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An Edith Stein-Based Personalist-Phenomenological Study of Adolescent Boys' Delinquency in Rehabilitation Centres in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya

By

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188219

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Applied Philosophy and Ethics at Strathmore University

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Strathmore University

Nairobi, Kenya

August, 2026

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Declaration and Approval

Declaration

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Abstract

This study investigated how adolescent boys in rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya experience and interpret delinquent behaviour through Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology. Conventional empirical studies have emphasised socioeconomic correlates such as poverty and deviant peer reinforcement, yet they have largely overlooked the subjective lived experiences of the boys themselves. Addressing this gap, the study documented and phenomenologically interpreted the lived experiences of delinquent adolescent boys across family, peer, and institutional contexts through Edith Stein's layered anthropology and developed dignity-centred, context-sensitive interventions for prevention and rehabilitation. Employing an explanatory mixed-methods design, the researcher conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews with twenty purposively selected boys aged 12–17 in Lang'ata rehabilitation centres and triangulated these insights with a purposive survey of one hundred adolescents from the same setting. A key methodological contribution was the rigorous integration of the two independent strands at the interpretation stage. Through Stein's eidetic reduction, the study uncovered the core essence of the delinquent experience as profound unmet longings for familial love coupled with an intuitive recognition that freedom must be bounded by responsibility and the common good. While poverty intensified family stress for many boys, relational and emotional neglect operated across economic strata, showing that material deprivation alone does not fully explain delinquency. The findings offer a new dignity-centred framework for rehabilitation and prevention in Nairobi's urban context, emphasising relational restoration alongside material support, and provide practical recommendations for strengthened family reintegration, mentorship, and trauma-informed care that honour the boys' moral and spiritual striving. This study contributes both theoretical depth to personalist phenomenology and actionable guidance for more humane responses to juvenile delinquency.

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List of Abbreviations

BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
NCRC	National Crime Research Centre
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations office on Crime

Definition of Terms

Behaviourism - A psychological and criminological approach which explains human behaviour primarily in terms of conditioning, reinforcement, imitation, and environmental influences rather than interior moral or existential experience (Bandura, 1977; Skinner, 1953).

Dignity - Refers to the inherent worth and value of the human person, grounded in personalist philosophy as intrinsic to every individual regardless of behaviour or social status (Wojtyła, 1969; Stein, 1931/2002).

Personalist Phenomenology - A philosophical framework integrating phenomenology with realist personalism, emphasizing the human person as a unified being composed of body, psyche, and spirit, endowed with dignity, freedom, relationality, and moral responsibility (Stein, 1917/1989; Stein, 1922/2000).

Empathy - The phenomenological act through which one person apprehends and understands the lived experience of another while respecting the individuality and subjectivity of that person (Stein, 1917/1989).

Lived Experience - The subjective, first-person experience through which individuals perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to their actions, relationships, and circumstances (Husserl, 1913/2014; van Manen, 1990).

Positivism - An empirical approach to knowledge that seeks to explain behaviour through measurable variables, observable facts, statistical correlations, and causal relationships (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2019).

Relationality - The understanding that the human person exists and flourishes through relationships with others and within a community, rather than as an isolated individual (Mbiti, 1969; Stein, 1922/2000).

Triangulation - The process of integrating multiple methods or sources of data in order to strengthen the credibility, validity, and depth of research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to individuals who are currently struggling with addiction and to those who bear the profound effects of broken families. It is also dedicated to all practitioners, caregivers, and scholars who are committed to understanding and addressing these challenges in both personal and professional capacities.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Adolescent delinquency remains one of the most persistent moral and social challenges confronting contemporary societies. It disproportionately affects young males across cultures and manifests in behaviours that undermine personal safety, social cohesion, and the common good. Global reports by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) and UNICEF (2023) consistently highlight adolescence as a period of heightened vulnerability to antisocial conduct, especially when poverty, family disintegration, weak social institutions, and cultural dislocation erode the formative structures that give meaning and direction to young lives.In Kenya, the situation is a significant social concern. Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2023) and the National Crime Research Centre (2023) reveal that boys are significantly over-represented in custodial institutions, remand homes, and disciplinary records. Common infractions include truancy, interpersonal violence, theft, substance abuse, and involvement in petty crime (Karimi, Kwena & Anika, 2020; Njoroge, 2011; Luti, 2015). These patterns mirror broader continental and global trends (Diwe et al., 2016; Zimba, 2023) and frequently extend beyond the school environment into family and community spheres, often serving as precursors to more entrenched adult criminality (Evans, Mwenje & Githui, 2021; Hawkins et al., 1998).

1.2 Background

Globally, adolescent boys are over-represented in delinquent statistics across cultures (UNODC, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). In many traditional societies, including pre-colonial African communities, mechanisms such as communal norms, rites of passage, taboos against antisocial behaviour, and religious practices (e.g., confession and reconciliation) effectively guided adolescents toward moral responsibility and social reintegration. These cultural resources achieved interior transformation through relational and spiritual means, aligning closely with personalist emphases on dignity and relational flourishing. In modern contexts, rapid urbanization, economic inequality, and family fragmentation have eroded such supports, leading to higher delinquency rates. In Kenya, particularly urban areas like Nairobi, national data (KNBS, 2023; NCRC, 2023) show boys dominating rehabilitation populations due to truancy, theft, substance abuse, and violence. Within Lang'ata Sub-County, these patterns are intensified by the intersection of traditional values and modern pressures.

The behavioural and social sciences have generated substantial empirical knowledge about the correlates and risk factors of delinquency. These models excel at identifying measurable variables (biological, psychological, familial, socioeconomic, or environmental). Therefore, these models provide important insights into delinquency through environmental, social, and psychological analysis. However, these approaches frequently remain within the realm of observable behaviour and external causation. They often fail to sufficiently account for the adolescent's subjective experience of shame, moral conflict, emotional suffering, dignity, belonging, and existential struggle. This explanatory gap is particularly evident in Nairobi's Lang'ata Constituency, a rapidly urbanising area characterised by the uneasy coexistence of traditional African communal values and the pressures of modern individualism, economic inequality, and social fragmentation. Existing studies in the Kenyan context have usefully highlighted socioeconomic drivers, peer influence, and family instability. However, they have largely overlooked how adolescent boys themselves understand, interpret, and assign moral meaning to their delinquent behaviour, especially within rehabilitation settings. As a result, many interventions risk targeting surface-level behaviours while failing to engage the deeper personal and existential crisis that often underlies them.

Phenomenology, with its foundational call to "go back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1913/2014), offers a powerful methodological bridge by prioritising the immediacy and richness of lived experience. Yet classical phenomenology, when left untethered, risks sliding into subjectivism. By focusing exclusively on how phenomena appear in consciousness, it can isolate subjective experience from any objective moral or ontological order, thereby reducing complex human realities to mere psychological descriptions. Many phenomenological studies of deviance, while insightful, stop short of asking whether these lived experiences correspond to a deeper moral reality or participate in an objective structure of human flourishing and dignity.

It is here that the personalist phenomenology of Edith Stein (1891–1942) provides a uniquely promising and robust framework. Stein integrates Husserlian phenomenological method with a realist ontology and a rich philosophical anthropology. For Stein, the human person is not a mere bundle of psychological processes or social roles, but a unified, embodied, and spiritual being, comprising body, psyche, and spirit, and endowed with freedom, relationality, and an innate orientation toward truth, goodness, and objective moral values (Stein, 1917/1989; 1931/2002;

1922/2000). Her realism affirms that subjective lived experience is not arbitrary or self-contained; rather, it participates in and reveals an objective moral and ontological order.

By grounding phenomenological description in this personalist realism, Stein avoids two equally problematic extremes: the relativism of purely subjective accounts that treat moral experience as ultimately arbitrary, and the reductionism of positivist or behaviourist psychology that interprets behaviour solely as responses to external stimuli or internal drives. Instead, Stein's approach allows researchers to describe lived experience with fidelity while simultaneously recognising that such experience is anchored in the concrete reality of the person's moral and existential condition. This orientation makes her framework especially well-suited to the study of adolescent delinquency: it enables an understanding of delinquent boys not merely as "cases" or "offenders," but as persons actively navigating the tensions between freedom and constraint, guilt and innocence, alienation and belonging, and the search for dignity within a morally structured world.

Situating the inquiry within Stein's personalist phenomenology therefore transformed the study of delinquency from a narrowly psychological or sociological exercise into a deeper philosophical and ethical exploration of moral becoming. It allowed the investigator to probe how adolescent boys in rehabilitation centres encounter themselves as responsible moral subjects. In the context of Nairobi's Lang'ata, where traditional communal ethics increasingly intersect with modern urban pressures, this approach was especially timely. It offered a way of re-reading delinquency not simply as social deviation or psychological maladjustment, but as a profound crisis of meaning.

By integrating rigorous phenomenological insight with quantitative validation, this study recovered the adolescent's interior moral world while remaining firmly anchored in objective reality. In so doing, it illuminated pathways through which freedom, responsibility, relationality, and dignity can be rehabilitated, thereby enriching both the empirical understanding and the ethical response to adolescent delinquency among boys in Lang'ata.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite decades of research, the study of adolescent delinquency continues to be dominated by objectivist paradigms that range from the positivist, behaviourist, and sociological approach. These methods excel at quantifying behaviour, identifying risk factors, and measuring correlations,

yet largely neglect the inner moral world of the person. Thus, they explain what happens and why it happens statistically, but they fail to illuminate how delinquent boys subjectively experience their own life and accompanying phenomena such as freedom, guilt, responsibility, shame, belonging, or the possibility of personal transformation. Consequently, rehabilitation interventions frequently address symptoms and external behaviours while leaving untouched the deeper existential and moral crisis of meaning that often lies at the heart of delinquent conduct.

In the specific context of Nairobi's Lang'ata rehabilitation centers, this limitation is acutely visible. While local studies have documented the role of economic marginalization, family breakdown, peer pressure, and educational disengagement, they have paid insufficient attention to how the boys themselves interpret and assign moral significance to their actions and identities. Classical phenomenological approaches could, in principle, access this lived dimension; however, when detached from realist foundations, they risk collapsing into mere subjectivism by offering rich descriptions of subjective experience without a moral or ontological grounding.

Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology directly addresses this shortfall. By rooting phenomenological inquiry in a realist metaphysics and a layered anthropology of the person (body, psyche, and spirit ordered toward moral truth and relational flourishing), Stein's framework enables researchers to explore delinquency not merely as behavioural deviance or social dysfunction, but as a distortion of personal dignity, freedom, and relational capacity.

The core problem, therefore, is the absence of a personalist-phenomenological perspective in the study of adolescent male delinquency in the Kenyan urban context. Without such a syndissertation, both research and rehabilitation practice risk fragmenting the person into isolated social, psychological, or economic parts, thereby undermining efforts to support genuine moral and personal restoration. This study addresses that critical gap by applying Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology to the lived experiences of adolescent boys (aged 12–17) in selected rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata Constituency, offering a dignity-centred account that bridges subjective meaning-making with moral realism.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 Aim of the Study

To interpret and explain, through the lens of Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology, how adolescent boys aged 12–17 in selected rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata Constituency experience and make meaning of their delinquent behaviour, and to translate these insights into dignity-centred recommendations for rehabilitation, prevention, and policy.

1.4.2 Objectives of the Study

I. To document and phenomenologically interpret the lived experiences and the meanings adolescent boys attach to their delinquent acts, with particular attention to family, peer, and institutional contexts.

II. To examine how the unmet personal needs of freedom and love are experienced, misdirected, and expressed through delinquent behaviour, using Stein's layered anthropology of the person.

III. To triangulate the phenomenological findings with quantitative analyses of a purposive survey in order to assess prevalence, patterns, and associations according to age, offence type, family structure, and school engagement.

IV. To propose context-sensitive, dignity-centred interventions and policy recommendations for rehabilitation, prevention, and successful reintegration.

1.5 Research Questions

In line with the above objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

I. How do adolescent boys (aged 12–17) in rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata Constituency experience and construct meaning around their delinquent behaviour within family, peer, and institutional contexts?

II. In what ways do the unmet personal needs for freedom and love shape the emergence, expression, and subjective interpretation of delinquent behaviour among these boys?

III. To what extent and in what ways do patterns emerging from phenomenological interviews correspond with or diverge from quantitative findings drawn from a purposive survey regarding offence types, family structure, age, schooling, and peer associations?

IV. What context-sensitive, dignity-centred interventions and practices can be adopted by key stakeholders (boys, rehabilitation staff, caregivers, and NGOs) to support effective prevention, rehabilitation, and community reintegration?

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

To maintain methodological focus and feasibility, this study was delimited in several important ways. First, it focused exclusively on male adolescents aged 12–17 currently residing in selected rehabilitation centers within Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi County. It did not include female adolescents or boys living outside formal institutional settings.

Second, the phenomenological inquiry was limited to three primary lifeworld contexts most relevant to personal development and meaning-making: family, peer/social relations, and school engagement.

Third, the mixed-methods design was restricted to approximately 20 in-depth phenomenological interviews and a quantitative component involving institutional records review plus a purposive survey of 100 participants. The study did not include longitudinal follow-up beyond the data collection period.

Fourth, while the study sought to generate actionable recommendations for rehabilitation practice and policy, its interpretations and proposals were contextually grounded in urban Kenyan (specifically Lang'ata) realities and were not intended to generalize to all Kenyan or African adolescents.

Finally, the study was theoretically delimited by its explicit commitment to Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology. It did not integrate other theoretical frameworks such as behaviourism, psychoanalysis, strain theory, or economic models of crime.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study made three complementary contributions to knowledge and practice:

I. **Theoretical Contribution**: By applying Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology to juvenile delinquency in an African urban context, the study extended and refines personalist theory. It demonstrated how Stein's layered anthropology of the person (body–psyche–spirit) illuminates the moral, relational, and existential dynamics of offending and recovery, thereby enriching both phenomenological philosophy and African criminological thought.

II. **Methodological Contribution**: The study used a mixed-methods design in which phenomenological inquiry was systematically triangulated with quantitative data from surveys. This approach enhanced the credibility, transferability, and policy relevance of qualitative findings while modelling a philosophically grounded way of combining subjective meaning with objective patterns.

III. **Practical and Policy Relevance**: By developing dignity-centred intervention recommendations with stakeholders, the study aimed to inform more humane, person-respecting rehabilitation practices, restorative justice programmes, and local policy in Nairobi County and comparable urban African settings. Ultimately, it sought to reduce stigma, support genuine moral and relational restoration, and contribute to more effective prevention and reintegration strategies that honour the full dignity of the adolescent person.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the study within the major theoretical, empirical, and methodological debates on juvenile delinquency, focusing on adolescent boys and the relevance of a personalist phenomenological approach. It begins by outlining key statistics and policy trends on boys' delinquency in Kenya and comparable contexts. It then reviews the dominant explanatory paradigms, mainly positivist and behavioral, highlighting both their contributions and their limitations. The chapter next traces the development of personalism from Aristotle and Aquinas to Edith Stein, showing why this tradition offers a richer account of the personhood and moral agency of delinquent adolescents. It further explains why phenomenology is the methodological partner best suited to exploring lived experience beyond the reach of conventional positivist designs. Finally, it synthesizes empirical studies aligned with the study's objectives and introduces the conceptual framework guiding the research.

2.2 Statistical Context

Around the world, adolescent delinquency remains a persistent concern, with boys consistently over-represented in arrest records and correctional facilities. International studies show that adolescence is a period of heightened susceptibility to antisocial and risk-laden behaviors, especially where poverty, exclusion, and family instability are present (UNODC, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). These global patterns are mirrored across many African contexts, where rapid urbanization, economic pressures, and fragile family structures intensify young people's vulnerability to conflict with the law.

Kenya reflects these broader trends in a particularly pronounced manner. National statistics indicate substantial levels of delinquency among adolescents, with boys forming the overwhelming majority of custodial and rehabilitation populations (KNBS, 2023; NCRC, 2023; Judiciary of Kenya, 2023). Kenyan studies further reveal strong links between boys' over-representation in disciplinary cases and factors such as family maladjustment, school climate challenges, and community-level instability (Njoroge, 2011; Karimi, Kwena, & Anika, 2020; Moracha, Mbiriri, & Bironga, 2021).

Taken together, these global, regional, and national trends demonstrate why a Kenyan study that foregrounds adolescents' lived experiences is urgently needed. By prioritizing boys' subjective narratives and interpreting them through a philosophically coherent anthropology, such

work can move beyond descriptive correlations and offer deeper explanatory and practical insights for policy and rehabilitation efforts in the country.

2.3 The Problem of Delinquency Among Adolescent Boys

The issue of delinquency among adolescent boys has been documented through empirical studies that highlight statistics on behaviors such as violence, drug abuse, and sexual degeneracy. This research indicates that boys are disproportionately delinquent compared to girls. Illustratively, boys feature in disciplinary infractions more frequently than girls. These disparities manifest in various ways, including absenteeism, school suspensions, expulsions, and engagement in violent or disruptive behaviors (Karimi et al., 2020; Diwe et al, 2016). In the USA, males represent 93.2% of prison inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2020). Males also engage in antisocial behavior at higher rates than females and are also likelier to become jobless, homeless, and drug addicts in later life (Kimmel, 2017). These statistics show that the problem of male delinquency poses a risk to the common good. A study conducted in Orlu, Imo State, Nigeria, surveyed 402 secondary school students and established that male students were more likely to engage in antisocial behavior than their female schoolmates (Diwe et al, 2016). Among the types of infractions recorded, stealing was the most common. 67% of boys reported that they had engaged in theft, which was higher compared to the 50% figure for girls (Diwe et al, 2016). Boys also engaged more in alcohol use (65% versus 20%) and sexual promiscuity (62% versus 30%) than their female colleagues (Diwe et al, 2016). Another study, in Namibia, showed similar findings whereby teachers described male students as undisciplined trouble makers and girls as cooperative, hardworking students (Zimba, 2023).

