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Family Support as a Predictor of Resilience among Students in Junior Public Schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Low resilience among students in junior public schools in Kenya remains a critical concern, yet the role of family support has received limited attention. In South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, this challenge manifests through emotional difficulty, poor coping, and declining academic performance. The objective of the study was to examine the influence of family support on resilience among students in junior public schools in the constituency. The study was anchored on Resilience Theory and Ecological Systems Theory and adopted a convergent mixed-methods design. The target population comprised 9,378 students, 116 Heads of Institutions (HOIs), and 116 Guidance and Counselling (G/C) teachers across Igoji, Abogeta, and Nkuene/Mitunguu sub-counties. Schools and students were selected through stratified and simple random sampling. Instruments were piloted in two schools (38 students, 2 HOIs, 2 G/C teachers); the family support subscale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.821. The main study involved 350 students, 21 HOIs, and 22 G/C teachers (91.4% response rate). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and simple linear regression; qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated at interpretation. Family support significantly and positively influenced resilience ($r = .612$, $p < .001$), explaining 37.5% of its variance ($R^2 = .375$, $F(1, 348) = 208.4$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings highlighted parental communication, emotional availability, encouragement, and practical support as strengthening students' coping. The study concludes that family support is an important protective resource for students' adaptation and recommends strengthening family engagement programmes that promote responsive parenting and sustained parental support.

Keywords: *Family support, Resilience, Junior public schools*

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1.0 Introduction

Resilience is the capacity of young people to adapt positively in the face of academic, social, and emotional adversity, and it is recognised across cultures as a critical developmental outcome (Masten, 2024). Globally, close relationships with caring adults are among the most consistently documented protective factors for resilience (Masten, 2014). Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa points the same way, with parental support linked to students' resilient behaviour and academic resilience (Mangoh et al., 2024; Nansamba et al., 2025).

In Kenya, the junior school stage spans roughly ages twelve to fifteen and is marked by heightened emotional reactivity, expanding social worlds beyond the household, and increasing academic demands. The Government has responded through guidance and counselling and life-skills education, yet Kenya-specific evidence on junior school students remains scarce. Locally, adolescents in Imenti South Sub-County are exposed to family adversities, including parental separation or divorce (39.3%) and emotional neglect (34.9%) (Kaaria et al., 2024), which may affect their emotional well-being and academic functioning.

Among the psychosocial resources available to a student, family support, defined as the emotional, informational, and practical assistance received from parents or guardians, is widely regarded as the most proximal and consistently available protective resource (Cheraghian et al., 2023). Because it operates through the student's closest relational system and does not depend on school resourcing or staffing, family support offers a direct lever for policy and practice, provided its contribution to resilience is empirically established rather than assumed.

Problem Statement

Family relationships are recognised as theoretically and empirically important to child development. Yet little is known about the extent to which family support independently influences resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County. Existing Kenyan evidence on parental involvement has focused largely on secondary school students' academic resilience rather than the broader psychosocial resilience of younger, early-adolescent learners (Surum et al., 2022), and it has more often measured involvement in school activities than the emotional and relational quality of support experienced at home. This gap limits the evidence available to guide family-focused interventions for junior public-school students.

Objective and Hypothesis

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of family support on resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, Kenya. The study tested one null hypothesis: H01: Family support has no statistically significant influence on resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, Kenya.

Theoretical Review

The paper was anchored on Resilience Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. Resilience Theory, associated with Garmezy (1974) and further developed by Masten (2024), conceptualizes resilience as "ordinary magic": it arises from common, normative adaptive systems, such as attachment relationships, self-regulation, and problem-solving capacity, rather than from rare individual traits. Masten (2024) emphasizes that resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic outcome of ongoing person environment interactions, so the family environment is an active, continuously operating influence rather than a static background condition. Family support is therefore conceptualized as a protective factor, alongside risks such as household economic pressure and academic stress, that jointly determine a student's adaptive capacity.

Because Resilience Theory says little about how a student's surrounding environment shapes outcomes, it was complemented by Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory posits that development is shaped through continuous, bidirectional interactions with nested environmental systems, from the immediate microsystem to broader societal structures. The family is the student's most proximal microsystem, so the quality, consistency, and warmth of family relationships influence the psychosocial resources available to students facing academic and social adversity. Read together, the two theories imply that family support is both a discrete protective factor and the medium through which the wider ecology of the student's life, including school and community, is filtered and interpreted.

