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Effects of Police Operational Factors in Managing Juvenile Gang Crime in Kisauni Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

For many years, Kisauni has always been known as a crime zone with Juvenile criminal gangs terrorizing the residents. Despite the Kenya police service presence, crime is still on the increase than decrease trend. Hence this paper sought to examine the effect of operational factors in managing of Juvenile gang crime. The research was predicated on a case study research design. The study comprised of 288 main respondents and used interview method to collect data which was analyzed using NVIVO software. Descriptive statistics such as use of histogram was used to present data while content analysis was used to interpret data and presented it using verbatim quotes. Operational factors such as poor communication network, systemic corruption in the police department and political influence, inadequate training of officers and poor transport network were found to affect the Kenya police service officers responses in managing juvenile gang crimes in Kisauni sub county. Major recommendations made by this study include legal and policy frameworks that tame activities of Juvenile criminal gangs whose networks are transnational in nature, Strengthening the police- community collaboration in the spirit of community policing, increase police funding to facilitate police operations, increase police training reforms, indulgence of non-governmental organizations in wealth and job creations for the youth and in eradication of poverty.

Introduction

According to Master and Garman (2023) juvenile gang crime is an expanding global issue that ranges from bullying and physical altercations to more serious sexual and physical assaults and murder. Globally, juvenile gang crimes rise in an environment of bad leadership, little resources, and poverty. For instance, youth in Brazil are more likely to be impacted and recruited into gang activities due to a lack of opportunities and unending poverty (Hoey & Aziz, 2022). In addition, and according to statistics, Georgetown University (1980) asserts that Brazil had almost 20,000 juvenile murders during the previous 20 years. In addition, from 1990 to 1999, Columbia documented 8,000 murder cases and 12,834 murders perpetrated by young people. People think that youth crime is brought on by a lack of supervision and a child-friendly environment. Additionally, children from low-income homes are the ones that are most frequently at risk. Observably in Russia however, the rise in child delinquency is attributed to behavior disorders, while in a study by Schroeder (2022) the majority of offenders had a history of academic failure, a lack of finances, and drunkenness.

One of the most hazardous places on earth is Mexico, which recorded 5,991 adolescent murder cases in 1999 and 1.52 million crimes overall in 2002 (Schroeder, 2022) while Venezuela recorded 2,090 murders in total in 1999 (Breckin, 2019). According to Hoey and Aziz, (2022), juveniles who committed crimes sharply increased because of the economic upheaval in Venezuela. To reduce the rate of juvenile gang criminality countries applied different rafts of measures albeit differently. For example, to combat the rising number of child crimes in the nation, the criminal age in the Philippines was lowered to 12 in 2019 (Schroeder, 2022). Further, the government also increased by double the length of prison terms for violent crimes committed by children. Thailand, which had 1456 murders reduced criminal liability age to ten years old, while minors between the ages of 10 and 15 were



encouraged to consult a juvenile judge without fear of facing consequences (Bolotta, 2023). With a total of 553,594 offenses and 1,273 teenage murder cases in 2002, Ukraine also struggled to combat drug use in the country (Berdzik, 2022), but juvenile drug crimes remained unabated in El Salvador.

Africa is not spared either, as the problem is apparently acute because of poverty, a lack of resources, employment prospects, educational opportunities, migration, parental control issues, and personal maladjustment (Fourchard, 2006). Literature on youth crime trends and statistics in Africa is scanty. However, the limited available projections on youth crime portray youth crime as being generally on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the cities where two thirds of the populations are between the ages of 12 and 25 (Kilonzo, 2020). Further, most of these young people live in informal settlements without basic facilities, services and security. Observably, however, in Africa, consistently youth are correlates of crime. Cases in point include Sudan and South Sudan which have been facing continued civil war and ethnic militias; Uganda which has a history of organized crime and militia groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); Somalia which for years has been at the mercy of terror group al-Shabaab; and Nigeria, which similarly continues with its own fight against Boko Haram. The majority of those fighting in such groups are young people, raising the question whether African governments are in control of their youth (Kilonzo, 2020).

