

Antisocial Attitude as a Correlate of Serious Offending Behavior among Juveniles within Kenyan Borstal Institutions

Waichinga Anne Wambere and Dr. Samuel Mutweleli

Department of Educational Psychology, Kenyatta University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Serious delinquency among juveniles of school going age is a major concern worldwide as demonstrated by the rising rates of juvenile recidivism in many countries. Recidivism among juveniles has been associated with seriousness/gravity of criminality. Several studies have linked it to inadequate preventive and rehabilitation processes and programmes for juvenile delinquents. The issue poses a threat to the realization of access to quality education for every child. In Kenya the challenge of serious juvenile delinquency is a drawback to the milestones achieved in the realization of quality education for all. Therefore, the problem requires strategic intervention in order to safeguard the right to quality education for every child and their holistic well-being. The purpose of the study was to establish the correlation between antisocial attitude and serious juvenile offending behavior. The objectives guiding the research sought to establish the relationship between antisocial attitudes and serious juvenile offending behaviour incarcerated within Kenyan Borstal institutions. The study was guided by the Cognitive Behavior Theory proposed by Beck. Correlational research design was used. The researcher targeted to draw inferences from a male population of 250 serious juvenile offenders at Shimo la Tewa Borstal institution, 26 from female serious juvenile offenders from Kamae Borstal Institution and key informants from both institutions. 49 male juvenile and 26 female juveniles were selected. Simple random sampling was used. Denver Youth Survey and Self Report Delinquency Survey tools were used. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were utilised. The results indicated; a moderate positive significant correlation between antisocial attitudes and serious juvenile offending behaviour ($r = .419, p = .000 \leq 0.05$ level of significance). Subsequently the study recommends a multifaceted approach to safeguarding learners from serious offending behaviour in the education and other child protection sectors.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Law Insider Dictionary (2013-2023), a serious juvenile offender is a youth, eighteen years and below, who has committed an offense that, if committed by an adult, would be considered a felony. It goes further to state that a felony entails a violent offense against a person or property or an offense involving dangerous drugs. Atieno et al., (2019) observed that crime, violence, and disruptive behavior among Juveniles are diverse and range from hazing, defilement, rape, sexual harassment, assault, robbery, murder, intimidation, bullying, gangsterism, vandalism, drug trafficking, stabbing among others.

In convectional practice, education has been known to be a protective factor for youth at risk of delinquency. Machin (2013) demonstrated this in his study that sought to identify the effect of educational attainment on youth crime in the United Kingdom. In the United States, the National Centre for Juvenile Justice and Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention statistics (2010), revealed that the total number of most serious juvenile offenses disposed in court was 1,368,200 out of this 26,300 were robbery cases 39,900 were aggravated assault, 90,100 were burglary, 3,900 were forcible rape, 5,500 were arson cases and 100 were criminal homicide cases. In Africa, data on juvenile delinquency trends is scanty though available research acknowledges that juvenile delinquency is widespread in the continent. In South Africa, World Bank Country Assessment Report (2014) revealed that violence perpetrated by young youths was a problem to reckon with and required strategic and multidisciplinary response. The study report indicated that young people were responsible for 75 percent of murder of children, 83 percent of murders of other youths, and 61 percent of murders of adults. At secondary school level learners were found to be primarily responsible for violence against their peers. The number of juveniles in Kenya incarcerated in 2013 and 2014 were 2570 and 3455

respectively which demonstrated a rise in juvenile offending (Langat et.al, 2021). Shavisa (2015) study in Kenya depicted schools as a protective factor for children at risk of juvenile delinquency. The article further observed that, rates of recidivism among juveniles in Kenya was high for instance from 2013 to 2014, an increase of 76.9% of the number of recidivist offenders was recorded. Therefore, the current study sought to investigate antisocial attitude as a correlate of serious delinquency among Juveniles of school going age. Anti-social attitudes are described as distrust that individuals present to authority figures such as (police, children officers and magistrates) and a perception of the world as an unsafe place coupled with an approval of solutions that include aggression, and identification with outlawed peers (Jha et.al 2020).

Some researchers also associated a person with antisocial attitudes with the following characteristics; ignores right and wrong, lies, takes advantage of others, is insensitive and disrespectful of others, depicts a superiority complex, and demonstrates hostility and irresponsibility (Mayo Clinic, 2023). Palvlovski's (2022) findings in Macedonia echoed the definition above; he established the following personality traits among the male juvenile offenders incarcerated in prison: antisocial attitudes, lack of social skills, inadequate stress management skills, impulsiveness, lack of self-control and poor value system. The researcher investigated the following factors of antisocial attitude namely; tendency to lie, steal, fight, use unkind language and commit a sexual offence as correlates of serious offending behavior and found out that majority of the respondents portrayed the factors outlined above.

