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Predictors of Criminal Involvement by Teenagers Living in Informal Settlement in Nairobi, Kenya: A Case Study of Kibera Slum

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Population.*

Crime is a multifaceted phenomenon caused by a myriad of factors, including social, economic, and psychological factors. This study examined the predictors of criminal behaviour among teenagers in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya. Kibera is the largest slums in Africa and is characterized by high poverty levels, high crime rates, unemployment rates, and limited access to basic amenities. The prevalence of crime in Kibera slum is marked by theft as the most reported crime and has drawn many teenagers into engaging in illegality as a way of earning a living. Notably, understanding these socio-economic and individual factors that contribute to teenage delinquency in Kibera is instructive in developing effective intervention and prevention strategies. This study was based on two objectives: examining the socio-economic factors and the individual-level factors that influence the adoption of criminal behaviour amongst teenagers in the Kibera slum. The strain theory was used to understand the relationship between the socio-economic and individual-level factors in the Kibera teenagers' context and the adoption of criminogenic behaviour. The case study design was adopted in which data was collected and analysed using qualitative methods. The data was collected from 19 participants, including teenagers, teachers, parents, guardians, and local administration officers. The sample was generated using purposive and snow-balling sampling with the questionnaire and focus group discussion used to collect the data. The study concluded that socio-economic factors influencing criminal behaviour amongst teenagers included access to education, economic instability, family dysfunction, peer pressure, community support, and school policies, while the individual-level factors included mental health issues, genetic variations, and prenatal and perinatal factors. The study recommended the establishment and implementation of programs to cater to economic impoverishment, educational access, role modelling, and mental health issues as necessary for tackling criminality amongst the teenagers in the Kibera slum.

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INTRODUCTION

Crime is a complex and multifaceted issue caused by multiple factors (Haylock et al., 2020; Knaappila et al., 2019; Pereda et al., 2022). According to Duran-Bonavila et al. (2017), one of the fundamental aspects of criminology involves understanding the complex web of factors that push individuals to adopt criminogenic behaviour. Crime is not spontaneous; it often emerges from a convergence of social, economic, psychological, and environmental influences (Jacobs et al., 2020; Kabiru et al., 2014; Knaappila et al., 2019). The exploration of these causes provides insight into the "how" and "why" individuals make choices that may harm themselves, others, and society (Mwangangi, 2019). This study looked at the predictors of crime amongst teenagers in Kibera slum.

Kibera, located in Nairobi, Kenya, is the largest slum in the city and is considered the largest in Africa (Austin, 2019; Wa Teresia, 2023). Contrary to earlier estimates, the 2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census reports a population of 170,070 residents in Kibera (Wa Teresia, 2023). However, various other sources suggest that the population could range from 500,000 to over 1,000,000 based on which specific slum areas are included in the estimation (Bouza, 2019; Onyango, 2020; Wa Teresia, 2023). Life in this slum is characterized by high unemployment rates (Bouza, 2019), and most residents live on less than \$2 per day (Austin, 2019). Access to education for the residents is limited due to the scarcity of schools, with parents

lacking the financial capacity to support their children's education beyond subsidized primary and secondary education (Bouza, 2019; Wa Teresia, 2023). Access to basic amenities such as running water, electricity, or healthcare services is also problematic for most residents (Austin, 2019).

Notably, the Kibera slum grapples with significant insecurity challenges. A survey by the Security Research and Information Centre (SRIC) in collaboration with the Government of Kenya and UNDP Kenya revealed that nearly 99% of the respondents had experienced or instead observed criminal activities in the slum within the last three months of the study duration (Saiesha, 2022), with theft contributing to about 35 percent of the reported crime (Bouza, 2019). With nearly half of the population in the slum being unemployed, most people spend their day drinking, a trend that has contributed to the widespread crime in the slum (Bouza, 2019). This crime problem has sucked in teenagers who are enticed into criminal activities in their neighbourhood for various reasons, including earning a living (Kimani, 2019; Onyango & Tostensen, 2015).

Considering the prevalence of crime in Kibera, teenagers face unique challenges and vulnerabilities that can increase their likelihood of becoming involved in criminal activities. It is, therefore, imperative to understand some of the predictors of criminal involvement among teenagers in Kibera, which is critical for developing effective intervention and prevention

strategies. This study, therefore, sought to understand the socio-economic and individual predictors of criminogenic behaviour amongst teenagers in Kibera slum based on the outlined research questions.

Research Questions

- What socio-economic factors contribute to criminal involvement by teenagers living in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, Kenya?
- What individual-level factors influence criminal involvement by teenagers living in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, Kenya?

