

Influence of Attachment Styles on Delinquency among Adolescents in Church Managed Reintegration Centers in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya

*Flora K. Luke

Department of Psychology, Catholic University of Eastern Africa

*Correspondance Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8080284>

Received: 28 April 2024; Accepted: 10 May 2024; Published: 20 September 2024

ABSTRACT

Adolescent delinquency, encompassing criminal activity by minors, is a growing global issue that poses significant challenges to communities, jeopardizing public safety and youth development.

This study employed a survey research design, administering standardized questionnaires on Attachment Styles and the Adolescent Delinquency Scale to 89 adolescents (aged 13-17) residing in three church-managed reintegration centers.

The quantitative analysis revealed avoidant attachment as the most prevalent style. Descriptive statistics identified moderate delinquency as the most common form of offending behavior. Correlation analysis showed a weak negative association between avoidant attachment and overall delinquency.

The findings suggest that attachment styles influence delinquency among adolescents in reintegration centers. Further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms of this relationship. The study highlights the potential importance of interventions that address attachment issues and cater to the specific needs of adolescent males in these settings.

Keywords: attachment styles, delinquency, parenting styles, adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent delinquency, characterized by criminal activity among individuals under the age of 18, is a pressing concern globally, with instances showing an upward trend in recent years (Nilsson et al., 2017). Understanding the multifaceted factors contributing to delinquency is crucial for devising effective prevention and intervention strategies. The issue of delinquency is complex, extending beyond immediate familial influences.

Van Der Laan's (2019) research from the Netherlands noted a decline in juvenile delinquency since 2007, possibly attributed to shifts in exposure to risk factors and increased parental supervision. Conversely, studies in China have identified a positive association between parental psychological control and delinquency, while noting a negative correlation with behavioral control (Zhu et al., 2020), underscoring the nuanced influences of parenting styles.

Similarly, Erude (2020) compared juvenile crime rates between the USA and Kenya, highlighting the significance of positive reinforcement from responsible adults in curbing delinquency. In Finland, Knaappila et al. (2019) conducted a population-based survey of 14- to 16-year-old adolescents, revealing positive associations between delinquency and socioeconomic disadvantages such as parental unemployment, low education levels, and single-parent households.

In African contexts, studies have explored the challenges of juvenile detention facilities in Nigeria, revealing

issues such as overcrowding, inadequate rehabilitation resources, and limited vocational training opportunities (Idowu & Muhammed, 2019). Furthermore, Peter and Nwadukwe (2022) argue that adolescent delinquency is one of the significant challenges facing Nigerian society today, with adolescents engaging in various crimes, including rape, theft, kleptomania, burglary, rebellion, murder, vandalism, and robbery. Their research focused on Rivers State in Nigeria and aimed to investigate the connection between interpersonal relationships and adolescent crime, finding that children in dysfunctional, single-parent homes were more likely to become criminals than their peers in two-parent families.

Similarly, among Tanzanian secondary school students, Ochieng (2022) studied the prevalence of psychoactive substance use and associated behavioral risks. Employing an embedded mixed approach, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews with school administrators, focus groups with teachers and students, and evaluations of relevant documentaries. The findings highlighted marijuana (cannabis), cigarettes, and alcohol as the most commonly used psychoactive substances, with peer pressure, stressful home situations, and easy access to mind-altering chemicals identified as contributors to the normalization of substance abuse among Tanzanian youth.

Adolescent delinquency is a pressing concern in various regions, as evidenced by Mokeira's (2019) investigation in Mumias Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya. Employing a descriptive approach, this study examined the effects of juvenile delinquency on academic performance among 7,548 second and third graders. Findings highlighted a negative correlation between delinquent behaviors and academic achievement, underscoring the detrimental impact on students' educational outcomes.

Moreover, Chapia et al. (2021) explored the influence of parental factors on substance abuse among high school students in Kinango Sub-County, Kwale County. Their findings indicated a significant positive correlation between parental influence and substance abuse among secondary school pupils, emphasizing the pivotal role of parental guidance in mitigating delinquent behaviors.

Moracha et al. (2021) also investigated behavioral problems in a Kenyan juvenile detention center, drawing from psychoanalytic and social learning theories. Their study revealed insights into attachment dynamics within religiously affiliated reintegration facilities, advocating for constructive correctional strategies to address juvenile criminal behavior and foster positive reintegration into society.

