

The proliferation of Criminal Gangs in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

The proliferation of criminal gangs has become a menace to people residing in urban areas, more so to the personal security of the residents. A study that sought to identify the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs conducted in Nairobi City County shows that in recent years, the number of criminal gangs and gang members has been on the rise, especially in urban areas. The study was prompted by the dynamic nature of the criminal gangs and more so the security challenges created by these gangs to Nairobi city county residents which is likely to negatively impact the city's profile. Social disorganisation theory and social bonding theories guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey approach with both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection being applied through the application of questionnaires and personal interviews. Deductive analysis was used to examine key research themes in qualitative data while SPSS and excel were used for the quantitative data. The study established that the high unemployment rate, increased access to drugs and illegal arms in the city, growth of the informal settlement, poor parenting, police corruption and inefficiency, peer pressure, police corruption and inefficiency, inequalities in education and employment, selfish political interests and poverty were some of the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County. The study recommended the prosecution of political patrons, provision of sustainable jobs for the youths, responsible parenting, and provision of civic education from agencies such as the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA), the National police service (NPS) should strive to improve police working conditions and eradication of police corruption and also actualize community policing, improvement of informal settlements through the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development.

Key Words: Proliferation, Criminal gangs, Personal Security, Nairobi City County.

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I. Introduction

A criminal gang can be defined as a group of three or more people, associates or relatives with a common interest or bond and has a defined leadership and internal organisation and who engage in illegal and possibly violent activities either individually or collectively within a community [23]. On the other hand, the proliferation of criminal gangs denotes the growth and spread of criminal gangs and gang activities in traditional and new geographical regions in that there are increased reports of the existence of gangs and gang problems from community members [34]. Globally, countries are striving to combat criminal gangs despite the wide literature and empirical evidence concerning the topic. [11] posits that criminal gangs exist all over the world, both in developed and developing nations and it has become difficult to completely eradicate the gangs. [3] claim that criminal gangs are responsible for robberies, break-ins, muggings, drug abuse, rape among others, crimes that threaten the personal security of city dwellers.

[10] further posits that criminal gangs have been increasing as a result of many opportunities created by globalisation and urbanization through enhanced communication and illegal activities being committed remotely. Gangs thrive in areas with conflict and urbanization increases conflict and enhances insecurity [28]. Conditions of disparities such as poor living standards and unequal distribution of resources created by rapid urbanization results in a conflict where various groups conflict over limited resources [28]. Urbanization mostly leads to the breakage of traditional family bonds and this encourages juvenile delinquency [8]. Urbanization also encourages the development of subcultures that could lead to social problems if twisted towards promoting negative behaviour such as delinquency and crime [32]. In the United States of America, gangs have increased and spread significantly with more than 33,000 gangs being identified and a membership of approximately 1.4 million people [9]. [6], states that this is an increase from the identified gangs which were around 21,500 with an

estimated 731,500 gang members in the United States of America in 2002. Criminal gangs in the United States of America have been accused of using bodily violence, threats and intimidation to thrive [1].

Developing nations are also grappling with the challenge of growth in criminal gangs. According [12], Nigeria has experienced an increase in criminal gangs and their associated violence with an alarming gang-related death of youths. Citizens totalling more than 20,000 are estimated to be victims of between 7,000 and 9,000 young people suspected to be involved in gang activities in Lagos. Approximately 60% of the shootings in Lagos and Onitsha cities in Nigeria are gang-related and an 89% surge in the number of youths below 20 years admitted to hospitals having stab wounds. According to [35], gang violence is prevalent in South Africa's Western Cape with children as young as 14 years being arrested on gang-related murder charges. An 86% increase in gang-related murder charges was experienced in 2013 with 12% of the 2,580 homicides being gang-related.

