

The Relationship between Social Factors and Criminal Behavior Among Youth Offenders in Kakamega GK Prison in Kakamega County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of socioeconomic factors on teenage criminal conduct. A descriptive and evaluative research design was used in the study. We used both probability and non-probability sampling approaches. Non-probability sampling included deliberate and convenient sampling, whereas probability sampling included proportionate stratified random sampling. Both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling strategies were used to pick the sample for the investigation. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify 200 adolescent offenders undertaking rehabilitation at Kakamega GK Prison, where previous offenders' records were already on file. The quantitative research method used a survey questionnaire, whereas the qualitative method used semi-structured interviews with a subsample of survey respondents. The survey and interview data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, respectively. The findings found that juveniles from low-income homes with no education and no employment were more likely to engage in criminal activity than those from higher-income families with education and employment. In addition, the study found that juvenile criminal behavior was associated with peer pressure, substance misuse, and inadequate parenting. According to the qualitative analysis, teenagers who were subjected to bad parenting, such as neglect and abuse, were more likely to engage in criminal activity than those who had supportive and caring parents. According to the study, addressing the socioeconomic variables that contribute to criminal conduct among juveniles is critical to reducing the frequency of young crime. Policies aiming at lowering poverty, boosting educational possibilities, and providing job prospects for youths are critical to reducing juvenile criminal behavior. Furthermore, enhancing parenting skills and offering support to low-income families can help reduce young criminal behavior. According to the study, governments, community leaders, and parents must collaborate to offer the necessary assistance and resources to ensure that adolescents in low-income communities do not fall behind.

Keywords: Criminal Behaviour, Kakamega GK Prison, Rehabilitation, Socio-economic Factors, Youth Offenders

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of criminal behavior among youths is a longstanding societal concern with far-reaching economic, social, and psychological implications (Ahmad et al.2022; Young et al., 2017). In numerous countries, there has been a noticeable increase in youth crime over the years, prompting heightened concern among policymakers, researchers, and community members (Wood et al., 2017).

Existing research has consistently identified socio-economic factors, such as poverty, lack of education, and unemployment, as significant predictors of criminal behavior among youths (Shah et al., 2019). Despite the considerable body of research on this topic, there remains a need for further studies that delve into the relationship between socio-economic factors and criminal behavior among youths in diverse contexts.

The impact of socio-economic factors on criminal behavior among youths is particularly intriguing as it underscores the connection between economic inequality and criminality. Poverty and other socio-economic factors profoundly influence the life experiences of youths, potentially leading to engagement in criminal behavior (Anser et al.2020). For instance, youths from low-income families may face limited educational opportunities, restricting their job prospects and increasing the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities (Gong, 2023). Similarly, growing up in neighborhoods with elevated crime rates may expose youths to criminal influences and peer pressure, contributing to their engagement in criminal behavior (Damm & Dustmann, 2014).

In Kenya, several studies have examined the relationship between socio-economic factors and youth crime. For instance, a study by Ndikaru (2021) identified poverty and lack of educational opportunities as significant predictors of youth crime in Nairobi, with family problems and peer influence also contributing to youth delinquency. Another study by Thuku (2017) explored the link between unemployment and crime among youths in Nyeri, finding

that unemployment was a significant predictor of youth crime, and poverty and lack of education played crucial roles in contributing to crime. Similarly, a study by Rwengo (2017) investigated the relationship between poverty and crime among youths in Eldoret, revealing that poverty, lack of education, and unemployment were significant predictors of youth crime in the county.

Despite the abundance of research on the relationship between socio-economic factors and youth crime in Kenya, there is a need for more studies exploring this relationship in different contexts. Notably, there is a gap in research focusing specifically on the relationship between socio-economic factors and youth crime in Nairobi, the capital city and one of the largest urban centers in Kenya. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the impact of socio-economic factors on criminal behavior among youths at Kakamega GK Prison in Kakamega Town, Kakamega County, Kenya.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between social factors and criminal behavior among youths in Kakamega GK Prison in Kakamega Town.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive and evaluative research design. Both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were employed. Non-probability comprised purposeful sampling and convenient sampling, while probability encapsulated proportionate stratified random sampling. To select the sample for the study, both probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques were applied. Purposive sampling was used to identify 200 youth offenders who were undergoing rehabilitation at Kakamega GK Prison, where already offenders had their records in the correctional facilities. This was because not all offenders in rehabilitation schools qualified as respondents for this study, but only those who had offended in the past year and been released and those who had not. Stratified sampling was used to group the 200 youths according to their socio-economic status. A random sampling table was used to identify the one hundred youths from different strata of 200 youth's socio-economic status. Furthermore, a simple random sampling table was used to select 15 correctional officers from a sample size of 30 correctional officers from selected institutions. Respondents were proportionately sampled across the correctional facilities.

