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## **Affluent Parents' Behaviour and Adolescents' Levels of Assertiveness in Karen Zone, Nairobi County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

*The family constitutes the basic ecology where adolescents' assertiveness is manifested. However, there is a darker side to some parents' behaviours that belies these virtues. This study sought to investigate affluent Parents' behaviour on adolescents' Levels of assertiveness. The research objective was: What are the levels of assertiveness among adolescents in affluent families? Eric Erickson's theory of psychosocial development was used and a Convergent parallel design. Quantitative applied cross-sectional while qualitative was phenomenological. The target population was 23263 with a sample size of 578 respondents consisting of 96 parents and 80 house helps purposefully sampled; 384 adolescents and 18 local officers randomly sampled. The study used Questionnaires for collecting data from both parents and adolescents, interview guide for local officers and house helps and a focus group discussion was done with 20 parents for in-depth data. Pilot testing was done to test face and content validity of the instruments. Reliability of the instruments was tested by computing a Cronbach's alpha. Qualitative data was analyzed in narratives while quantitative data was analyzed using inferential statistics using SPSS version 22.0. Findings revealed that adolescents' level of assertiveness was influenced by parental support, parental separation, divorce, absence, and poor parent-adolescent relationships. Strategies suggested included creating time for bonding, sharing meals, being emotionally present, parental support, and love by parents to adolescents. The study recommended the need for strengthening policies on guidance and counseling services for parents and adolescents for enhancement of assertiveness.*

**Key Words:** *Assertiveness, Affluence, Parental Behaviours, Bonding, Adolescents*

### **1. Introduction**

This study aimed at investigating Levels of Assertiveness among Adolescent in Affluent Families in Karen Zone, Nairobi County-Kenya: The family has extensively remained the foundation of humanity. Visualized as an abode from suffering and pain of daily lifecycle, the family has remained an important haven, a reassuring abode, a dwelling of relief and refreshment. However, within the same family, parents' contribution, which is the most rewarding work of adult life, is faced with many challenges in the changing world of treasure pursuit and necessity to advance. Adolescents in these families require assertiveness for better personality and skill development for successful achievement of improved individuality. Their movement towards independence can be stressful and therefore require closeness with parents so that they are assertive enough.

The level of assertiveness among adolescents has been shown to be related both to individual and contextual factors in terms of affluent parental behaviours. In a study by Chen, Lee, and Straham (2013), 11<sup>th</sup> graders from wealthy families were found to have higher frequencies of depression than U.S. counterparts, but depression levels in earlier grades were comparable or lower than those in the US sample. According to Chen's study, such symptoms lessen adolescents' levels of assertiveness. World Health Organization (2014) indicates that Chinese adolescent from wealthy families had suicide rates scoring higher than those in Western countries.

Deiner (2015), conducted a study in USA and established that heightened output related to affluence includes relaxation and high stress; individuals become increasingly prone to feelings of low assertiveness or high distress. A longitudinal research was carried in London by Holland, (2015), on 183 affluent adolescents whose parents had separated leaving their adolescents unattended. The adolescents from such backgrounds manifested physiological

disorders, emotional vulnerability, non-assertive behaviour, behavioral disturbance, delinquency, antisocial behavior, clinging, neuroticism, depression and psychiatric disturbance. A similar study by Lines (2012) found out that adolescents need to see their father and receive his support, approval and loving care to feel very special for development of assertiveness. This means not just seeing him but experiencing genuine interpersonal warmth, love and encouragement in place of sympathetic discipline and punishment.

Another research conducted in the United Kingdom by Olweus, (2016), on parental presence to adolescents found out that, adolescent neglect is characterized by failure to provide for them basic attachment that they so much long for amidst a period of crisis such as adolescence. He categorized neglect in three ways; physical abandonment, educational abandonment and emotional abandonment. He classified the emotional abandonment as marked by parental inattention to the adolescent's emotional needs and claimed this is by far the most common form of adolescent maltreatment today that causes serious assertiveness problems.

According to a study by Ujo (2013) in Nigeria among middle and high socio-economic status (SES) individuals, adolescents desired living in a peaceful, cheerful family full of happiness where harmony existed between parents. If parentages are in disharmony, arguing with each other or are perennially absent from home, this behaviour is likely to make teenagers feel unhappy in the midst of challenges. The study concluded that continuous parental absence is likely to be detrimental to adolescents who need parents for role modeling. Becker (2012) carried out a study on affluent youth in USA. The study concluded that affluent parenting behaviour scored negatively on adolescent assertiveness levels among adolescents.

