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# Delinquency in Urban Kenya Secondary Schools: Implications for Parenting

Dr Scolastica Kariuki-Githinji

*Department of Education, Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya*

**Abstract:-** Adolescents' delinquency is on the rise in Kenya, yet most of the studies in Kenya have focused on status finding than alleviating the problem among adolescents. This paper is a presentation of the findings on prevalence of adolescents' delinquency in urban Kenya secondary schools and the implications for parenting. A study was carried out to determine the links between parental behaviors and adolescents' delinquency with a view to mitigating the parental behaviors associated with teenagers' anti-social. The research was informed by Baumrind Parenting models theory, Social Control theory and Ego identity versus Role Confusion theory. The study participants comprised 219 female and 191 male students selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The researcher employed self-designed questionnaire and a self-report behavior checklist to gather data which measured adolescents' perceptions of parents' behaviors and their delinquent behaviors. A correlational survey design was employed. Parental conflicts significantly positively linked to adolescent non-illegal and generalized delinquency, while parental increased alcohol use positively related to non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behaviors at  $p < .01$  (two tailed test). Parenting training, adolescents counselling and behavior surveillance in schools were recommended.

**Key Words:** Adolescence, Delinquency, Parenting, parenting behaviors

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The need to explore adolescents' delinquency emerges from numerous reports among them Gachara and Wasanga (2011), the upsurge in youth delinquency has also been noted by (UNDP, 2017; Munyo, 2013). which showed rising levels of behaviors such as truancy, defying authority, aggressive acts, theft, vandalism, arson, truancy. A study by UN Habitat on Youth and Crime in Nairobi present revealed that that youth constitute majority of persons arrest for crime related to theft, assault, drug possession, mugging and manslaughter using guns, pangas and knives (UN Habitat, 2011).

The Juvenile Justice Geography, Policy, Practice & statistics (JJGPS, 2016) showed that a wide range of non-criminal behaviors by adolescents are grouped as status offences, they include truancy, underage consumption of alcohol and tobacco. In view of the JJGPS, report, many agencies other than juvenile courts are responsible in responding to status offences and states differ in label and behaviors. The JJGPS indicated that discourse on the most appropriate approaches in responding to problem behaviors among the youth is still on. Furthermore, the report indicates that researchers associate the

youth who commit status offences with either legislature suggesting a child welfare orientation on one end and a public safety approach on the other. The report suggests that discourse on appropriate approaches to responding to youths who violate social norms could be one way of preventing progression of adolescents to violation of criminal law.

As reported by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2014) there is an overlap between child welfare and Juvenile justice system. The report in explaining links between family and delinquency notes that children welfare systems fail at home first and in turn the minors break the law. The OJJDP (2014) report explicitly stated that juvenile systems must react to the law violating behaviors of the youth in a way that both protects the community, holds the youth accountable, while at the same time enhances youth productivity and responsibility. It would imply that if care givers at home, mainly parents nurtured children effectively, there would be less involvement in delinquency.

Minors who break social laws are referred to as status offenders because through the act is criminal the perpetrators are minors (Authur & Waugh, 2008). The fact that they are children, in this case below age of 18 as per Kenya law, the children need care and protection. For example, in the state of Florida truancy is considered non-illegal, yet the law holds parents responsible for failing to take their children to school. However, Authur and Waugh (2008) aver that in 2006, 4,717 youths were held in Juvenile residential placement in the United States for status offences (non-illegal delinquency).

According to OJJDP (2001) report reveals that historically, status offences such as school truancy or other anti-social behavior cases were heard in civil courts and not criminal courts. The report further reveals that minors were considered too young to be held responsible for criminal behavior and the juvenile law system was set up to handle these offenders with the intent to rehabilitate but not to punish.