III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Age of Youth Offenders

As indicated in Table 4.1 above majority of the youth offenders were in the age bracket of 23-27 years which is represented by 60% followed by 18- 22years, 30% and 28-34 years 10% respectively. This can be explained using poverty as an example which makes those in the age of 18-22 years be in prison rather than in education institutions due to lack of school fees and so did not go to school or dropped out on the way and engaged in those criminal behaviors in order to satisfy their basic needs.

Table 1

Age of Youth Offenders

Age Bracket	Percentage
18-22 years	30
23-27 years	60
28-34 years	10

3.1.2 Distribution Youth Offenders According to Marital Status

From the Figure 1, majority 50% youth offenders were those that were married, followed by 35% of those who were single, then 10% of those who were divorced and finally 10% were widowed.

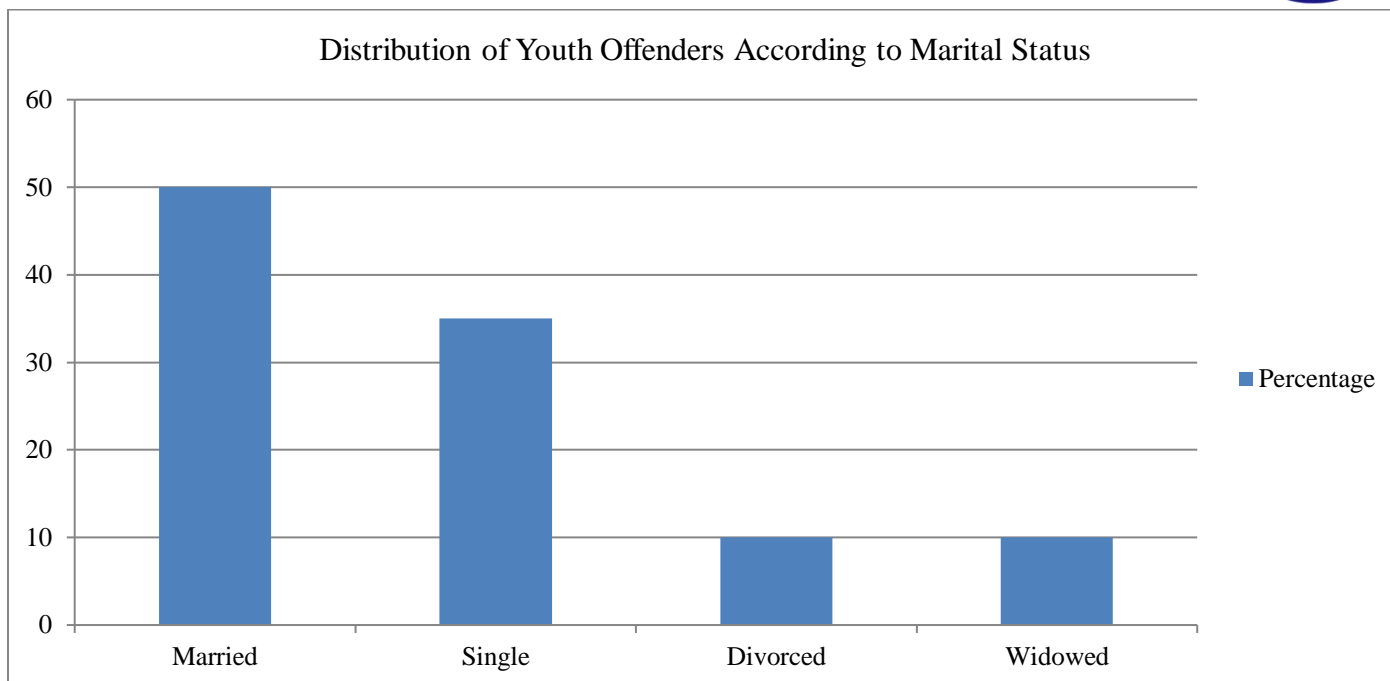


Figure 1
 Showing Distribution Youth Offenders According to Marital Status

This was interpreted to mean that majority of the youth offenders committed crimes due to the family burden where they were to provide for their families but due to lack of access to education and lack of skills and knowledge to apply for legitimate jobs they resorted to criminal behavior.