**i) *The Levels of Assertive Behaviour among Adolescents in Affluent Families***

In exploring cases of distress among adolescents in affluent families, Luthar (2010) found that adolescence have a series of psychological difficulties their journey to becoming self-governing persons. Uchenna (2013) revealed that affluent adolescents appeared to profit psychologically and academically when both parents provide aspects of an orderly and nurturing home life. The study also found that many teenagers being raised in single parent homes may not reach their full potential due to inadequate family modeling for both girls and boys. Nakidde (2014) reported that college students with emotional distress reported less engagement on campus activities. She also observed that the adolescents exhibited poorer relationships, which were associated with lower graduation rates. Using a longitudinal design, 69 participants were included in the study. Mumah (2014) established that there was a significant difference between the extent of self-assertiveness of adolescents in families with different parenting behaviours. The greatest difference was in connection with "little or too much love" despite what the adolescents went through. It was also discovered that adolescents who scored low on self-assertiveness received less parental connection than those who scored high on assertiveness despite their predicament. Rambo (2016) found out boys who scored low on assertiveness were found to use drugs and alcohol and other mind altering substance.

In South Africa, a study by Moyo (2012) focused on affluent parental behaviour and its effects on adolescent outcomes. The study suggested that behavioural control, monitoring, lack of communication, poor parent adolescent relationship, lack of involvement in adolescent work; inadequate backing and boundary projected escalated degrees of drug taking among teenagers. The study also found out that fathers overprotection of adolescents in affluent families resulted in less assertive adolescents especially in conflict resolution practices.

A distinction was made by Nyaboke (2017), in her study in Karen in Nairobi Kenya between emotion-coaching parents and emotion-dismissing parents. Emotion-coaching parents monitored their adolescents' emotions and viewed their adolescent's negative emotions as opportunities for teaching, assisting and balancing their emotions. These parents coached them on how to deal effectively with emotions. In contrast, the emotion dismissing parents viewed their role as to deny, ignore or change their adolescent's negative emotions. The study found out that, the adolescents of the emotion-coaching parents were better at physiological soothing themselves when they got upset and were still better in regulating their negative affect; were assertive, could form their attention better and had fewer behavioral problems than the adolescents of the emotion-dismissing parents.

Mwangi (2016) contends that adolescents from high socio-economic status (SES) have higher suicide rates from the rest. The study revealed that the cases were on the rise, alarming, worrying and yet they were unreported because the subject is taken to be taboo to both the high and low class families. All these cases happened between 2013 –2016. The study went further to note that recklessness; stress, depression, loneliness, boredom, suicide, accidents as well as drugs have often been cited among wealthy adolescents. These anxiety-provoking factors can result in poor self-esteem, loneliness, boredom, low assertiveness and the desire to fit in with others. The study concluded that adolescents just need a shoulder to lean on or somebody to listen to them. It recommended that parents need to build strong communication, support, relationship, and involvement in adolescents who are under their care. This will help enhance assertiveness and strong decision making skills among the youth.

The Ministry of education (2017) in a conference with heads of schools admitted that money cannot be replaced with parental care, love, presence and support for adolescents. The minister addressed parents and head teachers saying “if you cannot look after your teenager then you have no business getting children in the first place (Education Officer’s Remarks in Mombasa, 2017)”. This shows that there is a serious problem which should be addressed as echoed in the statement below:

If we want our youth to bring about the desired change we have been praying for on behalf of our dear country Kenya, then we need to encourage hard work rather than let our youth to “steal”, which seem to reveal low assertiveness among adolescents ‘these days (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2017).

In Kenya, according to Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2016), youth empowerment occupies a pivotal role in economic development educational advancement. The study argues that the youth have descended into drug addiction due to low assertiveness, the need for esteem as well as a sense belonging.

