

Delinquency among University Students and Parenting Attitudes in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Despite the heavy investment in education that the Kenya Government makes each year, delinquent behavior among University students continue to affect the goals of effective training and skill building. This undermines efforts at poverty alleviation and wealth creation in the country. Emerging evidence suggests that there is a correlation between University students' demeanor and parenting behaviour in Kenya today. At a tender age of 17 many young people are thrust into the independent University world and left to fend for themselves emotionally and even physically. This invariably leads to delinquent behavior such as drug abuse and prostitution. Studies in Kenya have not fully explored the effects of parental attitude, behavior as well as the family structure on adolescent delinquent behavior. To fill this gap in knowledge, the current study has sought to explore the relationship between parental behavior, attitudes and delinquent behavior among University students in Kenya. This study has adopted a correlational study design as well as a desk review methodology. The paper recommends that family-centric intervention measures be put in place. Factors such as sensitization on the critical role that the family structure plays in combating delinquency, strengthening of the parental role, discouraging divorce and encouraging parental involvement in the education of their children in the University must remain central.

Keywords: Delinquency, Student, Parent, University, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Delinquency refers to a juveniles' behavior pattern characterized by repeated offending, and is regarded mainly in its social, but also criminal aspects. Delinquent and non-delinquent individuals may be a product of the same society or even the same family. Young individuals who are unable to find affection and protection within the family may become more susceptible to delinquency as a form of empowerment. More than socioeconomic conditions, the lack of interaction between parents and children which is the concern for of this paper.

Depending on the nation of origin, a juvenile becomes an adult anywhere between the ages of 15 to 18, the age bracket with which university students averagely fall. Although the age is sometimes lowered for murder and other serious crimes as perceived by Agarwal, D. (2018). It therefore implies conduct that does not conform to the legal or moral standards of society; it usually applies only to acts that, if performed by an adult, would be termed criminal. It is distinguished from a status offense, a term applied in the United States and other national legal systems to acts considered when committed by a juvenile but not when committed

by an adult.

In Western countries, delinquent behaviour is most common in the 14- to 15-year-old age group. At age 14, most delinquent conduct involves minor theft. By age 16 or 17, more violent and dangerous acts, including assault and the use of a weapon, become prevalent. Most delinquents do not continue this behaviour into their adult life, for, as the circumstances of their lives change and they get a job, marry, or simply mature out of their turbulent adolescence, their conduct usually falls in line with societal standards. Although the evidence is ambiguous, most delinquents adjust to a noncriminal life, yet the proportion of delinquents who become criminals is higher than that of non-delinquents. In the United States, boys make up 80 percent of the delinquent population, and this rate is similar throughout Europe and Japan, Mishra, Elsie et al (2018). Schools and of late Universities are often the forum in which delinquent behaviour originates and develops.

Most delinquents perform poorly in the universities and are unhappy in the University environment, Cenat J., et al, (2015) as result of stress. The consequences of stress include impaired judgment, absenteeism in lectures, self-medication, and addiction to substances like khat chewing, smoking cigarettes, and drinking alcohol. Chronic exposure to stressful conditions leads to deterioration of academic performance, loss of memory, poor relationships with peers and family members, and overall dissatisfaction with life. Ultimately many delinquent youths are dropouts who drop out of the University have no job opportunities and end up committing petty and serious crimes in the communities to survive.

To place the current study into context, it is critical to note that problem behaviors among University student populations currently referred to as delinquency among university students, the world over, are of great concern to educators, counselors and Psychologists. This is because of the potential of problem behaviors at this stage to undermine the achievement of both personal and national development goals being great. The danger to achievement of goals stems largely, from the varying control responses that are often elicited with regard to problem behaviors. At the University, delinquency among university students leads to wastage of valuable class and study time due to chronic absenteeism of the students as well as errant behaviour.

University delinquency is broadly classified into two categories: Externalizing problem behaviors, and internalizing problem behaviors, for our case we shall deal with externalized problem behavior. Externalized problem behaviors are characterized by emotions, feelings and actions that are aggressively outwardly expressed, usually towards other persons or even peers. These include: risky sexual behaviors, alcoholism/drug abuse, destruction of property etc. In Kenya our universities have seen a spate of disruptive riots destroying property over the years, exhibiting external problem behaviour. Constant disruption of learning due to students' protests has defined university education since Kenya's independence. Up until the 1990s, such protests were triggered by larger socio-political issues such as democratization, human rights and economic equality. Since then, the spate of university student protests, averaging five every year seem to have mutated and have resulted into changes that have raised the costs of attending university to such issues such as food insecurity or even accommodation, note the quality of education has not been a factor. For example at Egerton University in January 2020, students were protesting the decision by the University management to fine each of them Sh16,862 to cover damages caused during their demos in December 2019, a matter that could easily have been resolved through dialogue. We can now attribute this sad affair to the problem of delinquency. In February 1998, Kenyatta University, was shut down indefinitely this was after students took to the streets to protest a wave of ethnic violence in which more than 120 people were killed while In December 2017, University of Nairobi closed as student anger rose over police brutality.