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Socio-economic Factors Causing Teenage Delinquency in Slums

Extant literature reveals that socio-economic factors have significantly influenced criminogenic behaviour amongst teenagers, particularly those living in informal settlements in urban areas. The social factors are associated with the family background of the teenagers in these informal settlements. Tiwari et al. (2023) observed that education plays a significant role in teenagers' lives and is directly associated with criminal behaviour. This is evident considering the low crime rates in areas where teenagers are provided adequate education opportunities. The reverse is true in areas where teenagers have limited access to education, hence becoming highly susceptible to criminal behaviour. The absence of educational prospects significantly drives juvenile delinquency in any community (Haylock et al., 2020). This is attributed to limited access to education, which predisposes teenagers to significant stress, dissatisfaction, and idleness, encouraging them to engage in anti-social activities (Knaappila et al., 2019; Mwangangi, 2019).

Patoari (2020) associated poor educational opportunities for teenagers as a source of their increased desperation because they do not see any way out of the poverty that characterizes their lives at home with their families. This particular socio-economic disadvantage incentivizes

criminal behaviour since the teenager finds it one of the quickest financial solutions to escape poverty (Pereda et al., 2022). Uche & Okemini (2022) observed that teenagers who miss out on school or spend more time at home than school are highly susceptible to negative influences in their neighbourhood and are often compelled to join gangs for social and economic survival. Teenagers who drop out of school are highly predisposed to criminal behaviour since they lack the requisite skills and knowledge to secure stable employment and maintain lawful lifestyles (Jacobs et al., 2020).

According to Khan (2016), income inequality significantly influences the adoption of criminogenic behaviour among teenagers from poor economic backgrounds. Tiwari et al. (2023) found that economic instability, characterized by unemployment and meagre incomes, exposes teenagers to poverty, increasing the chances of teenagers' involvement in anti-social behaviours. Mahmoodi et al. (2021) associated economic hardships with limited access to quality education, basic necessities, and basic amenities, which invariably hinder the personal development of teenagers. Poverty forces families to live in overcrowded neighbourhoods with unstable living conditions, and teenagers from these families are exposed to negative influences that entice them to indulge in criminal activities (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Knaappila et al., 2019).

Another key socio-economic factor that is associated with teenage delinquency is family dysfunction. This is characterized by poor or inconsistent parental discipline (Khan, 2016; Pereda et al., 2022), insufficient parental or guardian supervision (Khan, 2016; Tiwari et al., 2023), and maternal rejection (Patoari, 2020). According to Javed et al. (2012), family dysfunction is also characterized by parental criminality, which in turn inspires teenagers to engage in criminal behaviour. Teenagers with criminal parents are exposed to an environment that has normalized criminal behaviour, and they, therefore, do not find anything amiss about engaging in criminal activities (Haylock et al., 2020).

Such environments are characterized by a lack of positive role models and guidance, and this encourages teenagers to make friends with peers who have similar backgrounds and attitudes, a development that perpetuates delinquent behaviour (Haylock et al., 2020; Mwangangi, 2019; Sariaslan et al., 2018). In the same vein, Rekker et al. (2015) established that the stigma associated with having parents with a criminal record often leads teenagers to have low self-esteem and become isolated in the community. Such teenagers grapple with emotional struggles that push them towards delinquency as a way of coping with social exclusion.

Some factors associated with poor or limited supervision, which translates into teenagers' criminal behaviour, are inextricably tied to economic hardships. For instance, since economically struggling parents have to spend long hours at the workplace or juggle multiple jobs, they have limited or no time to supervise their teenagers or even interact with them (Kabiru et al., 2020). Unsupervised teenagers lack guidance or restrictions to engage in rampant criminal activities, especially in informal settlements (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Jacobs et al., 2020).

Peer pressure is a major social factor that has influenced teenagers to engage in criminal activities. Teenagers from economically disadvantaged families or communities are influenced by their peers to engage in criminal behaviour, which is often prevalent in their communities (Knaappila et al., 2019; Pereda et al., 2022). They, therefore, participate in drug and substance abuse and gang activities by fitting in with what their peers consider 'cool' (Mwangangi, 2019). Besides, adolescents in economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience unique challenges, which include limited access to opportunities and resources. They, therefore, look for ways of belonging and acceptance within their peer groups, including those engaged in criminal activities (Uche & Okemini, 2022).

The urge to fit into social groups to gain acceptance and social support leads teenagers to

make otherwise anti-social choices. Once they belong to this group, the teenagers may feel compelled to engage in criminal activities such as substance abuse and stealing as a way of aligning with the behaviour of their peers (Haylock et al., 2020; Sariaslan et al., 2018). Additionally, the promise of quick financial gain through criminal involvement is increasingly appealing to teenagers experiencing economic hardships at home (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Mwangangi, 2019).