3.1.3 Educational level of Youth Offenders

The result show that majority of youth offenders were those that did not continue with their studies after doing their primary education examination with 55% respectively, 35% are those that have studied up to secondary education and 10% respectively are those that went for tertiary education that is, the polytechnics and colleges. Most of those 55% are those that engage in crime because they are unemployed and yet they have to meet their basic needs as well as those of their families.

3.1.4 Family structure and stability as a contribution to criminal behavior among youths.

The result show that majority of the youth offenders 85% concurred that family structure and stability contributed to their involvement in criminal activities while 15% supported the aspect that family stability and structure had no contribution to their involvement in crime. This was explained where a stable and supportive family environment can promote positive behavior among youths, while a dysfunctional family contributed to criminal behavior.

3.1.5 Exposure to violence or abuse in the household or community while growing up.

Figure 2 show that 90% of the respondents concurred that they had been subjected to violence or abuse while growing up either in the family community level. This explains why they ended up in criminal activities due to being bitter out of the experience they had encountered while growing up. Mostly children who come from violent families end up engaging in the behavior. 10% of the respondents were for the aspect that they had never faced any abuse acts or subjected to violence while growing up.

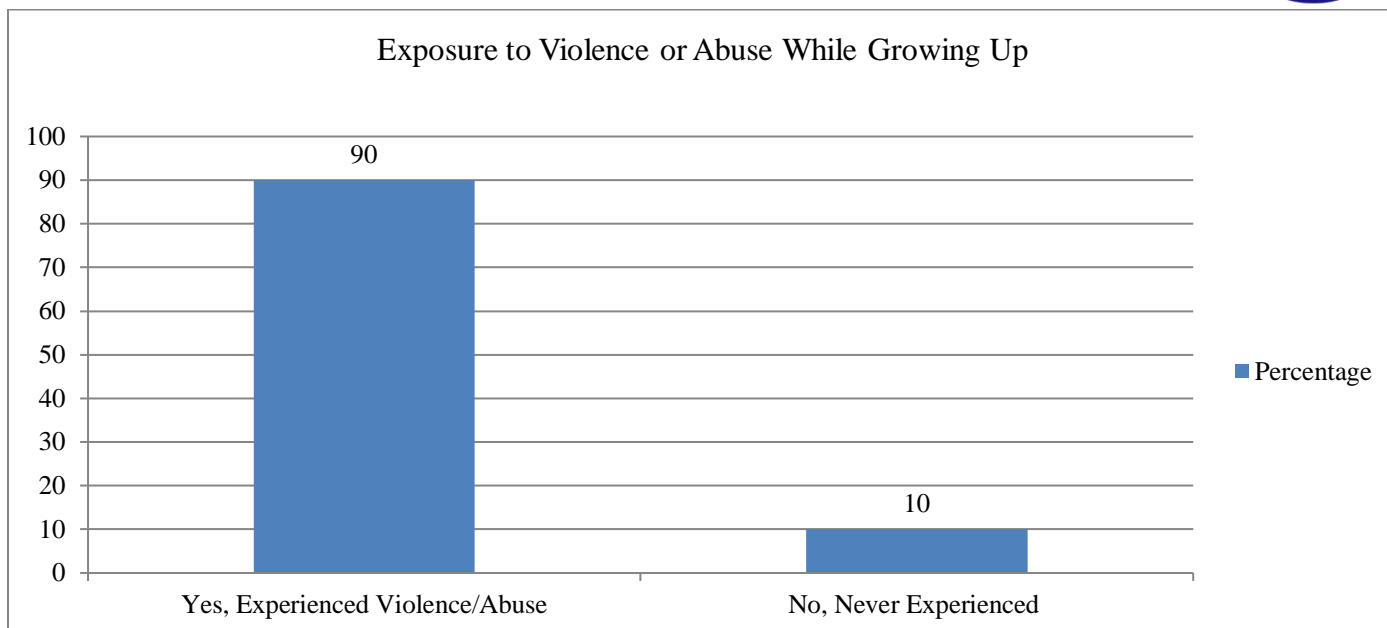


Figure 2
Showing Exposure to Violence or Abuse While Growing Up

3.1.6 Peer pressure as a contributor to criminal behavior

The result show that 75% of the respondents concurred that negative peer pressure contributed so much to them engaging in criminal activities. This is because their friends engage in them or to prove themselves to others that they were not cowards which later landed them to prison. On the other hand, 25% of the respondents were for the aspect that peer pressure had no contribution to their criminal behavior.

