

An Autopsy of the Social-environmental Factors Driving the Youth to Commit Crime in Selected African Countries

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ABSTRACT Indubitably, unconducive socio-environmental factors can present perfidious impact to the lives of the youths. This heralds the need to address the underpinnings of poverty as a sure way of tackling crime rate. This paper aims to make an autopsy of pertinent socio-economic underpinnings influencing the rate of crime among the youths in selected African countries. Findings indicate that the rate of crime among the youths is largely driven by the phenomenon of the youths mimicking the media services; exposure to poor parenting; being in a state of adolescence and peer pressure. The article concludes that all the learning institutions need to recognize that the adolescence stage is a difficult one and put in place measures to help the adolescents adjust to the adolescence; implores upon the governments of the developing countries to comprehend the existence of an inextricable relationship between youth misbehaviour and poverty. They should also realize that to successfully fight crime they need to heavily invest in addressing people's poverty; and at last the youths should embrace the culture of responsibility and accountability. It is not an acceptable for them to use peer pressure as a scapegoat when they want to indulge in a criminal activity.

INTRODUCTION

Although many causative environments of crime by the youths have either been empirically validated, or subjectively suggested, the phenomenon of committing crime is broadly a dynamic phenomenon that requires to be evaluated in every second, minute, hour, week, month and generally, regularly (Kang'ethe 2014a, 2015a). Indeed, the phenomenon of youth misbehaviour is a very complex phenomenon that needs a deeper analysis with the aim of offering albeit for the time being a solution. Indubitably, most African countries such as South Africa are in dire need of comprehensive and frequent researches to suggest newer approaches to handling youth offenders, or to remind those in authority the need to already work with the research recommendations made to ameliorate the situation (De Villiers 2006; Frank 2006). Research such as this one to make an autopsy of the social environment is central and forms a continuum of the problem solving machinery of a constellation of problems bedevilling the youths in their countries (Trevithick 2005).

Indubitably, the phenomenon of youth offenses is an undesirable national phenomenon. This is because it makes the general environment devoid of peace, make the youths fail to pursue their schooling and therefore lose to acquire skills that would usher them in job markets

in their near future, or make them become reliable citizens of the country (Kang'ethe 2014a). Succinctly also, the government like South Africa is spending billions and billions of money to maintain those who are daily incarcerated and thrown into jails and also in maintaining an environment of fighting crime every second. Generally also, crime taints the country very badly and has an economic impact in that many people from other countries who would like to invest in the countries are dissuaded due to the higher statistics of crime rate in the country. This negatively affects the process of attracting the much desired foreign direct investment (FDI). This is critical in South Africa where the country is believed to experience the highest gender based violence and drug and substance abuse (Nyamutinga 2015-2016; Makuyana 2015-2016). On the crimes relating to the drugs, the country is being referred to as the drug capital of the world.

Perhaps an inextricable relationship between sexual offenses and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS make the government worried, more so that the country's HIV/AIDS statistics are not abating (Mario 2014; Chatikobo 2015). Since HIV/AIDS remains a cankerworm that if not annihilated can shake the economic base of a country, then there is dire need for the government and any other sexual campaign friendly body to arm themselves to come up with possible interventions to ad-

dress the quagmire (Kang'ethe 2015b; Ramphele 2008).

Problem Statement

It is critical that the social environment is deeply interrogated so that the extent and dynamics of its contribution to the quagmire of crime is isolated. Perhaps this is because of the apparent observation and sometimes validated empirical realization of an extricable relationship between the prevalence of crime and socio-economic environment with those from lower socio-economic backgrounds more likely to engage in crime. It is therefore also pertinent that the dynamics of the social environment is also analysed for possible remedy. Perhaps this is important because youth engagement in criminal activities in many African countries, South Africa leading the pack, has reached unfathomable levels. The researcher believes that this analysis is likely to bring newer dynamics or perspectives that can inform stronger policy making process to avert youth misbehaviour.

