



Socio-Economic Vulnerability of Young Prison Inmates in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Young prison inmates (YPI) are also young adulthood offenders (YAO) in transition to added and/or new responsibilities, roles, and occupational careers. The transition typically encompasses a progression from varied forms of basic education to varied forms of employment or occupational careers. The transition is also a phase of life characterized by intense socio-economic vulnerability and the risk of disruption of lawful occupations. This study, therefore, assessed the socio-economic vulnerability of young prison inmates and the risk of contributing to the disruption of their lawful careers. The socio-economic vulnerability was assessed in terms of 1) the family type and structure, 2) the socio-economic indicators consisting of the location, religion, education and employment, and 3) more importantly, the livelihood security scale across several critical indicators including food, income, farming, employment, security to continue education and security in healthcare among others. The study concluded that a greater proportion of the young prison inmates had experienced extensive socio-economic vulnerability and risk of disruption of their lawful careers.

Keywords: Youth vulnerabilities, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, young adult inmates, career development, youth imprisonment, and Kenyan prisons

1. Introduction

While considerable attention has been given to crime, imprisonment, and rehabilitation, limited attention has been given to socio-economic vulnerability and the risk of disruption of lawful careers in low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Indicators of the socio-economic vulnerability among youth include limited access to education and healthcare, unemployment, low income, and exposure to crime or even violence. More specifically, socio-economic vulnerability among youth increases the propensity to (likelihood of) unlawful occupations or varied forms of unlawful activities. Indeed, despite the various policy measures, the proportion of crimes attributed to young people remains considerably high: 35% globally, 42% in Africa, and 54% in Kenya (UNODC, 2021; NCRC, 2018; NCRC, 2012). Such levels of unlawful incidents have been associated with fundamental disruption of lawful career, lawful occupational experience (employability), and socioeconomic well-being. Of greater concern has been the tendency to convert the young adult offenders into criminal careers: i.e., repeated and more severe offences and likely lengthy sentences in prison. This study was intended, therefore, to examine socio-economic vulnerability and likely disruption of lawful careers.

The theory of socioeconomic vulnerability has been used to assess, evaluate and to understand the conditions of poverty, unemployment, low income, family instability and deprivation and their contribution to crime patterns, conviction and imprisonment, rehabilitation of inmate, and the outcomes of such interventions (PRI, 2018; Rabuy & Kopf, 2015; Ashish, 2014; Smith & Hopkins, 2013; Freeman, 1996, 1991; Grogger, 1995).

2. Background to the Study

Among the 11.7 million imprisoned persons globally by 2023, about 4.1 million (35%) were young offenders aged between 15 and 26 (UNODC, 2021, 2023). Out of 476191 homicides worldwide in 2019, 200,000 (42%) were perpetrated by youth aged 10 to 29 years (WHO, 2020). Out of the 1.4 million prison population in SSA in 2023, 541,930 (42%) were young offenders between 15 and 26 years (Walmsley, 2018, and Walmsley, 2020).

Similarly, out of 430,103 imprisoned persons in East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) in 2019, 193,547 (45%) were young offenders (UNODC, 2019). Out of 60,000 imprisoned persons in Kenya in 2023, 298,000 nearly 50% were young adult offenders under the age of 26 (KNBS, 2023). Additionally, various reports indicate that crimes committed by this age group accounted for 67% of the total crimes in Kenya (Faria, 2022; Ondigo, 2020; KNCAJ, 2017).

Young adult offenders (YAO) are persons (or inmates) in early adulthood accompanied by added and/or new roles, responsibilities, and occupational careers. The transition from adolescence to early adulthood has typically been accompanied by intensive (severe) vulnerability related to progression from basic education to varied forms of employment and occupational careers (ILO, 2021; WHO, 2021; Scott et al., 2016 and Xie et al., 2014). More specifically, it has been hypothesized that socio-economic vulnerability among youth increases, among others, the propensity to (likelihoods of) unlawful occupations or varied forms of unlawful.

Many studies have explored the relation between socio-economic adversity and the propensity towards unlawful careers (Umoh 2025, Mensah 2025, Abhishek & Balamurugan 2024, Vargas 2023, Omboi 2020, Hardgrove et al 2014). These studies have reported the link (relation) between varied aspects of socio-economic adversities and the incidences of unlawful activities (occupations). More specifically, these studies have emphasized the link (relation) between poverty, unemployment, low income, severely limited livelihoods, and diversion to unlawful careers, varied forms of crime as a means of survival, and/or as a measure to improve livelihoods, financial gain, or socio-economic wellbeing.

These studies, however, have assessed only limited or isolated aspects of the socio-economic vulnerability of young persons, and have not addressed the socio-economic vulnerability of young prison inmates in low and middle-income countries.

