Hard Work as a Poverty Script: Examining the Relationship between Generational Work Beliefs and Financial Success among Urban Households in Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The belief that hard work alone guarantees financial success has long been deeply embedded in generational socialization systems, particularly in developing economies. However, emerging evidence suggests that such labor-centered narratives may not sufficiently explain contemporary wealth accumulation patterns in urban economies characterized by financial innovation, digital transformation, and expanding investment opportunities. This study examined the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success among urban households in Nairobi County, Kenya, with a particular focus on the mediating role of financial behavior. The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Learning Theory. A sample of 370 respondents drawn from young professionals and entrepreneurs was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques, yielding 339 valid responses (91.6% response rate). Data were collected using structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using SPSS Version 27. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis were employed to test the hypothesized relationships. Findings revealed that generational hard-work beliefs were widely prevalent among respondents ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.68$). Correlation analysis indicated a significant negative relationship between rigid hard-work beliefs and financial success ($r = -0.594$, $p < 0.001$), while financial behavior demonstrated a significant positive association with financial success ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.001$). Regression results showed that generational hard-work beliefs significantly predicted financial success ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 41.3% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.413$). Mediation analysis further confirmed that financial behavior partially mediated this relationship, indicating that beliefs influence financial outcomes primarily through behavioral pathways. The study concludes that while hard work remains an essential socioeconomic value, overreliance on labor-centric beliefs without complementary financial literacy, investment engagement, entrepreneurship, and strategic wealth-building behaviors may constrain financial progress in modern urban economies. The findings contribute to behavioral finance and financial psychology literature by demonstrating the role of inherited belief systems in shaping financial outcomes. From a policy perspective, the study recommends integrating financial literacy, investment education, and entrepreneurship training into formal and informal education systems to reshape limiting generational narratives. For academia, the study extends the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Learning Theory by demonstrating the behavioral transmission of financial outcomes through belief systems. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and broader geographical coverage to enhance causal inference and generalizability.

Keywords: Hard work beliefs, poverty script, generational mindset, financial success, wealth creation, urban households, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

For generations, hard work has been widely regarded as the primary pathway to economic success and upward social mobility. Across cultures and economic systems, individuals are socialized to believe that diligence, perseverance, sacrifice, and sustained labor effort inevitably lead to financial prosperity and improved living standards (OECD, 2023; UNDP, 2024). These beliefs are reinforced through family structures, educational institutions, religious teachings, and workplace norms, becoming deeply embedded in societal definitions of success and achievement (Bandura, 1977; Morgan & Trinh, 2021). Consequently, many individuals continue to evaluate economic progress through the lens of work intensity rather than through broader wealth-creation mechanisms. Despite the enduring popularity of the hard-work narrative, contemporary economic realities increasingly challenge the assumption that labor effort alone is sufficient to generate financial success. The emergence of knowledge-based economies, technological innovation, digital entrepreneurship, financial markets, and investment opportunities has fundamentally transformed pathways to wealth creation (World Bank, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2024). Research suggests that individuals who combine labor effort with financial literacy, asset ownership, investment participation, and entrepreneurial activities are more likely to achieve sustainable financial growth than those who depend exclusively on earned income (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2023; Klapper & Lusardi, 2023). Consequently, economic success in the twenty-first century appears to depend not only on how hard individuals work but also on how effectively they allocate resources, manage risk, and exploit wealth-building opportunities.

The growing importance of financial capability has attracted considerable attention within economics and behavioral finance literature. Financial capability encompasses the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for effective financial decision-making and long-term financial well-being (OECD, 2023). Studies consistently demonstrate that financially capable individuals are more likely to save regularly, participate in investment markets, diversify income sources, prepare for retirement, and accumulate wealth over time (Lusardi, 2024; Morgan & Long, 2020). In contrast, individuals with limited financial literacy often experience lower savings rates, reduced investment participation, and increased financial vulnerability despite maintaining stable employment and income streams (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022; OECD, 2023).

The relationship between effort and financial success has become increasingly complex within modern economies. While hard work remains an important contributor to productivity and income generation, evidence suggests that labor income alone may be insufficient for substantial wealth accumulation because earned income is constrained by time, employment opportunities, and human capacity (World Bank, 2024). Wealth accumulation is increasingly associated with ownership of productive assets, entrepreneurship, intellectual property, financial investments, and scalable business models capable of generating returns independent of labor input (World Economic Forum, 2024; IMF, 2024). As a result, individuals who possess the knowledge and confidence to engage in wealth-building activities often outperform those who rely exclusively on traditional employment-based income.

