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Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo**



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**Family Support and Social Reintegration of Adolescent Offenders in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Having a strong family support is one of the most important factors contributing to successful rehabilitation and especially among adolescent ex-offenders and thereafter gain a sustainable livelihood. This study sought to examine the role of family support in the social reintegration of adolescent offenders in Kinshasa city. The study was grounded on strain theory as proposed by Merton (1957) as well as pm system theory.

**Methodology:** Mixed methods research approach focusing on explanatory sequential design was adopted. Data was collected from a sample of 345 individuals including 330 adolescents and 15 key informants using questionnaires, FGDs, and key informant interviews. The study participants were selected from three localities, Kisenso, Limete, and Matete and Kisenso, using stratified sampling technique and purposive sampling.

**Findings:** Findings on adolescent offenders' perception on family support indicates that, 10% (n=33) of adolescent offenders expressed low perceptions of family support; 82.7% (n=273) had moderate perception of family support while 7.3% (n=24) have high perceptions of the support received from family members. The study also found a positive albeit rather weak correlation between family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders, with a Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) 0.377. From the findings, the ANOVA tests revealed that, family support (F=1.962, p=0.018) has statistically significant influence on social reintegration of adolescent offenders. The study concludes that, family support was found to be a predictor of social reintegration as family financial, material, and emotional support is needed to influence readjustment and social functioning of affected individuals.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** From the study, it was recommended that, different stakeholders including the government, NGOs, the religious organizations and individual philanthropists should support the family in her role to provide material and non-material support towards their adolescent ex-offenders for effective social re-integration.

**Key words:** *Conflict, Family environment, social reintegration, family support, family attitude, parenting style.*

**1.1 Study background**

Social reintegration can be understood as the support given to offenders during re-entry into society following imprisonment. A broader definition, however, encompasses the period starting

from prosecution to release and post-release support. The families of offenders, their immediate circle of friends, and the community have a fundamental role to play in assisting the offenders' return to society and supporting ex-offenders in rebuilding their lives. Research indicates that having strong family support is one of the most important factors contributing to successful rehabilitation, together with gaining steady employment (UNODC, 2006). The social functioning of ex-adolescent offenders released back to the family is a challenge to parents and policy makers. Worldwide, UNICEF (2022) estimates that more than one million children were detained by law enforcement institutions in 2021. Such children often face social challenges including poverty, drug abuse, parent neglect or separation, and lack of access to educational opportunities (Grami, 2021). The potential that the family environment represents as a contributing factor in addressing the dysfunctionality of the adolescents is often overlooked. Throughout the world, young offenders continue to be detained in prisons or kept in residential care institutions, with very limited involvement of the child's family, parents or relatives. This can further contribute to their social exclusion and recidivism (Council of Europe, 2021). Often, trained social service workers are hardly associated by the criminal justice system to care for and facilitate social reintegration of child offenders (UNICEF, 2022). And research remains limited on social workers' contribution to reducing recidivism of juvenile offenders (Muyobela & Strydom, 2017). The Indiana Youth Institute (IYI, 2021) notes with concern that detaining young people and taking them through the justice system, even if it is for a short period, has potential to harm them, with short and long-lasting effects on their health, education, economic situation. IYI (2021) concludes that young people who experienced the justice mechanism are at high risk of recidivism, defined in this context as committing criminal acts again within three years of being released.

The involvement of young people in criminal behaviour in Africa and the challenges of reintegrating them in the society are also experienced in other countries such as Zambia where adolescent offenders reside with adults in overcrowded prisons, with no space for educational programmes for juveniles (Muyobela & Strydom (2017). This prevents social workers to carry out case work and provide counselling services to incarcerated child offenders. The lack of social welfare officers is another challenge that affects the support to child offender in Zambia where there is a ratio of nine officers for a population of 3 million people including children (Muyobela & Strydom (2017). The above situation in Zambia suggests that a focus is on rehabilitation of adolescents in prison; and no evidence is found on the role of family members in the social reintegration of adolescent's offenders as existing literature's focus is on institutional-base rehabilitation like in other African countries (Gwatimba et al., 2018).

In Kenya, 80 percent of children in contact with the law are street children, and poverty and school dropout are among contributing factors of delinquency among adolescents (Langat & Odhiambo, 2021). Based on the best interest of the child principle, adolescents who commit offences in Kenya are either sent to rehabilitation institutions if they are between 10 years and 15 years; and Borstal institutions if they are between 16 years and 17 years (Republic of Kenya,

2017). However, the reality is that formal institutions are confronted with recidivism, which is an indication of failure of social reintegration despite the existence of such programmes. Much of the existing research on adolescent offenders in Kenya focus on the treatment on children in correctional institutions, and there is limited evidence on family environment and its role in social reintegration of children in contact with the law (Langat and Odhiambo, 2021).

