

# **Influence of the Level of Family Social Support of Student Mothers on the Psychological Wellbeing, Egerton University, Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

In pursuit of intimate relationships, students in Kenyan Universities end up getting pregnant before completing their undergraduate degree programmes. Upon giving birth, the students have to balance between the roles of motherhood and attend to student obligations. Striking a balance between the dual roles becomes a challenge to majority of the student mothers. The strain involved in balancing the roles results into psychosocial challenges. Some of these challenges include; level of participation in student activities, level of interpersonal relationships, level of family social support and motherhood stigmatization. The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of selected psychosocial challenges and coping strategies on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers among undergraduate students at Egerton University, Kenya. This study was guided by role conflict theory and the strain theory. The study used descriptive research design. The target population of the study was 91 respondents comprising of 82 student mothers, eight student counselors and one Dean of Students. Census sampling method was used to select the entire population. Data was collected using close-ended questionnaire for student mothers and interview schedule for student counselors and the Dean of Students. The instruments were validated by two supervisors and discipline research experts from the Faculty of Education and Community. The reliability analysis was based on a pilot study that was conducted in Maseno University involving eight student mothers. From the pilot study, the study revealed that the overall questionnaire reliability with 43 items was 0.838. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 was used to analyze data. The study found out that there was statistically significance influence on the level of participation of student mothers in student activities ( $\beta=0.217, p<0.05$ ), interpersonal relationships ( $\beta=0.188, p<0.05$ ), family social support ( $\beta=0.261, p<0.05$ ), coping strategies ( $\beta=0.125, p<0.05$ ) and motherhood stigmatization ( $\beta= -0.203, p<0.05$ ) on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers at 5% significance level. The study

recommended development of a special counseling program for student mothers on personal, academic, social and psychological issue.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal relationships, Stigmatization, Psychological wellbeing; coping, Strategies and family social support.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Undergraduate university students, especially those who join university immediately after completing secondary education are presumed to be single, without children and unaccompanied by dependents but through their academic journey in the university, the students pursue intimate relationships and some of them end up becoming pregnant and giving birth. (Brooks, 2012). In United States of America, Krueger, Cruse and Gault (2018) found out that single parent student mothers received financial aid from federal government in form of loan and Federal Pell Grants towards school fees. Despite the support, student mothers could not also attend to class work engagements due to meetings organized by the care facilities where they took their children. Another study by Zachry (2005) on student mothers suggested that becoming a parent can change the student mothers' perception of studying Motherhood and can also help them to foresee how education could provide a better life for their children.

Adofo (2013) found out that student mothers in Philippines faced financial challenges in pursuit of both student and parental roles. Some of the student mothers had to forego paying school fees in order to buy milk and diapers for their child. The student mothers relied on support from their parents to cater for both academic and childcare expenses. Bosch (2013) found out that the greatest challenge student mothers in Australia faced in their schooling is stigmatization. Once the students give birth, they become student mothers and they have to balance between the motherly roles and academic roles. Majority of these student mothers are aged between 18 and 23 years and are not yet married since the fathers of the children whom more times than not decline their fatherhood roles, (Bosch 2013).

The student mother is expected to be a good mother to her child and at the same time expected to perform well in their academic endeavors (Brooks, 2012). Striking a balance becomes a challenge to the student mothers. To manage the dual roles, student mothers may need support from diverse people and organizations (Spilovoy, 2016). For example, student mothers may rely on their family for financial and childcare support, friends and relatives for moral support and classmates and the university administration for academic support. This support is not always guaranteed which may result into diverse challenges to the student mothers (Bosch, 2013). Kathy-Ann, 2018 described that good relationship between student mothers and fellow students, lecturers, friends and relatives demonstrates positive wellbeing of student mothers. Confidence, high self-esteem, happiness and feeling of being safe have been associated with psychological wellbeing of student mothers.

In spite of the psychosocial challenges student mothers may face, there are some who use this as an opportunity to work hard at the university to an extent of bettering their lives and that of their babies, (Jamal 2014). The positive response of student mothers to psychosocial challenges may encourage other students with pregnancies, as well as other student to progress with their lives and their children instead of procuring abortion. Barr & Simons (2012) stated that early motherhood may be a source of motivation towards future socioeconomic wellbeing. The study further reported that having a child at a young age gave a student mother new meaning when personal and social help may be available (Barcelos & Gubrium 2014). Student mothers in both studies reported that their motivation to succeed increased to avoid the public's expectations of them being dependent on well-being with no high level of education (Barr & Simons 2012).

