

Differences in Juvenile Delinquency According to Perceived Social Class among Secondary School Students in Kisii County, Kenya

Nyarangi Esther Okenyuri, PhD¹, Dr. Rose Otieno, PhD², Dr. Peter Onderi. PhD³

¹School of Arts & Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Kisii University.
P.O.Box 1786-40200-Kisii

²School of Arts & Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Kisii University
P.O.Box 408-40200- Kisii

³School of Arts & Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Maseno University
P.O. Box 3275-40100-Kisumu

Abstract:- The purpose of the study was to establish the differences in juvenile delinquency according to respondents' perceived social class. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used. Convenience sampling, Simple Random sampling and purposive sampling. The parents were likewise chosen via convenience sampling. Cronbach alpha, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Keywords:- Juvenile Delinquency, Adolescent, Media, Poverty.

I. INTRODUCTION

The terms low social class and poverty are treated as synonymous. Seymour, (2009) states that poverty/low social class is a situation where one's resources are so seriously below those required by the average individual or family that an individual gets excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. Poverty is the factor behind such conditions: as lack of resources, lack of proper education and dysfunctional families. These conditions affect young people and society in general psychologically and end up becoming leading causes of juvenile delinquency in certain individuals. Poverty is defined by the World Bank (2015) as a scenario in which the affected individuals live on or below \$ 1.90 per day; that poverty means hunger, a lack of shelter, being sick and unable to see a doctor, not having access to school, and not knowing how to read. Poverty is defined as not having a job, being plagued by anxiety of the future, and living day by day. Loss of a kid due to a disease caused by contaminated water, impotence, lack of representation, and lack of freedom. Finally, the bank claims that poverty is a global disaster, a

cruel and unrelenting foe (<https://www.compassion.com> 2015).

Compassion International (2015), classified poverty into three different categories: The first one is social poverty which comprises undervalued groups of people, people who have few or no rights and whose voices have been silenced by the powers that be. The next type is educational poverty which denies the affected individuals an education. This type of poverty makes children vulnerable to exploitation since they have neither knowledge, skills nor training to give them an opportunity to live above poverty. Another type is health poverty which involves both physical and emotional health. Sick people cannot work so there is lack of needed resources.

Jensen (2009) further breaks the types of poverty by Compassion International (2015) into six finer types of poverty that people are likely to experience: The first one is known as situational poverty which is caused by an unexpected life crisis such as death, divorce/separation or a natural disaster that destroys acquired family property. The second type of poverty is generational poverty, which comes about when two family generations have been born into poverty. This is a difficult type of poverty to move out of because the affected family members are not equipped with appropriate tools for combating the vice. The third type of poverty is called absolute poverty, which involves a lack of essential necessities like food, shelter or running water. Families affected by this type of poverty usually live from hand to mouth. The fourth is relative poverty, which is occasioned by a family's income not being sufficient to meet the society's expectations on the average standard of living. The fifth is known as urban poverty. This type of poverty affects people who live in overcrowded areas which deny them access to essential services like clean water, quality education and support for the disabled. This makes them feel

unable to break the cycle of poverty. These people, classified as the urban poor, consistently and always deal with chronic and acute stressors like: overcrowding, violence and noise. The last type of poverty, according to Jensen is rural poverty. The affected are families who live in small urban centres with a population of below 50,000 people. Families in this category have limited access to services such as disability support and decent education.

Poverty and poor socioeconomic status in childhood have long been related with substance misuse, crime, and delinquency (Galloway & Skardhamar, 2010). Youth from low-income homes are more prone to participate in delinquent behavior than their peers from higher-income families (Seriasle 2014). Children from low socio-economic families experience a sense of deprivation in their lives; they have restricted access to many resources (Banovcinova, et al, 2014). These children yearn for money or other enjoyable goods that they cannot afford. They, like their counterparts from affluent homes, require money to fill up their cell phone credit, purchase smokes, visit computer cafes, or socialize with their peers. The inability to get the means to live like their peers makes them feel like failures, so they resort to illegitimate means in order to fit in (Shong, et al., 2018). In general, poverty has an impact on how a family behaves. Children from chronically impoverished families have more behavioral issues than children from non-poor families (Black & Engle, 2008).

A study conducted by Alpttani (2015) in Malaysia found out that many variables like movement to urban centres, cultural shock and the constant change of the family institution influence social problems, but the major indicator of these social problems is the poverty index. The study further found out that juvenile offenders committed crimes because they hailed from large families with four to seven siblings, but which had only minimal monthly income. Other researchers, (Mwangangi, 2019, and Cuentas, 2018) affirm that poverty and a general lack of financial resources in disadvantaged communities creates an on-going cycle of poverty and crime as the youth use illegal means to acquire money for survival. According to Shong et al. (2018), economic difficulty frequently results in spiritual, emotional, and material deprivation, all of which can lead to antisocial behavior in children. Similarly, a study by Rekker, Pardini and Meeus (2015) among youths from different SES families reported that youth are more likely to offend when their parent's socioeconomic status is low than when it is high. UNICEF, (2010) also states that the causes for the occurrence of delinquent behaviour among the youth are: the difficult economic situations in families, the high unemployment rate and migrations from villages to towns with a hope of finding better occupations which never happens.

