

Youth Violence: Perspectives on Risk and Protection

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Abstract

It is recognized that absence of social protection increases risks and compound vulnerability to economic shocks. Social protection is defined to be policies and programmes aimed at providing individuals and families income and other support for coping with the consequences of economic shocks. In Kenya, worsening economic conditions has made employment opportunities, particularly in the formal sector are scanty. This is recognized as potentially one of the most important shocks faced by the youth, circumstances that make them susceptible to risky behaviours. The youth are observed to be increasingly involved in various forms of crime and violence. The risks to which youth are exposed are a reflection of the absence of social protection policies which can provide some degree of protection against economic shocks. In view of this, the crucial role which the government must play in terms of development of labour market based policies and programmes to protect and support the youth is emphasized. The aim of this paper is to open a discussion on the notion of 'youth at risk' as seen from the perspective of social protection. The paper specifically seeks to capture the economic factors on the likelihood of youth violence, using the case study of Lugari constituency in the context of the post election violence in which it was mostly the youth that took part. We however take cognizance that while this analysis focuses on youth violence in Kenya, the findings can easily be projected to the wider Sub-Saharan Africa context.

Key words: Economic, Risk, Shock, Social Protection, Violence, Youth

Introduction

There is accumulating evidence that delicate economic conditions are among important factors which enhance the risk of becoming involved in crime and violence, or other and unhealthy behaviours. Poverty has been found to be significantly associated with the likelihood of involvement in crime and violence. The one thing that is common with this crisis is that the impact is higher on the youth. Evidence shows that poverty has influence on youth aggression due to increased stress and feelings of hopelessness that may arise from chronic unemployment and other associated factors.¹

To investigate this link, first, a definition of youth is in order. For the purpose of this paper, the definition used is in reference to young women and men aged 18 to 29 years.² This age range generally corresponds to the transition from school to employment. On this basis, identification of unemployment as one of the key risk factors that contribute to youth violence makes clear that the policy and programmatic responses need to be those that cushion the youth against economic shocks.

¹ Inter-American Development Bank. 2002. "Youth Violence Prevention." Technical Note 10 in M. Buvinic and A. Morrison (eds.), *Technical Notes: Violence Prevention*. Washington, D.C.: IDB.

² Although much of the standardized WHO data on youth violence use the 10-29 age range, the interest here is to capture the transitioning from schooling into employment.

Addressing youth unemployment is one of the overarching goals of the Government of Kenya. The Government has encouraged the notions of self-employment and entrepreneurship and among the youth, young people who turn to self-employment often work in unsafe conditions that offer low incomes and poor prospects for the future. However, young people still regard the formal sector as their main employment option. Notwithstanding, it is apparent that, prior to the 2008 post-election violence, Kenya had been slow in mainstreaming of youth issues in the sectors of the economy. Following the post-election crisis in 2008, the manner in which youth issues have been addressed came into much sharper focus. This motivated more attention to the socio economic needs of the youth, this being an essential element of efforts aimed at to provide an effective safety net to cope with the consequences of economic shocks. The aspects of social protection introduced included the creation of a youth employment programme dubbed '*Kazi kwa Vijana Programme*'. The introduction and implementation of this employment programme has been complemented by the establishment of the Youth Development Fund. The specific goal of these initiatives is to direct more resources to meet more comprehensively the needs of the youth particularly in relation to income generation.

Two broad sets of arguments offered in favour of these measures were; to ameliorate social tension and reduce crime, especially following the post election violence. The programme has so far provided employment to over 80,000 youth who are involved in activities ranging from construction of water dams and water, pans, managing public water kiosks, subsidiary works for boreholes and rehabilitation of irrigation schemes.³ The government report indicated reduction in cases of petty theft and extortion as more youth were now involved in income generating activities.⁴

The youth in Kenya

Considered wholesale, 75 percent of Kenya's population is under 30 years of age. Those between 15 and 30 years of age constitute about 32 percent of the population, representing about 60 percent of the total potential labour force in the country. Most however remain unemployed due to high levels of unemployment. It is therefore not surprising that youth employment remains a major issue for Kenya, given the high percentage of young people in the population.

The reality of youth unemployment can be appreciated in the context of the number of youth who graduate from various tertiary institutions ready to enter the job market every year. Statistics indicate that about 500,000 graduate, while 75 percent remain unemployed. It is particularly noted that while the number of youth in secondary and tertiary institutions has increased, the labour market in Kenya is not able to accommodate this large group of skilled young graduates because there is minimal link between the education system and the labour market needs.