Behavioral finance scholars argue that financial outcomes are influenced not only by economic resources but also by psychological and social factors that shape decision-making processes (Xiao & Porto, 2022). Individuals interpret financial opportunities through the lens of beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and social norms acquired throughout their lives (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977). Consequently, inherited assumptions regarding money, work, wealth, and risk may significantly influence financial behavior and ultimately affect economic outcomes. Financial decisions such as investing, entrepreneurship, saving, borrowing, and asset acquisition are frequently guided by cognitive frameworks developed during childhood and reinforced through socialization processes (Klontz et al., 2022; Morgan & Trinh, 2021). Within financial psychology literature, these cognitive frameworks are commonly described as money scripts. Money scripts refer to unconscious beliefs about money and wealth that individuals acquire through family interactions, cultural norms, and life experiences (Klontz et al., 2022). Such beliefs influence attitudes toward financial risk, wealth accumulation, debt, investing, and entrepreneurship. Some money scripts encourage prudent financial behavior and wealth creation, while others constrain economic advancement by limiting perceptions of opportunity and acceptable financial behavior. One particularly influential script is the belief that hard work represents the sole legitimate pathway to financial success. Although this belief may encourage discipline and perseverance, it may simultaneously discourage participation in alternative wealth-generation strategies such as investing, passive income creation, business ownership, and financial leverage (Lusardi, 2024; Xiao & Porto, 2022).

Social Learning Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how such beliefs are transmitted across generations. According to Bandura (1977), individuals acquire behaviors, values, and attitudes through observation, imitation, and interaction with significant others. Families therefore serve as important agents of financial socialization, shaping beliefs regarding money management, employment, investing, and wealth creation. Children who grow up in environments where success is consistently associated with hard work and sacrifice may internalize these narratives and continue to rely on them when making financial decisions in adulthood (Bandura, 1977; Morgan & Trinh, 2021). Consequently, inherited beliefs may continue to influence economic behavior even when economic conditions and wealth-creation opportunities have changed significantly.

Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that beliefs influence attitudes, attitudes shape intentions, and intentions subsequently guide behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Applied to financial decision-making, this theory implies that individuals who strongly believe that labor effort alone determines financial success may develop less favorable attitudes toward investing, entrepreneurship, or strategic risk-taking. Such attitudes may reduce participation in wealth-building activities and ultimately influence financial outcomes. Conversely, individuals who perceive wealth creation as involving multiple pathways may be more willing to engage in financial planning, investment diversification, and entrepreneurial ventures (Ajzen, 1991; Lusardi & Mitchell, 2023).

The Kenyan context provides a particularly important setting for examining the relationship between inherited work beliefs and financial success. Kenya has experienced remarkable growth in financial inclusion, mobile money adoption, entrepreneurship, and digital financial services over the past decade. According to the FinAccess Household Survey, formal financial inclusion has expanded significantly, reaching approximately 84.8 percent of the adult population (KNBS, CBK, & FSD Kenya, 2024). Mobile financial platforms, digital lending services, collective investment schemes, and entrepreneurship opportunities have created new pathways for wealth creation that were previously unavailable to many households (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022; World Bank, 2024). Nevertheless, levels of financial literacy, wealth accumulation, and financial resilience remain uneven, suggesting that access to financial services alone may not guarantee improved economic outcomes (OECD, 2023; KNBS, CBK, & FSD Kenya, 2024).

Nairobi County represents an especially relevant context for this investigation because it serves as Kenya's principal commercial, technological, and financial center. The county hosts a diverse population of professionals, entrepreneurs, investors, and salaried employees operating within an increasingly sophisticated economic environment. At the same time, many households continue to be influenced by traditional beliefs emphasizing labor effort, sacrifice, and perseverance as the primary determinants of success. This coexistence of traditional financial narratives and modern wealth-creation opportunities presents an important opportunity to examine how inherited beliefs influence contemporary financial behavior and outcomes.

Although previous studies have extensively examined financial literacy, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and investment behavior, relatively limited empirical attention has been devoted to the influence of generational work-related beliefs on financial success. Existing literature has largely focused on knowledge, access to financial services, and economic resources while paying comparatively less attention to the cognitive and cultural frameworks that shape financial decision-making (Klontz et al., 2022; Xiao & Porto, 2022). Consequently, an important knowledge gap remains regarding the extent to which inherited hard-work beliefs influence financial behavior and wealth accumulation among urban households.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success among urban households in Nairobi County, Kenya. Specifically, the study investigates whether traditional labor-centered beliefs influence financial behavior and whether financial behavior mediates the relationship between inherited beliefs and financial outcomes. By integrating perspectives from behavioral finance, financial psychology, Social Learning Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study contributes to emerging scholarship on the behavioral and cultural determinants of wealth creation within contemporary African economies.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Hard Work as a Generational Belief

The belief that hard work inevitably leads to economic success remains one of the most pervasive narratives within contemporary societies. Across generations, individuals are socialized to view diligence, sacrifice, perseverance, and long working hours as essential prerequisites for financial prosperity. These beliefs are reinforced through educational systems, religious teachings, family interactions, and workplace cultures (UNDP, 2024). As a result, hard work frequently becomes both a moral value and an economic strategy.

