

Challenges of Crime in City Slums: A Case Study of Mathare Slum in Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the challenges of crime within Mathare slum in Nairobi County, Kenya. It has been necessitated by the continued concern on the constant presence of crime within the slum areas of Nairobi. Although there have been studies carried out on various challenges in slums, this study provides a detailed analysis of the security challenges faced by Mathare slum dwellers. The study sought to examine five major thematic areas; major causes of crime in Mathare slum, types and trends of crime within Mathare slum, crime reporting, criminal gangs in Mathare slum and fear of crime within Mathare slum. Questionnaires and key informant interviews were used to obtain data from respondents who included Mathare slum residents, police officers, area chiefs and community policing committees' chairpersons from the thirteen villages in Mathare slum. The challenges of crime in Mathare slum were found to be a combination of multiple factors working in congruence to influence the commission of crime.

Keyword: Challenges of crime

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Rural to urban migration is a common feature in most cities of Africa. There has been a rapid urban growth in Kenya, especially in Nairobi. Between 2000 and 2005, Kenya's urban growth was 4.4 percent, compared to the regional average of 3.5 percent (UN-Habitat 2010). This has caused faster growth of the urban population and in turn caused extreme physical, social, and economic ramifications. Mathare slum is estimated to have a population of more than 200,000 people. Rapid growth of the urban population leads to overcrowding, slimmer employment opportunities, distinctive communities and social networks and facilitates the emergence of crime and violence. Slums are mainly a result of urbanization and its intensity and complexity. Slums are characterized by poverty, insecure shelters, unemployment, social exclusion, inadequate sanitation and water and insecurity (Berger 2006).

According to Ndikaru (2011) informal settlements in urban areas are particularly vulnerable to crime and violence. He further intimates that due to slums unplanned physical nature, inhabitants have scarce protection from official state security agencies and, because of high poverty levels, they have little resilience to loss or injury and finally the lack of institutions and service delivery, leaves the residents with little option of dealing with issues through the due process. Beal and Fox (2007) argued that a mix of poverty and urbanization may encourage the youth to engage in criminal activities to enable them protect their neighbourhoods due to absence of steady sources of income and absence of effective social support mechanisms.

According to UN-Habitat (2009), impoverished villages and communities in the urban centres, lead to gang violence, low education levels, and incredibly high crime rates. Further, Stravou (2002) argued that the existing forces found in destitute and dehumanizing living standards of the poor in the slums could drive majority of these individuals into criminal activities which result to an increase in crime rates. Crime is said to emerge where inequality and exclusion is highly practiced and out of limited official and social control. Therefore, crime and violence in many ways results from poverty (Kessides, 2005).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers have raised concerns over the pain that slum dwellers undergo under criminals as well as police. The relationship between Mathare slum dwellers and the police is characterized by mistrust. Many slum-dwellers view the police as generally slow, inept, corrupt and unlikely to patrol the slums or even successfully investigate crime for prosecution purposes. Slum dwellers have low levels of confidence with the police since they feel that they often cannot provide adequate security. They hate and despise police officers. As a result, they are unwilling to cooperate with the police and share information. On the other hand, police officers react with force and treat them imprudently. Criminals instead take advantage of the situation to terrorize members of the public and specifically target those people who they see as to be working closely with the police.

Painted graphics and writings on worn out buildings are viewed as a desperate way to vent out by the slum dwellers, mostly victims of violence from criminals. Inhabitants of the slum are therefore left vulnerable and defenceless in the face of violence and crime. The physical deterioration of slums has a spiralling effect on social control within these areas, and provides a fertile environment for crime and other deviant behaviours, and also for the rise of gangs. Gangs who pose as vigilante groups are known for muggings, extortion and violence. Police have been accused of extrajudicial killings and high handedness when responding to criminals and gangs earning both praises and criticism in equal measure from the slum dwellers. The study therefore sought to examine the challenges of crime in urban slums of Kenya, specifically Mathare slum.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Slums otherwise referred to as inner city neighbourhoods or informal settlements are defined as areas typically characterized by absence or deprivation of basic urban services, amenities, or needs such as adequate shelter, infrastructure investment, economic deprivation, uncontrolled human movement, squalor and poor sanitation as well as lack of security of tenure for residential land and dwellings (SRIC, 2014). According to SRIC (2014) approximately 3.9 million people live in slum and informal urban settlements in Kenya, constituting 55% of the urban population. Mathare slums in Nairobi is arguably the second biggest slum after Kibera slums in Kenya.

