

# Exploring the Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescents' Sexual Behaviour (Prostitution) in Chris Mwangi's *The Operator*.

Juslina Mussa Tuzza

## Abstract

*This paper examined the influence of parenting style on the adolescents' sexual behaviour in The Operator. The novel was selected purposefully because of the information it offers on the portrayal of prostitution particularly the causes and effects. The characters of Nancy and Diana are the manifestations of the novels portrayal of prostitution as a complex aspect of both literary and social contexts. The study employed qualitative research design to collect data from the novel The Operator based on descriptions and themes. The novel was read critically to collect primary information on the influence of parenting style on adolescents' sexual behaviour. Social constructivism approach was employed to analyse how parents and guardians interact with female characters and influence their behaviours. This was done through close reading and systematically organizing, integrating, and examining the patterns and relationships of the characters' behaviours and actions. Findings showed that prostitution in this novel manifests in the ways parenting style indulges the victims into becoming prostitutes. The paper argues that prostitution does not always result from economic factors but also from social factors. The findings, revealed that uninvolved parenting and authoritarian parenting styles are the factors forcing young female characters indulge in prostitution. The study recommends for the creation of supportive environment that can foster open communication between parents and children. Also, parents should adopt parenting style that encourages independence and autonomy while providing guidance and emotional support to adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Prostitution, Adolescence, Parenting, Uninvolved, Authoritarian

## 1.0 Introduction

This study examines the influence of parenting styles on adolescents' sexual behaviour in Chris Mwangi's novel, *The Operator*. The novel was selected purposefully because of the insights it offers on the portrayal of prostitution particularly causes and effects. Specifically, the study interrogated how parents, guardians, and other community members influence young girls to indulge in prostitution, and in turn, become affected by it. The involvement of women and young girls in prostitution often faces criticisms among scholars both in social and literary space, yet Mwangi creates female characters who are prostitutes. The authenticity of these female characters lies in the fact that he does not make them faultless heroines but rather he makes them accentuate how social factors (parenting) force them into prostitution. This novel and in turn this study lends a hand to the continuing debates on a parental role in building up a stronger and moral family, debates which build grounds

on the question of prostitution and the wellbeing of the young girls' generation. Therefore, through textual interrogation and negotiation, prostitution has become the subject through which female characters assert their victimizations by the social structures. It is within these social structures that this study was set to investigate the causes and effects that surround prostitution in Chris Mwangi's *The Operator*.

The presence of prostitutes and prostitution in the society has attracted the attention of many scholars from both fictional and non-fictional disciplines. The subject has been studied in media, literary works and health sciences to mention only a few. This has resulted from the increase of prostitution practices among young girls and women. Available studies offer differing observations regarding this subject. Heeley (2015) in her study "The Representation of female prostitutes in Victorian and neo-Victorian Literature" asserts, "prostitution is a trade that dates back before the Bible, but it was not until the nineteenth century that it was considered as a serious threat that could affect the nation not only socially and morally but also physically." She further contends, "Syphilis and other such disease associated with prostitution were becoming common affecting not only men but also women and children." Both, the increased diseases caused by prostitution and the increased practices of prostitution raised the attention of scholars into addressing the topic. However, since time immemorial, the level of prostitution has never decreased. Some communities consider prostitution as part of human life as they tend even to promote it through legalization and legitimization. Moreover, Heeley's observation over prostitution is also echoed by Blasdell (2015) in "Reel or Reality? The Portrayal of Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures" where he contends that prostitution exists in the earliest mythological records, but arguably the most ancient historical record can be found in the book of Moses, which suggests that prostitutes were common among the Jews in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century before Christ. The prevalence of prostitution among Jewish has been described in the two books of Moses. Moses says, "Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore; lest the land fall to whoredom and the land become full of wickedness."<sup>2</sup> Apart from these directives for Israelites in this third book of Moses, the same issue on prostitution has been revealed in his fifth book of Moses called Deuteronomy 22:21 where God says, "Then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she dies: because she hath wrought folly in Israel, to play the whore in her father's house: so shalt thou put evil away from among you"<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, Aspevig (2011) observes that in British and most Western cultures, prostitution has historically been portrayed as a sin, tied to a Judeo-Christian conception dating back to the story of Adam and Eve, of women as, on the one hand, the weaker and less libidinous sex, and on the other, able to exert power over men through their sexuality. He further finds out that the portrayal of prostitutes also has a long history in literature, dating back to the Bible (with the alleged prostitute Mary Magdalene)" as it is represented in literary works of "Dickens (*Oliver*) and Gaskell (*Mary Barton*) on the name of the "fallen woman" (Aspevig, 2011:4). According to Aspevig (2011), Literature of the time (Victorian Literature) also reflects on the limited chances and options of "rescued" women" as it is

2 See: The third book of Moses called Leviticus 19:29 Holy Bible King James Version on the conversation between God and Moses when God had called Moses in the tabernacle of congregation to give him directives for Israelites.