A combination of economic and psychological factors in the informal settlements push teenagers to engage in substance abuse. For one, if they do not have a viable income-earning activity, these teenagers may resort to criminal activities as a way of supporting their addiction (Haylock et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2020). Considering the high cost of drugs and alcohol, resorting to stealing, drug dealing, or other illegal activities becomes one of the most effective ways they can acquire the necessary funds (Rekker et al., 2015). There is a significant and positive correlation between substance abuse and teenagers' involvement in criminal activities (Knaappila et al., 2019). Notably, drugs impair teenagers' judgment and increase their impulsivity, which in turn increases their propensity to engage in criminal behaviour (Haylock et al., 2020). Additionally, a lifestyle associated with the use of drugs exposes teenagers to criminal networks, thereby normalizing illegal activities and providing them with opportunities to engage in criminal activities (Wa Teresia, 2021),

Various community factors have also been linked to the acquisition of delinquency. The crime rates in the neighbourhood and the presence of criminal gangs increase the exposure of teenagers to criminal behaviour (Mahmoodi et al., 2021). The impressionable minds of teenagers make them susceptible to such exposures as they may consider the toughness of criminals in the neighbourhood to be the best behaviour to emulate as a way of attracting the approval and admiration of their peers (Jacobs et al., 2020). The daily social and economic pressures that residents in informal settlements encounter make it

increasingly difficult to develop robust support systems that cater to teenagers' welfare (Haylock et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2020; Pereda et al., 2022). This becomes a challenge, particularly for teenagers who require mental health services and substance abuse treatment and, therefore, become increasingly susceptible to delinquency since they may consider criminality as a way of coping with their issues (Pereda et al., 2022).

According to Duran-Bonavila et al., (2017) outreach programs and community policing can be vital approaches towards mitigating these factors since they foster positive relationships between the community and law enforcement agencies. Mwangangi (2019) further notes that such programs also provide after-school programs and social support for vulnerable youth. Therefore, addressing these factors is critical in reducing and preventing delinquency and ensuring that teenagers live in safer environments.

School policies can also influence delinquency rates among teenagers. Sariaslan et al. (2018) note that schools create a safer and more supportive environment for teenagers when implementing effective policies, thereby reducing the likelihood of teenagers acquiring delinquent behaviour. For instance, some school policies have adopted stringent disciplinary measures that ensure harsh and punitive measures are meted out to undisciplined students (Knaappila et al., 2019). This inadvertently pushes teenagers towards adopting delinquent behaviour. Jacobs et al. (2020) concur that zero-tolerance policies criminalize minor infractions and potentially set teenagers on the path of the criminal justice system. On the other hand, schools that have adopted restorative justice practices, counselling services, and conflict resolution programs effectively address any underlying issues that may result in delinquency (Pereda et al., 2022). Such policies emphasize addressing the root causes of disruptive behaviours and enhancing a sense of accountability and responsibility among teenagers (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017).

According to Jacobs et al. (2020), schools that have adopted anti-bullying and anti-harassment

policies have significantly reduced delinquency since they create a more inclusive and safer environment for teenagers. Students who feel safe and respected are less likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behaviour than those who do not (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Mwangangi, 2019). Uche & Okemini (2022) also established that educational policies that promote engagement, extracurricular opportunities, and skill development have proven effective in diverting students from delinquent activities. Providing teenagers with diverse programs that include sports, arts, and career preparation gives them constructive outlets for their interests and energies (Haylock et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2020).

Individual Factors Influencing Teenage Delinquency in Slums

The social and economic hardships in the informal settlement are a crucial source of stress factors that are attributed to mental health issues among residents, teenagers included. According to Sariaslan et al. (2018), teenagers who grapple with mental health issues such as depression, impulsivity disorder, and conduct disorder are highly likely to engage in criminal behaviour as compared to those who do not. Sariaslan et al. (2018) noted that adolescence is a psychological and emotional development period. Whenever teenagers are exposed to mental health challenges at this stage, their propensity to engage in delinquent behaviour invariably increases. Teenagers from economically impoverished backgrounds may find difficulty accessing healthcare facilities to treat their mental health issues (Mwangangi, 2019). This exacerbates their conditions, especially when they are grappling with anxiety, conduct disorders, and depression, which can easily predispose them to impulsive and risky decision-making (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Pereda et al., 2022).

Teenagers may adopt delinquent behaviour as a coping mechanism for their emotional stress. They may also adopt criminogenic behaviour as a way of self-medicating, mainly when they are engaged in substance and drug abuse (Wa Teresia,

2021). Alternatively, this also becomes a way to vent their frustration, which may emanate from their impoverishment and desperation at home (Pereda et al., 2022). Rekker et al. (2015) also noted that the social isolation and stigma that often accompany mental health issues intensify the feelings of alienation and loneliness in teenagers, thereby pushing them to seek to belong to different groups and, therefore, engage in criminal behaviour. Besides, apart from lacking access to mental health treatment, those who do are not often provided with quality care, which leads to unaddressed mental health issues that eventually perpetuate delinquent behaviour over time (Haylock et al., 2020; Knaappila et al., 2019).