Like other developing nations, Kenya is struggling with the increase in criminal gangs, more so in an urban setting. According to the [24], 46 criminal gangs were profiled. The number of gangs increased to 326 in 2017 reflecting a very high percentage of the increase [21]. [2] identified 42 brothers' criminal gangs in Kisumu, Kakamega and Bungoma. In Mombasa, Wakali Kwanza, Wakali Wao and Wajukuuwabibi were prevalent. In Nairobi, Yakuza, Superpower, Kayole boys, Smarter and Gaza were among some of the gangs identified to be operating in Nairobi and its suburbs. As compared to other counties, Nairobi City County had the highest number of gangs identified with 52 gangs and closely followed by Mombasa County with 43 [21].

The proliferation of criminal gangs within Nairobi City is a major issue that is likely to affect the capital's profile as well as the personal security of the residents. The study therefore reveals the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi city County. The findings underline the need for more proactive government involvement and intervention to curb the menace associated with the criminal gangs. They underline the need for greater focus into the issue considering the role of politicians and law enforcement officers in the growth of criminal gangs in Nairobi City.

II. Literature Review: Proliferation of Criminal Gangs

Informal settlements where criminal gangs thrive have mushroomed as a result of rapid urbanization without proper formalized urban plans. [38], posit that failure to integrate the entire urban population due to the lack of proper planning as a result of rapid urbanization leads to the growth of informal settlements. [37] in a study conducted in Mathare, a popular informal settlement in Nairobi with several criminal gangs portrays the correlation between crime and violence and informal settlements. The study illustrates how the populous informal settlement has contributed to crime as a result of inadequate key resources and amenities. The economic inequality created by the informal settlements has contributed to the growth of criminal gangs as a result of culture dilution, injustices and economic difficulties. These findings have been further supported by [25] who states that deplorable living conditions that characterize informal settlements contribute to crime incidents in informal settlements and eventually the growth and spread of criminal gangs.

According to [5], poverty in Kenya especially in slum areas largely contributes to the proliferation of criminal gangs. Juveniles become breadwinners early in their lives and this encourages some to join gangs. This is supported by [16] in a study conducted on the growth of the Mungiki gang in Kirinyaga County. The study shows how poverty among other socio-economic factors contributes to the growth and spread of criminal gangs. This is also corroborated by [27], in a study conducted in Mombasa County on the influence of poverty on the growth of extremist groups.

The growth and spread of criminal gangs and extremist groups are also attributed to unemployment. According to [29], the lack of employment and reliable sources of income exposes the population to radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups and criminal gangs. [19], further states that lack of sustainable income-generating activities, boredom and unemployment increases the vulnerability of youths in urban areas. Unemployment and boredom expose the young population to drug abuse, negative cultural influences and peer pressure which enhances the likelihood of joining criminal gangs. [19], further explains that unemployment erodes confidence towards the capabilities of the government and this encourages the growth of illegal activities and criminal gangs.

Gang migration encourages the proliferation of criminal gangs. Migrant gang members recruit new local members in areas that didn't have gangs [15]. This was described as the importation model by [33] while conducting a study on Latino street gangs. The importation model is the gang members infusing their established gang into new areas. This enables the gang to spread more and expand its territories. The importation model was also referred to as gang colonization or gang franchising by [17] who also noted that gang migration leads to an increased number of gangs and their members and thus increased gang activities.

The proliferation of criminal gangs has also been attributed to popular culture. Popular culture is a set of practices, objects and beliefs that represents the most shared meaning of social system such as fashion, linguistics and entertainment among others [13]. Gang culture and image in form of popular culture conveyed

through real-life TV series and films have been universally recognized and consumed. In addition, the proliferation of gangs has been associated with societal problems such as social exclusion, drug and substance abuse, and dysfunctional families among others [36]. According to [30], there is a correlation between drug dealing, the growth of crime, the sale of weapons, drug abuse and the success of criminal gangs.

Poor parenting or absentee parents have also contributed to youths joining criminal gangs. The focus of young people shifts from family to peers and school activities when they join a school [26]. Parents, therefore, have a difficult time monitoring their children due to limited time together. This increases the possibility of the youths being influenced by delinquent behaviours such as gang membership. This corroborates a study conducted at Kamiti Youth Corrective and Training Centre by [7] who states that parental absenteeism and single parenthood increase the likelihood of joining criminal gangs and delinquent behaviour.