While University students are potential human resource, the population group is particularly involved in problem behaviours. Students in Universities in Kenya are typically young adults in their twenties (United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014). This group of population is particularly involved in risky sexual behaviours which include and not limited to, having sex with multiple partners, having unprotected sex (without condoms), having sexual intercourse with strangers, and having

intoxicated sex (Caldeira et al., 2009). A study conducted among university students at Egerton University, Kenya revealed that first year students experience a variety of adjustment problems associated with making a transition from high school and home to University (Caldeira et al., 2009).

Kenya is but one of the many African Countries that have had to deal with University student violent protests. South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania among others, have also had their share in recent years. For example, according to Sambo (1999), from 1990 to 1997, the University of Dar es Salaam recorded seven occurrences of students' protests while Sokoine University of Agriculture had experienced the same number in the same period. Student protests is not a new phenomena in Africa, It goes back to the late 60's and 1970's. For example, The University of Nairobi at that time, despite being the only University, very few academic years reached their full term without being closed early due to student riots. In October, 2019 Kenyatta University was closed following student protests. In March, 2020 rioting University of Nairobi students torched hostels to protest against the death of their colleague who was assumed to have been beaten by guards.

Student violent protests is an important issue to many stakeholders including the student community, the University administration, the society at large and the government (Kiboiy, (2013). According to the study by Kiboiy (2013), protests from students leads to premature closure of Universities which makes the students spend longer time in pursuit of their academic programmes. This results in interruptions of student programmes and consequent delay in their post-education productive life. Students' violent protests also has a negative impact on the University plans. The University calendar is often interrupted with the result that the affected University cannot admit fresh students as expected. For example the University riots at UoN in 1982 following a coup attempt led to the university's closure for more than one year creating a backlog of new students' intake. Protests of students also hurts the business and other communities operating or living around Universities. Rioting students often engage in wanton destruction of businesses and property sometimes resulting even in loss of lives. For example, riots by UoN students always spills over into the streets of Nairobi occasioning stoning of vehicles, and breaking and looting of business premises. In 1993 riots by Moi University students led to the closure of the University for two months, spilt over into the University neighbourhood resulting in destruction of property worth millions of shillings. Another University which experienced similar riots with devastating consequences is Maseno University in 1994. Kibabii University closed the institution indefinitely as students rioted in 2019. The students went on rampage destroying property of unknown value after a car hit a colleague in one the school's parking lot (Kaiboy, 2013)

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Structural-functional theories regard delinquent behavior as the consequence of strains or breakdowns in the social processes that produce conformity. These theories focus on institutions, such as the family and school, that socialize individuals to conform their behavior to values of the surrounding society and on the ways in which these institutions can fail in this task. Wide agreement or consensus is assumed about which behaviors are valued and dis-valued in society. The question structural-functional theories try to answer is: Why do many individuals during their adolescence behave in ways that challenge this consensus? That is, why do many adolescents violate behavioral norms that nearly all of us are assumed to hold in common? Despite the richness of theories of delinquency and the emerging sense of convergence among previously competing theoretical traditions, there is a new awareness that delinquency theories remain incomplete in their capacity to explain and sometimes even address basic micro- and macro-level questions. For example, a classic issue that persists despite its recognition is the question of why most delinquents discontinue their delinquency before or during their transition to adulthood. We know that most delinquents "age out" of delinquency, but we have not adequately explained why this happens.

PARENTING ATTITUDES AND CHALLENGES

In the acquisition of problem behaviour, it has been shown that the family in which a child grows is important. According to Efobi and Nwokwo (2014) the experience of living in a home that is unstable, for whatever reason, is unbearable and leaves its members with emotional scars which pervade the present and threaten the future expectations of the victims. Unresolved problems or inhibited emotions do not automatically disappear but accumulate and often find destructive channels. The authors say that the one involved becomes vulnerable and heightened emotions that lead to problem behaviours. Children who come from homes that are characterized by hostility adopt violent behaviour as a form of seeking help or attention in order to cope in that uncondusive climate (White& Renk, 2012). The authors indicate that frustration produces aggressive energy which activates violent behaviour.