In African context, Esia-Donkoh (2011) established that student mothers in University of Cape Coast in Ghana faced shortages of books, accommodation fees, diapers for the children, food supplements as well as feeding expenses. Berg and Mamhute (2013) revealed that lecturers did not understand the struggles of the student mothers at teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe and required them to attend all classes without fail. Taukeni (2014) established that student mothers from the University of Namibia got assistance in parenting from their mothers (parent to the student) who offered to take care of the child while the child's mother (student) is concentrating on studies. However, this separated them from their child for some months. In this context, Gospel-Tony, Ezinne and Annabel (2018) established that student mothers from universities in Nigeria lacked moral support from parents and friends, suffered from domestic violence and that they were unable to relate well with their lecturers and counselors. The student mothers were unable to freely interact with fellow course mates and were most of the time avoided by fellow course mates. This resulted into depression anxiety, stress and low self-esteem.

In Kenyan context, Chemnjor (2015) observed that majority of student mothers in Kenya public universities were isolated by fellow classmates. Chemnjor (2015) also noted administrative policies and academic structure were not favoring student mothers. In respect to this, student mothers were not allowed to university hostels.

Oundo and Murithi (2018) established that student mothers in Kenyan universities could not interact with the other students for they had developed hatred towards other students and isolated themselves. Oundo and Murithi (2018) further established that student mothers were stigmatized by the rest of the students in the university. This worsens the condition of student mothers in the university leading to feeling of suicidal, (Wangui, Macharia, & Kessio, 2015).

The student mothers' psychological wellbeing is very important in their stay in campus. The wellbeing of students is demonstrated by good life more than wealth, (Alsheikh, Parameswaran, & Elhoweris, 2010). The psychological wellbeing of student mothers has been associated with several positive outcomes on both individual and societal levels such as better health, better inter-personal relationships, and higher academic performance (Esia-donkoh, 2017b). Happy student mothers are more likely to graduate from university, to secure a job after university and more likely to receive favorable evaluations from their supervisors at work place (Manalang, Liangson, & Bayubay, 2016). Student Mothers who do not face the psychosocial challenges while they were students are likely to find their job more enjoyable and are less likely to lose their job and if they do they are more prone to be re-employed, moreover, they are more likely to earn higher incomes (Gospel-Tony *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, student mothers undergoing psycho-social challenges of decreased participation in student activities, decreased interpersonal relationships, decreased family social support and motherhood stigmatization are vulnerable to hopelessness (Esia-donkoh, 2017b).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Female students face various challenges when their status changes to student motherhood. Some of these challenges include; decreased participation in student activities, decreased interpersonal relationships, decreased family social support, motherhood stigmatization and coping strategies. In Kenyan Universities, there have been some cases of attempted suicide by student mothers which could be attributed to psychosocial challenges. Education stakeholders and researchers have been concerned with the question of factors that influence the wellbeing of student mothers in different contexts. Previous studies on student motherhood have not focused into establishing the influence of various psychosocial challenges on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers and coping strategies in Kenyan universities. The current study seeks to fill this gap by establishing the influence of the Level of Family Social Support on the Psychological wellbeing of Student Mothers in Egerton University.

### **1.2 Purpose and objective of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of the level of family social support on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers and coping strategies in Egerton University, Kenya

### **1.3 Research Hypothesis**

This study was guided by the following research Hypothesis;

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no statistically significant influence on the level of family social support on student mothers' psychological wellbeing.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by role conflict and strain theories. The two theories were used to complement one another. In respect to this, role conflict theory guided the study in regard to psychosocial challenges of student mothers while strain theory guided the study in regard to coping strategies on psychological wellbeing of student mothers.