**ii) Theoretical Framework: (Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory)**

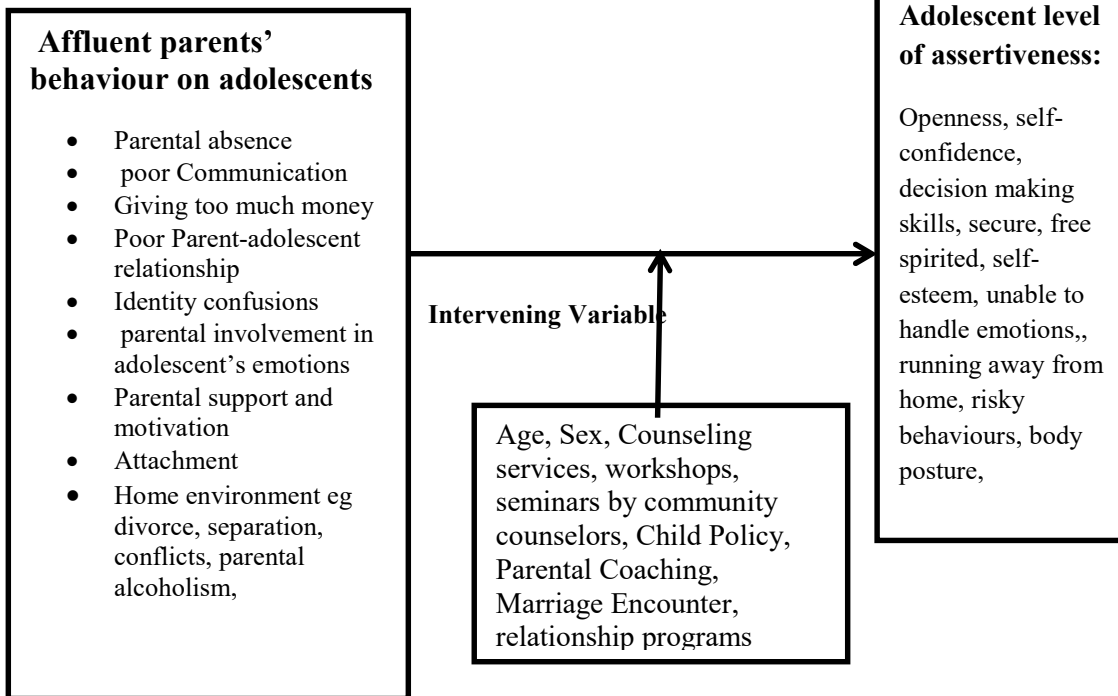
This study adopted a psychosocial perspective to account for assertiveness among adolescents in affluent families. Erikson (1963) contends that contradictions existing in the society make adolescents feel lost leading to poor assertiveness in life. Accomplishment primes to the capacity to remain astute and the opposite propels one to confusions and minimal assertiveness.

Erikson (1980) believes that emotive growth faces difficulties that derail adolescents’ progress. Developmental crises experienced in childhood according to Erikson (1963), poses numerous behavior problem especially when trust for parents in not nurtured. Identity and role confusion is one of Erickson’s Adolescent stages whereby the youth face a series of psychosocial conflicts. A confused adolescent may not be grounded in personal identity. Erickson maintains that when children disengage from parental attachment at puberty, it is not easy for adolescents to completely detach from parents’ constant watch.

The central component of Erikson’s psychosocial phase theory is the growth of ego identity that young people acquire with the help of nurturance, love, support and bonding from parents. Erickson’s eight stages are gradual and one has to progress successfully from one to the next. One has therefore to create an enhanced identity based on self-knowledge and continuity of experience.

**Independent Variable**

**Dependent Variable**



**Figure 1: A Figure Showing the Relationship between Affluent Parents’ Behaviour and Adolescent Level of Assertiveness**

In the above framework, the independent variables are affluent parents' behaviours whereas the dependent variable is the adolescent assertiveness. Influence of affluent parental behaviour can only be minimized and adolescent assertiveness enhanced if factors such as parental presence, attachment, parent-adolescent relationship, emotional support, home environment counseling, care and love are enhanced. From the theory, identity confusions may affect assertiveness of adolescents if not managed well by parents. The conceptual framework shows that affluent parents' behaviours have direct influence on adolescent level of assertiveness depending on how parents nurture their teenagers from birth. Failure to nurture them by parents early in life may result to adverse effects on adolescent assertiveness as reiterated by Erickson in his psychosocial theory. However, if parental behaviours of support, good communication, relationships, attachment, care and love are experienced, assertive indicators such as openness, decision making, self-confidence, high self-esteem is likely to be high among adolescents. Affluent parents therefore have the obligation to enhance adolescents' assertiveness through proper parenting behaviours if this could be lacking.