The youth in Kenya became a disenfranchised group as a result of the country's fast population expansion in the 1970s and 1980s (Dennison, 2021). According to Kyamana (2015) however, inmates between the ages of 21 and 25years, grew from 15,607 in the year 1971 to 21,904 in year 1976. Juvenile groups between the ages of 16years and 25years committed 89,770 offenses during the 2007–2008 fiscal year (IEA Studies). According to Gunter (2017) the UN Habitat research on youth and crime in Nairobi found that the most common crimes for which young people in trouble with the law are arrested are theft (45%), assault (23%), drug possession (10%), mugging (10%), and manslaughter (7%). Guns, machetes, and knives are among the weapons frequently utilized in the conduct of these crimes. Most of these crimes have money as their primary motivation, according to Gunter (2017).

According to the Kenya national police service Annual Report 2022, residents in the coast region were shocked by increasing violent juvenile gangs in year 2021. These included, Watalia, Wakali Wao, Wajukuu WA Bibi, Wasasi, and Wakali Kwanza, who were thought to have infiltrated Kwale, according to Kwale County Police Commander Steve Ambrose Oloo. Residents of the communities of Kiteje, Bombo, and Mkumbi in Matuga, Kwale County, have complained about an upsurge in insecurity. Residents have been experiencing nighttime fear due to adolescent gang activity. According to the report, the teenage thieves, who range in age from 12 to 27years, prey on unwary lone walkers in shadowy places before fleeing with their possessions (Cano, 2022).

According to the residents of Kwale, the juvenile gangs utilize machetes and knives, as well as electronic devices that momentarily paralyze their victims before they steal from them (Cano, 2022). Further, the residents of Kisauni Sub County are sick of the unrest and feel afraid because attacks start as early as six o'clock in the evening. According to Cano (2022) locals are aware of the gang members but refrain from speaking out for fear of being harmed. Residents in the area urge the government to increase security since programs to raise awareness of crime have failed to deter it, with increasing reports that juvenile criminal gangs are on the rise (Cano, 2022).

According to former Mombasa County commissioner Gilbert Kitiyo, in the year 2019 in Kisauni sub county, three Juvenile criminals have been shot dead and 36 others arrested, majority were between 14-18 years. Government security agencies called on the public to protect themselves from these Juvenile gangs by being in the house early in the evening when the crimes were said to happen and report to the Kenya police service when they encounter these marauding criminals. Insecurity in Kisauni Sub County has robbed Mombasa County of investment opportunities, as crimes have seemingly become a scare crow to investors. This study has been motivated by the rise of juvenile gangs in Mombasa County despite heavy deployment of the police in the area. It is upon this backdrop that this study seeks to establish the factors impeding the Kenya police service responses in managing of Juvenile gang crime, but in Kisauni Sub County within Mombasa County Kenya.

The Kenya national police service Annual Report 2022 indicate Juvenile gangs are on the increase in Kenya, more so in Kisauni Mombasa County, Kenya. These gangs, also believed to act under the influence of drugs are said to



sometimes barricade the Old Malindi road, for even an hour, terrorizing motorists and robbing them their valuables before entering their hideouts, despite the presence of a police station within the locality. Whereas the government has done a lot through police reform, creating additional institutional frameworks and increased police oversight through independent police oversight authority (IPOA), the Kenya police service seemed to be dogged by other underlying push and pull factors as it has been established by this study. Despite the Kenya Police Service's efforts to use deterrent tactics to keep juvenile gangs under control in the area, crimes continue to be committed practically daily, giving the impression that criminal gangs are in control of the neighborhood and have a siege mentality. This current study intends to explore the underlying push and pull factors responsible for the ostensible police inability to address the problem or reduce it to manageable levels. While most studies have examined the causes of juvenile gang violence and the effectiveness of crime deterrent methods on the prevention of juvenile gang crime. The reason for this study is that there has not been any documented study or detailed investigation, or inquiry done to determine the factors impeding the Kenya police service responses in managing juvenile gang crime, particularly in the Kisauni area, hence the rationale for this study.