According to Shong et al. (2019), one of the reasons why some young people turn to crime to get what they need is a lack of financial resources. Children don't understand why

their parents cannot provide for their needs. Kaur, Saini and Grewal (2021) state that many factors including family involvement and family climate do impact adolescent academic and social behavior as effectively as other parents. This attitude strains the parent-child relationship sending some of the children into antisocial behaviour. Compassion International, (2019). Children from low-income families are more likely to have academic disciplinary difficulties in elementary and middle school, as well as delinquency in adolescence. Poverty forces youth to dwell in poor socioeconomic communities with little resources such as work chances, financial assistance, mental health support services, medical services, educational services, and so on. Such youths who lack essential life support systems are likely to go down a path of crime. According to Ashley Crossman (2021), kids growing up in poverty may lack the legal methods to obtain desired social and economic goals, leading them to engage in criminal activity to meet those demands. According to Anderson (2014), poor pupils live in disadvantaged neighborhoods where schools receive less financing and parents have fewer means to invest in their children's education. Such students frequently exhibit persistent tardiness, a lack of enthusiasm, and improper behavior (Jensen, 2009). An adolescent who grows up in a family that lacks both social and economic resources stands the risk of suffering both school and work related problems, social exclusion and poor health problems (Piotrowska, Stride, Sroft & Rowe, 2014).

This kind of situation is not very different even in Kenya. Parents who are endowed with sufficient financial resources manage to take their children to high cost schools that are often more government funded and have more academic facilities than small community schools. Those that find themselves in poor community schools don't do as well in their school career as those in high class schools. Tremblay and Vitaro, (2012) state that inadequacy of necessary resources for achieving social expectations frustrates teens and hinders them from developing positive social relationships with their peers. Such youths can also experience anxiety, depressive symptoms, be aggressive, or vandalize property, (Barker, 2012). They can also display acting out behaviours, impatience, impulsivity, inappropriate emotional responses and less empathy for others' misfortunes. Jensen (2009) underscores this by stating that people from low-income families suffer stress brought about and indicated by living in: overcrowded homes, substandard housing, unsafe neighbourhoods, domestic violence, financial strain and material deprivation, to name but a few. Jensen, (2009) further states that over half of these poverty-stricken children come from families which experience evictions and utility disconnections frequently and which lack even a cooking stove.

Wright (2011) says that poverty limits parents' purchasing power, making them unable to invest in materials that are important to a child's positive development. The

effects of poverty make parents not to respond appropriately, and warmly to their children’s needs, and unable to provide a safe and secure living environment for them. Shong et al. (2018) discovered in their study that when poor children who perform poorly in school get together, there is a high likelihood that they will resort to some form of criminal activity such as burglary, theft, or robbery in order to obtain money to buy the things that their parents cannot afford to buy for them. Poverty also causes parents to give harsh punishments to their children. The result is that children retaliate by engaging in antisocial behaviour. Trondheim, (2012) reports a case of a young Ghanaian offender who confessed that as a young boy he lived with his father who was a labourer on other people’s farms and his mother who brewed and sold liquor. The victim reported suffering embarrassment and humiliation when he had to wear torn clothes amongst peers who wore new clothes in the Christmas season. He ended up running away from home and started engaging in deviant behaviour because of embarrassment due to poverty. Nisar, Ullah, Ali & allam, (2015) conducted a study on the effect of the family, the peer group and family socio-economic status on adolescent delinquency found that most delinquents in the age group of 15-18 years came from low income families and they were prone to friends of bad association.

Ngale (2009), reports that many Juvenile delinquents in Africa come from the lowest socio-economic stratum of society. Children from such homes normally lack consistent and adequate supply of basic needs like: access to health services, books, school fees, clothing, food, standard housing and even parental guidance. Many poor families in urban centres live in overcrowded homes for lack of adequate finances to afford a big enough home. Some fathers from such backgrounds stay away from home for long hours deliberately because they are embarrassed by their inability to provide enough resources. Poverty can result in significant financial constraints, family stress and suffering, strained parent-child interactions, family conflict, parental divorce, school failure, and affiliation with undesirable people (Kalil & Wightman, 2011).

Studies conducted in Kenya show the same trend; According to Kimani (2010), destitution, bad living conditions, insufficient education, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, and a lack of leisure-time activities are all elements that marginalize young people, making them prone to exploitation and criminal behavior. Ndigiri (2015), states that a majority of African youths are unemployed and they live in abject poverty, a factor which makes the young people to get involved in youth gangs and other predatory activities. The legacy of extreme poverty combined with entrenched corruption, in Kenya, has pushed many Kenyan children to commit delinquent acts as a means of survival (Sitati, 2008). Another researcher, (Rwengo 2017) agrees with the others by pointing out that poor family backgrounds influence children to run away from home and get involved in delinquency and

violence. Yet another scholar, (Ndaita 2016), states that children from poor and dysfunctional families engage in delinquent behaviour which could develop into crime.