According to Unowa (2007) unplanned expansion of urban cities disables the capacity of governments and local authorities to provide security and supply basic social infrastructure such as water, education, health and sewage disposal facilities. He adds that this leads to mushrooming of slums which overcome and swallow the already crumbling infrastructures of the urban nucleus, further compounding the challenges of security and crime. This not only overstretches the basic infrastructure and services but also policing services of the state

(Owusu et al., 2016). In this context, the cause of crime in slums can be defined or explained in terms of lack of access to productive employment, basic services, resources of the urban economy, effective and managed representation, security and justice. To explain possible cause of crime in the slums, Pare and Felson (2014) suggested three explanations: discrimination and lack of legitimate opportunities which limit slum dwellers access to legitimate societal resources and widely shared goals forcing them to access these resources and goals using illegitimate means, and thereby committing crime; lower social controls in slums and lower levels of collective efficacy enhances the risks of violence and aggressive behaviours and; the tendency of people in slums to participate in crime as a result of their socialization experiences leading them to have attitudes that are conducive to crime.

According to Sampson (2006) slum areas are characterized by high unemployment rates, family breakdowns, delinquency and general social disruptions and tend to produce alienation and consequently criminal behaviour. However, Fafchamps and Minten (2005) have argued that these tendencies can only manifest in the absence of law enforcement agencies such as the police or guardians as postulated in Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity theory. In the slums of South Africa, vigilantism is employed by residents to manage crime, in the absence of effective formal justice mechanisms (Meth, 2013). Understanding the causes of crime in slums therefore necessitates accounting for a complex array of factors. The areas are in and of themselves criminalized, and violence and crime are often a function of the slum dwellers frustrations and grievances over their poor living conditions (Meth, 2017).

Crime manifests itself in distinct ways in dissimilar situations and locations. Attempts to understand the typology of crime in a specific area can only give a rough picture at a specific period of time. Generally, literature indicates that crimes against property (stealing and malicious damage) and crimes against the person (assault and robbery with violence) are a common feature in slums (Ndikaru, 2011). In their survey of crime in slum areas in Nairobi, SRIC (2014) found out that the slums areas in Kenya accounted for a wide variety of crime typologies that included theft (35.37%), robbery (15.55%), burglary/break-ins (10.67%) and mugging (23.17%) which accounted for a combined 84.76% of all the reported crimes in four slums namely; Kibra, Bondeni, Manyatta, and Mishomoroni slums excluding Mathare slum. Incidences involving SGBV, assault, drug abuse, conning, pick-pocketing and murder together accounted for about 15% of the types of crime committed.

A critical component of crime-control efforts is the willingness of the public, especially victims of crime, to mobilize the police to resolve security issues. Without active community involvement the police are less likely to detect crimes, arrest suspects, and effectively allocate crime-control resources accordingly. While studying crime differentials in metropolitan areas Ndikaru (2010) observed that only 29.4% of the studied victims of crime within Mathare slums reported those incidences to the police. He further noted that there was a significant difference between different slum areas as far as crime reporting was concerned and that affirmed the negative perceptions of police in the slums. A study by the university of Iowa (2016) found out that many crimes in slum areas are not reported to police because of the fear of repercussions or because the crime is considered trivial. This creates major inaccuracies or errors in crime-rate estimates by law enforcement bodies. The study further emphasized on the consequences of victim non-reporting since crime-control resources are partly allocated by the seriousness and numbers of the reported cases.

