

# Parenting Practices and Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Zambia: A Case Study of Chipata Central Constituency

Mercy Mutale Mukuka

School of Humanities, Rusangu University, Monze, Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between parenting practices and juvenile delinquency in Chipata Central Constituency, Eastern Province, Zambia. The research examined how parenting styles, parental care, parental attachment, and spiritual nurturing influence delinquent behaviors including aggression, emotional instability, child prostitution, and disobedience among young people.

A cross-sectional survey design used 100 randomly selected parents from 31 residential areas in Chipata Central Constituency. Data were collected using structured questionnaires with Likert-scale items and analyzed using SPSS version 26. Pearson correlation coefficients established relationships between parenting variables and delinquent outcomes. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .775$ ), with subscale alphas from .71 to .82, exceeding the acceptable threshold (Taber, 2018; Nunnally, 1978).

Results revealed that indulgent parenting was the predominant style practiced (89% of parents focused primarily on children's behavior), correlating significantly with aggressive behaviors ( $r = +.433$ ,  $p < .01$ ). While 98% of parents acknowledged shared responsibility for childcare, parental care showed modest correlation with emotional outcomes ( $r = +.269$ ). Critically, 94% of respondents identified peer group influence, rather than parental attachment, as the primary driver of child prostitution. While widely endorsed (99%), spiritual nurturing showed only a weak correlation with reduced disobedience ( $r = +.084$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This finding supports Mukuka's (2022) assertion that spiritual formation in Zambian contexts must contend with multiple, and sometimes competing, spiritual frameworks.

This study provides the first empirical evidence on parenting-delinquency dynamics in Chipata Central Constituency, challenging universal assumptions about parental attachment and highlighting the dominant role of peer networks in shaping delinquent behavior in urban Zambian contexts.

**Keywords:** Parenting styles, juvenile delinquency, child upbringing, peer influence, spiritual nurturing, Chipata, Zambia

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Juvenile delinquency represents a pressing global concern with profound implications for social stability, community development, and national prosperity. Research has consistently demonstrated that parenting practices play a crucial role in shaping adolescent behavioral outcomes, with authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, balanced control, and rational discipline strongly linked to reduced levels of adolescent delinquency (Cho & Nolasco Braaten, 2021; Pinquart, 2017). Conversely, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles are associated with increased delinquency, aggression, and antisocial behaviors (Hoeve et al., 2009).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the relationship between parenting practices and juvenile delinquency must be understood within contexts of rapid urbanization, economic transformation, and evolving family structures. The African

proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" reflects a philosophy where multiple community members traditionally share responsibility for children's socialization, a reality increasingly strained by urbanization and the erosion of extended family support systems (Nsamenang, 1992).

Zambia faces growing challenges related to youth delinquency. According to official statistics, juvenile-related offenses have shown concerning trends, with Eastern Province recording significant incidences outside the major urban centers of Lusaka and the Copperbelt. Chipata Central Constituency, the most populous constituency in Chipata District with approximately 101,234 residents, has witnessed observable increases in youth aggression, substance use, and disrespect toward adults.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite growing recognition of juvenile delinquency as a significant social problem in Zambian urban centers, limited empirical research has examined the specific relationship between parenting practices and delinquent behaviors in localized contexts. Recent international research has identified specific family-related risk factors for delinquency. Svensson and Johnson (2022) emphasize the importance of examining family constellations in understanding delinquent behavior.

Furthermore, the role of spiritual nurturing in shaping children's moral development requires careful examination in contexts where religious values are strongly endorsed but may not consistently translate into practice. Mukuka (2022), in his examination of Chewa cultural practices in Eastern Zambia, explores how traditional religious worldviews interact with Christian formation. He notes that "children in Zambian communities often navigate multiple spiritual frameworks-formal Christian teaching at church and school, traditional beliefs embedded in family and community life, and media-influenced secular values" (p. 56). This cultural complexity complicates the relationship between spiritual nurturing and behavioral outcomes.

The researcher's preliminary observations in Chipata Central Constituency suggested widespread delinquent behaviors affecting children from both affluent and disadvantaged families, with inappropriate parenting emerging as a plausible contributing factor. However, no systematic empirical investigation had previously examined this relationship in this specific context, creating a knowledge gap that this study sought to address.

### **Research Objectives**

#### **Overall Objective:**

To investigate the relationship between parenting practices and juvenile delinquency in Chipata Central Constituency, Zambia.

