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Resource conflicts affecting criminality among the youth in Laikipia county, Kenya

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Abstract

Communities devoid of crime register profound developmental milestones due to optimal resource allocation, increased productivity and harmonious coexistence. However, Laikipia County in Kenya may not achieve the developmental goals laid down owing to persistent community conflicts and the rising number of youths convicted of various crimes. Competition for resources by constituent communities has been identified as the main driver of the long-drawn conflicts in the county, and as such, this study focused on examining resource conflicts affecting criminality among the youth in Laikipia County in Kenya. The study employed the descriptive survey research design on a population of 1324 convicted youths in Laikipia County. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 302 respondents comprising youths serving custodial and non-custodial sentences as well as corrections and probation officers. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. The reliability of the research instruments was estimated using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, while validity was established through the expert opinion of university supervisors. Data analysis was aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Data analysis results were presented as frequency distributions and in prose narration. The findings revealed that resource conflicts played a role in the rising cases of criminality among the youth in Laikipia County in Kenya.

Keywords: Criminality; Custodial sentence; Non-custodial sentence; Resource conflicts; Youth

1. Introduction

Community conflict involves disagreement and tension that arise within a specific geographic or social community due to divergent interests, values or competing needs among the members (Shakirullah et al., 2020). The variations in socioeconomic status, cultural background and individual or group aspirations can cultivate an environment rife with tension. This is a clear indication that unequal access to opportunities and competition for resources often result in conflicts within the community. According to Cavaliere et al. (2021), criminality encompasses engaging in activities that are considered illegal or in violation of the law and whose antecedent factors involve a combination of individual, environmental, economic and social influence. De Ribera et al., (2019) and Yom, (2021) asserted that criminality is the prevalent among individuals aged between 18 and 30 years who are often the mainstay of any country that depends on youth's productivity, creativity and innovation to thrive from generation to generation. To harness the potential of young people to grow economies, many countries have created programs for youth membership in public service intending to promote policies that enhance their growth and productivity (Nicholas et al., 2019). However, this is curtailed by disagreements and conflicts among members in various communities.

Community conflicts interrupt the lives of youths and thus hinder growth and productivity in society. Casey, Simmons, Somerville and Baskin-Sommers (2022) found out that instead of youths being productive, they become more involved in community conflicts and committed significant transgressions. It is clear that youth criminality in a conflicted society

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is perturbing because of the victimization that is perpetrated and the perception that society is incapable of providing suitable supervision and control to the youths. In most countries where there is economic deprivation involving basic needs, it is common for people to rebel and even turn to wrangles in the struggle to acquire resources (Velez-Torres & Méndez, 2022). The struggle for insufficient resources, such as land and water sources result in armed conflicts as parties involved tend to use lethal force to gain control of the disputed resources. As indicated by Madueke (2018), it is common for people to fight over land, property, wealth, and other social amenities in small communities, leading to animosity among members. These conflicts have numerous consequences, including the collapse of the economy and social amenities, insecurity, and even armed attacks among people in the region. Maza (2020) states that in Europe, young boys and girls growing up in conflict situations potentially become delinquent due to exposure to frequent skirmishes. This clearly shows that community conflicts interfere with normal functioning of the society.

Although the literature on youth criminality trends and statistics in Africa is scanty, the limited available predictions portray criminality among youths as being mainly on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the cities where most of the populations are between the ages of 16 and 25 (Menashe-Oren, 2020). Majority of the youths involved in criminality live in informal settlements without basic facilities, services and security. Botha and Abdile (2019) explains that youth criminality has risen in Nigeria due to insecurity in neighbourhoods where many young people opt to join “Boko Haram” and other terrorist sects for survival after being radicalized and brainwashed to abandon education and actively participate in the terrorist group activities. The terrorist groups use the youths as foot soldiers tasking them with heinous criminal activities. Most crimes reported to the police in Kenya are committed by youths. In a study by Obuya (2019), criminality among youths in Kenya is attributed to poverty and the social environment surrounding adolescents and young adults. Many youths who have been processed in the Criminal Justice System for criminal activities were from poor backgrounds, including slum dwellings, homelessness or street family life in childhood. Shikuku, Makworo and Njuguna (2018) explain that a person's social environment dramatically shapes behaviour and significantly determines involvement in criminal activities. However, it is not clear to what extent exposure to conflicts in the community presents youths with impelling circumstances that lead to criminality.