Furthermore, Walter et al. (2021) delved into adolescent aggression among secondary school students in Nairobi County, examining the association between attachment types and violent behavior. Their correlational study highlighted the predictive role of attachment styles in determining students' aggressive tendencies, shedding light on potential avenues for intervention and support.

Attachment theory, a crucial variable in this study, provides a lens through which to understand the impact of early caregiving experiences on adolescent development and behavior (Hoeve et al., 2012). Bowlby's theory posits that children form internal working models of attachment based on early interactions with caregivers, influencing their relationships and behaviors throughout life (Bretherton, 1990). Secure attachment fosters emotional resilience and positive social outcomes, while insecure attachment styles—such as avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized attachments—are associated with behavioral problems and delinquency (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018).

Research has shown that adolescents with secure attachment to caregivers exhibit higher levels of positive affect, lower stress levels, and increased life satisfaction. Conversely, insecure attachment styles are linked to difficulties in emotion regulation, low self-esteem, and negative conduct (Mónaco et al., 2019). Specifically, adolescents with avoidant attachment tend to exhibit socially withdrawn behavior, while those with ambivalent attachment may struggle with emotional instability and aggression (Shui, 2016).

The quality of parent-child attachment plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent behavior and delinquency outcomes (Kumuyi et al., 2021). Studies have found that authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and reasonable control, is associated with lower levels of delinquency, whereas authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles contribute to increased delinquent behavior (Cartwright & Gibson, 2017). Additionally, parental conflict

and maltreatment have been linked to higher rates of offending behavior among adolescents, highlighting the importance of a supportive family environment (Lu et al., 2020; Steketee et al., 2021).

Additionally, fix et al. (2021) conducted a study on 350 male adolescents incarcerated in a correctional facility, titled "Parent-Child Attachment and Delinquency among African American and European American Juvenile Offenders." This study investigated the role of self-control as a mediator between parental attachment and delinquency. The researchers found that the relationship between attachment to parents and antisocial behavior was mediated by the adolescents' self-control abilities. Specifically, aspects of parent-child attachment were found to be more predictive of delinquency in African American teenagers compared to European American adolescents. While models with European American adolescents confirmed previous theories regarding the link between self-control and criminal behavior, models with African American adolescents did not predict criminal behavior as strongly, suggesting a potential limitation of the self-control theory in this population. Overall, the study highlighted the nuanced role of parent-child attachment and self-control in predicting delinquency among different racial groups, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches to addressing juvenile delinquency.

This study aims to investigate the potential association between attachment styles and delinquency among adolescents in Kenyan reintegration centers. By exploring this link, we hope to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of delinquency in Kenya and inform interventions that promote positive youth development and reduce recidivism.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design to gather in-depth information on the influence of attachment styles on delinquency among adolescents in church-managed reintegration centers. Three adolescent reintegration centers in Nairobi County—Bosco Boys, Cottolengo Children's Home, and Nyumbani Community—were selected for the study due to their shared characteristics and focus on addressing delinquency and attachment issues in young people. Focusing on reintegration centers allows for investigating a population likely experiencing attachment issues and delinquency, while also offering easier access to participants and facilitating ethical research practices. Furthermore, examining this specific context, with its potential incorporation of faith-based approaches, provided valuable insights into the interplay between attachment styles and behavior among these adolescents.

The selection of participants is a critical aspect of research methodology (Creswell, 2014). For this study, a total of 89 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years were utilized. A census method was employed for the 89 adolescent participants due to the small size of the population for quantitative data.

The Attachment Styles Questionnaire, adapted from Robinson et al. (2001), was used to assess attachment styles. This questionnaire consists of 21 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, measuring attachment types based on the research by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). The Adolescent Delinquency Scale, developed by Farrington (1999), was employed to assess the severity of juvenile offenders' actions. This 19-item scale evaluates various antisocial behaviors, including violence, substance abuse, theft, and vandalism, using a five-point Likert scale.

RESULTS

The findings presented in this section encompass demographics, attachment styles, the prevalence of delinquent behaviors, and the influence of attachment styles on delinquency in church-run reintegration centers in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya. The data gathered through questionnaires and interviews were summarized using percentages, means, and ANOVA tables.