#### **Specific Objectives:**

- i. To identify parenting styles practiced in Chipata Central Constituency and determine their relationship with aggressive behaviors in children.
- ii. To examine how parental care practices influence emotional stability among children in the study area.
- iii. To assess the relationship between parental attachment and child prostitution in Chipata Central Constituency.
- iv. To explore the influence of spiritual nurturing on children's disobedience patterns.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What parenting styles are predominantly practiced in Chipata Central Constituency, and how do they relate to aggressive behaviors in children?
- ii. How does parental care influence emotional stability among children in the study area?

- iii. What is the relationship between parental attachment and child prostitution in Chipata Central Constituency?
- iv. How does spiritual nurturing affect disobedience patterns among children?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to scholarly knowledge by providing empirical evidence on parenting-delinquency dynamics in an under-researched Zambian urban context. The findings extend theoretical understanding of how parenting styles operate in African settings characterized by rapid urbanization, changing family structures, and the erosion of traditional support systems. Practically, the research provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, social welfare practitioners, and community organizations designing interventions to address juvenile delinquency.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Conceptualizing Parenting Practices**

Parenting practices are behaviors, strategies, and approaches parents use to raise children. Scholarship distinguishes parenting styles, overall parental attitudes, and emotional climate from parenting practices, which are specific behaviors for child socialization.

This distinction is especially relevant in African contexts where multiple caregivers may use varying practices while contributing to the overall family climate (Kagitcibasi, 2007).

Hoeve et al. (2009), in their comprehensive meta-analysis of the relationship between parenting and delinquency, examined 161 articles and concluded that parenting dimensions including support, behavioral control, and autonomy granting are significantly associated with delinquent outcomes. Their work established that parenting practices account for approximately 11% of the variance in delinquency, with effects varying by child age, informant, and delinquency type.

### **Parenting Styles: Theoretical Foundations and Contemporary Research**

Baumrind's (1967) seminal work identified three primary parenting styles based on variations in parental responsiveness and demandingness. Maccoby and Martin (1983) subsequently expanded this framework to four styles by distinguishing within permissive parenting between indulgent and neglectful approaches. This four-fold typology remains influential in contemporary research (Pinquart, 2017).

Authoritative Parenting combines high responsiveness with appropriate demandingness. Authoritative parents explain reasons for rules, encourage verbal exchange, and adjust expectations to children's developmental levels. Research consistently associates this style with positive outcomes including reduced delinquency, academic achievement, and psychological well-being (Cho & Nolasco Braaten, 2021; Pinquart & Kauser, 2018).

Authoritarian Parenting features high demandingness with low responsiveness. Meta-analytic research indicates associations with internalizing problems, lower self-esteem, and reduced social competence (Pinquart, 2017). However, the relationship between authoritarian parenting and delinquency may vary across cultural contexts, with some non-Western samples showing different patterns when authoritarian elements are combined with family warmth (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018).

Indulgent (Permissive) Parenting combines high responsiveness with low demandingness. Research links this style to impulsivity, externalizing problems, and substance use in adolescence (Vasiou et al., 2023).

Neglectful (Uninvolved) Parenting features low responsiveness and low demandingness. This style consistently predicts the poorest outcomes across developmental domains, including the highest rates of delinquency and antisocial behavior (Hoeve et al., 2009).

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## Parenting in African and Zambian Contexts

African traditional childrearing practices emphasize collective responsibility, gradual induction into adult roles, and learning through participation (Nsamenang, 1992). The philosophy encapsulated in "it takes a village to raise a child" reflects recognition that multiple community members share responsibility for children's socialization. This is a reality that distinguishes African parenting from the nuclear-family focus of Western models.

However, urbanization has significantly altered these traditional arrangements. As Nsamenang (1992) observed, the breakdown of social structures that historically assisted with parenting creates unprecedented challenges for contemporary African parents navigating competing cultural expectations without adequate community backup.

Socioeconomic factors also play a crucial role in parenting and delinquency. Davis-Kean (2005) demonstrated that parental education and family income influence child achievement through parental expectations and the home environment. Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) examined neighborhood effects on child and adolescent outcomes, finding that community resources and collective efficacy moderate the relationship between family-level factors and child development.

### Parental Care and Child Development

Parental care encompasses the provision of physical necessities, emotional support, and developmentally appropriate attention. Research emphasizes that the quality, not merely quantity, of parental attention matters crucially for child outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020). Sensitive, responsive caregiving during early childhood establishes foundations for secure attachment, emotional regulation, and social competence (Cassidy et al., 2023).

Frasquilho et al. (2016) demonstrated that unemployment and parental distress impact youth emotional well-being through both direct effects and moderated pathways involving parent-youth relationship quality. Stattin and Kerr (2000) provided a crucial reinterpretation of parental monitoring, arguing that much of what had been attributed to parental surveillance actually reflects child disclosure-children's willingness to voluntarily share information with parents.

