An Evaluation of the Relationship between School Dropout and Involvement in Criminal Behaviour among Juvenile Deliquents Serving at Shikusa Borstal Institution, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effect school dropout on criminal behaviour among juveniles that go through the Kenyan criminal justice system. Criminologists and educators have long speculated that increasing the educational achievement of young males might lower the probability that they engage in criminal activities. There are several theoretical reasons for expecting a relationship between education and crime. Studies have established that schooling increases the economic returns to legitimate work. Education has also been found to directly increase the psychic cost of committing crime. Research has also revealed that schooling could alter preferences in indirect ways. For example, education may help teenagers better understand all the consequences of their decisions, and ultimately make them more far-sighted. In the past decade, there has been a growing convergence between schools and legal systems. The study was conducted at Shikusa Borstal Institution in Kakamega County of western Kenya. A sample of 111 respondents comprising of juvenile offender committed to the institution were interviewed representing 30% of the total population of juveniles at the institution (369). Research objectives and hypothesis were formulated based the study constructs. A standard questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents who were identified using simple random sampling technique. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed. Statistical quantitative data was analyzed using inferential statistics. From the study findings, there is evidence that criminal behaviour among students under the age of 18 years has a statistically significant influence on school dropout rates. Conclusions and recommendations are made based on the study findings to guide policy makers and implementers on ways of reducing school dropout rates among individual below the age of 18 years.

Key Words: School Dropout, Criminal Behaviour, Juvenile Deliquency

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is a complex social problem that significantly impacts all members and processes of a social structure. Delinquency refers to a set of behaviors that are not in line with the collective practices and/or ethics of the dominant social group. Essentially, these behaviors deviate from societal norms and more specifically they violate established criminal codes and laws. Juvenile delinquency incorporates not only general criminal activity but conduct that is only unlawful for youths, such as running away from home and skipping school. Current research into this difficult and pressing issue reflects a vast range of theories about, and predictors of delinquency as well as a multitude of strategies to control and reduce overall delinquency. The consensus among practitioners and researchers, however, maintains that juvenile delinquency is a dynamic, multifaceted problem with numerous potentially causal factors. Subsequently, investigators and professionals suggest that treatment procedures must focus on not only the immediate issue of the offender's deviant behavior but on every element within the context of that behavior as well, including for example, family relations and social support services or networks.

Conventional practice has long associated early preventive measures with positive delinquency reduction results. In particular, timely recognition of at-risk youth and correction of ineffective or minimally effective parenting techniques are critical to the prevention of future delinquency (Lundman, 1993). Numerous risk factors have been identified as indicators or predictors of juvenile delinquency and those factors represent dysfunction at several levels, specifically within the structure of the offender's family. Some of these factors include conflict within the family, a lack of adequate supervision and/or rules, a distinct lack of parent-child attachment, instability, poor home life quality, parental expectations, as well as poverty, unemployment, and dropping out of school (Studymode.com, 2001). These factors lend themselves to more juveniles becoming involved in the juvenile system and being referred to community and non-community treatment programs.

Few doubt that educational attainment and crime are related. Two examples illustrate this point. In the United States, 41% of inmates in prisons and jails in 1997 had not completed high school, compared to only 18% of the general population. Second, a survey of newly sentenced prisoners in the UK in 2005/6 showed that 47% had no educational qualifications, compared to 15% for the general population (Hopkins, 2012). What is less clear is whether this link represents a causal relationship running from educational attainment to criminal behaviour, or whether it merely reflects a whole set of personal characteristics associated with lower education levels that denote those on the margins of society. This is important for policymakers as they assess the potential social returns to education. Education is the key to the production of human capital that drives the economy of any nation (UNICEF, 2004). However, little rigorous research has been conducted on the effects between education and youth crime (Belfield & Levin, 2009). Early school leaving and criminal behavior of young people are two important concerns in every community as they can result in individual and public losses. School dropout is associated with lower economic growth,

youth unemployment, decreases in gross income and with higher crime rates as well (Psacharapoulos, 2007). Crime can also increase the unemployment rate of the community (Calvó-Armengol & Zenou, 2003) and have a negative impact on economic growth in the region (Detotto & Otranto, 2010). Crime generates substantial social costs, through criminal justice system spending, security expenditures, costs to repair damages, victimization costs and health services costs. Criminals themselves face costs associated with criminal charges, can suffer from social stigma or social exclusion (Hannon, 2003), and experience a decline in earnings and employment following an arrest or imprisonment (Lochner, 2004).