Sample Characteristics

This section presents results on the demographic characteristics of respondents, including age and gender. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 17 years. The majority of adolescents in church-run reintegration centers were 15 years old, comprising 28.1% of the total population, followed closely by 16-year-olds at 24.7%.

The majority of adolescents in church-run reintegration centers were male, representing 79.8% (71) of the total population, while females accounted for 20.2% (18).

Attachment styles of the adolescents

This section presents results on attachment styles of the adolescents in church managed reintegration centres.

Attachment Styles of the Adolescents

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Secure Attachment	89	1.00	4.71	2.0144	.64179
Avoidant Attachment	88	1.57	3.43	2.5065	.36688
Disorganized Attachment	88	1.25	3.63	2.4077	.45387

This table presents the mean and standard deviation of different attachment styles among adolescents in church-run reintegration centers. Avoidant attachment has the highest mean, indicating that most adolescents exhibit this attachment style.

Prevalence of Delinquent Behaviors of Adolescents

The findings about prevalence of delinquent behaviors of adolescents in church managed reintegration centers are shown in this section.

Levels of Delinquency of Adolescents

		N	%
Mild Delinquency		20	22.5%
Moderate Delinquency		42	47.2%
Severe Delinquency		16	18.0%
Missing	System	11	12.4%

This table illustrates the levels of delinquency among adolescents in church-run reintegration centers. Moderate delinquency is the most prevalent, followed by mild and severe delinquency.

Relationship of Attachment Styles on Adolescent Delinquency

The results of research on the relationship of attachment styles on adolescent delinquency in church managed integration centers are presented below.

Correlation between attachment styles and overall delinquency

		Secure Attachment	Avoidant Attachment	Disorganized Attachment	Overall Delinquency
Secure Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	.171	-.019	.080

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.111	.858	.485
	N	89	88	88	78
Avoidant Attachment	Pearson Correlation	.171	1	.645**	-.271*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.111		.000	.017
	N	88	88	87	77
Disorganized Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.019	.645**	1	-.177
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.858	.000		.124
	N	88	87	88	77
Overall Delinquency	Pearson Correlation	.080	-.271*	-.177	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.485	.017	.124	
	N	78	77	77	78

There's a significant relationship between avoidant attachment and overall delinquency in that it has a correlation of $-.271$ and a p value of $.017$. This means that there's a weak negative relationship between avoidant attachment and overall delinquency.

DISCUSSION

The demographic analysis revealed interesting insights into the age and gender distribution of adolescents in church-run reintegration centers. The majority of participants were 15 and 16 years old, indicating that these age groups are more prevalent in such centers. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that adolescence, particularly the mid-teen years, is a critical period for intervention in delinquent behavior (Simmons et al., 2018).

When assessing attachment styles among adolescents in church-run reintegration centers, noteworthy patterns emerged. The predominance of avoidant attachment suggests that a substantial proportion of adolescents in these centers exhibit insecure attachment patterns characterized by emotional distance and detachment from caregivers. According to Kozłowska et al. (2021), a child's likelihood of being classified as having a high-risk attachment pattern (insecure attachment) is increased by lower socioeconomic status, family constellation (a non-traditional family unit), and adverse childhood experiences, including maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence). This finding is consistent with attachment theory, which posits that insecure attachment can predispose individuals to behavioral problems, including delinquency (Bowlby, 1988).

The prevalence of avoidant attachment underscores the importance of addressing attachment issues in interventions targeting juvenile offenders. Strategies aimed at fostering secure attachments between adolescents and caregivers, such as family therapy and mentoring programs, may help mitigate delinquent behavior by addressing underlying emotional needs (Green et al., 2019).

The analysis of delinquent behaviors among adolescents in church-run reintegration centers provided valuable insights into the nature and extent of offending in this population. The high prevalence of moderate delinquency, followed by mild and severe delinquency, highlights the multifaceted nature of delinquent behavior among adolescents in reintegration settings. Similarly, other findings reported a modest prevalence of delinquency in the overall population (Knaappila et al., 2019). These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive intervention strategies that address various forms of delinquency, ranging from minor offenses to more serious

crimes.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistics of delinquent behaviors revealed specific areas of concern, such as theft, substance abuse, and violence, which warrant targeted interventions. Programs focusing on skill-building, conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention may help address these behavioral issues and promote positive youth development in reintegration centers (Wasserman et al., 2015).