### Parental Attachment: Theoretical Perspectives

Attachment theory, originating in the work of Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978), proposes that infants form emotional bonds with caregivers that shape expectations about relationships and influence socio-emotional development throughout life. Secure attachment develops when caregivers respond sensitively and consistently to infant signals, providing a "secure base" from which children can explore (Cassidy et al., 2023).

Contemporary research has extended attachment theory to understand delinquency. Simons and Brown (2022), in their developmental perspective on girls' delinquency, tested the family stress model and found that economic pressure affects parenting practices, which in turn influence adolescent outcomes through attachment-related mechanisms. Chung and Steinberg (2006) found that neighborhood factors interact with parenting behaviors and peer deviance to predict delinquency among serious juvenile offenders.

### Spiritual Nurturing and Moral Development

Religious and spiritual education represents a significant dimension of parenting in many Zambian communities, where Christianity heavily influences cultural values and parenting expectations. Research suggests that religious socialization contributes to moral development and may protect against risky behaviors in adolescence.

Mukuka (2022) provides a critical examination of spiritual formation in Zambian contexts, exploring how traditional Chewa religious worldviews (ancestor worship, dreams, and visions) interact with Christian formation. He notes that "children in Zambian communities often navigate multiple spiritual frameworks: formal Christian teaching at church and school, traditional beliefs embedded in family and community life, and media-

influenced secular values. When these frameworks are not coherently integrated, children may receive contradictory messages about morality and behavior" (p. 56).

Silungwe and Mukuka (2025) found empirical support for the importance of integrated spiritual formation in their study of Zambian Christian university students. Their mixed-methods research across three Zambian universities (Rusangu University, Eden University, and DMI-St Eugene University) revealed that "students who reported stronger integration of faith with daily coping strategies showed lower rates of substance use, while those for whom religious identity was nominal rather than integrated showed no such protection" (p. 885).

Mukuka (2025) further argues that "the challenge facing Christian families today is not merely transmitting religious knowledge but embodying faith in ways that shape children's character and conduct. When parents separate spiritual instruction from daily life, attending church but inconsistently disciplining or modeling behaviors that contradict their teachings, children receive mixed messages that undermine moral formation. 8283).

### **Juvenile Delinquency: Conceptualization and Risk Factors**

Juvenile delinquency encompasses illegal acts committed by minors, ranging from status offenses to criminal behaviors that would be offenses regardless of age (Loeber et al., 2012). Contemporary research recognizes delinquency as multiply determined, with risk factors operating at individual, family, peer, school, and community levels.

Family-related risk factors for delinquency include harsh, inconsistent, or neglectful parenting; low parental monitoring and supervision; family conflict and violence; and weak family bonds (Hoeve et al., 2009). Gershoff (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of corporal punishment and associated child behaviors, finding consistent links between physical punishment and increased aggression and antisocial behavior. Cuartas et al. (2021) extended this research to low- and middle-income countries, documenting the prevalence and consequences of corporal punishment globally.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to comprehensively address parenting-delinquency relationships.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977, 2012) posits that behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Children learn aggressive and antisocial behaviors by observing parents, peers, and media models. Akers and Jennings (2015) further developed social learning theory within criminological contexts, emphasizing the role of differential association and reinforcement in delinquency acquisition.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy et al., 2023) explains how early caregiving relationships shape internal working models of self and others. Secure attachment provides foundations for emotional regulation and empathy-capacities that protect against delinquency.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) emphasizes that child development occurs within nested environmental systems. This framework helps explain how family, peer, school, and neighborhood factors interact to shape developmental outcomes.

Integrated Spiritual Formation Framework (Mukuka, 2022, 2025) emphasizes that effective spiritual nurturing requires integration across multiple dimensions: consistent parental modeling, family religious practice, community reinforcement, and emotional attunement. Mukuka (2022) highlights the complexity of spiritual formation in Zambian contexts where children navigate multiple spiritual frameworks, while Mukuka (2025) argues that spiritual endorsement alone may not protect against delinquency when other dimensions are weak.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on the literature review and theoretical integration, this study employs a conceptual framework positing that parenting practices (styles, care, attachment, spiritual nurturing) influence child behavioral outcomes,

moderated by contextual factors including socioeconomic status, community resources, and cultural norms. Peer influences interact with parenting effects, potentially amplifying or mitigating family influences. Spiritual nurturing's effectiveness depends on integration across multiple dimensions as proposed by Mukuka (2022, 2025).

### **Research Hypotheses**

H1: Indulgent parenting styles are positively associated with aggressive behaviors in children.