3 See: The fifth book of Moses called Deuteronomy chapter 22, verse 21; Holy Bible King James Version, the words were spoken by Moses to Israelites on the side Jordan in the wilderness.

in *David Copperfield* (1849), Nancy of *Oliver Twist* (1873) and Wilkie Collins's *The New Magdalen*, (1873) (Aspevig, 2011:30). The same observation is made by Heeley (2015) who believes that Victorian society only negatively viewed prostitutes. a prostitute was considered either a sinful temptress or a helpless victim and aroused feelings of pity, hatred, and fear. However, the problem has never ended, the reason writers like Mwangi in *The Operator* and critics had dedicated their time in addressing and studying the topic.

Moreover, Cross (2010) is of the opinion that prostitution continues to flourish and grow in unprecedented ways, without addressing reasons why the demand to purchase sex has been prevalent throughout mankind's history. According to Cross (2010), the practices and the effects of prostitution in societies continue to increase with all the attention paid to the subject as a way of trying to fight against the problem. This again, suggests for the need of the subject to continue being addressed as it is also the focus of this study.

Generally, the prevalence of prostitution as a result of parenting style in literary studies above seems to occupy a peripheral position. This study, therefore, explores the influence of parenting style on adolescents' sexual behaviour and prostitution in Mwangi's *The Operator* focusing on the depiction of the portrayed relationship between prostitution and parenting style. The study was guided by two objectives, first: the types of parenting style portrayed in Mwangi's *The Operator* and; secondly to interrogate how the portrayed types of parenting style influence adolescents' sexual behaviour.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section reviews literature related to parenting style and adolescents' sexual behaviour. Sylvester (2014) used questionnaire to investigate the influence of self-esteem, parenting style, and parental monitoring on sexual risk behaviour of adolescents in Ibadan. About 194 adolescents were selected from three secondary schools for the study in which six hypotheses were tested using independent sample t-test and regression analysis. The study's findings revealed that adolescents with low parental monitoring significantly reported higher risky sexual behaviour than those with high parental monitoring. Furthermore, adolescents with low authoritative parenting style reported higher risky sexual behaviour than those with high authoritative parenting style. The study concluded that self-esteem, parental monitoring, and parenting styles were predictors of adolescents' risky sexual behaviour.

Chigbu et al. (2022) explored parenting styles as a determinant of sexual behaviour of in-school adolescents in South East Nigeria. Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ) and Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (SBQ) were used to collect data from 1200 senior secondary II in-school adolescents. The study findings revealed that there existed a direct positive relationship between parenting styles and sexual behaviour of adolescents.

Oluwatosin and Adediwura (2010) investigated the undergraduates' history of sexual abuse, parenting style, and sexual risk behaviour in South-western Nigeria. Questionnaire on Sexual Abuse and Risky Sexual Behaviour' (QSARSB) and 'Perceived Parenting Authority Questionnaire' (PPAQ) were used to collect data from 2,300 undergraduate students selected from six universities. The study also found a significant relationship between parenting styles and risky sexual behaviour. However, family type had no influence on risky sexual practices among adolescents. The study concluded that university undergraduate

students in south-western Nigeria engaged in risky sexual behaviour because of factors such as poor parenting styles and history of sexual abuse.

Nyangoya (2022) explored parenting styles and sexual behaviour among teenage girls in Kiieni East Sub-County-Nyeri County, Kenya. About 392 girls were involved in the data collection using a self-administered structured questionnaire on parenting styles using the Index Parental Style (IPS). The study results revealed a significant moderate negative correlation between a mother's responsiveness and sexual behaviour for authoritative parenting while, there was a weak negative correlation between the father's responsiveness and sexual behaviour.

Sholihah (2019) investigated the influence of parenting patterns on adolescent sexual behaviour where questionnaires were used to collect data from 80 adolescents. The study findings revealed that there was 67.5 per cent democratic parenting and 11.25 per cent permissive parenting. Authoritarian parenting existed for only 7.5 per cent compared to 13.75 per cent of mixed parenting. On the question of the influence of parenting style and adolescents' sexual behaviour, the study revealed a significant relationship between parenting and adolescents' sexual behaviour.

Zubaidah, Maria, and Rusdiana (2020) explored the relationship between parenting style and sexual behaviour before marriage among teenagers in SMKN 3 Banjarbaru. The study revealed a significant relationship between the parenting style and sex before marriage in the behaviour of teenagers in SMKN 3 Banjarbaru.

Although a range of studies have been done on the question of parenting and adolescents' sexual behaviour, as evidenced by the studies mentioned above, most of them have focused on the social contexts creating a vacuum on the literary context. Furthermore, all the above reviewed studies have acknowledged the significant relationship between parenting style and adolescents risky sexual behaviour without highlighting on the specific type of parenting style, except for Sylvester (2014) who associated sexual behaviours with self-esteem of the adolescents caused by the parenting style.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This part presents and discusses the methodology for data collection of the current study. It includes a research design, data collection methods as well as procedures and techniques used in the data analysis process to disentangle a problem at hand.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study applied a qualitative research design to get the required results. This design was adopted as a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, that is, the relationship between prostitution and parenting style as portrayed in the novel (Creswell, 2014).

