

Evaluating the Relationship between Parental Emotional Attachment and Online Crime Victimization: A Study of University Students in Kenya, A Case of Chuka University

Kennedy Mwangangi Mutua, Lumadede Japheth (Ph.D.), Charles Mwirigi (Ph.D.)

Department of Social Sciences, Tharaka University, Kenya

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2025.1410000144>

Received: 28 October 2025; Accepted: 04 November 2025; Published: 22 November 2025

Abstract: Online crime victimisation harms not only individuals but also the wider community by weakening trust and safety. This study looked at how parental emotional attachment influences the chances of online crime victimisation among university students at Chuka University in Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. The target population was 19650 students pursuing different courses in Chuka university. Participants were randomly sampled from the population after the pilot study which was conducted in Tharaka University. During the pilot study, the reliability of research instruments was measured (Cronbach Alpha of .87) and deemed valid to collect actual data. This study relied on the principles of Routine Activity Theory and Social Learning Theory. After seeking permission from relevant authorities such as Tharaka University Ethics Committee, NACOSTI and Chuka University management the researcher proceeded to collect the actual data from 155 students using questionnaires by physically visiting the lecture hall. After inferential data analysis the results showed strong links between weak parental bonds and higher vulnerability to online victimisation. Maternal attachment ($p = .554$, $p < 0.01$) and paternal attachment ($p = .483$, $p < 0.01$) both played important roles in shaping how safe or at-risk youths were online. In today's world, digital technologies bring both opportunities and risks. The findings show that parental emotional support remains a strong shield even in an age where artificial intelligence, social media, and online platforms shape young people's lives. By using technology in education, counselling, and law, society can build new ways to protect and guide youths. The study concludes that strengthening parental support, building emotional resilience, and encouraging self-control can lower the chances of online victimisation. At the same time, digital tools such as online safety training, mental health support apps, and technology-informed laws can help create safer spaces. Working together, parents, teachers, and policymakers can use these tools to protect young people and support sustainable development in line with the wider goal of building safer and more inclusive societies.

I. Introduction

Online crime victimisation involves the use of Information Communication Technologies to carry out a series of acts intended to harm a person who cannot defend himself or herself and in some occasions the perpetrators may end up harming themselves (Piotrowski, 2012). Social media forums engage people from different diversities with immense anonymity which makes many youths hesitant to report in case they experience those unacceptable and undesirable behaviours to their parents and guardians (Cassidy, Jackson & Brown, 2009). Internet anonymity leads to vulnerability of youths as it creates an illegitimate use of social media to perpetuate sexual harassment, financial frauds, sexual solicitations and cyberbullying which in return intensifies with continued access to the internet (Besley, 2006). Online crime victimisation has posed a serious danger to most youths' wellbeing. Youths who fall victim to online crimes are usually affected either psychologically or emotionally, which at times may even lead to serious emotional implications such as suicidal ideations, violence and even deaths. In the African continent, especially Kenya there are few studies which have studied behavioural and emotional risk factors of online crime victimisation among the youths especially those in institutions of higher learning as most have focused on surveying numbers of youths victimised or ways in which they were victimised. This research study sought to fill this knowledge gap by addressing behavioural factors such as self-control and antisocial attitudes and emotional risk factors of online crime victimisation like stress and depression using a case of youths in Chuka University, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya.

II. Literature Review

Parental bonding, according to Choi (2017), is the close emotional connection that develops between a parent and their child. It might be to do with the indescribable sensation of lavishing their child with love and care. The link eventually develops into a relationship where the child and his or her parents share similar feelings as the child gets older. As a consequence, how caregivers respond to their children's everyday interactions and pursuits may have an effect on their mental health. According to the findings of Okesola & Adeta (2013), the vast majority of youths who spend more time away from their family or friends or who rarely interact with them spend the majority of their time online amusing themselves or forming new friendships. According to Okesola and Adeta (2013), youths who have a weak relationship with their parents, particularly during their early years, are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying if they develop a computer network addiction. A number of variables, such as the need for affection, tenderness, and a sense of belonging, could motivate young people with low levels of attachment to their parents to spend more time on social media, which over time may result in social media addiction and raise the risk of being victimised (Oksanen et al, 2021).

Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) discovered that most youth who participate in cyberbullying enjoyed low levels of connection to their families. A lack of parental protection and care, especially in the early stages of infancy, may be the cause of the lack of trust, affection, and

closeness that the majority of cyberbullies display, according to their claims. Young people who spend little time with their parents may not receive the safety and care they need from their parents, which can lead to a long-lasting separation. Accordingly, reactive attachment disorder is an emotional disorder that can strike children as early as infancy or as late as middle childhood or adolescent. These psychiatric problems might develop from caregivers exposing their children to major flaws in their parenting style. Insufficient care and protection, lack of monitoring, a lack of basic necessities, fragmented families, solo parenting, violent homes, or households associated with alcohol and drug abuse are just a few instances of parental failures in child rearing (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). As a result of these poor home situations, children grow up with a lack of healthy emotional attachment from their parents, which may lead to an increased need to spend more time where they feel desired, notably on social media.

III. Methodology

This research adopted a Correlational method approach. Correlational approach involved collecting both quantitative data and qualitative data of both the independent variables and dependent variables. It was helpful as it helped the researcher to assess how one variable predicted the other and the strength and direction of their relationship. The study was done in Chuka University located in Chuka Igambang'ombe constituency in the Eastern slopes of Mt Kenya, Kenya. It is about 55 kilometres South of Meru town along Meru - Embu - Nairobi highway. This study area had been preferred for this study because it had the same characteristics as any other public university in Kenya at the time data was collected. The population of the Study was 19650 university students who studied in Chuka University when the research was carried out. Chuka University was selected purposely by the researcher. This research adopted a simple random sampling technique to select a sample size of 155 students from the accessible population in Chuka University.

To determine the sample size Nassiuma (2000) formula was applied.

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{e^2}$$

$$C^2 + (N - 1) e^2$$

Where: n= sample size, N= accessible population, c= coefficient of variance, e= standard error

C=25% (Nassiuma 2000),

e = 0.02 and

N=19650

$$n = \frac{19650 \times 0.25^2}{0.02^2 + (19650 - 1) 0.02^2}$$

$$= 155 \text{ respondents}$$

In this study, data was collected using self-administered questionnaires, which were considered the most suitable tool for obtaining information from a relatively large sample within the available time. Pilot study on 10% of the sample size was conducted in Tharaka University in Tharaka-Nithi, Kenya. Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of .87 was calculated to test the reliability of the research instruments and establish whether data collection tools captured all the variables and elements under study and also find out if any adjustment was needed.

Before collecting data, the researcher requested authorization from the Tharaka University Research Ethics Committee (TUREC). The next phase was to get a research permission from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). In addition, the researcher obtained authorization from the Chuka administration by notifying them of the desire to do study at their university. Quantitative data was analysed through data validation, editing and coding in a SPSS software version 26. All participants in this study were engaged on informed consent by ensuring that they were well informed on the purpose of this research, its objectives, confidentiality of responses and benefits and risks of participating in the study.

IV. Results and Discussions

Respondent Response Rate- Out of 155 questionnaires distributed only 140 questionnaires were adequately responded translating to 90.3% response rate. This showed a strong respondent outreach thus this meant that the collected data had less biasness, high credibility and representativeness and could be useful in making strong and more reliable insights about the relationship between both the independent variables and dependent variable.

Distribution of Respondents by Age. Almost 80% of the respondents were aged between 19 and 24 years, showing a strong concentration in this age group. In contrast, only about 5% of participants were between 30 and 35 years old. The educational landscape of the respondents as shown in the graph above showed that the majority of them were pursuing diploma or had diploma qualification as they contributed to 64.3% of the sample.

Distribution of Respondents by Family Structure- According to the analysed data, nearly half of the sample under study (49.3%) were from the traditional two-parent families followed closed by those from single parenthood (32.9%). A small portion of the respondents (6.4%) were from the extended families while another substantial portion (11.4%) came from the unconventional living set ups, maybe under guardianships, foster care, stepfamilies, or blended households

Period Respondents Stayed with Parents in a Year- The majority of respondents who participated in this study (60%) stayed with their parents between three to six months in a year followed by 18.6% who only stayed with their parents less than three months a year. Only a small percentage 16.4% stayed with their parents for longer time in a year while 5% never stayed with their parents.

Frequency of Online Victimization- Online bullying had the highest mean average with close to 86% respondents reporting to have been bullied online either often or very often. This means that nearly 9 out of every 10 youths were victims of online bullying. No respondent who reported to have never been bullied or to have been bullied sometimes meaning that youths were experiencing bullying online frequently.