Previous studies have associated the adoption of delinquent behaviour among teenagers with genetic factors. Some particular genetic variations may contribute to individuals' susceptibility to engage in criminal behaviour. These genetic variations impact the individual's neurotransmitter functions, ability to regulate emotions, and control their impulses (Duran-Bonavila et al., 2017; Pereda et al., 2022). Jacobs et al. (2020) noted that the genes associated with the dopamine receptor, or rather the serotonin system, are linked to risk-taking behaviours and impulsivity, which are predators of delinquency. While acknowledging the influence of genetic composition on criminal behaviour, Mahmoodi et al. (2021) cautioned that it is essential to take note of the fact that genetics alone are not the only determinant of criminogenic behaviour among teenagers; there are other environmental factors, such as socio-economic status, family dynamics, and community characteristics that significantly predict delinquency.

According to Hazra (2021), prenatal and perinatal factors play a significant role in influencing delinquency. Essentially, children's early life stages have lasting impacts on their subsequent development. Some of the prenatal factors include conditions and events during pregnancy, such as maternal substance abuse involving drugs and alcohol, which export the foetus and increase the risk of behavioural problems that later translate into delinquency (Knaappila et al., 2019). Duran-

Bonavila et al., (2017) also found that poor maternal nutrition and stress during pregnancy negatively affect the brain development of the foetus, which manifests in the form of their subsequent difficulty in regulating emotions. This factor is associated with the acquisition of delinquent behaviour.

In their study, Mahmoodi et al. (2021) established that perinatal factors include conditions during birth and immediately after birth, such as premature birth and oxygen deprivation, that interfere with brain development. These complications can also result in neurological defects and brain damage that are associated with behavioural challenges among children. The lack of bonding between children and their caregivers or inconsistent caregiving in the early postnatal years results in attachment challenges that manifest in delinquent behaviour (Mwangangi, 2019; Pereda et al., 2022). Attachment issues are often caused by neglect or maternal depression, which may not be addressed on time, particularly in deprived backgrounds where mental health issues are stigmatized (Haylock et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the strain theory to understand the acquisition of criminal behaviour among teenagers living in informal settlements.

Strain Theory

Strain theory argues that social norms and structures produce strains on individuals, pushing them to adopt criminal behaviour, mainly when they cannot succeed using conventional means (Brown et al., 2013; Vito & Maah, 2017). The theory was developed by Robert Merton, a sociologist, and has been used to understand criminality among teenagers (Krohn et al., 2010; Vito & Maah, 2017). Strain theory is based on the belief that individuals have goals that are culturally defined and that can be achieved through socially approved means (Cullen et al., 2011). However, not everyone has access to socially approved standards, which has resulted in inequality, which translates into frustration that

often manifests as criminal behaviour (Vito & Maah, 2017).

The strain theory outlines five adaptive responses to this particular strain, which are crucial in understanding teenage criminality. They include conformity whereby teenagers pursue societal goals using prescribed means geared towards law-behaviour and therefore strive to achieve success through established norms (Brown et al., 2013). There is also innovation, in which innovators accept the goals but modify or reject the means for achieving them. In this case, teenagers may adopt unconventional standards such as stealing or drug dealing to succeed, mainly when conventional means appear inaccessible (Vito & Maah, 2017). Strain theory acknowledges that peer groups encourage criminal behaviour to cope with the strain experienced in the quest for societal success (Cullen et al., 2011; Krohn et al., 2010). Limited access to opportunities can lead to strain and frustration, which may push teenagers toward criminal innovation (Vito & Maah, 2017).

Ritualism is another adaptive response in which the ritualists adhere to the socially prescribed means even though they may abandon the pursuit of societal success. Therefore, they may lose interest in conventional success even though they continue to abide by social rules, even knowing that these actions are not fruitful in the long run (Brown et al., 2013). Retreatism is another adaptive response where retreatists reject the goals and the means prescribed by society. Retreatists may resort to drug abuse or other forms of deviant behaviour in their quest to disengage from conventional values (Krohn et al., 2010). Additionally, as an adaptive response, rebellion involves rejecting established goals and means and seeking replacement with new values and systems. In this case, the objective is to reshape society based on the beliefs of the rebels, which often come through social or political revolution (Brown et al., 2013; Cullen et al., 2011).

In sum, strain theory provides a valuable framework for understanding teenage criminality. The theory helps to outline the effects of societal structures and opportunities on adolescent

behaviour. Notably, teenagers who face blocked opportunities are likely to respond to strain through criminal means, such as stealing, prostitution or drug involvement in the pursuit of success or recognition.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study research design. The study undertook an in-depth exploration of Kibera slum. The study, therefore collected and analysed detailed information from the slum residents to gain an understanding of the antecedents of criminal behaviour among teenagers living in the slum. Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommend the adoption of the study research designs in studies that seek to uncover causal links and analysing dynamics between key variables. The study, therefore, focused on uncovering the socio-economic and individual factors that explain criminal behaviour amongst Kibera teenagers.

The case study research design adopted a qualitative data collection and analysis approach. This was necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities of crime among teenagers based on the residents' perspectives of the slum. Besides, the approach provided a rich contextual understanding of the research phenomenon, which was crucial in interpreting the findings accurately (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The qualitative methods adopted were also highly adaptable, enabling the researcher to adjust the approach based on new insights that emerged while collecting and analysing data (Coghlan & Shani, 2018).