This study, therefore, assessed the socio-economic vulnerability of the young prison inmates and the risk of contributing to the disruption of their lawful careers. Specifically, the study assesses the socio-economic vulnerability of the young inmates in terms of 1) the family type and structure, 2) the socio-economic indicators consisting of the location, religion, education and employment, and 3) more importantly livelihood security scale across a number of critical indicators including food, income, farming, employment, security to continue education and security in healthcare among others.

3. Methodology

The study was a survey design, a one-time collection of data. Accordingly, adequate preparation was carried out to ensure the time was appropriate and convenient for the majority of the population. The data collection instruments were developed based on best practices. This included the development of a questionnaire, a key informants guide, and a focus group discussion guide (Creswell, 2007; Pardede, 2018). Access to secondary data, including records, registers, and reports, was used for preliminary understanding of the population and development of a sampling frame. In addition, logistics were carried out as well as familiarization of the prison facilities, briefings on interview protocols and schedules with Officers in charge (OIC) in Kamiti and Langata prisons, respectively.

The study was conducted in Kamiti Medium Prison and Langata Women's Prison. The two institutions were selected purposely on account of being the only maximum prisons in the city, having a greater number of convicted young inmates, and having rehabilitation programs. Kamiti is similarly the largest prison for men, while Langata is the largest women's prison in Kenya. Both institutions are headed by a Chief Superintendent of Prisons (GoK, 2012). Kamiti Medium Prison is located 20 Km North of Nairobi City County. It was established in 1955 by the British government to detain offenders during the state of emergency. Kamiti Maximum Security Prison command comprises Kamiti Youth Training and Correction Centre, Kamae Girls Borstal Institution, Kamiti Medium Prison, and Kamiti Maximum Prison, which have approximately 1800 convicted inmates serving long-term imprisonment (Mososi & Wandibba, 2019). Langata Women's Prison is located 15 Km south of Nairobi Central Business District and was established in the 1950s. and houses long-term and short-term women prisoners.

The population of the study was convicted young adult inmates between 15 and 26 years in Kamiti Medium Prison and Langata Women's Prison. Available records at the two institutions indicated that the institutions support a total of 1700 inmates who are categorized as remandees and convicted. Further, based on the records, 391 were between 15-26 years, and which were therefore the study target population. However, those in the remand were excluded principally because they had not been convicted, had not started their sentences, and had not been exposed to rehabilitation.

The study used Yamene's (1967) formula for small and finite populations with a 95% probability of confidence level to determine the required sample. Systematic random sampling was used to draw individual samples in the Kamiti and Langata women's prisons. In Kamiti medium prison, a sample of 170 was drawn using a systematic sampling interval of two (2) in the register. In Langata women's prison, a sample of 105 was drawn using a systematic random sample at an interval of one (1) in the register.

The socio-economic vulnerability was assessed in terms of 1) the family type and structure, 2) the socio-economic indicators consisting of the location, religion, education and employment, and 3) more importantly, the livelihood security scale across several critical indicators including food, income, farming, employment, security to continue education and security in healthcare among others. The principal objective was to assess areas of greatest vulnerability or insecurity.

4. Findings, Validation, and Discussions

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Young Inmates

The first objective was to assess the socio-demographic characteristics of the young inmates. Accordingly, the study assessed various aspects of the socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, age, marital status, family size, religious affiliation, location of their residence, education, socioeconomic dimensions, and employment status before imprisonment.

4.1.1 The Gender of the Young Inmates

Although the proportion of women in prison in Kenya remains around 8-10% of the prison population, the study assessed a sample of 37% women and 63% men (Table 4.1.1) below because of inclusion of the Langata Women Prison in the sample; purposely to have greater insight on how the

two genders have been affected by the socio-economic vulnerability, propensity to crime and disruption of the career prospects. These responses were consistent with previous reports (Chebet 2022, KNBS 2022, NCRC 2022, Ondigo 2020, NCAJ 2017, SRIC 2014). KNBS (2022) reported that the proportion of men was significantly higher compared to women among the offenders who were convicted in Kenya between 2013 and 2022. The proportion of women in prison stood at around 7% globally, 5% in SSA, and around 8 to 10% in Kenya (WPB 2022, PRI 2022, BJS 2021, NCAJ 2017). Inclusion of the Langata Women's Prison in the sample increased the proportion of women in the study to 37% which was also similar to previous studies. Indeed, Ondigo (2020) reported substantially similar percentages in a study that included Langata Women's Prison. These findings demonstrated that women are considerably less likely to commit crimes compared to men.

4.1.2 The Age of the Young Inmate

Age of the inmates was considered important as an indicator for a number of processes, including life phases, opportunities, and challenges. In this respect, the study assessed the age of the young prison inmates and responses (Table 4.1.2) indicated that 64% of the young inmates were in the age category of 24-26 years of age.