Methods

This paper employed a qualitative case study research design. The case study approach is characterized by Bryman (2016) as an empirical investigation that explores a modern phenomenon inside a practical setting, where the distinction between phenomenon and setting is ambiguous and numerous sources of evidence are employed. A case study approach was deemed appropriate because it aimed to explain the dynamics of a specific social unit holistically, according to Kothari, (2004). As it was the case, this kind of layout makes it easier to gather firsthand information. The paper used a purposive sampling method to enlist 288 respondents into the study. The interview method was used to collect data from all the respondents. Additionally, 13 Key informants who were knowledgeable in law enforcement and security management practice were also enlisted to inform the study.

Results and Discussion

The effect of operational factors in managing Juvenile gang crime in Kisauni sub county within Mombasa County, Kenya

The paper assessed the effect of operational factors in managing Juvenile gang crime in Kisauni Sub County within Mombasa County, Kenya. The results are presented in Figure 4.1.

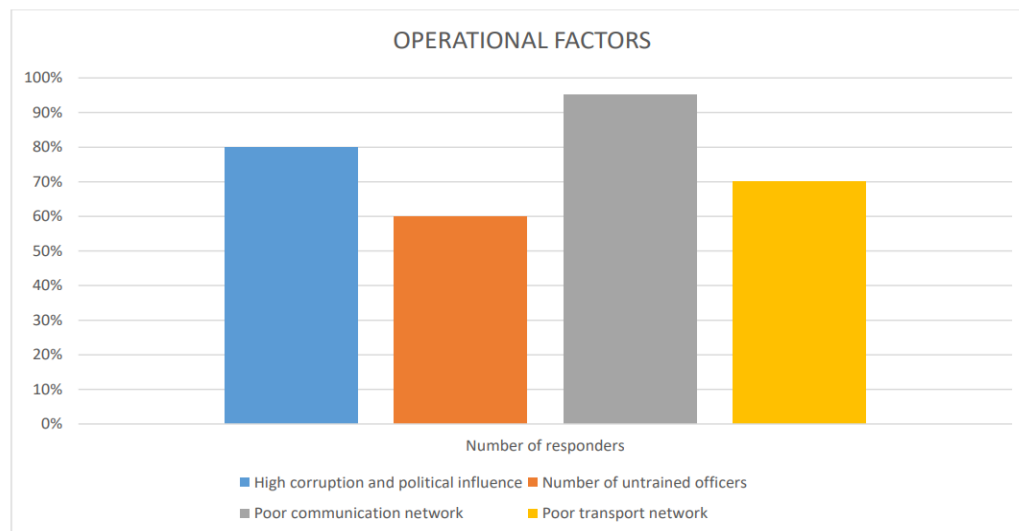


Figure 4.1 Operational factors impeding the Kenya police service responses in managing juvenile gang crime in Kisauni Sub County, Mombasa County



As indicated in Figure 4.1, operational factors such as, high corruption and political influence, inadequate training of officers, poor communication network and transport network affected Kenya police service officers' responses in managing juvenile gang crime in Kisauni Sub County, Mombasa County. According to a Key respondent:

"The Kenya police service has on many occasions attempted to eradicate' gangs, through civilian officers and also by use of subtle undercover operations in addition to patrolling the streets with guns and other lethal weapons. Although the officers get it right, leading to the arrests and prosecutions of juvenile gang members, their efforts have similarly on many occasions been outsmarted. Further, though there are departments in justice administration process which work with the local community to help keep the juvenile criminal gangs at bay, there is still a general feeling that the Kenya police service should take adequate measures to understand the root causes of the juvenile gang problem, to cut them at the nib."