Kuma (2020) cites poverty as the major factor to the issue of street children, violence and crime including as evidenced by the *kuluna* phenomenon. Makelele (2018) provides a comprehensive explanation of factors leading adolescents to become offenders in Kinshasa. These include (1) a militarised environment with at least six military camps surrounding the city; (2) failed demobilization of former child soldiers used during armed conflict; (3) poverty, social and economic marginalisation of youth with limited education opportunities and employment prospects, hence unable to satisfy their basic needs (water, quality health and education); (4) valorisation of violent groups as politicians and wealthy individuals hire them for protection against other gangs; (5) limited parental support as abandoned children without care and education become *shege* (street children). The National Congolese Police (PNC, 2022) documented a total of 5000 cases of adolescent offenders arrested by law enforcement officers in 2021 in Kinshasa City.

In addition, there is no research evidence on how family-based diversion measures, facilitated by social workers, have been embraced in DRC to prevent further marginalization, antisocial behaviour and recidivism among adolescents (PRI, 2020). Further, there is no research evidence on the extent to which reintegration initiatives and policies place the family at the heart of on-going efforts in DRC to address drivers of adolescence delinquency such as economic hardship, limited access to family support, lack of adequate education, housing, and food. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of family support in the social reintegration of adolescent offenders in Kinshasa City.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Family support, in particular the assistance from parents, is the most valuable asset fathers, mothers and care givers can give to children including adolescents, as parental support is the most crucial factor predicting adolescents' development and social competence such as self-esteem, social behaviour, and educational performance (Saimons & Robert, 2017). Such support is even more expected from adolescents who enter in contact with the law, and are in need of social reintegration services. Family support is justified in the case of adolescent offenders as the risks many of them face are often associated with poor economic conditions, limited or inadequate information, strained relations with family members. Yet, globally the main response to juvenile offenses is the arrest, detention, and imprisonment of young people in conflict with the law, with limited access to rehabilitation services from penal institution. In this context, the role of family in providing support to adolescent offenders is not clear. In the case of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, there is no evidence that family support is considered as one of



the sub-systems in the overall adolescent reintegration agenda. Beyond, the involvement of youth offenders in Government agricultural farms, often very far from their families, there is no evidence that family as the basic unit in the society is linked to justice for children system to prevent recidivism of adolescents once released from detention centers or prisons.

UNODC (2018) recognized the crucial importance of family support to former prisoners' re-entry into their community, as a key factor of success for social reintegration. UNODC further stresses that often, family support is what is lacking for most former prisoners. However, UNODC social reintegration discussion is focusing on adult male and female prisoners in need of family support to find a job or livelihood opportunities. Children are discussed from parents' perspective as prisoners re-connect and re-establish relationships with children and relatives through the assistance of social workers (UNODC, 2018). UNODC does not address the specific issue of adolescent offenders, who, as under age are likely to depend on the care and support of their parents and relatives, more than adult former prisoners. This study addressed this by examining family support from adolescents' perspectives, in particular how social work practice mediates such linkages during social reintegration process. To address these gaps in policies and literature, this study focused on the family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders in Kinshasa.

### **1.3 Study Objective**

This study was guided by the following objective: to investigate the role of family support and the social reintegration of adolescent offenders in Kinshasa City, DRC.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The research contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of family, criminal justice social work in ensuring an effective support system for adolescents in need of social reintegration. This study on family environment and social reintegration of adolescents also contributes to the extension of knowledge on the interplay between family and community social work practice, and the protection, and reintegration of children in conflict with the law in Kinshasa City. This study's findings will be significantly important for parents, social workers, policymakers, police and justice actors working to address the question of adolescent offenders, and their social reintegration process.

### **1.5 Scope and delimitations of the study**

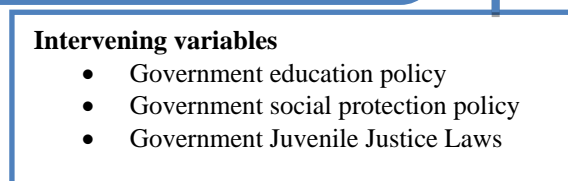
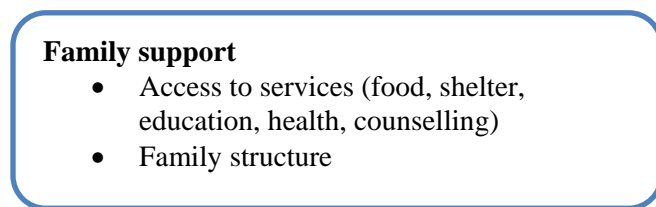
This research on family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders was conducted in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where police reports thousands of cases adolescents every year. The study was limited to adolescent offenders released to families from penal institutions (detention centers, police stations or prisons) to facilitate access to respondents during research activities. In addition, as the focus of the study is on the family environment, it is crucial to interact with adolescent ex-offenders who return to their families.