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

According to Kothari, research in the field of humanities relies mainly on two sources of data; the primary data and secondary data. Primary data entail, "...those which are

collected afresh and for the first time [...] the secondary data are those which have already been collected by someone else [...]” (95). Considering that this is a literary study and hence a humanistic study, the primary information was obtained through a close reading of the novel, Mwangi’s *The Operator*. This novel was subjected to critical examination through Social Constructivism approach to understand the influence of Parenting Style on adolescents’ sexual behaviour (Kothari 2004). In addition, this study benefited from secondary data which were obtained through the reading of relevant critical literary books, journal articles, internet sources, theses, and essays relevant to the topic under study.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

This study examined Mwangi’s *The Operator* by interrogating the novel’s fictional portrayal of the influence of parenting style on adolescents’ sexual behaviour. This was done through close reading and systematically organizing, integrating, and examining the patterns and relationships of the characters’ behaviours and actions (Neuman, 2014). The collected information was followed by the assignment of clues of significance of the influence of parenting style on adolescents’ sexual behaviour.

## 4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents findings of this study. It describes the findings about the influence of parenting style on adolescents’ sexual behaviour, including the types of parenting style portrayed in Mwangi’s *The Operator*. The section begins by the plot overview of the novel under study. The sub-sections below provide more detail.

### ***The Operator*: Plot Overview**

*The Operator* is a contemporary novel set in Mombasa where the story portrays a light-hearted realistic struggle against the self and the urge of conscience which is constantly dogging young adolescents into prostitution. The focal point of the story is the two young girls who are secondary school students: Diana and Nancy. Diana, the main character and narrator of the story, gives an account of her personal life experience with her friend Nancy. In this story, different settings are introduced; St. Cecilia Girls’ High School where the life experiences of Diana and Nancy opens, Kaka Hotel, and different night clubs and bars where their life experiences in bad sexual behaviour – prostitution gain momentum. The novel portrays Diana and her friend’s (Nancy) life experiences of passionate lust for money and sex, the experience which is built on different motives regardless of the fact that they are secondary school students. These two young girls come from different socio-economic backgrounds and find themselves at one meeting point – St. Cecilia High School where everyone comes to hunt for her ‘bright future’, the future which is surrounded by many uncertainties. Diana is a Form Three student who comes from a poor family where she lives with her single mother after her father abandons them. She is shy, brilliant and charming, she longs for a good life, and she wants money which she could not get from her separated family. This leads her to engage in unsafe sex which at last ruins her. As the story opens, Diana is at the bar searching for her friend Nancy. In this bar she falls in the hand of the counterman who sells her to this adult man – Bailey. On the contrary, Nancy’s story in this novel portrays her as a girl who comes from a wealthy family. Through

her family, she had everything a girl could need. However, she chooses to want everything including money, fashion, boyfriends, and sex. This desire leads her into prostitution which later leads to destruction and loss of life. In the course of their sexual engagement, the two 'girls-women' decide to drop out of school while in Form Three and decide to enter the external world which is a free world to them and they end up being consumed by this world. On the surface, the story of Chris Mwangi in *The Operator* seems to be the story of prostitutes. However, the cynosure of the novel is on the relationship between these two young girl-students and the nature of parenting styles they receive at their homes and how this influences prostitution in these young characters.

### **Types of Parenting Style Portrayed in Mwangi's *The Operator***

The first objective of the study was to explore the types of parenting style commonly portrayed in the novel *The Operator*. Parents are very important in the children's existence, especially in their early years until they can support themselves. Discipline and control imposed by parents help develop a healthy personality of a child (Sunita, Singh & Sihag 2022). It is commonly acknowledged that parents play a dominant role in moulding and shaping the behaviour of children. Therefore, lack of awareness on their parenting can lead children towards undesirable behaviours that have damaging effects that eventually create emotional and behavioural problems in children. The parenting style is the attitude parents express to their kids. It can be affected by numerous factors, including: social, cultural, political, economic, and the like (Sunita, Singh & Sihag 2022). Parenting style is affected by the temperaments of both parents and children, and is chiefly based on the impact of one's own parents and culture.

According to Darling (1999), there are four parenting styles, which include indulgent, authoritative, authoritarian, and uninvolved. Darling's categorization is based on their lowness or highness on parental responsiveness and demanding behaviour.

Mwangi's *The Operator* portrays two parenting styles which result in the young girls engaging in risky sexual behaviours – prostitution. These are uninvolved parenting and authoritarian parenting styles.

