

FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUTH CRIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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ABSTRACT

Effective solutions and prevention measures to social problems are easy to find when the root causes of such problems are established. For this reason, scholars have come up with several underlying factors that influence criminality among the youth and juvenile delinquency. This paper addresses these factors among the youth imprisoned at Kamiti Youth Corrective Training centre (Y.C.T.C) which is the only penal institution for young male offenders aged 17 – 21 years in Kenya. The study involved 55 inmates selected by simple random sampling method from a sample frame of 120 inmates. Out of the 55 respondents 31 were aged 17 years while the remaining 24 were aged between 18 and 21 years. The data was collected by the use of questionnaires and personal interviews. The need to pay more attention to the crime that involve the young people is further supported by the crime reports which indicate that a higher number of juveniles and the youth have been involved in various crimes both in society and in learning institutions where unrests and riots are common.

Keywords: Youth crime, juvenile delinquency, Kenya

POVERTY AND CRIME AMONG THE YOUTH

Various observations indicate that most of the youth are in crime because of poverty, which drove them into criminal acts for survival (Prior & Paris, 2005). At Y.C.T.C, the study revealed that over 70%; more than 40 out of 55 of the inmates were poor or came from poor family backgrounds based on where they lived, property ownership and the types of offences committed. For instance, some boys indicate that they had run from home to beg for survival in the streets because they lacked basic needs. In those streets they latter committed crimes to survive, they were involved in petty offences like stealing goods or properties whose value were less than Kshs 500. This finding on poverty as a cause of crime among the young people confirms the opinion of Thomas R. Forstenzer, in his article “Tomorrow in North America: Youth between the American dream and reality”, in *The Twentieth Session UNESCO General Conference Report* titled - Youth in the 1980's” on poverty as a cause

of deviance. He observed that economic stress and a sense of personal failure is “... the chronic culprit for the symptoms of social decay: drugs, alcohol and sex related problems that will affect the young as long as the family itself has difficulty facing the strains of inflation and unemployment”.

As poverty dictates which social class an individual belongs to, it was observed that most of these youth at Y.C.T.C belonged to the lower social class. A majority of these offenders at 45 out of 55, (81.8%) indicate that before their arrests, they lived in the various slums around Nairobi city such as Mathare, Kibera and Mukuru Kwa Njenga. The researcher noted that a number of these offenders were bare footed. This observation on the influence of social class on crime and delinquency affirms the opinion of Wright & Younts (2009) that the delinquency rate increases with a decrease in social class.

DRUGS GREATLY INFLUENCE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND YOUTH CRIMINALITY

Some youth get into crime due to peer pressure and rebellion against parental authority (Maseko, 2009). Cases of the young offenders whose offences were being in possession of bhang (cannabis sativa) were noted at YCTC and they confessed to have been recruited by friends. This reinforces Erickson (2001) observation that drugs also lead the youth to crime. There were some youth who claimed to have committed criminal activities under the influence of chang'aa (traditional liquor) and bhang. This confirms Dentler (1967) assertion that addiction to narcotics destroys the moral fibre of the addict; therefore, their character deteriorates and habits become evil. Makhoha (2008) in a study on the factors that influence male delinquents to commit capital offences among Kamiti inmates established that drugs were one of the factors. The cases of unrest in schools and colleges have also been attributed to drug abuse where bhang smoking is common. For instance, these riots and arson attacks in schools; where students are burnt in their sleep to death by their colleagues occurred in Endarasha Boys High on 18/10/2010 in Nyeri County when two students were burnt to death (Sunday Standard Newspaper,

19/10/2010). At Kodero Bara Secondary School in Migori County, a fourteen-year-old form one boy died in a night fire that burnt a dormitory; ten students were questioned by the police over the February 2004 incident. There are many factors that have been cited as the cause of these unrests include authoritarian school administration management, and lack of dialogue between the teachers and students.

However, the National Agency for the Campaign against Drug Abuse (Nacada) in its October 2002 study recognizes the rampant drug abuse in learning institutions which is not limited to cannabis sativa. On the youth out of learning institutions, a Mr. Joseph Kibet (Buruburu police chief) observes that "We have so many kids who have dropped out of school or those who are jobless and are idle. They get involved in drugs and crime". Most of the criminals in the Eastlands, Nairobi, are aged between 15 and 25 years: "When these young stars take drugs, they cease to be normal people. They turn to crime to get money for drugs (Daily Nation Newspaper, 26/1/2004).

