



Influence of Child Participation in Family Decision-Making on Juvenile Delinquency: Evidence from Nairobi South Ward, Kenya

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Abstract: Child inclusion in family decision-making has gained growing attention due to its potential role in reducing juvenile delinquency. This study examined the influence of child participation on delinquent behavior in families within Nairobi South Ward, Kenya. Guided by the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Social Control Theory, the study adopted a correlational research design with a mixed-methods approach. A sample of 395 children, parents, and key informants was selected using Yamane's formula. Data were collected through questionnaires and structured interviews, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, regression, and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that child participation in family decision-making had a statistically significant negative relationship with juvenile delinquency ($\beta = -0.749$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that inclusive parenting practices reduce delinquent tendencies. Child empowerment also showed a marginally significant effect ($\beta = -0.424$, $p = 0.06$), highlighting its complementary role in fostering positive behavior. Family structure and social life activities were not significant predictors quantitatively, though qualitative insights suggested indirect influences through social bonding and peer exposure. The study concludes that fostering participatory parenting and empowering children are critical in preventing juvenile delinquency. It recommends policy reforms, family-level interventions, and community programs that enhance child inclusion and supportive social environments.

Keywords: Child Participation, Family Decision-Making, Juvenile Delinquency, Nairobi South Ward, Kenya

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1. Introduction

Child participation refers to the meaningful inclusion of children in decision-making processes that affect their lives, taking into account their social, cultural, and linguistic diversities (KU Children's Services, 2020). It is grounded in children's rights to be heard and to freely express their views, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), particularly Articles 12 and 13. These provisions emphasize that children, regardless of age, should be given opportunities to express their opinions and have them considered in matters that influence their well-being.

Despite these international commitments, child participation remains inconsistently practiced across regions due to social, cultural, and religious variations (Turus, 2021). In many societies, children's voices are still undervalued, which may contribute to maladaptive behaviors such as juvenile delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency—defined as unlawful or antisocial behavior by individuals aged 7 to 18 years—has become a pressing global concern (Ruoyu, 2020). Scholars highlight multiple causes including exposure to domestic violence (Mark, 2021), poverty, dysfunctional family structures, negative peer influence, drug abuse, and lack of positive

role models (Tan & Yasin, 2020). Environmental contexts such as slums further exacerbate delinquency due to poverty, social disorganization, and limited opportunities (John, 2021). The consequences are severe, ranging from school dropout, early sexual behavior, and rebellion against parental authority to an increase in street children and conflict with the law. Globally, juvenile delinquency accounts for significant crime statistics, with the World Health Organization (2023) reporting that youths aged 15–29 contribute 37% of all homicide cases.

Comparative evidence suggests that strengthening child participation in decision-making can mitigate juvenile delinquency. In Europe, for instance, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the establishment of children’s participation platforms reflect commitments to embedding children’s voices in governance (Tan & Yasin, 2020). These measures, along with forensic youth care systems, have contributed to declines in delinquency in several European states, though disparities persist, as seen in Spain’s rise in sexual aggression cases in 2022 (Spain Attorney General’s Office, 2023). Similarly, in the United States, child protection measures such as foster care, timely reporting of abuse, and school-based interventions underscore the importance of safe and participatory environments for children (Judite, Marit & Miguel, 2022).

In contrast, Africa faces higher rates of juvenile delinquency, largely attributed to poverty, armed conflict, cultural hierarchies, and weak child participation frameworks (Ndeleko, 2024). Although the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990) provides a framework for child rights, its implementation is uneven. Practices such as child soldier recruitment, female genital mutilation, and lack of inclusive family decision-making perpetuate risks for children (SOS Children’s Villages, 2024). In South Africa, for example, high rates of juvenile incarceration highlight the persistence of structural drivers of delinquency despite policy reforms (Prisoner Insider, 2021).

In Kenya, the Children’s Act (2022) affirms the right of children to express their views in matters affecting them, complementing efforts by agencies such as the Child Welfare Society of Kenya (CWSK). Nonetheless, juvenile delinquency remains a growing challenge, especially in urban areas such as Nairobi where poverty, family instability, and peer influences intersect (Wa Teresia, 2021; Mwanza, Mwaeke & Omboto, 2020). Rising youth unrest, increasing numbers of street children, and the establishment of juvenile detention facilities reflect the gravity of the problem.