These responses were similar to previous reports (Cowling 2022, Kagwi-Ndungu 2022, KNBS 2022, BJS 2021, KPHC 2019, NCRC 2018, NCAJ 2017, and SRIC 2014), which indicated that the average age of the arrested persons in Kenya was between 16 and 25 years. More specifically, Cowling (2022) indicated that by 2022, around 8000 of the convicted persons in Kenya were aged between 21 and 25 years. Kagwi-Ndungu (2022) reported that the number of prison inmates aged above 26 years doubled to 36,101 in 2021, and those aged between 18-25 years increased sharply from 12,487 in 2020 to 28,956 in 2021. In addition, NCRC (2018) reported that 57% of crimes reported to the police in Kenya have been committed by the youth and young inmates between 18 and 25 years have continued to constitute an average of 49% of the prison population.

The results align with the age-crime relationship curve, which is widely recognized as consisting of four phases: (1) a rapid increase in criminal activity during mid-adolescence, (2) a peak in late adolescence, (3) a sharp decline in early adulthood, and (4) a gradual, continuous decline thereafter throughout later years (Farrington, 1986; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Hall, 1904; Quetelet, 1831). The findings of the study demonstrate that the relationship between age and crime follows an asymmetrical bell curve, with criminal behaviour rising sharply in adolescence, peaking in the mid-20s, and gradually declining thereafter, mirroring life expectancy. Notably, the peak age for criminal behaviour consistently occurs around 25 years, across virtually all types of crime.

4.1.3 Marital Status of the Young Inmates

The study considered the marital status of the young prison inmates as an important phase in life with associated responsibilities, social skills, and challenges. In this respect, the study assessed the marital status of the young prison inmates. Responses (Table 4.1.3) indicated that 59% were single, 39% had entered the phase of marriage or establishing some other family 29% were married, and 10% were separated.

These responses were consistent with previous studies (Agasa, 2011; BJS, 2021; Sampson et al., 2006; Western, 2004). Western reported that in general, by the age of 26, nearly 25% of men in

correctional institutions were married compared to 46% of those who had not been subjected to the criminal justice system (BJS, 2021; Western, 2004). In addition, Andersen et al. (2015) reported that marriages created systems of obligations and restraint. The findings suggested that once a young person gets married, they are likely to focus on marital responsibilities such as parenting, making them less inclined to engage in criminal activities.

4.1.4 Number of Children Among Young Inmates

The number of children among the young prison inmates is usually considered a key indicator of parenthood, social responsibility, social skills, and potential challenges. In this respect, the study assessed the number of children among the young prison inmates, and responses (Table 4.1.4) indicated that the number of children ranged from zero to 6. More specifically, while 42% did not have children, 58% of the young inmates had children, in whom 24% had one child, 18% had two children, and 10% had three children.

Table 4. 1 Gender, Age, Marital Status, and Number of Children Among Young Inmates

1. Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	172	63
Female	103	37
Total	275	100.0
2. Age categories	Frequency	Percent
15-17	12	4.4
18-20	13	4.8
21-23	72	26.5
24-26	175	64.3
total	272	100.0
3. Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Single	162	59.0
Married	78	28.5
Separated	26	9.5
Divorced	4	1.5
Widow/Widower	4	1.5
total	274	100.0
4. Number of Children	Frequency	Percent
0 (None)	114	41.5
1	66	24.0
2	50	18.2

3	28	10.2
4	12	4.4
5	4	1.5
6	1	.4
Total	275	100.0

The large number of children among the young inmates suggested early parenthood, parenthood responsibilities, and increased demand for sustainable livelihoods. The study also assessed the number of dependents for the young prison inmates, and responses indicated that nearly 30% of the young inmates did not have dependents, 24% had one to two dependents, and 22% had 3 to 4 dependents.

These responses were similar to previous reports (KDHS, 2022, 2014, 2008–09; KDHS, 2014; Economic Survey, 2022). In principle, these reports indicated that nearly 1/3 of the young prison inmates were parents with responsibilities to take care of their children.

The results indicated that for young adults, the transition to parenthood comes with many family responsibilities. This significant burden can expose families to socioeconomic insecurities, which may increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour. In contrast, individuals without parental responsibilities are more prone to commit crimes, often due to unemployment or involvement in low-paying jobs.

4.1.5 The Type of Family and Structure

Different types of parental structure have been considered important dimensions (variables), particularly concerning different life outcomes, including life skills, socio-economic capacity, and resilience to address adverse or vulnerable conditions. In this respect, the study assessed the marital status of the parents of the young prison inmates. Responses (Table 4.2.1) indicated that 54% of the young inmates came from parents who were married at the time of their arrest, and 46% came from parents who had a vulnerable marriage, either were experiencing varied challenges, or were still single.

