuse such as use of 'put downs' and continuous experiences of failure continue the abuse cycle. Perhaps teachers should be encouraged to use less punitive approaches to classroom management and focus more on positive interactions, praise and reward systems for positive behaviors and students accomplishments. The same should be practiced by parents at home.

In addition, classroom teachers should be on the forefront and teach about healthy relationships, communication skills, decision-making, recognizing and validating of feelings and positive self-esteem. This can be possible if the Ministry of Education designs school curriculum in such a way that it accommodates the above listed skills. While these skills are vital for all children, they could also be a deciding factor and go a long way in breaking the abuse cycle. One healthy adult teacher who can model and teach a healthier approach to life could also be the key to breaking the cycle of abuse. An excellent curricula to deal specifically with all forms of child abuse should be availed by the Ministry of Education.

However the most successful programmes would be those that teach the child from a holistic approach. Therefore, comprehensive school health curricula such as living healthy and teenage health programmes are recommended. These should be designed to empower the children to value themselves, experience healthy interpersonal relationships and recognize, honor and express feelings.

The government should employ more stringent measures to deal with emotional child abuse. The judicial system must recognize emotional child abuse and punish the abusers.

- An effective advocacy effort should be undertaken by the government, NGOs, religious groups and the local media to raise the public awareness of the child's rights as spelt in the children's Act 2001. Resources need to be mobilized to facilitate this process. The government should stop paying lip services to programmes related to children but instead allocate adequate resources to them.
- The government should address the issue of economy with a view to bridging the existing gap between the poor and the rich. The continual economic disparity between the rich and the poor fuels parental emotional abuse. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that parents cannot give to their children what they (parents) do not have. The government should not ignore the plight of slum dwellers because it is in the slums that the majority of Kenya urban dwellers live hence an enabling environment should be created for them to be in a position to work and meet their families' basic needs. After all, every self-

respecting and responsible government or society must cater for the needs of its members.

- The introduction of “free” and compulsory primary education by the government is a major step in upholding children's rights in the country, because the government is tackling one of the key issues in child abuse. Therefore parents' who fail to take their children to school for whatever reasons should be arrested and charged in the courts of law with emotional child abuse.
- The government should ensure that parents ~~that~~ parents take children as their sole responsibility for the good of the family and the whole society. They therefore should have children that they can adequately cater for.
- Parents, should create enabling environment in their homes where they can encourage, talk over a problem to make children feel better, wanted and develop high self esteem. Children should be offered opportunities to express themselves and be listened to without reprimand.
- Parents should remember that although children are a product of society, it is the family that is supposed to provide love and care to them. “Free” primary education can only work if parents are responsible enough to provide food, uniform, station<sup>ery</sup> and pay building funds. If this is left on the government alone, it would be burdensome and the likelihood of the programme collapsing would be inevitable. However, care should be taken to ensure that orphans and those children who come from absolutely poor families should be

identified and give a free education. They should be exempted from paying school levies in their quest for education.

- Medical care system should be equipped with the personnel to address emotional harm caused to children. All members of the public should be involved in curbing emotional child abuse by reporting suspected child abusers to relevant authorities for counseling.
- More research should be carried out on parental child abuse by the universities so that policy makers can be aware of the issue and put relevant measures in place to curb it.

#### **.4 Areas for further research**

- Parental emotional child abuse in upmarket residential areas.
- Emotional child abuse by teachers.

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<http://www.emotionalabuse.asp>





11. Why in your opinion do you think parents abuse their own children?
12. What are the factors that make children be emotionally abused by their parents?
13. Comment on the effects of parental emotional child abuse on their children?
14. Do you think parental emotional-psychological abuse can be curbed?  
Please explain.
15. Are you aware of children who should be in school but stay at home?
16. Would you be aware of the reasons as to why they are not in school?  
Explain
17. At what age do you think the children are more likely to be emotionally abused by parents?
18. What other comments would you like to make regarding parental emotional.