#### **2.1.1 Role Conflict Theory**

Role Conflict Theory was developed by Goode in the year 1960. The theory explains the experiences that persons undergo when they are faced with demands and compliance to the demands would result into difficulties. A study by Grady, (2014) further revealed that role conflict resulted from disagreement between roles that seem to be equally special such as concurrently representing student and parent role. Role overload is similar and involved challenges of navigating multiple roles that just become too much for student mother to manage successfully, Grady, (2014). The proponent of the theory outlines two types of role conflict. The first type of role conflict is inter-personal role conflict. This occurs when one person holds several roles and is expected to execute all. The second type is intra-personal role conflict and is based on the belief that more is demanded from one person by other people (Kathy-Ann, 2018).

The theory outlines three measures to cope with role conflicts. The first coping strategy is to decide the role to execute and role not to execute in order to comply at least to one of the role demands rather than being in dilemma of what to do. The second coping strategy is altering the demands of others on oneself. This involves changing the expectations of others on oneself and explaining what to be delivered instead (Robert Ricco, Sarah Sabet, & Cassandra Clough, 2008). The third coping measure is to change one's perceptions on what is expected

of him or her instead of changing the expectations. Positive attitudes towards accomplishing the increased demands may in the long run help in resolving conflicts associated with more demands (Berg & Mamhute, 2013).

Once a student gives birth while undergoing her studies at undergraduate level, the student mother is faced with more demands and is required to comply with the demands. The student mother is required to execute academic roles without fails as well as motherly roles. Balancing these roles results into role conflict because the student mother may not have the capacity to give full attention to both the demands (Esia-Donkoh, 2011). These roles may be taking care of the child, looking for money for childcare related demands, concentrating on the relationship partner, attending classes, attending academic and class discussions, doing assignments and reading for examinations (Chemjor, 2015). Motherly roles and academic roles result into role conflict leading to psychosocial challenges. For the student mothers to cope with the increased demands after getting the child, the student mothers need support from different people which may not be forthcoming, (Gospel-Tony et al. 2018). This struggle to satisfy the various roles of a student mother can be explained by the role conflict theory. Therefore, role conflict theory will guide the study in regard to psychosocial challenges of student mothers in Egerton University.

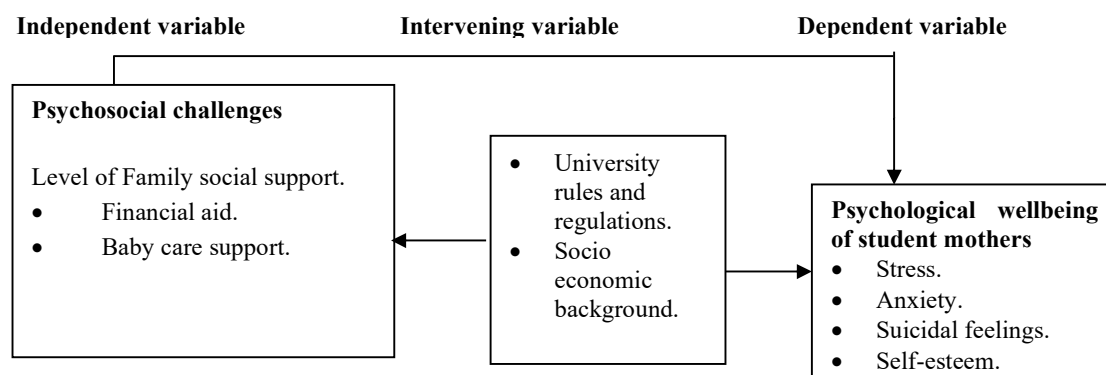
### 2.2.2 Strain Theory

Strain theory was developed by Robert King Merton in (1938). He was an American sociologist who argued that society can encourage deviance to a large degree. Merton believed that socially accepted goals put pressure on people to conform and for this study the student mothers. His theory was largely developed due to the social and economic circumstances occurring in the United States' society during the early 1900s. Strain Theory focuses on strain and social environment. This theory posit that strain can arise due to inability to achieve positively esteemed goals, loss of positively valued incentives, and the presentation of negatively valued motivations, (Agnew, (2011). These strains can cause individuals to feel stressed or frustrated, which can result in coping with these frustrations through unhealthy relationships and pregnancies, (Chesser, 2015). Student mothers studying at the university are likely to experience contradicting role demands as each of these roles expects to be prioritized over the other (Chesser, 2015). Additionally, financial struggles and inadequate childcare options may contribute to strain felt due to a lack of resources, (Brown & Nichols, 2012).