## 2. Methodology

This study used a convergent parallel mixed –method research design. A total population of 24,506 was used from which a sample of 578 participants was drawn. Adolescents were sampled using random sampling while the others were purposively sampled. Data was collected through structured interview guide, open, closed ended questionnaires and focus group discussion. To test the validity of the research instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot study in two homes which was not part of the study sample. Reliability was established by pre-testing the instruments prior to conducting the study and defective items on the instruments corrected using a Cronbach's. A correlation of 0.71 was arrived at after computing the Cronbach's alpha on items in the instruments. . Data from the completed questionnaires were cleaned, decoded and captured into the computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analyzing data into percentages, means and standard deviations. A correlational statistics (frequency analysis) and regression was computed for presentation and analysis. Inferential statistics were done using regression. The researcher analyzed qualitative data was through thematic analysis which involves identification, examination and interpretations of patterns and themes in textual data and determining how the patterns and themes help to answer research questions.

## 3. Data Analysis and results

The background information was sought in relation to their distribution by gender, age, marital status at the time of the study. Demographic information from the respondents was further discussed in the following subsequent sub themes.

### i) *Distribution of Respondents by Age*

The respondents' age was summarized into age groups where three of them emerged. The findings were analyzed and presented for each group of respondents in Table 1.

**Table 1 Age of Respondents**

Category	Adolescents		Category	Parents	
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
10 - 14 years	61	17.8	25 - 34 years	3	3.4
15 - 19 years	173	50.6	35 - 49 years	49	55.7
20 - 24 years	108	31.6	≥ 50 years	36	40.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100.0</b>

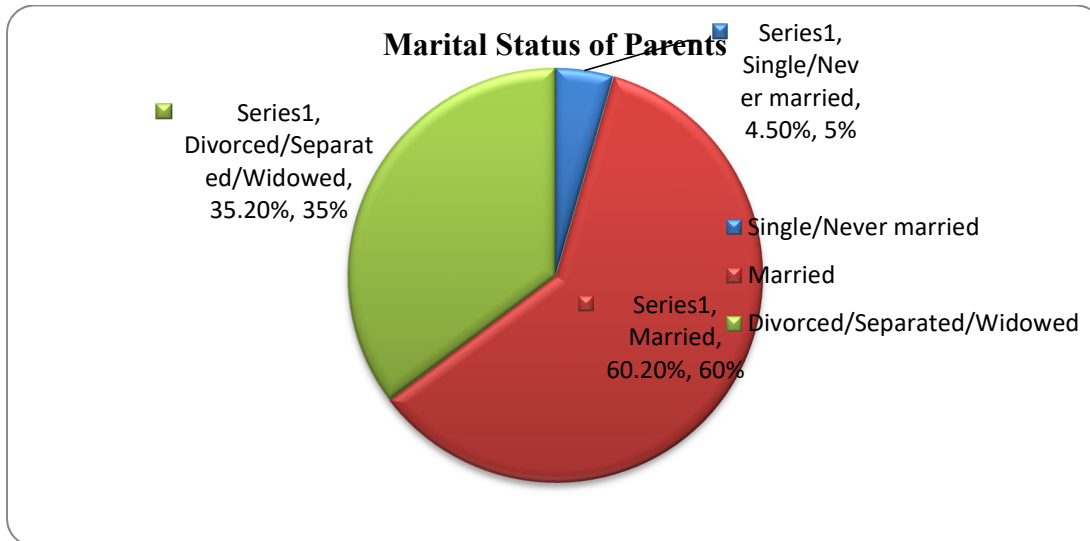
The findings in Table 1 shows that majority of the adolescents who participated in the study were aged between 15 and 19 years (50.6%) with another 31.6% aged between 20 and 24 years. The lowest participation was realized from those ranging between the ages of 10-14 years. The low response rate of those aged between 10-14 years could have been attributed to the fact that adolescents at the age of ten to fourteen are engaged in a series of activities with friends since they could be undergoing the first changes occurring at the onset of adolescence.

Those between the ages of 15-19 were majority maybe because this is the peak of adolescence where developmental involvements include movement towards social and economic independence, development of identity, the acquisition of skills needed to carry out adult relationships and roles and above all, the capacity to think in abstract terms. As for the parents, majority (55.7%) were aged between 35 and 49 years with a further 40.9% aged 50 years or more. This is likely to be the age when parents are generative and engage in more parenting activities with enthusiasm.

Thus, majority of the youths between ages 15-19 years were able to provide adequate responses regarding their interaction with their parents which could affect their assertiveness.