THE OTHER CAUSES OF YOUTH CRIMINALITY

Ojo (2012) lists broken homes and low education attainment as some of the causes of delinquency, which was revealed at Y.C.T.C since most of the boys were from dysfunctional families. Some boys had been orphans without guardians before their arrests, others had single or divorced parents, and some had parents in major differences, others parents' or guardians were alcoholics who could not offer good parenthood. For example, among the 55 randomly sampled youth, 7 had parents who had separated, 6 youths' mothers had died, 14 were fatherless (fathers either died or were unknown to them having been born out of wedlock), while 8 had no parents at all; were either total orphans or never knew both their parents having been abandoned when young. On education level, it was established that out of these 55 young convicts, 43; (78%) did not go beyond class six primary with their schooling.

West & Farmington (1973) propose that like low family income, large family size is a characteristic feature of offenders first convicted at an early age.

These scholars observe that this is due to faulty upbringing by parents or guardians at critical stages of infant development because of the presence of several siblings. This observation was also established by this study. Out of the 55 randomly sampled young offenders 32; (58%) were from families where they have six siblings and above. Eckersley & Dear (2002) conclude that other than break up of families, individualism and rapid technological development are factors that cause crime among the youth. Finally, some crimes committed by the youth are out of excitement games not related to constructive living. Ridway (1973) observes that "here theft is understandable, revenge understandable but not the principle in excitement ..." in towns they stuff chewing gum and folly sticks in telephone coin slots without seeing anything wrong. These games young people play in search of excitement lead to appalling crimes like vandalism and grievous bodily harm, and when they are asked about what transpired, they respond that they were just playing and did not intend to cause any harm.

THE CONTROL MEASURES FOR THE YOUTH CRIME AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

According to Richards (2011) putting youthful offenders behind bars may not deal with the kind of factors which caused their recorded crimes. In most cases it becomes a mere removal of these youth from their dwelling areas. The following measures are therefore suggestions that can help reduce the rise in the number of the young people involved in criminal activities. Creation of wealth should be our top priority. Employment opportunities are to be created by both the governments and private entities for youth of employable ages. However, these people must learn to accept whatever work and not yearn for white-collar employment. The society should also provide ready professional guidance and counselling services in schools, particularly at adolescence to counter the evil impact of the peer pressure that influence these young into crime and delinquency.

The parents must also take responsibility over their children up to the time when they would be in the position to stand on their own. This involves providing for their children's material needs and giving them moral guidance. Many parents have forfeited the former role and have left it to the movies and advertising agencies to run their children's lives. There must be a realisation that in adulthood, values come from the family, religious and education background. Therefore, parenthood should be taken more seriously thus parents must not be too busy to know and monitor the activities of their teenage sons and daughters. Religion has a positive impact as a social control measure (Odegi-Awuondo, 1995). Therefore, religious leaders should work extra time to reach out for the youth

and involve them in religious activities, a god fearing young adult won't get into criminal activities since this is a sin before God.

Education and training have a role in youth criminality as observed earlier; subsequently, the Kenyan government deserves every support from local and international organizations as well as individuals to sustain the constitutional free basic education, and ensure its quality. Parents and guardians must also co-operate by not only directing their children to schools but making preparations to take over this responsibility from secondary to colleges. Uneducated person would not know what is required of him and yet ignorance is no defence in law. Good time and personal management skills must be inculcated in our youth; idleness is not just a devils' workshop: it is to man what rust is to iron. Work and recreational activities should alternate as the youth are alerted to take responsibility for their actions. This will help reduce crimes committed out of excitement games. The youth in learning institutions must be fully engaged in sports and other extra curricula activities; this will leave them with no time for strikes and other destructive activities. Finally, the communities must help their governments to reduce the number of youthful offenders because as Boss (1967) recommends: "The society must strive to reclaim adolescent offenders at an age when positive correction is possible before criminal career is developed, this is the age success is most likely. The differential treatment of all the youthful offenders is a prudent policy".

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