In Kenya, a study highlighted differences in the nature and frequency of infractions among male and female students. The study, conducted in Machakos County, found that boys predominantly engaged in infractions such as rudeness to prefects, bullying, and improper dressing. On the other hand, girls exhibited a higher tendency toward absenteeism and sneaking food into school. These trends are known to teachers and counselors, 82.5% of whom note that boys are likelier to engage in truancy than girls (Luti, 2015). Another correlational study in Kilifi County, Kenya, also revealed that boys engage more frequently in disruptive behavior than girls (Karimi et al., 2020).The study also established that these tendencies negatively impacted their grades, suggesting that they are at greater risk of academic failure than their female colleagues. These findings are similar to those of Kathanzu (2010), who in a study of schools in Kitui district,

found that boys were likelier to engage in drug abuse, noise making, and fighting as compared to girls. Consequently, boys were suspended and expelled at higher rates than their female schoolmates. As they live with their families, delinquent adolescents often engage in lying, theft, truancy and defiance of authority. These tendencies are more pronounced in households that lack involvement of either the father or the mother in parenting (Evans, Mwenje, & Githui, 2021; Japheth, Mwirigi, & Otiso, 2024; Mugisha & Zulu, 2004).At the social level, delinquents often associate with deviant peers after encountering difficulties in forming or maintaining prosocial relationships, which further reinforces their antisocial tendencies (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016).In the school environment, delinquents often engage in bullying, truancy, vandalism, and substance abuse (Njoroge, 2011). Delinquent behavior among adolescents is often a precursor to a more serious antisocial behavior in adulthood (Hawkins et al., 1998). In post-adolescence, delinquent people often engage in serious antisocial behavior such as criminal gang activity, violent riots and chronic drug abuse (Githui, 2023). These patterns highlight delinquency patterns and developmental trajectories. They indicate that male delinquency manifests at the family, societal and educational level with significant ramifications for adult life prospects, highlighting the importance of early intervention.

2.4 Theoretical Review

This section provides an overview of the dominant traditions of delinquency research and describes the epistemological and ontological presuppositions underlying each tradition. The overview ranks three clusters: positivist, behavioural, and phenomenological. It then shows why The phenomenological approach proposed for this study offers an integrated view distinct from the others.

2.4.1 Positivist Approaches

Positivist studies of delinquency aim to make the study of crime scientifically sound. Early positivists searched for biological, psychological, and social correlates of criminality and attempted to build predictive models based on empirical regularities (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2019). In the twentieth century, there was a development of positivist social science into epidemiological and statistical criminology: large surveys, regression models, and risk factor analysis as the standard procedures for establishing correlates of offending behavior (Farrington, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Positivist approaches yield insightful technical descriptions of trends and prevalence. They also identify correlations such as those between school performance, poverty,

and family structure. Thus, these approaches have enabled targeted interventions such as early-intervention programs for high-risk groups. In policy contexts, measurable risk assessment and statistical analysis of programs are critical. However, positivist studies treat their subjects as objects of measurement with an an array of variables that do not consider the subjective meanings attached to them by each person. Therefore, they cannot account for the agency, moral calculus, or the lived experience of each person. Therefore, these studies describe the problem of delinquency but do not provide the subjective insights necessary for understanding a person's choices.

2.4.2 Behaviourist Approaches

Behaviourist approaches are premised on the assumption that the behavior of individuals is shaped by conditioning, reinforcement, and environmental contingencies (Skinner, 1953; Bandura, 1977). Policy implications are therefore aimed at modifying reinforcements and environmental conditions to avoid antisocial learning and promote prosocial behaviors. These approaches can explain the mechanisms of imitation and learning. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), for instance, explains the manner by which media and peers can supply models of behaviours that adolescents then replicate if the behaviours are rewarded or result in social status. Nonetheless, these approaches tend to underestimate personal interior life, including agency and moral calculus. They therefore do not explain why certain behaviors transcend reinforcement logic. Behaviourism can explain the "how" of acquiring behaviour, but is less adequately equipped to explain the "why" from the agent's point of view.

2.4.3 Contemporary Criminology

Contemporary criminologists offer several explanations for juvenile delinquency. These theories aim to specify causal mechanisms through which individuals are drawn into deviant behaviour. One of these approaches is Social Control Theory, first proposed by Hirschi (1969) and subsequently refined in later criminological research (Hirschi, 2017; Vazsonyi et al., 2021). The theory proposes that delinquency arises not primarily from extraordinary pressures toward crime, but from the weakening of social bonds such as attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. When these bonds are weakened, the individual becomes less restrained from deviant action. Recent empirical extensions continue to support the protective role of strong familial attachment and school engagement in reducing delinquency (Kierkus & Hewitt, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). However, a persistent limitation of Social Control Theory is that it does not sufficiently account

for the phenomenology of disconnection. The theory remains largely silent on how adolescents experience such detachment internally, whether as fragmentation of identity, moral confusion, or loss of dignity.

Another influential framework is Agnew's General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992; Agnew, 2019), which conceptualises delinquency as a response to stressors arising from the disjunction between culturally prescribed goals and structurally available means. Strain may emerge through poverty, educational exclusion, family breakdown, or perceived injustice, producing negative emotions such as anger and frustration, which may in turn facilitate delinquent coping strategies. Recent studies continue to validate the link between cumulative disadvantage and youth offending, particularly in urban and economically unequal contexts (Botchkovar et al., 2021; Moon & Morash, 2023). Nevertheless, Strain Theory remains primarily externalist. The question of how adolescents interpret cultural mismatch in relation to meaning, dignity, or moral selfhood remains insufficiently explored.

Another influential framework in contemporary criminology is developmental and life-course criminology, associated with scholars such as Sampson and Laub (1993) and Moffitt (1993). This theory posits that delinquency is not static but evolves across the life course. Key concepts such as turning points, cumulative continuity, and age-graded social bonds have refined understanding of delinquency. Recent longitudinal research has further strengthened these insights, highlighting the importance of employment, marriage, and institutional attachment as stabilising factors (Farrington et al., 2019; Kazemian, 2022). However, the theory remains largely within the behavioural realm. The internal transformation of meaning, such as how individuals reinterpret their lives and reconstruct moral identity, remains secondary rather than central.

Across these dominant frameworks, the adolescent is often treated as a node within systems of influence rather than as an existential subject capable of interior reflection, rupture, longing, and transcendence. From a philosophical standpoint, this reflects a tendency to reduce the person to a reactive entity within structural systems rather than fully acknowledging the human subject as a free, meaning-seeking agent.

2.4.4 Traditional African Mechanisms

Traditional African societies developed highly structured and culturally embedded mechanisms for guiding adolescent behaviour, which functioned simultaneously as moral education, social integration, and identity formation systems. These included rites of passage, communal taboos,

elder mentorship, storytelling traditions, and religiously grounded practices such as reconciliation, confession-like disclosure, and ritual cleansing. Anthropologists and African philosophers note that such systems were not merely disciplinary but formative, shaping the character of the young person through participation in communal life rather than external enforcement alone (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997). Rites of passage, for example, marked transitions from childhood to adulthood and were designed to inculcate responsibility, endurance, and social accountability through structured liminality (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1969). Elder mentorship functioned as a sustained pedagogical relationship in which moral knowledge was transmitted through narrative, example, and correction, reinforcing the African conception of personhood as fundamentally relational and developmental rather than static (Wiredu, 1996; Ikuenobe, 2006). Storytelling traditions—especially proverbs, folktales, and mythic narratives—served as ethical memory systems, encoding communal values and moral consequences in symbolic form that was easily retained and socially reinforced.

Religious and ritual practices also played a corrective and reintegrative role. Acts of reconciliation, purification, and communal restoration addressed moral transgression not only as individual wrongdoing but as a rupture in relational harmony requiring reintegration into the moral community. This resonates with Mbiti's famous formulation that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," highlighting the ontological priority of relationality in African moral anthropology (Mbiti, 1969). Such mechanisms thus achieved moral formation through interiorisation within relationships, rather than through purely coercive external regulation.

From a philosophical perspective, these structures align closely with personalist ethics, particularly the emphasis on the dignity of the person as constituted through relationship, responsibility, and moral development within community (Wojtyła, 1979; John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993). They also reflect Gyekye's "moderate communitarianism," which balances communal belonging with individual moral agency (Gyekye, 1997).

This study therefore argues that a selective and critically assessed integration of these indigenous resources can enrich contemporary adolescent rehabilitation frameworks by reintroducing relational depth, moral narrative formation, and communal accountability into modern systems that are often overly procedural, individualistic, or punitive in orientation.

2.4.5 The Personalist-Phenomenological Approach

The personalist tradition begins from the conception of the human person not primarily as a set of variables or conditions but as a unique and dignified reality composed of reason, freedom and relationality (Aristotle, ca. 350 BCE; Aquinas, 1274; Stein, 1935; Wojtyła, 1969). Thus, personalism requires researchers to account for a first-person perspective as a way of understanding each person's interior life. In contexts such as juvenile delinquency, where behavior expresses personal needs, this model can be particularly useful. The Aristotelian individual is a social being because goods for humans are obtained through relations in a polis. For the study of delinquency, Aristotle's teleological anthropology indicates that behaviors are only explicable in terms of the pursuit of goods, even when these are misidentified, as in the case of antisocial behaviors such as gang social status and pleasure from drug abuse. Aristotle holds that virtue is attained by practice and normative instruction. It is important to note that Aristotle's explanation exceeds behavioral explanations because it places all action within the teleology of ultimate ends of human life and not short-term rewards for behavior.

Thomas Aquinas developed a conceptualization of the human being as an embodied rational soul that exists in communion with other persons (Aquinas, 1274). Aquinas' moral life is composed of ordered appetites directed by reason and will. Aquinas stresses the relational dimension of personhood, viewing human beings not as isolated individuals but as inherently social and oriented toward others (Aquinas, 1274). The person finds fulfillment in communal and social relations directed toward the common good. Aquinas emphasizes the inner life (will, reason, passions) and positions them within the person's relational dimension.

Edith Stein developed a phenomenological approach to personalism. In 'On the Problem of Empathy', (1916/1989), she investigates how we access the lived experiences of others, showing that empathy allows us to grasp another person's consciousness while respecting their irreducible individuality. Stein described how empathy is the original act in which we constitute the other as a person for our consciousness. Stein argues that empathy is not a projection but a proper grasp of the other's experience through analogical perception. The empathizer has a sense of the other's embodiment and therefore the other's interiority. Stein also developed Aristotle and Aquinas' anthropology by stressing the bodily, psychological, and spiritual strata composition of persons and the need to account for them in any study of persons (Stein, 1916/1989). Stein's insights provide two methodological and interpretive advantages. Methodologically, empathy and

the resultant description of the other provide researchers with access to the lived sense of adolescents' behavior with minimal bias. Stein's emphasis on dignity and relationality encourages consideration of the way feelings of humiliation, exclusion, or recognition (or their absence) constitute a moral logic of action. Thus, Stein gives personalism a philosophical anthropology and a study method. Karol Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II) developed personalism with his focus on freedom, responsibility, and dignity as entrenching the personalist normative argument. For youth with delinquency, Wojtyla's personalist norm is that remedial actions should respect the personhood of the youth. Thus, in this perspective, retribution systems carry the risk of further alienation. Interventions acknowledging self-transcendence and the possibility of re-orienting toward the moral (education, formation, restorative practices) align with Wojtyła's personalism.

Together, these philosophical moments provide an account of the person that is teleological as in Aristotle, morally shaped within social structures as in Aquinas, available through empathic description and phenomenological inquiry as in Stein, and normatively dedicated to dignity, freedom and non-instrumentality as in Wojtyła. This integrated personalist anthropology provides both ontological frameworks (what is a person?) and methodological directives (how do we study persons?) suitable for the analysis of adolescent delinquency as a personalist phenomenon.

2.5 The Concept of the Person and Personal Needs

Philosophical anthropology, and particularly the personalist tradition, conceives of the human person as an irreducible subject who cannot be fully accounted for by social or biological variables. Sellés (2010) holds that the person is not merely an individual among individuals but a unique person characterized by the corporeal faculties, the essential human qualities of will and intellect and the personal transcendental qualities of knowledge, freedom, love, and coexistence. It is this personal reality that provides a foundation for moral responsibility and distinguishes human action from mere behaviorism. As opposed to positivist or reductionist accounts, the personalist theory maintains that the dignity of every human person requires respect for his interiority, agency, and transcendent orientation (Wojtyła, 1969).

The tripartite constitution of the human person is a characteristic of personalist anthropology. Edith Stein (1917) also emphasizes that man must be comprehended on three levels: the bodily, the psychic, and the spiritual. Sellés (2010) elaborates this model by showing how the corporeal level roots us in the world, the essential level mediates will and cognition, and the personal level opens us to transcendence and ultimate meaning. To study adolescents merely as

biological or social agents is therefore to overlook the depth of their personhood. From this multi-layered anthropology follows a sense of basic personal needs. Stein (1922) identifies freedom as fundamental, insofar as the human person is characterized by the capacity to choose beyond instinct or conditioning. Freedom, however, is not authentic unless ordered to the true and the good (Aquinas, 1265-1274; Wojtyła, 1969). Love is likewise constitutive of personhood, insofar as persons are fulfilled not in isolation but in self-giving relationships (John Paul II, 1988). Co-existence defines the interpersonal dimension of communal life, and it is the actual context in which freedom and love unfold (Wulf, 2017). Finally, knowledge is one of the basic personal imperatives because truth is the horizon of freedom and the foundation of human flourishing (Sellés, 2010).

Interpreting delinquent adolescents in light of this model accounts for how thwarted needs for freedom, love, co-existence, and knowledge distort personal development and lead to antisocial expressions of these very needs. The need for freedom, for instance, will be expressed as rebellion, the need for love as inappropriate attachments, or the need for knowledge as destructive curiosity. A personalist-phenomenological investigation, therefore, offers avenues to comprehend delinquency not as sheer pathology but as a misguided search for authentic personal fulfillment.

2.6 The Personalist Perspective On Delinquency

Personalist conceptions of human beings view them not as autonomous individuals but as dignified, relational beings. In this perspective, the human person has an inherent need for co-existence, freedom, and dignity (Sellés, 2010). Persons, as conceptualized by Stein, exist in a web of inter-subjective relationships (Betschart, 2022). Thus, true freedom is realized not in isolation but in the ability to perfect one's dignified and free relations with other people (Betschart, 2022). Fulfillment of these personal needs is essential for the flourishing of the person. Understanding the personal experience of delinquents can therefore shed light on personalist aspects of the problem. It can do this by highlighting how delinquents experience their connections to others, their freedom to choose, and their experience of dignity (Betschart, 2022; Wulf, 2017). This approach enables researchers to grasp subjective manifestations of the person (John Paul II, 1988). Consequently, it allows inquiry into perceptions and meanings that may escape the methods of positivist methods. Phenomenological delinquency research has provided insights into the lived experience of adolescence. For instance, a phenomenological study of delinquent children in the Philippines by Salih (2021) showed that delinquent behavior was not experienced merely as

deviance but as a response to unfulfilled relational needs. In this study, participants described an unfulfilled search for connection that was met in peer groups. They also cited feelings of mistrust towards non-offending peers. This phenomenological approach showed that mob delinquency is not simply a material struggle for survival but is also a striving for belonging. Another study by Facchin and Margola among Italian drug addicts showed that their delinquent behavior was experienced as a means to gain social recognition among peers (2016). This research revealed that drug addicts can engage in criminal activities, not only for material gain, but for the purpose of meeting their relational needs. In another study by Basson and Mawson, involving violent adolescent males in South Africa, revealed that their crimes had been committed in a state of anger after conflicts in their personal lives, with their victims being simply the trigger of their violence (2011). Another study by Marano (2014) showed that the acquisition of illegal weapons by adolescent males in New Jersey was perceived as a means of gaining social acceptance among peers. These phenomenological investigations show the subjective meanings of delinquency that quantitative statistical approaches tend to overlook.

Phenomenology can shed light on offenders' decision-making processes and personal lives, therefore enabling comprehensive control and prevention procedures. This approach can also inform successful rehabilitation by highlighting affected adolescents' personal needs. Phenomenology's qualitative analysis of lived experience can be triangulated with quantitative data (e.g., delinquency surveys) to optimize the validity of the empirical studies concerning the problem.

2.7 Phenomenology as a Method For Personalism

Phenomenology as a method and attitude was derived from Husserl and transformed by subsequent philosophers to things as they present themselves to consciousness (Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1913). Its central methodological procedures of bracketing, horizontal description, and eidetic reduction are designed to suspend naturalistic assumptions in order to uncover invariant structures of experience. Edith Stein adapted Husserlian methods to social cognition issues, believing empathy is a viable way of knowing the experiential life of others.

Delinquent acts have a tendency to have an expressive character. They convey complaints, claim status, or respond to shame in language understandable only by the actor. Phenomenological interviews, which are lengthy, open-ended, reflective conversations provoked by reflective analysis, give a glimpse in to the intentional structures organizing particular actions as meaningful.