Students' mothers have been found to experience high levels of stress, time, pressure burdens and financial challenges (Grady 2014). Students who are parents need to attend not only to endless class program requirements but also to the daily needs of their children. It is presumed that because student mothers assume multiple demanding roles, student with children may experience more intensified difficulties with stress, finances, and struggles exceptional to their overlapping identities, as compared to other students who are not parents (Grady, 2014). However, parenthood and undergraduate students may also provide benefits to student mothers in that these roles may buffer the stress of one another and allow students mothers to gain new insights into parenting and being keen on class activities, (Dillon, 2012).

Such instances of ways in which roles positively affect one another are referred to as role enhancement (Sieber, 1974), whereas the ways that these intersecting roles make one another more difficult are examples of role conflict (Goode, 1960). Campus life is presumed to be challenging for students and especially for student mothers who have additional responsibilities of taking care of their babies in addition to academic work. Student mothers may experience financial constraints when the family support is minimal and they may be unable to provide enough care to their babies and their upkeep as well. The strain theory helps the researcher understands the influence of psychosocial challenges and coping strategies on psychological well-being of student mothers. The strain theory will guide the study in regard to coping strategies of student mothers in Egerton University and it compliments with the role conflict theory.

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework



Source: *Researcher (2020)*

### 3.0 Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research design. The targeted population of the study was 91 individuals comprising of student mothers (82), student counselors (eight) and Dean of Students (one) at Egerton University. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select respondents such that those who were interviewed were the ones most involved in the study. Due to their busy schedule in performing academic related tasks and also taking care of their babies, the study adopts Drop-and-Pick questionnaire distribution and collection method. A total of 80 questionnaires were successfully filled giving a response rate of 97.8%

## 4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

The study sought to investigate the influence the level of family social support on psychological wellbeing and coping strategies of student mother's in Egerton University, Kenya. Data on family social support, employed by the students' mothers was collected and analyzed systematically, interpreted and presented to accomplish the objectives of the study. The study adopted a five point Likert scale, responses were assigned the following values; 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Somehow Agree, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly Agree. A mean score below 3.00 implied that the respondents on average disagreed with the statement while a mean score of above 3.00 indicated the respondents on average agreed with the statement. A standard deviation of above 1.000 indicated that less consensus on the responses. A standard deviation of below 1.000 implied consensus of the respondents.

**Table 1: Family Social support of Student Mothers**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somehow Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	
	F %	F %	F %	F %	F %	Mean	Std. Dev.
My family has not embraced me after becoming a mother while I was a student.	15 19.0	5 6.3	29 36.7	16 20.3	14 17.7	3.11	1.020
My family members do not subject me to domestic violence such as quarrels	6 7.6	4 5.1	34 43.0	16 20.3	19 24.1	3.48	0.842
My parents encourage me to remain focused	4 5.2	2 2.6	28 36.4	22 28.6	21 27.3	3.70	0.765
My family members have stopped being close to me since I became a mother	17 21.5	5 6.3	21 26.6	29 36.7	7 8.9	3.05	0.99
My family do not give me moral support in continuing with my studies.	20 25.3	4 5.1	17 21.5	26 32.9	12 15.2	3.08	1.121
Composite Scores						3.28	0.948

In regard to families embracing the student mothers after becoming a mother, a mean score of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.020 was achieved. As the standard deviation was above 1.000 it showed that the student mothers were not in consensus with the statement that families embraced the student mothers after becoming parents. This was shown by the two extremes of 19.0% of student mothers who strongly disagreed and a 17.7% who strongly agreed. A mean score of above 3.00 indicated that on average the student mothers were in agreement that student mothers are not embraced after becoming mothers. This can be because the family felt the student mothers have failed them and hence the family would not support their failure. The findings of this study were in line with the findings of Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili, & Salsali(2017b) that found that family members do not embrace student mothers after becoming mothers as it lowers the dignity of the family. In line to this, one of the student counsellors indicated that;

*“Most of the student mothers I have counselled admit that they lack support from their families after giving birth while in campus. Most of the reasons cited is increased cost of childcare support and educational support.”*