The study was, therefore, based on a population of 800,000 residents of Kibera slum (Tangen, 2021). The targeted population included teenagers, parents, guardians, teachers, and local administration. The participants of the study were sampled using purposive and snow-ball sampling methods. Purposive sampling selects participants with experience or knowledge that reflects the phenomenon measured in a particular research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Therefore, teenagers, parents, guardians, teachers, and local administration

offices were sampled purposely, considering the information they could provide relevant to the research questions that guided the study. The snow-balling sampling method was deemed suitable to this study due to the lack of a sampling frame from which the sample could be drawn (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the participants initially referred the researcher to two other individuals who were willing to participate in the study, which resulted in 27 participants involved in the study. These included 4 administrators, 5 teachers, 7 parents, and 11 teenagers.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were conducted among the parents, teachers, and administrators, while the teenagers were engaged in a focus group discussion that the researcher moderated. The focus group discussion was conducted amongst teenagers in the Gatwikera area of the Kibera slum, while the interview featured participants from all sections of the slum, including Laini Saba, Lindi, Kianda, Makina, Siranga, and Kibera. The data was collected between January and March 2023. All participants were required to sign consent forms, which specified their roles and rights within the study. The researcher sought the consent of the teenagers' parents before involving them in the study. The participants also consented to an audio recording of their interviews, which was subsequently transcribed for further analysis. The participants were made anonymous using their names (from P1 to P19) to safeguard the privacy of the information they provided and make them anonymous. The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the transcribed data. This involved data cleaning, coding, sub-theme, and theme generation, interpretation, and analysis report writing (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Socio-economic Factors

The findings revealed that various socio-economic factors influenced teenagers to engage in criminal behaviour. The interviewees

acknowledged that socio-economic factors were at the core of the criminogenic behaviour of youth in the slum. For instance, according to P4, "some teenagers are pushed to engage in criminal activities to help provide for themselves or their families, and this is normally in cases where such teens come from economically struggling families." P7 has seen teenage girls involving themselves in prostitution as a way of "providing food and clothing for themselves and their family." According to the strain theory, people deprived of opportunities to advance themselves or live a comfortable life are invariably incentivized to engage in criminal innovations. In the case of teenagers, this could involve engaging in criminal activities such as drug dealing or prostitution as a way of helping themselves or their parents to acquire the necessities of life (Vito & Maah, 2017). Studies such as Bonavila (2017); Khan (2016); Knaappila et al. (2019); Mahmoodi et al. (2021), and Tiwari et al. (2023) have used poor economic background to explain criminal involvement among teenagers. Mahmoodi et al. (2021) found that economic hardships translated into limited access to quality education, basic necessities, and amenities for impoverished families. The teenagers from these families grapple with personal development, and according to Duran-Bonavila et al., (2017) and Knaappila et al. (2019), they are also exposed to negative influences that entice them to indulge in criminal activities. Furthermore, Haylock et al. (2020) established that the daily social and economic pressures that teenagers from low-income families have to contend with interfere with their wholesome development because they lack strong support systems that can cater to their welfare/

According to P2 and P9, poverty has pushed youth to crime because they lack the opportunity to pursue education and end up joining gangs or bad companies as they stay at home. P9 noted that "children who are sent home most of the time because of school fees issues end up spending the idle hours with bad company and thus begin stealing or mugging." P15 added that this lack of educational opportunities "gives us a scenario

where we have youth who do not have qualifications for accessing gainful employment. And these are the same youth who are recruiting teenagers into gangs, promising them an easy life". Previous studies such as Tiwari et al. (2023), Jacobs et al. 2020 and Uche & Okemini (2022) have also come up with similar findings.

On the one hand, Tiwari et al. (2023) established that limited access to education opportunities predisposes teenagers to significant stress, dissatisfaction, and idleness, which encourages them to engage in anti-social activities. They recommended availing ample education opportunities and access to teenagers to dissuade them from engaging in criminogenic behaviour. Uche & Okemini (2022) linked limited educational opportunities to the cost issues that see many teenagers from impoverished backgrounds missing school due to lack of fees or dropping out altogether. They noted that while these teenagers spend an inordinate amount of time out of school, they become highly susceptible to negative influences in their neighbourhood and are often compelled to join gangs for social and economic survival. Jacobs et al. (2020) also found that teenagers who drop out of school become susceptible to crime because they lack the structures that prevent them from anti-social behaviour, which schools in their operationalization uphold. These structures impart the teens' requisite skills and knowledge about maintaining lawful lifestyles.