Kabiru et al., (2014), conducted a study in Korogocho and Viwandani slum settlements in Nairobi and they too reported that adolescents who live and grow up in poverty, poor housing conditions, persistent exposure to neighbourhood crime and violence are highly likely to be pulled into delinquency by the adverse life events.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to establish the differences in juvenile delinquency according to perceived social class among secondary school students in Kisii county, Kenya.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was descriptive survey research with mixed methodologies. Mixed research methods were used because both qualitative and quantitative data was generated from the questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussion questions which were used. Descriptive survey design was appropriate because the phenomena of the study were just described and reported as they were found without any interventions. According to Osbaldesto (2021), qualitative research involves collecting rich, detailed, and sometimes emotionally driven data based on the personal views of the respondents.

IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND RESPONDENTS’ FAMILY SOCIAL CLASS

In objective five the researcher was to establish if there was any relationship between respondents’ perceived family social class and juvenile delinquency. Respondents were asked to classify their families or lifestyles as either low, middle or upper class. Their self-reported perceptions are shown on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents on their Perceived Family Social Class

	Frequency	Percent
Low class	83	13.6
Middle class	502	82.3
Upper class	25	4.1
Total	610	100.0

From table 1, 83 (13.6%), 502 (82.3%) and 25 (4.1%) of the respondents considered themselves to be from low, middle and upper classes respectively. This shows that a majority of the respondents (82.3%) considered themselves of middle class, followed by those that classified themselves as coming from low class (13.6%) and a mere 4.1% considered themselves of upper class. The researcher compared the

group's levels of delinquency to ascertain if they were significantly different using one- way analysis of variance

ANOVA). Table 2 below shows the results.

Table 2: One Way Anova for Differences in Delinquency According to Social Class

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.707	2	.853	3.822	.022
Within Groups	134.209	601	.223		
Total	135.916	603			

Table 2 above shows that there is a significant difference between the mean scores in delinquency according to social status. This implies that levels of delinquency were not the same among the perceived self-reported respondents' social class.

A post-Hoc analysis was done to find the groups that were showing significant differences. The results are reported below in Table 3.

Table 3: Post Hoc Results of the Differences in Delinquency According to Social Class.

(I)	(J)	Mean differences	Std error	Sig
Low class	Middle class	-.05147	.05604	.359
	Upper class	-.29581*	.10781	.006
Middle class	Low class	.05147	.05604	.359
	Upper class	-.24434*	.09686	.012
Upper class	Low class	.29581*	.10781	.006
	Middle class	.24434*	.09686	.012

From Table 3 the results revealed that there is a significant difference in delinquency between low class and upper class (p-value =0.006), and no significant difference between low class and middle class (p-value=0.359). Surprisingly, the positive differences between upper and both the low and middle class that are significant indicate that those who perceive themselves as coming from upper class are more likely to be involved in delinquency than those in lower classes. The findings are not surprising because this study already found a positive relationship between much exposure to media content and juvenile delinquency; it is upper class children who have access to and considerable time to spend on digital gadgets. Youth from rich homes have more access to digital gadgets than those from poor homes. The reason here is that upper class parents can afford to buy smart phones or laptops for their children; they can also install TV sets, complete with a wifi connection, in their homes. During the day, when such parents are away at work, or even when they are present, the children freely use the internet to watch any content of their choice where they copy anti-social behavior. The principal from school C agreed with this assertion; he said that many young people tend to imitate the behavior of their favourite media characters. Poor parents, on the other hand cannot afford these 'luxuries' which inability ends up being a blessing in disguise to their children., According to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children from the upper class can learn delinquent acts from what they watch on the digital gadgets available to them. In addition, youth from rich homes have access to much money which they can easily use on frowned upon activities, besides the fact that they can also bow to peer pressure. Parents also agreed with these facts, but added that there are several factors which influence

delinquency in all social classes, including children from the low class. The findings, however, contrast the assertion by Ashley and Crossman (2021) that it is children from poor families who are likely to engage in delinquency because they lack legitimate means of acquiring desired necessities so they engage in crime in order to satisfy their needs.

The results from Table 3 revealed that a majority of the respondents 468 (76.7%) stayed with their two biological parents. This was followed by 112 (18.4%) who reported staying with their single mothers. This makes a total of 95.1% staying with their biological parents (either both parents or a single one).

V. SUMMARY

The objective of the study was to find the difference between juvenile delinquency and perceived social class. It was found out that there was a significant difference in levels of delinquency among the perceived self-reported social classes.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there is a difference between juvenile delinquency and social class.

RECOMMENDATION

Finally, the study recommended that children from different social classes should be counselled adequately so as to deter juvenile delinquency cases.

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