On the issue of family members not subjecting the student mothers to domestic violence such as quarrels, a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 0.842 was obtained. Since the standard deviation was below 1.000 it indicated that the student mothers were in consensus on the statement that family members were not subjecting the student mothers to domestic violence. On average the student mothers agreed that family members were not subjecting them to domestic violence. This is indicated by a majority of 43.0% of the student mothers who somehow agreed that family members were not subjecting the student mothers to domestic violence such as



quarrels. This could be possibly because the family members considered the student mothers as adults and thus better ways to solve issues other than domestic violence. The findings of this study were contrary to the findings of Bäckström(2018) that found that student mothers were subjected to domestic violence especially emotional neglect and abuse. Domestic violence was not a popular theme for the interviews conducted in which one of them indicated that;

*“In the recent past, we receive few cases of domestic violence of student mothers due to the level of civilization of students and cases of student motherhood becoming much common even at lower levels of education”*

A mean score of 3.70 and a standard deviation of 0.765 was obtained on the statement that the parents encouraged the student mothers to remain focused. The standard deviation revealed that the student mothers were in one accord that parents encouraged them to remain focused. The mean score showed that, on average the student mothers agreed that parents encouraged them to remain focused. This is further indicated by the majority of 36.4% that somehow agreed that parents encouraged the student mothers to remain focused. This could be because parents still believe in their children even after they feel the children have let them down. This was in concurrence with the study by Vyskocil(2018) which established that although parents were disappointed when their children become parents when still students, the parents encouraged and supported them to remain focused.

The study obtained a mean score of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.990 in regard to family members having stopped being close to student mothers after becoming a mother. Since the standard deviation was below 1.000, it revealed that the student mothers were in consensus on the statement that family members have stopped being close with student mothers since they became mothers. A mean score of above 3.00 meant that, on average student mothers agreed that family members have stopped being close with the student mothers. This is shown by 45.6% of student mothers who agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that family members had stopped being close with student mothers after they became mothers. Family members might have stopped being close with the student mothers after they became mothers as may be they did not want to be associated with them for getting a child before completion of University. Kotchick, Dorsey and Laurie Heller(2017) further supported that family member’s stop being close with student mothers after becoming a mother.

A mean score of 3.08 and a standard deviation of 1.121 was obtained on the statement that the family do not give moral support to student mothers while continuing with their studies. A standard deviation of above 1.000 showed that the student mothers were not in consensus that family do not give moral support to student mothers while continuing with their studies. This is supported by the two extremes of the student mothers’ responses of 25.3% who strongly disagreed and 32.9% who agreed that family do not give moral support to student mothers for their continuing studies. A mean score of 3.08 indicated that on average student mothers agreed that family do not give moral support to student mothers for continuing with their studies. This could be because the family might be considering the student mothers as adults who do not need moral support. The findings of the study were contrary with the findings of Motjelebe (2019) that found that mothers always gave social and moral support to their children, the student mothers whenever they needed the support.

Focusing on family moral and financial support as well as encouragement from family members, it emerged from the interviews that the level of moral and financial support reduced since student motherhood status set in. However, most of the key informants reported that student mothers got some level of encouragement from family members and relatives. One of the key informants asserted that;

*“Most parents, especially mothers to the student mothers arte cited by most of the student we counsel as supporting and encouraging in the motherhood journey and academics. However, some students have with time expressed concerns about lack of moral support from some family members. This could attribute to much psychological stress on the side of student mothers”*

The composite mean score of 3.28 and a composite standard deviation of 0.948. The composite standard deviation revealed that the student mothers’ responses on family social support were in consensus. A composite mean score of 3.28 indicated that, on average the student mothers agreed to have received family social support Esia-donkoh(2017); Kathy-Ann (2018) contradicted with the findings of the current study as the studies found that family members always gave moral support

#### 4.2 Inferential Analysis

The study used regression analysis to test research hypothesis. In respect to this, family social support and coping strategies of student mothers were regressed against their psychological wellbeing. Table 1 shows the model prediction power of the model predicting psychological wellbeing of student mothers.