The findings also noted that peer pressure is a social factor that affects teenagers in the slum, pushing them towards criminal activities. According to P11, teenagers in the slums are sold to the flashy lifestyle of their peers who are engaged in crime, and because of the poverty in their homes, they tend to feel that engaging in crime is the best way to fit in. P8 concurs that "most of the teenagers who have joined gangs have been pushed by peer pressure, which starts with the abuse of drugs including smoking, drinking and taking bang." Previous studies such as Uche & Okemini (2022) established that in their pursuit of ways of belonging and acceptance within their peer groups, including those engaged

in criminal activities. Mwangangi (2019) noted that such teenagers participate in drug and substance abuse and crime to fit in with their peers. According to Haylock et al. (2020), once teenagers belong to gangs, they are invariably compelled to engage in criminal activities that characterize their gangs' solidarity. Duran-Bonavila et al., (2017) further noted that the possibility of quick financial gain in these gangs motivates teenagers to participate in criminal activities.

The teenagers also lack positive role models within the poor neighbourhood. According to P19, there are no "role models and mentors within our community whom these teenagers can emulate. Everyone is busy living their lives, and this gives the opportunity for thieves and sexual perverts to capture the minds of our children". As P7 observes, this challenge is closely associated with poor parenting and dysfunctional family structures in the slums. These findings agreed with those by Khan (2016), who established that teenagers from dysfunctional family backgrounds are highly susceptible to negative influences in their social environment as compared to those coming from stable families. Tiwari et al. (2023) highlighted that fractured family environments, unfavourable family circumstances, and parental substance abuse characterize family dysfunctionality that makes teenagers susceptible to crime.

Besides, P7 claimed that "parents spend most of their time away chasing money and have less and less time with their children." Besides, "some of these teens come from troubled families where parents are violent, or you find the single mother is also a prostitute and such like things." These results agree with those by Kabiru et al. (2020) and Duran-Bonavila et al. (2017), who also found that poor or inconsistent parental discipline and insufficient parental or guardian supervision provided teenagers with loopholes for engaging in criminal behaviour. Kabiru et al. (2020) found that parents of teenagers from these underprivileged neighbourhoods spend long hours at the workplace or juggle multiple jobs. As a result, they have limited time, if any, to interact

with, guide, and supervise their teenagers. Duran-Bonavila et al., (2017) also found that Unsupervised teenagers lack guidance or restrictions to engage in criminal activities, yet they live in an environment where criminality is rampant.

The findings revealed that the high rates of substance abuse in the slum are another predictor of teenage delinquency. According to P5, the high poverty rates amongst the households in the slum "is a source of increased emotional and psychological stress, which also affects the teenagers from these households. They, therefore, opt to indulge in substance abuse, which is readily available in the slum, as a way of escaping their reality. In that way, they end up committing crimes such as robbery, burglary or mugging so that they can fund their drug addictions". P1 also observed that "these teenagers who engage in crime are often depressed and they resort to crime as a way of expressing their anger about their lives." In their studies, Rekker et al. (2015) also found that the high cost of drugs and alcohol pushes addicted teenagers to resort to stealing, drug dealing, or other illegal activities becomes one of the most effective ways that they can acquire the necessary funds. Haylock et al. (2020) noted that substance abuse impaired the judgment of teenagers and increased their impulsivity, which, in turn, heightened the teens' propensity to engage in criminal behaviour. Wa Teresia (2021) further noted that teenagers who interact with criminal networks eventually adopt substance abuse as a way of life, which they abuse to engage in criminal activities.

The study findings showed that the school policies adopted play an integral role in preventing teenage delinquency. P4 noted that "schools should come up with disciplinary policies that ensure students are disciplined as a way of preventing them from going astray. If there are no such rules, the students will do whatever they want, and this includes joining bad groups that will lead them to engage in anti-social behaviour". P6 claimed that "school played a very important role in instilling discipline in us, and that should continue even with our children. Without having

strict teachers, we would have gone astray a long time ago". In their studies, Jacobs et al. (2020) and Sariaslan et al. (2018) also established a link between school disciplinary policies and criminogenic outcomes in teenagers. According to Jacobs et al. (2020), schools that have adopted anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies have significantly reduced delinquency since they create a more inclusive and safer environment for teenagers. Sariaslan et al. (2018) found that the safer and more supportive environments that schools create for teenagers, which involve implementing effective disciplinary policies, reduce the likelihood of teenagers acquiring delinquent behaviour.

While adopting strict disciplinary guidelines for students is important, some participants argued that this should be done with moderation. P10 noted that "these are no longer times when students were canded for every small mistake that they committed. We are dealing with a different generation, and using excessive force to punish them can lead to worse results". These sentiments were also held by P14, who argued that "punishment both at home and at school should be moderate rather than excessive because teenagers are likely to rebel when they feel that they are not given space to express themselves or even make mistakes." P3 suggested moderation in everything, including "punishment and counselling. If you punish a teenager severely, they will likely rebel and stick with the bad company you are trying to discourage them from. Similarly, if you advise them excessively, they start to wonder what is wrong with them or with you, and they will likely insist on their way". Knaappila et al. (2019) concurred with these findings, pointing out that schools that have adopted stringent disciplinary measures that ensure harsh and punitive measures are meted out to undisciplined students inadvertently push teenagers towards adopting delinquent behaviour. Jacobs et al. (2020) also found that zero-tolerance policies criminalize minor infractions and potentially set teenagers on the path of the criminal justice system.