Gangs are a common feature in almost all slums. A report by World Bank (2010) commented that it is a general practice for Korogocho and Viwandani slum dwellers to pay a group of young men or vigilante to provide security in the slums. These informal security networks that take place outside the regulatory framework of the state are a complex web of linkages of different groups that include gangs, youth groups and vigilantes. The gangs may be organized or not but they take charge of providing security in certain areas of the slum whereby the residents are coerced to pay a weekly fee for protection. The gangs are involved in criminal activities and administer instant justice to would be offenders. They have also been blamed for mob injustices, radicalization and abuse of human rights. Some of these groups are formed as community policing outfits but later turn out to be vigilante groups World Bank (2010). Since most people in the Mathare slum are poor, they live on the margins of the law, characterised by unlawful takeover of houses, failure to pay taxes and the illegal tapping of water and electricity, among others. The government has been unable to adequately provide these services to the slum residents, who in turn pay gangs for such basics. They also turn to the gangs for justice, law and order. Gangs now provide security by filling the void created by the absence of government. A complex array of factors completes the picture of why the gangs are able to operate between legality and illegality, legitimacy and illegitimacy.

Fear of crime is being afraid, anxious, or concerned about becoming a victim of crime in public areas in relation to immediate environmental clues (Gabriel & Greve, 2003). Fear of crime has detrimental effects on individual psychology as it can restrict people's freedom and choice significantly influencing individual behaviour in space, neighbourhood and overall life (Bobaum & Hunecke, 1998). At the societal level, the fear of crime burden may be unfairly placed on those already socially and economically disadvantaged as they may not have sufficient resources to protect themselves or to move from high crime areas (Jackson, Farrall, & Emily, 2007). The fear of crime whether real or imagined is a common feature in urban slums. Dark alleys, deteriorated buildings, overly radical graffiti and identified crime hotspots instill fear and have great impact in the daily lives of slum dwellers. Due to the frequent criminal incidences experienced in these areas, slum residents have no choice but to be careful on the areas to visit and the time they leave their houses. There is a widely-held consensus in crime studies that crime and fear of crime are unequally distributed across cities, and that areas of higher poverty are likely to be areas of high crime incidence as well (Sampson, 2006).

In light of the aforementioned, it is clear that there are various security challenges within urban slums in Kenya. The driving factors that shape crime are complex and interwoven, ranging from social and economic to historical and political. These challenges seem to be blamed on the government failure to provide adequate security, services, infrastructure and employment opportunities to the constant increasing number of people living in slums. This has led to high number of crimes and violence meted upon the slum dwellers who still hold the conventional view that crime and violence is the primary responsibility of the police without recognizing that the complexity of the phenomenon requires a broad-based response.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was a case study to examine the challenges of crime in urban slums. The study was carried out amongst Mathare slum residents, police officers, area chiefs and community policing committees' chairpersons in Mathare slum in Nairobi County. Police officers and chiefs were randomly selected from the nearest police stations and administrative areas respectively.

Questionnaires were used to solicit data from Mathare slum residents aged 18 years and above. The questionnaires contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Gender balance was also considered in administering the questionnaires. Key informant interviews were conducted with the police officers, area chiefs and community policing committees' chairpersons. The questionnaires and the key informant interviews aimed at obtaining information on five thematic areas, namely: major causes of crime in the slum, types and trends of crime in the slum, crime reporting, criminal gangs in the slum and fear of crime in the slums.