### 1.6 Limitations of the study

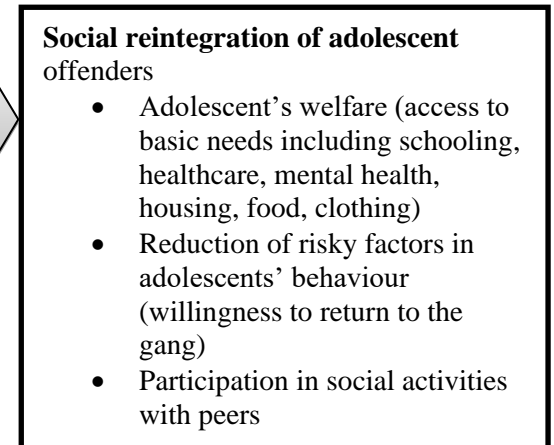
The researcher was faced with the following limitations during the study. Accessing research participants in a safe location was a challenge considering that the study deals with a sensitive subject, the involvement of adolescents in various offenses and type of support they need at the family level. To mitigate this challenge, the researcher collaborated with civil society organisations whose case workers are involved with adolescents in conflict with the law to facilitate the identification and respondents and research participants. Additionally, as some the adolescent offenders may have been associated with youth gangs, there were safety issues to keep in mind when planning the research in various areas in Kinshasa. As a mitigation measure, the researcher relied on CSO' facilities to safely conduct FDGs.

### 1.7 The Conceptual framework

#### *Independent Variable*



#### *Dependent variable*



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework

*Source:* Own conceptualization, 2021

Family support was operationalized by the way adolescents perceive material and non-material support received from families to enable them be functional and socially reintegrate the society. Such support includes emotional attachment, ensuring adolescents' access to food, shelter, healthcare, education, training and counselling. The respondents used Likert-like scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to score 13 statements related to various aspects of family support.

### 1.8 Literature review

This section reviews both theoretical and empirical literature on family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders.

#### 1.8.1 Theoretical review

The study was guided by two theories: strain theory and system theory.

Strain theory was proposed by Robert Merton (1957) to explain criminality as a result of frustration by individuals in the society who cannot achieve socially accepted goals with legal means, instead, they innovate by including resorting to illegal means to achieve the society goals.

The mismatch between the society goals of economic performance and the lack of means to achieve such goals causes strain, and pushes individuals to the margin of the society, which then lead them to commit crime as a response to such frustration (Bartollas and Schmallegger, 2018). Based on Merton's explain of deviant behaviour, and applying it to adolescent offenders, one would argue addressing the economic marginalization would facilitate the social reintegration of young people in conflict with the law. While Merton's explanation is relevant, it is limited. First, Merton associates crime with low classes in society, and could not explain how individuals who are economically successful commit crimes (Nguyen & Ngo, 2021). Second, Merton's explanation does not address all dimensions of adolescent offending as there could be other types of strains which need to be addressed to support adolescents' social reintegration.

Disagreeing with Merton's narrow explanation of crime is Agnew (1985) who offers a more comprehensive analysis of strains that lead to individuals' response, including crime. Agnew (1985) who points out that despite economic prosperity over the years, crime remains a reality in the society. While building on Merton's strain concept, Agnew (Perk et al., 2018; Brezina, 2017) develops a general strain theory and elaborates on three types of strain. He argues that there are three situations are likely to result into strains for individuals who face them: the failure to achieve society goals in society; the perception of being subjected to negative treatment such as abuse, unemployment, lack of shelter, bullying by others, discriminations; and the feeling of losing love and esteem of valuable persons in one's love. These various types of strain are likely to cause anger and frustration in individuals, who then result to delinquent behavior (Brezina, 2017). Following Agnew's explanation of strains, to socially integrate such individuals, one would need to address all types of strains causing a negative reaction by individual adolescents experiencing them. Agnew's strain theory is relevant to the understanding of adolescent offenders and the motivations behind their actions. However, he felt to appreciate peer pressure as a source of delinquent behaviour by adolescents. In addition, Agnew's explanation is limited to explain adolescents' reaction to strains as a static situation, and he fails to explain interdependence between various types of strains. The systems' theory is analyzing to complement strain theory in this study.

The General System Theory (GST) was developed by a group of scholars conducting research in biology, engineering, physics and mathematics. These include the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1920s, and mathematicians and engineers such as Mihajlo D. Mesarović, Elizabeth Steiner and George S. Maccia in 1960s (Thompson, 2016). These early proponents of GST were concerned with developing a theory which mathematically explains various linkages for one system. They argued that addressing part of a system in isolation does not account for the whole reality. Living systems, they argue, should be analyzed in the way their parts relate and interact with each other (Montuori, 2017). The following are the basic assumptions underpinning the grand system theory as discussed by earlier proponents of the systems' approach, as well as by those applying a system thinking to social sciences including social work.