Although there are good theoretical reasons to expect that increases in high school graduation rates may result in lower crime rates, quantifying this relationship is not an easy task. The key difficulty in estimating the effect of education on criminal activity is that unobserved characteristics affecting schooling decisions are likely to be correlated with the unobservable factors influencing the decision to engage in crime (Moretti, 2005). For example, individuals who grow up in poor inner-city neighborhoods may be more likely to drop out from school, and at the same time may be more likely to engage in criminal activities. As a result, we might observe a negative correlation between crime and education even if there is no causal effect of education on crime. In other words, the correlation between education and crime may not be causal, but might simply reflect the influence of disadvantaged family background, bad peer influence and poverty in general (Moretti, 2005).

Determining whether the correlation between schooling and criminal activity is causal is crucial for policy makers. If the negative association is causal, investing in public education will have important benefits not only for the individuals who acquire the extra schooling, but for society at large, in the form of lower crime rates (Moretti, 2005).

Problem Statement

School dropout issue is a major social and economic problem that poses complex challenges for policy makers, educators, parents, students and the general public. Young adolescents who leave school without completion are at a disadvantage on the labour market in today's knowledge-based society and end up in crime. Criminal behavior in adolescence can have strong links to future negative outcomes, among them adult crime, low academic performance and early school leaving. At the same time, school dropout can encourage juveniles to become involved in criminal behavior. From the one hand, lower educational attainment and criminal involvement can develop a dynamic interrelationship. From the other hand, many mutual confounding factors can determine both education and criminal behavior and it can be difficult to isolate a single chain of causality. Insight in how education and youth crime is casually related may indicate possible measures to reduce crime and educational inequality in society. It is upon this backdrop that this study sought to investigate the relationship between criminal behaviour and school dropout.

Review of Related Literature

Getting arrested and involvement in criminal activity, while enrolled in school, has a negative impact on high school completion. Minority students are more likely to leave high school early, and to end up in prison than white students (Hirschfield, 2009). High school graduates are less likely to be involved in crime than those young people who do not graduate from high school (Pettit & Western, 2004; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). While the goal is for all students to graduate from high school, remaining enrolled in school longer results in better outcomes for students and society, even if a diploma is never achieved. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) estimated that if students were to attend at least one extra year of schooling, before dropping out, the murder rate would reduce by up to 30%. Violent felonies were also predicted to decrease, if at risk students' time in school increased, as Ikomi (2010) found a correlation between graduation rates and violent felonies.

The age-crime curve shows that the peak age of criminal behavior is in adolescence, between age of 15 and 19 (Farrington, 1986; Piquero et al. 2007; Bosick, 2009). Young people involved in criminal behavior in adolescence are usually dealt with in juvenile justice system (see Goldson and Muncie, 2006; Loeber et al., 2013). The vast majority of existing studies on the relationship between education and crime do not consider differences between age groups, and have a mixed-age research population. However, and as is shown below, youth crime can differ from adult crime in several respects, and therefore its relationship to education might be also different.

Young people appear to be involved in a greater variety of criminal behavior, but also less serious and less sophisticated crime, compared to adults (Junger-Tas etal., 2010). For example, the most frequent arrests among U.S. youth are for minor crimes against property, vandalism, drugs dealing, disorderly conduct, and obstruction of justice (Puzzanchera et al., 2010). In European countries, group fighting, carrying weapons, drugs dealing, shoplifting, vandalism and computer hacking predominate (Junger-Tas et al., 2009).

Young people and adults can differ in their motivation to exhibit offending behavior. In accordance with the economic theory, adults have an economic interest to be engaged in crime (see Becker, 1968; Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Lochner, 2011). Although adolescents tend to report that the main motivation of their criminal involvement is gaining economic and financial benefits, there are many other reasons of their criminal behavior, such as, enjoyment, excitement, entertainment and pleasure (Goldson & Muncie, 2006; Farrington, 2001). Luallen (2006) considers that mischief crimes committed by juveniles "often result from boredom rather than calculated criminal thought" (p. 88). Similarly, Scitovsky (1999) believes that violence in school largely occurs due to feelings of boredom and a lack of activities at school. Peer group pressure, mood swings, and lack of reflection on emotional situations are significant factors that can stimulate offending behavior of juveniles (McCord et al., 2001). Finally, a criminal act is frequently viewed by young people as a risk-taking

adventure that gives offenders status and particular respect within their group of peers (Cohen, 1955).

The other distinct aspect of youth crime is that adolescents are relatively more likely to commit crime with others or in groups compared to adults (see Zimring, 1981; Greenwood, 1995; Reiss, 1988). In contrast to adult criminal associations, groups of juvenile offenders are typically formed by territorial affiliation, and they are usually random and less stable over time (Reiss, 1988). Therefore, social interactions at school and on the street seem to have a great impact on behavior of young people. Juveniles are more likely to co-offend with individuals of the same gender and the same age group compared to adults (Reiss, 1988). Similar to adult crime, young males participate in criminal activities more often than young females (Levitt & Lochner, 2001).