In Nairobi's informal settlements where criminal gangs are more prevalent, police are viewed as corrupt, incompetent and lacking the capacity to handle cases properly [20]. [20], posits that people always complain that police lack the willingness to help them and they are sometimes asked to facilitate police operations such as fuelling police vehicles to visit crime scenes. Some criminals are also set free under unclear circumstances or due to shoddy investigations and this encourages residents to embrace gangs for security and other social services. In some areas, criminal gangs control the provision of services such as water, electricity and security. This encourages the growth of gang membership due to the funds they collect from the illegal taxes and levies imposed on the residents.

In Kenya, gangs flourish by being offered political patronage and protection from politicians which undermines any response from the government institutions such as law enforcement agencies and the judiciary [31]. [24], also noted that some criminal gangs are sponsored by politicians and receive administrative and political support. This has also been reinforced by [4], who opines that criminal gang activities increase before electioneering periods based on the demands of their services such as intimidating political opponents by selfish politicians to fulfil their interests.

III. Theoretical Frame Work

The study employed two theories in explaining the proliferation of criminal gangs. First, the social disorganization theory provides a theoretical explanation as to why criminal gangs are spreading in urban centres. According to the theory, location matter is a key principle and an individual's social and physical environment influences the behaviour of the individual. An individual's residential location is an important factor in determining a person's involvement in crime unlike other characteristics like race. On the other hand, the social bonding theory assumes that people are likely to engage in illegal activities and thus they need to be controlled. According to the theory, people engage in delinquent behaviours when social constraints over the individual become weak. This theory, therefore, explains the reasons why gangs spread and also provides a framework for strategies to combat gangs.

IV. Research Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive research design and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in gathering both secondary and primary data. According [14], descriptive research design defines opinions, and the current situation and finds out explanations. The design describes individuals or events by describing them in nature and thus it was very crucial in finding out the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs because of the probing questions it uses.

Nairobi City County was selected as the suitable study site because it had the highest number of criminal gangs as compared to other counties [22]. The study involved both male and female adult residents of Nairobi City County who were key in establishing the impacts of the proliferation of criminal gangs on personal security. The study also involved civil societies, police officers and national government administration officers due to their involvement in combating criminal gangs by designing and implementing strategies.

The study had a sample size of 400 participants selected to participate in the study. According to [18], 10% to 30% of the sample size is a good representation in representing the target population. Therefore 30% of the sample size which is 120 respondents was used to draw findings and conclusions in the study. The respondents were 3 police officers, 3 national government and administration officers, 3 respondents from the civil society and 111 local adult residents from Dagoretti, Kasarani, Embakasi, Westlands and Kamukunji sub-counties within Nairobi City County. The local adult residents were recruited using stratified random sampling because it gave each member of the population an equal chance of participating in the study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit police officers, national government and administration officers and respondents from civil society because it allowed the researcher to select the most experienced and knowledgeable respondents.

The data collected was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and excel. Excel was used to analyse and record responses from questionnaires based on the Likert-5 agreement scale whereas SPSS revealed the correlation between key variables by conducting the regression analysis. Qualitative data obtained from the

interviews conducted with national government administration officers, police officers and civil society was analysed by using deductive analysis and presented through illustrated quotes.

V. Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Questionnaire Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha for the reasons for proliferation was 0.838, that of impact on personal security was 0.815 while that of methods used was 0.721. the overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.791.

5.2 Research Question 1: What are the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County?

The table below illustrates the participants' responses in terms of the factors that contribute to the proliferation of criminal gangs.