Various communities reside in Laikipia County of Kenya, including Kikuyu, Maasai, Kalenjin, Samburu, Turkana, and Pokot, each with norms, cultures, and interests. Rafferty's (2020) research on conflict narratives states that conflicts could arise due to differences in beliefs, cultures, and interests in a society with various communities. These conflicts result in insecurity in the entire locality exposing the inhabitants to the cruelty that comes with the conflicts. Mwenda (2018) was of the view that the causes of conflicts among communities in Laikipia County were attributed to the differences in interests ignited by economic benefits and fuelled by political interests. Research indicates that Laikipia County experiences more conflicts than any other place in Kenya (Mutunga, 2021). Many areas in Laikipia County are affected by losses resulting from these conflicts. As observed in a study by Mbah et al. (2020), the recent spate of wrangles has devastated the county affecting the locality economically, socially and politically. This means that the youth who experience conflicts often lose time, support and opportunities ordinarily available for their counterparts in a non-conflict community. Therefore, this study is necessary to establish resource conflicts affecting criminality among the youth in Laikipia County, Kenya.

Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine how resource conflicts affect criminality among the youth in Laikipia County in Kenya.

2. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 1324 convicted youths in Laikipia County in Kenya. Using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for infinite population, a sample of 302 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the main respondents while an interview guide was used to collect data from key informants who included correctional and probation officers handling youth offenders within Laikipia County. The reliability of the research instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha coefficient whose reliability coefficient value was 0.758 thus considered reliable. Data were analysed using the chi-square test statistic with the help of SPSS version 25.0. The hypothesis testing applied a significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. The results were presented in tables, figures, and prose narration.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the study were discussed and presented as follows:

3.1. Demographic information of the respondents

The study respondents were required to indicate their gender, age, marital status, employment status, and religious affiliations. The data analysis indicated that 42.4% of the respondents were female, while the remaining 57.6% accounted for male respondents. The study focused on young individuals aged 18 to 26 years. Age distribution analysis indicated that 39.4% of the respondents were aged 18-21 years, 38.0% were aged between 21-23 years, and 22.6% of the respondents were aged between 24-26 years. The results concerning the marital status of the respondents showed that 52.9% were single, 28.3% were married, 14.1% were separated, and 4.7% were widowed. None of the respondents were divorced. The study sought information on religious affiliations since religion informs conventional practices. The respondents' submissions showed that a majority of the respondents were Christian, accounting for 81.5%, whereas 18.5% were Muslim. Employment is an essential resource and thus influences criminality. The study information indicated that 31.6% of the respondents had casual employment, 34% were self-employed, and 34.3% were unemployed.

3.2. Resource Conflicts Affecting Criminality among the Youth

This study aimed to determine whether there was a significant influence of resource conflicts on youth criminality based on demographic variables including gender, age, marital status, employment status, and religious affiliations in Laikipia County, Kenya. The analysis involved conducting a chi-square test statistic to test the hypothesis at a significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. information in Table 1 below shows the test findings.

Table 1 Chi-square results on the Resource Conflicts Affecting Criminality among the Youth

Statement	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Religion	Employment Status
I have experienced persisting resource conflicts in this community.	0.897	0.730	0.920	0.925	0.366
Scarcity of water for livestock rearing motivated my commission of crime	0.380	0.511	0.398	0.573	0.004
Land disputes promoted my involvement in criminal activities	0.711	0.570	0.999	0.123	0.210
Unemployment encouraged me to commit crimes in this community	0.130	0.787	0.349	0.233	0.737
Unequal distribution of resources in the community motivated my criminal behaviours.	0.281	0.504	0.046	0.327	0.217
Experiencing resource conflicts inspired me to engage in criminality	0.170	0.730	0.912	0.840	0.467

The findings in Table 1 indicate that there was no statistically significant influence of resource conflict on youth criminality based on demographic variables in Laikipia County in Kenya. However, scarcity of water for livestock rearing indicated a statistically significant influence on youth criminality based on the respondents' demographic variable of employment status, with a p-value of 0.004. Likewise, the unequal distribution of resources in the community showed a statistically significant influence on youth criminality based on marital status with a p-value of 0.046. Consequently, scarcity of water for livestock rearing and unequal distribution of resources in the community determined, in varying degrees, whether young individuals engaged in criminal activities.