H2: Consistent, responsive parental care is negatively associated with emotional instability in children.

H3: Secure parental attachment is negatively associated with child prostitution.

H4: Spiritual nurturing is negatively associated with disobedience in children, moderated by integration of spiritual values with consistent parental modeling and emotional attunement (Mukuka, 2022, 2025).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), appropriate for examining relationships between parenting variables and delinquency at a single point in time and providing baseline data for this previously unstudied population.

### **Study Area**

The research was conducted in Chipata Central Constituency, Chipata District, Eastern Province, Zambia. Chipata Central Constituency encompasses 31 residential areas spanning diverse socioeconomic conditions. The constituency was purposively selected as the most urbanized area in Chipata District where delinquency concerns are most pronounced, with no previous research examining parenting-delinquency dynamics in this context.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population comprised parents and primary caregivers residing in Chipata Central Constituency with children aged 0-17 years. Using Yamane's formula (1967) at 90% confidence level, a sample of 100 respondents was determined adequate. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across residential areas and socioeconomic groups. The 31 residential areas were grouped into three strata based on housing characteristics and socioeconomic indicators: high-density/low-income (15 areas), medium-density/middle-income (10 areas), and low-density/higher-income (6 areas).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

A structured questionnaire, developed from a literature review, had four sections: socio-demographic characteristics; parenting practices (styles, care, attachment, spiritual nurturing) measured on 5-point Likert scales; child delinquency indicators measured on 5-point Likert scales; and open-ended questions on delinquency prevention strategies. The questionnaire was translated into Nyanja (the predominant local language) and back-translated to ensure accuracy.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Content validity was established through expert review by three senior researchers. Construct validity was assessed through exploratory factor analysis, confirming the expected factor structure.

Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As Taber (2018) notes in his comprehensive examination of Cronbach's alpha use in educational research, alpha is commonly reported as a measure of

internal consistency, with values above .70 generally considered acceptable. The overall instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .775$ ), with subscale alphas ranging from .71 to .82, exceeding the .70 threshold recommended for social science research (Nunnally, 1978; Taber, 2018).

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics summarized respondent characteristics and response patterns. Pearson correlation coefficients examined relationships between parenting variables and delinquency indicators, with significance set at  $p < .05$ . Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 100 parents and primary caregivers participated in the study. Table 1 presents their socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=100)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	35	35.0
	Female	65	65.0
Age	20-30 years	28	28.0
	31-40 years	40	40.0
	41-50 years	22	22.0
	51+ years	10	10.0
Marital Status	Married	72	72.0
	Single	12	12.0
	Divorced/Separated	10	10.0
	Widowed	6	6.0
Education	None	15	15.0
	Primary	23	23.0
	Secondary	27	27.0
	College	20	20.0
	University	15	15.0
Occupation	Employed	47	47.0
	Self-employed	10	10.0

	Entrepreneur	15	15.0
	Farmer	6	6.0
	Unemployed	22	22.0
Religion	Christian	88	88.0
	Muslim	5	5.0
	None	7	7.0
Number of Children	1-3	56	56.0
	4-6	32	32.0
	7-9	7	7.0
	10+	2	2.0
	None	3	3.0

The sample was predominantly female (65%), reflecting the continued primary responsibility of mothers for childcare. Most respondents were married (72%) and aged 31-40 years (40%). Employment patterns showed 47% in formal employment, while 22% reported no income-generating activity-a significant concern given established links between poverty and parenting stress (Frasquilho et al., 2016; Mwansa, 2023). The overwhelming Christian majority (88%) reflects national patterns and is significant given the study's focus on spiritual nurturing.

### Parenting Styles and Aggressive Behaviors

Objective 1 sought to identify parenting styles practiced in Chipata Central Constituency and determine their relationship with aggressive behaviors in children.

Table 2: Parenting Style Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Parents should take time to talk and listen to their children	80.0	2.0	17.0	0.0	1.0
Parents should make decisions for their children	49.0	40.0	7.0	2.0	2.0
Good parents should mainly focus on the behavior of their children	49.0	40.0	7.0	2.0	2.0
Responsible parents do not neglect their children	79.0	19.0	1.0	0.0	1.0

Results indicated strong endorsement of parent-child communication (82% agreed/strongly agreed), a core element of authoritative parenting (Pinquart, 2017). However, a substantial majority (89%) also endorsed that "good parents should mainly focus on the behavior of their children"-a perspective more characteristic of indulgent parenting, where parents attend closely to behavior but may fail to set appropriate limits (Vasiou et al., 2023).

This apparent contradiction suggests that parents may not clearly distinguish between different parenting dimensions, reflecting what Nsamenang (1992) described as the complexity of parenting in African contexts undergoing rapid social change.