The first assumption is the ‘wholeness’ nature of a system: a system as a whole is greater than the sum of its components (Lai & Lin, 2017). This assumption looks at the inter-relation between various elements of a system and the whole. The aim of various systems’ components is to contribute to the functioning of the whole. This means that each component contains the characteristics of the whole entity, but cannot have a significant meaning in isolation from the whole entity. Applying this to social work practice in a family for example, each member individually cannot be assessed and understood without an understanding of the rest issues affecting the family as whole. This entails that social workers and child protection actors are expected to invest in the holistic understanding and treatment of adolescent clients within their family and social environment (Shangwa & Mathende, 2019). This suggests that although each component of the system deserves due attention, the wholeness nature of a system needs to be preserved so that all elements are geared toward the equilibrium, which is the stability of the system. The second assumption is that the components of a system are interrelated, interconnected and interlinked in a web of complex and complementary relations (Priest, 2021). This assumption looks at the relationship between various elements of a system; the nature, quality and intensity of interactions and relations between different elements of the system determines the functioning of the whole system. Based on this assumption, if child offenders are considered by the society as a pathology, therefore the society as a whole is malfunctioning; unless the behavioural challenges affecting adolescents are addressed, including through effective support from parents and other key actors in the society, the whole society remains a pathology. The third assumption is that a system is either directly or indirectly affected by other systems in a way that a system should not be analyzed in isolation from others (Alter, 2018). An adolescent as an individual system for example, is emotionally affected by other systems such as parents, relatives, peers, and school mates. In addition, macro-level systems such as the economy and health can affect micro level systems such as families and communities. For example, UNDP (2020) policy brief notes that COVID19 which is a crisis in the health system has direct and indirect effects on family systems, and their ability to provide for individual members. The fourth assumption of the systems theory is that all systems have boundaries meant to be open and closed to external systems (Lai & Lin, 2017). The boundaries of a family system include for example children-parents’ subsystem; sister-brother sub-system; or mother-father subsystem. The boundaries enable systems to interact with others while maintaining their autonomy. The fifth assumption of the systems theory is that all systems gear towards constant state of stability or equilibrium referred to as *homeostasis* (Lai and Lin, 2017). This suggests that the activities of sub-systems aim at ensuring self-preservation of the whole system, hence the constant search for the adaptation and equilibrium. Applying this to families, one can argue that families with adolescents who were detained, arrested and imprisoned would need to support such adolescents to regain their functionality, not once, but during adolescents’ lives and their transition to adulthood.



Conclusively, the General System Theory (GST) is relevant to the study of family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders. The theory explains how adolescents in need of social reintegration can draw from the wider family environment to accessing coordinated, interdependent, and interrelated services. This call for a multi-sectoral approach to the provision of services. Child justice is just one of such sub-system; it should be complemented by other sub-systems around the family environment to contribute to effective reintegration of former adolescent offenders. The system theory provides the basis for an understanding of the linkages between different types of family support required by adolescent offenders for their reintegration. However, the challenge posed by a systems theory approach to social work is the capacity of social workers to assess different sub-systems that will add value to the interventions required by the client systems (individual, family, community, and various professional actors). In addition, systems theory emphasis on homeostasis or equilibrium suggests that the whole and its sub-systems are less likely to tolerate change and positive disruptions, while keeping individuals in the same situation. Yet, in the case of adolescent offenders for instance, their social reintegration could also benefit from creativity, innovative approaches and radical changes within their environment.

### ***1.8.2 Empirical review***

#### ***Family support and social reintegration of adolescents***

Saimons and Robert (2017) posit that family support, in particular the assistance from parents, is the most valuable asset fathers, mothers and care givers can give to adolescents. They argue that parental support is the most crucial factor predicting adolescents' development and social competence such as self-esteem, social behaviour, and educational performance. The support entails a broad range of assistance, ranging from enabling adolescents to need their basic physical needs to non-material support such as ensuring adolescents are listened to, guided, appreciated and overall cared for (Liu, et al, 2020). Both Saimons and Robert and Liu et al. point out the crucial import the support adolescents need for their material and mental wellbeing.

Kamaripati and Malathum (2020) provide a comprehensive analysis of family support. They have identified three characteristics of such support. First, family support entails the help that family members give to one of them in need. Second, such help can be in forms of emotional, instrumental or informational support. Third, they argue that family support involves an interaction and a relationship between the giver and the receiver. In their analysis, family support is receiver-led. This means that the person who requests help may be facing with difficult situations that they cannot handle on their own, hence the need for interventions by family members. These situations may include strained family connections, financial and material challenges. The authors posit that family support leads to readjustment, quality well-being and effective running of the overall family. Kamaripati and Malathum (2020)'s model is comprehensive and explains why some family members, including adolescents may be in need of support, and that support is multifaceted, and have positive outcomes. Family support in the case of adolescent offenders could mean providing adolescents with the required guidance and

information they need to prevent anti-social behaviour. However, it is not clear in this model how family members help their members to build resilience, and remain independent from recurrent support in particular when they are adults.

Discussing emotional support, Atoum and Al-Shoboul (2018) note that love, affection, warmth that adolescents receive from family members, peers, friends, is associated with the growth of emotional intelligence amongst adolescents. They argue that such support is a signal to adolescents that they can find comfort and resources they need to bounce back in time of crisis from those who care for them. They also found that family members and friends provide adolescents with higher levels of emotional support than teachers for instance. And because adolescents are experiencing storm, discoveries, and are more sensitive to emotions than any other age group (Mulyati et al., 2019; Saimons and Robert (2017), providing them with emotional support is crucial for their social readjustment, especially when they face challenges such as distress, disappointment, and anti-social behaviour.