Phenomenology, therefore, bridges the gap left by positivist epidemiology. While questionnaires tell us what number and what correlates there are, phenomenology shows what actions mean to the individual and how meanings are situated in bodily, social, and historical environments (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research requires rigorous reflexivity, which is the ongoing practice of reflecting on one's own assumptions, beliefs, and biases to ensure they do not distort the understanding of participants' experiences. This is closely linked to avoiding projection, the error of seeing one's own meanings, emotions, or values in the experiences of others rather than attending to the experiences as they are lived by the participant. Researchers also employ systematic analytic procedures to uncover the essential structures of experience. One such procedure is bracketing, which involves consciously setting aside preconceptions and prior knowledge about the phenomenon to approach it with openness. Another is imaginative variation, a technique in which researchers explore multiple perspectives or possibilities to identify the invariant, core aspects of the experience. Ethical awareness is equally crucial, particularly when engaging with vulnerable populations such as adolescents at risk of delinquency, ensuring that participation is voluntary, respectful, and protective of the individual's dignity (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Through these processes, phenomenology produces rich, detailed descriptions of lived experience, capturing meanings that might be invisible to more quantitative or observational approaches. These descriptions not only deepen theoretical understanding but can also inform culturally sensitive interventions, allowing practitioners and policymakers to design programs that respond meaningfully to the subjective realities of those they aim to help.

2.8 Phenomenology as it Relates to the Particular Objectives of the Study

2.8.1 Objective 1: Interpreting Lived Experiences of Delinquent Adolescent Boys Across Family, Peer, School and Institutional Contexts

Phenomenological and qualitative studies consistently demonstrate that delinquent adolescents interpret their behaviour through relational and meaning-laden experiences rather than as isolated individual acts. Across diverse contexts, adolescents describe their conduct in terms of belonging, dignity, peer recognition, and responses to vulnerability (Basson & Mawson, 2011; Facchin & Margola, 2016; Salih, 2021).

In South Africa, Basson and Mawson (2011) found that young male offenders frequently describe violence as a way to overcome perceived powerlessness and to reassert status within their peer networks. In Europe, Facchin and Margola (2016) showed that early family disruptions, fragile attachment patterns, and peer approval of offending behaviours shape how adolescents interpret their own actions. Salih (2021) similarly observes that delinquent conduct often emerges as a meaning-making response to relational instability rather than as mere deviance.

Within this phenomenological perspective, delinquent behaviour appears as an embodied response to breakdowns in the relational lifeworld—family, peers, school and institutional structures—where systems that ordinarily confer identity, recognition and dignity have weakened or failed. This accords with Stein's view that the person is constituted in relation and that meaning is derived from lived encounters across layered social, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

2.8.2 Objective 2: Examining How Unmet Personal Needs Shape the Emergence and Expression of Delinquent Behaviour

Personalist accounts maintain that delinquent behaviour often arises when fundamental personal needs such as freedom, co-existence, belonging and dignity are blocked or unmet. These are not simply external pressures but disruptions to the flourishing of the person as a unified being. Stein's layered anthropology refines this understanding by showing how threats to dignity or relational security are experienced internally as disturbances to the person's core. Her phenomenological method clarifies that adolescents act not merely from impulse but from attempts—frequently misdirected—to restore internal balance, agency or recognition in environments that fail to meet their emotional and relational needs.

Through this lens, delinquent behaviour becomes intelligible as a misguided effort to re-establish freedom, secure belonging, or reclaim dignity in contexts where these needs are chronically frustrated. This interpretation supports the study's aim of examining how unmet personal needs are experienced and expressed in the lived worlds of delinquent boys.

2.8.3 Objective 3: Developing Dignity-Centred, Context-Sensitive Interventions for Prevention and Mitigation

Evidence from systematic reviews indicates that effective delinquency interventions must operate across multiple levels of the adolescent's environment, incorporating family, school, community and institutional supports (Hawkins et al., 1998; Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Parenting programmes, early childhood education, behavioural supports in schools, mentoring and structured

extracurricular activities consistently contribute to positive outcomes. Studies from low- and middle-income countries underscore the importance of contextual adaptation and meaningful community participation (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016).

A personalist and phenomenological orientation enriches these models by insisting that interventions should honour and restore the adolescent's dignity, identity and relational needs. Programmes focused solely on behavioural correction often yield superficial change or increased stigma. In contrast, approaches aligned with personalist thinking—such as restorative justice, mentoring relationships and school cultures that cultivate positive interpersonal encounters—promote deeper rehabilitation by engaging the adolescent as a whole person (Zehr, 2002; Bazemore & Umbreit, 1995). In this way, phenomenology guides the development of context-sensitive and dignity-centred interventions that address both the behavioural and relational dimensions of adolescent delinquency.

2.9 Empirical Review: Kenya, East Africa, and Comparative Contexts

Empirical investigation of juvenile delinquency has produced a large and methodologically diverse literature. These range from large-scale quantitative population surveys and administrative research that are positivist or behavioural in approach, to qualitative studies that focus on the subjective experience of the phenomenon. To supply the present study with the best empirical grounding, this section classifies the empirical literature by methodology, summarizes notable findings and methods.

2.9.1 Positivist Studies

Quantitative research has dominated most criminological understanding of juvenile delinquency. Large longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have consistently identified common correlates of youth offending as being family dysfunction, ineffective parenting, academic underachievement, drug use, and delinquent peers (Farrington, 2006; Moffitt, 1993; Thornberry, 2000). Farrington's cohort and other life-course studies demonstrate the predictive power of early discipline problems for later delinquency (Farrington, 2006; Moffitt, 1993). The Developmental and Life-Course research uses statistical modeling (i.e., growth mixture models, survival analysis) to trace trajectories of delinquent behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Thornberry, 2000). Regional quantitative studies validate these findings. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, population surveys and crime mapping show that adolescent delinquency is concentrated in urban poor areas,

tends to be linked to drug taking and school non-attendance, and disproportionately involves males (UNICEF, 2023; UNODC, 2023). Quantitative research also highlights crime patterns such as the prevalence of property offenses and juvenile theft in poor communities and the prevalence of gang membership in areas where there is social dysfunction (Hawkins et al., 1998; UNODC, 2023).In Kenya, boys are disproportionately represented among indiscipline cases and in juvenile custodial populations (Karimi, Kwena, & Anika, 2020; Luti, 2015) . Their studies show that family disruption and parental absence are predictors of misbehavior, and that drug use is an important correlate of delinquent behavior (Karimi et al., 2020; Moracha, Mbiriri, & Bironga, 2021).

2.9.2 Behaviouralist Studies

Behavioural formulations have been applied as evidence-based interventions. These have taken the form of parent training programs, school behaviour management and cognitive-behavioural therapy. Studies show that the majority of early intervention programs reduce delinquency if implemented with consistency (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Hawkins et al., 1998). Meta-analyses show that multi-component programs involving family and school stakeholders have the largest effect (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Bandura (1977) focused on reinforcement of positive behavior among adolescence. This was achieved by teachers through disciplinary and after-school programs that modified peer group relationships. In Kenya, programme evaluations are typically quasi-experimental and emphasize feasibility, adaptation and implementation concerns. Programmes with combined economic support to families and social interventions have stronger retention and more sustainable behaviour change (Beegle et al., 2018; Cluver et al., 2016).

2.9.3 Phenomenological Research

A phenomenological investigation examines the lived meaning of delinquency. Groundbreaking studies reveal how youth view their acts as pathways to identity, community and status (Basson & Mawson, 2011; Facchin & Margola, 2016; Salih, 2021). For instance, Basson and Mawson (2011) used descriptive phenomenology to show how South African male youth offenders conceived of violence as a response to social exclusion. Facchin and Margola (2016) also found that drug-dependent inmates experienced drug abuse as a means of meeting their relational needs. Phenomenological investigation therefore illuminates how delinquency is often intelligible in first-person structures which cannot be quantified by quantitative instruments. In Kenya, qualitative research into adolescent delinquency is still relatively underdeveloped. Njoroge (2011) reports a case study of school factors leading to juvenile delinquency in Nairobi, drawing

on interviews and observation of schools. Njoroge's research showed that teacher-student relations, corporal punishment regulations, and school moral atmosphere were frequently experienced by boys as exclusionary, which resulted in disengagement. Other Kenyan studies (Evans, Mwenje, & Githui, 2021; Igandu, Odek, & Marima, 2023) have explored conceptions of work, respect, and masculinity among youth. Such studies show that delinquency can be used to fulfill relational needs and provide a sense of purpose for idle youth. Phenomenological studies reveal personal meanings (Geertz, 1973; van Manen, 1990). However, bracketing, reflexivity, and triangulation with multiple data sources are required to reduce projection and increase credibility (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

2.9.4 Mixed-Methods Studies

Mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative measurement of prevalence and patterning with qualitative analysis of meaning allow researchers to move from how often and for whom things happen to how the patterns are lived and why they occur. Methodologists argue that mixed designs strengthen causal inference and practical application by using qualitative findings to test, refine, and make more human quantitative models (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Several path-breaking youth justice studies illustrate this complementarity. Large administrative and survey studies have mapped disproportionality in school exclusion and its links to later justice contact, and follow-up interviews and ethnography explored the institutional practice and daily life that produces those trends (Skiba et al., 2011; Skogan, 2009). These complementary approaches illustrate how statistics demarcate at-risk groups and pathways and how qualitative research highlights mechanisms such as bias, policy enforcement, and stigma that quantitative models cannot.

Program evaluation and service delivery research in juvenile centers also utilize mixed designs. For example, residential-care and family-based care evaluation commonly use an explanatory-sequential design: a first-phase evaluation of program adoption and outcomes for a population, and then interviewing staff, youth, and families to explain why outcomes varied and what services were seen (Day et al., 2015). The study showed the applied utility of mixed methods in designing and developing interventions for rehabilitation and reintegration. Kenyan studies provide a straightforward template for combining institutional prevalence research with qualitative assessment of needs. In the study on children in conflict with the law by the National Crime Research Centre (2023), quantitative data on demographic patterns, adequacy of programs, and

unmet needs were collected, and officials' and children's perceptions of unmet educational, psychosocial, and legal needs were documented. The study combined population data with in-depth, practice-oriented qualitative analysis, proving that mixed designs can be effective within the Kenyan policy context and capable of producing generalizable and actionable evidence.

Combining phenomenology into a comprehensive mixed-methods design is also possible. Martiny et al. (2021) proposed that third-person quantitative findings and first-person phenomenological results can mutually constrain and inform each other: quantitative survey data inform sampling and scope, but phenomenological interviews refine constructs, indicators, and causal claims. This works especially where questions of research involve measurement of meaning depth (e.g., how boys experience shame, recognition, family breakdown, or institutionalization) and scope (e.g., how common delinquency and unmet needs are).

Empirical examples of this mixed methods hybrid appear in education, clinical, and forensic settings. Phenomenological mixed-methods research are used in explanatory research where survey or administrative data are used to identify subgroups to be studied with in-depth phenomenological interviewing. They are also used in convergent parallel designs, which collect survey/administrative and phenomenological data simultaneously, integrating findings at the interpretation stage (Finlay, 2011; Giorgi, 2009; Martiny et al., 2021).

There are several advantages of combining phenomenology with other research methods. Firstly, it gives scope and depth: administrative records and surveys quantify prevalence and subgroup trends, but phenomenological interviews retrieve first-person descriptions of boys' experiences of dignity, shame, freedom, and relational needs (Martiny et al., 2021). Second, it provides better measurement and theory-building: phenomenological notions such as humiliation or recognition can be used to design survey items and test whether these subjective feelings statistically mediate between background risks and offending (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Third, it advances policy relevance and ethics: combining population estimates with rich descriptions of lived need and dignity delivers evidence that is credible to policymakers and ethically argumentative when advocating for child-centered reforms, restorative practices, or community reintegration initiatives (NCRC, 2023).

Mixed methods are well entrenched in criminological and delinquency scholarship. Adding phenomenology to mixed designs is theoretically sound as well as practicable. Kenyan

organizations have already used the former to bring together prevalence measurement with qualitative needs assessment.

2.10 Research Gap

Although international research has extensively examined adolescent delinquency, significant theoretical, empirical and contextual gaps remain, particularly within the Kenyan setting and with respect to personalist and phenomenological interpretations of delinquent behaviour among adolescent boys in rehabilitation centres.

First, existing Kenyan and regional studies rely heavily on quantitative and behavioural criminological approaches that identify risk factors but do not explore how adolescents experience, interpret and assign meaning to their behaviour within family, peer, school and institutional contexts. No study in Lang'ata, and very few in sub-Saharan Africa, have undertaken a phenomenological analysis of delinquency grounded in Edith Stein's personalist framework. As a result, the lived meanings, struggles for dignity, relational wounds and inner narratives that shape delinquent behaviour remain largely undocumented.

Second, although global scholarship acknowledges that unmet emotional and social needs can influence delinquency, the literature does not apply Stein's layered anthropology to explain how threats to freedom, belonging, recognition and dignity are experienced internally by delinquent adolescents. Existing studies in low and middle income contexts emphasise structural risk factors but do not examine how these factors are embodied, interiorised and transformed into behaviour as adolescents attempt to restore agency or secure relational meaning. This represents a significant conceptual gap in understanding how unmet personal needs are lived and acted out in the daily experience of delinquent boys.

Third, even though international evidence highlights effective interventions, there is a lack of dignity-centred, contextually appropriate models for Kenyan rehabilitation centres. No study in Lang'ata has triangulated phenomenological insights with institutional records and quantitative data to generate interventions that attend both to outward behaviour and to the inner constitution of the person. This gap limits the development of rehabilitation strategies that are sensitive to the lived realities of boys in Kenyan institutional care.

Fourth, there is a deeper philosophical gap in existing phenomenological studies of delinquency. Much of the global phenomenological literature risks drifting into subjectivism, where behaviour is interpreted only through individual meaning-making, or into relativism, where

all interpretations are treated as equally valid. Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology addresses this limitation by grounding subjective experience within an objective realist account of the human person whose dignity, freedom and relational nature are intrinsic and stable. This personalist anchor strengthens phenomenological inquiry by ensuring that the interpretation of lived experience is measured against the real structure of the person and the requirements of authentic human development. It therefore enhances phenomenology by preventing it from collapsing into purely private or culturally variable interpretations.

In consideration of these factors, the present study identified a phenomenological gap within existing delinquency literature. Although contemporary criminology explains delinquency through observable structures, pressures, and behaviours, limited attention has been given to delinquency as a lived human experience involving emotional suffering, moral consciousness, relational hunger, and the search for dignity.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

In this study, the perspective is phenomenological. The essence of this research lies in uncovering the lived meaning-structures and experiences of delinquent adolescent boys in Lang'ata. Quantitative questionnaire data provides triangulating supports that situate those meanings in statistical contexts. The phenomenological method employed is based in Husserl's approach as elaborated by Stein and Wojtyła.

2.11.1 Phenomenology as the Foundational Methodology

Phenomenology begins with Edmund Husserl's invitation to "return to the things themselves". Husserl (1913) tried to set naturalistic assumptions aside with the epoché, suspending the "natural attitude," in order to describe how phenomena are lived by consciousness. For Husserl, the person is not an object to be quantified like a stone but a subject whose experiences are displayed in intentional structures or directedness to meaning. For this study, this means going beyond lists of risk factors to inquire: What does stealing, fighting, or rebelling against adults mean to the adolescent himself? Phenomenology tries to make these meanings live, and not just inferences from outside correlational facts.

2.11.2 Edith Stein: Empathy and the Layered Person

Edith Stein developed phenomenology by showing that empathy is the original act in terms of which we encounter the other as a person. Persons, Stein maintained, are built up in layers of body, psychology, and soul (1917). In Stein's conception of human beings, reducing a person to

one layer distorts the truth of being. Thus, for this study, delinquent boys are not merely "bodies committing acts" (positivist look) or "organisms conditioned by reinforcements" (behaviourist view). They are multilayered persons: body, emotion, intellect, and spirit, with an interior meaning for their actions.

2.11.3 The Integrated Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) is grounded in Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology and adopts a stratified, concentric design that mirrors her anthropology of the human person as a unity of body, psyche, and spirit. At the centre lies the inviolable core essence of the person and his or her transcendent needs for freedom, love, co-existence, knowledge, and dignity. The second layer captures the lived experiences and subjective meanings that delinquent adolescent boys in Lang'ata rehabilitation centres attach to their actions, accessed primarily through in-depth phenomenological interviews. The third layer provides empirical validation and contextualisation by triangulating these qualitative insights with quantitative data drawn from institutional records and structured surveys. Finally, the outermost layer translates the integrated findings into practical, dignity-based interventions that respect the full personhood of the adolescent rather than merely controlling behaviour.