##### ***Influence of Psychosocial Challenges and Coping Strategies on the Psychological Wellbeing***

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.909	0.826	0.814	0.30414

Predictors: (Constant), Family Social Support

The study obtained the following values as indicated in Table 1. An R value of 0.909, R square value of 0.826, Adjusted R squared value of 0.814 and a standard error of estimate value of 0.30414. The R value obtained represented the correlation coefficient between the observed and the predicted values of the dependent variable. Since the R value obtained was greater than 0.7 it was implied that there was a strong correlation between the predicted and observed values of psychological wellbeing. The value obtained further stated that the model was a good fit for the data.

The coefficient of determination value represented by R squared was 0.826, this was an indication that the 82.6% variance in the dependent variable was explained by the independent variables in the study. The study thus indicated that motherhood stigmatization, coping strategies, participation in the students' activities, family social support and interpersonal relationship combatively explained for 82.6% of the variability in the psychological wellbeing of the student mothers at university level. This further entailed that 17.4% of the variability were explained by other factors not considered in the study.

The study further obtained a value of 0.814 as the value of adjusted R Square. This value was lower than the value obtained for R Square, this was an indication that there would have been less improvement of the model with the addition of predictor variables. This result thus indicated that the current regression model was ideal for the prediction of psychological wellbeing. The standard error of estimate for the study was given as 0.30414 which is a value less than 1.0 and an indication that the model was highly accurate in prediction. Through the use of ANOVA, the study sought to establish whether the regression model was statistically significant for prediction as shown in Table 1

**Model Significance**

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	31.692	5	6.338	68.522	0.000
Residual	6.660	72	0.093		
<b>Total</b>	<b>38.352</b>	<b>77</b>			

Dependent Variable: Psychological Wellbeing of Student Mothers

Predictors: (Constant), Family Social Support.

The obtained results were presented in the table. F-statistic value of (68.522) was obtained in the study which was greater than the F-critical value of (2.37) for 5 degrees of freedom for the regression and 72 degrees of freedom for the residuals. The study further obtained a  $p < 0.05$  leading to the rejection of the F-test. These findings thus implied that their psychological wellbeing had at least one significant predictor in the regression model. The study further sought to establish which model predictions were significant as shown in Table 1.

**Model Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.064	0.232		0.277	0.783
Family Social Support	0.261	0.076	0.204	3.429	0.001

Dependent Variable: Psychological Wellbeing

The study further noted that family social support had an unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.261. The obtained t-statistic was 3.429 and a p-value less than 0.05. The values in the study implied that family social support was a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing, it was further established that for every unit increase in the predictor variable there was 0.261 units increase in the dependent variable. The study hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>: There is no statistically significant influence on the level of family social support on student mothers 'psychological wellbeing was rejected at 5% significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This was due to the fact that family social support enables the student mothers to be assured of assistance from the family members even as they undertook their academic tasks hence they were not overly strained psychologically. This results were corroborated with a study by Esia-donkoh(2017) and Kathy-Ann (2018)who opined that a supportive family network is closely associated with positive educational outcomes for student mothers.

**5.1 Summary of the study Findings**

The purpose of the study was to established the influence of the level of family social support on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers and coping strategies in Egerton University, Kenya

### 5.1.1. Family Social support of Student Mothers

The study further noted that family social support had an unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.261. The obtained t-statistic was 3.429 and a p-value less than 0.05. The values in the study implied that family social support was a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing, it was further established that for every unit increase in the predictor variable there was 0.261 units increase in the dependent variable. The study hypothesis **H<sub>3</sub>**: There is no statistically significant influence on the level of family social support on student mothers' psychological wellbeing was rejected at 5% significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### 5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that there is statistically significant influence on the level of family social support on student mothers' psychological wellbeing. In regard to this, when the level of family social support increases, student mothers' psychological wellbeing increases.

The study concludes that Family members to offer both moral and financial support to student mothers in order to cater for educational and childcare expenses. Most student mothers noted that they rarely offered such support from their families.

### 5.3 Recommendation for Further Research

The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of the level of family social support on the psychological wellbeing of student mothers and coping strategies in Egerton University, Kenya

A further study can be conducted to establish the effect of student motherhood on educational participation of student mothers at University level. This is because the current study established that the student mothers missed some classes due to childcare related activities.

A further study should be conducted on the enabling factors for student mothers towards completion of first degree incorporating deferment and dropouts.

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