The correlation analysis between attachment styles and overall delinquency yielded important insights into the relationship between attachment patterns and behavioral outcomes among adolescents in reintegration centers. The significant negative correlation between avoidant attachment and overall delinquency suggests that adolescents with higher levels of avoidant attachment may engage in fewer delinquent behaviors. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that avoidant attachment may serve as a protective factor against delinquency by promoting emotional self-regulation and autonomy (Allen et al., 2019).

This finding contrasts with other studies that reported a significant influence of attachment styles on delinquency among adolescents, indicating that strong, secure attachments between parents and children reduce delinquent behaviors (Lee et al., 2013; Arbona & Power, 2003). These studies underscore the importance of effective parental engagement, including open communication and attentiveness to changes in children's attitudes, as crucial for developing problem-solving skills and positive behaviors.

Our results also disagree with Yilmaz and Tras' (2019) findings, which demonstrated that adolescent delinquent actions are positively correlated with the preoccupied style, a sub-dimension of insecure attachment. Additionally, in contrast to our findings, higher levels of fearful and dismissing attachment styles (insecure attachment), along with increased physical activity, according to Maalouf et al. (2022), were significantly linked to elevated physical and verbal aggression. It was also found that a higher fearful attachment style was associated with greater anger, while a secure attachment style corresponded to reduced anger. Furthermore, higher levels of preoccupied and dismissing attachment styles were significantly related to increased hostility.

However, the weak correlation underscores the complex interplay between attachment styles and delinquent behavior, indicating that multiple factors may contribute to adolescent offending. Future research exploring the mechanisms underlying the relationship between attachment styles and delinquency is warranted to inform targeted interventions and support the positive development of at-risk youth in reintegration settings.

REFERENCES

1. Allen, J. P., Manning, N., & Fischer, A. A. (2019). Emotion regulation and attachment: Unpacking two constructs and their association. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, Volume 41(1), 137-147.
2. Bowlby, J. (1988). Developmental psychiatry comes of age. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.
3. Arbona, C., & Power, T.G. (2003). Parental attachment, self-esteem, and antisocial behaviors among African American, European American, and Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50(1), 40-51.
4. Bretherton, I. (1990). Communication patterns, internal working models, and the intergenerational transmission of attachment relationships. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 11(3), 237-252.
5. Cartwright, C., Gibson, K. (2017). Stepmothers perceptions and experiences of the wicked stepmother stereotype. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(7). <http://doi.10.1177/10192513x17739049>.
6. Chapia, M., Kimani, M., & Rop, N. (2021). Parental influence on drug and substance abuse among secondary school students in Kinango sub-county, Kenya. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 8(10). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v8i10.3942>
7. Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research Designs: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. London: Sage
8. Erude, Cara. (2020). *Juvenile Delinquency in the United States versus Kenya A Cross-Cultural Comparison final document*. Western Illinois University
9. Farrington, D. P. (1999). Validity of self-reported delinquency. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 9, 293–295. doi:10.1002/cbm.327