V. Parental Emotional Attachment and Online Victimization

The Analysis of Maternal Emotional Attachment

The study found that most respondents felt warmth, affection, and support from their mothers. About two-thirds felt emotionally supported, while 86.5% reported being helped when needed, showing trust and responsiveness at home. This maternal care builds self-esteem and problem-solving skills, which in turn reduces vulnerability to online scams and manipulations. Those who lacked such support were more likely to struggle with emotional regulation and turned to risky online behaviours like love bombing, oversharing, or seeking attention from strangers. A consistent pattern emerged where around 80–86% of respondents felt their mothers were affectionate, understood their worries, and encouraged independence. This maternal encouragement helped youths develop autonomy, digital resilience, and caution when interacting online. Autonomy and understanding empowered them to make safer decisions, set boundaries, and resist online exploitation. However, a significant minority about one in five did not feel empowered or understood, which left them vulnerable to isolation, secrecy, and unsafe digital interactions. Despite the strong presence of warmth and affection, excessive maternal control stood out as a paradox. Nearly 94% of respondents reported experiencing controlling behaviours, while 86.5% felt their privacy was often invaded. Although mothers may have intended this as protection, many youths perceived it as mistrust, leading them to hide apps or online activities. This secrecy increased exposure to online risks without adult guidance. Thus, maternal attachment was marked by both strong emotional support and controlling tendencies, shaping how youths navigated safety and risk in digital spaces.

		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Sd
Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice	Count	0	25	22	61	32	3.71	1.013
	Row	0.0%	17.9%	15.7%	43.6 %	22.9%		
helped me as much as I needed	Count	0	19	0	75	46	4.06	0.935
	Row	0.0%	13.6%	0.0%	53.6 %	32.9%		
Let me do those things I liked doing	Count	10	9	16	54	51	3.91	1.175
	Row	7.1%	6.4%	11.4%	38.6 %	36.4%		
Seemed Not emotionally cold to me	Count	0	10	9	87	34	4.04	0.772
	Row	0.0%	7.1%	6.4%	62.1 %	24.3%		
Appeared to understand my problems and worries	Count	0	19	8	82	31	3.89	0.903
		0.0%	13.6 %	5.7%	58.6 %	22.1%		
Was affectionate to me	Count	0	9	10	75	46	4.13	0.803
	Row	0.0%	6.4%	7.1%	53.6 %	32.9%		
Liked me to make my own decisions	Count	0	17	10	87	26	3.87	0.855
	Row	0.0%	12.1%	7.1%	62.1 %	18.6%		
My parent wanted me to grow up	Count	0	19	0	71	50	4.09	0.948
	Row	0.0%	13.6%	0.0%	50.7 %	35.7%		
Tried to control everything I did	Count	0	9	0	92	39	4.15	0.719
	Row	0.0%	6.4%	0.0%	65.7 %	27.9%		
Invaded my privacy	Count	0	9	10	47	74	4.33	0.869
	Row N %	0.0%	6.4%	7.1%	33.6 %	52.9%		

The table below shows the correlation between maternal emotional attachment and online crime victimization. From the analysed results, the spearman's correlation co-efficient ($\rho = .554$) shows a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship between the two

variables. This suggests that, as maternal emotional attachment decreases, the vulnerability of becoming a victim to online crimes increases. The **p-value = .002 (< 0.01)** confirms that this is not by chance - the results are significant at 99% confidence level. From the findings, youths reporting less closeness, warmth, communication and trust with mother figures tend to experience higher levels of online crime victimization.

Correlations of Maternal Emotional Attachment and Online Victimization

Correlations

OC_AV				MF_AV
Spearman's rho	OC_AV	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.554**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
		N	140	140
	MF_AV	Correlation Coefficient	.554**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
		N	140	140

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Analysis of Paternal Emotional Attachment

The study showed that most respondents experienced warmth and support from their fathers, with 80% reporting warmth and four in five feeling supported. About two-thirds also felt affection, though nearly a quarter (24.3%) still reported emotional coldness. Many (77.9%) believed their fathers understood their worries, suggesting that paternal emotional attachment-built self-worth, resilience, and open communication, which helped protect youths from online manipulation and dependence on strangers.

When it came to autonomy, most respondents felt their father's encouraged independence, with 75–86% reporting some freedom, support to grow up, and decision-making encouragement. However, 13.6% said they were restricted and not encouraged to make their own choices. Such lack of autonomy was linked to secrecy, external approval seeking, and risky online behaviours, while healthy paternal encouragement supported responsibility and safer online decision making.