Descriptive statistics were conducted to determine resource conflicts affecting youth criminality in Laikipia County. The supposed facilitation was measured on a five-level Likert scale from very likely to very unlikely. Information in Table 2 below represents the findings.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics on Resource Conflicts Affecting Criminality among the Youth

Statement/Rating	VL (%)	L (%)	N (%)	U (%)	VU (%)
I have experienced persisting Resource conflicts in this community.	7.1	33	25.2	20.9	13.8
Scarcity of water for livestock rearing motivated my commission of crime.	4.7	55.6	14.1	18.9	6.7
Land disputes promoted my involvement in criminal activities.	11.4	44.1	14.1	20.9	9.5
Unemployment encouraged me to commit crimes in this community.	2.4	41.4	18.5	23.6	14.1
Unequal distribution of resources in the community motivated my criminal behaviours.	14.1	39.4	25.3	18.8	2.4
Experiencing resource conflicts inspired me to engage in criminality.	9.1	44.4	20.9	18.5	7.1

The results in Table 2 outline the respondents' responses in percentages based on their level of agreement with statements on resource conflicts facilitating youth criminality in Laikipia County in Kenya. The majority (40.1%) of the respondents affirmed that they had likely or very likely experienced persisting resource conflicts within their communities. Regarding the statement that scarcity of water for livestock rearing influenced criminality among the youth, 60.3% of the respondents considered it likely or very likely. A 55.5% majority of the respondents deemed it likely or very likely that land disputes promoted youth involvement in criminal activities. Furthermore, the study sought to determine whether unemployment among young people in the county encouraged them to commit crimes. Accordingly, 43.8% of the respondents regarded this statement as likely or very likely. To find out whether the unequal distribution of resources in the community motivated criminal behaviours among the youth, 53.5% of the respondents indicated that it was likely or very likely. Finally, experiencing resource conflicts within the communities inspired young individuals to engage in criminality, as attested by 53.5% of the respondents. In quintessence, persisting resource conflicts, scarcity of water for livestock rearing, land disputes, unemployment, unequal distribution of resources, and experiencing resource conflicts facilitated youth criminality in Laikipia County in Kenya.

Focus group discussions were conducted to triangulate findings from convicted young individuals serving custodial and non-custodial sentences. The qualitative data gathered was thematically analysed and presented in prose narration. The focus group discussion group participants were asked whether there were persistent resource conflicts in the community, a probation officer acknowledged that "*Crime is a major issue in many communities in Laikipia County. Many of the youths serving custodial sentences were initiated into criminal gangs by their peers or family members and, thus, have experienced crime firsthand earlier in life.*" Evidently, the findings of this study indicate that many young people experience resource conflict in the county. A convicted offender affirmed that "*Despite innovativeness, young people like myself lack conventional means of pursuing their goals and are frustrated, thus turning to alternative means such as cattle raids, theft, and robbery to achieve them. Some express their rebellion against society by forming criminal gangs.*" Such sentiment among the youth leads some to adopt positive perspectives towards crime, as established by Maluku (2020), in that individuals adopt criminality by association with other criminals or embracing perspectives favourable to crime. The findings agree with Balogun (2021) that conflict for resources is a major driver of unemployment and youth criminality. Therefore, this implies that experiencing persisting resource conflicts within the community exacerbates youth criminality.

In regard to the scarcity of water for livestock rearing in relation to youth criminality, participants agreed that the scarcity of water for livestock rearing contributed to youth engaging in criminal activities. One of the convicts resounded, "*In my case, I engaged in cattle rustling because there were fewer means of livelihood in the local community. In particular, the lack of adequate water is a big issue in Laikipia County. If we had enough water for small-scale farming, many of us young people would do livestock farming.*" Many of the study participants echoed this sentiment. Laikipia County is among the areas in Kenya that are affected by adverse climates and lack permanent water sources. One respondent affirmed, "*Local residents are forced to trek for more than 10 kilometres in order to access water. There are few water points which are shared between people and animals. Thus, human beings are often pit against wild animals in the struggle to access water resources.*" This competition for water resources breeds conflict among communities that escalates to ethnic clashes (Elfversson, 2019). Moreover, inter-clan conflicts and human-wildlife conflicts have ravaged Laikipia County for decades, exacerbated by power struggles and rapid population growth (Kamais & Mosol, 2022). Many young people are caught up in the inter-clan clashes over water resources, which trigger violence, with some of

the youth getting involved in the conflict. The findings confirm that the scarcity of water for livestock rearing influenced youth criminality in Laikipia County in Kenya.

Concerning land disputes and youth criminality, the focus group participants affirmed that land disputes promoted the involvement of young people in criminal activities in Laikipia County, Kenya. One participant stated, "*Territorial conflict is a common phenomenon in Laikipia since most of the land was owned communally. During dry seasons, farmers and herders clash over grazing fields, where pastoralists forcefully invade farms and private ranches to feed their dying livestock. Also, communities from neighbouring counties such as Turkana and Samburu invade Laikipia in search of water and better pastures during the dry season, and this causes conflict.*" Hughes (2022) established that land disputes in Laikipia have deep historical and cultural roots dating back to the colonial era and most of the conflicts today can be attributed to political incitement. Hughes affirms that different communities lay competing claims to the land which was communally owned for a long time. These competing claims brew never-ending conflicts that increase youth criminality in the region. Works by Njoka et al. (2022) illustrate that the injustices committed during land re-subdivision after independence and the breakdown of government systems caused persistent land conflicts in Laikipia County in Kenya. Additionally, cultural attachment to land and cattle leads to cattle rustling, a source of conflict in the communities. The findings of this study indicate that young people have inherited land disputes, which increased their involvement in criminal activities.