**ii) Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status**

The present marital status determines the availability of both parents to contribute to the growth and development of the children especially adolescents. The findings were summarized into frequency and percentages as presented in Figure 2.

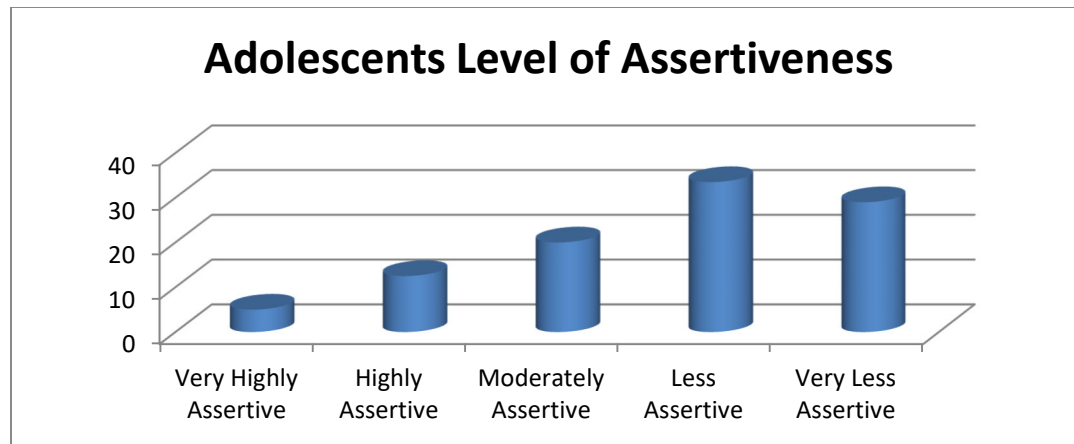


**Figure 2: Marital Status of Parents**

The findings in figure 2 shows that majority of the adolescent parents (60.2%) were married thus depicting stable families where both parents were available and thus could contribute in the upbringing of their adolescents. However, there were a significant 35.2% of parents who reported being divorced/separated/widowed and another 4.5% who reported being single/never married. This gives a cumulative 39.7% of the respondents in which one of the parents was missing leading to the burden of parenting. Divorce and separation were found to affect and trouble adolescents more than the death of father or mother. This finding corresponds with findings of Luthar (2010) who found that adolescents who lack guidance from both parents experienced low assertive behaviour. They were likely to abuse drugs and bully others in an attempt to fill the emptiness within them due to lack of parental love and care from both father and mother.

**iii) Levels of Assertiveness among Adolescent in Affluent Families**

The research objective sought to establish the levels of adolescent assertiveness from affluent families in Karen area Nairobi. Likert scales were developed for adolescents and parents to measure the level of assertiveness. The researcher used Rathus assertiveness scale (30 items) to assess assertive behaviour. The complete score of assertive behaviour ranged from 0-150 for 30 items. Levels of assertiveness were categorized as very highly assertive (121-150), highly assertive (91-120), moderately assertive (61-90), less assertive (31-60), and very less assertive (0-30). The responses were analyzed and presented separately for parents and adolescents as shown in the sub-sequent subdivisions.



**Figure 3: Level of Adolescents' Assertiveness**

Figure 3 shows that 5% of the adolescents were very highly assertive, 12.5% of them were highly assertive, 20% were moderately assertive, and 33.5% were less moderately assertive and 29% of them very less assertive. From the findings it is clear that most of the adolescents (33.5%) were less assertive and very less assertive (29%) respectively. This was more likely to be due to affluent parents' behaviour of being absent from home and leaving the poor adolescents in a vacuum hence the experience of void in adolescents. This void could have accounted for the great number of adolescents who reported being less assertive and very less assertive. This finding is in line with Mumah (2014) who affirmed that adolescents who stay for days without parental presence are distrusting and may feel dejected thus experience the lowest assertiveness as well as self-esteem. Parents therefore need to be there for adolescents, listening to their pains, emotional disturbances and crisis that comes with the stage of development for enhancement of assertive behaviour.

