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## Kin Support and Child Health: Investigating Two Approaches in an African Slum

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### Abstract:

Extensive research from sub-Saharan Africa shows that mothers frequently rely on help from other family members to ensure their children's health and well-being. Yet, there is considerable debate about the relative importance of support from grandmothers versus fathers. Using an innovative survey instrument to interview 462 unmarried mothers in a slum area of Nairobi, Kenya, we provide insight into this debate by showing that a *status* versus *transfers* approach to measuring kin support asks subtly different questions and yields different results. A *status* approach reflects an evolutionary perspective that argues that maternal grandmothers have a greater incentive than non-residential fathers to provide material and practical support for young children. In contrast, a *transfers* approach is consistent with social support theories whereby the social capital provided by fathers may be more beneficial to children's health than that afforded by grandmothers. Demonstrating that different approaches to measuring kin support matter highlights the need for kin research that crosses disciplinary boundaries and encourages the development of more nuanced family policies designed to protect children's health in Africa.

**Key Words:** Kin Support, Child Health, African Families, Child Care, Financial Transfers

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**Competing Interests:** None of the authors have competing interests to declare with respect to this research.

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