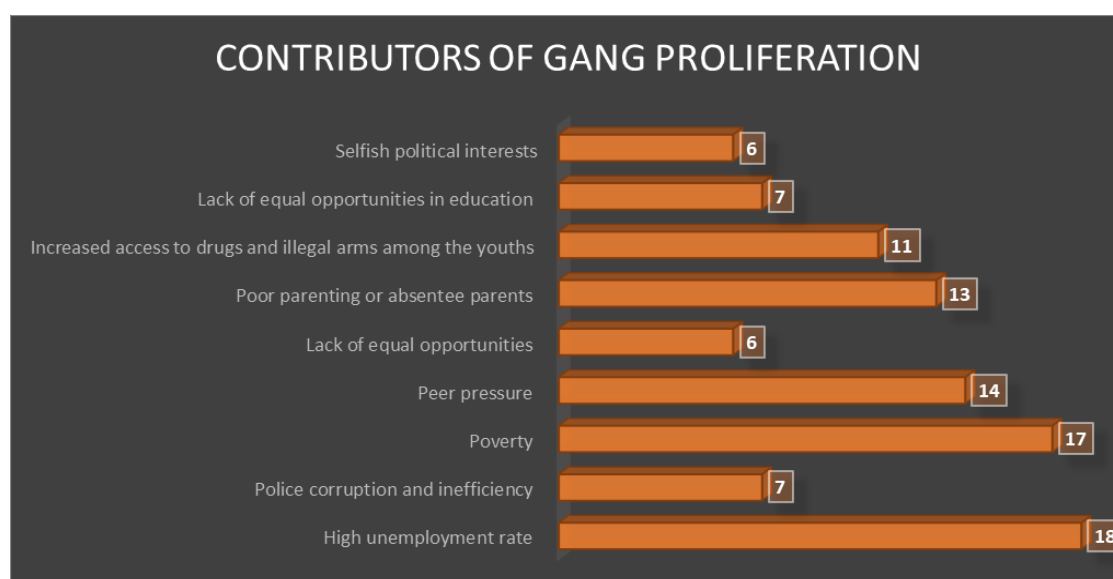
Table 1 What are the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County?

	Questionnaire Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The high unemployment rate in Kenya has contributed to the rise in criminal gangs in urban centres.	55.56%	40.40%	2.02%	2.02%	0.00%
2	The growth of informal settlement areas in urban regions has contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs.	47.47%	43.43%	6.06%	3.03%	0.00%
3	Police corruption and inefficiency in addressing crime have contributed to the growth of criminal gangs in urban areas.	50.51%	39.39%	5.05%	4.04%	1.01%
4	Selfish political interests are a major cause of the growth of criminal gangs in urban centres.	55.56%	40.40%	4.04%	0.00%	0.00%
5	Poverty is a major factor that has contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs in urban areas.	69.70%	30.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
6	The lack of equal opportunities in education and employment has contributed to the growth of criminal gangs in urban regions.	52.53%	44.44%	3.03%	0.00%	0.00%
7	Peer pressure has encouraged youths to join criminal gangs in urban areas.	44.44%	46.46%	6.06%	2.02%	1.01%
8	Poor parenting or absentee parents have pushed the youth to criminal gangs, especially in urban areas	39.39%	38.38%	14.14%	7.07%	1.01%
9	Increased access to drugs and illegal arms among the youths has contributed to the growth of criminal gangs in urban settings.	47.47%	42.42%	10.10%	0.00%	0.00%

(Source: Author, 2022)

The high unemployment rate was cited as a reason for the proliferation of criminal gangs with 95.96% of the study participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Similarly, 90.91% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the growth of informal settlements within urban areas strongly contributes to the proliferation of criminal gangs in urban centres. The inefficiency of the law enforcement agency and police corruption was also cited by 89.90% of the study participants as major reason for the proliferation of criminal gangs. Selfish political interests by political leaders were also cited by 95.96% of the survey participants as a reason for the proliferation of criminal gangs. With 100% of the survey participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing, poverty was cited as a major reason for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County. Further, 96.97% of the survey participants opined that the lack of equal opportunities in education and employment contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs in the city. In addition, other factors cited as the reason for the proliferation of criminal gangs were the growing access to drugs and illegal firearms (89.90%), peer pressure (90.91%) and poor parenting/ parental absenteeism (77.78%). The chart below shows the responses from the participants when they were asked to state the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in the city.