Statement of the Problem

The challenge of serious crimes committed by juveniles continues to escalate in Kenya. According to the National Crime Research Centre 51% of the crimes in Kenya are committed by the youth. Studies also indicate that the number of youths dominated criminal gangs is on the rise in the country (NCRC 2012 and NCIC, 2017).

The high rates of crime and violence perpetrated by juveniles in Kenya has both direct and indirect effects on learning outcomes, economic growth and social development. Majority of serious juvenile offenders have dropped out school and are at a greater risk of discontinuing their formal education altogether. If the rising prevalence of serious offending by juvenile in Kenya is not curtailed it may undermine the gains already made towards the realization of education goals, sustainable development goals, related national goals like the big four agenda and ultimately vision 2030. Existing studies on juvenile delinquency in Kenya lack adequate data on serious juvenile delinquency inspite of the fact that serious juvenile delinquents are more at risk of dropping out of school with limited chances of re-enrollment than medium and low risk juvenile offenders. Most studies on juvenile delinquency have contributed enormous knowledge on juvenile delinquency in general, however this study sought to address the existing knowledge gap on serious juvenile offenders and examined if antisocial attitude is a predictor of the serious offending behavior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Cognitive Behaviour Theory (CBT) (Beck,1966). The theory proposes that, distress in an individual is caused by faulty cognitive processes. The theory further alludes that the serious juvenile offender learns irrational beliefs from significant others during childhood at family, school or community level from which he or she creates irrational dogmas. This happens when the juvenile offender actively reinforces self-defeating beliefs either through auto suggestion, self-repetition or behaving as if they are useful. A child who lives with emotional and physical violence in the family, school or community settings may internalize self-defeating dogmas or beliefs of unworthiness, self-blame and doubt which may predispose him/her to psychological disturbance that may manifest in the form of aggressive and violent behavior against others during adolescence and adulthood (Corey, 2023). The theory focuses on working with thinking and acting rather than primarily with expression of feelings. Therapy is seen as an education process. The therapist teaches the client strategies on straight thinking and assigns him homework to practice learned skills on daily life. The theory further illustrate how the Juvenile offender originally learns irrational beliefs from significant others during childhood and that through repetition of these early indoctrinated irrational thoughts the juvenile offender keeps the dysfunctional attitudes such as anti-social attitudes alive and operational in his or her life.

The serious juvenile offender can therefore be assisted to dispute and abandon their irrational antisocial attitudes and beliefs in favor of rational ones through cognitive restructuring. This may entail helping the juvenile offender to monitor their self-talk, identify negative self-talk and substitute it with positive self-talk.

METHODOLOGY

Correlational research design was used to establish relationship between Antisocial Attitude and Serious Offending Behaviour among Juveniles .

Research Instruments Questionnaires

Denver Youth Survey (ICPSR, 1990) tool was used to measure the antisocial attitude psycho variable. 14 items were used to measure antisocial attitudes that is the juvenile's perception of how acceptable it was to behave aggressively both under varying conditions of provocation and when no conditions are specified. The 14 items were scored on a 4-level Likert scale ranging from 1 'very wrong,' 2 'A little wrong,' 3 'Wrong', and 4 'Not very wrong'. Based on the tool's 14 items, the score level ranged from 14 to 56, whereby a score of (14 to 28) indicated a low level of antisocial behavior, 29 to 42 indicated a moderate level of antisocial attitude, and 43 to 56 indicated very high levels of antisocial attitude.

The researcher also used the Self report delinquency survey (Delbert,1976) to measure the serious offending behavior among the juveniles. It had 17 items. The 17 items were scored through a 4-level Likert scale: Never 1, Twice 2, Thrice 3, and Four times or more 4. To measure levels of juvenile serious offending behaviour, the scores ranged from (17 to 68) whereby (17 to 34) was a low level of offending, (35 to 51) was a medium level, and (52 to 68) was a very high level of offending.

Data Analysis

Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.0 was used. Descriptive statistics was used. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to establish the association between predictor variable and the outcome variable.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Demographic Characteristics of Serious Juveniles Offenders

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the primary participants of this study. This includes gender, age, level of education, offense committed, duration of stay in the Borstal institution and the regions juveniles came from. The findings are tabulated in Table 1

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	47	65.3%
Female	25	34.7%
Total	72	100.0%
Age		
14-15 years old	13	18.1%

16-18 years old	17	23.6%
19-21 years old	41	56.9%
22 and above	1	1.4%
Total	72	100.0%
Educational Levels		
Class 4-6	1	1.4%
Class 7-8	1	1.4%
Form 1-2	33	45.8%
Form 3-4	28	38.9%
Above Form 4	9	12.5%
Total	72	100.0%
Offense Committed		
Fighting / robbery with violence	3	4.2%
Defiling/ rape	9	12.5%
Assault	57	79.2%
Drug abuse/trafficking	3	4.2%
Total	72	100.0%
Duration of stay in prison		
1-6 months	6	8.3%
7months to 1 year	12	16.7%
1month-2 years	53	73.6%
3 years and above	1	1.4%
Total	72	100.0%
Regions of Juveniles		
Central Kenya	23	31.9%
Nairobi Kenya	13	18.1%
Eastern Kenya	3	4.2%
Western Kenya	7	9.7%