According to one of the study's Key informants that resonated with all other community policing respondents, *"Police service to the public may be improved through measures such as; vetting current officers to root out the corrupt ones, creating awareness of citizen's rights and the duties of the Kenya police service officers, including the protection of life and property which they seem reluctant to do, partnering with like-minded organizations to control the juvenile gang crime problem, increasing undercover operations to dismantle criminal gang activities and holding parents accountable for crimes committed by their children."*

Observably police service seems to be hampered by other legal and policy factors. For example, an interviewee (community policing committee member) stated:

"There are no sufficient laws and policies, a view that was shared by 90% of the respondents to counter human trafficking and programs for safe migration and for victims of trafficking. Besides, criminal bond terms should be reviewed, given that most international traffickers can afford to pay the bond and leave the country."

According to 80% of the respondents:

"The Kenya police service performance is sluggish and inefficient and also marred with human right abuses; In some cases, the Kenya police service threatens people with arbitrary arrests, punishments and extra judicial killings."

Another police respondent further averred that:

"Other issues that affect police operations include; junior police to senior police officers mistrust, and police-civilian mistrust. This has affected collaboration between the police and the community and has largely affected service delivery. For example, collaboration between the Kenya police service and Wazee wa Mtaa, village elders who report to the chiefs about children involved in gangs in their area is very poor. Further, there is a lot of political interference, which can be solved by creating an independent legal system that is free from the influence of local and national leadership."

Sampled police responses revealed that:

"The justice system is efficient but very slow while others said it is marred by corruption. The majority had some experience with the justice system and claimed that cases are handled depending on how much money one has. Many cases do not get to court. Further, criminals have become hardened and do not care because they believe that, if arrested they can bribe the Kenya police service officers and go free. After paying bribes, offenders fail to appear in court for plea. This, they found very oppressive to the poor. Further, people fear the offender after being released on bond and often the Kenya police service does not come in to offer protection to them. It was further stated that, one of the most wanted criminals said that he was also placing the Kenya police service officers on notice for hunting him, too, and ended up killing some of the Kenya police officers."

Discussion

As argued by Sherman (2007) and Walker (2007) also established in this study, operational factors such as poor communication network, high corruption and political influence, inadequate training of officers and poor transport network affected Kenya police service officers' responses in managing juvenile gang crime in Kisauni Sub County, Mombasa County. Observably police service is hampered by other legal and policy factors. For example, there are no sufficient laws and policies, a view that was shared by 90% of the respondents to counter human trafficking and programs for safe migration and for victims of trafficking. To cut the problem at the nib the study



suggested reviewed and enhanced bond terms given that most international traffickers can afford to pay the bond and leave the country. The study suggested vetting of current officers to root out the corrupt ones, creating awareness of citizen's rights and the duties of the Kenya police service officers, including the protection of life and property which they seem reluctant to do, partnering with like-minded organizations to control the juvenile gang crime problem, increasing undercover operations to dismantle criminal gang activities and holding parents accountable for crimes committed by their children. As found by Sullivan (2018) also established by this study Police performance was also found to be sluggish and inefficient, but also found to be marred with human right abuses; In some cases, the Kenya police service threatens people with arbitrary arrests, punishments and extra judicial killings.

Other issues that affect police operations include junior police to senior police officers' mistrust, and police-civilian mistrust. This has affected collaboration between the police and the community and has largely affected service delivery. For example, collaboration between the Kenya police service and "Wazee wa Mtaa", village elders who report to the chiefs about children involved in gangs in their area is very poor (Sherman, 2007; Walker, 2007). Further, there is a lot of political interference, which can be solved by creating an independent legal system that is free from the influence of local and national leadership.

Conclusion

According to the paper, police operational factors such as poor communication network, high corruption and political influence, inadequate training of officers and poor transport network affected Kenya police service officers responses in managing juvenile gang crime in Kisauni sub county, Mombasa County. Based on the study's findings, it is clear that policymakers and community leaders should prioritize interventions aimed at addressing the Kenya police service operation inadequacy in Kisauni Sub County.

Major recommendations made by this study include legal and policy frameworks that tame activities of Juvenile criminal gangs whose networks are transnational in nature, Strengthening the police- community collaboration in the spirit of community policing, increase police funding to facilitate police operations, increase police training reforms, indulgence of non-governmental organizations in wealth and job creations for the youth and in eradication of poverty.

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