While hard work undoubtedly contributes to productivity and income generation, contemporary economic realities suggest that labor effort alone may not sufficiently explain wealth accumulation. Modern economies increasingly reward innovation, entrepreneurship, technological adaptation, financial capability, and ownership of productive assets (World Economic Forum, 2024). Consequently, individuals who rely exclusively on labor income may experience slower wealth accumulation than those who combine work effort with strategic investment and wealth-building practices.

Research in behavioral economics suggests that inherited beliefs often continue to influence behavior even after the economic conditions that produced them have changed. Socially transmitted narratives become cognitive frameworks through which individuals interpret opportunities, risks, and financial decisions (Morgan & Trinh, 2021). These frameworks may either facilitate or constrain economic advancement depending on their alignment with contemporary economic environments. The emergence of digital economies, remote work, financial technologies, and passive income opportunities has further challenged traditional assumptions regarding wealth creation. In contemporary urban economies, wealth is increasingly generated through ownership of assets, intellectual property, investment portfolios, and scalable business models rather than labor alone (Xiao & Porto, 2022). This shift raises important questions regarding whether inherited beliefs emphasizing hard work as the sole pathway to success remain appropriate in rapidly evolving economic environments.

Poverty Scripts and Financial Psychology

Financial psychology literature introduces the concept of money scripts to explain how unconscious beliefs shape financial behavior. Klontz et al. (2022) define money scripts as deeply embedded beliefs regarding money that develop during childhood and influence financial decisions throughout adulthood. These beliefs affect saving behavior, investment decisions, borrowing practices, spending habits, and wealth accumulation

According to financial psychologists, some money scripts may promote financial well-being while others may contribute to financial difficulties. Limiting financial beliefs are often referred to as poverty scripts because they constrain individuals' perceptions of available economic opportunities. Examples include beliefs such as 'rich people are dishonest,' 'money is difficult to obtain,' 'investing is too risky,' or 'hard work is the only legitimate way to earn wealth.'

Poverty scripts are particularly influential because they operate below conscious awareness Klontz et al. (2022). Individuals may unknowingly reject profitable opportunities because such opportunities conflict with deeply held beliefs regarding work and money (Xiao & Porto, 2022). For example, a person who strongly believes that wealth must be earned exclusively through physical effort may perceive passive income investments as unrealistic or morally questionable. Consequently, such individuals may underinvest in financial assets despite possessing the resources to do so. Research in behavioral finance demonstrates that financial decisions are often influenced by cognitive biases and social conditioning rather than purely rational analysis (Xiao & Porto, 2022). Individuals tend to interpret economic opportunities through the lens of their existing beliefs. As a result, inherited financial narratives may either facilitate or hinder wealth accumulation depending on the extent to which they align with contemporary economic realities.

Financial Literacy and Wealth Creation

Financial literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required to make informed financial decisions. It encompasses understanding concepts such as budgeting, saving, investing, borrowing, risk management, and financial planning. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies financial literacy as a critical life skill that enhances financial well-being and resilience. The OECD/INFE 2023 International Survey found that individuals with higher levels of financial literacy consistently reported greater financial well-being, stronger financial resilience, and better financial outcomes than individuals with lower levels of financial literacy. Similarly, evidence from Kenya suggests that financial inclusion has expanded significantly over the last decade. The 2024 FinAccess Household Survey reported that formal financial inclusion increased to 84.8 percent of adults. However, only 42.1 percent of Kenyans demonstrated adequate financial literacy, while only 18.3 percent were classified as financially healthy. These findings indicate that access to financial services alone does not automatically translate into wealth creation.

Financial knowledge and behavior remain critical determinants of financial well-being.

Numerous studies have established a positive relationship between financial literacy and financial well-being. Lusardi and Mitchell (2023) found that financially literate individuals are more likely to participate in financial markets, save for retirement, diversify investments, and accumulate wealth. Similarly, OECD (2023) reported that higher levels of financial literacy are associated with improved financial resilience and long-term financial security.

Financial literacy influences wealth accumulation through several mechanisms. First, financially literate individuals are more likely to save consistently and establish long-term financial goals (OECD, 2023). Second, they demonstrate greater participation in investment activities, including stocks, bonds, mutual funds, money market funds, and business ventures. Third, they exhibit stronger risk management capabilities and are less vulnerable to financial fraud and poor financial decisions. Consequently, individuals who possess financial knowledge may accumulate wealth more effectively than those who rely solely on labor income, regardless of the number of hours worked (KNBS, CBK, & FSD Kenya, 2024)..