There is evidence that there are many parental factors that are linked to the behaviour of University students. Different studies provide evidence of problem behaviour that can be traced from the families of the student. Evidence of the influence and correlation of parental affection on the behaviour of children has been documented by different researchers. Becker, Peterson, Hellmer, Shoemaker, and Quay (1959) studied factors in parental behaviour and personality as related to problem behaviour in children in Illinois, USA. They found that in families with children with conduct problems, both parents were maladjusted, gave vent to unbridled emotions and tended to be arbitrary with the child. In addition, the mother tended to be active, dictatorial, thwarting and suggesting whereas the father tended not to enforce regulations. Different studies have been conducted to examine the specific influence father-child and mother child relational dynamics have on the psycho social development of children. The findings of these studies, while mixed, tend to converge on the fact that parental behaviour contributes to the psycho social adjustment of children.

Tanaka, Raishevich and Scarpa (2010) indicate that family conflicts, physical punishment and harsh parenting have shown to be significantly negatively associated with children's externalizing behaviour (Whie& Renk, 2012). Rugg (2013) states that a negative emotional attitude characterized by lack of parental involvement and warmth, increases the risk of the child engaging in delinquency. Calzada and Pines (2010) demonstrated in their study that home warmth could help children to improve their stress response system which in turn helps them deal with social challenging situations relevant with other later aggressive behaviour.

Other factors that contribute to problem behaviour indirectly include parental drug abuse, stressed families and single parent status (Stratton Reid, 2008). Further Wiese anf Freud (2011) suggested that lack of parental involvement, as well as poor monitoring and supervision of children's activities strongly predict violent behaviour. In Kenya, Kinai (2002) found that adolescents whose parents were harsh and cruel were likely to be more aggressive than those whose parents were warm and loving and young adults whose parents neglected and rejected them were likely to be more aggressive than those whose parents were supervising and monitoring their activities and social contact. Young adults whose parents used physical punishment and threats frequently were likely to be more aggressive than those whose parents used inductive reasoning and reinforcement frequently. The findings of the study also showed that adolescents whose parents enforced discipline inconsistently were likely to be more aggressive than those whose parents enforced discipline consistently, and that adolescents who experience tensions and discord among family members were likely to be more aggressive than those who experienced peace and harmony.

The relational dynamics within families especially parent-adolescent relationships have been studied and found to have significant influence on adolescent psychological adjustment. Dmitriera et al., (2004) investigated the role of parent-adolescent relationships in mediating the association between family-related life events and adolescent depressive symptoms and problem behaviours. They sampled 1,696 eleventh

graders from major cities in the United States, China, Korea and the Czech Republic. The study found that the path from family-related life events to adolescent problem behaviours was mediated by perceived parental involvement, parent adolescent conflict and perceived parental sanctions of adolescent misconduct. The study also found across cultures there was considerable similarity in the association of family factors with adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptomatology. Knafo and Plomin (2006) studied parental discipline and affection and found that parents who had positive feelings towards their children and provided positive, non-coercive discipline had children who were relatively more pro-social and that the opposite was true of parents high in negativity towards their children.

The contribution of family relational dynamics and emotional socialization and adolescent psycho-social well being, have also been studied. The findings of those studies also show correlations between parental emotional and behavioural dynamics and both positive and negative behaviour in adolescents. Stocker, Richmond, Roades and Kiang (2008) studied family emotional processes and adolescents' adjustment among 131 families. They sampled 76 adolescent boys and 55 adolescent girls. The study examined the association between parents' emotional coaching and emotional expressiveness of adolescents' internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The study found that mothers were more accommodative and supportive of adolescents' emotional experiences than fathers were. They also found that mothers' and fathers' expression of negative emotions was positively associated with adolescents externalizing symptoms.

More evidence of the influence of parent-adolescent relationships on adolescent psycho social outcomes is found in Bulanda and Majumdar (2009). They studied perceived parent-child relations and adolescent self-esteem among a sample of 10,331 adolescents with an average of 19 years. Adolescents reports of mothers and fathers' physical availability, involvement and quality relations were each independently and positively associated with adolescent self esteem. They also found that positive interactions with one's parents involvement and high quality relations with parents, self-esteem grew stronger in the presence of high involvement and relationship quality of the second parent.