Table 2 Reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in the city



(Source: Author, 2022)

5.3 Interview Responses

5.3.1 What factors do you think have contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs across Nairobi City?

When the interviewees were asked this question, drug abuse by adolescents and young adults was cited. Poverty, corruption by law enforcement agencies and judiciary, unemployment, poor parenting and protection from politicians were all cited as major contributors to the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County.

VI. Findings

The study aimed to identify the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs in Nairobi City County. The threat of poverty and unemployment which creates inequalities in obtaining resources was identified to be one of the major reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs. This is supported by the social disorganization theory which acknowledges the role of inequality in human behaviour and delinquency. This also explains why criminal gangs are more prevalent in informal settlements.

The social bonding/ control theory indicates how weak cultural and social bonds can encourage delinquent behaviour. Peer pressure and popular culture have therefore contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs. Peer pressure in social settings and cultural shock linked to popular culture encourages delinquency and criminal conduct.

The lack of equal opportunities in employment and education was also noted to have contributed to the proliferation of criminal gangs in the city. Unemployment was mostly cited to have contributed to the phenomena. The lack of equal opportunities in education was however disputed by some interviewees who argued that the Kenyan education system offers opportunities to the entire population.

The growth of criminal gangs in urban areas is also caused by police corruption and inefficiency. Corruption within the police helps gang members evade justice and continue with their activities by providing them with protection. The gangs also flourish due to the inefficiency of the police which inhibits their capacity and responsibilities in dispensing justice and responding to crime. This is closely linked to political patronage. Politicians offer security and finance criminal gangs. This support from top politicians undermines the government's efforts to combat the gangs.

Another reason that was identified to cause the growth of criminal gangs in urban areas is poor parenting or absentee parents. Poor parenting as explained theoretically by the social bonding/ control theory explains how absentee or poor parenting contributes to the proliferation of criminal gangs because the bond between the child and the parent is affected and this reduces the ability of the parent to influence the child's behaviour. Poor parenting is also closely related to drug and substance abuse. The increased access to drugs and illegal arms contributes to the proliferation of criminal gangs. Drug trafficking provides funds to the gangs and illegal arms are used to commit crimes by the gangs.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Some of the reasons for the proliferation of criminal gangs identified after the comparative analysis of the interviews, questionnaires and literature evaluated during the study were; poverty and unemployment, police corruption, increased access to drugs and illegal arms, peer pressure/ popular cultural influence, the influence of political leaders and poor parenting.

The study recommended that the government through the ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development should invest in the economy to reduce unemployment as well as create job opportunities for the youth. Initiatives addressing chronic poverty such as eradicating the bureaucracy of accessing youth funds for starting up businesses should be eradicated. The government through its agencies such as the National police service in collaboration with other agencies such as the Office of the director of public Prosecutions should deal with the key financiers of the criminal gangs irrespective of their status and political position in society.

In addressing the corruption and criminal activities by rogue police officers, the National police service commission should expedite the reforms within the police service. The reforms and prosecution of rogue police officers will ensure accountability within the service. The National police service commission should also fully implement the community policing strategy to enhance the voluntary flow of information.

To address the issue of delinquency and drug abuse, civic education from government agencies such as NACADA in collaboration with NGOs is paramount. Such programs can help enhance the sensitization of the youth to address the increasing drug use and also reduce gang membership. Furthermore, civic education can also help create awareness of the impact of parental absenteeism on juvenile delinquency.

The integration of government programs and civil society programs can help enhance the sensitization of the youth to address the increasing drug use and also reduce gang membership. Such programs can help educate young Kenyans on the consequence of joining gangs as well as educate them on some of the genuine income-generating activities and job opportunities available. Furthermore, civic education can also help create awareness of the impact of parental absenteeism on juvenile delinquency. This can help strengthen the family structure and ensure the presence of a strong support system for children, adolescents, and young adults.

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