Table 4.2 Parent Marital Status and Siblings

1. Parents' marital status	Frequency	Percent
Single	52	18.9
Married	149	54.2
Separated	31	11.3
Divorced	6	2.2
Widow/Widower	10	3.6
Deceased	27	9.8
Total	275	100.0
2. Number of Siblings	Frequency	Percent

0	28	10
1-2	43	16
3-4	85	31
5-6	66	24
Over 7	53	19
Total	275	100.0

In principle, responses indicated that the young inmates came from backgrounds characterized by different family structures. These responses were consistent with previous reports (KPHC, 2019; KDHS, 2022), which indicated that over two-thirds (2/3) of the households in Kenya have typically been married, and nearly a third (1/3) had varied status. In addition, IEA (2010) reported that family structure was significant in predicting crime among young adults. In particular, the report indicated that young adults from single-parent families were more likely to participate in a crime situation as compared to those from married-parent families.

4.1.6 Number of Siblings for the Young Inmates

Similarly, the number of siblings in the childhood of a person has been associated with different life outcomes at subsequent life phases, including life skills, socio-economic capacity, and resilience to address adverse or vulnerable conditions. In this respect, the study assessed the number of siblings who lived with the young prison inmates before incarceration. Responses (Table 4.2.2) indicated that 43% of the young inmates lived with relatively large siblings, over the rate of 3.4 per woman (or household) based on the 2022 projected census.

The findings indicated that the majority of the respondents had between 2 and 8 siblings. These responses were consistent with reports from secondary data and previous studies (KPHC, 2019; KDHS, 2022). Large siblings and therefore large households (or families) have been demonstrated to severely outpace available resources, particularly financial resources and/or livelihood assets; thereby increasing vulnerability to poverty and disruption of the career prospects. In addition, several studies have examined the effects of sibling at the childhood of a person on subsequent life outcomes such as education, social skills, deviance and/or employability (Merry et al., 2020; Conger & Wendy Little, 2010).

4.1.7 Location of the Residence of Young Inmates

The study identified the location of the young inmate in terms of the Location, Wards, and County. In addition, the study also considered the characteristics of the location in terms of rural-urban as important, particularly concerning the available livelihoods and prevailing challenges. Accordingly, the study assessed the rural-urban status of the residences of the young inmates. Responses (Table 4.3.1) indicated that while 41% lived in rural areas, 59% of the young inmates lived in urban areas, typically accompanied by greater demand for sustainable livelihoods, particularly employment and financial resources, as well as challenges related to informal settlements.

Responses were similar to previous reports (O'Neill, 2023; Cowling, 2022; Chebet, 2022; KPHC, 2019). These sources reported that while, on average, 29% of the population in Kenya lived in urban areas,

a greater proportion of the young population lived in urban areas. More specifically, other studies have reported that over 50% of the young people in Kenya live in some form of urban area or informal urban settlements (O'Neill, 2023; Cowling, 2022; Chebet, 2022).

These reports also indicated that the urban population in Kenya increased from 12 million (25.7%) in 2015 to 15 million (27.8%) in 2022. The same reports projected that by 2040, nearly 50% of the population in Kenya will be living in urban areas, in which a greater proportion will be young people. Other reports indicated that most of the young people in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) lived in informal settlements without basic facilities, services, and security (UN-Habitat, 2011). These findings suggested that youth crime is primarily an urban issue in Kenya, linked to the significant number of young people, especially those living in urban informal settlements.

4.1.8 Religious Affiliation for the Young Inmates

The study considered religious affiliation as a key source of values, cohesion, social skills, and related challenges. Accordingly, the study assessed the affiliation of the young prison inmates to religion, particularly Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. Responses (Table 4.3.2) indicated that 50% of the young adult offenders were Protestants, and 36% were Catholics.

Responses were consistent with previous reports (Cowling, 2022; KNBS, 2022; Ondigo, 2020; Nyaberi et al., 2019; NCAJ, 2017). More specifically, Ondigo reported substantially similar percentages in a study that included the Langata Women's Prison (2020). In addition, Cowling (2022) reported that by 2021, religious affiliations in Kenya consisted of Protestants (45%), Catholics (33%), and Muslims (13%).

Table 4.3 Location, Religion, and Education of the Young Inmates

1. Residence	Frequency	Percent
Rural	113	41.2
Town	102	37.2
Municipality	12	4.4
City	47	17.2
total	274	100.0
2. Religion	Frequency	Percent
Protestant	135	50
Catholics	97	36
Muslims	39	14
total	271	100
3. Education	Frequency	Percent
No Formal Education	75	1.8
Primary Education	120	44.1
Secondary Education	109	40.1

Technical Education	27	9.9
University Education	9	3.3
Post University Education	2	0.7
Total	272	100.0

4.1.9 Education of the Prisoned Young Inmate

Education is usually considered a critical process to enhance life skills, socio-economic capacity, prospects for better occupations, and resilience to address adverse or vulnerable situations. It includes fostering social mobility and equality in society. In this respect, the study assessed the education levels of the young prison inmates and responses (Table 4.3.3) generated four (4) interesting observations. First, the majority (44%) of the young inmates had primary education, as compared to the national average of 49.8%. Secondly, 40% of the young inmates had secondary education as compared to the national average of 24.9%. Thirdly, 9.9 % had technical education as compared to the national average of 7%; and fourthly 4% had university education as compared to the national average of 3.5%.