Mathare slum is comprised of 13 villages namely; Mashimoni, Mabatini, Mathare No. 10, Gitathuru, Area 2, Kosovo, Kwa Kariuki, Mathare 3A, Mathare 3B, Mathare 3C, Mathare 4A, Mathare 4B, and Kiamutisya. A sample of 10 randomly selected people from each of the 13 villages was selected making a total of 130 slum residents. 10 police officers from Huruma and Pangani police stations were randomly selected and 5 chiefs were also randomly selected. The total sample size was 150 respondents. The study produced both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was organized, cleaned, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was analyzed by interpreting the responses. Data was well studied to achieve the most cogent conclusions possible so as to improve the credibility, reliability, and quality of the analysis made by the study. Data was interpreted through percentages, tables and bar charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Background Information

The study established that educational levels were relatively low in Mathare slum. Only 18% of those interviewed had university degrees and most of them had no jobs. 32% had completed their O-levels, 41% had only completed class eight, 18% had dropped out of school due to various challenges (mostly lack of school fees), 7% had never gone to school at all and 2% were attending school or some other educational institution. The main occupation of a majority of the Mathare slum residents were low income earning activities such as casual labour, which constituted 33.5% of the sampled residents. 32% indicated that they were running small businesses, while 15.5% were jobless, 6.6% were civil servants, 4.1% were professionals, 3.3% were village elders, 3% were housewives and 2% were students. Although the study did not ask about personal income of the respondents, which is a sensitive issue, it can be inferred from their education and employment that most residents had low and inconsistent income due to the type of employment they had. These findings are crucial in establishing the integrity of the overall findings of the study.

Major Causes of Crime in Mathare Slums

The study found out that they were five key causes of crime within Mathare slum. 46% of the respondents attributed unemployment as the most important cause, followed by poverty at 25%, drug and alcohol abuse at 15% peer pressure at 8% and availability of small arms at 6%. The respondents stressed that unemployment and poverty go hand in hand. The absence of a stable source of income to take care of the basic needs was identified as a causal factor for alternative (criminal) means of safeguarding their livelihood. Respondents also pointed out that the lack of structure that comes with a steady employment means that unemployed people have more idle time, frustrations, and inclination for alcohol and drug abuse. Table I presents the responses indicating the major causes of crime in Mathare slum.

Table I: Major causes of crime in Mathare slums

Causes of crime	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployment	54	36
Poverty	32	21.4
Drug and alcohol abuse	25	16.7
Peer pressure	18	12
Small arms	13	8.6
No reason given	8	5.3

The respondents stated that unemployment was such a serious issue that even those who may be lucky to find some semblance of employment (mostly construction sites and other manual jobs) earn very little that they sometimes “moonlight” in crime in order to supplement their scanty incomes. Respondents indicated that poverty has made it difficult for the youth to avoid crime since they have to survive. Idleness and high levels of unemployment were identified as having increased the number of young people willing to take risks even if it means indulging in criminal activities because they have nothing to lose.

Types and Trends of Crime in Mathare Slum

As indicated in table 2 below, respondents indicated that robbery, mugging/snatching (stealing), assault, sexual offences, and malicious damage were the most common types of crimes within Mathare slum. Robbery came in at 32%, mugging/snatching (stealing) at 24%, drug abuse 20% assault at 14% and sexual offences at 10%. These findings can therefore be used to infer that the miserable social and economic conditions that plague Mathare slum, poverty and low incomes are together the drivers of such types (robbery and stealing) of crimes committed for people to put food on their table. A staggering 88.9% of the respondents pointed out that they had witnessed one or more of these crimes being committed or they were in one way or another affected, mostly within the family or personally experiencing some form of crime. Respondents indicated that most crimes were committed at night from around 1800hours to 0700hours and were mainly concentrated on narrow alleyways, bus stages, maze-like passages and poorly lit areas that typically characterize slums.

The study also found out that males were slightly more likely to be victimized than women, and youth were more vulnerable than older people. Males were also mentioned as the most perpetrators of crime at 70% compared to women 30%. Males accounted for just over half (55%) of respondents who had been victims of at least one of the above-mentioned crimes, compared to 45 percent of females. These findings corroborate the government of Kenya (2009) that they were more males than females in Mathare slum and that the youth made up the highest number of the residents in the slum.