Taken together, these insights underscore the critical link between child participation in family decision-making and juvenile delinquency. Where children are meaningfully included and empowered within their families, they

develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and resilience against negative influences. Conversely, exclusion, rigid hierarchies, and neglect foster alienation that may manifest in delinquent behavior. This study situates itself within this discourse, examining how family-level child participation influences juvenile delinquency in Nairobi South Ward, Kenya, while drawing on global and regional perspectives to illuminate local realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

Child participation in family decision-making can temper juvenile delinquency when it builds both internal intentions and external bonds. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) explains how participatory practices, e.g., inviting children’s views and negotiating rules—shape prosocial attitudes and subjective norms that lower delinquent intent (Kan & Fabrigar, 2020; Conner, 2020). Evidence that better youth decision skills predict less offending aligns with TRA (Timmer et al., 2022). Social Control Theory (SCT) adds that participation strengthens attachment, commitment, and involvement, which are key bonds that deter deviance (Costello & Laub, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022). Using the Lundy model’s dimensions of space, voice, audience, influence, translates theory into practice: structured opportunities (space/voice), attentive adults (audience), and visible impact on outcomes (influence) nurture both intentions (TRA) and bonds (SCT) (Kennan et al., 2021; OECD, 2023; Grace et al., 2024; Holla Sivertsen et al., 2025; Michail et al., 2025). Synthesizing these strands, participation is not merely rights-based; it is a targeted prevention lever that fosters accountability, belonging, and self-regulation. Critically, TRA risks underplaying context, while SCT can overlook cognition; combining them with Lundy’s operational dimensions yields a coherent, testable pathway from inclusive decision making to reduced delinquency—mediated by intentions, moderated by bonds, and strengthened by meaningful influence. (Ayano et al., 2024; Lamari-Fisher & Bond, 2021).

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Child Participation in Decision Making and Juvenile Delinquency: A Theoretical and Empirical Synthesis

Child inclusion in family decision-making has gained prominence as both a child rights imperative and a practical strategy to curb juvenile delinquency. Decisions regarding education, finances, and family dynamics shape children’s development (Mukhwana, Muhingi & Mwikali, 2022), and

excluding them can lead to alienation, rebellion, or deviance. Both the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Social Control Theory (SCT) provide a useful framework to understand how participation influences behavior. TRA emphasizes attitudes and intentions (Conner, 2020; Kan & Fabrigar, 2020), while SCT highlights social bonds and attachment (Costello & Laub, 2020). Together, they underscore that participatory parenting not only builds internal motivation for positive behavior but also strengthens external bonds of trust and belonging.

2.2.2 Participation and Parenting Styles

Parenting styles strongly influence whether children are given a voice in family decisions. Authoritative parenting, which combines warmth, clear expectations, and participatory practices, consistently shows the lowest risk of delinquency (Amran & Basri, 2020; Simons & Sutton, 2021; Onsando et al., 2021). In contrast, authoritarian approaches that deny independence often provoke rebellion, while permissive parenting—offering freedom without boundaries—creates vulnerability to peer and social pressures. Galindo's (2023) study in the Philippines confirmed that shared decision-making fosters stronger bonds and responsibility, reducing delinquency. From a TRA perspective, authoritative parenting allows children to form prosocial attitudes and intentions, while SCT highlights the social bond created through respectful dialogue. Thus, participatory parenting cultivates accountability and resilience by linking children's sense of agency with family belonging.

2.2.3 Social Life Activities and Peer Influence

Children's social lives, especially peer interactions, present another dimension where participation matters. Huijismans et al. (2021) found that delinquency spreads through association with deviant peers, while Olalere et al. (2021) showed that unsupervised peer groups encourage bullying, aggression, and other misconduct. Social media has amplified these risks, as seen in Nyarangi's (2024) Kenyan study linking online exposure to risky behaviors and cyberbullying with delinquency. TRA suggests that when children lack strong internalized attitudes shaped at home, they are more likely to adopt peers' deviant norms. Conversely, SCT emphasizes that weak parental bonds leave children vulnerable to peer influence. Thus, involving children in discussions on friendships, technology use, and social activities can provide guidance while still granting autonomy, protecting them from deviant pathways.