### **Uninvolved Parenting in *the Operator***

Uninvolved parents are not warm and do not place any demands on their teens (Kopko 2007). They minimize their interaction time, and, in some cases, are uninvolved to the point of being neglectful. Uninvolved parents are indifferent to their adolescents needs, whereabouts, or experiences at school or with peers. Uninvolved parents invoke such phrases as, "I don't care where you go," or "why should I care what you do?" (Kopko, 2007). One of the issues portrayed in *The Operator* is the question of disrupted families where parents do not involve themselves in the wellbeing of their children. Diana reveals her hatred over her father because of the experiences she had with this uninvolved father. Diana reveals that she had rarely seen her father who was busy with his religious commitments. Diana reveals this in Chapter Two which presents events of the story in a flashback style. She says,

*It had all started four years back at Gikuni in Kikuyu Location where I grew up. Ours wasn't much of a family. There was the old man, six foot one, chocolate brown and probably the least family-conscious father in the division (Mwangi, 1989:15).*

The use of words 'least family-conscious father' in the quotation above reveals that one of the things Diana lacked at her age was fatherly attachment, love, and guidance. She even describes her father with a hesitant tone which is a sign of uneasiness resulting from the fact that the two had no common ground. Diana continues introducing her father,

*He was a travelling salesman, dealing only in religious books and doing some preaching of the side, a kindly old soul who knew less about his family than our nearest farm neighbours. You have probably seen him in a bus wearing his Second World War army boots and a Salvation Army gift suit (Mwangi, 1989:15).*

From that, Diana's father had no time to look for his family to the extent that the family lacked his presence as well as his time to attend their needs. He was busy selling religious books and preaching while his family was struggling for survival. This created hatred to Diana over this kind of father whom she describes as a least family-conscious father in her division.

### **Authoritarian Parenting in *the Operator***

The second parenting style revealed in the novel by Chris Mwangi is Authoritarian parenting. In addition to developmental changes in autonomy, adolescence also is a period of youths' changes in attitudes about parental authority—specifically, the extent to which parental assertion of control is seen as an appropriate extension of their role (Darling et al., 2008). Authoritarian parents display little warmth and are highly controlling. They are strict disciplinarians; they use a restrictive, punitive style, and insist that their adolescents follow parental directions. Authoritarian parents do not engage in discussions with their teen and family rules and standards are not debated. Authoritarian parents believe the adolescent should accept, without question, the rules and practices that they establish (Kopko, 2007:2). Authoritarian parents tend to define issues as falling into parental jurisdiction too rigidly (Smetana, 1995; Baumrind, 2005). In this case, adolescents and parents may be deprived of opportunities to debate and negotiate appropriate boundaries, which in turn can make youth question and doubt the legitimacy of parental authority.

Children in their adolescence need parental guidance, but they do not need authoritarian guidance. In this type of parenting the demands from the children are too high whereas the parents are not responsive at all. This type of parenting is very strict and rigid. Parents impose strict and rigid rules over the child which are compulsory to be followed, any disobedience of the rules or parents' orders directly means punishment, the authoritarian parent uses corporal punishment such as spanking, and usually, the explanation for the punishment is "just because they said so" (Jadon and Tripath, 2017:910).

Authoritarian parents are low in responsiveness yet highly demanding. The authoritarian parenting style is associated with parents who emphasize obedience and conformity and expect that rules be obeyed without explanation in a less warm environment. Additionally, authoritarian parents exhibit low levels of trust and engagement toward their children, discourage open communication, and engage in strict control (Hoskins, 2014:509)

Mwangi's *The Operator* leaves the readers in suspense on what actions do parents execute to calm down the 'devil' of lust and desire for sex as portrayed to exist in Diana and Nancy. The novel is silent to the extent that these two young girls' characters are free to do

whatever they want, regardless of their parents' Authoritarianism. At a peripheral, there is a portrayal of poor parenting style, which is portrayed in Mwangi's *The Operator* and that is authoritarian parenting. In the novel, Diana reveals that Nancy was not in good terms with her mother because her mother was too authoritarian. This is revealed when Nancy gets pregnant and remains in the dilemma knowing nowhere to go nor what to do. The only thing that she was not ready to do was going back to her parental home. The narrator in the novel says,

*She had earlier on the thought of taking a regular job but now the prospect dismayed her. She was not ready for that yet, she admitted. She did not want to go home to her parents either. She was fed up with her mother's do's and dont's. "Mum is too pushy," she told me" (Mwangi, 1989:79-80).*