Research and best practices indicate that delinquent children need help, support and protection since detaining them exacerbates their problem behaviors. Siegel and Welch (2009) described children who violate social laws not as criminals although their acts could be illegal; they are considered to be in need of supervision, support and control by their parents, guardians and teachers. Various institutions are in charge of persons who commit crime in Kenya, they include the National Police Service, Judiciary, and Office of the Director

of Public Prosecution, Prisons department and Probation and Aftercare Services (UNDP, 2017). At school level when adolescents commit crime, they first fall in the hands of teachers and for most of the time the matters do not fall in the hands of the police in Kenya. So, if the matters are not checked at school level such offenders are likely to get in full criminality. As such, parents' behavior that induce children into anti-social behaviors either through failure to provide supervision, support, control or by modeling inappropriate behaviors would be considered as putting their children at risk for delinquency. It can thus be argued that parents who involve in antisocial behaviors are likely to make their children vulnerable to multiple developmental risks and to a trajectory of crime.

A survey by African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect, (ANPPCAN, 2002) and Kariuki(2014) noted that family substance abuse is related to neglect and child abuse by parents. Many researchers have pointed out that parents are the key socialization agents for their children and so the adolescents' problem behaviors tend to be founded in the family (Muindi & Koro, 2008, & Kithinji & Kithinji, 2005). This suggests that part of meaningful intervention on children's delinquency is founded in parenting and the process should be entrenched in the law.

A lot of behavior problems occurs among children in the school going age and more so in adolescence. Siegel and Welch (2009) asserted that children involve in both criminal and non-criminal delinquent behaviors. The criminal behaviors the teenagers engage in include illegal behaviors such as violence, stealing, and drug abuse as well as status offences (non-illegal) behaviors such as disobedience to school rules and truancy (Kariuki, 2014). The status offenses are those that are deemed to be problematic to the community for example, truancy and noncompliance, while behaviors such as violence and use of drugs or trafficking are regarded as criminal at any age (Lerner, Jacobs, & Wertlieb, 2002). In (Eke, 2004) it was also noted that in Nigeria adolescents engage in criminal and status offences. The delinquent behaviors include stealing, arson, rape, drug offences, murder, and burglary, pick pocketing and armed robbery. Eke (2004) termed the status offences as the non-illegal offences the children and adolescents engage in include running away from home and truancy. Okorodudu and Omoni (2005) have also observed that some adolescents exhibit vandalism, destruction of property and violence against the larger society.

In their study, Aloka and Bujuwoye(2013) noted that problem behaviors are on the rise, while Ndeti (2008) observed adolescents' substance abuse is common in secondary schools. The commonly abused substances include beer, wine, spirits and cigarettes. More recently, The Daily Nation Friday (August 7, 2015) recorded a case whereby students who had closed school hired a Nairobi bound minibus to travel in. The Minibus was intercepted by police after the public reported the suspicious behavior of the students who were playing loud

music and were found smoking bhang. The students were reported to be from several schools near Karatina such as Kibirigwi Girls Secondary School, Mukurwe-ini Boys Secondary School, Kaheti Boys Secondary School, and Kanyama School. The Secondary School students and others from Kirinyaga County conspired to hire a Nairobi bus to take them to the city.

In tracing the trajectory of delinquency, Loeber and Farrington (2001) identified three developmental pathways to delinquency. In view of Loeber and Farrington children begin by first becoming stubborn prior age 12 and then proceed to defiance and avoidance of authority and at adolescence tend to become minor lying, property damage and eventually some serious delinquency while engage in serious delinquency which eventually yield to overt delinquency that includes aggression and violence.

The Ministry of Education, Kenya (2012) recognizes that it has a state duty to provide mentorship, mold and nurture children through education, however it has inadequate resources and structure to deal with mentorship, guidance, counselling and behavior shaping). As such, the Ministry cannot offer adequate support in schools for children at risk or already involved in delinquency. Globally, children behavior problems help systems have not found uniform Child justice practices, nevertheless there seems to be consensus that parents have a role to play in providing care and nurturance (Authur & Waugh (2008). Research approaches to solving delinquency problems in Kenya such as that by Otieno and Ofulla (2009) in Kisumu and Muola, Ndung'u and Ngesa (2009) in Nakuru have been mainly descriptive surveys with no focus on parenting in the light of providing solutions to the problem.