Hard Work Beliefs and Financial Decision-Making

Financial decision-making involves choices relating to spending, saving, investing, borrowing, and wealth management. These decisions are influenced by financial knowledge as well as psychological and cultural factors. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, beliefs shape attitudes, which subsequently influence intentions and behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals who strongly subscribe to traditional hard-work narratives may prioritize employment-based income while undervaluing investment opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures (Lusardi (2024). Such individuals may perceive financial success primarily as a function of labor effort rather than strategic resource allocation. Conversely, individuals who embrace adaptive wealth-building beliefs are often more willing to pursue entrepreneurship, investment diversification, and asset acquisition (Lusardi 2024). In contrast, individuals who embrace adaptive wealth-building beliefs often recognize the importance of combining hard work with financial intelligence, innovation, and investment. These individuals may be more willing to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, diversify income streams, and participate in investment markets. The distinction between earned income and asset-generated income has become increasingly important within modern economies. Wealth accumulation is increasingly associated with ownership of productive assets, financial investments, intellectual property, and scalable business models rather than labor effort alone (World Bank, 2024). Consequently, financial success may depend not only on how hard individuals work but also on how effectively they deploy financial resources.

Empirical Review

Recent empirical studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between financial literacy and wealth accumulation. Morgan and Long (2020) found that financially literate individuals are more likely to save regularly, participate in investment markets, and maintain higher levels of financial well-being. Lusardi (2024) similarly reported that financial capability contributes positively to savings behavior, investment participation, and retirement preparedness Within Kenya, Charles and Musau (2024) established that financial literacy significantly influences investment participation and financial growth among individuals and institutions. Financial knowledge was associated with improved investment decisions, stronger financial planning practices, and higher wealth accumulation outcomes. These findings support the argument that financial success is influenced by strategic financial behavior rather than labor effort alone. Similarly, emerging evidence indicates that financially informed individuals are more likely to engage in investment activities, entrepreneurship, and long-term financial planning than those with limited financial knowledge. International studies similarly demonstrate that entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, and financial capability are significant determinants of wealth creation and long-term financial success. According to Kiyabo and Isaga (2020), individuals and enterprises that exhibit innovativeness, proactiveness, and calculated risk-taking are more likely to achieve superior financial performance and accumulate wealth than those that rely solely on traditional employment. Likewise, financial capability enhances individuals' capacity to make informed investment decisions, manage resources efficiently, and diversify income sources, thereby improving financial outcomes (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). Research further indicates that entrepreneurial competencies and access to finance stimulate innovation and business growth, which in turn contribute to sustainable wealth accumulation (Siddiqui & Rokade, 2026). Similarly, Rauch et al. (2009) found that entrepreneurial orientation is positively associated with organizational and financial performance across diverse economic contexts, suggesting that wealth generation is influenced not merely by hard work but also by strategic entrepreneurial behavior, innovation, and financial literacy.

Despite extensive literature on financial literacy and investment behavior, limited empirical research has examined how inherited beliefs about hard work influence financial outcomes. Most studies focus on knowledge, access to finance, or entrepreneurial capabilities while overlooking the role of underlying belief systems that shape financial decisions. This represents a significant knowledge gap, particularly within African urban contexts where traditional work ethics remain highly valued.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

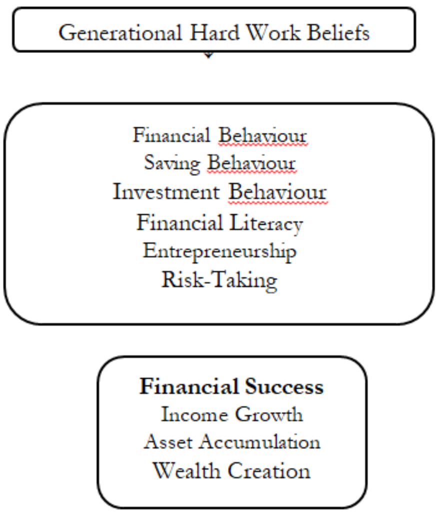
The Theory of Planned Behavior, developed by Ajzen (1991), posits that behavior is determined by intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Within the context of this study, hard-work beliefs shape attitudes toward wealth creation. Individuals who believe that success is achieved solely through hard work may develop attitudes that discourage investment, entrepreneurship, or alternative wealth-building mechanisms. These attitudes subsequently influence financial decisions and financial outcomes. The theory therefore provides a useful framework for explaining how inherited beliefs translate into observable financial behaviors.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), argues that individuals acquire behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes through observation and social interaction. Families, educational institutions, religious organizations, peers, and communities serve as important agents of socialization. The theory suggests that beliefs regarding work, money, and success are learned and transmitted across generations. Children who repeatedly observe messages emphasizing hard work as the sole pathway to prosperity may internalize these beliefs and carry them into adulthood. Social Learning Theory therefore explains the mechanism through which financial narratives become embedded within individuals and influence financial decision-making over time.

Conceptual Framework

The study proposes that generational hard-work beliefs influence financial success through their effect on financial behavior and decision-making.