This narration testifies that Nancy was bored with her mother. In most cases, girls make friends with their mothers and they are the ones they share their life secrets with. Nancy admitting that her mother was pushy shows that she was not a friend to her in such a way that she (Nancy) could not personally want to go back to her and tell her what had happened to her. This pushy character as described by Nancy is what some scholars call demandingness, meaning the claims parents make on adolescents to become integrated into the family whole by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts, and willingness to confront the child who disobeys (Baumrind as quoted in Oluwatosin & Adediwura, 2010). Nancy chooses a wrong path of individuality because she finds her parental home uncomfortable place for her in her condition. As discussed in section 3.1 on uninvolved parenting style, authoritarian parenting also has a negative effect to children because as it has been revealed by Chris Mwangi, it makes a child find an alternative way of surviving. Nancy dies miserably in her attempt to abort because she chooses to distance herself from her parents just because they are authoritarians. Adolescents of authoritarian parents learn that, following parental rules and adherence to strict discipline is valued over independent behaviour. As a result, adolescents may become rebellious or dependent. Those who become rebellious might display aggressive behaviours. More submissive adolescents tend to remain dependent on their parents (Kopko, 2007:2). Nancy becomes rebellious to her authoritarian parents and chooses to live her own life. We see from the novel that Nancy was crazy about high-class society and she liked mingling with notables (Mwangi 1989:79). Nancy's freedom she acquires puts her into jeopardy which at last ruins her life. Even when she finds a man whom she thought she would marry things do not work in her favour because from the start she had taken a wrong path. James who is also described as Jimmy is the man she loves and he is the one responsible for her pregnancy according to her. When Nancy and Diana move to live with this man, they experience a harsh treatment which also ends up with Jimmy beating Nancy after discovering that Jimmy is not faithful to her. Jimmy calls both Nancy and Diana sluts and he asks them to leave his house.

The same authoritarian is revealed by Diana to her mother. Diana being raised by her mother and in the absence of her father who was busy with religious commitments, she reveals her disagreements with her mother in the question of joining St. Cecilia High School, which is described as a boarding school. Though she had passed and got grades that would allow her to join the school. She says,



*On leaving Gikuni Primary School, my mother insisted on sending me to a boarding school. I had very good KCPE results but I did not want to go to the boarding school. I had heard rumours about the discipline in some girls' boarding schools and I did not like the idea. I liked the good life at home and I did all I could to avoid going to a boarding school. In spite of my protests my mother sent me to St. Cecilia's Girls' High School in the end (Mwangi, 1989:18).*

Something to note about the narrator in Chris Mwangi's *The Operator* is that sometimes parents must think of what is good to their children and even dictate what they should do because they assume that responsibility of being the custodians of what is good and what is not good to their children. Equally important, it is not always that parents might be that good in deciding what is good and what is bad for their children. This is what happens to Diana. She remembers all her misfortunes which befall her because of her mother's authoritarian decision to send her in a girls' boarding school, the decision she had resisted before. It is from this school which she ironically describes as "St Cecilia's Maximum-Security Prison" that she meets her fate. She describes some of the experiences she went through while at this school such as masculine assault on a girl in the dorm, an enjoyable afternoon with someone else's boyfriend at the local shopping centre, fighting with the prefect and intense argument with one of the nuns. Through these experiences Diana further explains this bad memory,

*These incidents flashed through the mind as the Ford Escort made its way past the many coffee estates in the location. I tried to re-live my past while at the same time wondering what life was all about, feeling that I had grown up too fast and hating having done so. Mine had been a short quick trip through young adolescence, at times knowing not where I was headed, yet not caring much (Mwangi, 1989:35).*

This is a memory of harsh experience Diana reveals to have gone through as an adolescent from a boarding school. What Diana reveals to have gone through is explained by several scholars to result from parenting style which has been described as a factor that influences levels of crime among the youths including, juvenile delinquency, petty crime and other serious criminal acts (Musyoki, 2017:67). This shows that parenting style is vital in the development of children's behaviour. Children who are raised under the authoritarian parenting style, in most cases, face behavioural disorders. Diana, as it is with her friend Nancy, falls into risky behaviours such as smoking and prostitution because from the start she is sent to the chosen life in the environment where she is not comfortable. Apart from what Nancy and Diana do while at school, other girls who study there also engage themselves in those risk behaviours such as prostitution.

Regardless of whatever experiences Diana faces, she completes her life circle by opting to go back to her parental home. The novel remains silent on what happened to her at her parental home but in the end, she tells how she resorted on going back to her mother, her sister, and her preaching father. Diana learns several life experiences and finally, she returns to where her life had started as she says, "I slipped quietly and went around the building to a nearby bar. Here, I took a taxi. When the driver asked me where to take me, I told him to drive off. It did not matter where he went now. I had finally found the helm of my ship and set course for home" (Mwangi, 1989:169). In this, Diana left the bar in confusion but with only one conscious decision, to go back home. After growing up into

a woman as she says, she finds no other solution than going back to her parental home. Throughout her story, Diana reveals that the purpose of her engagement in prostitution is not only economic gains. This is revealed when she encounters Mr Bailey. Diana feels guilty to have affairs with a man of Bailey's age. She even drinks alcohol to wave away this guilty. She, however, admits that she had to accept due to the circumstances. For commercial sex workers, the age of the 'client' is not something counted, rather is what a 'client' can offer. Also, Diana reveals that she was not a commercial prostitute when she meets Captain Saki. In their chats, Nancy asks Captain Saki how many children he has after saying that he is married, of which he answers that he has planted seventeen children in different countries. Diana reveals that she was decent if it was not what she calls 'circumstances.' She reveals this through her encounter with Captain Saki who is portrayed as a womanizer. She says,