In respect to parenting and delinquency, the Children Act (Cap. 586), Laws of Kenya PART III, spells out parents' responsibility to their children. The parental responsibilities refer to the duties, rights, powers and authority, which by law the care giver has over the child. According to the law, part of the parents' responsibility is maintenance of the child and provision of adequate diet, shelter, clothing, medical care and education as well as guidance. Having established that the parental role is significant in shaping children's behaviors, the researcher sought to investigate the relationship between parents' behaviors and adolescents' delinquency with a view to mitigate parents' behaviors to alleviate delinquency among adolescents. Two key objectives of the research in relation to this paper were, first to examine if there is a relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental conflicts and their involvement in non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behaviors, and second was to determine if there is a relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental alcohol use and their involvement in non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behavior.

To achieve the objectives first it was assumed that the primary caregiver to the adolescent was either the biological parent or

any other person that played the nurturing role. As such the key caregivers (mother, father or both) were considered to be performing the parenting role and are thus the parents. The second, assumption was that adolescents' perceptions were based on their interpretation of their experiences with their parents' behaviors. The third and final assumption was that the adolescents' responses were true and honest answers that revealed parental behavior and their involvement in non-illegal and minor-illegal delinquent behaviors.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational survey design. The design allows the researcher to describe different events, experiences or behaviors and look for links between them (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Jeanne, 2011). However, the design does not enable the researchers to determine causality. Such a design is useful when the objective is to find out the relationships between variables without seeking to prove causation (Mugenda, 2008; Robson, 2002). The design was appropriate because the researcher needed to relate adolescents' perceptions of parental behaviors to their delinquent behaviors.

In EMIS (2003-2007) report Nairobi had a public secondary school enrolment of 26,755 boys and 22,973 girls (49,728 adolescents). KNEC's (2010) list of public secondary schools indicated that Nairobi had 60 schools which were registered for KCSE exam by the year 2010. Gay (1992) considered 10% of the population an adequate representative sample of study. In the study the original sample comprised of 460 participants who were selected using stratified and simple random sampling methods. However, the final sampled participants who successfully completed the survey were 219 females and 191 male students aged 13-19. Purposive sampling was used to select Nairobi as locale of study since it is the capital city of Kenya. The city attracts people from other counties for career and business opportunities. Nairobi County has a population that comprises varied cultures and social economic status. The rapid social, economic and political growth of its population makes it representative of a global culture. Gategi's (2008) crime survey revealed that Nairobi County was rated as having the highest incidence of crime among other Counties. The demographic traits and crime rates of Nairobi County made the city a suitable choice for the study.

Kariuki (2014) designed self-report measures and a behaviour check list which were used to collect data in Nairobi County Secondary school. The tools were in 5- Point Likert scale. Adolescents' self-report measures have been found to be reliable and thus have been used in previous studies such as Arim, Marshall, Shapka (2009) to study of parental control. Also, Saskia Wijsbroek, William, Hale III, Quinten, Raaijmakers, and Wim (2011) used the method to study perceived parental behavioral, psychological control and adolescents' self-reported anxiety disorders symptoms. The

tool's reliability was  $\alpha = 0.80$  and validity was ascertained by the experts in Educational psychology Kenyatta University.