More specifically, the data indicated that the proportion of young inmates with secondary education was higher by 15.1% than the national average, and the proportion of young inmates with primary education was lower by 5.8% than the national average. As compared to the national average, young inmates had higher proportions in secondary education, technical education, and even university education.

In principle, these responses were consistent with previous reports (Nyabuto et al., 2022; NCRC, 2022; Ondigo, 2020; NCAJ, 2017; SRIC, 2014). Other studies have reported that, in general, prison inmates have been characterised by low levels of formal education (Pompoco et al., 2017; Goujon, 2015; Maximo, 2014; Roos, 2006). It will also be noted that SDG 4 addresses access to quality education with ten (10) targets. In which seven (7) are outcomes, and three (3) are means to achieving the outcomes. Specifically, target 4.1 calls for ensuring access to quality primary and secondary education for all girls and boys by 2030, and target 4.3 calls for ensuring access to technical, vocational, and higher education for all girls and boys by 2030, as well as access to lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The responses reflected some progress towards SDG 4.1 and limited progress towards SDG 4.3.

4.2 Experiences of Career Development and Challenges

The second objective of the study was to assess the experiences of career development, lawful occupations (careers), and challenges among the young inmates. The objective was based on the view (hypothesis) that the transition from childhood to early adulthood has typically been characterized by increased opportunities and challenges, with greater challenges in SSA, including Kenya (Bennett & Waterhouse, 2018; Kabiru et al., 2013; ILO, 2013; UN, 2007).

The process also involves a transition from basic education to tertiary or higher education, or from education to varied forms of employment, leaving home and establishing another family, among other processes. The transition from childhood to early adulthood in SSA, including Kenya, has been characterized by challenges that include poverty, inadequate education, limited

opportunities, and greater vulnerabilities that can substantially change the trajectories of career development among young adults.

4.2.1 Socioeconomic Vulnerability of Young Inmates

Given these challenges, the study was guided by the principle, the proposition, and indeed the hypothesis that adverse childhood conditions (ACC) have tended to trigger (increase) propensity (tendency) to crime in early adulthood, or transition to early adulthood. Among the key socio-economic insecurities (vulnerabilities) include 1) food insecurity 2) income insecurity 3) farming insecurity 4) employment insecurity 5) deficiency in meeting education needs and deficiency in meeting health expenses among others (NCRC, 2021; KPHC, 2019; Hall, 2017; ILO, 2017; WB, 2015; UNDP, 2013).

Accordingly, the study assessed these socioeconomic insecurities (vulnerabilities) of the young inmates. Responses (Table 4.4) indicated that the young inmates experienced varied levels of socioeconomic insecurity; namely, 1) food insecurity, 2) income insecurity, 3) farming insecurity, 4) employment insecurity, 5) meeting education needs, 6) meeting healthcare expenses, 7) livelihood insecurity, and 8) inheritance insecurity.

Table 4.4 Social Economic Vulnerability (Insecurity) of Inmates

Insecurity	Food insecurity	Income insecurity	Farming insecurity	Employment insecurity	Education expenses	Medical expenses	Livelihood insecurity	Inheritance insecurity
Mild insecurity	24.3%	15.7%	18.65%	14.2%	13.1%	14.6%	12.0%	12.3%
Moderate insecurity	40.8%	33.7%	24.1%	30.0%	26.9%	37.1%	39.1%	33.0%
Intensive insecurity	17.6%	26.6%	23.6%	30.4%	30.2%	25.5%	22.2%	16.7%
Severe insecurity	17.3%	24.0%	33.6%	25.3%	29.8%	22.8%	26.7%	37.9%
Total	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275	100% n=275

More specifically, young inmates that reported experience of severe-intense insecurity (vulnerability) in many indicators including 1) food insecurity (34.9%), 2) income insecurity (50.6%), 3) farming insecurity (57.2%), 4) employment insecurity (55.7%), 5) inability to meet education expenses (60%), 6) inability to meet health expenses (48.3%), 7) livelihoods insecurity (49%) and 8) inheritance insecurity (54.6%).