The framework assumes that while hard work remains important, financial success is largely determined by how individuals translate effort into strategic financial decisions and wealth-building activities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sample

This study adopted a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between generational beliefs regarding hard work and financial success among urban households in Nairobi County, Kenya. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates the objective measurement of variables and enables the application of statistical techniques to determine relationships and predictive effects. A cross-sectional design was particularly suitable because data were collected from respondents at a single point in time, allowing the study to capture prevailing beliefs, financial behaviors, and financial outcomes within the target population. The study was conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya's principal commercial and financial center. Nairobi provides an appropriate context for investigating contemporary wealth creation dynamics because it hosts a diverse population of professionals, entrepreneurs, and salaried employees who operate within an increasingly digital and knowledge-driven economy. At the same time, many residents continue to be influenced by traditional beliefs regarding work, sacrifice, and economic success, making the county an ideal setting for examining the interaction between inherited work beliefs and modern wealth creation practices. The target population comprised young professionals and entrepreneurs operating within Nairobi County. These groups were selected because they are actively engaged in income-generating activities and are likely to have experienced both traditional and contemporary perspectives regarding financial success. The accessible population consisted of approximately 4,850 individuals drawn from professional associations, entrepreneurship networks, business groups, and urban employment sectors. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error, resulting in a sample size of 370 respondents.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of professionals and entrepreneurs within the sample. Following stratification, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents from each category. This approach enhanced representativeness and reduced the likelihood of sampling bias. Out of the 370 questionnaires distributed, 339 were successfully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 91.6 percent, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalization of findings.

Data Collection and Measurement

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from existing literature on financial behavior, wealth creation, behavioral finance, and social learning. The questionnaire consisted of both demographic and construct-specific items. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The independent variable, generational hard-work beliefs, was measured using statements assessing respondents' beliefs regarding the extent to which financial success is achieved through hard work, perseverance, sacrifice, and prolonged labour effort. The construct was conceptualised as a belief system acquired through family and societal socialisation, reflecting labour-centred views of wealth creation rather than actual financial decisions or behavioural intentions. Financial behavior was conceptualized as an intervening variable and measured through indicators relating to saving practices, investment participation, financial planning, entrepreneurial engagement, and willingness to take calculated financial risks. These dimensions were included because they represent practical pathways through which beliefs may influence financial outcomes.

The dependent variable, financial success, was measured using indicators relating to income growth, asset accumulation, investment portfolio growth, financial stability, and perceived financial well-being. Respondents were asked to evaluate their financial progress over time and indicate the extent to which they had experienced improvements in their economic circumstances. The measurement approach was informed by contemporary studies in behavioral finance and financial well-being, which recognize financial success as a multidimensional construct encompassing both objective and subjective outcomes. To preserve conceptual distinctiveness, generational hard-work beliefs were treated as a cognitive belief construct reflecting inherited perceptions of how wealth is created, whereas financial behaviour represented the behavioural actions undertaken by individuals, including saving, investing, entrepreneurship, financial planning, and risk-taking. The constructs were therefore conceptualized as theoretically related but analytically distinct.

Table 1: Operationalization of Study Variables

Variable	Indicators	Measurement Scale
Generational Hard-Work Beliefs	Labor-centered success beliefs, sacrifice orientation, traditional work ethic	Likert Scale (1–5)
Financial Behavior	Saving behavior, investment participation, financial planning, entrepreneurship, risk-taking	Likert Scale (1–5)
Financial Success	Income growth, asset accumulation, investment growth, financial well-being	Likert Scale (1–5)

Reliability and Validity

Prior to the main data collection exercise, a pilot study involving 37 respondents was conducted to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the research instrument. The pilot participants were drawn from a population similar to, but distinct from, the main study population. Feedback obtained during the pilot phase informed revisions to questionnaire wording and structure, thereby improving the quality of the instrument.

Content validity was established through expert review by scholars and practitioners with expertise in finance, behavioral economics, and research methodology. The reviewers assessed the extent to which the questionnaire items adequately represented the constructs under investigation and provided recommendations for refinement. Their feedback contributed to improving both the comprehensiveness and relevance of the measurement instrument.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to Hair et al. (2022), a coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable internal consistency. The reliability analysis yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.871, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. The results therefore confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for use in the main study.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Generational Hard-Work Beliefs	0.842
Financial Behavior	0.866
Financial Success	0.883
Overall Reliability	0.871

Data Analysis

Data were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 27). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of respondents and provide an overview of the study variables. Measures including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to describe prevailing perceptions regarding hard work, financial behavior, and financial success. Inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypotheses and determine the relationships among variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of the association between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success. Correlation coefficients were interpreted based on established statistical guidelines to determine the magnitude and significance of observed relationships.