Finally, the timing of youth crime varies with the type of offence (see Gottfredson & Soulé, 2005; Taylor-Butts, 2010). Police-reported crimes against persons typically occur during after-school hours (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999), and more specifically, between three and six o'clock in the afternoon (Newman et al., 2000; Taylor-Butts, 2010). However, Gottfredson and Soule (2005) argue that violent offenses during school hours are the most frequent. By contrast, the peak of violent crime among adults is between midnight and three o'clock in the morning (Taylor-Butts, 2010). Furthermore, youth violence tends to decrease on weekends when young people are interacting less with their peers (see Jacob & Lefgren, 2003) while violent adult offences are increasing during weekends (see Falk, 1952; Briscoe & Donnell, 2003).

Several recent prominent studies have used very plausible "natural experiment" type research designs to show that keeping potential high school dropouts in school longer can indeed have dramatic causal effects on the future outcomes of many youths. For example, using the variation in compulsory schooling ages across states, Lochner and Moretti (2004) find that raising the compulsory schooling age by one year lowers the probability of incarceration later in life by 0.10% for whites and 0.37% for blacks. For some students, dropping out of school is the culmination of a process that likely started years before, while for others it may happen quite suddenly due to a change in life circumstances (Alexander et al. 1997). Moreover, dropping out of school is often a process, with many students leaving and returning to school multiple times (Chuang, 1997; Entwistle et al. 2004).

There is considerable variation in the proximate reason or reasons individuals give for out of school (Rumberger 1987). As argued by other researchers, many of these reasons can be often be classified as *pull* factor*s*, or factors such that the individual says he dropped out in order to do more of a particular activity such as working for pay or taking care of family members, while others can be classified as *push* factors, where the circumstances an individual found himself in made school no longer tenable and was in some sense pushed out, which could include reasons such as expulsion,

residential moves, poor performance, or legal problems (Stearns and Glennie 2006, McNeal 1997, Mihalic and Elliot 1997, Fine 1986, Jordan et al. 1996).

Jarjoura (1993) and Sweeten et al. (2009) looked at how criminal behavior varies by reason given for dropping out. Sweeten et. al. (2009) primarily use the reason given for dropping out as a way to examine the implications of "identity" theory with respect to crime. Given this interest, their analysis differs from that done below in that they stratify and control for their "reasons for dropping out" in substantially different ways than done here. Moreover, Sweeten et al. (2009) use an individual fixed-effects strategy, essentially looking at how criminal behavior differed for an individual in the time just after dropping out relative to when in school. This is in contrast to the analysis done here which attempts to look at both criminal and labor market behavior when individuals are in their early twenties, several years subsequent to the dropout decision.

Relationship between Education and Crime

Machin et al. (2012) identify the effect of educational attainment on youth crime using the reform in post-compulsory education system in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the U.K. as a source of exogenous variation in educational participation of young individuals aged between 16 and 21. This reform increased the number of individuals that stayed in education. The criminal data used for this study come from on a randomly selected sample of offenders. The results show that a one percent increase in the proportion of males in full time education and a one percent increase in the proportion of men staying in education after the compulsory school leaving age reduces criminal behavior of young men by around 1.9 percent and 1.7 percent, respectively. This reduction is also present for women, although smaller in magnitude, 1.1 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively.

Brugård and Falch (2012) exploit Norwegian data on educational characteristics and detailed data on imprisonment for persons aged between 21 and 22 to analyse the relationship between education and youth crime. They use exam results as an instrument for skills, and the study track structure together with proximity to high schools as instrument for the number of semesters in high school education. The results of this study suggest that an additional semester in high school reduces the probability of imprisonment by 0.44 percentage points.

Merlo and Wolpin (2009) provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamic interactions among a youth's schooling, employment and criminal behavior decisions and criminal involvement outcomes. They use individual-level panel data reported by the Afro-American male population aged between 13 and 22 in the U.S. To estimate youth's decisions to engage in schooling, employment and criminal behavior (including all possible combinations of these three activities), they apply a multinomial discrete choice vector autoregression model. They use the estimates to account for unobserved heterogeneity and state dependence (past choices and outcomes).

Furthermore, they simulated the effect of changing schooling status at age 16 for the same individuals and compare their criminal involvement. They conclude that not attending school at age 16 (implying school dropout) increases the likelihood of committing crime and being incarcerated at age 19-22 by up to 14.8 percentage points and up to 8.1 percentage points, respectively.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design where 111 respondents were identified using simple random sampling from Shikusa Borstal Institution in Kakamega County in western Kenya. This constituted 30% of the total population of juvenile delinquents committed to the facility for various offences against persons and/or property. The total population of inmates at Shikusa Borstal Institution as at the time of conducting the study (August 2015) stood at 369. A standard questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Questionnaire method is especially where there are large numbers of respondents to be handled because it facilitates easy and quick derivation of information within a short time (Kerlinger, 2004). The structured (closed-ended) and unstructured (open-ended) items were used so as to get the responses from respondents. The data obtained from the field was organized, edited to ensure completeness, comprehensibility and consistency, classified and coded according to research hypotheses and objectives for analysis. Study data was analyzed by use of both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for windows. Each question related to a variable was assigned a score or numerical value by use of likert scale method. The number on a likert scale was ordered such that they indicate the presence or absence of the characteristics being measured. All statistical measurements were performed at 95% confidence level.