VT OMNES VNVM SINT

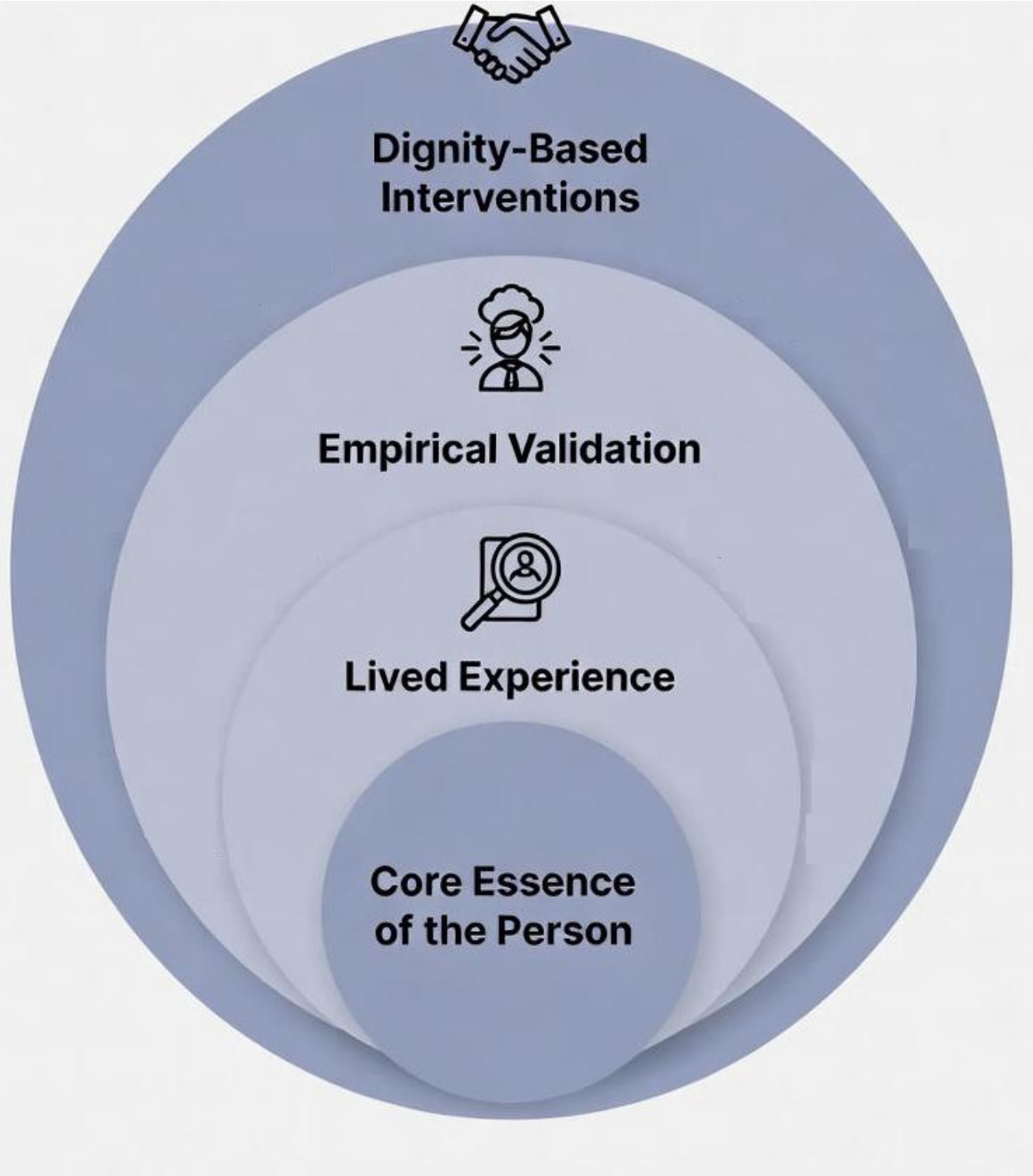

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

2.12 Conclusion

Delinquency research in Kenya has repeatedly emphasized the effect of socioeconomic deprivation, family dysfunction, school disengagement, and peer dynamics. Okumu (2008) showed that adolescents in low-income urban informal settlements are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system and that poverty both directly and indirectly influences delinquent behavior. Similarly, Moracha, Mbiriri, and Bironga (2021) validated poor parental control, defective discipline, and exposure to domestic violence as long-term predictors of deviance in Nairobi adolescents. Peer group membership, particularly gang or delinquent associations, likewise amplifies such risks by offering alternative identity, belonging, and material incentives (Onyango, 2014; Basson & Mawson, 2011). These studies view adolescent boys as measurable objects rather than as living subjects. That is, research on Kenyan delinquency to date has largely operated within positivist and behavioural epistemologies, recording risk factors and correlates without breaking through to the subjective meaning that delinquent acts have for adolescents themselves. For example, quantitative questionnaires can tell us how many boys are detained in rehabilitation centres and what offence they most frequently commit, but they can say nothing about whether or not the boys understand their actions to be survival tactics, honour displays, or revenge for humiliation. The prevailing methods, therefore, are open to reductionism. Poverty, family breakdown, and peer pressure are indeed good predictors, but they do not represent the fullness of delinquency. They tell us what conditions correlate with deviant action, but not how deviant action is lived and interpreted by actors who perform it. The boys' own words are too often absent from these accounts, their actions accounted for from the outside by adults, policymakers, and researchers applying interpretive frameworks without seeking to enter the boys' own fields of meaning. This limitation is symptomatic of broader issues in criminology and the human sciences. As Stein (1917) argued, reifying the individual to a bundle of causal processes erases the stratified depth of human subjectivity. Similarly, Wojtyła (1969) warned against understanding the acting person as a behaviorist object rather than a moral subject whose actions are freedom, dignity, and relationality.

The present research adopted phenomenology as its chief methodology precisely because phenomenology offers privileged access to lived meanings and subjective structures of experience (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Rather than beginning with outside-imposed categories, phenomenology began with description: an audition of delinquent boys themselves accounting for

their deeds, their selves, and their worlds. The phenomenological analysis of Kenyan male delinquency among boys knew the subjective meanings attributed to deviant behavior. It also illuminated the relational demands underlying deviant behavior. Using this methodology, the study contributed to Kenyan criminological research by bridging a significant research gap: the unavailability of first-hand testimonies in delinquency research in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study investigated delinquency among adolescents in Lang'ata constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya, with a focus on how educational, family, and community environments influence behaviour. It examined adolescents' experiences across school, home, and peer contexts to understand the factors contributing to delinquency. The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative analysis of academic performance and disciplinary records with phenomenological interviews to explore the lived experiences of delinquent boys, generating both empirical evidence and insight into the meanings underlying their behaviour.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component analysed responses to surveys on personal values, family background, peer relations, and rehabilitation experiences in order to identify recurring patterns, correlations, and contextual factors associated with delinquent behaviour among adolescent boys. However, since the study sought not merely to classify delinquency behaviourally but also to understand it as a lived human experience, a qualitative phenomenological component was necessary. Guided by Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology, the qualitative dimension explored how adolescents themselves interpret experiences of family disruption, friendship, rejection, substance use, belonging, shame, moral struggle, and freedom within their social environments. The integration of quantitative findings with phenomenological analysis enabled the study to move beyond purely objectivist explanations of delinquency by combining observable behavioural patterns with the subjective interior experiences of the participants. Through triangulation, the study achieved a more holistic understanding of delinquency as both a social phenomenon and a lived personal reality.3.3 Target Population

The study focused on adolescent boys in selected rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata, Nairobi. Rehabilitation centres were selected because the target population (delinquent boys aged 12–17) could be found in rehabilitation centres that have been established to address behavioural problems.

3.2.1 Sampling Technique

The study purposively sampled 20 adolescent boys from rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata for the qualitative phenomenological interviews. After the researcher explained the study objectives and requirements to the rehabilitation centre managers, the managers suggested boys who could participate, with preference given to those exhibiting frequent misdemeanours. This ensured that participants were highly relevant to the research objectives. This non-probability, purposive approach was appropriate for the phenomenological strand, where the goal was to obtain rich, in-depth accounts of lived experience rather than statistical generalisability. A sample of 20 aligned with methodological guidance for phenomenological research, which recommends small, focused samples (commonly 5–25) to allow detailed, exhaustive analysis and thematic saturation (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

For the quantitative component, 100 adolescents were identified in liaison with rehabilitation centre managers after the researcher explained the objectives and requirements of the study. This process also followed a purposive sampling strategy. Managers suggested boys who best represented the range of delinquent behaviours and backgrounds relevant to the research. Stratification considerations by age (12–14 and 15–17) and offence type (e.g., theft, violence) were applied where possible to ensure representativeness and allow meaningful inferential analysis of patterns and trends. This sample size provided sufficiently precise prevalence estimates (approximately ±10% margin of error at 95% confidence), supported subgroup comparisons, and met common rules-of-thumb for multiple regression analysis (10–20 cases per predictor, with up to five predictors), while remaining feasible within the study context (Farrington, 2006).

By combining these two strands, the study achieved complementary strengths: the phenomenological sample (n = 20) yielded deep, rich descriptions of adolescent lived experiences, while the quantitative sample (n = 100) contextualised these experiences within broader patterns and correlations. Together, this design strengthened both the theoretical insights and empirical grounding of the research, enhancing its relevance for policy and practice.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study used both primary and secondary data collection methods.

3.3.1 Primary Data Collection

- Structured Surveys: These were used to gather quantitative data on discipline cases.

- In-depth Interviews: These were conducted to gain phenomenological insights into the problem of delinquency. The interviews established the participants' lived experience of delinquency in the family, social, and institutional environment.

3.3.2 Secondary Data Sources

- Existing Literature: Previous research on the phenomenology of delinquency.

3.4 Research Instruments

3.4.1 Surveys

- Questions on their engagement in delinquency.
- Questions on their biodata
- Questions on their family background
- Questions on their valuation of personal needs

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: These were used to summarise data on delinquent behaviour among male adolescents.
- Inferential Statistics: These were used to identify correlations between the family, social, and educational environments and delinquent behaviour.

3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: This involved analysing interview responses and coding key themes to characterise the lived experiences of delinquent boys in the family, community, and institutional environment.

3.5.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data was a cornerstone of this study's mixed-methods design, ensuring that both measurable trends and lived experiences of adolescent delinquency informed the findings in a coherent and mutually reinforcing manner. Integration occurred across design, data collection, and interpretation stages to produce a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Because official disciplinary records were unavailable, preliminary quantitative

analysis of such records could not be conducted prior to data collection. Instead, consultation with rehabilitation centre managers, after the researcher clearly explained the study objectives and requirements, guided the identification of suitable participants for both strands of the research.

At the design level, the process of consulting rehabilitation centre managers served to identify patterns and diversity in delinquent behaviour across age groups, offence types, and environmental contexts such as family, school, and peer influences. These insights, drawn directly from the managers' knowledge of the boys in their care, guided the selection of participants for the qualitative phenomenological interviews. This targeted approach ensured that adolescents representing diverse profiles and experiences were included. The consultation-based method allowed the qualitative strand to explore differences in the lived experience of delinquency in a focused manner, rather than relying on a random or purely convenience-based selection.

During data collection, the phenomenological interviews with the 20 boys were conducted based on a prepared interview guide. The interviews focused on exploring the boys' lived experiences of delinquency in family, peer, school, and institutional contexts through phenomenological questioning. The quantitative survey administered to the 100 boys was conducted separately and provided measurable trends on patterns of delinquent behaviour, family backgrounds, school engagement, and peer influences. These survey responses were later integrated with the phenomenological insights at the interpretation stage. By bringing together the independent qualitative narratives and the quantitative patterns, the study produced complementary insights. The survey responses from the 100 participants were integrated directly with the phenomenological insights obtained from the 20 in-depth interviews.

At the interpretation stage, the study employed a triangulation approach, comparing and syndissertationing the quantitative survey results with the qualitative narratives. For example, numerical trends indicating correlations between family instability and delinquent behaviour were interpreted alongside interview accounts that revealed adolescents' personal experiences amidst family conflicts. In this way, quantitative data provided the structural framework of generalisable trends, while qualitative findings elucidated the lived realities behind those trends. This iterative process enabled the research to move beyond descriptive statistics or isolated narratives, producing an integrated understanding that captured both the breadth and depth of adolescent delinquency.

Through this detailed integration, the study achieved a syndissertation in which quantitative and qualitative methods informed, complemented, and validated each other. Quantitative analysis

identified broad patterns and relationships, qualitative inquiry explained the mechanisms and subjective experiences underlying those patterns, and the combined insights provided a robust foundation for both theory and practice. This integration strengthened the study's explanatory power, enhanced its validity, and produced actionable knowledge that could inform interventions aimed at addressing adolescent delinquency.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study upheld the following ethical standards:

1. Confidentiality – All identifying information (Institution identities and participant details) was anonymised.
2. Non-Coercion – Participants were not forced to participate in the research activities.
3. Approval from Authorities – Approval for all research was obtained from relevant authorities.

3.7 Conclusion

By integrating the quantitative survey with qualitative interviews, the study provided a phenomenological understanding of observed behaviours. The qualitative aspects of the study analysed how delinquent boys experienced their personal lives, while the quantitative approach analysed statistics concerning the phenomenon. This combined approach provided an enriched perspective that combined measurable statistics with the lived experience of subjects.

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Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, emphasizing the lived experiences of adolescent boys in rehabilitation, and integrating quantitative data to support and contextualize these experiences. Employing Edith Stein's phenomenological method, the analysis seeks the essential structures of consciousness. Through eidetic reduction, the study attends to phenomena as they appear, suspending assumptions to apprehend the authentic experiences of participants.

The qualitative component involved twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews exploring family backgrounds, peer networks, substance use, delinquent behavior, and visions of the future. Quantitative data were collected from one hundred participants, capturing family configurations, schooling histories, substance use patterns, previous rehabilitations, and value orientations. Triangulating qualitative narratives with quantitative measures allowed the study to validate experiential findings within a broader structural context.

Four core essences emerged from the analysis. The first is the primacy of friendship as a psychic anchor. The second is substance dependency as a bodily strategy for coping with distress. The third is familial disruption and pedagogical rupture, shaping vulnerability to delinquency. The fourth is spontaneous delinquency intertwined with ethical reflection and spiritual striving.

4.2 Qualitative Interview Results

4.2.1 Delinquency as Intersubjectivity

Participants consistently emphasized the centrality of peer relationships in defining their daily lives. Friendships provided a stabilizing structure in the midst of familial disruption, domestic instability, or bereavement. One participant who had lost both parents at age nine described his first few days on the street as having been made easier by a friend who taught him how to avoid police raids. Delinquent acts of violence were also experienced as acts of friendship. For instance, fighting against a rival gang was done by members of each gang who wanted to maintain their status within the group. Failure to fight for one's gang could lead to expulsion from peers. Thus, violence against rival gang members was seen as a mode of validating bonds of friendship which are crucial to survival on the street.

4.2.2 Delinquency as a Moral Dilemma

Substance use was widespread and deeply intertwined with participants' coping strategies. Inhalants, glue, petrol, and cannabis were described as providing temporary relief from psychic

distress, grief, and anxiety. One participant orphaned at age ten recounted that sniffing glue alleviated the fear of sexual abuse by elder street boys by creating a temporary sense of courage. These practices were often social, reinforcing relational bonds while addressing psychic pain. One participant noted that proximity to fellow smokers of bhang and users of sniffing petrol was in itself a guarantee that one would get intoxicated due to the airborne nature of the drug. Thus, life on the street was a virtual guarantee for drug abuse. The statistics corroborate this insight. Eighty seven percent of participants reported using drugs such as bhang and sniffing glue on a regular basis. Despite this, many of the boys retained an ethical awareness of the immoral nature of drug abuse.

4.2.3 Delinquency as Despair amidst Moral Striving

Relapse narratives highlighted the ongoing struggle between bodily cravings, psychic despair, and spiritual striving. One participant admitted that he felt exhilarated while stealing and then felt guilty afterwards, only to fall again into the cycle after seeing a person leave his belongings unattended. He noted that the temptation to steal produced almost-irresistible feelings excitement that were later followed by guilt after the act. Another participant noted that sniffing petrol was very addictive. Years of attempts at quitting had only partially succeeded despite him understanding that the habit was harmful to his health. Another participant described his act of running away from a rehabilitation center as having been motivated by the desire for sniffing petrol. He later approached another rehabilitation center after re-encountering the perils of street life. This pattern of relapse is backed by collected statistics. Seventy-two percent of participants experienced post-rehabilitation relapse, with the average time to relapse being 3.4 months. Motivation to change scores were averaged at 3.9 out of 5, and seventy two percent had histories of multiple relapses. This data validates the experience of addiction relapse as a form of despair amidst the struggle to change.

4.2.4 Delinquency as a Substitute for Family

Family environments exerted profound influence on participants' development and behavior. Ninety two percent of delinquent subjects reported absence of one or two parents due to bereavement, or abandonment. Eighty-eight percent came from single parent homes. For many participants, friendship functioned not merely as companionship but as a substitute structure of belonging and recognition amidst fractured familial and institutional relationships. Reporting on their experiences at home, the score for feeling loved by those around them at home were 2.7, and 2.1

for feeling supported when facing problems. Participants often described fleeing abusive or neglectful households and seeking nurturing or stabilizing relationships with peers or neighbors. One adolescent recounted leaving home to live on the street after his relatives adopted most of his siblings following the death of his parents. His relatives left him with an elder sister who spent many nights away. Thus, vagrancy emerged as a response to familial disruption. Another described the death of his mother as having resulted in his father taking him to live with his grandparents in a new town where he got involved in glue sniffing. Other participants described longing for connection with people who had shown them love. One described spending money gained from garbage collection in a cyber café searching online for a neighbor that had been kind to him when his family was fighting. The quantitative data support these narratives, revealing widespread parental absence, family conflict, and single-parent or extended household living arrangements among delinquent adolescents.