Rift Valley Kenya	5	6.9%
Nyanza Kenya	7	9.7%
Coastal Kenya	12	16.7%
North Eastern Kenya	2	2.8%
Total	72	100.0%

As seen in Table 1, most (65.3%, n = 47) of the participants of this study were males, then followed by the females (34.7%, n = 25). It was found that most (56.9%, n = 41) of the participants were between the ages of 19-21 years old, while 1.4% (n = 1) of the participants was within 22 years and above. Findings from the educational level revealed that 45.8% (n = 33) the participants were in Form 1-, while 1.4% (n = 1) of the participants were in class 4-6 and 7-8 respectively. Finding revealed that a majority (79.2%, n = 57) of the participants had committed assault, while 4.2% (n = 3) had fought/ robbed with violence and had abused/trafficked drug respectively. Regarding duration of stay in borstal institution, a majority (73.6%, n = 53) had been incarcerated from 1 month to 2 years, while 1.4% (n = 1) had being incarcerated between 3 years and above. Based on the regions where the juveniles came from, 31.9% (n = 23) of the juveniles were from Central Kenya, while 2.8% (n = 2) of the juveniles came from Northeastern Kenya.

Table 2

Levels of Antisocial Attitude

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low	3	4.2%
Moderate	11	15.3%
High	58	59.7%
Total	72	100.0%

As seen in Table 2, findings revealed that most (59.7%, n = 58) juveniles scored high level of antisocial attitude, while 4.2% (n = 3) of the juveniles of school going age within Kenyan borstal, were at low level of antisocial attitude. The high score on antisocial attitude is a critical concern that calls for intervention.

Table 3

Levels of serious juvenile offending behaviour

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Low	10	10.2%
Moderate	12	20.4%
High	50	69.4%
Total	72	100%

According to Table 3, the outcome of the analysis demonstrated that a significant number of the participants were at high level of serious juvenile offending behavior (69.4%, n = 50), while the lowest score (10.2%, n = 10) was low level of serious juvenile offending behavior.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁ There is no Relationship between Antisocial Attitude and Serious Juvenile Offending Behavior

Table 4

Correlation between antisocial attitude and serious juvenile offending behavior

		Antisocial Attitude	Serious Juvenile Offending Behavior
Antisocial Attitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	72	72
Serious Juvenile Offending Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.419**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	72	72
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

As seen in Table 4, findings from the Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there was a moderate positive correlation ($r = .419$, $p = .000 \leq 0.05$ level of significance) between antisocial attitude and serious juvenile offending behavior among juveniles of school going age within Kenyan borstal institutions. These results validate the results obtained from analysis of the serious juvenile offender responses, which indicates that antisocial attitude contribute to serious juvenile offending behaviour.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The main objective of the study sought to establish if there is a correlation between antisocial behaviour and serious juvenile offending behaviour. The descriptive statistics demonstrated that serious juvenile offenders with high levels of antisocial behaviour also manifested serious juvenile offending behaviour. The inferential statistics further revealed that a significant relationship existed between antisocial attitude and serious juvenile offending behaviour. This outcome suggests that antisocial attitude among juveniles contributes to serious offending behaviour.

The findings corroborate with Esposito, M. (2020) study that established those self-reported anti-social beliefs independently predicted the rate of re-offending among incarcerated 11 to 18 years old British offenders. The study finding further concurred with those of Molinedo (2020) which demonstrated that 45.5% of the respondents drawn from 14 to 18 years' old convicted offenders, had anti-social attitudes. Therefore, it can be inferred that anti-social attitudes contribute to repeat offending among juveniles which qualifies them to be categorized as serious juvenile offenders.

The study outcome also aligns very well with the Cognitive Behavior Theory (Beck, 1966) upon which this study is underpinned. The antisocial attitudes and antisocial beliefs learnt by the offenders from their relationships with significant others have been depicted to have a positive relationship with the juveniles' serious offending behaviour. This agrees with the CBT concept which states that faulty or limiting beliefs and attitudes are learnt and internalized by young offenders in their childhood. The theory further explains that through cognitive behaviour therapy the faulty cognitions can be unlearned in favor of more adaptive ones.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study sought to establish if there was a correlation between antisocial attitudes and serious offending behavior. The outcome demonstrated that the majority of the juveniles rated high on both the

dependent and independent variables, and the two variables were positively and significantly correlated. It is therefore recommended that the Departments of Prison and Children Services strengthen the existing child offender policies to enrich social emotional learning among incarcerated juveniles.

The study delimited itself to only four psychosocial correlates, namely, antisocial attitudes, parental support, commitment to school, and exposure to community violence. Given that there are many other psychosocial variables that may influence serious juvenile offending, there is a need to conduct further research on the additional correlates of serious offending behavior.

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