		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Statement								
Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice	Count	0	27	0	72	41	3.91	1.031
	Row N %	0.0%	19.3%	0.0%	51.4%	29.3%		
helped me as much as I needed	Count	0	19	7	51	63	4.13	1.017
	Row N %	0.0%	13.6%	5.0%	36.4%	45.0%		
Let me do those things I liked doing	Count	17	8	10	99	6	3.49	1.089
	Row N %	12.1%	5.7%	7.1%	70.7%	4.3%		
Seemed Not emotionally cold to me	Count	8	34	21	45	32	3.42	1.241
	Row N %	5.7%	24.3%	15.0%	32.1%	22.9%		
Appeared to understand my problems and worries	Count	0	7	24	67	42	4.03	0.822
	Row N %	0.0%	5.0%	17.1%	47.9%	30.0%		
Was affectionate to me	Count	0	9	39	70	22	3.75	0.797
	Row N %	0.0%	6.4%	27.9%	50.0%	15.7%		
Liked me to make my own decisions	Count	19	0	48	30	43	3.56	1.299
	Row N %	13.6%	0.0%	34.3%	21.4%	30.7%		
My parent wanted me to grow up	Count	0	18	9	33	80	4.25	1.047
	Row N %	0.0%	12.9%	6.4%	23.6%	57.1%		
Tried to control everything I did	Count	9	0	8	74	49	4.1	0.991
	Row N %	6.4%	0.0%	5.7%	52.9%	35.0%		
Invaded my privacy	Count	0	9	8	86	37	4.08	0.759
	Row N %	0.0%	6.4%	5.7%	61.4%	26.4%		

Despite signs of warmth and support, paternal control and privacy invasion were strikingly high. Nearly nine in ten respondents felt their fathers often controlled them and invaded their privacy, which created mistrust and rebellion. This pattern revealed a conflicted paternal attachment marked by both strong support and overbearing control, leading to anxious or avoidant tendencies among youths. A

Spearman's correlation ($\rho = 0.693$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed a strong, significant relationship between weak paternal attachment and online victimisation, showing that father-child emotional bonds have a meaningful influence on online safety outcomes.

Correlations of Paternal Emotional Attachment and Online Victimization

OC_AV		FF_AV	
Spearman's rho	OC_AV	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	140
	FF_AV	Correlation Coefficient	.693**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	140

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

VI. Conclusions

In summary, this study confirms that and parental factors play significant and interrelated roles in influencing youth susceptibility to online crime victimization. To effectively mitigate these risks, prevention and intervention efforts must integrate digital literacy programs with emotional self-awareness training and enhanced parental engagement. Only through such comprehensive approaches can the safety and resilience of youths in increasingly digital societies be strengthened. Universities, student leaders, and government organizations should promote digital discourse platforms, intergenerational talks, and parental participation initiatives. These programs promote emotional connection, minimize isolation, and re-establish trust, therefore protecting adolescents from harmful online habits.

VII. Limitations and Future Research

While this study has illuminated key aspects of online crime victimization among youths, it has also opened the door to new questions that demand scholarly attention. The complexity and evolving nature of the digital space call for deeper, more targeted inquiries in the following areas:

1. To explore the behavioural and emotional consequences of online victimisation among youths, with particular focus on how these experiences shape psychological well-being, coping mechanisms, and risky online behaviours.
2. To investigate the gender dynamics in online victimisation by examining differences in vulnerability, forms of victimisation, and coping strategies across gender identities.
3. To evaluate the criminal justice system's response to online victimisation, assessing its effectiveness in prevention, investigation, prosecution, and victim support.

References

1. Piotrowski, C., & Perdue, B., & Armstrong, T. (2012). Scholarly online database use in higher education. *Education*, 125, 443-445.
2. Cassidy, W., Jackson, M. and Brown, K.N. (2009) 'Out of The Mouths of Babes: Students Voice Their Opinions on Cyber-Bullying', submitted to the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies*.
3. Belsey, B. (2006) 'Bullying.org: A Learning Journey', *Bulletin - Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association* 49(4): 20.
4. Choi K.-S., Lee J. R. (2017). Theoretical analysis of cyber-interpersonal violence victimisation and offending using cyber-routine activities theory. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 73, 394-402.
5. Okesola, FB and Adeta, AK, (2013). The Nature, Causes and Consequences of Cyber Crime in Tertiary Institutions in Zaria-Kaduna State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 98-114. Retrieved online on 14th September, 2019.
6. Matti Näsi, Pekka Räsänen, Markus Kaakinen, Teo Keipi, Atte Oksanen (2015): "Do routine activities help predict young adults' online harassment: A multi-nation study", *Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy, University of Helsinki*, Vol 17, Issue 4
7. Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ. Online aggressor/targets, aggressors, and targets: a comparison of associated youth characteristics. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2004; 45:1308-1316.