Taking a gender approach to livelihood challenges, Stark et al. (2018) argue that family support is a crucial cushion of adolescent girls faced with violence and abuse, as alternative sources of income and livelihood opportunities become scarce. This view was confirmed by empirical evidence by UNICEF (2020) in Homa Bay county in Kenya where the UN Agency found out that girls engage in transactional sex with older men to respond to their basic needs such as clothing, food, transport and other school related expenses. These views expressed by Stark et al. (2018) and UNICEF (2020) call for the need to have support systems addressing livelihood needs for adolescents including girls, to prevent any exposure to risky behaviour including crimes.

Finally, investigating the relation between socio-economic status (SES) of parents and delinquency, Knaappila et al. (2019) argue that socioeconomic hardships are a key risk factor of lawbreaking behaviour amongst young people. The authors posit that low socioeconomic status (SES) increases the risk of delinquency among adolescents as such adolescents are likely to face challenges in meeting their material, financial, educational and shelter related needs. SES was measured by Knaappila et al. (2019) using data collected from adolescents on variables such as parental education, parental employment and family structure. While the authors recommend parental socioeconomic distress as an important factor to consider among prevention strategies for adolescent delinquency, they left out the dimension of child neglect, and how this can negatively influence social reintegration of adolescents, irrespective of parent's socioeconomic status. The question of mediation between adolescent offenders and parents with high or low socioeconomic status, and the roles of social workers in this process are not addressed. This gap, and other others identified from the literature on family support have been addressed in this study.

### **1.9 Methodology**

The research utilized mixed methods, in particular the explanatory sequential design, where quantitative data collected were complemented by qualitative data in order to get an-in-depth understanding and appreciation of issue, as well as the need to take into the voices of participants in the study (Creswell, 2014).

#### ***Study and target population, and sample***

The city of Kinshasa, which is the capital of DRC, has a population estimated around 14,3 million inhabitants, living in the space of 9,965 square kilometers (Balana, Jarobshkin, Konou et al., 2021; Bayebila et al., 2021). The city is also known for its musical and social events, some of which is used for the reintegration of young people formerly involved in drug, street life, and criminal activities (Parion, 2020). Based on national police statistics, Kinshasa accounts for a total of 5000 adolescent offenders recorded by the police in the year 2021 (CNP, 2022, n.p). And the three areas of Kinshasa with the highest (51%) cases of adolescent offenders were purposively selected to identify participants to the research. The sample of 370 for quantitative data collection was obtained based on the population of 5,000 adolescents, using Taro Yamane 's formula of (1967) which is best suited for categorical variables (Israel, 2003; Adam, 2020). Respondents were approached to express their interest in participating in focus group discussions (FGDs). In addition, the researcher planned to interview 20 key informants to gather the views of parents and professionals on the role of family in the social reintegration of adolescent offenders. Non-probability sampling technique, such as snowball was used to identify the research participants. To collect data on family support, the researcher used and adapted the Family Support Scale (FSS) tool developed by Uddin and Bhuiyan (2019) and which has an internal consistency reliability of 0.94 (Conbach's Alpha Coefficient). The adapted version had a Conbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.877, and contains 13 items scored on Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

#### **1.10 Study findings: *Response rate***

The researcher reached 330 adolescents (male,74.2 % and female, 25.8%) who responded to the questionnaire on family support and social reintegration. Among them, 12 adolescents (six girls and six boys) accepted to participate in the in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In addition, using the purposive sampling, the researcher identified and reached 15 key informants selected among adolescents' parents, representatives of national and international institutions working on child welfare and protection, children's judges, police officers from the special protection brigade; social workers, counsellors, and teachers (from primary and secondary schools). The number of respondents and participants reached (n=345) during the data collection activities between September and October 2022 represents a response rate of 84%. The quantitative data presented in this chapter was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics to summarize general trends in quantitative data obtained. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, and results were presented in narrative form.

### Main findings: Family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders

The study sought to assess the extent to which family support influences social reintegration of adolescent offenders. The aim of any reintegration initiative is to ensure the offender does not recidivate, hence the crucial importance of family support in terms of emotional support as well as access to guidance, basic needs, education and skills opportunities (Mwangangi, 2019). The table below presents the results of respondents' perception of support they receive from their family members.

The respondents' perceptions of family support were grouped into three levels: Low= for scores ranging from 0 to 20; moderate for 21 to 30; and high for 31 and above. The results are shown on table 1 below.

**Table 1: Levels of perceived family support**

Levels of perceived family support		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Low	33	10.0
	Moderate	273	82.7
	High	24	7.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field data, 2023**

The above table shows that 10% (n=33) of adolescent offenders expressed low perceptions of family support; 82.7% (n=273) have moderate perception of family support while 7.3% (n=24) have high perceptions of the support received from family members. The findings suggest that the majority (82.7%) of adolescent offenders have mixed perceptions of family support which is not strong or weak. The results agree with UNODC (2018) which, while recognizing the critical importance of family support for former prisoners, notes that lack or limited family support is a common feature of many former offenders including children and women.