4.2.5 Delinquency as Impulsivity

Delinquent behavior was frequently impulsive, accompanied by cycles of regret and moral reflection. One participant described the exhilaration of theft followed by intense remorse. Thirty-nine percent of respondents had committed three or more offenses, with the average age at first offense being 12.3 years. Self-reported recognition of the need for responsibility and rule-following averaged 3.6, while rating of the absolute freedom of choice averaged 2.2, reflecting the fact that even delinquent understand the importance of moral guidelines that place limits on autonomy. Despite this knowledge, they engage in delinquent acts repeatedly only feeling remorse afterwards. Thus, delinquency emerges as a negotiation between corporeal impulses and moral reflection.

4.3 Perception of Transcendental Values: Love and Freedom

Participants consistently articulated the importance of love and freedom, describing these as essential guiding principles in their lived worlds. Love functioned as a stabilizing relational and moral force. Several participants referred to the unmet need for love as a prominent factor for their actions. For example, one respondent described his escape from boarding school as having been motivated by the desire to live with his mother and siblings. In another case, a respondent cited the fear of a hostile stepmother as having motivated his refusal to live on his father's rural farm even after he became homeless. Quantitative measures indicated that ninety-four percent rated feeling loved by peers or family as important, illustrating the centrality of love as a value even to delinquent adolescents.

Among participants, the value for unbounded freedom was low at 2.2 indicating an awareness that unbounded freedom can be destructive. Participants also showed a value for hierarchy. The value for respect from adults was low at 2.0, while that of mutual respect from peers was high at 4.4. These narratives illustrate how adolescents experience the transcendental of love and freedom even while displaying delinquent behavior.

4.4 Quantitative Survey Results

In conducting the quantitative component of this mixed-methods study, a purposive sample of 100 adolescent boys aged 12–17 years residing in selected rehabilitation centres in Lang'ata Constituency, Nairobi County, completed two structured data-collection instruments: Appendix 6 (Quantitative Data Collection Form 1) and Appendix 7 (Quantitative Data Collection Form 2). These forms were administered exactly as designed in the methodology to ensure systematic capture of both objective background variables and subjective personal values and priorities. Form 1 collected participant identification details, family structure and living situation, offence history, and relapse information. Form 2 collected self-reported ratings on personal needs, feelings about life, and perceptions of freedom using a consistent 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Not important / Not true", 2 = "Slightly important / Rarely true", 3 = "Moderately important / Sometimes true", 4 = "Important / Often true", 5 = "Very important / Always true"). The survey was administered in a quiet room within each rehabilitation centre after the 20 phenomenological interviews had been completed but before any eidetic reduction or deeper interpretive analysis of the interview transcripts. This deliberate sequencing, as outlined in the methodology (section 3.6.3), allowed the quantitative data to function as an independent, objective baseline that could later be triangulated with the qualitative findings without researcher bias contaminating the numerical responses. All 100 boys completed both forms fully, yielding a 100% response rate and enabling robust descriptive statistical analysis (percentages for "highly important" responses = ratings of 4 or 5, and arithmetic means for overall scores). The quantitative results provide measurable trends to the study's objectives, confirming patterns of family disruption, offence involvement, and—most importantly—the persistence of personal values and moral orientations among the boys. These patterns align directly with the study's emphasis on unmet personal needs (freedom, recognition, belonging, dignity).

Of the 100 participants, the average age was 14.8 years (range 12–17). The majority (88%) came from single-parent households. These family-structure findings mirror the statistical context

and empirical review in the literature review (sections 2.2 and 2.9), where single-parent and disrupted homes are strongly associated with elevated delinquency risk among adolescent boys in Nairobi. Offence history indicated that substance abuse was the most common offence (reported by 87 boys), followed by theft (44). Frequency of offences was high: 39% reported more than 5 offences, 31% reported 4–5 times, 21% reported 2–3 times, and only 9% reported a single offence. The average age at first offence was 12.4 years. Relapse data showed that 72% of the boys had experienced at least one previous relapse after earlier rehabilitation periods, with an average time to relapse of 3.4 months. Interventions previously participated in included counselling (41%), mentorship (28%), skills training (19%), and other programmes (12%). These objective patterns from provide the verifiable statistical foundation required for triangulation with phenomenological findings.

The boys' self-ratings reveal a consistent picture: despite documented family instability and offence involvement, the spiritual dimension of the person remains actively oriented toward relational belonging, dignity, responsibility, and ordered freedom. High ratings cluster around love, respect among peers, safety, social acceptance, and motivation to change—precisely the "transcendental values" the study identifies as central to personalist interpretation (section 2.5). Conversely, ratings for unbounded or unrestricted freedom are markedly low, supporting Stein's realist view that genuine freedom is always freedom ordered toward the good and responsibility rather than mere licence (Stein, 1922; Wojtyła, 1969). These numerical priorities give measurable confirmation to the claim that delinquency emerges from misguided pursuits of unmet personal needs rather than from a complete absence of moral aspiration. The survey results therefore serve as the quantitative anchor that justifies and generalises the richer narratives obtained through eidetic reduction of the interviews. These results are consolidated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Self-Reported Ratings of Key Personal Values and Orientations

Survey Value	**% Highly Important (4 or 5)**	**Average Score (out of 5)**
Feeling loved by family	84%	4.3
Feeling respected by adults	41%	2.8

Survey Value	% Highly Important (4 or 5)	Average Score (out of 5)
Feeling respected by peers	78%	4.1
Feeling free to make my own choices	69%	3.8
Feeling safe and secure	79%	4.2
Being able to succeed or achieve goals	64%	3.6
Having friends and social acceptance	81%	4.3
Receiving guidance or mentorship	62%	3.5
Being responsible and following rules	71%	3.9
I feel loved by people around me	32%	2.7
I feel respected by people around me	74%	3.9
I feel free to make my own decisions	67%	3.7
I feel safe where I live or stay	76%	4.1
I feel supported when I face problems	27%	2.1
I feel motivated to change or improve	67%	3.7
Freedom means being able to make my own choices	72%	3.9
Freedom means being able to express myself	68%	3.8
Freedom means being free from punishment or restrictions	22%	2.3

Survey Value	% Highly Important (4 or 5)	Average Score (out of 5)
Freedom means being respected and trusted	75%	4.0
Freedom means being able to succeed in life	73%	3.9
Freedom means doing what I want, regardless of others	18%	2.2

Table 4.1 reveals three dominant patterns that directly support the research questions. First, relational and belonging values dominate the highest scores. The participants noted that "Feeling loved by family" (84%, 4.3), "Having friends and social acceptance" (81%, 4.3) were very important as indicated by the scores. However the participants reported an average score of 2.7 for actually feeling loved by those around them and 2.1 for feeling supported during difficult situations These confirm unmet needs for love and support among the subjects.

Second, the importance of bodily and safety needs score strongly ("Feeling safe and secure" 79%, 4.2; "I feel safe where I live or stay" 76%, 4.1), were all rated as very important even by the former street dwelling participants. This reflects the fact that safety is a core personal need even among street dwellers.

Third, moral and responsibility items remain robust ("Being responsible and following rules" 71%, 3.9; "I feel motivated to change or improve" 67%, 3.7), while perceptions of unbounded freedom are low ("Freedom means doing what I want, regardless of others" 18%, 2.2; "Freedom means being free from punishment or restrictions" 22%, 2.3). This last finding is especially significant for the personalist-phenomenological approach. Stein (1922) insists that the spiritual layer of the person never fully loses its orientation toward objective moral order. The boys' low endorsement of unrestricted freedom demonstrates precisely this capacity to recognise that authentic freedom is always freedom-for-responsibility and the common good. The contrast between high relational aspiration and low endorsement of egoistic freedom indicate that delinquency is often the result of unmet personal needs rather than willful immorality.

Evidently numbers do not replace the phenomenological depth of the interviews. They complement it, creating the mixed-methods triangulation that strengthens credibility and policy relevance as stated in the significance of the study (section 1.6). The quantitative results from Appendices 6 and 7 confirm that adolescent boys in Lang'ata rehabilitation centres experience profound relational and moral needs even while engaging in repeated delinquent acts. The data reveal no absence of values; rather, they show a persistent spiritual orientation toward love, dignity, responsibility, and meaningful freedom that persists despite structural adversity. The quantitative strand therefore fulfils the methodological commitment to bridge subjective lived experience with objective, generalizable patterns among Nairobi's urban adolescent boys.

4.5 Conclusion

Stein's phenomenology demonstrates that adolescent delinquency is not merely a behavioral problem but a multidimensional lived experience. Adolescents navigate corporeal impulses, psychic distress and spiritual striving within peer, family, and social structures. Friendship, substance use, vagrancy, family disruption, and transcendental values of love and freedom interact with rule structures and hierarchical guidance to shape moral and relational development. Quantitative data corroborate the qualitative findings and provide insight into the prevalence of key patterns in family setups. These experiences, confirm the prevalence of relational, ethical, and existential patterns in the lives of adolescent boys. Delinquency emerges as an embodied, psychic, and spiritual response to life's challenges.

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Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The interpretive framework employed in this study draws primarily from the phenomenology of Edith Stein. Stein's philosophical anthropology offers a particularly valuable lens through which to understand the experiences of delinquent adolescents because it conceptualizes the human person as an integrated unity of body, psyche, and spirit. According to this perspective, human behavior cannot be reduced to external actions or biological impulses alone. Rather, every action arises from the dynamic interaction between bodily drives, emotional and relational experiences, and the spiritual capacity to recognize values and orient oneself toward meaning.

The findings of this study reveal that delinquency among adolescent boys in rehabilitation cannot be adequately understood as mere criminal behavior or moral failure. Instead, delinquency emerges as a complex response to disrupted relational environments, psychological distress, and existential struggles. The boys in this study are not simply malevolent. They are persons navigating difficult life experiences in which survival, belonging, and moral aspiration coexist in tension.

5.2 Overview of Extant Literature From the Perspective of the Present Study's Results

The quantitative highlighted in Table 1, together with the phenomenological interviews, directly confirm the main patterns that were already described in the literature review. These give concrete evidence that the structural, behavioural, and relational patterns outlined in sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.9, and 2.10 of the literature review are reproduced in Lang'ata's rehabilitation centres. It shows that the experiences of these boys are not unusual or isolated. They are the same realities that Kenyan, East African, and broader research have already documented.

The statistical context used reports from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2023) and the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC, 2023), which show that boys are heavily over-represented in custodial and rehabilitation populations in Kenya, and that family maladjustment, school disengagement, and community instability are important factors. The present study confirmed this. Of the 100 boys surveyed, 88 % came from single-parent households. The average age of the boys was 14.8 years, and the average age at first offence was 12.4 years. This early start confirms the review's point that family instability leads to delinquent behaviour from a young age. In addition, 72 % of the boys reported at least one previous relapse after earlier rehabilitation periods, with an average time to relapse of 3.4 months. This relapse pattern confirms the review's observation that family instability contributes to repeated cycles of offending.

The findings of this also confirmed that theft, truancy, violence, and substance use are prominent delinquent behaviors among adolescent boys affected by family dysfunction. From the quantitative survey, theft was the leading major offence. The present study results confirm this description exactly. Theft was reported by 44 boys, violence by 37 boys, substance abuse by 87 boys, and vagrancy by 63 boys. The current study's offence types and family-structure data (88 % single-parent) reproduce the same connections in the Nairobi urban environment. Similarly, Luti (2015) studied public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County and reported that 82.5 % of teachers and counsellors observed boys as more prone to truancy and disruption because of limited parental involvement in single-parent or absent-parent homes.

The literature review also explained that delinquent behaviour often begins in the family, extends to school and community, and can lead to more serious problems in adulthood. The present studys early onset of offending at 12.4 years and the 72% relapse rate confirm this developmental trajectory, echoing the reference to Hawkins et al. (1998) in the review. The role of peer influence, another central theme in section 2.3, receives equally clear confirmation. The literature review described how boys who encounter difficulties in forming or maintaining prosocial relationships at home often turn to deviant peers, and how this association reinforces antisocial tendencies. The present study confirmed this substitution process in measurable terms. Despite the high rate of family disruption (88 % single-parent), the boys assigned very high importance to peer-related values. 81 % rated "having friends and social acceptance" as highly important with an average score of 4.3, and 78 % rated "mutual respect among peers" as highly important with an average score of 4.4. These elevated scores show that the boys actively seek belonging and recognition in peer groups when family relationships are fractured. This is the same movement from family problems to street communities that the literature review described.

At the same time, the very low rating for unbounded freedom which was rated by only 18% as highly important indicates that the boys do not simply desire chaos. They retain an awareness that genuine freedom involves responsibility and order. This balance in the survey results confirms the review's point that peer communities offer a substitute form of belonging but remain distorted because they do not fully satisfy the deeper relational and moral needs of the person. The comparative contexts examined in section 2.9 of the literature review provide further confirmation. That section reviewed positivist studies, behavioural studies, phenomenological research, and

mixed-methods work from Kenya, East Africa, and other African countries. Diwe et al. (2016) surveyed 402 secondary-school students in Imo State, Nigeria, and found that boys engaged in theft (67 %), alcohol use (65 %), and promiscuity (62 %) at much higher rates than girls, with single-parent homes as a major factor. The present study showed that 88 % of affected boys came from single-parent households. Zimba (2023) in Namibia reported that teachers viewed boys as undisciplined trouble-makers in contexts of family instability and rapid urbanisation. The Lang'ata boys' family data and offence history confirm that the same pressures operate in Nairobi's urban environment. The review also cited Njoroge (2011) and Moracha, Mbiriri, and Bironga (2021), who connected peer associations and substance use to school disengagement in Kenyan urban areas. The current study's truancy numbers and the high peer-value scores confirm these links. National reports from KNBS (2023) and NCRC (2023), which formed part of the literature review, are confirmed by the exact family-structure percentages and relapse figures obtained in this study. Section 2.4 of the literature review outlined theoretical approaches, including positivist, behaviourist, and personalist perspectives. The present results confirm the strengths and limitations of those approaches.

The study established that delinquent boys continue to hold strong moral orientations. 71 % rated "being responsible and following rules" as highly important with an average of 3.9, and 67 % rated "I feel motivated to change or improve" as highly important with an average of 3.7. These scores confirm that the boys are not merely products of environmental conditioning, as a purely behaviourist view might suggest. They possess an inner world of values that points toward the personalist perspective outlined in section 2.4.4. This is the research gap identified in section 2.10 which refers to the absence of a personalist-phenomenological framework capable of interpreting the statistical patterns through the inner moral world of the person. The current study's results confirm that gap by reproducing the empirical patterns the literature already knew while also revealing the persistent spiritual orientation that Stein's approach can now illuminate.

Taken together, these detailed confirmations show that the findings from Lang'ata are not separate from the wider body of knowledge. They are a concrete illustration of the same structural, behavioural, and relational realities that the literature review mapped out across Kenya, East Africa, and beyond. The survey answers and interview stories reflect the same family disruption,

the same turn to peer groups, the same early offending, and the same inner moral awareness that the literature described.

5.3 The Role of Poverty

Although existing positivist literature frequently identifies poverty and urban marginalisation as primary statistical correlates of adolescent delinquency, the phenomenological findings of the present study demonstrate with considerable clarity that material deprivation, taken by itself, does not furnish a sufficient or exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon. Many of the boys in the study spoke openly about the reality of hunger at home and the daily struggles their parents faced in trying to provide even basic necessities. These accounts confirm that poverty remains a significant contributing factor. Moreover, parents who are themselves overwhelmed by economic hardship often find it difficult to offer the consistent attention, emotional presence, and relational guidance that adolescents deeply need. In this sense, material deprivation frequently compounds the vulnerability of young people and limits the family's capacity to nurture healthy personal development.

At the same time, the study also encountered cases that reveal there is more to the story than poverty alone. Two participants whose family circumstances were relatively stable in economic terms offer compelling illustrations of this deeper truth. In the first case, the boy's mother had endured prolonged and severe domestic violence until the local community, supported by the intervention of the area chief, stepped in decisively and transferred management of a rental property to her, thereby securing a reliable source of household income. Despite this material improvement, the boy repeatedly absconded from boarding school and returned home, where his mother assigned him the daily task of washing clothes for his school-going siblings. This arrangement was experienced not as economic necessity but a form of betrayal of his need for recognition and accommodation as day scholar. He ended up running away from home. In another case a boy that resided on his father's rural property in Kiambu with all the basic needs provided by his nevertheless absentee father left him roaming the village on his bicycle. Eventually, he cycled the considerable distance of approximately twenty kilometers to Nairobi, where he entered street life, leaving a comfortable, but empty home to live on the street with friends. In this case, also, the decisive factor was not poverty but the absence of the warm, affirming relational bond that Edith Stein identifies as essential to the healthy development of the psyche and the orientation of the spirit.

These examples confirm that while poverty and economic struggle are important contributing circumstances that can intensify family stress and reduce parental availability, they do not tell the entire story. Family breakdown and the consequent distortion of personal needs for love, belonging, recognition, and dignity can and do occur across widely differing economic strata. By deliberately bracketing the reductionist assumption that ties deviance to poverty, Stein's personalist phenomenology enabled the study to uncover the more profound interior, relational, and spiritual dynamics that operate even when economic conditions are not dire. This insight refines and extends the theoretical and empirical discussions presented in Chapter 2 and lends additional weight to the call for dignity-centred interventions that prioritise the restoration of relational bonds in addition to addressing material needs

5.4 Lived Experiences of Delinquency

Friendship and peer relationships occupy a central place in the lived experiences of delinquent adolescents. Participants repeatedly described peer groups as the primary source of belonging, protection, and emotional support within the difficult environments in which they lived. These friendships often functioned as substitute family structures, particularly for boys who had experienced parental loss, abandonment, or severe domestic instability.