"Family support offers a direct lever for policy and practice, provided its contribution to resilience is empirically established rather than assumed."

Empirical Review

At the global level, evidence consistently links family support to adolescent resilience, though mechanisms and magnitude vary by context. In Portugal, Alves et al. (2024) found that family support was significantly associated with resilience among young people in residential care, and that resilience partially mediated the link between family support and life goals. In Iran, Cheraghian et al. (2023) used structural equation modelling with 560 high school students and showed that parental support predicted resilience both directly and indirectly through hope and active coping. In Indonesia and Turkey, Suud et al. (2024) studied over 1,100 students and established that family social support enhanced academic resilience primarily through self-regulated learning, despite differing educational systems and cultural norms around parental involvement.

At the regional level in sub-Saharan Africa, Mangoh et al. (2024) found a significant positive relationship between parental support and resilient behaviour among university students in Cameroon. Nansamba et al. (2025) reported that parental influence significantly predicted students' academic resilience in Universal Secondary Education schools in Luweero District, Uganda, with teacher support shaping the strength of that relationship. Nationally, Surum et al. (2022) found that parental involvement, spanning academic, physical, social, emotional, and financial dimensions, significantly strengthened academic resilience among public secondary school students in Turkana County, with its socially expressed dimension emerging as the strongest predictor. At the local level, evidence is limited to the prevalence of family adversities among adolescents in Imenti South Sub-County (Kaaria et al., 2024).

Together, this evidence spans care-experienced youth, university students, and secondary school students across Europe, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. It consistently shows a positive relationship between family support and resilience, operating both directly and through hope, coping, and self-regulation, which provides a strong a priori basis for expecting a similar association among younger, early-adolescent students. However, no study was identified that examined family support as a stand-alone predictor of resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, a gap this paper addresses.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework links family support (independent variable), operationalized through emotional security, parental guidance, shared time, and material provision, to resilience (dependent variable), measured across personal, relational, and contextual domains of individual

resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Masten, 2014). The framework treats family support as a unidimensional predictor while recognising that its influence may be partly channelled through intervening processes, such as hope and coping, that lie outside the present analysis.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Linking Family Support to Resilience

Independent Variable		Dependent Variable
Family Support • Emotional security • Parental guidance • Shared time • Material provision	→	**Resilience** • Personal domain • Relational domain • Contextual domain

2.0 Materials and Methods

Study Area and Research Design

This paper was conducted in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, Kenya, drawing on junior public schools in Igoji, Abogeta, and Nkuene/Mitunguu sub-counties, an area with a predominantly rural, subsistence-farming profile in which most guardians depend on small-scale crop and livestock farming. A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted, in which quantitative and qualitative strands were given equal priority (QUAN = QUAL), collected concurrently, analysed separately, and integrated at the interpretation stage (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The design allowed the magnitude of the association between family support and resilience to be triangulated against students' and key informants lived accounts of how family support is experienced in the household.

Target Population and Sample Size

The target population comprised 9,378 students, 116 Heads of Institutions (HOIs), and 116 Guidance and Counselling (G/C) teachers in junior public schools across the three sub-counties (Table 1). Schools were stratified by sub-county and selected through simple random sampling; students were then proportionately allocated to the 23 sampled schools and selected through stratified and simple random sampling. One HOI and one G/C teacher were purposively selected from each sampled school for their professional vantage point on students' family circumstances and wellbeing. Of 384 questionnaires distributed, 350 were returned, alongside 21 HOI and 22 G/C teacher interviews, giving a response rate of 91.4%, above the 70% threshold recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2023) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

Table 1

Target Population, Sample, and Respondents by Sub-County

	Target population			Sample		Respondents		
Sub-county	Students	HOIs	G/C	Schools	Students	Students	HOIs	G/C
Igoji	3,179	42	42	8	130	118	7	8
Abogeta	3,778	44	44	9	154	142	8	8

Sub-county	Target population			Sample		Respondents		
	Students	HOIs	G/C	Schools	Students	Students	HOIs	G/C
Nkuene/Mitunguu	2,421	30	30	6	100	90	6	6
Total	9,378	116	116	23	384	350	21	22

HOIs = Heads of Institutions; G/C = Guidance and Counselling teachers. Sample students = questionnaires issued; one HOI and one G/C teacher were sampled per school (23 each).