*He turned to me slowly and smiled. "I can plant babies inside you any minute." "Thank you for the offer," I said, "I'll contact you when I need one." "Call Captain Saki anytime." He laughed. "I'll remember that." I sneered, shifting chairs to sit further away from him (Mwangi, 1989:83).*

This conversation, and the decision Diana takes to distance herself from the drunkard Captain Saki reveals that Diana remained with a residual amount of decency. Furthermore, Diana reveals herself not to be after men's money when Nancy tells her that they had to leave with Captain Saki's wallet. Nancy tells her that she had locked Captain Saki in the toilet and therefore they had to leave with his wallet. This makes Dina feel guilty and she even wonders how Nancy had changed to that extent such that she valued money now more than she could at St. Cecilia. All these show that Diana did not engage in prostitution just because she wanted money to earn a good life.

### **Parenting Style and Adolescents' Sexual Behaviour (Prostitution)**

The second objective of this study was to interrogate how the portrayed types of parenting style influence adolescents' sexual behaviour. A cordial relationship between adolescents and parents fosters training and acceptability of the norms. Adolescents are learners trying to establish their independence and that any lapses in this vital life act may have adverse consequences (Okpako as cited from Oluwatosin & Adediwura, 2010:141). Adolescents appear to thrive developmentally when their family setting is one of warm relationship. The relationship can be cold due to any reason; for example, when both parents work outside their home they may find it difficult to stay connected with their children's behaviour and education.

In their review on the effects of parenting styles on children's behavioural problems in different cultures, Sunita, et al. (2022) found out that social anxiety and withdrawal in girls were positively predicted by uninvolved, non-reasoning, neglect, and reject parenting dimensions, whereas these traits were negatively predicted by authoritative style and connection of parenting dimensions. Sunita, et al. (Ibid) review which included 51 studies from various countries including the United States, India, Pakistan, Finland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Spain, Iran indicated that parenting styles had an effect on the behaviour of children.

Generally, it has been observed that parental involvement is vital in the shaping of young adolescents' behaviours. Failure to engage in young adolescents' growth and development

can potentially make young adolescents develop risk behaviours including prostitution. In *The Operator*, this situation is revealed by Diana through her narrative about her father when she says,

*Religion was his life, and I am grateful for his involvement in the holy duties. But I hate him. I hate him for denying me my share of fatherly love, and I despise him for not providing his family with the guidance that makes children grow upright, psychologically (Mwangi, 1989:15).*

This narration reveals two things that Diana lacked from his busy father. One is fatherly love. This shows that Diana grew up under single parenting care. She grew up without enjoying her father's love and care. The second thing she lacked from her father is guidance. She believes a lack of guidance from her father, which she claims 'makes children grow upright,' has resulted into what she is now. She ends up doing the wrong things because of lack of fatherly guidance. Diana feels her father is a stranger to her and she did not even miss him. Diana's father was a stranger in his own family to the extent that his youngest son dared to ask his mother to let their father go find somewhere else to sleep, "The boy had run to mother in tears, saying that the old man should be told to go away and look for his bed." This feeling as it is expressed by the child justifies how cold the relationship between the father and the family was.

Given the entire situation in this family, it is obvious that Diana lives the kind of life she is forced into by circumstances resulting from having an uninvolved father. She acknowledges that had her father given her guidance, it could have helped her grow up right psychologically. She grows up under the care of a single mother who does not provide all she wanted to become an upright girl. In their study on the influence of single parenting on pupils' academic performance in Basic Schools in the Wa Municipality, Abudu and Moses (2013) assert that when both parents are present, it implies that the child would derive most care. However, when one of the parents is absent in a child's life, a gap is created as the child would lose the support that would have emanated from that parent.<sup>4</sup> Because of uninvolved parenting, Diana was engaged in risk behaviours at a young age in her father's bedroom. She says,

*I was in daddy's bedroom with Kaniu and the radio was on full blast for camouflage. [...] I was already a woman when Kaniu suddenly gripped my shoulders and moaned painfully, like a swimmer with an agonizing cramp. It was over, almost before it started and I had accomplished nothing (Mwangi, 1989:17).*

It is astonishing to see how Diana's parents were less concerned with her at the time she needed them. She started pre-marital sex affairs when she was thirteen years, six months and twenty-three days. Diana can remember all these experiences in her narrative because she knows how she has been affected by this. It is from this first day with Kaniu that Diana learns new knowledge which she had not been given by her parents. This situation confirms a view by some scholars that there are very low percentages of parents who provide information on sex to their children regardless of family types (Oluwatosin & Adediwura, 2010:150). Diana reveals that she lacked information about sex from her parents, thus she learned from her peer students at school. She says,

<sup>4</sup> See Abudu Amadu Musah and Moses Naim Fuseini on the influence of single parenting on pupils' academic performance in Ghana.