P13 acknowledged the important role that schools play in shaping teenagers' behaviour "because it is teachers who spend most of the time with them than their parents. They can know the friends they keep and track their behaviour by how they perform in class. Teachers can easily tell when a teenager is going astray when their grades begin to drop". However, P13 recommended the adoption of "moderate disciplinary measures to encourage the teenagers to obey them rather than inspire them to break them." These findings agree with those of Pereda et al. (2022) and Uche & Okemini (2022), who advocated for moderation to incentivize teenagers to adopt the outlined school rules and regulations rather than rebel against them. According to Pereda et al. (2022), adopting restorative justice practices, counselling services, and conflict resolution programs proved quite effective in addressing any underlying issues that may result in delinquency. Besides, Uche & Okemini (2022) also advocated for establishing educational policies that promote engagement, extracurricular opportunities, and skill development, which have proven effective when it comes to diverting students from delinquent activities.

Individual Factors

The findings indicated that mental health was at the centre of many criminal activities that teenagers in the slum engaged in. P6 asked, "what does a teen who has not had food for several days do especially if you show them an alternative way of earning something? They take it even though it is not legal. It is their only way to deal with the stress back at home". P4 noted that some teenagers come from troubled families and "they are very stressed about the fights they witness at home; they do not have anyone else to turn to, most of the time, except the gangs." The strain theory acknowledges that peer groups encourage criminal behaviour. This is instructive in helping the affected teenagers to cope with the strain experienced in the quest for societal success. In this way, inadequate access to opportunities creates strain and frustration, which may push teenagers toward criminal involvement. Studies such as Pereda et al. (2022) found similar results

indicating that teenagers engage in criminal activities to vent their frustration, which may emanate from their impoverishment and desperation at home. According to Rekker et al. (2015), social isolation and stigma that often accompany mental health issues intensify the alienation of the affected teenagers and encourage them to seek solace in criminal gangs.

The study's findings indicated that several factors influenced teenagers to participate in criminal activities. The participants acknowledged that some teenagers adopted criminal behaviour that they must have inherited from their parents. P7 gave an example of some delinquents whose parents are known criminals, with one of the parents serving time in prison. P15 said, "This thing runs in the blood because you find a child whose parent is a thief also stealing, and it seems nothing can be done to stop them from this criminal behaviour." P19 quoted the Swahili proverb that "the child of a snake is a snake" and added that "it is not strange for a child whose parents have a criminal record to also start criminality in adolescence when they are discovering themselves." According to P5, some criminal parents are involved in their illegal activities. "They give them chores such as delivering drugs or chang'aa to clients or servicing their clients in cases of prostitution, and the children readily do these chores because somehow it runs in the blood. These findings concur with Duran-Bonavila et al., (2017) and Jacobs et al. (2020), who linked criminality to hereditary factors. On the one hand, Duran-Bonavila et al. (2017) established that genetic variations impact the individual's neurotransmitter functions, the capacity to regulate emotions and control their impulses. On the other hand, Jacobs et al. (2020) found that genes associated with the dopamine receptor, or the serotonin system, are linked to risk-taking behaviours and impulsivity, thereby predicting delinquency.

However, most of the participants denied that criminality among teenagers was inherent. They give examples of some adults they knew who had not adopted the criminal character of their parents, who were known criminals. P2 said that "it all

depends on the upbringing. Some children are criminals, and their parents are people of good moral standing". P6 argued that "if parents are to blame for the criminality of their teens, it is because they have failed to supervise and advise them; it is not something that the teens inherit from their parents." P7 also claimed that "there are many factors that influence teenagers to get into criminal activities, one of which is bad company. A teenager who keeps out of the bad company will not engage in bad behaviour, even if their parents are criminals themselves.

According to P11, whether a child of a criminal follows in their parents' footsteps will depend on more than just inheriting the criminal gene from them. P11 further added that "if the child is raised in an environment where they are provided for adequately and they are not exposed to criminal agents, they are highly likely to stay out of illegal activities. However, if the environment is conducive to crime, then they may seem to follow in the path of their parents, and they may even do more exploits as compared to their parents". These findings align with Mahmoodi et al. (2021) who established that genetics alone are not the only determinant of criminogenic behaviour among teenagers; other environmental factors such as socio-economic status, family dynamics, and community characteristics significantly predict delinquency.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study concluded that several significant factors influence teenage criminal behaviour in slum environments, such as the Kibera slum. These factors can be broadly categorized into socio-economic factors and individual factors. Understanding these influences is essential for developing effective strategies for preventing and addressing delinquency among teenagers in such communities. For one, socio-economic factors play a significant role in pushing teenagers toward criminal activities. These include economic hardships, poverty, and limited access, critical predictors of teenagers' criminal behaviour. Economic struggles encourage some teenagers to engage in criminal activities in a bid to provide for

themselves and their families. They, therefore, engage in illegal activities such as drug dealing, prostitution, and theft. As a result, teenagers from impoverished backgrounds are more susceptible to negative influences that encourage them to adopt criminal behaviour.