Table 3: Aggression Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Violent behaviors have become common in most young people today	59.0	34.0	6.0	1.0	0.0
Most violent children come from violent homes	53.0	37.0	6.0	0.0	4.0
Physical punishment is not the best way to discipline aggressive children	38.0	51.0	6.0	2.0	3.0

Parents overwhelmingly recognized youth violence as prevalent (93% agreed/strongly agreed), and most (90%) endorsed the link between violent homes and violent children-consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and meta-analytic findings (Hoeve et al., 2009). A majority (89%) recognized that physical punishment may be counterproductive, aligning with research on corporal punishment (Gershoff, 2002; Cuartas et al., 2021).

Table 4: Correlation Between Parenting Style Indicators and Aggression

Variable	1	2	3
1. Parents should talk/listen	1		
2. Parents should focus on behavior	.000	1	
3. Violent behaviors common in youth	.433**	.048	1

\*\* Correlation significant at  $p < .01$

A significant positive correlation emerged between parent-child communication and recognition of youth violence ( $r = .433, p < .01$ ), supporting research linking communication-oriented parenting to greater parental awareness (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). The correlation between "focus on behavior" and violence recognition was not significant ( $r = .048, p > .05$ ), suggesting that simply attending to behavior without appropriate limit-setting may not protect against youth aggression. This finding aligns with research distinguishing effective behavioral monitoring from mere attention to behavior after problems emerge (Hoeve et al., 2009).

These findings partially support Hypothesis 1, suggesting that many parents in Chipata Central Constituency may practice indulgent parenting-attending to children's behavior while failing to establish clear expectations and consequences.

### Parental Care and Emotional Stability

Objective 2 examined how parental care practices influence emotional stability among children.

Table 5: Parental Care Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Provision of basic needs is responsibility of both parents	79.0	19.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
It is necessary for parents to pay attention to children's needs	58.0	34.0	7.0	0.0	1.0
Paying attention to children can make them too demanding	13.0	15.0	51.0	18.0	3.0
My children are free to discuss issues with me	51.0	43.0	4.0	0.0	2.0

Almost all respondents (98%) affirmed shared parental responsibility for basic needs provision, and 92% endorsed attention to children's needs—positive foundations for parental care. Most (69%) rejected the notion that attention makes children demanding, indicating understanding that attentive parenting does not necessarily spoil children. Additionally, 94% reported that their children feel free to discuss issues with them, suggesting openness in parent-child communication consistent with authoritative parenting (Pinquart, 2017).

Table 6: Emotional Instability Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Neglected children usually suffer from low self-esteem	60.0	30.0	5.0	0.0	5.0
Children who don't receive expressive love likely have low self-esteem	60.0	30.0	5.0	0.0	5.0
I always express love to my children	51.0	43.0	4.0	0.0	2.0

Parents strongly recognized links between neglect and low self-esteem (90%), and between limited love expression and low self-esteem (90%). Most (94%) reported consistently expressing love to their children; a positive finding suggesting that emotional warmth may be more consistently available than material resources.

Table 7: Correlation Between Parental Care and Emotional Instability

Variable	1	2	3
1. Provision of basic needs both parents' responsibility	1		
2. Necessary for parents to pay attention	.269**	1	
3. Neglected children suffer low self-esteem	.288**	.113	1

\*\* Correlation significant at  $p < .01$

Significant but modest correlations emerged between parental care variables and recognition of neglect's effects on self-esteem. Provision of basic needs correlated with attention to needs ( $r = .269, p < .01$ ) and with recognition of neglect's effects ( $r = .288, p < .01$ ). However, attention to needs did not correlate significantly with recognition of neglect effects ( $r = .113, p > .05$ ).

These modest correlations suggest that while parents conceptually understand links between care and emotional outcomes, these understandings may not consistently translate into practice. The findings partially support Hypothesis 2: parental care relates to emotional stability, but the relationship is weaker than expected, possibly because other factors—peer influences, school environment, community context—moderate these effects (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

### Parental Attachment and Child Prostitution

Objective 3 assessed the relationship between parental attachment and child prostitution.

Table 8: Parental Attachment Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Parents should always provide a safe environment for children	73.0	24.0	3.0	0.0	0.0

Children become out of control when provided with safe environment	20.0	30.0	30.0	15.0	5.0
Parents should ensure every child feels acceptable in the family	73.0	24.0	3.0	0.0	0.0

Almost all respondents (97%) endorsed providing safe environments and ensuring children feel acceptable—core attachment principles (Cassidy et al., 2023). However, 50% agreed safe environments could lead children to become "out of control." This reveals tension between attachment principles and concerns about permissiveness, reflecting broader cultural negotiations between traditional authority-based parenting and contemporary child-centered approaches.