The foregoing outcomes were consistent with previous studies, which reported that young persons in Kenya have experienced severe levels of unemployment, underemployment, and several socio-economic insecurities (NCRC, 2021; KPHC, 2019; Hall, 2017; ILO, 2017; WB, 2015; UNDP, 2013). Other studies have reported that young adults, particularly in prison in Kenya, come from impoverished backgrounds characterised by high socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Tobiko et al., 2021; Nguni, 2019; SRIC, 2014; Achoda, 2012; Ou & Reynolds, 2010). In addition, NCRC (2021) reported that crime in Kenya was largely associated with unemployment and poverty. As observed by a participant, most

inmates experienced severe and intense insecurity, as confirmed by narrations by a 21-year-old young adult offender.

Back at home, we barely used to have enough food, and sometimes we would skip meals or go for days without food.

Another participant stated that:

A good Samaritan used to pay for my school fees, but upon his death, I dropped out of school since my mother could not raise my school fees.

4.2.2 Socioeconomic Vulnerability of the Parents

In addition, the study assessed the socioeconomic insecurity (vulnerability) of the parents of the young inmates. Responses (Table 4.5) indicated that the parents of the young prison inmates had also experienced varied levels of socioeconomic insecurity across the eight (8) indicators; namely 1) food insecurity, 2) income insecurity, 3) farming insecurity, 4) employment insecurity, 5) meeting education needs, 6) meeting healthcare expenses, 7) livelihood insecurity and 8) inheritance insecurity.

Table 4.5 Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities of the Parents

Insecurity	Food security	Income Security	Farming security	Employment security	Education expenses	Medical expenses	Livelihood security	Eroded Inheritance
Mild	22.3%	16.9%	34.5%	17.8%	19.6%	18.3%	15.1%	16.2%
Moderate	40.2%	32.2%	26.5%	27.0%	28.1%	34.7%	37.6%	31.4%
Intensive	19.3%	28.0%	20.9%	27.0%	31.2%	23.7%	23.3%	18.6%
Severe	18.2%	23.0%	18.1%	28.2%	21.2%	23.3%	24.0%	33.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275

Responses indicated that parents of the young inmates had experienced severe-intense insecurity (vulnerability) in several indicators as follows 1) food insecurity (37.5%), 2) income insecurity (51%), 3) farming insecurity (39%), 4) employment insecurity (55.2%), 5) inability to meet education expenses (52.4%), 6) inability to meet health expenses (47%), 7) livelihoods insecurity (47.3%) and 8) inheritance insecurity (52.4%).

The foregoing outcomes were also consistent with previous studies, which reported that the parents of the young persons in Kenya lived largely in poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and in impoverished conditions (NCRC, 2021; KPHC, 2019; Hall, 2017; ILO, 2017; WB, 2015; UNDP, 2013). Other studies have reported that poverty, low income and related socio-economic insecurity have been associated with low social skills, readiness for schooling, inability to complete education and severely low employability of young prison inmates (Vadivel et al., 2022; Kisache, 2019; Kiboi, 2018; Humble & Dixon, 2017; Ou & Reynolds, 2010; Ferguson et al., 2007).

The findings were generally consistent with views expressed during the FGD at Kamiti prison. The discussants observed that the majority of the offenders were from the lowest socioeconomic level of society. These findings mirrored the quotation from a young offender's narration:

Our father left us when I was 11 years old. My mother is now a single parent. She used to do casual jobs such as washing clothes. There were days she would come back with nothing, and we would sleep hungry. I started selling ground nuts in the evening, mainly in local bars, to support her and my five siblings.

Similarly, FGD participants at Kamiti prison retaliated:

The majority of the offenders came from a family set-up. They are children raised by single mothers, absentee parents, violent parents, alcoholic parents, abusive parents, and a few by single fathers. Others have raised themselves after the collapse of their families. We also have total orphans. These young people are likely to become vulnerable as they search for means of survival at a tender age.

In addition, discussants from Langata Women's Prison also noted that:

Most young adult inmates come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Their family's numerous economic challenges influence some to migrate from rural areas to urban areas in search of greener pastures, but they find themselves in crime due to economic vulnerabilities.

4.2.3 Duration of the Inmate Searched for Employment

In addition to the foregoing vulnerabilities, the study assessed the duration during which the young inmates searched for employment. Responses (Table 4.6.1) indicated that the young inmates searched for employment on average for a period of 5 to 6 years; two years longer than the national average of 3 to 5 years.