The perceptions of family support were also discussed during FGDs, where recurrent issues raised by participants included lack of or limited emotional support, material and financial support to satisfy their basic needs. The following statements from female and male participants in the FGDs provide evidence for inadequate family support to adolescent offenders when they return home. For example, P9 observed that *"I am happy to return to school or have access to vocational training, but no one is paying for my education"* (P9, 2023). The lack of support for education expressed by P9 was further corroborated by another participant who reported the following: *"I was repeatedly told by my uncle I am a Kuluna (criminal). My life will never change positively. No family resources will be wasted on me for my education"* (P10, 2023). These testimonies are evidence of verbal abuse to which some adolescent offenders are subjected

to by family members, some of whom do not seem to value children who are in conflict with the law.

Contrary to quantitative data suggesting that the majority of adolescent offenders receive family support to access to food, during FGDs, some participants provided qualitative evidence on harsh living conditions, including the challenge to find food. For example, P10 stated that *“I stayed for days without food. I was told by my mother that there was no food. The house is crowded with people, and it is hard to find where to sleep. In general, living conditions are very bad”* (P10, 2023). The lack of food and adequate shelter has the potential to create strains for adolescents. The struggle for better living conditions seem to be a feature for most adolescent offenders, hence making them more vulnerable to substance abuse and depression (UNICEF, 2021).

Qualitative data also confirmed the quantitative findings that the majority of adolescents are not satisfied with the overall support they receive from parents. The situation is even challenging for adolescents living in households managed by single parents, who represent 55.5% of the respondents in this study. For instance, P11 stated the following: *“when my dad was around, he was taking care of me. My mum is not able to even send me to school or help me learn some practical skills”* (P11, 2023).

The above statement suggests that some of the adolescents face challenges to meet their basic needs, especially those living with single parents. This also means that social protection policy should prioritize families of adolescent in need, including those who living with single mothers, unable to provide for their children.

The table 2 below provides detailed account of adolescents’ perceptions of family support.



**Table 2: Adolescent offenders' perceptions of family support**

N	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	My family helps me with religious activities	21 (6.4%)	49 (14.8%)	137 (41.5%)	123 (37.3%)	330 (100%)
2	My family gives me useful information	44 (13.3%)	131 (39.7%)	132 (40.0%)	23 (7.0%)	330 (100%)
3	My family give me emotional support	93 (28.2%)	120 (36.4%)	106 (32.1%)	11 (3.3%)	330 (100%)
4	My family helps me to participate in social events	55 (16.7%)	109 (33.0%)	143 (43.3%)	23 (7.0%)	330 (100%)
5	My family helps to solve my problems	101 (30.6%)	128 (38.8%)	83 (25.2%)	18 (5.5%)	330 (100%)
6	My family is aware of my health	41 (12.4%)	83 (25.2%)	162 (49.1%)	44 (13.3%)	330 (100%)
7	My family helps me with medical treatment when needed	52 (15.8%)	93 (28.2%)	146 (44.2%)	39 (11.8%)	330 (100%)
8	My family gives me money when I need it	145 (43.9%)	140 (42.5%)	44 (13.5%)	1 (0.3%)	330 (100%)
9	My family provides me with food	51 (15.5%)	78 (23.6%)	159 (48.2%)	42 (12.7%)	330 (100%)

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10	My family cares about where I sleep	67 (20.3%)	90 (27.3%)	154 (46.7%)	19 (5.7%)	330 (100%)
11	My family cares about my companionship	114 (34.5%)	127 (38.5%)	72 (21.8%)	17 (5.2%)	330 (100%)
12	My family helps me to stay happy	108 (31.5%)	102 (29.4%)	104 (30.0%)	16 (4.5%)	330 (100%)
13	I am satisfied with my (overall) family support	86 (26.1%)	143 (43.3%)	88 (26.7%)	13 (3.9%)	330 (100%)

**Source:** *Field data, 2023*

Table above indicates adolescents' perceptions of family support with variation from one type of support to another. For example, on the aspect of the help adolescents receive from parents on religious activities, findings revealed that 6.4% (n=64) of adolescents strongly disagreed being provided with such support by their families, 14.8% (n=49) disagreed with this view and a large proportion, 41.9% (n=137) agreed that their family support them on religious activities with another group of adolescents (37.3%; n=123) strongly agreeing with the same. This implies that the majority (78.8%) of adolescent offenders agree and strongly agree that they receive family support on religious related activities. The finding agrees with Kermen (2018) who found that spiritual interventions address juvenile delinquency by supporting adolescents' spiritual health, promoting moral values and preventing recidivism.