One of the effective family factors which can lead to young individuals tendency towards drugs is family function. Family function depends on the ability of the family in problem-solving, communication, roles, affective, responsiveness, affective involvement and behaviour control in order to protect the whole family system. Qualitative and quantitative differences in the above-mentioned components can lead to formation of different personalities in the family and in some cases, to behavioural problems. Family functioning in a family with drug addiction may include inappropriate relationships, emotional mixture, role play and behaviour management compared to a family without drug related problems. Many of the factors protecting against drug use are corresponded with family functions while many of the threatening factors regarding drugs are corresponded with inappropriateness and weakness in family functions. In a study conducted by Zuckerman (2003) the researcher concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between the tendency to drugs and close relationship among family members.

Similar support for consideration of family and parenting factors in adolescent behaviour are found in Savic-Raboteg et al. (2001) who studied the relation of parental practices and self-conceptions to young adolescent problem behaviours and substance use. The findings of their study showed that high parental monitoring was the only aspect of parental behaviour that was consistently negatively related to children's behaviour problems and substance abuse. Wood, Read, Mitchel, and Brand (2004) studied parent and peer influences on alcohol involvement among recent high school graduates in a public University in the Northeastern United States. The results of their study showed that parental influences moderated peer influence- drinking in behaviour, such that higher levels of perceived parental involvement were associated with weaker relations between peer influences and alcohol use and problems. Mudeme (2004) in a study on parental factors associated with drug use among youth found that some parental characteristics were associated with youth drug use. These characteristics were: A lack of parental understanding, lack of parental confiding

relationships, lack of parental awareness of youths behaviours and lack of or inconsistent parental rules. Boyle and Boekeloo (2006) studied perceived parental approval of drinking and its impact on drinking problem behaviours among 265 first year College students in the USA. The results of their study showed that students perceiving more parental approval for their drinking were more likely to report at least one drinking problem.

Studies on parental approval and adolescent sexual behaviour have also been conducted with results showing a correlation between the two. Jaccard and Dittus (2006) conducted a study on the adolescent perception of maternal approval of birth control and risky sexual behaviour among a sample of 20,000 adolescents in the USA. Results of the study showed that perceived approval of birth control may increase the probability of sexual activity in some adolescents. Parental nurturance may be strongly correlated with problem behaviours and psychological adjustment in children. According to Reuter and Biller (1973) high paternal and high maternal availability combined was related to high scores on the personality adjustment measures among early adults. The link between parental acceptance and psychological adjustment and consequently behaviour outcomes has been explored. Turner, Saranson, and Saranson (2001) conducted a study on the link between parental acceptance and young adult adjustment among 292 undergraduate students in a University in Washington, USA. Their study found that children of parents who described them more positively also reported higher levels of negative psychological adjustment. These findings support those of Kinai (2002) who found that adolescents whose parents were harsh and cruel were likely to be more aggressive than those whose parents were warm and loving.

The other parental factor that can influence students' problem behaviour is parental separation and single parenthood. According to Santrock (2007) divorce is a major source of stress for the whole family but adolescents and young adults are affected more because of their experiences. Adolescents who are victims of divorce may suddenly display deviant behaviours. Brevik et al., (2009) concur when they state, broken homes and homes in which parents frequently quarrel have been linked to stress in children and often results in physical and emotional illness. The authors also say that divorce also brings unpredictability, unreliability and insecurity into the adolescent world. Bewilderment, anxiety, anger, grief and shame are common responses. According to Bradford et al. (2008) children of divorced parents have more difficulties than their parents do. In their research, they found that five years after divorce only about a third of the children were functioning well. The largest group, 37% were depressed, could not make friends and suffered a wide range of other behaviour problems. The researchers concluded that parental separation and divorce affected a number of children. Children respond to divorce with anger, resentment, anxiety, depression, confusion and aggression. Egbochuku (2013) while investigating the effects of single parenthood and truant behaviour in secondary school students in Edo State, found that problem behaviours of children have been influenced in some way by the familial environment. The findings indicated that being born into a single parent family is associated with increased risk of violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The author says that the different outcomes of socio-economic conditions of single-parent household, disciplinary styles, difficulty in securing assistance and problems in supervising and monitoring might result in problem behaviour. Children living in a home that has been disrupted by divorce are likely to exhibit anti-social and aggressive behaviour and become involved with delinquent activities and substance abuse.