The independent variables of study were adolescents' perceptions of parents' behaviors, these included supportiveness, monitoring of the teenagers' conducts, punitive disciplining, conflicts and alcohol use, while the dependent variables comprised adolescents' delinquency (non illegal; -noncompliance in school, truancy) and illegal delinquency (violence, substance abuse and stealing). Quantitative data analysis approaches were employed; they included descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (Pearson product moment coefficient ( $r$ ) and Spearman's Correlation Coefficient ( $r_s$ ). Mean scores were computed on involvement both non illegal and illegal delinquency as well as the mean scores on parental conflicts and alcohol use and correlation was computed using Pearson correlation coefficient for conflicts. Correlation for parental alcohol use and adolescents' delinquency were computed using on ordinal scores and therefore Spearman correlation coefficient was employed.

In respect to this paper, two null hypotheses of the study are presented, they were tested for statistical significance at  $\alpha$  less than or equal to .05 and .01

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental conflicts and their involvement in non-illegal and illegal delinquent behaviors.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental alcohol use and adolescents' involvement in non-illegal and illegal delinquent behaviors

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants comprised 53.4% females and 46.6% male adolescents. Majority of the adolescents (62%) aged 15-16 years. Some 20.1% of the adolescents were females and 15.9% were males in single gender boarding schools. Day school adolescents comprised 22% male and 13.2% female students. In addition, the researcher examined the age at which adolescents first involved themselves in delinquent behaviors. It was found out that 29.3%, involved in noncompliance, 19.3% in truancy and 16.3% involved violent acts first by age 10-12. Moreover, 4.4% begun substance abuse while 5.1% began stealing at the age of 13-15 years.

The findings indicated that the mode onset age for noncompliant, truancy and violent behaviors is age 10-12 while that of substance abuse is age 13-15. The adolescents also indicated their current age and their level of involvement in delinquent behaviors as shown in Table 3; these were scored at a maximum of 3 points- for highest involvement. The results showed that the peak age for involvement in non-illegal delinquency was 15 to 16 with a mean involvement of 1.91, while the peak age of involvement in minor illegal delinquency was 13-14 with a mean involvement of 1.5411. It was noted that the involvement in illegal delinquency reduces with age. It was noted that adolescents involved more in status offences (non-illegal) than in minor- Illegal delinquency.

*Adolescents’ Perceptions of Parental Conflicts and Their Involvement in Delinquent Behaviors*

The researcher also examined the relationship between adolescents’ perceptions of parental conflicts and their involvement in non-illegal and minor illegal delinquent

behaviors. The findings are presented and discussed in this section. As shown in Table 1 some, 410 respondents indicated their perceptions of parental involvement in conflicts. The results show that the highest percentage of the adolescents who never got involved in non-illegal (15.8%) delinquent behaviors perceived that their parents always had conflicts.

Table 1: Perceived Parental Conflicts and Adolescents’ Delinquent Behaviors

Parental Conflicts	Non- Illegal				Illegal			
	Not involved	Occasionally	Persistently	Total	Not involved	Occasionally	Persistently	
Rarely	17	178	24	219	107	107	0	219
	7.8%	81.3%	1.0%	100%	48.9%	48.9%	.0%	100%
Often	6	99	1.6%	134	74	74	4	134
	4.5%	73.9%	21.6%	100%	55.2%	55.2%	3.0%	100%
Always	9	33	15	57	21	21	0	57
	15.8%	57.9%	26.3%	100%	36.8%	36.8%	.0%	100%
Total	32	10	68	410	02	202	4	410
	7.8%	75.6%	16.6%	100%	49.3%	49.3%	1.0%	100%

The highest percentage of those who never got involved in minor-illegal delinquent behaviors (55.2%) perceived that their parents often had conflicts. The lowest percentage of the adolescents who were never involved in non-illegal delinquent behaviors (4.5%) perceived that their parents often had conflicts. On the other hand, adolescents who perceived that their parents always had conflicts comprised the highest percentage of those who got involved in minor-illegal delinquent behaviors (36.8%).

