



Nexus Between Urban Crime and Unemployment in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper establishes the nature of urban crimes prevalent in Nairobi County, Kenya in the context of Kibera and Karen jurisdictions. The paper adopted a descriptive research design and stratified random sampling technique to enlist respondents into the study. The study sample size comprised of 196 respondents and 10 Key Informants (K-I's). The main data collection methods were the questionnaire for the main respondents and interviews for K.I's. Quantitative data was analyzed with the aid of a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Frequency distribution tables were used to present data. The findings indicate that; the nature of urban crimes prevalent in Nairobi County in general, specifically in Kibera and Karen jurisdictions were categorized into; violent crimes (44.4%), property crimes (55.4%), and drug-related (10.2%). Violent crimes included; armed robberies, and street robberies. Property crimes included; break-ins, stealing, and muggings. According to 80% of the K.I.s, most criminals were mainly unemployed youths, most of them utilizing criminality as a source of livelihood. These youthful criminal gangs waylaid victims going to or from jobs in the evening and early morning to rob or mug them. The study observed that an increase in unemployment led to property crimes, while significant violent crimes were only committed due to the trigger effects of unemployment. This study recommends serious national resource mapping that will factor in industrialization and Job creation for the unemployed. Further, the study recommends Job creation in county governments to discourage rural to urban migrations of job seekers to cities.

Introduction

Though there is still a dearth of literature about the nature of crimes in Urban areas, De Silva, Buddhadasa and Ranaweera (2022), in their study on property crimes in urban areas, tried to explain the relationship between urban crime and unemployment. According to them, disorganised environmental and social contexts predispose city dwellers to criminogenic factors that lead them to crime. Further, according to Omboi (2015), unemployment is a complex multi-dimensional problem affecting many countries globally today, albeit defined differently by many scholars. According to Okafor (2011), unemployment is generally understood as a state of joblessness. Buonanno and Montolio (2008) argue that crime and unemployment go hand in hand. By implication socio-economic challenges and poverty that are as result from unemployment leads some people to earn a living



through criminality. Related studies, however, that have been conducted in this area attempted to create a nexus between poverty and crime but not between unemployment and crime itself, hence the rationale for this study.

Observably, unemployment is not only a third-world problem, but in like manner, it also affects many developed world countries. For instance, in the UK, the unemployment rate has risen intensely to a level that having a university degree is no longer an end compared to lower-educated folks. A study conducted by Andreson (2013), determined how the state of the economy relates to criminality in Canadian provinces. Andreson (2013) used GDP figures to represent the Canadian state of economy alongside statistical figures on low income and unemployment. His findings showed a direct link between the state of the economy and crime in Canadian provinces. Further, in a study done by Raphael and Winter (2001) in the US, there was a positive correlation between unemployment and criminality. Their study found a positive correlation between unemployment and criminality in the United States. Ayang, Timbi and Toumpiguim (2021) similarly established a significant relationship between the effects of unemployment and crime in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In part, unemployment in Kenya has been catalysed by the discrepancy in the labour market needs and the training institutions (Farah & Ali, 2018). Training institutions in Kenya have exponentially expanded due to the increase in many households' ability to finance their children's education needs. This has led to the commercialisation of education, which has negatively affected the important focus of aligning the labour market needs to the training institutions. Lack of discrimination has resulted in a large number of graduated youths with skills that the labour market cannot fully absorb, further driving up unemployment. This demonstrates the failure of linking government training policy to deliver market to address this challenge. Cognizant of the complexity of crime within Nairobi, the government initiated a community policing program that incorporated residents in providing security for themselves in coordination with state security agencies like the police and local administration officials (Murefu, Wamũyũ, & Ochieng, 2019). The policy put residents in a position to be involved in wider security arrangements exclusively done by the state without paying attention to local sensibilities. This has positively reduced crime as the government has information channels with the community to tackle crime.

When analysing crime, it may be insufficient to utilise reported crime figures to arrive at accurate conclusions as not all crime incidences are officially filed with the Police (Papps & Winkelmann, 1999). This is true, especially in slum areas within Nairobi where government representation may be absent. This, therefore, implies that policies that apply in organised settlements may not necessarily work in informal settlements. This is because there are local nuances in the factors motivating the rise in crime in slum areas around Nairobi. For instance, the impact of unemployment may vary between two areas of varying socio-economic status, and it may certainly lead to crime in slum dwellings. A socio-economic imbalance in the youth environment has been identified as a factor that contributes to the rise of crime (Adekoya, 2020). These differences become pronounced when the youths have different exposures to key factors like education. Youths who are less exposed to education are more likely predisposed to engage in crime than those who are not. Slum-based youths are more likely to have dropped out of school due to their parent's inability to provide for their school fees. Because this happens early in the formative education stages, the youths are introduced to crime tendencies early. Youths who live in urban, better-organised settlements in Nairobi are more likely to be engaged in formal and tertiary education, thereby insulating them from participating in criminal activities. When there is economic depression in a country, the people may be pushed to find criminal economic activities to plug their loss of income;