The respondents were asked if unemployment influenced criminality among the youth. In response, a young man serving a non-custodial sentence reported, "*The unemployment rate is relatively high in Kenya, especially among the youth and many of them cannot afford basic needs. As a result, many young people look to engage in drugs and crime as a 'feasible alternative' to regular employment. In my case, I was unable to get sustainable employment since I did not complete college. Peer pressure pushed me to engage in illegal activities to get quick money.*" Another respondent added, "*The tough economic conditions in the country right now are unforgiving for the unemployed young people. Many youths in Laikipia county lack the capacity to start business ventures despite having good business ideas. Hence, many tend to embrace illegal methods of earning income or to rebel against society for 'creating' unemployment.*" The findings of the study concur with Jawadi et al. (2019), who established that high unemployment rates directly lead to higher crime rates. In general, youth unemployment has been associated with increased social vices such as prostitution, theft, and robbery (Uchechukwu et al., 2023). When young people fail to get meaningful employment despite having achieved the required level of education, the idle youth are inclined to commit crimes to meet their basic needs (Nason, 2019). Therefore, unemployment indicated an effect on criminality among the youth in Laikipia County.

In the case of unequal distribution of resources affecting youth criminality, the focus group participants agreed that the unequal distribution of resources motivated young people to engage in criminal activities. A respondent pointed out, "*Walking around, you will notice Laikipia East constituency has more resources such as water, electricity, education, healthcare and roads compared to other areas. Water is a particularly scarce resource, and many communities living downstream complained that they were disadvantaged by those living upstream in the use of the resource. This unequal distribution of resources causes ethnic antagonism among the communities in the county and results in conflicts, which are associated with criminal activities. Remember that a large portion of the population in Laikipia is made up of young people who are also stakeholders in these conflicts.*" Another respondent added, "*Laikipia is home to many ranches and nomadic herders. Since water is a scarce commodity, water spots are owned either communally or by private ranchers. During dry seasons, nomadic pastoralists invade these ranches, farms and communal water spots, triggering disputes over the sharing of scarce resources. Many young people get sucked into these conflicts and end up in jail.*" These results affirm that curtailing of resources among local communities serves to incite conflicts among young people, especially when there is drought and the resources like water and pasture become scarce (Njoka et al., 2022). The study findings align with Kamais and Mosol (2022) that inequality in the distribution of resources is a major contributor to conflicts and thus criminal activities. Therefore, most youth criminality in Laikipia County has been linked to scarcity and unequal distribution of resources.

Regarding experiencing resource conflicts as an inspiration for youth criminality, focus group discussion members agreed that experiencing resource conflicts encouraged many young people to engage in youth criminality since it inspired their antagonism. Furthermore, most conflicts become violent with youth at the forefront, in which they become perpetrators and casualties. One participant stated, "*Some of these conflicts over resources result in the loss of lives, especially in cases of human-wildlife conflict, land grabbing, and power struggles. The youth get caught up in the midst of these struggles, and some become radicalized to engage in never-ending revenge wars.*" The study findings are in line with Maluku (2020), who affirmed the theory of differential association, such that social interactions with criminality often lead to criminal behaviour, especially among young people. In addition, Kamais and Mosol (2022) attested that many young and energetic community members get caught up in inter-ethnic conflicts, leading to revenge wars with far-reaching consequences in Laikipia County in Kenya.

4. Conclusion

Results revealed that there were no differences in resource conflicts affecting youth criminality. The study sought to establish whether there were significant differences in specific resource conflicts based on gender, age, marital status, religious affiliation and employment status of the respondents. The items tested were; the experience of persisting resource conflicts, scarcity of water for livestock rearing, land disputes, unemployment and unequal distribution of resources and how they inspired criminal behaviours among the respondents. It was determined that there were no differences in these resource conflicts affecting youth criminality based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. However, differences were noted on scarcity of water for livestock rearing based on employment status with a p-value of 0.004 and, on unequal distribution of resources based on marital status with a p-value of 0.046.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior Coordination and National Administration may initiate programs and interventions aimed at protecting the youth in times of conflicts within their communities. Consequently, policy makers in the ministry may need to revise existing policies aimed at reducing criminality in light of persistent conflicts in communities. Further, law enforcement and local administration may consider integrating youths in peace building initiatives and strategies within the communities.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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