To assess the predictive effect of generational hard-work beliefs on financial success, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

where Y represents financial success, β_0 represents the intercept, β_1 represents the regression coefficient, X_1 represents generational hard-work beliefs, and ε represents the error term. The regression model focused on the direct relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and occupation were analysed descriptively but were not included as control variables in the regression model because the primary objective was to establish the bivariate predictive relationship between the focal constructs. Given the theoretical proposition that financial behavior may explain how inherited beliefs influence financial outcomes, an additional mediation model was estimated in which financial behavior served as an intervening variable. This analysis enabled the study to determine whether the influence of hard-work beliefs on financial success operates directly or indirectly through financial decision-making processes. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5 percent level ($p < 0.05$). The study adhered to accepted ethical principles throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected or disclosed. All data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate and Respondent Characteristics

A total of 370 questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. Of these, 339 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 91.6 percent. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), a response rate above 70 percent is considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalization. The high response rate was therefore deemed sufficient to support the reliability and validity of the study findings. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed to provide an understanding of the composition of the study sample. The findings indicated that 54.6 percent of the respondents were male, while 45.4 percent were female. The majority of respondents (62.8%) were between 25 and 40 years of age, reflecting the dominance of economically active individuals within the sample. In terms of education, 71.4 percent possessed at least a bachelor's degree, suggesting a relatively educated population with the potential to access financial information and investment opportunities. Regarding occupation, 58.7 percent were salaried professionals while 41.3 percent were entrepreneurs. The study distinguished between inherited beliefs regarding the value of hard work and the financial behaviours through which individuals pursue wealth creation, thereby reducing conceptual overlap between the predictor and the mediating construct. The demographic profile suggests that the respondents were well positioned to provide informed perspectives regarding financial behavior, wealth creation, and the influence of inherited beliefs on economic outcomes.

Descriptive Analysis

The study sought to establish the extent to which respondents subscribed to traditional hard-work beliefs and how such beliefs influenced financial behavior and wealth creation practices. The findings revealed that a majority of respondents had been socialized to believe that financial success is primarily achieved through prolonged hard work and perseverance. Specifically, 68.4 percent agreed that hard work was the most important determinant of success, while 64.9 percent indicated that they had been taught from childhood that wealth is earned mainly through labor and sacrifice. Furthermore, 59.3 percent agreed that individuals should work harder rather than seek alternative wealth-generation strategies. However, only 27.1 percent of respondents reported being exposed to concepts such as investing, passive income generation, financial leverage, or wealth-building strategies during their formative years. Similarly, only 31.8 percent indicated that their families actively discussed investment opportunities and long-term wealth creation. The results suggest that traditional narratives emphasizing labor effort continue to dominate financial socialization processes among many urban households in Nairobi.

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Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the study variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Generational Hard-Work Beliefs	4.11	0.68
Financial Behavior	3.52	0.74
Financial Success	3.44	0.79

The mean score of 4.11 for generational hard-work beliefs indicates a strong prevalence of traditional work-centered beliefs among respondents. The mean score for financial behavior suggests moderate engagement in investment, savings, and entrepreneurial activities. Financial success recorded a moderate mean score of 3.44, indicating that respondents had achieved varying levels of economic progress.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Generational Hard-Work Beliefs	1.000		
2. Financial Behavior	-0.571**	1.000	
3. Financial Success	-0.594**	0.628**	1.000

**$p < 0.01$

The results indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success ($r = -0.594$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that stronger adherence to traditional labor-centered beliefs is associated with lower levels of wealth accumulation and financial growth. The analysis further revealed a significant negative relationship between hard-work beliefs and financial behavior ($r = -0.571$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents who strongly embraced traditional work narratives were less likely to engage in investment activities, entrepreneurial ventures, and strategic wealth-building practices. Conversely, financial behavior exhibited a significant positive relationship with financial success ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals who actively saved, invested, and pursued entrepreneurial opportunities reported superior financial outcomes.

These findings support the argument that financial success is influenced not only by effort but also by the quality of financial decisions and wealth-creation strategies adopted by individuals.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which generational hard-work beliefs predict financial success.

Table 5: Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.643
R^2	0.413
Adjusted R^2	0.409
Standard Error	0.611

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The model produced an R^2 value of 0.413, indicating that generational hard-work beliefs explained approximately 41.3 percent of the variation in financial success among respondents. This level of explanatory power suggests that inherited beliefs regarding work and wealth constitute a substantial determinant of financial outcomes. The findings should, however, be interpreted with caution. Although the observed relationship was statistically significant, the regression model did not control for potentially confounding demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as age, education level, occupation, or prior income. Consequently, part of the observed association may reflect the influence of factors not explicitly modelled in the present study. Future research should employ multivariable regression models incorporating these covariates to isolate the independent effect of generational hard-work beliefs on financial success.