conversely, when better economic prospects exist, crime levels will correspondingly depreciate (Sitienei & Chumba, 2020). This implies that crime directly relates to the availability of gainful opportunities that enable people to have a decent life. It is, therefore, within Kenya's interest to enhance the quality of life as an indirect intervention in reducing the probability of youths embracing crime to earn their living. The interplay of intention, capacity and chance of availability work together for crime to exist (wa Teresia, 2023). Crime has an enabling environment that makes it to thrive in a given setting. If the youths are willing and able to commit crimes based on the promises, it indirectly gives them a better level of life, and they will engage in it. To effectively discourage this, these motivating factors must be removed to minimise the possibility of the youths participating in crime. The lack of employment of youths points to the fact that self-employment or job creation is not seen as a viable way of contributing to Kenya's economic growth, which could positively affect crime (Farah & Ali, 2018). Many youths perceive education as a direct pathway to employment and, by extension, the security of a better life. This has left them ill-prepared for eventualities when situations like unemployment present themselves. Until recently, entrepreneurship and self-employment were not actively encouraged by the government and training institutions. The resulting scenario today in Nairobi is that many youths with the requisite skills to engage in entrepreneurial activities are still idle and unemployed as they seek employed positions. A certain level of social engineering is required to change this mindset among the youths to get them to gainfully participate in activities that will reduce the chances of engaging in crime.

If gainful and legal employment is deemed to give lower returns than criminal activities, the level of crime is expected to skyrocket (Papps & Winkelmann, 1999). As Kenya's economy becomes more depressed and layoffs and austerity measures are taken by many business entities, this may harm the country's security as many youths may interpret illegal activity to be more profitable. It, therefore, means that policies have to be formulated by the government to make crime perceived as not worth the risk and dissuade the youths from engaging in it. In a society where youths find themselves drifting away from the common social fabric, resulting in fragmented relations, crime levels are expected to increase (Adekoya, 2020). A less cohesive society indirectly encourages extreme behaviour, especially among the youth, as other members of the society become less responsive to them. Many residents in informal settlements barely survive on their meagre provisions, and they will be less motivated to share this with their immediate surroundings. Youths in Nairobi slums find themselves in such conditions, which predispose them to crime to fend for themselves.

Unemployment statistics are important in analysing crime dynamics (Sitienei & Chumba, 2020). This is because it avails trends within a given demography, thereby enabling the identification of motivating factors that mediate the occurrence of crime within a specific location. It, therefore, implies that for the government to address crime among the youth in Nairobi effectively, it has to focus on unemployment and identify targeted measures that can positively respond to enhancing the quality of life among the youth. Further, Nairobi exhibits an interesting pattern where many of its unemployed youths are clustered in slum dwellings, which gives ground for further study to understand motivating factors. It should be noted that for any crime committed, there are often dissenting reasons behind it when one examines the offender and the victim's thinking (wa Teresia, 2023). This underlines the complexity of crime, calling for a comprehensive approach that identifies viable solutions in different interpretations. Nairobi youth may blame unemployment as a motivating factor for engaging in crime. At the same time, the victims may apportion the blame on the government for failing to provide security agencies with effective tools to deal with crime in Nairobi.



Rapid population growth and globalisation influences have put pressure on major cities, creating increased crime conditions (Shikuku, Makworo, & Njuguna, 2018). Nairobi is increasingly facing unprecedented expansion, especially in its informal settlements, so the government cannot match the provision of basic amenities. Settlements that are emerging are, therefore, not planned or projected, which has reduced the resources available to support the residents. This has created conditions for uncoordinated constructions and illegal settlements, fuelling crime in the city.

Although the government currently engages in a slum upgrading programme in some informal settlements, including *Kibera*, these efforts do not match the population explosion. Crime's spontaneity and constant change necessitate applying preventive crime strategies rather than post-crime reaction measures (Ronoh & Hamasi, 2021). It is, therefore, imperative that Kenya's government emphasises the adaptability of its efforts in countering crime within Nairobi if it has to be effective in realising its objectives. Preventive measures are less costly and have far-reaching effects than reactive measures after a crime occurs.

