

# Lost emotions; Lost Opportunities: Impact of Inadequate Caregiving for Children Aged 0-3 Years on Later Life Outcomes in Kenya

<sup>1</sup>Mumah, S. C. J. and <sup>2</sup>Wadende, P.

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## Abstract

Research has consistently shown that the first 1000 days of life are very important in defining a child’s adulthood. Rapid brain development experienced at this stage means that the child’s later abilities in life (i.e., cognitive, social, physical and emotional) are initiated here and that any developmental delays accrued during the period zero-to-birth may be corrected. Nonetheless, the prognosis changes after the first 1000 days when the child’s brain is highly malleable, implying that any developmental lags occurring during this period are seldom corrected in later years. This study focused on emotional development of children during the first 1000 days of life with the premise that during this period, the child bonds with care-givers and thus the basis for later emotional attachments and exhibited responses. Consequently, a good foundation ensures healthy emotional behavior in adult years and vice-versa. This is important due to the ever increasingly more stressful lives in developing economies like Kenya, characterized by high societal expectations and individual desires to succeed at whatever cost; coupled with the modernity syndrome! As a consequence, many a Kenyan (prospective)mother misses out on viable training opportunities set forth both by the government (e.g. ECDE, Maternal and child health, etc) and other agencies; and subsequently, the requisite knowledge for child care within the first 1000 days. The net result is a generation plagued with more and more incidences of psychosomatic disorders and the associated negative impacts on quality of life and general well-being both for individuals and society. The study objective was to find out how parents prepare themselves for child care in the first 1000 days of life and particularly how they prepare to initiate acceptable emotional responses in the children. Qualitative data was collected via IGDs from expectant women (N=120) and fathers (N=40) aged 17-45 years seeking prenatal services at the County Government’s hospital in Kericho, Kenya. Key findings include the fact that the earlier mentioned gap had not been bridged especially with regards to emotional development within the first 3 years. Mothers explained what nutritional, medical and other arrangements they had made for their children but seldom thought about emotional care plans. Sadly, the few fathers present at these sessions were unable to articulate any emotional support they would give their growing children. It is interesting to note that these fathers were articulate regarding material support they needed for the growing child. None had read the Mother-Child-Health booklet provided at the hospital that gave some detail about how to foster optimum emotional bonding with their children. Implications of these findings are explored further in this paper by the researchers who recommend the provision of support that parents currently need to initiate the right emotional development in their children in the first 1000 days since; failing to do so may result in too high a price to pay!

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<sup>1</sup>The Psychology Clinic, PsyHealth International. P. O. Box 52516-00100, Nairobi, Kenya. Phone: +254 722 168 803. Email: [scjumumah@gmail.com](mailto:scjumumah@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, Kisii University. P. O Box 2030-20200, Kericho, Kenya. Phone: +254704928984. Email: [pamela.wadende@gmail.com](mailto:pamela.wadende@gmail.com)