I knew what happens when men hit the ceiling. The older girls talked about these things at school. Some said they got their climax while others said they did not, but they agreed that the boys always did. I was determined to get mine too, but I guess I had chosen the wrong party. I promised myself another go with an older boy after Kaniu failed me (Mwangi, 1989:17).

It is from this bad start that Diana falls into the belly of prostitution, in search for fulfilment of desires.

Lack of Parental involvement is also revealed to Nancy's family when Diana phones them to deliver bad news about Nancy's death. The conversation between Diana and the housemaid Annah Muthoni at Nancy's parental home (Mwangi, 1989:112-113) reveals that Nancy's parents were busy people who could not be at home even in late hours. The housemaid reveals that Mr Kairu (Nancy's father) uses to work in office up to the late hours, or else for Wednesday he goes for refreshment at Muthaiga Golf Club. Though the author reveals through the housemaid that Nancy's parents were worried about Nancy's disappearance, the novel remains silent about the measures these worried parents had taken to find Nancy, provided that she had left the school while in Form Three. For two months, Nancy was nowhere to be found and the parents continued with their daily routines till the message about her death was delivered to them. This reveals that Nancy's parents were not involved in their daughter's affairs. Different dimensions on parenting styles show something interesting to note. Children who perceive their parents to be neglecting-rejecting engage in risky sexual practices than children raised in other parenting styles. This may be because such children lack parental involvement or control in making decisions. The style of parenting characterized as 'disengaged', provides ground for the adolescents to be loose in their behavioural dispositions (sexual behaviour inclusive), (Oluwatosin & Adediwura, 2010:150-151). Diana and Nancy engage in risky sexual practices because they find their parents neglecting-rejecting.

Lack of parental involvement in the novel *The Operator* leads to the lack of information to the children about their growth and development. Parents who neglect their young adolescents put these young adolescents in high-risk behaviour developments.

## 5.0 Conclusions and Policy Implications

The issues that are entwined in this novel namely, prostitution, uninvolved, and authoritarian parenting styles reveal how prostitution can be a complex issue both in literary and social contexts. This novel shows the profound changes needed to happen in the society on how to deal with adolescents' growth and development. The story in the novel reveals lack of good guidance from the characters' parents such that their lives and dreams go to waste. Both two young girls' characters had dreams to achieve, and they hoped for contentment. Diana puts much blames on her father for taking much of his time serving other people while forgetting his family. She even admits that it is because of this irresponsible 'preaching father' that she fails to grow upright psychologically. She grows up with her own decisions and independence to the extent of falling into bad hands of friends such as Nancy, and hence prostitution.

Authoritarian parenting style, on the other hand, becomes another reason for indulging in prostitution. Diana is forced to go to a boarding school regardless of the bad image she had about girls' boarding schools. Every parent wishes for better school to his/her child. The question left to the reader of this novel is that, should parents listen to their children's choice of school?

The story in this novel has also delineated how authoritarian and uninvolved parenting styles affect the life of Nancy, another victim of prostitution. At first, she reveals how her mother was pushy. It is because of the authoritarian nature of her mother that she is not ready to go back home when something bad happens to her, pregnancy. Children get involved in many practices some of which may result in harm to their lives. But where should they go after that? The better place for a child to resolve every conflicting problem is at his/her parental home. Nancy dies without any notice to her parents and the novel has remained silent of whether her parents managed to see her corpse. This happens because of the authoritarian parenting style. Through the portrayed experiences Diana and Nancy go through, Chris Mwangi appears to be posing a challenge to the parents and the society in general about parenthood. The negative presentation of the two girls allows Mwangi to join other social constructivist' assumptions that what a child acquires as knowledge and understanding is a shared practice that comes from individuals around him/her. Therefore, recommend that parents under the guidance of relevant government institutions should create an environment where open communication between parents and children is fostered. This will allow children to express their concerns, fears, and preferences regarding their education and other aspects of their lives. Parents should listen to their children's choices and opinions, taking them into consideration when making decisions. Also, parents should adopt a supportive parenting style that encourages independence and autonomy while providing guidance and emotional support. This can help prevent feelings of neglect or rebellion in children, reducing the likelihood of them seeking unhealthy relationships or falling into risk sexual behaviours.