METHODOLOGY

This research article has widely sought different materials from the internet sources especially the journals leaning on youth misbehaviours and also exploring the socio-environmental factors.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Mimicking the Media

Although media should not always be blamed as the environment that drives people to make a constellation of crimes in the country such as South Africa, parents and guardians should advise and caution their children against wanting to mimic what they see in the television. However, in a world where advertisements of embracing apparently a stronger personality, increasing beauty, and mimicking global idols are concerned, the youths find themselves wanting to experiment those qualities benchmarked by the medial idols (Kang'ethe 2014a, b). This has seen the youths pressing themselves to mimic such behaviours that nets them into the cages of law enforcement agencies. Many have to look for money and resources through hook

and crook to buy the items that are deemed to afford oneself beauty and therefore the road to being an idol. Since the media has idolised and normalised the concept of being sexy, sexual and engagement in life episodes, many youths get embroiled in risky sexual adventures that usually make them fools of themselves and make them jeopardize their health (Ramphele 2008). An example is where the youths just get involved in sexual overtures without protective devices making them vulnerable to STIs, HIV/AIDS or finding themselves pregnant. Such become samples or victims of those who seek to terminate the pregnancies. Since in many African countries the government consider termination of pregnancies an immoral and an ethical practice, such youths are likely to become youth offenders with the ramifications that the act inheres (De Villiers 2006). Therefore, perhaps the governments need to censure some of the advertisements like those that promotes sex and sexuality; sexual dressing and inculcation of a culture to expose nudity and sexually attractive body parts. To say the least, although media services constitutes a lion's share of the companies' money making services and by extension pay heavy taxes to the government, a deal needs to be struck where the ills associated with advertisements and the gains are pitted. This calls for the government agencies to consider a cost benefit analysis (CBA) of the whole phenomenon of advertisements. Largely, advertisement and media services are aspects of globalization that are believed to facilitate development of countries (Kang'ethe 2014b).

Poor Parenting

Indubitably, whether viewed at socially, culturally or otherwise, parents have a cardinal role of providing their children with good nurturance. Good nurturance does not only mean providing the children with the physical needs such as food and clothing to meet Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Abraham Maslow quoted by Cherry 2013), but also meeting other psychological and emotional needs such as feeling being loved, trusted, dignified etc. This according to Carl Rogers constitute qualities that are bound to motivate people strengthening their personalities, confidence, self-awareness, and inculcating self-fulfilling endeavours (Rogers 1951 quoted by Kang'ethe 2006). This complements the

demands of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs that indicates that for individuals to achieve a commendable personality or what he calls the level of actualization, they must be afforded the needs that will cover all the ladders or rungs of needs. This implies that if needs are adequately met for our youths, perhaps they will not engage themselves with rebellious or criminal activities (Abraham Maslow quoted by Cherry 2013). However, in a world of today, parents whether in developed or developing countries appear to be caught in complex and sophisticated social environment of being single mothers, be swimming in a sea of poverty and dependency, be in a state of cohabitation, separation or divorce. Largely, they may not invest or afford adequate time and circumstances to offer their children most of the psychosocial services that growing children need (Cherry 2013). Most children feel neglected, abandoned and as a way of reaction, tends to be rebellious (Kang'ethe and Makuyana 2014; Kang'ethe and Nyamutinga 2014). Therefore, such circumstances do not allow many children/ youths to become behaviour compliant, behaviour sensitive or treading in a behaviour meant to make them good citizens. The situation is usually worse in many resource strapped countries where parents are likely to have low literacy levels, lower income and their social environments being devoid of circumstances such as recreation. In fact a subjective analysis of this researcher who is currently in attachment in one of the correctional facility deduces that most of those incarcerated to prison appears to be of low literacy levels and emanating from filthily poor backgrounds. Apparently, in this researcher has no iota of doubt that a strong inextricable relationship exist between the state of poverty and being an offender. As he conducts his case work with individuals, many explain their backgrounds that indicates gruesome poverty.