Table 4.6 Years Searched for Employment and Type of Employment Secured

1. Years	Frequency	Percent
1-2	10	4.5
3-4	35	15.0
5-6	111	50.0
7-8	68	30.0
Above 8	01	0.5
Total	225	100.0
2. Type of Employment Secured	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	38	14.3
Casual employment	88	33.2
Informal employment	72	27.2
Established business	30	11.3
Semi-permanent employment	27	10.2
Permanent employment	4	1.5
Professional employment	6	2.3
Total	265	100.0

Various reports have estimated that the transition from leaving school to securing employment in Kenya takes an average of 3 to 5 years, depending on the location, age, gender, education and technical skills (Cowling, 2022; KPHC, 2019; Hall, 2017; WB, 2015; UNDP, 2013). According to these reports, an average of 500,000 to 800,000 young people has been entering the job market in Kenya each year. The reports also indicated that the transition has been difficult because of a wide range of factors, including inadequate education, skills, experience and limited employment opportunities.

Indeed, the same reports estimated that 64% of unemployed persons in Kenya are youth, only 3% of them have had formal education beyond secondary school, and 92% of them have had no vocational or professional skills and have therefore had limited chances of fully participating in the labour market. In addition, the results were consistent with previous studies, which also reported some correlates between unemployment and vulnerability to crime among young adults (Mazorodze, 2020; Seng & Kiilu, 2019). As illustrated by narrations by the FGD participants, the young offenders were experiencing a difficult transition.

Some inmates are from poor homes. They started feeding themselves and their siblings at a tender age. The only viable option for them was menial jobs or petty crimes.

Additionally, previous studies (reports) identified youth employment challenges in Kenya, unemployment, and vulnerability to crime (Hall 2017, WB 2015, UNDP 2013). These studies reported a challenge of 'youth bulge', a situation where 20% of the population in a country falls between 15 and 24 years of age, and a greater proportion of them face vulnerable employment.

More specifically, reports indicated that between 2015 and 2022, an average of 19.1 million people were employed in Kenya, 83% (15.9 million) were employed in the informal sector and 17% (3.2 million) were employed in the formal sector (Aaron, 2023; Cowling, 2022; KPHC, 2019; GOK, 2019; NCRC, 2018; Hall, 2017; WB, 2015). During this period, unemployment among young people stood at 13.4% and unemployment among young adults (20-24) stood at 15%. By 2022, the rate of unemployment among young adults (15-24 years) remained the same in Kenya (Aaron, 2023; Cowling, 2022).

Since most of them had modest education (44% primary education and 40% secondary education) and prevailing employment opportunities during that period, the prospects for most of the young prison inmates were in the informal sector employment. Further, the findings highlighted the connection between employment and crime rates. When young adults face unemployment, they are more likely to engage in criminal activities due to financial hardship. Conversely, increasing employment opportunities for young adults can lead to a decrease in criminal behaviour. In general, higher unemployment rates correlate with a greater likelihood of individuals participating in crime.

4.2.4 Employment Secured by the Inmates

The study also assessed the type of employment secured by the inmates during the transition to early adulthood, and/or from education to employment. Responses (Table 4.6.2) indicated that while 25% secured relatively established business, semi-permanent employment, or professional employment, 75% of the young inmates secured vulnerable employment, where 33.2% secured

casual employment, 27.2% secured informal employment, and 14.3% remained practically unemployed.

These observations were consistent with the reports that the majority of the youth in Kenya have been engaged typically in vulnerable employment, mostly in the informal sector, largely because of inadequate education, skills, experience, and limited employment opportunities (Cowling, 2022; KPHC, 2019; Hall, 2017; WB, 2015; UNDP, 2013). According to the ILO (2017), even when young people secure employment, they typically secure vulnerable employment, mostly in the informal sector. Given these observations, the transition to young adulthood in Kenya has largely been characterized by poverty, limited socio-economic capacity, and vulnerable employment. It will also be noted that early studies on unemployment or underemployment had reported that unemployed persons or persons employed in “lowly occupations” were more likely to commit crimes (Beirne, 1987; Quetelet, 1831).

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Socio-Demographics Characteristics of Young Inmates

The first objective of the study was to assess the socio-demographic characteristics of young adults (ages 18 to 26 years), which was also a period of transition to early adulthood. Key indicators included their gender, ages, marital status, parental structure and siblings, location of the residence, religious affiliation, and education, among others.

Although the proportion of women in prison in Kenya remains around 8-10% of the prison population, the study assessed a sample of 37% women and 63% men because of the inclusion of the Langata Women Prison in the sample; and because of the need to have insight on how the two genders have been affected by early socio-economic vulnerability, propensity to crime and disruption of the career prospects.

The study established that the majority of the young inmates (64%) were aged between 24 and 26 years old, which was also consistent with the previous studies. The study also established that 59% of the young inmates were single, and 39% had entered the phase of marriage or establishing some other family, with 29% married and 10% separated. The children of the young inmates ranged from zero to 6. While 42% did not have children, 58% of the young inmates had children, in whom 24% had one child, 18% had two children, and 10% had three children. The large number of children among the young inmates suggested early parenthood, parenthood responsibilities, and increased demand for sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, the study established that 54% of the young inmates came from parents who were married at the time of their arrest, and 46% came from parents who had vulnerable marriages, either were experiencing varied challenges or were still single. The study also established that 43% of the young inmates lived with relatively large siblings at a rate of 3.4 per woman (or household) based on the 2022 projected census. Large siblings and therefore large households (or families) have been demonstrated to outpace severely limited resources, particularly financial resources and/or livelihood assets; thereby increasing vulnerability to poverty and disruption of career prospects.