Table 6: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	92.741	1	92.741	237.168	0.000
Residual	131.842	337	0.391		
Total	224.583	338			

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 237.168$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that the model adequately explains the relationship between the study variables.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Variable	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	4.271	0.188	22.718	0.000
Generational Hard-Work Beliefs	-0.482	0.031	-15.401	0.000

The findings reveal that generational hard-work beliefs exert a significant negative influence on financial success ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$). The negative coefficient suggests that stronger adherence to traditional labor-centered success narratives is associated with lower levels of wealth accumulation and financial advancement. The null hypothesis stating that generational hard-work beliefs have no significant influence on financial success was therefore rejected.

Examination of the Proposed Mediating Relationship

To examine whether the observed relationships were consistent with the proposed theoretical model, the associations among generational hard-work beliefs, financial behavior, and financial success were assessed. The results showed a significant negative relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial behavior ($r = -0.571$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that respondents who more strongly adhered to traditional labor-centered success narratives were less likely to engage in strategic financial activities such as investing, entrepreneurship, wealth diversification, and long-term financial planning. Financial behavior was also positively associated with financial success ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals who actively saved, invested, diversified income sources, and practiced financial planning reported better financial outcomes. Taken together, these findings are consistent with the proposition that financial behavior may represent an important pathway through which generational hard-work beliefs are associated with financial success. However, because the study employed a cross-sectional design, these relationships should be interpreted as associative rather than causal, and the proposed mediating mechanism cannot be confirmed. Instead, the observed pattern of relationships provides empirical support for the study's theoretical framework. The findings are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that beliefs shape attitudes and intentions that subsequently influence behavior. They also align with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that beliefs acquired through socialization continue to shape behavior throughout the life course. Future studies employing longitudinal designs and formal tests of indirect effects, such as bootstrapped mediation analysis, are needed to establish whether financial behavior mediates the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success among urban households in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success ($r = -0.594$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that stronger adherence to traditional labor-centered success narratives is associated with lower levels of wealth accumulation and financial advancement. The regression analysis further demonstrated that generational hard-work beliefs significantly predicted financial success ($\beta = -0.482$, $p < 0.001$), with the model explaining approximately 41.3 percent of the variation in financial success ($R^2 = 0.413$). This level of explanatory power is substantial within behavioral and social science research and indicates that inherited beliefs regarding work and wealth constitute an important determinant of economic outcomes. The findings suggest that while hard work remains valuable, excessive reliance on labor effort as the primary wealth-creation strategy may limit participation in alternative opportunities capable of generating long-term financial growth. These findings support emerging evidence within behavioral finance literature which argues that financial outcomes are shaped not only by economic resources but also by beliefs, attitudes, and cognitive frameworks (Xiao & Porto, 2022; Klontz et al., 2011). Financial decisions are rarely made in a purely rational manner. Instead, individuals frequently interpret opportunities through inherited assumptions regarding money, risk, effort, and success. Where such assumptions emphasize labor effort as the sole legitimate pathway to prosperity, opportunities involving investing, entrepreneurship, asset acquisition, and financial leverage may be underutilized.

The findings are particularly consistent with research conducted by Lusardi and Mitchell (2023), who found that individuals possessing stronger financial capability and broader financial knowledge are more likely to participate in investment markets, accumulate assets, and achieve long-term financial security. Similarly, Morgan and Long (2020) reported that financially informed households demonstrate superior financial resilience and wealth accumulation compared to households that rely primarily on employment income. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that financial behavior is influenced not only by financial knowledge but also by inherited beliefs regarding how wealth should be created.

The results also align with the work of Klontz et al. (2011), who argued that money scripts acquired during childhood significantly influence adult financial behavior. According to financial psychology theory, individuals frequently develop unconscious beliefs regarding money that guide financial decisions throughout their lives. The current findings suggest that the belief that "hard work alone creates wealth" may function as a limiting money script when it discourages investment participation, entrepreneurship, and strategic wealth-building behavior. An important contribution of this study lies in its Kenyan context. While many previous studies have focused on financial literacy and financial inclusion, relatively few have examined how inherited work-related beliefs influence wealth accumulation in African economies. Kenya presents a particularly interesting environment because of its rapid expansion of digital finance, entrepreneurship, and investment opportunities. According to the FinAccess Household Survey (2024), formal financial inclusion has expanded significantly over the last decade. However, the present findings suggest that access to financial services alone may not guarantee wealth accumulation if individuals continue to operate within restrictive financial belief systems.

The findings further revealed that respondents who embraced adaptive wealth-building approaches reported an average monthly income growth rate of 22.7 percent compared to only 8.9 percent among respondents who strongly adhered to traditional hard-work-only ideologies. This difference is economically significant and suggests that individuals who combine hard work with investing, entrepreneurship, financial planning, and income diversification may achieve substantially better financial outcomes than those who rely exclusively on labor income. The finding supports contemporary wealth-creation theories which emphasize asset ownership, scalable income streams, and financial leverage as important drivers of long-term prosperity (World Bank, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2024). From a theoretical perspective, the findings provide empirical support for both Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior. Social Learning Theory is supported because respondents exposed to traditional work-centered narratives demonstrated significantly different financial behaviors from those exposed to broader wealth-creation perspectives. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior is validated because beliefs regarding work and success influenced financial attitudes and behaviors that ultimately affected financial outcomes.