From a phenomenological perspective, this strong orientation toward peer relationships reflects the fundamentally relational nature of the human person. Edith Stein emphasizes that human beings do not exist as isolated individuals but as persons who come to know themselves and the world through relationships with others. The self is not formed in isolation but emerges through encounters with other persons whose recognition and presence shape one's sense of identity. The experiences described by the participants illustrate this relational dynamic clearly. When one participant described how another street boy taught him how to survive through garbage collection and how to avoid police raids, the narrative revealed more than the transmission of practical knowledge. It revealed a process of communal formation in which the individual becomes integrated into a social network that provides meaning and orientation in daily life.

Although the natural orientation toward true community is distorted by family breakdown, street life frequently offers a substitute form of belonging. This substitute meets some of the immediate needs for recognition and co-existence, but it is a distorted community. It satisfies the psyche's longing for connection through risky behaviour rather than through the spiritual values of dignity and the common good that Stein describes. In environments where the family structure

has collapsed or become dysfunctional, adolescents seek belonging within peer networks that replicate many of the functions traditionally associated with family life. These networks provide guidance, emotional companionship, and a sense of identity. The importance of such peer relationships is confirmed in detail by the extant literature reviewed in the pre-discussion section 5.2, which includes specific Kenyan studies such as Evans, Mwenje, and Githui (2021) in Nairobi County, Karimi, Kwena, and Anika (2020) in Kilifi County, and Luti (2015) in Machakos Sub-County, as well as comparative work from Nigeria (Diwe et al., 2016) and Namibia (Zimba, 2023). However, the findings of this study suggest that these peer relationships possess not only practical significance but also deep existential importance. Within Stein's phenomenological framework, human beings experience themselves as persons partly through what she calls empathy, the capacity to perceive and understand the inner experiences of others. Through empathy, individuals enter into shared worlds of meaning and develop communal identities. The peer groups described by participants appear to function as communities of shared experience. Members of these groups often face similar hardships, including homelessness, hunger and exposure to violence. These shared experiences create bonds that can be stronger than those formed within conventional social institutions. The boys recognize themselves in one another's struggles and therefore experience a form of solidarity that strengthens their sense of belonging.

This relational solidarity helps explain why acts of violence against rival gangs were sometimes interpreted as demonstrations of loyalty rather than simply as criminal acts. Within the internal logic of these peer communities, defending one's group becomes a moral obligation. Similarly, distancing oneself from drug-using gang members is perceived as a betrayal of the common bond among street families. Failure to participate in collective actions may lead to exclusion from the group, which in turn threatens the individual's sense of belonging and security.

Such dynamics reveal the complexity of delinquent behavior. Actions that appear purely antisocial from an external perspective may be experienced internally as expressions of loyalty, courage, or solidarity. The boys are not rejecting moral values altogether; rather, they are operating within alternative moral frameworks shaped by the circumstances of street life.

From the standpoint of Stein's personalist view, the human person is naturally oriented toward true community which comprises relationships built on love, dignity and the common good. When the family is broken through death, separation or conflict, this healthy orientation is distorted. The boy still longs for belonging, but the normal path is blocked, so he turns to whatever

form of community is available. Human beings are naturally inclined toward communal life because the spiritual dimension of the person seeks relationships in which values such as loyalty, trust, and mutual recognition can be realized. When healthy communities such as stable families or supportive schools are absent, individuals attempt to construct alternative communities that fulfill these relational needs. The peer groups described by participants therefore represent attempts to reconstruct social belonging in environments marked by fragmentation and instability. Although these communities may sometimes result in delinquent activities, they still reflect the underlying human desire for meaningful relationships. This interpretation aligns with broader theoretical perspectives on delinquency that emphasize the role of social belonging. Sociological theories such as differential association and social bonding theory argue that delinquent behavior often emerges within peer groups where certain behaviors are normalized. However, the phenomenological perspective employed in this study deepens this analysis by emphasizing personal need for belonging.

The boys in this study experienced their peer groups as vital communities in which their identities and survival strategies were formed. Understanding this relational dimension is crucial for developing effective rehabilitation strategies, as it suggests that successful interventions must address the need for belonging and community rather than focusing solely on behavioral control.

5.5 Substance Use and Bodily Coping

Another central theme that emerged from the results concerns the widespread use of substances such as glue, petrol, and cannabis among participants. The extremely high prevalence of drug use, with eighty seven percent of participants reporting regular use, indicates that substance consumption is deeply embedded within the daily lives of street-connected adolescents.

At first glance, such widespread substance use might appear simply as evidence of antisocial leanings. However, a deeper phenomenological analysis reveals that these practices often function as coping mechanisms through which adolescents manage intense emotional and physical stress. Edith Stein's philosophical anthropology provides an important conceptual framework for understanding this phenomenon. Stein emphasizes that the human body is not merely a physical object but the living medium through which individuals experience the world. Bodily sensations, emotions, and impulses shape the way individuals perceive their surroundings and respond to challenges. For adolescents living on the streets, the body becomes a central site of survival. Hunger, cold, exhaustion, and fear are not abstract problems but immediate bodily experiences that demand responses. Substances such as glue and petrol can temporarily alter bodily states, reducing anxiety,

dulling hunger, and producing feelings of courage or detachment. The participant who described using glue to overcome fear of sexual abuse illustrates this process vividly. In this case, substance use served as a bodily strategy for managing overwhelming fear in an environment where protection was scarce. By altering his bodily state, the participant was able to navigate situations that would otherwise have been psychologically unbearable. Such behaviors reflect the intimate relationship between bodily experience and psychological coping. When individuals face chronic stress or trauma, they often seek ways to regulate their emotional states. In the absence of supportive relationships or professional psychological assistance, substances may become one of the few available tools for emotional regulation. Research on street children in many parts of the world supports this interpretation. These substances are inexpensive, widely available, and capable of producing rapid psychoactive effects, making them particularly attractive for individuals living in extreme poverty.

The phenomenological approach employed in this study highlights an additional dimension of this issue. Substance use among participants was often embedded within social relationships. Boys frequently consumed drugs together, sharing substances and experiences within their peer groups. This communal aspect of drug use reinforces social bonds while simultaneously providing psychological relief. The observation that proximity to other users could result in intoxication due to airborne substances further illustrates how drug use becomes integrated into the physical environment of street communities. In such contexts, avoiding substances may be extremely difficult, even for individuals who wish to abstain. Despite the pervasive nature of drug use, the findings indicate that many participants retained a clear awareness of the dangers associated with these practices. This awareness suggests that the spiritual dimension of the person, which Stein associates with value recognition and moral reflection, remains active even in the presence of addiction.

In addition, the relapse statistics reported in the results chapter illustrate the tension between bodily dependency and spiritual aspiration. Although seventy-two percent of participants experienced relapse after rehabilitation, the relatively high motivation score indicates that many adolescents sincerely desire change. They recognize the harmful consequences of substance use and aspire to healthier ways of living. This internal conflict reflects the complex structure of human freedom. According to Stein, freedom does not mean the absence of constraints but the capacity to orient oneself toward values despite the presence of competing impulses. The struggle between

addiction and aspiration therefore reveals the ongoing effort of the human spirit to achieve self-mastery.

Understanding substance use through this integrated framework has important implications for rehabilitation programs. Interventions that focus exclusively on punishment or abstinence may fail to address the underlying emotional and relational needs that drive substance use. Effective rehabilitation must therefore include strategies for emotional support, community building, and the development of healthy coping mechanisms. Moreover, recognizing the bodily dimension of addiction highlights the importance of medical and psychological treatment within rehabilitation settings. Addressing withdrawal symptoms, trauma, and mental health challenges is essential for enabling adolescents to regain control over their bodily impulses. In this sense, substance abuse among delinquent adolescents should not be interpreted merely as deviant behavior but as a personal response to life challenges. By acknowledging the interplay between body, psyche, and spirit, rehabilitation programs can better support the holistic development of young people seeking to overcome addiction and rebuild their lives.

5.6 Familial Context and Emotional Struggles

The findings presented in the results chapter demonstrate that familial disruption constitutes one of the most significant background conditions shaping the trajectories of the adolescents in this study. The quantitative data reveal that ninety-two percent of participants reported the absence of one or both parents through bereavement, abandonment, or prolonged separation. Furthermore, seventy-two percent explicitly identified family breakdown as a contributing factor in their entry into street life or delinquent behavior. These statistics indicate that the majority of participants experienced significant instability in the primary relational environment that normally supports child development.

Within the framework of Edith Stein's phenomenological anthropology, the family occupies a foundational role in the formation of the human person. Stein emphasizes that the human individual does not develop in isolation but within relational contexts that shape the formation of the psyche and the orientation of the spirit. The early family environment provides the first experiences of trust, authority, affection, and moral instruction. Through these experiences the child gradually learns how to interpret relationships, recognize values, and situate himself within a social world.

When these formative relationships are absent or disrupted, the developmental process becomes fragmented. The participants' narratives illustrate this fragmentation. Several boys described the death of parents as a decisive turning point that destabilized their lives. In such circumstances the loss of parental care was often followed by displacement within extended family networks, where resources were limited and emotional bonds were sometimes weaker. The story of the participant whose relatives adopted most of his siblings but left him in the care of an elder sister illustrates the psychological consequences of such displacement. His experience reflects not only material hardship but also a sense of relational exclusion. From a phenomenological perspective, the pain associated with such experiences arises because the human psyche seeks connection with significant others. When a child perceives himself as abadoned, feelings of insecurity and anxiety result. Similarly, the narrative of the boy who was sent to live with grandparents in a new town after the death of his mother reveals how geographical displacement can intensify emotional vulnerability. Relocation disrupted his familiar social environment and placed him within a context where supervision and emotional support were limited. Under such circumstances, involvement with street peers and substance use became increasingly likely and he ended up addicted to sniffing petrol.

The quantitative indicators of emotional support reinforce these qualitative accounts. Participants reported an average score of 2.7 for feeling loved by those around them and 2.1 for feeling supported during difficult situations. These relatively low scores suggest that many participants perceived their family environments as emotionally insufficient even when some form of family structure remained present.

The phenomenon of searching for past sources of affection, as described by the participant who used money earned from garbage collection to locate a kind neighbor through the internet, provides further insight into the emotional dynamics underlying delinquency. Such actions demonstrate that the desire for meaningful relational connection remains active even after experiences of abandonment or neglect. The boy's effort to reconnect with someone who had shown kindness reveals the persistence of what Stein would describe as the spiritual orientation toward love and recognition.

Stein's concept of empathy is particularly relevant in this context. Empathy, for Stein, refers to the capacity to perceive the inner experiences of another person and thereby enter into a

shared relational world. Within healthy family environments, empathy is cultivated through repeated interactions in which children experience understanding and care from parents or guardians. These experiences enable the child to develop trust in others and confidence in his own worth.

In the absence of such empathetic relationships, the development of emotional stability becomes more difficult. Adolescents who grow up in environments characterized by neglect, conflict, or instability may struggle to establish secure attachments. As a result, they may seek belonging in alternative contexts, including peer groups that provide immediate acceptance even if they encourage risky behaviors. This dynamic is confirmed by the extensive research reviewed in the pre-discussion section 5.2, including Kenyan county studies (Evans et al., 2021; Karimi et al., 2020) and broader African and global reports (Diwe et al., 2016; Zimba, 2023; UNODC, 2023; UNICEF, 2023).

Family disruption affects adolescents not only through economic deprivation or lack of supervision but also through the erosion of the relational bonds that normally provide emotional security and moral guidance. Without these bonds, adolescents may experience profound feelings of loneliness, rejection, and uncertainty about their place in the world. These emotional conditions can create a psychological environment in which delinquent behavior becomes more likely. Street life may appear attractive not because it offers comfort but because it provides a form of community in which individuals feel recognized and accepted. In this sense, the movement from family environments to street communities reflects an attempt to reconstruct relational belonging under difficult circumstances.

At the same time, the findings indicate that many adolescents retain a strong desire for familial connection even after entering street life. The narratives describing memories of caring relatives or neighbors demonstrate that the spiritual orientation toward love and belonging persists despite experiences of loss and displacement. This persistence suggests that rehabilitation programs should place significant emphasis on rebuilding healthy relational environments rather than focusing solely on behavioral correction. Programs that facilitate family reconciliation, mentorship relationships, or supportive community networks may therefore play a crucial role in addressing the underlying emotional needs of delinquent adolescents. By restoring relational bonds that affirm the dignity and worth of the individual, such programs can help adolescents reconstruct the identity structures that were disrupted earlier in life.

5.7 Delinquency as Impulsivity

Another significant insight emerging from the results concerns the cyclical nature of delinquent behavior among participants. Many adolescents described engaging in impulsive actions such as theft or violence followed by periods of regret, reflection, and attempts to desist from further wrongdoing. The statistical data reinforce this observation. Fifty-two percent of participants reported committing four or more offenses, yet their average score for recognizing the importance of responsibility and rule-following was relatively high at 3.6.

This combination of repeated delinquent acts and persistent moral awareness reveals an important aspect of phenomenology of delinquency. Contrary to stereotypes that portray delinquent youth as amoral beings with no understanding of ethics, the participants in this study demonstrated a clear capacity for ethical reflection. They confessed to actions that had hitherto been unknown, noting that concern for their victims was a constant source of stress. Within Stein's philosophical anthropology, this capacity arises from the spiritual dimension of the human person. The spirit possesses the ability to recognize values, evaluate actions, and orient itself toward moral ideals. This capacity enables individuals to experience remorse when their actions conflict with the moral good.

The phenomenon described by participants, in which impulsive actions are followed by remorse, illustrates the dynamic interaction between the different dimensions of the human person. The body generates immediate impulses in response to environmental stimuli, such as opportunities for taking possession of a desired but unearned property. The psyche processes emotional experiences associated with these actions, including excitement and fear. The spirit then evaluates the actions in relation to moral values. This three-layered interaction that involves the body generating an immediate impulse, the psyche registering the emotional consequences of excitement and fear, and the spirit evaluating the act against moral values produces the clear cyclical pattern observed in the study. In the cycle, the boy acts under bodily pressure, feels the emotional storm in the psyche, experiences spiritual remorse and the desire to change, yet the cycle restarts when the next bodily need or opportunity arises.

The average age of first offense, approximately 12.3 years, corresponds with developmental stages during which adolescents begin to develop more sophisticated forms of moral reasoning. Psychological research indicates that early adolescence is a period characterized by increasing awareness of social norms and ethical principles, even as emotional regulation and impulse control

remain relatively immature. The coexistence of moral awareness and impulsive behavior is therefore consistent with developmental theories of adolescence. However, the phenomenological approach adopted in this study provides a deeper understanding of this phenomenon by highlighting the role of spiritual value recognition in shaping moral reflection. The relatively low score for absolute freedom reported by participants also supports this interpretation. Although the boys engaged in behaviors that violated social rules, they did not generally endorse the idea that individuals should act without moral constraints. On the contrary, many expressed the belief that rules and responsibilities were necessary. This finding challenges simplistic interpretations of delinquency as a rejection of moral authority. Instead, it suggests that many adolescents recognize the importance of ethical guidelines but struggle to align their actions with these ideals in environments characterized by instability, peer pressure, and limited supervision.

The cyclical nature of delinquency therefore reflects an ongoing moral struggle rather than a complete abandonment of ethical values. Participants frequently described attempts to stop engaging in criminal activities, even if these efforts were temporary or unsuccessful. Such attempts demonstrate the continuing influence of moral aspiration within the lives of these adolescents. From a rehabilitative perspective, recognizing this moral aspiration is crucial. Programs that treat delinquent youth solely as offenders may overlook the internal moral conflicts that many adolescents experience. By contrast, interventions that acknowledge and nurture the ethical capacities of young people can build upon existing motivations for change. Stein's emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the person suggests that rehabilitation should involve opportunities for moral development, reflection, and the cultivation of virtues. Educational programs, mentorship relationships, and structured community environments can provide contexts in which adolescents learn to align their actions more consistently with their ethical values. Such approaches recognize that delinquent behavior often arises from conflicts between immediate impulses and deeper moral aspirations.

5.8 Transcendental Values: Love and Freedom

This study also established the continued presence of transcendental values such as love and freedom within the moral consciousness of delinquent adolescents. Despite living in environments characterized by instability, violence, and substance abuse, participants consistently expressed the importance of love, belonging, and meaningful personal freedom. These findings provide an important counterpoint to simplistic interpretations of delinquency that portray young offenders as morally disengaged or indifferent to love and responsible freedom. The findings

reveal that the participants in this study retained a strong orientation toward the value of love even when their life circumstances made the realization of this value difficult. Many of the narratives collected during the interviews referred to experiences of relational longing. Participants spoke about the desire to reestablish connections with parents, siblings, or other significant figures. For example, the case of the participant who refused to attend boarding school because he wished to remain with his mother and siblings illustrates the depth of this relational orientation. Although his decision eventually contributed to his vulnerability to homelessness and delinquency, the motivation behind the decision to run away from school reveals a strong attachment to familial love. From a phenomenological perspective, this attachment represents the recognition of a fundamental value rather than a simple emotional reaction. Similarly, the participant who refused to live on his father's rural farm due to fear of a hostile stepmother demonstrates how relational environments can influence the ways in which individuals pursue or avoid certain forms of belonging. In this case, the participant's refusal to return to his father's home was not merely an act of defiance but a response to a perceived absence of genuine care and acceptance within that environment.