Despite the government's efforts to arrest its rise, urban crime has been an existential problem in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. The government has employed different strategies with a varying degree of success. Its main focus has been increasing the state security apparatus's capacity to respond to security challenges proactively and at speed. Existing criminal patterns suggest the existence of underlying factors responsible for increasing crime rates in the city despite the various measures the government has put in place. One of the worst hit areas is the informal settlements, which may be because of overpopulation, social deprivation and poor accessibility, hence, poor government. This paper investigated the relationship between urban crime and unemployment to understand its complexity and the underlying factors that challenge crime management. As has been established in this study, the problem of crime and insecurity in Nairobi is exacerbated by unemployed youth who engage in violent property crimes. With vices such as drug abuse and alcoholism being prevalent in informal settlements, it is critical to account for this concerning the impact of unemployment on the youth. The area of youth unemployment and violent crimes nexus is still invisible to many scholars, hence the rationale for this study.

Methodology

The paper adopted a descriptive research design and stratified random sampling technique to enlist respondents into the study. Descriptive survey research collects primary data based on communication with a representative sample of individuals (Zikmund, 2007). Further, the design, through the use of interviews, provided respondents with an opportunity to provide information about themselves, their attitudes and beliefs, demographics and other past, present and future behaviours (Cozby, 2003). The design was deemed appropriate since the study sought to explore the underlying factors that led to the exponential rise in urban crime in Nairobi. Stratified sampling was used using the questionnaire method to enlist 196 respondents for the study. The interview method was also used to collect data from 10 Informants knowledgeable in law enforcement and security management praxis.



Response Rate

Out of 196 filled and usable questionnaires, 196 were obtained from all the respondents. This represented a 100.0% response rate. Therefore, all the tables and graphs presented in this chapter have a total frequency of 196 unless otherwise stated. In contrast, some tables have a total response of more than 196, more so in cases where multiple responses were sought.

The nature of urban crimes prevalent in Nairobi County, Kenya

The study established the nature of urban crimes in Nairobi County, Kenya, in Kibera and Karen jurisdictions. These crimes were categorised into violent crimes (44.4%), property crimes (55.4%), and drug-related (10.2%). Violent crimes included armed robberies and street robberies. Property crimes included Breakings, stealing and muggings. Drug-related crimes such as drug and alcohol abuse and peddling were ranked the lowest. Additionally, the study identified three types of armed robberies committed within Kibera and Karen jurisdictions in Nairobi County. These included street robberies, which had the highest percentage (45%), followed by robberies within residential areas (30.0%), and highway robberies (25%). According to 80% of the K.Is, most criminals were mainly youthful. This may be attributed to a lack of employment hence most of them utilise criminality as a source of livelihood. Further, according to this study, the general tendency was to perceive Kibera as having higher rates of street robberies (55.0%) than Karen but with a tendency to have higher rates of highway robberies (70%) and residential robberies (92.5%) in Karen than in Kibera. As explained by Mwaeke and Ombaka (2018) regarding the variance of criminality based on affluence and fewer affluence areas, this trend was explained by the affluence of Karen that may have attracted highway robbers and residential robbers in the area. Further, there was a general tendency to perceive Karen as having higher breaking rates (67.4%) than Kibra. Still, however, though there are significant rates of muggings and stealing crimes in Karen, Kibera still leads with higher rates of stealing (65.2%) and muggings (61.7%). This trend was explained by the affluence of the Karen, which may have attracted more breakings. At the same time, increased poverty and an increased number of idle youths contributed to stealing and muggings in Kibera. This study also lends support to findings by Peng, Sun and Zhang (2022), Raphael and Winter-Ebmer (1998), and Bessant (1995) that there was a general observation that most youths in Kibera are jobless and idle. They wait for those going to or from jobs in the evening and early morning and steal or mug them. The nature of urban crimes prevalent in Kibera and Karen Jurisdictions is presented in

Table 1. *Table 1: Nature of urban crimes prevalent in Kibera and Karen Jurisdictions*

| Crime category | Nature of crimes | Frequency(n=196) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Violent Crimes | Armed robberies | 40 | 20.4 |
| | Street Robberies | 47 | 24.0 |
| | Total | 87 | 44.4 |
| Property Crimes | Breakings | 45 | 23.0 |
| | Stealing | 24 | 22.2 |
| | Mugging | 20 | 10.2 |
| | Total | 89 | 55.4 |
| Drug Related | Drug and Alcohol abuse | 14 | 7.1 |
| | Drug Peddling | 6 | 3.0 |
| | Total | 20 | 10.2 |
| | Grand Total | 196 | 100 |

Source: Field Data, 2023



Conclusion

This study has established the nexus between unemployment and urban crime in Nairobi County, Kenya. Most crimes were largely property crimes committed by unemployed youths, apparently utilising criminality as a source of livelihood. This study recommends serious national resource mapping that will factor in industrialisation and Job creation for the unemployed. Further, the study recommends Job creation in county governments to discourage rural-to-urban migrations of job seekers to cities.

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