The lack of educational opportunities is another significant contributor to teenagers' vulnerability in impoverished informal settlements. This manifests as school absenteeism or dropping out due to financial constraints. The affected teenagers often spend their idle hours with bad company, and this exposes them to criminality, which they end up adopting. Besides, the lack of educational opportunities translates into a lack of qualifications for gainful employment. This makes the teenagers an attractive target for gang recruitment drives since they promise them an easy life. There is, therefore, a link between limited educational opportunities and stress, dissatisfaction, and idleness among teenagers and their subsequent involvement in criminal activities.

Peer pressure is another vital social factor leading teenagers into criminal activities. Teenagers in the slums are often lured by the flashy lifestyle of their peers engaged in crime. They are tempted to perceive criminal activity as the best way to fit in due to poverty at home. Drug abuse amongst teens is also attributed to peer pressure. The addicted teens end up considering substance abuse as their way of life and use drugs in their process of committing crimes. Thus, within the context of criminal groups, peer pressure drives teenagers into anti-social behaviour with the promise of quick financial gain as a key motivating factor.

The other social factor includes the absence of positive role models and mentors in the community. This is complicated by other factors, including poor parenting and dysfunctional family structures that make teenagers more susceptible to negative influences in their neighbourhoods. Teenagers from dysfunctional family backgrounds are highly likely to be influenced by their social environment.

In itself, substance abuse is another key predictor of teenage delinquency in the slum. High poverty rates within the slums and the associated stress encourage misguided teenagers to turn to drugs as a way to escape their harsh reality. Consequently, such teenagers resort to criminal activities so that they can fund their addictions. Notably, considering the high costs of drugs and rampant unemployment in the slums, illegal activities become the only avenue available to these teenagers to acquire their drugs.

As a social factor, school policies play a critical role in instilling discipline and reducing delinquency among teenagers. When implemented in moderation, effective disciplinary policies create a safe and inclusive environment in which the likelihood of delinquency is reduced. However, excessive punishment could become counterproductive, leading to rebellion with worse outcomes.

Individual factors contribute to criminality among teenagers in Kibera slums. These include mental health issues characterized by stress and depression among teenagers from impoverished and troubled households. Due to these, the affected teenagers' resort to crime as a way to cope with stress, frustration, and mental health issues associated with their challenging living conditions. They consider criminal behaviour as an outlet for dealing with their emotions. Individual factors also include hereditary influences in some teenagers who may have inherited a disposition towards criminal behaviour from their parents, who are known criminals. However, it is essential to take into account the fact that not all teenagers with criminal parents follow the same path. In the same vein, most delinquents have parents with no criminal record. Therefore, other socio-economic factors such as poverty, upbringing, and social environment play a critical role in bringing out criminogenic behaviour in teenagers.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drawn in this study, the following recommendations were considered necessary to address the socio-economic and

individual factors leading to criminality amongst teenagers in the Kibera slum.

- Establish and implement socio-economic interventions, including programs that address Kibera residents' social and economic challenges. These programs should focus on addressing poverty levels and the limited access to resources such as education and healthcare facilities for the slum residents. These programs will be instructive in reducing financial motivations that encourage teenagers in the slum to get involved in criminal activities.
- Establishment of programs that enhance educational opportunities for teenagers in Kibera slum. This will involve improving access to education, reducing school absenteeism, and lowering dropout rates that are auctioned by financial constraints. Providing educational opportunities to teenagers will reduce their exposure to bad company within the neighbourhood, enticing them to criminality.
- Establishment of mentorship programs that will provide the youth with positive role models in the community. The mentors will be tasked with guiding teenagers and helping them to counteract negative influences such as peer pressure and those associated with their dysfunctional family backgrounds. The mentors will also be in charge of steering educational campaigns that will empower the teenagers to effectively handle peer pressure, drugs, and substance abuse and countering criminal influences in the neighbourhoods.
- Establishment and implementation of substance abuse prevention programs that target the teenagers in Kibera slum. The program should also provide rehabilitation services for teenagers who are already using drugs. Besides, the program should devise measures for reducing the accessibility of drugs in the slum, thereby deterring youth from accessing them and becoming

susceptible to addictions and criminal involvement.

- Establish programs for addressing mental health issues amongst teenagers in Kibera slum. The program should provide teenagers with counselling and mental health services to help them tackle mental health issues such as stress, conduct disorders, and depression. The program can also provide the teenagers with informational resources on mental health to help them become aware of mental health challenges, their manifestations and effects, and the available agencies that can help them out.

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