These narratives illustrate a key insight of Stein's philosophy: human beings do not simply seek survival but seek meaningful relationships in which their dignity as persons is affirmed. When such relationships are absent or distorted, individuals may engage in behaviors that appear irrational from an external perspective but are understandable when interpreted as attempts to preserve personal dignity or avoid emotional harm.

The quantitative findings support this interpretation. 84 % of the boys rated feeling loved by family or peers as highly important (average score 4.3). Even inside the distorted street communities, the spiritual core of the person refuses to give up its natural orientation toward genuine love and belonging. The high valuation of love therefore confirms that the substitute community on the street never fully satisfies the deeper need. It only highlights the persistent spiritual aspiration for the real relational good that the broken family could not supply. This high valuation of love suggests that relational recognition occupies a central place in the moral and emotional lives of these adolescents. The significance of this finding becomes clearer when considered alongside the relatively low scores reported for feeling loved within their actual family environments. The contrast between the high importance assigned to love and the relatively low

levels of experienced familial affection indicates a gap between aspiration and lived reality. Many participants clearly desired loving relationships but had limited opportunities to experience them consistently within their immediate environments.

Within Stein's framework, such a gap between value recognition and lived experience can produce profound existential tension. The human spirit recognizes the value of love and seeks to realize it in relationships. When circumstances prevent this realization, individuals may experience frustration, loneliness, or despair. These emotional states can contribute to behaviors aimed at filling the relational void, including involvement in peer communities that provide forms of acceptance and belonging.

Freedom emerged as another important transcendental value within the participants' narratives. However, the data indicate that participants did not interpret freedom as unrestricted autonomy. Instead, their responses suggest a more nuanced understanding in which freedom is recognized as meaningful only when balanced by responsibility and social order. The relatively low score for unbounded freedom, approximately 2.2, indicates that most participants did not endorse the idea that individuals should act without limitations. This finding challenges stereotypes that portray delinquent youth as individuals who reject all forms of authority or discipline. On the contrary, the participants demonstrated an awareness that freedom must coexist with rules and responsibilities.

From the perspective of Stein's philosophy, this awareness reflects the spiritual capacity to recognize the ethical dimensions of freedom. True freedom, according to Stein, is not the absence of constraints but the ability to orient one's actions toward values that contribute to the flourishing of oneself and others. Freedom therefore involves responsibility, self-discipline, and consideration for the well-being of the community.

The participants' responses regarding respect also reveal interesting patterns. Valuation of respect from adults received relatively low scores, while mutual respect among peers received much higher scores. This difference likely reflects the hierarchical perception of society that is present even among delinquents. They recognize that adults do not owe them respect by virtue of their age and societal role. For peers, however, mutual respect is expected, indicating that the boys recognized the importance of dignity within peer networks.

From a phenomenological standpoint, these findings demonstrate that transcendental values remain present in the moral consciousness of delinquent adolescents even when their behavior contradicts those values. The boys may engage in theft, substance abuse, or violence, but they still express aspirations toward love, respect, and meaningful freedom. This situation highlights the complexity of delinquency as a human phenomenon. Rather than representing a simple rejection of moral values, delinquent behavior often reflects an ongoing struggle to achieve personal desires within environments that provide limited opportunities for their fulfillment.

Recognizing this dynamic has important implications for rehabilitation programs. If delinquent adolescents continue to value love, respect, and responsible freedom, then rehabilitation efforts can build upon these existing moral orientations. Programs that emphasize relational support, mentorship, and the development of personal responsibility may therefore resonate more strongly with the internal motivations of young people seeking to transform their lives.

5.9 Implications for Rehabilitation and Social Intervention

The interpretation of the findings through Stein's phenomenological framework provides several important insights for the design of rehabilitation programs and social interventions aimed at supporting delinquent adolescents. One of the most significant implications concerns the need to address the relational dimension of delinquency. The results of this study demonstrate that many forms of delinquent behavior emerge within contexts of relational fragmentation. Family disruption, parental absence, and social marginalization create environments in which adolescents struggle to find stable sources of belonging and recognition. In response to these conditions, young people often form peer communities that provide emotional support but may also encourage risky or illegal activities. Effective rehabilitation must therefore focus not only on correcting behavior but also on rebuilding healthy relational environments. Programs that foster supportive relationships between adolescents and mentors, counselors, educators, or community members can provide alternative sources of belonging that reduce the appeal of delinquent peer groups.

Another important implication concerns the role of emotional and psychological support. The widespread use of substances among participants indicates that many adolescents rely on drugs as coping mechanisms for dealing with trauma, fear, and insecurity. Rehabilitation programs must therefore include strategies for addressing the emotional and psychological challenges associated with street life.Counseling services, trauma-informed care, and opportunities for

emotional expression can help adolescents develop healthier ways of managing stress and anxiety. By addressing the underlying emotional needs that drive substance use, rehabilitation programs can reduce the likelihood of relapse and support long-term recovery.

The findings also highlight the importance of moral and spiritual development in rehabilitation. Participants demonstrated a clear capacity for ethical reflection and a strong orientation toward values such as love and freedom. Programs that nurture these capacities can help adolescents strengthen their sense of purpose and responsibility. Educational initiatives that encourage critical reflection, moral reasoning, and personal growth may therefore play an important role in supporting rehabilitation. Activities that promote community service, cooperation, and leadership can help adolescents experience the positive realization of the values they already recognize as important. By improving access to education, strengthening family support systems, and creating opportunities for meaningful participation in community life, societies can reduce the conditions that give rise to delinquency in the first place.

Stein's anthropology understands the human being as a unity composed of body, psyche, and spirit. Each dimension possesses its own characteristic modes of functioning while remaining integrated within the personal whole. The body relates the person to material reality and immediate physical needs. The psyche governs emotional life, affective responses, and patterns of habit. The spirit represents the highest dimension of the person, enabling self-reflection, moral judgment, and openness to values such as truth, goodness, love, and freedom.

The narratives collected during the interviews reveal disturbances within each of these dimensions. At the bodily level, participants frequently described experiences of hunger, exhaustion, exposure to harsh environmental conditions, and lack of basic resources. These experiences created a persistent state of physical vulnerability that shaped decision making in profound ways. When food, shelter, or safety are uncertain, the body's instinct for survival exerts strong influence over behaviour. Acts such as theft of food or engagement in informal street economies often emerged within this context of bodily necessity.

At the psychological level, the participants' accounts reveal emotional landscapes marked by loneliness, fear, anger, and longing for acceptance. Many of the boys experienced the loss of parental figures through death, separation, or prolonged absence. Such experiences produced deep emotional disruptions that weakened the stability normally provided by familial relationships.

Within Stein's framework, the psyche seeks relational attunement and recognition from others. When these forms of recognition are absent, individuals may experience feelings of abandonment that shape their search for belonging.

The emergence of peer communities within street environments can therefore be interpreted as a response to psychological needs for companionship and mutual recognition. The participants frequently described the sense of solidarity found within groups of peers who shared similar experiences of marginalization. Within these groups, behaviours such as substance use, theft, or confrontation with authority could become markers of loyalty and courage. These behaviours were not always experienced as morally wrong within the immediate context of the peer group but rather as necessary strategies for maintaining status and belonging.

Despite these disturbances within the bodily and psychological dimensions, the spiritual dimension of the person remained clearly visible in the participants' reflections. Many adolescents expressed feelings of regret after committing offences. Others spoke about their hopes for the future, their desire to rebuild relationships with family members, and their belief that life could take a different direction. Within Stein's philosophy, the spiritual dimension is characterized by the capacity to recognize values and orient oneself toward them. This capacity persists even when individuals act contrary to the values they acknowledge. The participants' recognition of the importance of love, freedom, respect, and responsibility demonstrates that the spiritual core of the person remains active despite adverse circumstances.

The statistical findings reinforce this interpretation. While a significant proportion of participants engaged in delinquent behaviour, the majority expressed strong agreement with statements affirming the importance of responsibility, mutual respect, and structured social order. This suggests that the boys' moral frameworks were not entirely absent but rather fragmented by environmental pressures and developmental challenges.

Stein's phenomenology therefore invites an interpretation of delinquency not as the disappearance of moral consciousness but as a conflict between competing influences within the layered structure of the person. Bodily needs for survival, psychological needs for belonging, and spiritual aspirations toward moral values interact in complex ways. When supportive relational environments are absent, the balance between these dimensions can become destabilized.

The rehabilitation centres studied in this research appear to function as spaces where a gradual rebalancing of these dimensions becomes possible. Regular meals address bodily deprivation. Structured routines and educational programs contribute to psychological stability. Opportunities for reflection, counselling, and mentorship nurture the spiritual dimension by encouraging moral self-understanding and the recognition of personal dignity.

Through the lens of personalist phenomenology, the adolescent boys in this study appear not merely as offenders but as developing persons whose bodily vulnerabilities, psychological struggles, and spiritual aspirations interact within unique personal circumstances. Recognizing this complexity allows rehabilitation efforts to move beyond simplistic models focused on containment and toward approaches that affirm the dignity and developmental potential of each individual.

5.10 Conclusion

By examining delinquency as a lived experience shaped by the interaction of body, psyche, and spirit, the analysis provides a deeper understanding of the complex realities faced by adolescent boys in rehabilitation. The findings demonstrate that delinquency cannot be adequately explained as simple deviance or moral failure. Instead, it emerges from the interplay of relational disruption, emotional distress, bodily coping mechanisms, and ongoing moral aspiration. Peer relationships provide substitute communities in the absence of stable families, while substance use functions as a strategy for managing psychological pain and physical hardship.

Despite these challenges, the participants in this study displayed a persistent orientation toward transcendental values such as love, freedom, and respect. These values remain active within their moral consciousness even when their behavior appears to contradict them. The presence of these values suggests that delinquent adolescents retain the capacity for moral growth and transformation.

Understanding delinquency in this holistic manner has important implications for rehabilitation and social policy. Programs that address the relational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human development are more likely to support lasting change than those that focus solely on punishment or behavioral control. The phenomenological perspective adopted in this study affirms the dignity and complexity of the human person. The adolescent boys whose experiences were explored in this research are not merely amoral offenders but spiritual persons navigating life in search of belonging, meaning, and personal freedom. By recognizing and

nurturing the values that continue to guide their aspirations, rehabilitation efforts can help these young people move toward lives characterized by dignity.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The study investigated the lived experiences of adolescent boys between the ages of twelve and seventeen in selected rehabilitation centers in Lang'ata Sub County. Using the personalist phenomenology of Edith Stein as the primary theoretical framework, the research sought to understand how delinquent behavior emerges within the intersection of family relationships, peer communities, institutional environments, and the personal search for dignity and belonging. The study combined qualitative phenomenological interviews with quantitative analysis derived from a survey involving one hundred participants. This approach made it possible to explore both the subjective meanings of delinquent behavior and the broader statistical patterns associated with it.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

Several important findings emerged from the study. First, delinquent behavior among the participants was strongly associated with family instability. A large proportion of the boys reported experiences such as parental separation, death of a parent, or prolonged absence of caregivers. These disruptions weakened the relational foundations that normally support adolescent development. Second, peer influence played a significant role in shaping behavioural patterns. Many participants described entering delinquent activities through associations with older peers who offered protection, companionship, or economic opportunities within street environments. Third, substance use was frequently employed as a coping mechanism for emotional stress. Participants described using substances to manage feelings of fear, loneliness, and anxiety associated with life outside stable family structures. Fourth, despite engaging in delinquent acts, the boys demonstrated a clear awareness of moral values. Many participants emphasized the importance of respect, responsibility, and structured social order. This suggests that delinquent behaviour does not necessarily reflect a rejection of ethical principles but rather a struggle to live according to those principles within difficult circumstances. Finally, the findings revealed that needs for belonging, recognition, dignity, and meaningful freedom play central roles in the lives of delinquents. When these needs remain unmet within family or institutional environments, young people may seek alternative forms of recognition within peer groups.

6.3 Conclusion

The central insight of this study is that adolescent delinquency cannot be understood solely through legal or behavioural categories. It must also be interpreted as a human experience shaped by relational disruptions, emotional struggles, and the ongoing search for dignity and belonging. Through the lens of Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology, the boys who participated in this research appear not simply as offenders but as developing persons whose lives have been shaped by complex interactions between bodily vulnerability, psychological need, and spiritual aspiration. Recognizing this complexity invites a shift in perspective. Rather than focusing exclusively on punishment or control, societies are called to create environments that nurture the dignity and developmental potential of every young person. Through supportive relationships, educational opportunities, and meaningful participation in community life, adolescents who have encountered delinquency can rediscover pathways toward responsibility, purpose, and hope.

6.4 Responses to the Research Questions

The first research question asked how adolescent boys in rehabilitation centres experience and interpret their delinquent behaviour within family, peer, and institutional contexts. The findings show that delinquent acts are often interpreted by the participants as responses to situational pressures rather than deliberate attempts to violate social norms. Experiences of hunger, abandonment, and exclusion frequently formed the background against which these behaviours emerged.

The second research question explored how unmet personal needs for freedom, belonging, recognition, and dignity shape delinquent behavior. The study found that these needs, when not satisfied within the family, motivate adolescents to seek them outside the home in street communes. These peer groups often provided alternative spaces where these needs could be partially satisfied.

The third research question examined the relationship between phenomenological insights and their triangulating quantitative patterns. The results demonstrated strong convergence between the narratives provided by participants and the statistical patterns observed in the survey data.

The fourth research question focused on the development of dignity centred interventions for prevention and rehabilitation. The study concludes that effective interventions must address

not only behavioural outcomes but also the relational and existential dimensions of adolescent development.

6.5 Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to scholarship in several ways. First, it demonstrates the relevance of Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology for understanding contemporary social issues such as juvenile delinquency. The layered anthropology of body, psyche, and spirit provides a rich framework for interpreting the experiences of adolescents within complex social environments. Second, the study contributes empirical insights into the lived experiences of boys in rehabilitation centres within Lang'ata Sub County. These insights highlight the importance of relational and emotional factors that are often overlooked in purely statistical analyses of juvenile delinquency. Third, the research illustrates the value of combining phenomenological methods with quantitative data. This approach strengthens the credibility of the findings by allowing subjective experiences to be interpreted alongside measurable social patterns.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted within rehabilitation centres located in Lang'ata Sub County, which means that the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions or cultural contexts. Further, the sample focused exclusively on male adolescents between the ages of twelve and seventeen. Future studies may benefit from examining the experiences of girls or older youth within similar institutional settings. Also, the phenomenological interviews relied on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by memory limitations or social desirability bias. In addition, although official discipline records were formally requested, the rehabilitation centres were unable to release them. Therefore the quantitative analysis rests primarily on survey self-reports. This does not weaken the phenomenological findings, which remain the primary source of essential insight into the lived experience of the boys. Despite these limitations, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a strong foundation for understanding the dynamics of adolescent delinquency within the studied context.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could expand this investigation by conducting longitudinal studies that follow adolescents after their release from rehabilitation centres. Such research would provide valuable insights into the long term effectiveness of rehabilitation programs. Comparative studies

involving multiple counties or countries could also help identify cultural factors that influence the development of delinquent behaviour and the success of intervention strategies. Further philosophical research may explore how other personalist thinkers complement Stein's framework in addressing issues related to youth development, dignity, and moral formation.

6.8 Recommendations for Rehabilitation and Policy

Several recommendations emerge from the findings of this study. First, rehabilitation centres should move beyond purely punitive or behaviour-control models toward dignity-centred approaches that recognize adolescent offenders as persons capable of moral growth, relational healing, and transformation. Rehabilitation environments should therefore prioritize emotional safety, psychological support, moral formation, and the restoration of personal dignity. Structured daily routines, mentorship programmes, educational opportunities, and vocational training should be integrated not merely as disciplinary mechanisms but as pathways toward responsibility, self-worth, and meaningful social participation.

Second, the findings underscore the central importance of the family in both the emergence and prevention of delinquency. Rehabilitation programmes should therefore incorporate stronger family reintegration strategies wherever possible. Counselling, mediation, parenting support, and guided reconciliation processes may help repair fractured relationships between adolescents and caregivers. Since many participants associated delinquency with emotional neglect, rejection, or family instability, strengthening familial bonds should be treated as a core rehabilitative priority rather than a secondary intervention.

Third, rehabilitation policy should incorporate trauma-informed and relational approaches to adolescent care. Many adolescents engage in substance use, aggression, or antisocial behaviour not merely out of criminal intent but as coping responses to emotional suffering, social exclusion, humiliation, or unresolved psychological distress. Rehabilitation personnel should therefore receive training in trauma-informed care, adolescent psychology, conflict de-escalation, and relational mentorship in order to better respond to the emotional and existential realities underlying delinquent behaviour.

Fourth, the study recommends the integration of spiritual and ethical formation within rehabilitation frameworks. The findings revealed that many adolescents retained an orientation toward transcendental values such as love, freedom, acceptance, dignity, and respect despite engaging in delinquent behaviour. Rehabilitation programmes should therefore create spaces for moral

reflection, spiritual accompaniment, character formation, and constructive identity development. Such interventions may help adolescents reinterpret their experiences and recover a sense of meaning, responsibility, and hope.

Fifth, community-based prevention and early intervention initiatives should be significantly expanded. Programmes providing mentorship, sports, creative arts, vocational training, academic support, and positive peer engagement can reduce vulnerability to delinquent peer networks by fostering belonging and constructive identity formation. Schools, religious institutions, local community organizations, and families should collaborate more closely in identifying and supporting at-risk youth before delinquent patterns become entrenched.