Table II: Types of crime in Mathare slum

Type of Crime	Percentage
Robbery	32
Mugging/Snatching (Stealing)	24
Drug abuse	20
Assault	14
Sexual offences	10

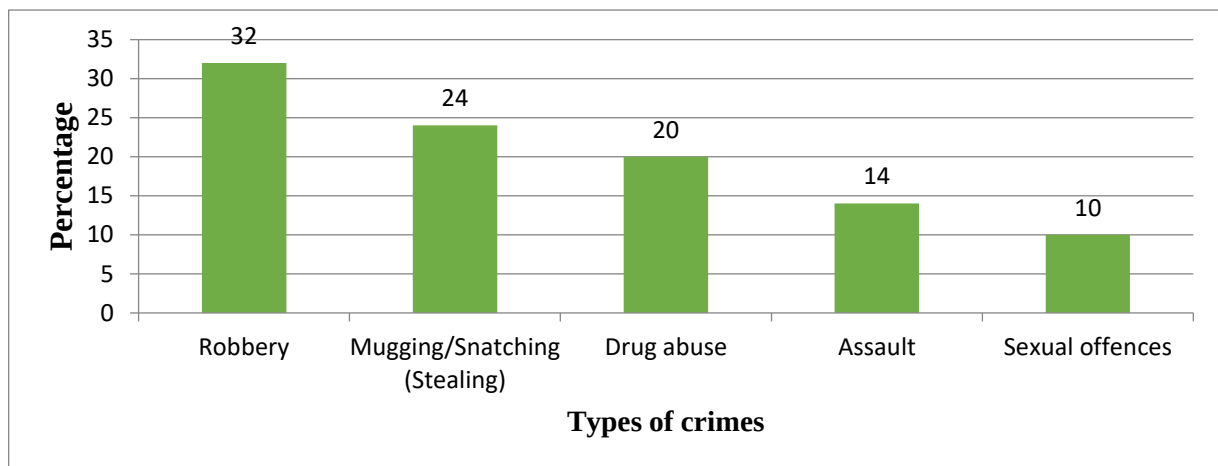


Chart I: Types of crimes in Mathare slum

As indicated in chart I above, robbery was identified as the major type crime within Mathare slum. During the time of such robbery's violence is meted on those who resist and thus becoming robbery with violence. The assailants are mostly armed with knives, machetes, guns or any other crude weapon. Respondents indicated that most perpetrators are normally high on drugs during the commission of these crimes. Mugging/snatching was identified as a common along bus stages and pathways. A large and increasing number of illicit liquor dens, along with easy access to drugs were also highlighted as a factor in robberies, muggings, assaults and sexual offences.

Crime Reporting

Examining the extent to which the residents were ready to report crime to the police is very crucial as it gives a picture of how confident the slum dwellers are with the police service. The results from the study indicated that reporting of crime incidents to the police was low. 45% of the respondents had reported some form of crime to the police while 55% responded to the contrary. As indicated in the table III below, when they were asked the reasons why they were not reporting crime to the police majority of respondents, 32% indicated that they had no confidence in the police, 27% said that they were fearful of the perpetrators, 18% did not have any proof, 9% posited that some criminal cases were minor and did not warrant the attention of the police, 8% indicated that reporting property related crime was insignificant since the police were not capable of recovering lost items/properties and 6% did not report for other reasons such fear of stigma; others report to youth groups, village elders or vigilante groups; police asking for bribes; slow police response; unfriendly police and others cannot report a perpetrator who is a family member or a friend.