On whether parents give adolescents useful information, 13.3% (n=44) of respondents strong disagree; 39.7% (n=131) disagree while 40% (n=132) stated that parents provide them with the information they need, and 7% (n=23) strong agree with the same. The findings imply that the majority (53%) of adolescent offenders do not receive adequate information from parents during their reintegration process. Such adolescents might not feel guided and supported by parents on information they might need on companionships and peer pressure, education and job opportunities and as well as relationships which are important aspects of adolescent development (Bell, 2016). And the lack of guidance to adolescents could be a predictor of juvenile delinquency (Lobos, 2020). In this context, they are likely to count on themselves or their peers for direction in life.

Table 2 also revealed that 28% (n=93) of adolescents strongly disagree that they receive emotional support from their families, while 36.4% (n=120) disagree, while 32.1% (n=106) of them agree that they receive such an emotional support and only 3.3% (11) strongly agree. The findings suggest that the majority (54.4%) of adolescent offenders do not receive emotional support from their family members. Yet, as the findings by Bailen et al. (2019) suggest, parents' perceptions of their adolescents' emotions have the potential to shape adolescent's self-esteem and mental health.

When asked whether family members help adolescents to participate in social events, 16.7% (n=55) of respondents strong disagree, 33% (=120) disagree, while 43.3% (n=143) agree and 7% (n=23) strongly agree that they received help to participate in social events. These findings suggest mix reactions from adolescents, whereby just below half (49.3%) adolescents are associated by family members in social events, while a slightly more than the same percentage (49.7) of adolescents are not associated with social events by their families. The perceived lack of association of adolescents expressed by almost half of the respondents suggests that adolescents experiencing this attitude are likely to be distanced from family members, and feel isolated during the reintegration phase.

On problem solving, 30.6 % (n=101) of adolescents strong disagree that they receive support from family members; 38.8% (n=128) disagree, while 25.2% (n=83) agree that they receive family support to solve their problems, and 5.5% (n=18) strongly agree with the same. This implies that 68.4% of adolescents do not receive support from their families on how to solve their problems. Yet, Offrey and Rinaldi (2017) found that when there is a communication between parents and children on their problems, children tend to find more effective strategies of dealing with issues than when challenges that adolescents face are not discussed with parents and care givers. The adolescents in conflict with the law who have no family support to address their problems are likely to be frustrated, which in turns does not facilitate their readjustment in the society.

When asked about whether the family was aware of their health status, 12.4% (n=41) strongly disagree, 25.2% (n=83) disagree; close to half (49.1%; n=162) agrees while 13.3% (n=44). The findings imply that the majority (62.4%) of adolescent's health status is known to their family members. This was further confirmed by the majority (56%) of adolescents who agree and strongly agree that families help them with medical treatment when needed, while 44% of them strongly disagree and disagree that families help them with access to healthcare. The findings agree with Jones et al. (2021) who provided evidence of parents' interest in adolescents' health.

On whether family members give adolescents money when they are in need, 43.9% (n=145) of respondents strongly disagree, 42.5 % disagree, while 13.5% (n=44) and 0.3% respectively agree and strongly agree with the same. This implies that the majority (86.4%) of adolescent offenders do not receive financial support from family members when they are need. Inadequate financial support to adolescents in need is source of strain as discussed in Morton's Strain Theory. As

such, adolescents could resort to illegitimate means of accessing money, including theft (Lobos, 2020). Such adolescents are at high risk of recidivism.

Regarding the question about whether their families provides them with food, 15.5% (n=51) of adolescents strongly disagree, 23.6% (n=78) disagree, 48.2% (n=159) agree, while 12.7% (n=42) strongly agree. The findings indicate that the majority (60.9%) of adolescent offenders receive food from their family members. This is in agreement with Monroe-Lord et al. (2021) who found that the family environment, in particular parents, play a crucial role in supporting adolescents' healthy dietary practices. The findings are also consistent with Masten et al. (2021) who found that when families provide children with basic needs, including food and healthcare, they support children's development, and reduces stress in the family environment. Inadequate access to food and basic necessities are likely to push adolescents to the street in search for food using all means including stealing as evidenced in this study: theft of food items is among the reasons given by adolescent offenders for their arrest.

Asked whether their families care about where they sleep, 20.3% (n=67) of adolescent offenders strongly disagree, 27.3% (n=90) disagree, 46.7% (n=154) agree and 5.7% (n=19) strongly disagree. The findings demonstrate that the majority (52.4%) of families cares about where the adolescents sleep. This could be an indication of families' desire to keep adolescents under their roof, and prevent them from returning to the traumatic street life. This view is in agreement with Zhou et al. (2021) who found a positive correlation between shelter conditions and adolescents' well-being.

When asked if their families care about their companionship 34.5% (n=114) of adolescent offenders strongly disagree, 38.5% (n=127) disagree, 21.8% (n=72), while 5.2% (n=17) strongly agree. The findings show that majority (73%) of the adolescents' families do not care about their companionship. Yet, Yusuf et al. (2021) found peer influence to be a predictor of delinquency among adolescents. This study notes that adolescent offenders in Kinshasa tend to operate among peers and in organized gangs (Lagrange and Vercoulon, 2021); therefore, family members' knowledge of their children's companionship is critical to prevent re-offending among adolescents.