Table 9: Child Prostitution Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
I have seen young people involved in prostitution	65.0	29.0	2.0	0.0	4.0
Some young people are forced into prostitution seeking affectionate love	42.0	37.0	15.0	0.0	6.0
Group influence leads young people into prostitution	55.0	39.0	6.0	0.0	0.0

A striking 94% of respondents reported observing youth prostitution in their communities, confirming its prevalence. Most (79%) recognized that some youth enter prostitution seeking affection—consistent with attachment theory (Cassidy et al., 2023). Most notably, 94% identified peer group influence as a pathway into prostitution, with only 6% disagreeing.

Table 10: Correlation Between Parental Attachment and Prostitution

Variable	1	2	3
1. Children become out of control with safe environment	1		
2. Parents should ensure child feels acceptable	-.040	1	
3. Group influence leads to prostitution	-.155	.149	1

No significant correlations emerged between parental attachment variables and recognition of group influence on prostitution. The near-zero correlations suggest that, in this context, peer influence may operate independently of family attachment—challenging assumptions that strong family bonds necessarily protect against negative peer influences.

These findings do not support Hypothesis 3. Rather than revealing a protective effect of parental attachment against prostitution, the data suggest that peer dynamics may be the predominant influence, potentially overwhelming family protective factors. As one respondent noted: "Even children from good homes fall into this because friends pressure them."

This finding aligns with differential association theory (Akers & Jennings, 2015) and with Chung and Steinberg's (2006) finding that neighborhood factors interact with parenting behaviors and peer deviance to predict delinquency. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) provides a framework to understand how systems like family, peers, and neighborhoods interact and influence developmental outcomes.

### Spiritual Nurturing and Disobedience

Objective 4 explored the influence of spiritual nurturing on children's disobedience patterns.

Table 11: Spiritual Nurturing Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Bringing up children in Christian way enables them to withstand temptations	70.0	25.0	2.0	1.0	2.0
Children need not only physical but also spiritual nurturing	66.0	33.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
I enjoy sharing the word of God with my children	52.0	36.0	8.0	2.0	2.0

An overwhelming majority endorsed spiritual nurturing: 95% agreed Christian upbringing helps children withstand temptation, 99% affirmed children's need for spiritual nurturing, and 88% reported enjoying sharing faith with children. These findings reflect the deeply Christian character of the community and align with research showing religious socialization as central to Zambian parenting (Mukuka, 2022, 2025).

Table 12: Disobedience Indicators (N=100)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	NS (%)
Most young people these days have no regard for adults	54.0	44.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
Disobedience may result from giving freedom without restrictions	38.0	51.0	6.0	2.0	3.0
Children who argue back to parents tend to disobey counsel	38.0	51.0	6.0	2.0	3.0

A remarkable 98% of respondents perceived youth disrespect toward adults as prevalent, suggesting widespread intergenerational tension. Most (89%) attributed disobedience to excessive freedom without appropriate restrictions, consistent with research on permissive parenting (Vasiou et al., 2023).

Table 13: Correlation Between Spiritual Nurturing and Disobedience

Variable	1	2
1. Children need physical and spiritual nurturing	1	
2. Children who argue back tend to disobey counsel	.084	1

Correlation not significant ( $p > .05$ )

The correlation between spiritual nurturing endorsement and recognition of arguing back as problematic was weak and non-significant ( $r = .084, p > .05$ ). This finding does not support Hypothesis 4's expectation that spiritual nurturing would negatively correlate with disobedience.

Several interpretations merit consideration, each supported by contemporary scholarship:

First, the weak correlation may reflect measurement limitations-items measured attitudes toward spiritual nurturing rather than actual practice frequency. As Mukuka (2022) observes, "children in Zambian communities often navigate multiple spiritual frameworks-formal Christian teaching at church and school, traditional beliefs embedded in family and community life, and media-influenced secular values" (p. 56). This cultural complexity means that parental spiritual nurturing occurs alongside other influences that may dilute or contradict its messages.

Second, the near-ceiling effects on both spiritual nurturing endorsement (99% agreement) and disobedience recognition (98% agreement) restricted variability, potentially attenuating correlations.

Third, the relationship between spiritual nurturing and disobedience may be moderated by other factors-parenting style consistency, community religious participation, or youth developmental stage-not captured in this analysis. Mukuka (2025) argues that "spiritual formation's effectiveness depends on its integration with consistent discipline, parental modeling, and community support, not merely religious instruction" (p. 8285).