According to Ezuchi (2014) the models of upbringing used in the family are of high importance for a child's moral behaviour. The author states that in families where positive behaviour is not a norm, exposure to violence through popular culture may have a more profound impact. On the whole, unhealthy family climate is likely to lead adolescents into indulgence in delinquent conducts. For these reasons, there has been considerable interest in exploring the relations between various aspects of a child's home environment and the development of problem behaviours. Unfortunately, this research area presents several problems. First, one cannot manipulate and control child-rearing practices. Particularly parental behaviours such as maternal rejection or severe punishment do not operate in isolation but occur in conjunction with other aspects of the

home environment. In addition, the child's behaviour may well affect his parents' reaction to him so that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a particular parental method of handling a child is a cause or is a result of the child's actions. In spite of these reservations the various research literatures suggest several conclusions. Children who are unwanted by their parents and who are given little affection and attention are likely to develop hostile behaviour patterns (Grusec, 2010)

The influence of parental nurturance on the psycho-social well being of adolescents cannot be understated. The findings from different studies reviewed above all point to the importance of children feeling accepted, loved and cared for by parents. The literature reviewed seems to converge around the importance of parent-child relationships on the psycho social adjustment of children. Mattering to one's parents is critical to the psycho social adjustment of adolescents. While researchers in Kenya have attempted to understand the causes of problem behaviours among University students, studies conducted in Kenya have not adequately addressed the role of parental behaviour in this. As such the need to investigate the relationship between parental behaviour and University students' delinquency. This is crucial in order to increase understanding of how to intervene with adolescent students that may present with problem behaviours.

According to Garcia and Thornton (2014:1) current research shows that the involvement of family in learning helps to improve student performance, reduce absenteeism and restore parents' confidence in their children's education. Learners with parents or caregivers who are involved in learners' education, earn higher grades

and test scores, have better social skills and show improved behaviour, Which is something that we as a community and the world at large are in need of, as it would highly contribute in reducing crime and poverty. Ideally it would help to have a greater percentage of parental involvement in their children's education.

We can confidently assert that this is very true too about university teenagers to avoid university delinquency. In Kenya it is now evident that parental attitudes change immediately their teens join the university. They are now treated as adults and totally neglected even though some of them are barely 17 years. There seems to be a total disregard of their needs leading to university delinquents. Seeing parents involved in the education of their teens University education is a good thing because it improves University academic performance. Teens become more focused in their university work (Kwatubana & Makhalemele, 2015:315). This motivates students not to give up easily when they do not understand a particular lectures and will not skip lectures because they know that their parents are always monitoring their lecture attendance, 2007:320).

According to Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004:303), another challenge that hampers effective parental involvement is low income that some receive per month, which leads them to focus on earning an income for their families and not to spend enough time to monitor the teens university education (Lau et al, 2011). Additional reason for parents not to be involved is the fact that institutions sometimes fail to create strong links between homes and universities or an environment where parents do not feel welcomed or are intimidated in universities more especially low income poorly educated parents. This situation is made worse by the fact that some parents are unable to read and write and they can only communicate in their mother tongue, which makes it difficult for them to monitor their teens in their university education (Lemmer, 2007:220).

POSSIBLE WAYS OF MITIGATING THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED ABOVE

There are varied strategies that the Universities can use to get parents involved in their teens learning, consequently avoiding delinquency. This could be done through reaching out to the community, the

Universities being part of the communities or by encouraging parent participation by publicizing University activities. This can be done via traditional means by communication means such as announcements, or easy to read newsletters or use non-traditional methods such as television, phone calls and sending emails. The use of only traditional measures could tend to be ineffective in such cases where individual parents rely on non-traditional methods. In a study conducted by Kwatubana and Makhalemele (2015:316), some recruitment strategies that motivated parental involvement in school activities were used. In the same study schools in the Free State decided to use a raffle to select parents that were to be food handlers. This strategy can work well in situations where the school wants to eliminate discrimination by choosing individuals based on their status in the community or favouritism. The use of effective strategies for encouraging parental involvement will enable the parents to be able to see the importance of being involved in their teens learning, and to be able to see the benefits that might result afterward. Also reaching families whose home language is not English by sending them information about their learners in their own home language in order to break the language barrier (Lemmer.2007:221) is important.

CONCLUSION

We can confidently conclude that delinquency among university students and parenting attitudes in Kenya is a pressing issue that needs our collective attention. Parental involvement is associated with a wide range of positive child outcomes in primary and high schools, such as good academic skills, positive attitudes and social competence (Lau, Li & Rao, 2011:97), this can be applied to parenting university teens too. Parental involvement in learning acts as a gel that helps to make learning for teens pleasant and encourages them to work even more as they seek to make those closest to them in society proud when they finally graduate in their chosen fields.

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