Furthermore, the highest percentage of the adolescent who got involved in occasional non-illegal (81.3%) delinquent behaviors perceived that their parents rarely got involved in conflicts. The lowest percentages (57.9%) of those who were engaged in occasional non- illegal delinquent behaviors perceived that their parents always had conflicts. In addition, the highest percentage of the adolescents who got involved in persistent non-illegal (26.3%) delinquent behavior perceived that their parents always had conflicts. The lowest percentage (11%) of those who persistently got involved in non-illegal

delinquent behaviors perceived that their parents rarely got involved in conflicts.

Further, the adolescents who perceived that their parents often had conflicts comprised the highest percentage (55.2%) of those who engaged in occasional minor-illegal behaviors. Those who perceived that their parents had conflicts often comprised the lowest percentage (36.8%) of adolescents who were engaged in occasional minor-illegal behaviors. Finally, the highest percentage (3%) of the adolescents who were involved in persistent illegal behaviors comprised those who perceived that their parents often had conflicts.

*Adolescents’ Perceptions of Parental Alcohol Use and Their Involvement in Delinquent Behaviors*

In this section, the researcher has presented the results on adolescents’ perceptions of parental alcohol use and their involvement in non-illegal and minor illegal delinquent behaviors as shown in Table 2,

Table 2: Perceived Parental Alcohol Use and Adolescents’ Delinquent Behaviors

Parental alcohol use	Never	Adolescents’ involvement in Delinquent Behaviors						
		Occasional	Persistent	Total	Never	Occasional	Persistent	Total
No Response	1	1	3	5	2	2	1	5
	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100%	40.0%	40.0%	20%	100%
Frequent	20	144	28	192	108	82	2	192
	10.4%	75.0%	14.6%	100%	56.3%	42.7%	1.0%	100%
Rare	5	139	25	169	75	94	0	169
	3.0%	81.8%	15.2%	100%	44.2%	55.8%	0%	100%
Never	6	21	12	44	19	24	1	44
	18.8%	58.1%	27.9%	100%	44.2%	53.5%	2.3%	100%
Total	32	310	68	410	204	202	4	410
	7.8%	75.6%	16.6%	100%	49.8%	49.3%	1.0%	100%

Some 405 respondents indicated their perceptions of parental alcohol use. The results showed that adolescents who perceived their parents as never using alcohol (18.8%) comprised the highest percentage of those who never got involved in delinquent behaviors. The adolescents who perceived their parents as rarely using alcohol comprised the lowest percentage (3.0%) of adolescents who never got engaged in delinquent behaviors. The adolescents who perceived rare alcohol use comprised the highest percentage of those who involved in occasional non-illegal (81.8%) and minor-illegal (55.8%) delinquent behaviors. Further the adolescents who never perceived alcohol use comprised the lowest percentage (58.1%) of those who got involved in occasional non-illegal delinquent behaviors. Those who perceived frequent use of alcohol comprised the lowest percentages (42.7%) of the adolescents who got involved in occasional minor-illegal behaviors.

On the other hand, adolescents who never perceived use of alcohol comprised the highest percentage of those who got involved in persistent non-illegal (27.9%) and persistent minor-illegal (2.3%) delinquent behaviors. Finally, the adolescents who perceived rare use of alcohol comprised the lowest percentage of those who got involved in persistent

non-illegal delinquent behaviors (14.6%). Adolescents whose parents rarely used alcohol, never got involved in persistent minor- illegal delinquent behaviors.

*Correlates between Parental Antisocial Behaviors (Conflicts and Alcohol Use) and Adolescents' Delinquency*

Correlates between parental antisocial behavior (conflicts and alcohol use) and adolescents' involvement in non-illegal and minor illegal delinquency and generalized delinquency were computed as shown in Table 3. The findings showed that parental conflicts (verbal and Physical violence) and non-illegal delinquent behaviors had positive statistically significantly correlation with non-illegal delinquency at  $r (.157^{**}) = .001, p < .05$  and generalized delinquency at  $r (.124) = .012, p > .05$ . However, there was no statistically significant correlation between perceived parental conflicts and minor-illegal delinquency at  $r (.049) = .325, p > .05$ .