2.2.4 Family Structure and Systems

Family structure remains a critical determinant of delinquency. Studies across contexts—from Sweden (Svensson & Johnson, 2022) to Ghana (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2022) and Kenya (Macharia et al., 2020)—highlight that single-parent households, domestic neglect, and financial strain increase delinquency risk. Delcea et al. (2019) further show that unstable family systems erode children's sense of belonging. According to SCT, these weak bonds undermine attachment and commitment, leaving children disconnected from prosocial values. While TRA explains how decision-making shapes intentions, SCT offers a lens into how structural family deficiencies weaken bonds, increasing deviance. Including children in family decisions can offset some risks by fostering responsibility and compensating for structural vulnerabilities.

2.2.5 Empowerment and Educational Interventions

Empowerment through education and structured programs is another dimension where participation reduces delinquency. Longitudinal evidence from Australia (Mazerolle et al., 2019) shows that engagement programs reduce truancy and foster community belonging. Similarly, Surong and Lyngdoh (2020) in India and Ohiomah and Efejuku (2024) in Nigeria found that educational empowerment, role plays, and counseling instilled moral values, reduced recidivism, and improved reintegration of juvenile offenders. These findings align with TRA by shaping positive attitudes and intentions toward lawful behavior, and with SCT by reinforcing social bonds through meaningful community and institutional support. Kenyan evidence (Mayieka & Obuba, 2018) also underscores community education and teacher training as preventive strategies. Collectively, empowerment initiatives highlight that participation must extend beyond the home into schools and communities, where children are given space, voice, and influence (Kennan et al., 2021; Grace et al., 2024).

2.2.6 Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

A critical synthesis reveals that the Theory of Reasoned Action and Social Control Theory complement each other in explaining how child participation influences delinquency. TRA underscores the cognitive dimension: children form attitudes, norms, and intentions when involved in decision making. SCT emphasizes the relational dimension: participation strengthens bonds of attachment, commitment, and involvement that reduce deviance. However, each theory has limitations—TRA underplays subconscious or structural influences, while SCT overlooks internal decision processes. Applied together and reinforced by frameworks like Lundy's model of participation (Kennan et al., 2021; Holla Sivertsen et al.,

2025), they offer a holistic pathway from inclusive decision making to reduced delinquency.

2.3 Literature Gaps and Research Implications

Most existing studies remain context-specific, with much evidence drawn from Western or Asian settings. Few explore how child participation interacts with multiple factors simultaneously—such as family structure, peer influence, and empowerment—in African contexts. Kenyan studies (Onsando et al., 2021; Nyarangi, 2024; Macharia et al., 2020) provide valuable insights but often focus narrowly on parenting or peer influence, without integrating broader ecological variables. This study therefore addresses a critical gap by examining child participation as a multidimensional construct that intersects with social life, family structure, and empowerment. Anchored in TRA and SCT, it explores how participation can serve as both a protective factor and a preventive intervention, especially in settings where structural vulnerabilities heighten delinquency risks.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to explore the relationship between child inclusion in family decision-making (independent variable) and juvenile delinquency (dependent variable). Correlational designs are non-experimental and are appropriate for measuring

statistical associations between variables without manipulation (Seeram, 2019). The approach was considered cost-effective, efficient, and suitable for the study context, though it does not establish causality.

3.2 Study Site, Population, and Target Population

The study was conducted in Nairobi South Ward, Starehe Sub-County, Nairobi County, located 3 km from Nairobi CBD. The ward, with a population of about 98,000 (KNBS, 2019), is socio-economically diverse, comprising informal settlements (Mukuru kwa Reuben, Kayaba, Marigoini) alongside affluent estates (Plains View, Mariakani, Diamond Park). It is religiously mixed (Christians and Muslims), with access to amenities including schools, hospitals, and industries.

The target population was approximately 33,705 individuals, including children, parents/guardians, and child protection officers.

The study population focused on:

- Children aged 12–17 years (ideal for comprehension and linked to adolescence/delinquency).
- Parents/guardians (key decision-makers in families).
- Child protection officers (social workers, counselors, psychologists) offering expert perspectives.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Distribution by Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Children	Aged 12–17 years; residents of Nairobi South Ward	Below 12 years; non-residents
Parents/Guardians	With children/experience in caregiving, a valid Kenyan ID	Outside the study area, unwilling participants
Child Protection Officers	Licensed professionals (counselors, psychologists, social workers)	Unlicensed or lacking a valid ID
General	Willing participants only	Those demanding compensation

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sampling was conducted using simple random sampling, which minimizes bias and enhances reliability (Bhardwaj,

2019). Yamane’s (1967) formula determined a sample size of 395 from the 33,705-target population, with a 5% margin of error. The distribution is shown below:

Table 2: Distribution by target population and sample size

Population Group	% Representation	Sample Size (n)
Children (12–17 years)	65%	257
Parents/Guardians	30%	118
Child Protection Officers	5%	20
Total	100%	395

3.4 Research Approach and Instruments

A mixed-methods approach was applied:

- Quantitative: Closed-ended questionnaires for children and parents.