With poverty and its concomitant ramifications, many parents are not able to provide adequate state of nurturance. They therefore abandon or close their ears and eyes over so many things that point to the need to pay attention to them. This researcher recalls a statement by one of the poor parent that it is not possible for their children upon maturity to stay in their one roomed house. Instead, it is imperative that they go look for alternatives. This then means that the parents lessen their control for such chil-

dren, and probably in a state of adolescent period find themselves experimenting many things that make them rub the shoulders of the law in the wrong way.

State of Adolescence

Eric Erikson calls the state of adolescence a state of storm and stress (Erikson 1968 quoted by Kang'ethe 2010a; Melgosa 2005). And indeed it is a phase full of stresses that if not adequately handled can tear an individual to a state of making oneself fail to socially function (Segal et al 2007; Sheafor and Horejsi 2008; Melgosa 2005; Fineman 1984 quoted by Kang'ethe 2010a). It is usually characterized with exploration of what the youths consider as activities done by the adults. This is also a state of youth's rebelliousness. This means that parents as well as the institutions must be adequately prepared to handle the youths with all the requisite care. At this stage, youths are also selfish and expect to be given more attention that what was happening previously. This state of attitudes usher them into a conflicting path with their parents and adults generally (Kang'ethe and Makuyana 2014; Kang'ethe and Nyamutinga 2014). Perhaps the conflicts are exacerbated by lack of resources in the families that they hail from. For instance, more spacing for privacy is a key requisite of those undergoing adolescence stage. They feel they need to be respected through having their own beds and other resources. Their body feels and demands some extra recognition. Perhaps this sounds impossible to the adolescents from poor families whose houses only constitutes a one roomed house. Then, the prevalent situations runs counter the demands of an adolescence body and thinking. Confronted with such circumstances, most youths may find themselves being driven by the demands of the adolescence out of their domiciles and have to look for life outside their domiciles. This point became clear when this researcher was shown by a parent a one- roomed house where the parents and the children are supposed to reside. The parent did indicate that the situation is prone to making their children go out to sink or float in the outside world. She did indicate that the girl children are forced to go and live with men who have houses and for their male children it provided an opportunity to engage in unpalatable illegal activities that make them to be in conflict

with the law. Such people may end up in correctional services and no one would be brave enough to route the epidemiological terrain of the offender. Indeed, socio-environmental factors are key towards luring the offenders into a state of offending. This perhaps explain why many offenders hail from broken homes or generally from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Peer Pressure

This is becoming a cankerworm especially in South Africa especially when the activities driven by peer pressure becomes unlawful. Perhaps this is manifest when South African students while agitating for some demands or changes in the institutions of higher learning through strikes burn even their classes. This is perfidious and needs to be condemned with the harshest language possible (Chatikobo 2015). Perhaps a characteristic or the phenomenon of peer pressure is manifest when the young people tend to irrationally follow what their peers are doing. This is to seek recognition and also to cement a niche of identity. Although peer pressure is a phenomenon that sweeps across many countries in the globe, its perfidious effects has reached unfathomable proportions in South Africa where the youths become both confrontational and ready to hurt other people who sometimes may not have contributed to the quagmire under question. Perhaps there is an inextricable relationship between peer pressure and state of adolescence (Eric Erikson 1968 quoted by Kang'ethe 2010b).

CONCLUSION

Unacceptably, many countries of the developing world have been hit by a wave of youth misbehaviours making it difficult for jails to accommodate them. Realistically, crimes of various kinds have been on the increase despite the governments' efforts to fight them. Perhaps the government needs to realize that they are fighting a losing battle if they do not invest adequately in the war against poverty. Perhaps this is because an inextricable relationship between rates of crime and the youth's socio-economic backgrounds exists with those from marginalized homes tending to engage in crime more than those who hail from relatively stable socio-economic backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ All learning institutions need to recognize that the adolescence stage is a difficult one and put in place measures to help the adolescents adjust to the adolescence.
- ♦ Governments should strive to realize an inextricable relationship between youth misbehaviour and poverty. They should realize that to successfully fight crime they need to heavily invest in addressing people's poverty.
- ♦ The youths should embrace the culture of responsibility and accountable. It is not an acceptable phenomenon for them to use peer pressure as a scapegoat when they want to indulge in a criminal activity.

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