The data indicated that while 41% lived in rural areas, 59% of the young inmates lived in urban areas, typically accompanied by greater demand for sustainable livelihoods, particularly

employment and financial resources, as well as challenges related to informal settlements. In addition, the study also established that 50% of the young inmates were Protestants and 36% were Catholics, both of which reflected their percentage in Kenya.

The data indicated that the proportion of young inmates with secondary education was higher by 15.1% than the national average, and the proportion of young inmates with primary education was lower by 5.8% than the national average. These observations reflected a paradoxical situation where the young inmates were relatively disadvantaged by 5.8% in primary education, considerably advantaged by 15.1% in secondary education, and marginally in technical and university education. Overall, it pointed to a greater potential of the young inmates.

5.2 Socio-economic Vulnerability

The second objective of the study was to assess the experience of the young inmates on career development and challenges. In this respect, the study established that the young inmates experienced severe (intense) insecurity (vulnerability) in several areas (indicators) including 1) food insecurity (34.9%), 2) income insecurity (50.6%), 3) farming insecurity (57.2%), 4) employment insecurity (55.7%), 5) inability to meet education expenses (60%), 6) inability to meet health expenses (48.3%), 7) livelihoods insecurity (49%) and 8) inheritance insecurity (54.6%). These responses indicated that young inmates lived with considerable insecurity (vulnerability), unable to have steady options of livelihood, unable to have stable employment, and unable to meet education and health expenses, among others.

In addition, the study established that the parents of the young inmates also experience severe (intense) insecurity as follows 1) food insecurity (37.5%), 2) income insecurity (51%), 3) farming insecurity (39%), 4) employment insecurity (55.2%), 5) inability to meet education expenses (52.4%), 6) inability to meet health expenses (47%), 7) livelihoods insecurity (47.3%) and 8) inheritance insecurity (52.4%). This was largely consistent with the view (hypothesis) that the vulnerability of the parents would transform into the vulnerability of the children, and therefore the young inmates.

The study also established that the young inmates searched for employment on average period of 5 to 6 years; two years longer than the national average of 3 to 5 years. Such extended periods of searching for employment had additional effects of depleting any available resources and increasing the vulnerability of the young adults. During these periods, Kenya was undergoing a 'youth bulge, a situation where 20% of the population in a country falls between 15 and 24 years of age, and a greater proportion of them faced vulnerable employment.

The study established that while 25% secured relatively established business, semi-permanent employment, or professional employment, 75% of the young inmates secured vulnerable employment, where 33.2% secured casual employment, 27.2% secured informal employment, and 14.3% remained practically unemployed.

5.3 Conclusion

The study concluded, therefore, that the majority of the young inmates (64%) were aged between 24 and 26 years old, which also coincided with the transition to early adulthood; a largely vulnerable transition period in low and middle-income countries, particularly in SSA and Kenya.

Although a greater proportion were single, over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the young inmates had entered into the phase of marriage or establishing some other family, which increased roles, responsibilities, and related challenges. The study also concluded that a greater proportion of the young inmates lived in urban areas, particularly in the urban informal settlements with a wide range of socio-economic challenges. In addition, nearly half of the young inmates came from parents with vulnerable marriages, lived with large siblings with depleted livelihoods, and therefore increased vulnerability to poverty and disruption of their career prospects.

The study also concluded that young inmates were characterized by a relatively disadvantaged primary education and considerable advantage in secondary education, technical and university education, which pointed to a greater potential of the young inmates.

In this respect, the study concluded that the young inmates experienced severe (intense) insecurity (vulnerability) in several areas (indicators) including 1) food insecurity, 2) income insecurity, 3) farming insecurity, 4) employment insecurity, 5) inability to meet education expenses, 6) inability to meet health expenses, 7) livelihoods insecurity and 8) inheritance insecurity.

The study concluded that a greater proportion of the young secured vulnerable employment, largely casual employment and informal employment, consistent with the experience of the chronic 'youth bulge' where a greater proportion of the people in early adulthood are either unemployed or are absorbed in vulnerable informal employment.

In summary, the study concluded that young inmates lived with considerable insecurity (vulnerability), unable to have steady options of livelihood, unable to have stable employment, and unable to meet education and health expenses, among others. Overall, the study concluded that the transition of young inmates to young adulthood was largely characterized by poverty, limited socio-economic capacity, and vulnerable employment.

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