Table III: Reasons for not reporting crime to the police

Reasons for Not Reporting Crime	Percentage
No confidence in the police service	32
Fearful of the perpetrators	27
Have no proof	18
Minor case does not warrant police action	9
Reporting is insignificant	8
Other reasons	6

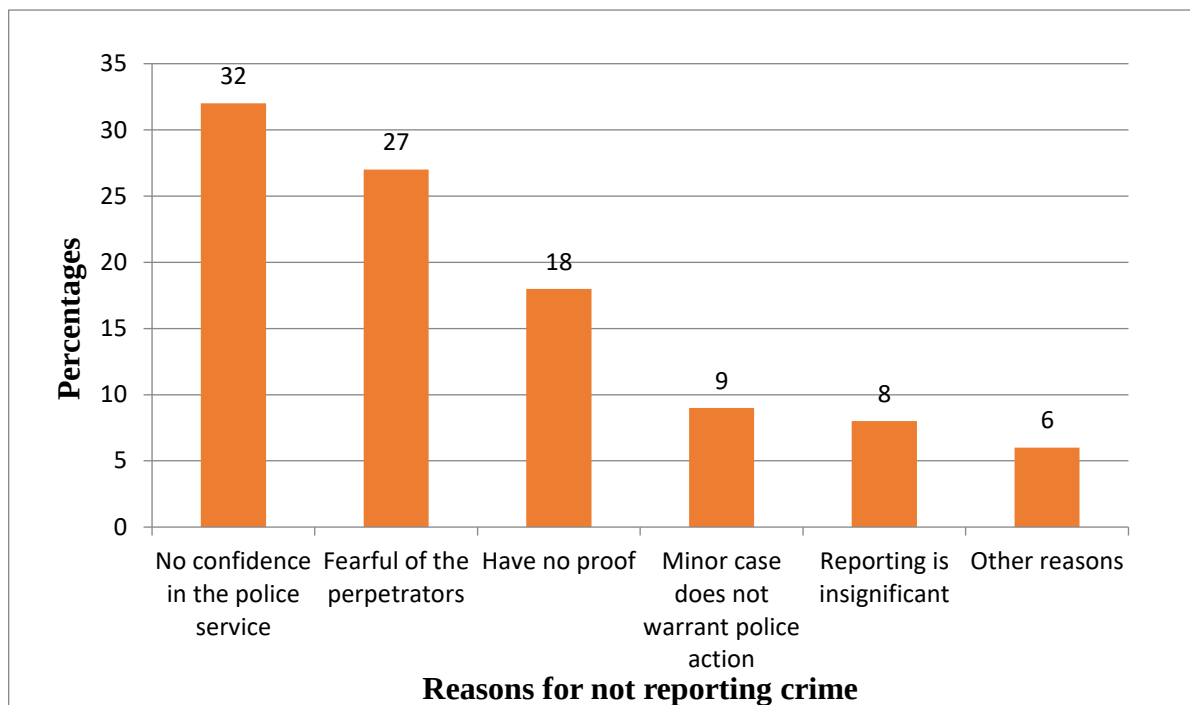


Chart II: Reasons for not reporting crime to the police

As indicated in the chart II above, the lack of reporting crime to the police in Mathare slum is mainly due to the lack of confidence in the police service and that even if the crimes were reported, the police would delay or even not take any action. Secondly, fear of revenge or retaliation from the perpetrators of crime is another serious issue specifically in slums where anyone who is seen to be working closely with the police is seen as a traitor. Thirdly, since successful processing of crime reports requires proof in terms of material evidence or witnesses, some residents feel that they lack these essentials for crimes such as snatching or mugging where you have nothing to prove your case and no one will volunteer to be your witness.

Criminal Gangs in Mathare Slum

The study established that it was indeed true that there were criminal gangs operating within Mathare slum. 68% of the respondents responded in the affirmative and 32% of them responded to the contrary. After careful examination the researcher established that some of the respondents were a bit hesitant in discussing about criminal gangs. Some of the groups were organized while others were unorganized outfits of young men brought together by circumstances. These gangs were identified as some of the dangerous people that an individual may come across while in the slums as they acted with impunity, robbed, used violence and had no respect for human life. They perceived themselves as an oppressed and a frustrated lot that was defending themselves from the government that does not care about them. They mostly have a shared ethnic or age group identity and view themselves as a gang and are recognised by others as such.