3.1.7 Lack of Positive Role Models or Mentors Influence Involvement in Criminal Activities

The result show that 55% of the youth offenders concurred that lack of positive role models and mentors contributed to their involvement in criminal behavior. This simply means that they had no one to emulate or to guide them correctly on delaying with life hack issues. Similarly 45% responded lack of role models or mentors did not contribute to their involvement in criminal behavior. A role model's behavior may positively or negatively influence youth's or adolescent's attitudes towards violence, violent or criminal behavior.

3.1.8 Frequency of Family Problems Contributing to Criminal Behavior

The result show that the largest percentage of respondents 83.3% concurred that there is a strong correlation between family dysfunction and delinquency among young people where frequently often family problems like lack of parental supervision, family conflict and violence, parental substance abuse, inconsistent punishments which are harsh that lead to rebellion and economic hardships leading to a stressful environment that lead most youths in criminal behavior. 16.7% of the respondents however disputed that family that it's on rare occasions that family problems contribute to criminal behavior as they base their argument on other factors of human persona rationality and unemployment and joblessness as majority of factors. 0% of the respondents completely disagreed that there was no correlation.

3.1.9 Perception of Correlation between Negative Peer Influence and Youth Criminal Behavior

As shown in Table 2 below, majority of the respondents 93.3% observed and agreed that there is a correlation between negative peer influence and youth engagement in criminal behavior and activities. This can be explained where most youths often seek acceptance approval from their peers in their socialization. The constant exposure to peers engaged in criminal activities can also influence them and change their rationality on criminal consequences. Similarly, 6.7% disagreed that there is no correlation between negative peer influence and youth crime. They have belief that individual characteristics play a major role in a person's behavior.

Table 3

Perception of Correlation between Negative Peer Influence and Youth Criminal Behavior

Response	Percentage
Agree	93.3
Disagree	6.7

3.1.10 Influence of Positive Role Models or Mentors in Criminal Behavior Among Youths

As shown in Figure 3, majority 70% of Correctional Officers who were sampled agreed that positive role models and mentors are extremely influential in preventing criminal behavior among youths. This was interpreted to mean that while role models antisocial behavior is directly linked to increased violent behavior through youth's attitudes towards violence, positive role models are extremely influential in preventing criminal behavior among youths.