Instrumentation and Reliability

Student resilience was measured across personal, relational, and contextual domains of individual resilience described in the resilience literature (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Masten, 2014). The instrument assesses resilience from a social-ecological perspective across personal, relational, and contextual domains, and has been validated for use with early-adolescent populations in multiple national contexts. Family support was measured using ten researcher-developed Likert-scale items covering emotional security, parental guidance, attentiveness to worries, shared time, and material provision, each rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instruments were piloted at Kariene and Ntonyero Junior Schools in Central Imenti Sub-County with 38 students, 2 HOIs, and 2 G/C teachers (approximately 10% of the main study sample), consistent with the piloting recommendation of Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). Cronbach's alpha was .853 for the resilience scale and .821 for the family support scale, both exceeding the .70 threshold recommended by Ranganathan et al. (2024) and Taber (2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through self-administered student questionnaires distributed and retrieved by trained research assistants. Qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews with HOIs and G/C teachers, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically using both deductive and inductive coding. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 30 through descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, percentage agreement), Pearson product-moment correlation, and simple linear regression, with family support entered as the sole predictor of resilience. Normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed through visual inspection of residual plots and found to be reasonably satisfied. The model was specified as $Y = \beta0 + \beta1X + \varepsilon$, where Y is resilience, X is family support, $\beta0$ is the constant, $\beta1$ is the regression coefficient, and ε is the error term. Qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative results at interpretation to explain the size and shape of the association observed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from Kenya Methodist University and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), with authorization from the Sub-County Directors of Education for Igoji, Abogeta, and Nkuene/Mitunguu. Informed consent, together with parental or guardian consent for minor participants, was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Descriptive Findings

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for family support. Family support was rated positively overall (composite M = 3.68, SD = 0.68), falling in the high category on the five-

point scale. The highest-rated indicators were emotional security ("I feel safe and loved around my family," 80.0% agreement, M = 4.09) and parental guidance ("The rules and advice from my family help me make good choices," 79.1%, M = 4.03), suggesting that the affective and normative dimensions of family life are well established across the sampled households. Attentiveness to worries (69.7%, M = 3.78) and reassurance in difficulty (68.3%, M = 3.74) were also rated favourably, indicating that most students perceive their families as emotionally available in distress. In contrast, only 49.7% of students agreed that their family spent quality time with them (M = 3.29), and 57.1% agreed that it met their financial and practical needs (M = 3.44), pointing to a gap between the affective and practical dimensions of family support.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Family Support Items

Item	Agreement (%)	M	SD
I feel safe and loved at home	80.0	4.09	1.08
Family rules and advice help me make good choices	79.1	4.03	1.02
My family pays attention to my worries	69.7	3.78	1.12
My family reassures me in tough times	68.3	3.74	1.14
My family motivates me to explore new activities	57.4	3.50	1.20
My family meets my financial and practical needs	57.1	3.44	1.25
My family spends quality time with me	49.7	3.29	1.27

Note. N = 350. Agreement = percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Items were rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Qualitative responses converged with this pattern: family conversation tended to organize around academic performance, to the exclusion of more exploratory or emotionally oriented topics. Several students described their interactions with parents as consisting mainly of questions about schoolwork and grades. Key informants located the source of this shortfall in the occupational structure of the catchment area. Because most guardians were engaged in subsistence farming, Heads of Institutions described farming households as "time poor," with parents too fatigued after fieldwork to sustain open conversation in the evenings, while older siblings often absorbed informal caregiving duties. Family support in South Imenti Constituency is therefore affectively strong, normatively strong, and practically thin, a pattern best understood as a structural consequence of the household economy rather than of parental disengagement.

Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis showed that family support was positively and significantly associated with resilience ($r = .612$, $p < .001$), a strong association on Cohen (1988) classification. A simple linear regression with family support as the sole predictor (Table 3) explained 37.5% of the variance in resilience ($R^2 = .375$, adjusted $R^2 = .373$, $F(1, 348) = 208.4$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .612$, $t = 14.44$, $p < .001$), indicating a statistically and practically meaningful relationship.

Table 3

Simple Linear Regression of Resilience on Family Support

Predictor	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	β	t	p
Family support	.612	.375	.373	.612	14.44	< .001

Note. N = 350. Dependent variable = resilience. Adj. R^2 = adjusted R^2; $F(1, 348) = 208.4$, $p < .001$.

Family support was a strong, statistically significant predictor of resilience, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis that it has no statistically significant influence on resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency. The finding is consistent with prior research at every level. Globally, Cheraghian et al. (2023) in Iran found that family support predicts resilience both directly and through hope and coping, Alves et al. (2024) in Portugal linked it to resilience and future-oriented life goals, and Suud et al. (2024) in Indonesia and Turkey found that the relationship operated substantially through self-regulated learning. Regionally, Mangoh et al. (2024) and Nansamba et al. (2025) reported similar associations, and nationally, Surum et al. (2022) found socially expressed parental involvement to be the strongest predictor of academic resilience. The coefficient observed here is notably large: a single predictor explained more than a third of the variance in resilience, underscoring the contribution of close family relationships to students' resilience in this setting.

Read alongside the descriptive and qualitative findings, the result suggests that the affective and normative dimensions of family support, feeling safe, loved, and guided, do most of the protective work, since these were the most strongly endorsed dimensions. This is consistent with Cheraghian et al. (2023) finding that hope and active coping mediate the link between parental support and resilience, both of which are more plausibly cultivated through emotional availability and guidance than through material provision alone. The weaker practical dimension, constrained by household time and resource pressures, may be an area where the protective potential of the family remains only partially realized.

These findings connect to wider global, national, and local concerns. Globally, they reinforce the view that resilience arises from ordinary protective relationships rather than exceptional individual traits (Masten, 2014, 2024), which positions families as a low-cost resource for adolescent mental health agendas, especially where specialist services are scarce. Nationally, they suggest that school-based guidance and counselling and life-skills initiatives in Kenya will be most effective where they engage parents as partners rather than treating the school as the sole site of psychosocial support. Locally, the strong effect coexists with documented family adversities, such as parental separation and emotional neglect among adolescents in Imenti South (Kaaria et al., 2024), and with the time poverty of subsistence-farming households, implying that the protective potential of family support is substantial but unevenly realized across households.

Limitations of the Study

This paper is subject to limitations. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference; more resilient students may elicit warmer family responses, in addition to, or instead of, family support building resilience. Family support was measured exclusively through student self-report, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Finally, because family support was isolated as a single predictor, the analysis does not account for shared variance with unmeasured factors, such as household socio-economic status.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper examined the influence of family support on resilience among students in junior public schools in South Imenti Constituency, Meru County, Kenya. The findings confirm that family support exerts a strong, statistically significant, and positive influence on resilience, accounting on its own for more than a third of its variance. This influence is rooted in a family environment that is affectively and normatively strong but practically thin, constrained chiefly by the time and material pressures of a subsistence-farming economy rather than by any lack of parental commitment. The paper concludes that family support is one of the most potent protective resources available to students in this setting, and that interventions to strengthen resilience should prioritize the family as a primary point of entry while addressing the structural barriers that limit its practical influence.

5.0 Recommendations

First, parents and guardians should prioritize shared, non-instrumental conversation with their children beyond academic performance, supported by school-organized parenting workshops that offer brief, low-cost strategies, such as designated mealtime conversation routines, for sustaining it despite the time pressures of farming livelihoods. Second, county education offices and school administrations should support community-based initiatives, such as parent cooperatives, savings groups, or church-based support networks, that ease the material and time constraints facing subsistence-farming households and thereby strengthen the practical dimension of family support. Third, Guidance and Counselling teachers should be equipped to identify and refer students whose family circumstances place them at particular risk of inadequate support, providing a safety net where family-level interventions cannot immediately close gaps. Finally, future research should use longitudinal designs to establish the temporal ordering between family support and resilience and examine mediating mechanisms, such as hope, coping, and school belonging.

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