Respondents indicated that young men in Mathare slum seek refuge in gangs in order to survive and strengthen their sense of identity and shared brotherhood. These groups of young men and women were said to stalk their victims before attacking with no aim of harming them unless

there was some form of resistance. The gangs were notorious with muggings, extortion, burglaries, threats, kidnapping for ransom, drug trafficking/peddling, collecting illegal fees in pretence of providing security and most of them are normally armed with knives, machetes and small arms. Some of the criminal gangs operating in Mathare slum that were mentioned include; Mungiki, Gaza, China squad, Taliban, Super power and rounder seniors.

The key informant interviews showed that some slum residents were supportive of some the gangs claiming that the gangs solve disputes and provide utility services like illegal electricity and water and connections. The gangs are known to install illegal connections without meters by tapping into the main electricity and water supply lines. Some of the residents therefore tend to empathise with them and blame the government for not doing enough to create jobs. The relationship between the community and the gangs was seen to be complicated since they seem to have a love-hate relationship, which is also symbiotic.

The interviewees also pointed out that some gangs are given a safe haven when being pursued by the police. When police officers react to reign on the gangs, they are met with mixed reactions from the slum residents. Those who support the gangs accuse the police of high handedness and extrajudicial killings while others who are against the gangs support the police tactics and argue that it is the only way to handle the burgeoning of gangs and crime in the slums.

Fear of Crime

Most Mathare slum residents felt that their area is not safe. 44% of the respondents indicated that they felt very unsafe, 32% felt a bit unsafe, 22% felt fairly safe and 2% felt very safe. Generally, feelings of insecurity were high during the night. The fear of crime was thought to go up significantly at night perhaps because of higher incidences reported at night, greater volatility, and the anonymity given to the perpetrators. Insecurity was identified as a persistent factor in people's lives. Respondents emphasized that they felt unsafe moving around the areas in which they live. Girls and older women were especially affected; their movement was restricted during the day and more so at night, and they were fearful of falling victim to rape or robbery. Having access to water and sanitation was also indirectly associated to issues of insecurity. Respondents explained that making use of these services, especially at night increased the probability of being a victim of violence. Some respondents indicated that unwillingness of some slum dwellers to invest in household improvements or even in business was very pronounced due to the perception that it would make them a target of crime. Whether the respondents had been victims of crime or not, 32% of them had developed coping mechanism of either avoiding specific crime hotspots or avoiding moving out at certain hours especially at night. This can infer to mean that fear of crime had permeated the slum community to a point of influencing their daily behaviour whether or not they had been victims of crime or violence.

Table IV: Perceptions of fear of crime in Mathare slum

Perception of Fear of Crime	Percentages
Very unsafe	44
A bit unsafe	32
Fairly safe	22
Very safe	2

