

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS
AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONGST
EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS IN GATHANJE
ZONE, NYANDARUA COUNTY, KENYA**

MAINA JOSEPH GATU

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF EDUCATION
DEGREE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES OF
MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY**

NOVEMBER, 2015

ABSTRACT

Stress has been established to be an impediment to preschool children's socio-emotional development. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between stress and preschool children's socio-emotional development in Gathanje Zone, Nyandarua County, Kenya. The objectives of this study were to examine specifically stress-related withdrawal, aggression, overreactions to minor problems and irritability in relation to preschool children's socio-emotional development. The study was based on The Drive Theory. The study adopted mixed methods approach since the study involved collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The study applied explanatory sequential design in which qualitative data helped explain or build upon initial quantitative results. The target population for this study comprised of 54 preschool managers, 120 preschool teachers, 108 parents' representatives and 1218 preschool children all totaling to 1500. The researcher sampled 300 respondents, that is, 20% of 1500. The researcher then applied stratified sampling to create 5 strata based on the number of sub-zones. From each stratum 2 preschool managers and 6 preschool teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Similarly, from each stratum, 4 parents' representatives and 48 preschool children were selected using simple random sampling. Questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklist were used to collect data from preschool managers, preschool teachers, parents' representatives and preschool children respectively. Piloting of research instruments was conducted to establish validity, reliability, credibility and dependability. Reliability coefficient of $r = 0.715$ was obtained using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Method indicating high internal consistency. Data analysis began by identifying common themes from the respondents' description of their experiences. Frequency counts of the responses were then obtained to generate information about the respondents and to illustrate the general trend of findings on the various variables that are under investigation. Qualitative data was analyzed along the objectives whereas basic quantitative data will be analyzed using Chi-square in Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS Version 21). The findings of the study were presented using tables. The major findings of this study are that stress impacts on preschool children's socio-emotional development. The study thus recommends that parents and teachers should minimize any situation which might precipitate instances of stress amongst preschool children. Early childhood professionals are encouraged to develop respectful relationships and engage responsively with children and families to avoid stress. They are advised to develop a culture of cooperation and sharing to be emulated by the preschool children for their holistic growth and development. Curriculum planners should design and formulate policies which promote stress-free learning environment through cooperation and positive interpersonal relationships amongst preschool children during their classwork and outdoor academic activities. Preschool teacher-training colleges should train or inform student-teachers about the importance of children's socio-emotional development. The government should develop a policy to formally make preschools comfortable for preschool children by appealing to their socio-emotional development.