- Qualitative: Structured interviews with child protection officers.
- Secondary Data: Reports, journals, census data, and databases.

Table 3: Instruments of data collection

Respondent Group	Instrument	Number of Respondents
Children (12–17 years)	Questionnaires	257
Parents/Guardians	Questionnaires	118
Child Protection Officers	Structured Interviews	20
Total	–	395

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability was enhanced through the consistent administration of instruments, simplified questionnaire language, and a conducive environment that facilitated responses. Validity was achieved by aligning the instruments with the study objectives, specifically by measuring children’s participation in family, personal, and educational decisions. Triangulation of children’s, parents’, and experts’ perspectives strengthened construct validity (Vu, 2021).

findings presented through tables, charts, and graphs for clarity and comparison. On the other hand, qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis, where recurring themes, phrases, and patterns from interviews were systematically coded and interpreted to provide deeper insights into the research problem (Vu, 2021).

3.6 Data Analysis

- Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, and standard deviation in SPSS, with the

3.7 Ethical consideration

The study adhered to ethical research protocols, summarized in Table 4

Table 4: Ethical Considerations

Ethical Principle	Application in Study
Voluntary participation	No coercion; no compensation demanded
Informed consent	Obtained from adults and guardians for children
Right to withdraw	Participants could exit at any stage
Confidentiality	Data anonymized; identities concealed
Cultural respect	Accommodated religious/cultural practices
Child protection	Safeguarded children’s rights and emotions
Research permits	NACOSTI, Nairobi County, Department of Education, County Commissioner approvals

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The study achieved a 100% response rate across all categories—257 children, 118 parents, and 20 child

protection officers (Table 5). This unusually high participation was facilitated by clear inclusion criteria, advanced community engagement, manageable sample size, and flexible data collection schedules. Such full participation strengthens the study’s representativeness and minimizes bias (Creswell, 2014).

Table 5: Sample size distribution

Respondent Category	Target Sample	Actual Responses	Response Rate (%)
Children (12–17 yrs)	257	257	100
Parents	118	118	100
Child Protection Officers	20	20	100
Total	395	395	100

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

Among children, most were aged 13–16 years (56.2%), reflecting the core adolescent group most at risk of delinquency. Gender distribution was nearly balanced (52% male, 48% female). A majority lived with parents (70%), while smaller proportions lived with guardians (13%), adult siblings (7%), foster parents (5%), or grandparents (5%).

Parental respondents were primarily married (47%), though substantial proportions were single (22%), separated/divorced (26%), or widowed (5%). Family diversity allowed for exploration of family structure as a risk factor. Key informants were mainly social workers, supplemented by counselors, psychologists, and Sub-county Children officers, offering a professional lens.

4.3 Child Participation in Family Decision-Making

Both children and parents reported moderate participation of children in household decisions. Two-thirds of children indicated being involved *always* or *sometimes* in family matters, while 10% were *never* consulted. School-related decision-making revealed lower involvement, with 45% reporting rare or no consultation. Parents corroborated these findings, with 64% acknowledging child involvement at home, but less so in school decisions.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Authoritative Parenting Theory (Baumrind, 1966), which emphasizes negotiation and responsiveness. Authoritative environments foster responsibility, self-regulation and reduce deviance (Simon & Sutton, 2021). Conversely, autocratic parenting, noted by child protection officers, was associated with resistance and covert deviant behavior.

Table 6: Children involved in decision making

Domain	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Home decisions	23	42	25	10
School issues	18.5	36	29	16.5
Meal planning	21	35	28	16

4.4 Influence of Social Life and Peer Activities

Peers were identified as a strong influence, with 95% of children acknowledging that peers shaped their behavior. Social media emerged as the dominant leisure activity (67%), surpassing sports or studying, and was highlighted by child protection officers as an unmonitored risk environment. About 28% of children reported peers engaging in delinquent acts, suggesting peer contagion effects, consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), where behavior is modeled and reinforced within peer networks.