Finally, policymakers should address the broader structural conditions that contribute to adolescent delinquency. Persistent poverty, school dropout, unemployment, substance abuse, family instability, urban marginalization, and limited access to youth development opportunities create environments in which delinquency becomes more likely. Long-term prevention therefore requires not only rehabilitation reform but also wider social investment in education, family support systems, youth empowerment programmes, mental health services, and community development initiatives.

6.9 Final Conclusion

Adolescent delinquency cannot be reduced to legal or behavioural categories alone. Through Edith Stein's personalist phenomenology, this study has shown that behind the statistics and deviant acts are persons yearning for love, dignity, and meaningful freedom. By combining philosophical insight with traditional African wisdom and practical recommendations, Kenyan society can respond to these boys not merely with correction, but with genuine care and restoration.

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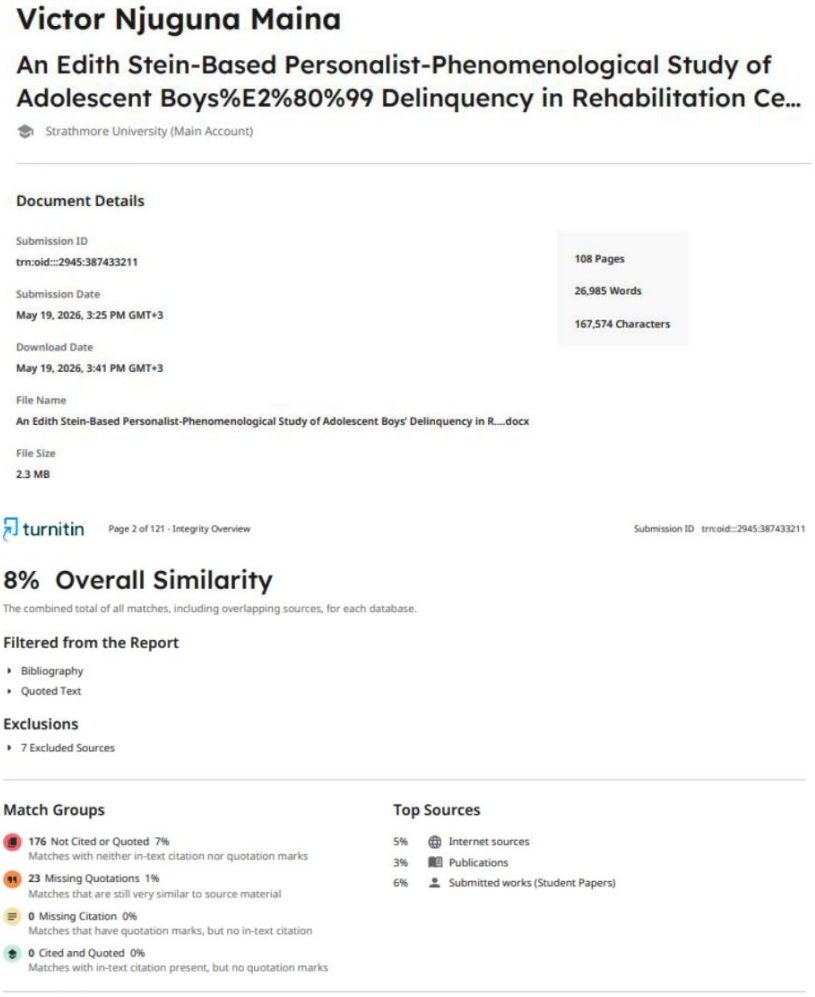
VT OMNES VNVM SINT

Appendices

Appendix A: Similarity Report



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Appendix B: Ethical Clearance Confirmation

Strathmore UNIVERSITY

16th January 2026

Mr Maina Victor,
njuguna.maina@strathmore.edu

Dear Mr Maina,

RE: An Edith Stein Based Phenomenological Analysis of Adolescent Boys Delinquency in Rehabilitation Centres in Lang'ata Sub-County

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-masters** research proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC3170/25.** The approval period is from **16th January 2026 to 15th January 2027.**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, and MTA) will be used
ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise, that may increase the risks or affect the safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours
v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/ and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Ambrose Rachier,
Chairperson; SU-ISERC

Ole Sangale Rd, Madaraka Estate. PO Box 59857-00200, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel +254 (0)703 034000
Email admissions@strathmore.edu www.strathmore.edu

Appendix C: Ethical Clearance from NACOSTI



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **210484**

Date of Issue: **28/January/2026**

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Mr.. VICTOR NJUGUNA MAINA of Strathmore University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: An Edith Stein-based Phenomenological Analysis of Adolescent Boys' Delinquency in Rehabilitation Centres in Lang'ata Sub-County for the period ending : 28/January/2027.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/26/4183624**

210484

Applicant Identification Number

Ag. Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

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See overleaf for conditions

THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013 (Rev. 2014)
Legal Notice No. 108: The Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was the established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE

1. The License is granted subject to provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, and other relevant laws, policies and regulations. Accordingly, the licensee shall adhere to such procedures, standards, code of ethics and guidelines as may be prescribed by regulations made under the Act, or prescribed by provisions of International treaties of which Kenya is a signatory to.
2. The research and its related activities as well as outcomes shall be beneficial to the country and shall not in any way;
    i. Endanger national security
    ii. Adversely affect the lives of Kenyans
    iii. Be in contravention of Kenya's international obligations including Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN).
    iv. Result in exploitation of intellectual property rights of communities in Kenya
    v. Adversely affect the environment
    vi. Adversely affect the rights of communities
    vii. Endanger public safety and national cohesion
    viii. Plagiarize someone else's work
3. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period.
4. Neither the license nor any rights thereunder are transferable.
5. The Commission reserves the right to cancel the research at any time during the research period if in the opinion of the Commission the research is not implemented in conformity with the provisions of the Act or any other written law.
6. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research.
7. Excavation, filming, movement, and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies.
8. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials.
9. The Commission may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project for the purpose of assessing and evaluating compliance with the conditions of the License.
10. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy, and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) onto a platform designated by the Commission within one year of completion of the research.
11. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice.
12. Research, findings and information regarding research systems shall be stored or disseminated, utilized or applied in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Commission from time to time.
13. The Licensee shall disclose to the Commission, the relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, and the relevant national agencies any inventions and discoveries that are of National strategic importance.
14. The Commission shall have powers to acquire from any person the right in, or to, any scientific innovation, invention or patent of strategic importance to the country.
15. Relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee shall monitor and evaluate the research periodically, and make a report of its findings to the Commission for necessary action.

National Commission for Science, Technology and
Innovation(NACOSTI),
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P. O. Box 30623 - 00100 Nairobi, KENYA
Telephone: 020 4007000, 0713788787, 0735404245
E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke

Appendix D: Letter of Introduction

Victor Njuguna Maina

P.O. BOX 2938, 01000

Thika

njuguna.maina@strathmore.edu

+254 710 834 656

26-11-2025

To: [Name of the Head/Administrator]
[Name of Institution/Facility]
[Address]
[City, Postal Code]

RE: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT – RESEARCH ON ADOLESCENT DELINQUENCY

I am Victor Njuguna Maina, a postgraduate student at Strathmore University undertaking a Master's degree in Applied Philosophy and Ethics. In fulfillment of the requirement to attain my degree, I am conducting a research study on Delinquency among Adolescent Boys in Nairobi.

The present study intends to explore the experiences, moral understanding, and personal development of adolescent boys participating in delinquent behaviors. The results of this research will be used to drive interventions in a way that promotes moral development, personal responsibility, and respect for human dignity among adolescents.

I am writing to kindly request permission to access participants from your institution/facility for this study. Information related to all participants will be handled with confidentiality; participation will be strictly voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequence. Data collection, analysis, and reporting will fully maintain anonymity.

Your support will greatly increase the chances of success of this study, while the findings may be useful to your institution for understanding personal lives and development among adolescents in your care. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,

Victor Njuguna Maina

Master's Student, Strathmore University

Appendix E: Parental/Guardian Consent Form

Title of Study: An Edith Stein based Phenomenological Analysis of Adolescent Boys Delinquency in Rehabilitation Centres in Lang'ata Sub-County

Purpose of the Study: To explore how adolescent boys experience and interpret their delinquent behavior with a goal of improving delinquency prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Interview Sessions:

Each participant will take part in one-on-one interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes.

Interviews will be semi-structured, allowing participants to share experiences in their own words while guiding discussion around delinquency, moral awareness, personal responsibility, and experiences of transformation.

Data Collection:

Interviews will be audio-recorded with prior consent/assent. Notes may also be taken to capture key observations. Data on delinquent behavior will be collected from institutional records and directly from participants. All data will be anonymized immediately; participants will be assigned unique codes.

Participant Rights:

- Participation is completely voluntary, and participants can refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time without penalty.
- Participants may pause or stop an interview if they feel uncomfortable.

Confidentiality and Storage:

- Recordings and notes will be securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.
- Personal identifiers will not appear in transcripts or reports.

Support and Follow-Up:

If any participant experiences distress, the interview will pause or stop immediately, and support will be sought from the concerned authority.

Minimizing risk:

Questions are non-judgmental; participants may skip any question or pause/stop the interview.

Benefits:

The study has the potential to contribute to the improvement of adolescent rehabilitation programs.

VT OMNES
VNVM SINT

Consent Statement:
I have read and understood the information above. I voluntarily consent for my child to participate.

Parent/Guardian Name: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher Name: Victor Njuguna Maina
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Appendix F: Participant Assent Form

Purpose of the Study

You are being invited to take part in a study that seeks to understand the experiences of boys who have been involved in delinquent behaviour and are now in rehabilitation. The goal is not to judge or blame, but to learn from your story so that families, schools, and communities can understand your experience better.

What Participation Involves

You will be asked to talk about your life — your experiences at home, school, and with friends — and how you understand what happened.

The interview will take about 45–60 minutes and will be conducted privately in a respectful and confidential setting.

You may refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

Confidentiality

Your name or personal information will not appear in any report. You will be identified only by a anonymous code number. The information you give will be kept securely and used only for research and academic purposes.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your treatment, rehabilitation, or relationship with the institution in any way.

Possible Risks and Benefits

There are no physical risks. Some questions may make you remember difficult experiences, but you may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable. The possible benefit is that sharing your story may help others understand and support young people better.

Consent Statement (for participants aged 18 and above)

I have read or had this form read to me. I understand the purpose of the study and my rights. I agree to take part voluntarily.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____
Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Assent Statement (for participants under 18 years)

This study has been explained to me. I know I can choose to join or not join and can stop at any time. I want to take part in the discussion.

Participant Signature / Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

Parent / Guardian Consent
I have read the information and give permission for my child to participate.
Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Phenomenological Interview Guide
Interviewer Introduction

"Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I'm not here to judge you but to understand your life story in your own words. You can share as much or as little as you wish."

Life Story and Background

Can you tell me about your life before coming here — your family, school, friends, and what a normal day was like?
(Prompt: Who were the most important people to you? What things made you happy or unhappy?)

Experiences of Challenge and Choice

Think about the time before you came here. What were some of the challenges or pressures you faced?
(Prompt: How did you deal with them? What decisions did you make? How did those choices feel at the time?)

Relationships and Belonging

Tell me about the people around you at home, school, and in your neighborhood.
(Prompt: Who supported you? Who didn't understand you? When did you feel respected or disrespected?)

Meaning of Your Actions

When you think about the things that led you here, how do you understand them now?
(Prompt: What were you trying to achieve or express? How do you feel about them today?)

Hopes, Needs, and the Future

What do you feel you need most in life right now?
(Prompt: Love, peace, respect, or freedom. How do you describe these?)

What kind of life do you hope to live after leaving this place?
(Prompt: What would you say is your goal for the future?)

Closing

"Thank you for sharing your story. Is there anything else you would like adults or society to know about your experiences?"

Participant Code: _____

Interview Date: _____

Interview Location: _____

Participant Information

Field	Details
Age	
Duration in Rehabilitation	
Family Structure (both parents / single parent / guardian / other)	
Type of Delinquent Behaviour / Offence	

Researcher Observations

Aspect	Notes
Emotional tone / body language	
Context of interview	
Researcher reflections / biases	

Ethical Record

Consent obtained: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Assent obtained (if minor): ☐ Yes ☐ No

Confidentiality explained: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant reminded of right to withdraw: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Appendix H: Data Protection Procedures

Data Storage and Security

Audio recordings, interview notes, and transcripts will be stored in encrypted digital folders accessible only to the principal researcher. Any hardcopy notes will be kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence. The electronic data will be password-protected, and the backup copies will be stored on an encrypted external drive, but not on any cloud services, to avoid possible exposure to third-party access.

Anonymization Process

Each participant will be assigned a unique code number, such as P01, P02, etc., at the time of the interview. Names, personal identifiers, and any information that might indirectly identify participants-through such things as school names, family surnames, or specific neighbourhoods-are removed from all transcripts and replaced with generic descriptors. For example, "my friend," "a teacher," and "my area." The final report will include only aggregated themes and anonymized quotations, ensuring participants cannot be traced individually.

Access and Use of Data

Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to raw data. No third party will have access to identifiable data, including the rehabilitation institution itself.

The data will be used solely for the academic and educational purpose of this research.

Data Retention and Erasure

Research data will be kept for five years after publication. Following this duration, all identifiable files will be permanently deleted from electronic storage, and hardcopy notes shredded to ensure complete disposal.

Participant Rights

At the beginning and end of each interview, participants will be reminded that they:

- Have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason,
- May request that their data not be used, and
- Can refuse to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Appendix I: Quantitative Data Collection Form 1
Participant Identification

Variable	**Entry**
Participant Code	
Age (years)	
Date of Admission	
Date of Discharge (if applicable)	
Duration in Rehabilitation (days/weeks)	
Referral Source	☐ Court ☐ Family ☐ Police ☐ Other: _____

Family Structure and Living Situation

Variable	**Options / Entry**
Living Location / Residence	☐ With Both parents ☐ With One Parent ☐ With Other Relatives ☐ With Friends ☐ Other: _____
Family Structure	☐ Nuclear (both parents) ☐ Single-parent ☐ Extended family ☐ Other: _____
Number of Siblings	

Offence History

Variable	**Entry**
Offence Type (major offences)	_____
Frequency of Offences	☐ Once ☐ 2–3 times ☐ 4–5 times ☐ More than 5 times
Age at First Offence	

Relapse

Variable	**Entry**
Previous Relapse after rehabilitation	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unknown
Time to Relapse (if known)	_____ months/weeks
Intervention/Program Participated	☐ Counseling ☐ Mentorship ☐ Skills Training ☐ Other: _____
Notes / Remarks	

Appendix J: Quantitative Data Collection Form 2

Participant Values and Priorities Form (1–5 Scale)

Instructions:

I. Read each statement carefully.

II. Rate how important or true it is for you on a scale of 1 to 5:

Key

Scale	**Meaning**
1	Not important / Not true
2	Slightly important / Rarely true
3	Moderately important / Sometimes true
4	Important / Often true
5	Very important / Always true

Personal Needs and Priorities

Statement	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Feeling loved by family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeling respected by adults	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeling respected by peers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeling free to make my own choices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feeling safe and secure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being able to succeed or achieve goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Having friends and social acceptance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Receiving guidance or mentorship	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Being responsible and following rules	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Feelings About Life

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I feel loved by people around me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel respected by people around me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel free to make my own decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel safe where I live or stay	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel supported when I face problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel motivated to change or improve	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Perception of Freedom

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Freedom means being able to make my own choices	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Freedom means being able to express myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Freedom means being free from punishment or restrictions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Freedom means being respected and trusted	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Freedom means being able to succeed in life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Freedom means doing what I want, regardless of others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix K: Schedule

Activity	November	December	January	February	March
Strathmore University RHINNO Ethics Approval					
Obtain NACOSTI/Government Research Approval					
Participant recruitment and scheduling					
Data Collection					
Data Cleaning and Preparation					
Data Analysis					
Results Interpretation					
Dissertation Write-up (Chapters: Results, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations)					

Appendix L: Budget
Transport

Item	Quantity	Cost (KES)
Transport to rehabilitation centres	20 visits × 200	**4,000**
Additional administrative visits (NACOSTI, SU ethics office)	10 trips × 150	**1,500**
Contingency travel	10 trips × 150	**1,500**
Subtotal		**7,000**

Communication & Coordination

Item	Cost (KES)
Airtime & data bundle for communication with institutions, scheduling interviews	**3,000**
Printing, photocopying, scanning (letters, consent forms, questionnaires)	**2,500**
Subtotal	**5,500**

Research Materials & Data Collection Tools

Item	Description	Cost (KES)
Printing questionnaires (150 copies)	@ 10/=	**1,500**
Pens, files, clipboards		**800**
Recording device (alternative: phone)	Allowance for airtime + backup	**1,000**
Notebooks	2 × 150	**300**
Subtotal		**3,600**

Incentives for Participants (Non-Monetary)

Item	Cost (KES)
Snacks for participants during interviews (juice + biscuit)	20 boys × 30/=
Subtotal	**600**

Report Writing & Production

Item	Cost (KES)
Printing and binding final dissertation (4 copies)	4 × 700
Flash drive for backup	**800**
Subtotal	**3,600**

Total Estimated Budget

Category	Total (KES)
Transport	7,000
Communication & coordination	5,500
Research materials	3,600
Participant incentives	600
Report writing	3,600
Grand Total	**20, 300 KES**