This study contributes to the behavioral finance literature by demonstrating that financial success is not merely a function of effort, income, or access to financial services. Rather, financial success appears to emerge from a complex interaction between inherited beliefs, financial behavior, financial literacy, and wealth-creation strategies. The findings therefore challenge traditional assumptions that hard work alone guarantees economic advancement and suggest that modern wealth accumulation increasingly requires a combination of diligence, financial intelligence, strategic decision-making, entrepreneurship, and investment participation.

The study is important because it introduces generational hard-work beliefs as an explanatory variable within the wealth-creation literature. Existing studies have extensively examined financial literacy, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship, but comparatively few have investigated the influence of inherited work-related belief systems on financial outcomes. By identifying financial behavior as a significant mediating mechanism, the study provides new insights into how cultural narratives and socialized beliefs shape economic behavior and wealth accumulation in contemporary urban economies.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between generational hard-work beliefs and financial success among urban households in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings indicate that while hard work remains an important value in personal and economic development, exclusive reliance on labor-centered beliefs may constrain wealth accumulation in contemporary economies. Respondents who strongly adhered to traditional narratives emphasizing hard work as the primary pathway to prosperity were less likely to engage in strategic financial behaviors such as investing, entrepreneurship, income diversification, and long-term financial planning. The results further revealed a significant negative relationship between rigid hard-work beliefs and financial success, while financial behavior was found to partially mediate this relationship. This suggests that inherited beliefs influence financial outcomes primarily through their effect on financial decision-making and wealth-building behavior. Consequently, hard work remains necessary but increasingly insufficient as a standalone strategy for wealth creation in economies characterized by technological innovation, financial sophistication, and expanding investment opportunities. The study contributes to behavioral finance and financial psychology literature by demonstrating that inherited beliefs and socialized narratives play an important role in shaping financial outcomes. It also extends Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior by illustrating how generational beliefs influence financial attitudes, behaviors, and wealth accumulation processes.

Theoretical Implications

The findings provide support for Social Learning Theory by demonstrating that beliefs regarding work, money, and success acquired through socialization continue to influence financial behavior in adulthood. The study also supports the Theory of Planned Behavior by showing that inherited beliefs shape attitudes toward wealth creation, which subsequently influence financial behavior and outcomes. More broadly, the findings contribute to behavioral finance literature by highlighting the importance of cognitive and cultural factors in explaining financial decision-making and wealth accumulation.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that financial literacy interventions should move beyond basic financial knowledge to address underlying beliefs and attitudes toward money, work, and wealth creation. Educational institutions, employers, and financial service providers should promote investment literacy, entrepreneurship, financial planning, and asset ownership as complementary pathways to financial success. Such interventions may help individuals develop adaptive financial behaviors capable of enhancing long-term financial well-being.

Policy Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening financial literacy programs targeting urban households, young professionals, and entrepreneurs, with greater emphasis on investment participation, entrepreneurship, financial planning, and asset accumulation. The Ministry of Education should integrate practical financial education into secondary and tertiary curricula, while financial institutions should expand customer education initiatives aimed at promoting long-term wealth creation and informed financial decision-making.

Limitations of the Study

As with many quantitative survey studies, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study design. The study employed a cross-sectional approach, which provides a useful snapshot of the relationships among generational hard-work beliefs, financial behavior, and financial success at a particular point in time. In addition, financial behavior and financial success were assessed using respondents' self-reports, providing valuable insights into participants' perceptions and experiences. The study focused on urban households in Nairobi County, offering context-specific evidence on financial beliefs and wealth creation. Future research may build on these findings by adopting longitudinal designs, incorporating objective financial indicators where feasible, and extending the investigation to other geographical and socioeconomic contexts to further enrich understanding of these relationships.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should examine the relationship between generational financial beliefs and wealth accumulation using longitudinal designs that track financial behavior over time. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the causal pathways linking inherited beliefs to financial outcomes. Further research should investigate the moderating influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, occupation, and income on the relationship between hard-work beliefs and financial success. Understanding these differences may help identify population groups that are particularly vulnerable to limiting financial narratives. Comparative studies involving rural and urban populations, as well as cross-country investigations within Africa, would provide valuable insights into how cultural and socioeconomic contexts shape financial beliefs and wealth creation practices. Such studies could contribute to the development of more context-specific financial literacy and economic empowerment interventions. Finally, future scholars should explore additional psychological constructs such as financial self-efficacy, risk tolerance, entrepreneurial mindset, and future orientation as potential mediators or moderators in the relationship between inherited beliefs and financial success. Such investigations would further advance understanding of the behavioral mechanisms underlying wealth accumulation in contemporary economies.

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