Parents' awareness of children's peers was relatively high, though 25% admitted rarely or never knowing their child's friends. Both children and parents reported limited conversations on sexual health (38–46% rarely/never), indicating a potential communication gap.

4.5 Family Structure and Delinquency

Family composition emerged as a critical factor. Over 52% of children lived with both parents, while 42% were raised in single-parent households. About 80% of children and 68% of parents agreed that family structure influences delinquency, with single-parent households identified as the highest risk. Child protection officers reinforced this, citing instability and inconsistency as precursors to deviance.

These findings align with Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978), which posits that family stability influences

children's emotional regulation and behavior. Prior research confirms that children from disrupted families are more vulnerable to delinquency (Svenson & Johnson, 2022).

4.6 Child Empowerment and Mentorship

Empowerment emerged as a protective factor. Among children, 62% reported attending mentorship programs, and 74% believed mentorship improves social readiness. Parents overwhelmingly reported mentoring their children (98%), and both groups recognized parental rewards for good performance as motivational. Protection officers emphasized non-academic empowerment—seminars, church programs, camps—as critical in building resilience. This aligns with Positive Youth Development (PYD) Theory (Lerner et al., 2005), which underscores mentorship and empowerment as buffers against risk behaviors. Empowerment builds self-esteem, strengthens pro-social identity, and redirects youth away from delinquency.

4.7 General Findings on Juvenile Delinquency

Children acknowledged minor deviant acts such as use of vulgar language (35%) and sneaking out of school (25%), though major crimes were rare. A strong majority (83%) believed family life influences delinquency, and 93% linked parental behavior to children's outcomes. Peer pressure was identified as the leading cause (58%), followed by poverty (23%) and lack of guidance (15%).

Table 7: Children cases of delinquency

Cause	% of Respondents
Peer pressure	58
Poverty	23.4
Lack of guidance	15
Family background	3.6

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine predictors of delinquency, with delinquency as the dependent variable. The results revealed that child participation in decision-making was the strongest and most significant predictor, demonstrating a protective effect ($\beta = -0.749$, $p = 0.001$). Child empowerment also showed a negative association with delinquency, although its effect was only marginally significant ($\beta = -0.424$, $p = 0.06$), suggesting a potential but less robust protective influence. In contrast, social life activities ($p = 0.555$) and family structure ($p = 0.97$) were not statistically significant predictors in the model. However, qualitative findings indicated that these factors may exert an indirect influence on delinquency, highlighting the importance of contextual and relational dynamics in shaping child behavior.

This highlights decision-making inclusion as the core protective mechanism, consistent with theories of democratic parenting and youth empowerment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study demonstrates that inclusive decision-making, child empowerment, and mentorship significantly reduce juvenile delinquency risks. While family structure and peer dynamics remain important, their effects are mediated by parental engagement.

Policy implications include:

1. Promoting authoritative parenting practices that emphasize communication and joint decision-making.
2. Expanding mentorship and empowerment programs through schools, faith-based organizations, and community groups.
3. Strengthening parent-child dialogue on peers and sexuality to mitigate risk factors such as peer pressure and social media exposure.

By situating findings within Social Learning Theory, Family Systems Theory, and Positive Youth Development, the study highlights the pivotal role of families and empowerment structures in shaping adolescents' pathways away from delinquency.

5.2 Recommendations

Table 8: Recommendations by level of intervention

Level	Recommendations
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt authoritative parenting practices that emphasize dialogue, negotiation, and shared decision-making. • Strengthen parent-child communication on peers, sexuality, and digital media use. • Provide targeted support to single-parent and disrupted households, including parenting support groups and psychosocial counseling.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate peer-led initiatives (peer counseling, youth clubs) to model positive behavior. • Expand mentorship programs covering both academic and non-academic empowerment (sports, arts, life skills). • Embed digital safety and empowerment modules within school curricula.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish community mentorship hubs in collaboration with child protection officers, faith-based groups, and local leaders. • Strengthen community safety nets to mitigate poverty-related risks (cash transfers, vocational training, youth employment initiatives). • Promote cultural values of collective responsibility (Ubuntu) to reinforce positive child rearing and protection.
Policy/National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize child participation frameworks in national child protection policies, ensuring children's voices are systematically included. • Scale up government and NGO investment in youth empowerment and mentorship initiatives. • Align national strategies with Positive Youth Development approaches, focusing on empowerment, mentorship, and resilience-building.

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