Additionally, the findings revealed that parental alcohol use had a positive, statistically significantly correlation with non-illegal delinquent behaviors at  $r (.147^{**}) = .003, p < .01$ , minor-illegal delinquent behaviors at  $r (.223^{**}) = .000, p < .01$  and generalized delinquency at  $r (.196^{**}) = .000, p < .01$ .

Table 3: Correlation between Perceived Parental Antisocial Behaviors and Adolescents' Delinquent Behaviors

		Non- illegal	Minor-illegal	Mean Generalized Delinquency
Parental Conflicts	Pearson Correlation	.152*	.076	.124*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.122	.012
	N	410	410	410
Spearman's rho				
Parental Alcohol use	Sig. (2-tailed)	.147**	.223**	.196**
	N	.003	.000	.000
	N	410	410	410

\*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The alternative hypothesis ( $H_{a1}$ ) was adopted at  $p < .05$  for parental conflicts and adolescents' non-illegal and generalized delinquency. Moreover, the null hypothesis ( $H_{a2}$ ) was adopted for parental alcohol use at  $p < .01$  and adolescents' involvement in non- illegal and minor illegal delinquent behaviors and generalized delinquency.

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following conclusions were drawn-

- 1) Many adolescents begin involvement their involvement in delinquency at puberty stage.
- 2) The status offences usually precede the illegal behaviors.
- 3) Parental conflicts and violence has influences adolescents' involvement in non-illegal delinquency and generalized delinquency.

- 4) Parental alcohol abuse influences adolescents' involvement in non-illegal, minor-illegal and generalized delinquent behaviors.

Drawing from the conclusions, children violate social laws and are influenced by to some extent by parental antisocial behaviors (parental conflicts and alcohol abuse.). Parents should be held culpable of their children's antisocial behaviors and be investigated and helped to develop desirable behaviors for them to socialize their own children.

The findings are consistent with Cuning and Merrilees (2008) who found that parental conflicts influence adolescents' substance abuse and violence. So, there is positive association between perceptions of parental conflicts and adolescents' involvement in delinquent behaviors a view that is also shared by Grekin, Brennam and Hammen (2005). Equally, the positive correlation of parental alcohol

use and delinquency concurs with Dogan, Conger, Kim, & Mysyn (2007). Shannon, Rand, Kee, & Katherine D, (2007) results indicate adolescents' perceptions of parental activities explain the teenagers' antisocial behavior. Parents' negative behavior models are likely to expose their children overtly or covertly to similar conducts and other antisocial behaviors. The parents may also feel they have no authority to discourage antisocial behavior. Besides, some adolescents may perceive their parents' antisocial behavior as rewarding and are likely to adopt the same.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *School Related Interventions*

Children spend most of their time in school and thus they best suited to shape children's, behaviors other than waiting until the law catches up with the children and begin rehabilitating then often outside the normal children growth and development settings. In view of this, the following is recommended-

- i. Parenting psychosocial education in schools, churches and community-based organizations on how inter-parental conflicts (verbal and physical violence) and alcohol abuse influence adolescents' involvement in noncompliance in school is needed.
- ii. Adolescents who are involved in delinquent behaviors need to be committed for counselling and life skills training. They should not be expelled from school since the adolescents do not necessarily translate to criminal offenders.
- iii. There is need for a multi-faceted approach to adolescents' juvenile delinquency behavior management in schools.
  - a. The approaches should include Ministry of Education deploying professional counselors and psychologists who can embark in adolescent's behavior shaping and guidance of parents.
  - b. The Justice system should develop holistic measures for dealing with juvenile delinquency that draws from expert in child development, counselors, psychologists and juvenile psychologist and investigation officers.
  - c. Finally, for all children who behave in delinquent ways, part of the reform program should involve parenting programs for the parents.

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