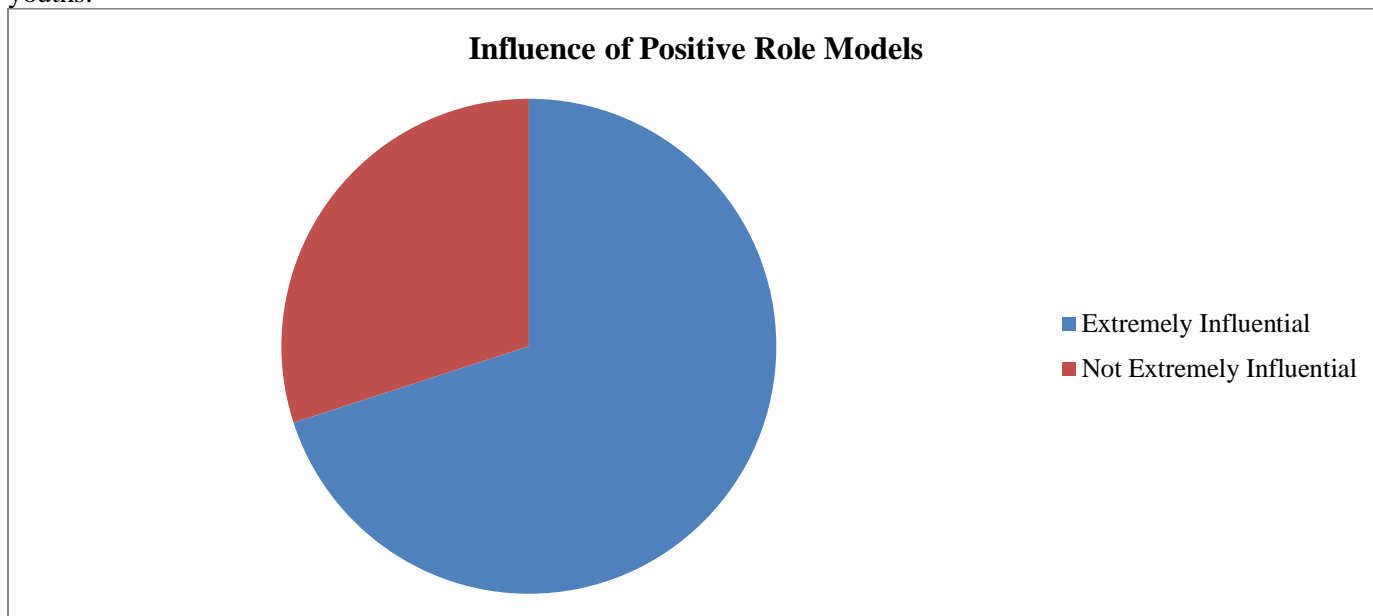


Figure 3

Showing Influence of Positive Role Models

3.2 Discussions

The high occurrence of young offenders in the 18–22 age groups is thought to be caused by financial challenges, specifically the inability to pay for school. Because their parents cannot afford to pay for school, many individuals in this age group may wind up behind bars rather than in classrooms. As a result, some may not have finished high school or may have dropped out in the middle, forcing them to turn to crime to provide for themselves and their families. This conclusion is in line with the argument put up by Ahmad et al. (2022), which highlights the complex relationship between economic and social issues. There seems to be an association between the lack of educational options caused by financial restrictions and an increase in the risk of young criminal activity.

Problems with family dynamics, stability, and childhood exposure to violence all play a role in shaping criminal conduct, highlighting the family as a key influencer. Comprehensive family support programs are necessary because people, particularly married people, feel pressure to care for their families. Financial aid, parenting training, and counseling are all potential means of reducing the stresses that can push someone over the edge into criminal behavior. Both Thuku (2017) and Rwengo (2017) have made note of the fact that family dynamics have an effect on juvenile delinquency, suggesting that problems within families are significant contributors to the development of juvenile delinquency. To lower the risk of persons engaging in criminal activities, it is crucial to adopt interventions that enhance family structures and provide support systems.

According to Thuku (2017), there should be interventions aimed at improving educational possibilities because of the association between low levels of education and criminal activity. Young people can be better prepared for lawful employment and less likely to turn to crime if they have access to programs that offer affordable and accessible education beyond primary levels in addition to vocational training.

The importance of community-based interventions is underscored by the fact that Ahmad et al. (2022) and Young et al. (2017) demonstrated that negative peer pressure is a major factor in juvenile criminal conduct. When young people are around their friends, their chances of being involved in illicit activities are either increased or decreased. Essential components of treatments aimed at reshaping peer influences include educational campaigns, mentorship programs, and community activities that encourage good peer interactions.

An important component of criminal conduct is the lack of positive adults to look up to as role models or mentors. Interventions should take a community-based, comprehensive approach to address these problems because of how interrelated they are. Correctional facilities, community groups, educational institutions, and government agencies all need to work together on this. Communities can foster an atmosphere that is favorable to decreasing and preventing young engagement in criminal activities by tackling socio-economic inequities, bolstering family structures, changing peer influences, and offering positive role models.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The objective sought to establish the relationship between social factors and criminal behavior among youths in Kakamega GK Prison in Kakamega Town in Kakamega County. The social factors and youth relationship with criminal behavior that were investigated were their distribution according to age, distribution according to marital status, education level attained, family structure and stability, exposure to violence and abuse, peer pressure, lack of role models or mentors, frequency of family problems, correlation between peer pressure influence and youth crime and influence of positive role models.

5.2 Recommendations

In order to adequately tackle these concerns, it is imperative to implement comprehensive approaches that extend beyond the boundaries of the criminal justice system. Interventions ought to comprise a range of measures that prioritize poverty reduction, enhancing access to education, and cultivating community support. The objective of this strategy is to reduce the risk variables linked to delinquent conduct among young individuals in the examined population

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