Fourth, Silungwe and Mukuka (2025) found parallel dynamics in educational settings: "students who reported stronger integration of faith with daily coping strategies showed lower rates of substance use, while those for whom religious identity was nominal rather than integrated showed no such protection" (p. 885). This pattern suggests that integrated spiritual formation-whether in family or educational contexts-is essential for behavioral outcomes.

### Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Table 14: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Prediction	Result	Conclusion
H1	Indulgent styles associated with aggression	Partial support	Communication orientation protective; behavior focus alone not protective
H2	Consistent parental care negatively associated with emotional instability	Weak support	Significant but modest correlations; other factors likely involved
H3	Secure parental attachment negatively associated with child prostitution	Not supported	Peer influence identified as primary factor
H4	Spiritual nurturing negatively associated with disobedience	Not supported	Weak, non-significant correlation; may reflect integration gaps (Mukuka, 2022, 2025; Silungwe & Mukuka, 2025)

### Qualitative Findings: Parent-Recommended Strategies to Prevent Delinquency

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) revealed four primary themes:

#### Theme 1: Enhanced Parental Monitoring and Involvement

Respondents emphasized the need for active parental monitoring, knowing children's friends, and maintaining involvement. This reflects recognition that parental monitoring protects against delinquency-consistent with research (Hoeve et al., 2009; Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

#### Theme 2: Community-Based Social Control

Many respondents invoked traditional African philosophy emphasizing collective responsibility: "We need to return to our traditions where any adult could correct any child." This reflects longing for collective childrearing (Nsamenang, 1992).

#### Theme 3: Spiritual and Moral Education

Respondents emphasized spiritual formation through church attendance and home-based religious instruction. This aligns with research linking religious involvement to reduced delinquency, though Mukuka (2022, 2025) cautions that spiritual formation requires integration across multiple dimensions and must contend with competing spiritual frameworks.

#### Theme 4: Structured Youth Activities and Opportunities

Many respondents identified lack of constructive activities as a problem: "There is nothing for young people to do here." This resonates with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

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## DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

This study provides the first empirical evidence on parenting-delinquency dynamics in Chipata Central Constituency, revealing a complex picture that both confirms and challenges conventional wisdom.

### The Predominance of Indulgent Parenting

The finding that most parents primarily focus on children's behavior without corresponding emphasis on limit-setting suggests widespread indulgent parenting, reflecting multiple influences: reaction against authoritarian parenting, urbanization-related disruption of traditional authority, and exposure to Western child-centered philosophies without accompanying frameworks for appropriate limits. The association with aggression aligns with international research linking permissive parenting to externalizing problems (Hoeve et al., 2009; Vasiou et al., 2023).

### The Limited Protective Effect of Family Factors and the Critical Role of Peer Networks

Family factors show a weak relationship with delinquency, especially child prostitution where peer influence predominates. This challenges assumptions that strong families always protect against all delinquent outcomes. It highlights the universal importance of addressing peer dynamics in delinquency prevention, showing how family, peer, school, and neighborhood factors interact to shape developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Chung & Steinberg, 2006).

### The Disconnect Between Spiritual Values and Practice

While respondents overwhelmingly endorsed spiritual nurturing, the weak correlation with disobedience outcomes supports Mukuka's (2022, 2025) integrated spiritual formation framework. Parents may hold strong spiritual values without consistent translation into practice, a pattern Silungwe and Mukuka (2025) documented among Zambian university students. Mukuka (2022) highlights that children navigate multiple spiritual frameworks, while Mukuka (2025) emphasizes that spiritual endorsement alone, without integration with consistent modeling and community support, may not protect against delinquency.

### The Community's Desire for Collective Action

Qualitative findings' emphasis on community-based solutions reveals awareness that families alone cannot solve delinquency problems, reflecting traditional African philosophy's enduring influence (Nsamenang, 1992) and recognition that contemporary conditions have eroded traditional supports.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of Findings

This study investigated relationships between parenting practices and juvenile delinquency in Chipata Central Constituency with 100 parents. Key findings include:

**Parenting styles:** Indulgent parenting appears predominant, with most parents focusing on children's behavior without corresponding emphasis on appropriate limit-setting, showing modest association with recognition of youth violence.

**Parental care:** While parents strongly endorsed attentive care, correlations between care practices and emotional outcomes were modest, suggesting other factors moderate these relationships.

**Parental attachment:** Attachment variables showed no significant relationship with child prostitution, with peer influence overwhelmingly identified as the primary pathway.

Spiritual nurturing: Despite near-universal endorsement of spiritual values, spiritual nurturing showed no significant correlation with disobedience outcomes, supporting Mukuka's (2022, 2025) argument that spiritual formation requires integration across multiple dimensions.