## References

- Akyeampong, E. (1997). Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast. *Past & Present Society*, No. 156, pp 144-173.
- Abudu, A. M., and Moses, N. F. (2013). Influence of Single Parenting on Pupils' Academic Performance in Basic Schools in The Wa Municipality". *International Journal of Education Learning and Development*, 1(2), pp. 85-94.
- Amineh, R. J. and Hanieh D. (2015). Review of Constructivism and Social Constructivism. *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, 1(1), pp. 9-16.
- Aspevig, K. A. H. (2011). Fact and fiction: representations of prostitution in Contemporary British news media and novels. *Theses and dissertations*. Paper 669.
- Baumrind, D. (2005). Patterns of parental authority and adolescent autonomy. *New Dir. Child Adolesc. Dev.* 2005, 61–69. DOI: 10.1002/cd.128
- Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behaviour. *Child Development*, 37(4), 887-907.
- Blasdell, R. (2015). Reel or Reality? The Portrayal of Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures: Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
- Brooks, J.B. (1991). *The process of parenting*. Mayfield.
- Chigbu, E. F., Ofojebe, E. N., Nnadi, G. C., Uzoekwe, H. E., & Mokwelu, B. O. (2022). Parenting styles as determinant of sexual behaviour of in-school adolescents in South East Nigeria. *European journal of education studies*, 9(2).
- Cresswell, J.W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cross, K. (2010). Representation of Prostitution in Six Canadian Newspapers: Race, Gender and Poverty: CMNS 431, *Media Analysis*.
- Darling, N., Cumsille, P., and Martínez, M. L. (2008). Individual differences in adolescents' Beliefs about the legitimacy of parental authority and their own obligation to obey: a longitudinal investigation. *Child Dev.* 79, 1103–1118. Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01178.x
- Darling, N. (1999). *Parenting style and its correlates*. ERIC Digest ED427896.
- Erin, O. (2015). Prostitution Ideology and Trafficking Policy: The Impact of Political Approaches to Domestic Sex Work on Human Trafficking Policy in Australia and the United States. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 36(2), 191-212, DOI: 10.1080/1554477X.2015.1019277 (2015)
- Heeley, K. (2015). The Representation of female prostitution in Victorian and neo- Victorian Literature: MA Dissertation. University of Chester, United Kingdom.
- Hoskins, D. H. (2014). Consequences of Parenting on Adolescent Outcomes. *Societies*, 4, pp. 506–531
- Hosokawa, R. and Katsura, T. (2018). Role of Parenting Style in Children's Behavioural Problems Through the Transition from Preschool to Elementary School According to Gender in Japan. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 16(1): 21. Doi: [10.3390/ijerph16010021](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16010021)
- Jadon, P. S., and Tripath, S. (2017). Effect of Authoritarian Parenting style on self-esteem of the Child: A Systematic Review. *IJARIIIE*, 3 (3).

- Kara, S. (2009). *Sex trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. Columbia University Press. New York.
- Kopko K. (2007). *Parenting Styles and Adolescents*. Cornell University. Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Kothari, C.R (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, Second Revised Edition. New Age International (P) Ltd.
- Musyoki, Y. M. (2017). Relationship between Parenting Style and Crime Among Youths in Informal Settlements in Hananasif. MA Dissertation. University of Nairobi.
- Neuman, L.W. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Seventh Edition. Pearson.
- Ngubia, G. W. (2017). Allegory of Derangement in Postcolonial Fiction: A Study of Selected Novels from Africa. MA Dissertation. Kenyatta University.
- Nyangoya, D. (2022). *Parenting Styles and Sexual Behaviour among Teenage Girls in Kieni East Sub-County-Nyeri County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa).
- Oluwatosin S. A and Adediwura A. A. (2010). Undergraduates' History of Sexual Abuse, Parenting Style & Sexual Risk Behaviour. *African Research Review*, 4(2). Pp. 139-155.
- Sholihah, A. N. (2019). The influence of parenting patterns on adolescent sexual behaviour. *International Journal of Health Science and Technology*, 1(2), 51-59.
- Smetana, J. G. (1995). Parenting styles and conceptions of parental authority during adolescence. *Child Dev.* 66, 299–316. Doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.1995.tb00872.x
- St. Pierre, H. J. (1996). Coming to Terms: Social Constructivism. *The English Journal*, 85(1), pp. 91-92
- Sunita, Singh, C. and Sihag, J. (2022). The effects of parenting style on children's behaviour: A Systematic literature review. *The Pharma Innovation Journal*, SP-11(11): 1695-1702.
- Sylvester, O. A. (2014). Influence of self-esteem, parenting style and parental monitoring on Sexual risk behaviour of adolescents in Ibadan. *Gender and Behaviour*, 12(2), 6341-6353.
- Walkowitz, J. R. (1980). The Politics of Prostitution": *Journal of women in culture and Society*, 6 (1), pp. 123-135.
- Wanjala, C. L. (2003). The Growth of a Literary Tradition in East Africa: An Inaugural Lecture at the University of Nairobi.
- Wasosa, W. (2011). Prostitution in selected colonial and post – colonial Shona Novels. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 3(2), pp. 25-32
- Weitzer, R. (2011). "Male Prostitution" In C. Bryant (Ed). *Routledge Handbook of Deviant Behaviours*: Routledge, pp. 378-382
- Weitzer, R. (2007). Prostitution: Facts and Fiction: *The American Sociological Association*, 6(4), pp. 28-33
- Weitzer, R. (2005). New directions in research on prostitution: *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 43, pp. 211-235.