Regarding the question about whether their families help them to be happy, 31.5% (n=108) of the adolescents strongly disagree, 29.4% (n=102) disagree, 30.0% (n=104) agree and 4.5% (n=16) strongly agree. The findings indicate that majority (60.9) of families of the adolescents do not help them to stay happy. This could explain why 26.1% (n=86) of adolescent offenders strongly disagreed with statement related to the satisfaction with overall family support; 43.3% (n=143) disagreed, 26.7% (n=88), while 3.9% (n=13) strongly agree. This means, the majority (69.4%) of the adolescents are not satisfied with their families' (overall) support, in disagreement with Dam at al. (2023) who found that nearly 30% of adolescents were not satisfied with life. The findings are in tandem with Mathil (2016) who found that adolescent offenders' families tend to be characterized by poor cohesion and lack of support to the members. Yet, family support is a predictor of social and mental well-being (Dan, et al. 2023).

Conclusively, the study found that from adolescent offender's perspectives, the family support remains inadequate particularly in terms of emotional support, useful information, attention to their companionship, and problem solving. These aspects of family support are to be improved to facilitate effective social reintegration of adolescent offenders.

### Correlation analysis

The study also aimed at investigating the relationship between family support and social reintegration of adolescent offenders. The results of the correlation analysis performed on the two variables are presented on table 3 below.

**Table 3: Correlation matrix between family support and adolescent offenders' social reintegration**

		Family Support Scores13	Adolescents' social reintegration
Family Support Scores13	Pearson Correlation	1	<b>.377</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	330	330
Adolescents' social reintegration	Pearson Correlation	<b>.377</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	330	330

**Source:** *Field data, 2023*

The result on table 3 shows a Pearson Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.377 and a p-value of 0.00 between family support and social reintegration, against the threshold ranging from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , and p-value of 0.05 or less. The result obtained indicates a positive but weak relationship between the independent variable (family support) and the dependent variable (adolescents' social reintegration). This also means that an increased support to adolescent offenders during the reintegration phase tend to be associated with an improved feeling by adolescents to be socially reintegrated. The findings are in tandem with Tsai et al. (2017) who found a positive relationship between family support and stability in adolescents facing stressful situations.

### One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

In order to answer some of the research questions, the study sought to use the ANOVA test. The ANOVA is a type of t-test which helps to investigate the influence of independent variables on dependent variables (Cresswell and Guetterman, 2019; Gesami, 2023). In this study, one-way ANOVA test was performed to investigate the influence of independent variables (family support, family attitude, authoritative parenting style, authoritarian parenting style and neglectful



parenting style) and the dependent variable, adolescent offenders' social integration. The results are presented in the table below.

**Table 3: One-Way ANOVA test results**

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Family Support_Cat13	Between Groups	4.797	15	.320	1.962	<b>.018</b>
	Within Groups	51.009	315	.163		
	Total	55.805	330			

**Source:** *Field data, 2023*

The ANOVA table above suggests that, family support ( $F=1.962$ ,  $p=0.018$ ) has statistically significant influence on social reintegration. This means that this variable has significant effect on adolescent offenders' social reintegration. This also suggests that, family environment factors may predict social reintegration of adolescent offenders. The finding is consistent with earlier analysis in this study which indicates a very low but positive correlation between family support and social reintegration with a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.377. Family support therefore is key factor in preventing anti-social behavior and preventing recidivism among ex-adolescent offenders.

### 1.12 Conclusion

Family support was found to be a predictor of social reintegration, as family financial, material, and emotional support is needed to influence readjustment and social functioning of affected individuals. In this case, social welfare administration become key social work method for intervention at the family levels. Further, there is need to address the policy and implementation gap evident in the 2009 child protection Law of Kinshasa to enhance a conducive family environment for effective social reintegration of adolescents in conflict with the law. The establishment of care and education institutions as well as the expansion of a body of trained social workers in various institutions (health, schools, judiciary, family, etc.) would potentially mitigate the challenges adolescents and parents face in juvenile delinquency and ensure access to an array of interconnected services in the continuum of care. In this regard, the involvement of criminal justice social workers would be crucial to ensure professional handling of adolescents involved in anti-social behavior. Effective social reintegration of adolescent offenders can thus be enhanced by ensuring justice for children system is connected to the family environment, and particular relies on family support for sustainable care and protection of children. The study has

provided evidence that family is at the heart of adolescents' development, growth and readjustment in the society.

### 1.13 Recommendations

The family should be helped to understand the need for material and non-material support towards their adolescent offenders. The feeling of love and being consulted is key in restoring the broken sense of self for adolescents who already feel disowned. Social casework may be critical in helping adolescents to overcome their past and cope with the new life demands. In addition, family social work is also critical to support the functioning of the family as a whole.

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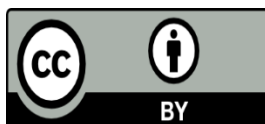
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