Findings

Table 1: Categorical Dropout and Criminal Behaviour Measures

Composite Variable	Composite Index
School dropout differences	0.37
Criminality differences	0.62

Findings in table 1 shows the Blau's heterogeneity index for school dropout and criminal behaviour. Composite dropout index is 0.37 while the composite criminal behaviour index is 0.62. Study findings show the coefficient of variation for school dropout among juvenile deliquents which is the heterogeneous measures for continuous predictors of criminal behaviour outcomes.

Table 2: Correlation Between Major Study Variables

		Criminal Behaviour
School	Pearson Correlation	.702**
Dropout	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022
	N	111

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2- tailed)
*Correlation significant at 0.01 level (2 - tailed)

Findings in table 2 reveal a statistically significant relationship between school dropout and involvement in criminal behaviour (r=0.702; P<0.05). This implies that dropping out of school may contribute to up to 70.2% of the likelihood of involvement in criminal behaviour.

Table 3: Effect of School Dropout on Likelihood of involvement in Criminal Behaviour

	Value	Df	Asympt.Sig. (2 -sided)	Exact Sig. (2 -sided)	Exact Sig. (1 -sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.731[a]	1	.002		
Continuity Correction[b]	8.442	1	.003		
Likelihood Ratio	19.837	1	.003		
Fisher's Exact Test				.002	.003
Linear by Linear Association	19.713	1	.003		
N of valid cases	109				

0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 4. The minimum expected count is 48.95

Findings in table 3 reveal a statistically significant effect of school dropout on likelihood of involvement in criminal behaviour (X^2=19.731; P<0.05). Since only one degree of freedom (df=1) was recorded in the X^2 computation, Yates correction for continuity was performed and results accordingly incorporated in the final score (X^2=19.731: df=1). This was a single sample Chi-square where the researcher intended to establish the goodness-of-fit between observed and expected frequencies in the relationship between school dropout and involvement in criminal behaviour.

Conclusions

In a more general sense, the situation as it currently stands with reference to juvenile crimes and delinquency can be associated with a relatively increased rate in aggravated and violent crimes among the youthful society, general increase of criminal offenses with increased rare of school dropout rates. As identified in this research, cases of juvenile delinquency cover a large number of different legal violations and social standards, varying from serious criminal offenses to minor crimes that are committed by youth. Some forms of juvenile delinquency crimes form part of the

maturation process and development and become non-existent spontaneously as they become adults. Many adults who are currently considered responsible earlier committed many types of minor crimes during their adolescent stage. Poverty, unemployment and social segregation frequently result in marginalization, and juveniles who are segregated are further vulnerable to beginning and maintaining behaviors that are delinquent.

Based on the findings of the aforementioned data analysis, it is clear that whenever poverty increases, more cases of juvenile delinquency are observed. Since poverty is closely associated with education and unemployment, the more the number of unemployed civilians, the more cases of juvenile delinquency would exist in the region as many idlers get involved in criminal cases at younger ages to sustain their survival. Poverty is a direct product of unemployment, thus, the higher the rate, the greater the number of juvenile offenses.

With a review of related literature suggesting that fewer adults are involved in criminal activities than the juveniles, it could be an indication that juveniles face a lot of challenges due to their age and peer influence but adults realize that they are beyond certain criminal acts. Unemployment, low levels of education, and poverty, are factors that are common among juveniles. There is likely to be an increased degree of juvenile delinquency cases with time.

Recommendations

It is advisable, therefore, that more juveniles who cannot continue with education for whatever reason be assisted to become employed. This will engage them meaningfully and as a result keep them away from crime. The provisions of the Employment Act (2007) barring the employment of people under the age of 18 should be reconsidered in cases where the subject is unable to continue with school for whatever reason and where employment may be the only way to provide such a person with gainful engagement.

If policies that are adopted to act as solutions to the current trend of juvenile delinquency, then a higher prioritized consideration should be given to youths or juveniles that are marginalized by virtue of being poor and incapable of supporting their education. This would help reduce their level of vulnerability and disadvantage in society and problems that are associated with youths that act out negatively. Laws or policies in the country should be given a major concentration and focus while developing nationwide youth policies. The effective administration of juvenile justice must undergo decentralization to encourage local governments or authorities to actively take part in preventing juvenile delinquency and reincorporate juvenile offenders into their respective societies via support activities and projects, with the final intention of promoting dependable citizenship.

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