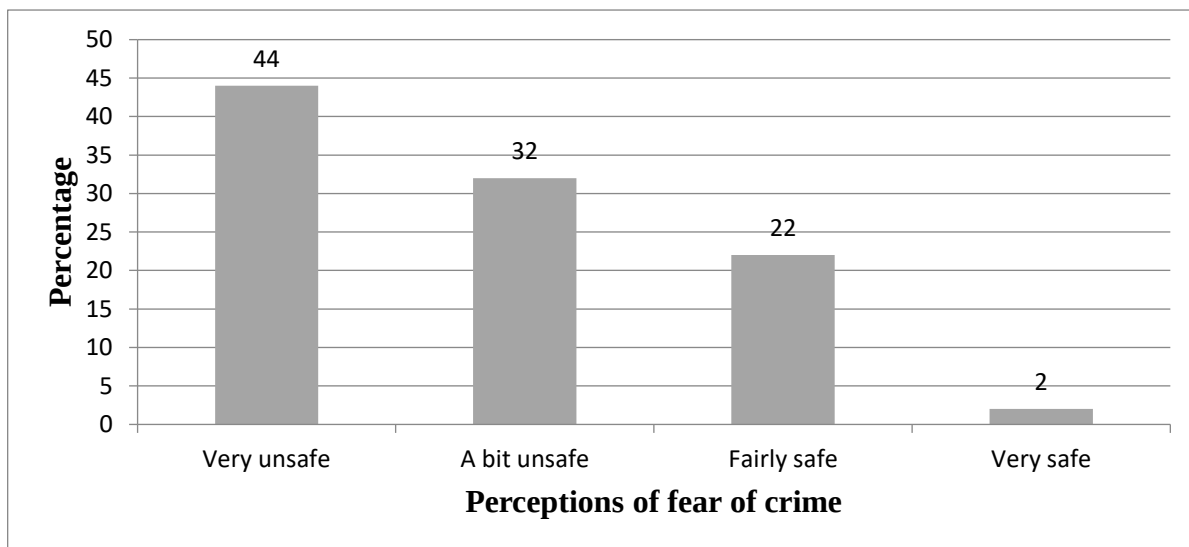


Chart III: Perceptions of fear of crime in Mathare slum

As indicated above it may be inferred that 44% of the respondents considered themselves potential victims even though some of them had never been victimized before. At such levels, even neighbours are seen as potential perpetrators and this feeds to the cycle of fear of crime whether it is actual or perceived. This further erodes the social fabric of the community and breeds disaffection with the government and the police. The high perceptions of fear of crime also indicate low levels of trust with the police who are accused of not actively patrolling the slums of Mathare, slow response and corruption.

CONCLUSIONS

Slums all over the world have been associated with neglect from authorities, high population densities, poor housing and sanitation conditions, breakdown of social order and constant insecurity challenges. From unemployment to failure of the police service, the complexity of the crime problem in Mathare slum is therefore a combination of multiple factors working in congruence to influence the commission of crime. This study thus concludes that crime in urban slums should not only be a problem to the slum dwellers, but a concern to all the stakeholders with a goal of ensuring equal income earning opportunities, justice, equality and incorporating both the control and prevention aspects, while ensuring coordination mechanisms between them. This multi-layered perspective allows for participation of a wide range of legitimate state and non-state actors therefore strengthening the government legitimacy in provision of security as the core government function. Alternatively, it may be that there is an overestimation of crime in Mathare slum which is symptomatic of a more serious concern, in which case, the study concludes that suitable approaches would be needed to enhance the sense of safety in the slums. In addition, the challenge of crime in the Mathare slums perhaps may not be simply associated with an objective number of criminal events but also depends on how the society and individuals, perceive and respond to it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations may be made. Given that employment was seen as the major cause of crime, a timely recommendation would be a coordinated approach between the government and other non-profit organizations to

empower the youth with vocational training programs that would help them create their own jobs, be self sufficient and eliminate idleness. Sports facilities and opportunities would also play a great role in identifying and nurturing talents that in turn help people earn their daily bread and be engaged in productive activities. It is the recommendation of this study that there is need to foster community participation in policing and strengthening the strained relationship between the police and the slum dwellers. The rationale here is that, the role of security cannot be left to the police or the community; it should be a collective responsibility that demands equal participation of the stakeholders with each party playing its rightful role to achieve the overall goal of community safety.

Thirdly, there is need to rethink policing in the slums area. This includes erratic patrols, monitoring known offenders, avoiding the perception that the youths are suspects whether or not they have committed crimes and institutionalizing witness protection mechanisms in the slums. These are crucial elements that foster legitimacy of the police service, enhances public confidence and acceptance that the slums dwellers are also important. Lastly, social institutions such as the family, churches and schools are vital in shaping perceptions and behaviours. These institutions should play active role in teaching and sensitizing young people on adherence to the rule of law no matter their circumstances, peaceful coexistence, and instilling a culture of respect for the sanctity of human life that prevents the use of crime and violence as an instrument for addressing personal and community disputes.

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