As a result, poverty underlies the lives of the majority of the youth. In the Strategic Plan (2007 to 2012), The Ministry of Youth Affairs observes the lack of employment opportunities has placed many young people at risk, and contributes to rising levels of youth delinquency, crime and violence. Accordingly of this deepening, the early mid 1980's saw a rapid growth in the percentage of 'At risk' youth, described as those young girls and boys whose living conditions, health and circumstances or behaviours place them at risk of victimization and/or involvement in crime. It has been found that criminal attacks, including rape, mugging, armed carjacking and home invasions are increasingly being associated with the youth. Aggregate crime involvement statistics suggest that over 50 percent of all the convicted criminals are young people aged between 16 and 25 years.

³ Report of the Prime Minister to the National Assembly, 25th November, 2009

⁴ Nairobi's Provincial administration, <http://www.ntv.co.ke/News/-/471778/610582/-/rskkwdz/-/index.html>, Sunday June 14, 2009

Case Study of Lugari Constituency

Lugari is an electoral constituency in Kenya's region of Western Province. The constituency is relatively cosmopolitan in terms of ethnic configuration. Lugari is predominantly an agricultural area. As mirrored in the rest of Kenya, young adults (those between 18 and 35 years of age) form greater part of the population. Lugari was one of the areas worst hit by violence following the 2007 elections in Kenya. A close scrutiny of research findings regarding post election violence in the area suggests that, while perceptions on election rigging was a key trigger of the violence, at the background, land issues and economic conditions in general, may have been noteworthy precursors.

Majority of the adult population (over 70 percent) have a personal earning of less than or equal to US dollars 50 a month, and only about 1 in every 10 have a personal income of more than US dollars 260 a month. The marriage age in the area is as low as 18 years of age thereby increasing the dependency and strain on development.

Income opportunities are further weakened by lack of capital and limited opportunities to access loan facilities for investment. Only 1 percent is likely to access finances from bank institutions. It is noted that only about 2 in every 10 adults have temporary or casual employment or are employed full time, a consideration deemed extremely important by many financing institutions as a significant indication of frequent individual's cash inflow.

Analysis and findings

This study described in this paper was conducted in November 2010 with a sample of 300 adult respondents in Lugari. For the purpose of this paper, however, the analysis focus only the youth sub-group (n=175) has been considered. The sample was drawn using a two stage sample design with probability proportional to size. The key objective of this analysis was to investigate the influence of socio-economic and poverty factors on the likelihood of youth violence in Lugari. The analysis applied in this paper sought to capture the influence of the following variables: employment status, education level, socio-economic status based on household income, and living conditions.

For analysis, the effects of these socio-economic variables have been modeled to determine their relative influence on youth violence. The bivariate logistic regression method has been used to estimate occurrence of participation in violence due to the socio-economic factors. The findings are presented in terms of the odds of participating in violence. In interpreting odds ration, the closer the values are to one, the weaker the effect of the given factor on the occurrence of violence. Odds ratio greater than one indicate a higher likelihood of violence occurring, while values less than one indicate lower likelihood. The table below presents the findings.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
Employment status	Unemployed	1.337
	Self employment	0.586
Education	Primary and below	0.660
	Secondary and above	2.740
Household income	US\$ \geq 65	0.187
	US\$ \leq 195	0.747
Quality of living conditions	Fair/Good	0.967
	Poor	0.712

For the purpose of analysis, the socio-economic factors are grouped into two categories: opportunity variables (i.e. employment status and education), and well-being variables (i.e. household income and living conditions). First looking at opportunity variables, the analysis shows that unemployed youth are more than twice as likely to participate in violence as their employed counterparts to participate in violence. On the other hand, those youths with secondary level education and above are almost four times as likely to participate in violence as their counterpart who have attained primary level education and below.

Counter to expectations, when it comes to well-being variables, the analysis shows that both income and quality of living conditions have less influence occurrence of violence. Overall, one key point emerges: that income differentials alone do little to explain participation in violence. Rather it is lack of opportunity to earn an income that is more likely to be associated with youth violence.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter points to a number of potential policy conclusions. The most important conclusion is that youth unemployment is a significant concern. It is not just enough to provide the youth with education. In actual sense, education appears to elevate expectations, and when these are not met the likelihood of crime and violence is exacerbated. The weight of evidence suggests no direction of causality between income levels or living conditions being and youth violence. It is also observant that males are more associated with violence as compared with females (data not depicted in table). Although this is likely to be subject to debate, this suggests strongly that livelihood interventions should particularly be targeted at young men.