In line with the above, qualitative findings indicated that affluent parents' behaviours contributed highly to adolescents' level of low assertiveness. One of the participants argued:

These adolescents do not talk to anybody around here. They are seen quiet most of the time only to find them being locked in the cell for wanting to shoot one of their siblings or even parents. They do not express themselves freely meaning that they are likely not to be happy in those big homes of theirs. Personally, I don't talk to these adolescents or parents in these houses. When they happen to be walking along these streets, we bypass as if we are not neighbours in the next home. (23/2/2018)

The above script could be an indication that adolescents in question have low assertiveness as they could not even express their views freely than pick a gun as a sign of aggression. This finding indicates that there is a felt need to improve the assertiveness of adolescents through training programs. This finding concurs with Okinda (2018) who argued that adolescent level of assertiveness is likely to be affected by affluent parents' behaviours especially when their tendency to stay away and may deny adolescents the warmth they need. The study suggested that affluent parents need to help adolescents improve assertiveness by ensuring warmth, fondness and affection. The study concluded that adolescents with high assertiveness generally exude confidence and trust more making them less inclined to cases of aggression.

**Table 2: Views of Parents on Assertiveness of Adolescents**

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	STDV
My son/daughter feel down, depressed, irritable or hopeless	23 (26.1)	31 (35.2)	7 (8.0)	16 (18.2)	11 (12.5)	3.443	1.380
My son/daughter feel tired or show little energy every time	19 (21.6)	29 (33.0)	11 (12.5)	13 (14.8)	16 (18.2)	3.250	1.424
My son/daughter feel bad that they are a failure, let themselves and parents down	14 (15.9)	20 (22.7)	13 (14.8)	24 (27.3)	17 (19.3)	2.886	1.385
	18	26	5	20	19	3.045	1.493



My son/daughter has trouble concentrating on things	(20.5)	(29.5)	(5.7)	(22.7)	(21.6)		
My son/daughter has trouble making up their mind	13 (14.8)	18 (20.5)	9 (10.2)	29 (33.0)	19 (21.6)	2.739	1.394

(n = 88); Percentage in parenthesis ( )

From the findings in Table 8, majority of the parents cumulatively agreed that their son/daughter feel down, depressed, irritable or hopeless (Mean = 3.44 ± 1.38) where 35.2% agreed as 26.1% strongly agreed. Similarly, majority of the parents (54.6%) cumulatively agreed that their son/daughter feel tired or show little energy every time with only 33% disagreeing (Mean = 3.25 ± 1.42). Depression and little energy exhibited by the adolescents as reported by their parents is an indication of low assertiveness.

Further, majority of parents (46.6%) cumulatively disagreed that their son/daughter feel bad that they are a failure, let themselves and parents down while 38.6% cumulatively agreed (Mean = 2.88 ± 1.38). This shows that about 38% of the adolescents have negative feeling about themselves due to failing and letting themselves and their parents down. However, the parents disagreed that their children are indecisive. This emerged as majority of the parents (54.6%) cumulatively disagreed that their son/daughter has trouble making up their mind with 35.3% agreeing (Mean = 2.74 ± 1.39). The outcome demonstrates a comparatively low level of adolescents' assertiveness.

How affluent parents treat their adolescents in terms of behaviour, manage the house hold and create a home atmosphere affects assertiveness and overall behaviour of adolescents relative to new individuals, in generating interactions with important people like parents themselves, in having close binders, and in inspiring themselves in order to outshine in goal oriented behaviours. This indicates that parental role in adolescents' life is of paramount importance. It is important to emphasize the significance of affluent parental behaviours in shaping adolescent assertiveness since they are likely to be positively or negatively influenced. In fact, Becker (2012) asserts that adolescents who live with the ongoing marriage of parents have higher levels of assertiveness than those who live with only one parent.

#### 4. Conclusions

The study concludes that a significant proportion of adolescent youth from affluent families are less assertive as they feel down, depressed, irritable or hopeless. Depression and little energy exhibited by the adolescents as reported by their parents is an indication of low levels of assertiveness. The adolescents also have a problem with concentration and indecisiveness which ultimately affects their assertiveness.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

Parents should be encouraged to attend family counseling sessions to allow them have time with their adolescents where they can open up and share on their challenges. This should to help ensure that parents and adolescents are helped to build relationships that could be impacting on adolescents' assertiveness.

Adolescent should be encouraged to frequent counseling services in the event that they find themselves emotionally disturb to avoid stressful situations, depression, drug and substance abuse, loneliness, feeling of low esteem, suicidal tendencies and boost assertiveness. Monthly youth counseling in churches, in the community, youth seminars by organizations could help adolescents to build resilience and thereby deal with assertiveness. Psycho-education could be given through the media daily to all parents and their adolescents on the need to relate closely for creating positive attachment and adolescents' assertiveness.

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