Qualitative findings highlighted community-level factors such as collective childrearing, structured youth activities, and economic opportunities. These factors significantly influenced youth outcomes, aligning with ecological systems approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

### **Theoretical Implications**

These findings support ecological systems theory's emphasis on multiple, interacting influences on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). They challenge assumptions about the primacy of family protective factors, revealing contexts where peer influences may overwhelm family effects. The disconnect between spiritual values and behavioral outcomes underscores the need for theoretical models distinguishing between value endorsement and integrated practice, supporting Mukuka's (2022, 2025) integrated spiritual formation framework.

### **Practical Recommendations**

For Parents and Families:

- i. Adopt authoritative parenting practices: Move beyond merely focusing on behavior to establishing clear expectations while maintaining warm relationships (Pinquart, 2017).
- ii. Monitor peer relationships actively: Given peer influence's critical role, know children's friends and maintain open communication about peer dynamics (Stattin & Kerr, 2000).
- iii. Integrate spiritual teaching with consistent practice: Ensure spiritual instruction is supported by consistent modeling and emotional attunement, recognizing that children navigate multiple spiritual frameworks (Mukuka, 2022; Silungwe & Mukuka, 2025).
- iv. Build community connections: Actively cultivate relationships with other families to rebuild collective childrearing networks (Nsamenang, 1992).

v. For Community Organizations and Faith-Based Groups:

- a) Develop structured youth programs: Create engaging activities providing alternatives to negative peer contexts.
- b) Establish intergenerational mentoring: Connect youth with positive adult role models.
- c) Offer parenting education with practical support: Deliver programs that address the integration of spiritual values with consistent discipline and parental modeling (Mukuka, 2025).
- d) Create safe spaces for youth discussion: Address issues youth may not discuss with parents.

vi. For Local Government and Social Welfare:

- a) Implement community-based prevention: Establish neighborhood watch programs and youth recreation facilities.
- b) Support economic empowerment: Given poverty's role in delinquency pathways, economic programs for vulnerable families are essential (Frasquilho et al., 2016; Mwansa, 2023).
- c) Train community child protection workers: Paraprofessionals embedded in communities can identify at-risk youth and link families to services.

- d) Develop coordinated response systems: Social welfare, education, health, and justice sectors should collaborate on comprehensive prevention strategies.

### Recommendations for Future Research

- i. Longitudinal studies: Follow families over time to clarify causal directions.
- ii. Peer network analysis: Examine peer dynamics-network structure, influence processes.
- iii. Mixed-methods research with youth: Directly engage youth voices to complement parent reports.
- iv. Intervention research: Test parenting programs and community interventions.
- v. Research on integrated spiritual formation: Examine how integration of spiritual values with consistent modeling affects child outcomes, building on Mukuka (2022, 2025) and Silungwe and Mukuka (2025).

### Limitations

This study has several limitations: a cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions; single-informant (parent) reports may be affected by social desirability bias; the limited geographic scope requires similar research in other Zambian communities; a modest sample size limits subgroup analyses; youth perspectives are absent; and peer influence and spiritual integration are measured limitedly.

### CONCLUSION

This study provides foundational evidence on parenting-delinquency relationships in Chipata Central Constituency, revealing that while parenting practices matter, they operate within complex ecological systems where peer influences, community contexts, and economic conditions also shape youth outcomes. Indulgent parenting often prevails, and peer networks play a critical role in pathways to prostitution. Furthermore, strong spiritual values frequently conflict with limited behavioral effects. These factors together highlight the need for comprehensive, multi-level interventions that address families, peer groups, and community contexts all at once.

Mukuka (2022) reminds us that Zambian children navigate multiple spiritual frameworks, while Mukuka (2025) captures the challenge and opportunity for spiritual formation:

"The challenge facing Christian families today is not merely transmitting religious knowledge but embodying faith in ways that shape children's character and conduct. When parents compartmentalize spiritual instruction from daily life-attending church while practicing inconsistent discipline or modeling behaviors contradictory to their teachings-children receive mixed messages that undermine moral formation. However, when parents integrate spiritual values with consistent modeling, emotional attunement, and community support, they establish environments where children can internalize faith as a lived reality, rather than merely an abstract doctrine." (p. 8285)

As Zambia continues rapid urbanization, understanding how these transformations affect parenting and child development becomes increasingly urgent. The African proverb reminds us that "it takes a village to raise a child." In contemporary Chipata, that village must be intentionally rebuilt through strong families, connected communities, supportive institutions, and policies that enable collective investment in children.

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