9. Fix, R et al (2021) Parent-Child Relations and Delinquency Among African American and European American Juvenile Offenders: An Expanded Examination of Self-Control Theory. *Race and Justice*, 11(1), 28–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368718776052>
10. Green, J., McLaughlin, K. A., Berglund, P. A., Gruber, M. J., Sampson, N. A., Zaslavsky, A. M., & Kessler, R. C. (2019). Childhood adversities and adult psychiatric disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication II: Associations with persistence of DSM-IV disorders. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 67(2), 124-132.
11. Hoeve, M., Stams, G. J. J., Van der Put, C. E., Dubas, J. S., Van der Laan, P. H., & Gerris, J. R. (2012). A meta-analysis of attachment to parents and delinquency. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 40(5), 771-785.
12. Idowu O.A. and Muhammed A. (2019): Challenges of controlling delinquency and juvenile recidivism in a correctional center in Ondo State Nigeria.
13. Kozłowska, K., Chudleigh, C., McClure, G., Maguire, A. M., & Ambler, G. R. (2021). Attachment Patterns in Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.582688>
14. Knaappila, N., Marttunen, M., Fröjd, S., Lindberg, N., & Kaltiala-Heino, R. (2019). Changes in delinquency according to socioeconomic status among Finnish adolescents from 2000 to 2015. *Scandinavian journal of child and adolescent psychiatry and psychology*, 7, 52–59. <https://doi.org/10.21307/sjcapp-2019-008>
15. Kumuyi, D. et al (2021) Parental Factors as Determinants of Conduct Disorder among In-School Adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. *Psychology*, 12, 643-659. doi: 10.4236/psych.2021.124040.
16. Lee, P. G., Chong Abdullah, M., Elias, H., & Uli, J. (2013). PARENTAL ATTACHMENT AS PREDICTOR OF DELINQUENCY. In *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction: Vol. Vol. 10* (pp. 99–117). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137225.pdf>
17. Lu H. et al (2020) Interparental Conflict and Delinquency Among Chinese Adolescents: Parental Knowledge as a Mediator and Deviant Peer Affiliation as a Moderator. *Front. Psychol.* 11:1775. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01775
18. Maalouf, E., Salameh, P., Haddad, C., Sacre, H., Hallit, S., & Obeid, S. (2022). Attachment styles and their association with aggression, hostility, and anger in Lebanese adolescents: a national study. *BMC Psychology*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-022-00813-9>
19. Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2018). Attachment theory as a framework for studying relationship dynamics and functioning. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships* (2nd ed., pp. 175–185). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417867.015>
20. Mokeira (2019) Influence of juvenile delinquency in secondary school on students' academic performance: a case study of Mumias sub-county, Kakamega County, Kenya.
21. Mónaco, E., Schoeps, K., & Montoya-Castilla, I. (2019). Attachment Styles and Well-Being in Adolescents: How Does Emotional Development Affect This Relationship? *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(14), 2554. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16142554>
22. Moracha, E. et al. (2021). Examination of the prevalence of conduct disorder among young Offenders: A case study of Shikusa Borstal Institution, Kenya. *Research Journal in Advanced Social Sciences*, 2(1) Retrieved from <https://royalliteglobal.com/rjass/article/view/637>
23. Nilsson, A., Estrada, F., & Backman, O. (2017). The unequal crime drop: Changes over time in the distribution of crime among individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. *European Journal of Criminology*, 14(5), 586-605.
24. Ochieng, J. (2022). Prevalence of Psychoactive Substance Use and Associated Behavioral Risks among Secondary School Students in Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 3(4)185-196. Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/eajess.v3i4.211>.
25. Peter, P. F., & Nwadukwe, H. T. (2022). Effects of Family Structure on Juvenile Delinquency in Rivers State: A Theoretical Review. *Central Asian journal of social sciences and history*, 3(10), 75-94.
26. Robinson, C. C., Mandlaco, B., Roper, S. O., & Hart, C. H. (2001). The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ). ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284239814_The_Parenting_Styles_and_Dimensions_Questionnaire_PSDQ

27. Shui, M. Y. (2016). Blended families and their influence on sibling relationships and first union formation. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 77(5). <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxyub.rug>.
28. Simmons, C., Steinberg, L., Frick, P. J., & Cauffman, E. (2018). The differential influence of absent and harsh fathers on juvenile delinquency. *Journal of Adolescence*, 62, 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.10.010>
29. Steketee, M., Aussems, C., & Marshall, I. H. (2021). Exploring the Impact of Child Maltreatment and Interparental Violence on Violent Delinquency in an International Sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(13–14), NP7319–NP7349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518823291>
30. Van Der Laan, A., Rokven, J., Weijters, G., & Beerthuisen, M. G. C. J. (2019). The drop in juvenile delinquency in the Netherlands: changes in exposure to risk and protection. *Justice Quarterly*, 38(3), 433–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1656762>
31. Walter O. et al (2021) "Role of Attachment Styles in Aggressive Behavior among Secondary School Students in Nairobi County, Kenya." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 11(05): pp. 49-56.
32. Wasserman, G. A., Keenan, K., Tremblay, R. E., Coie, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Loeber, R., ... & Niccols, A. (2015). Risk and protective factors of child delinquency. In *Developmental Origins of Aggression* (pp. 29-48). Springer, New York, NY.
33. Yilmaz, M. and Tras, Z. (2019). The Investigation of Risk-Taking Behavior in Adolescents in Terms of Attachment Styles and Social Problem-Solving. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 5(2), 343-348
34. Zhu et al (2020). The Influence of Adolescent Problem Behaviors on Life Satisfaction: Parent–Child Subsystem Qualities as Mediators. *Child Ind Res* 13, 1767–1789 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-020-09719-7>