

Investigation of the Relationship between Help-Seeking Behaviour and Juvenile Delinquency among Secondary School Students in Kisii County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study is about committing anti-social activities like: theft, illicit sexual relations, use and trafficking of drugs, fighting, destruction of property and cheating (juvenile Delinquency) by high school students ages 14-18 in Kisii Central Sub-County, Getembe Zone, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to explain the extent to which suicidal ideation, help-seeking behaviour, and use of media influence JD among secondary school students in Kisii Central Sub-County, Getembe Zone. It was also about the extent of differences in JD according to family type and perceived social class. The objective dealt with in this paper was to investigate the relationship between help-seeking behaviour and Juvenile Delinquency among secondary school adolescents in Kisii county, Kenya. Kisii Central Sub-County was selected because no similar study has been done there and because acts of student violence are apparent there. Probability and non-probability sampling methods were used. Questionnaires were used to collect data from students and teachers, interview schedules for principals, and focus group discussion questions were used on parents. The results indicated that respondents who scored highly in help-seeking behaviour were more delinquent than those that had a low score. The conclusion was that young people who think that they do seek help probably seek it from irresponsible people. It was therefore recommended that youths should be sensitized to seek help from caring persons in order to reduce cases of juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Help-Seeking, psychological problems, emotional intelligence, cyber bullying.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Help-seeking behavior is defined as any effort made by a person in order to sort out a problem; the effort is intended to make one adapt to a difficult situation and to gain greater personal competency and well-being (Batten & Dutton, 2011, Wilson & Deane, 2010 and Zartaloudi & Martinos, 2010). Help-Seeking behavior is a function that is of crucial importance in the modern society today where people are assailed by all sorts of problems. Willing clients can use the function either to manage or overcome unpleasant issues. Zartaloudi and Martinos, (2010) state that help-seeking behaviour is an important factor in an individual's life because it helps in reducing the severity of problem behaviour. In this study, adolescent help-seeking behaviour is defined as any action or activity undertaken by a youth who considers himself/herself as having a need for personal, psychological, emotional, or health-related assistance

with the intention of alleviating or resolving this need in a constructive way.

Help-seeking behavior did not start yesterday; it is as old as mankind. People of all ages and all times have always sought for help out of their problems. Traditionally, help to young people was given by adults who were close family members and members of the extended family. It was unknown that any young person could be misled by these adults since they had personal interest in the youth's welfare. Zuckerman & Kaim, (2011), state that these traditional help-giving systems were known by all in the communities, were available, accessible and non-stigmatizing to the seekers. Unfortunately, however, it is not far-fetched that an adult, today, can knowingly give wrong advice to a youth. All help that was sought at the traditional time was treated as it deserved according to the wisdom of the time. In cases where administration of medicine was

required, the informal help-givers administered traditional medicine in an attempt to ease people's discomfort. According to Abdullahi, (2011) traditional medicine is the oldest health-care system that has withstood the test of time. Cook (2009) confirms that traditional health care delivery is still used by a majority of people in Africa and the rest of the world.

Although traditional healers and medicine-men have been used in Africa all the time, there are misconceptions, myths and negative attitudes which hinder many people from seeking much needed help from them. This assertion is in agreement with the theory of planned behaviour which states that people don't always do what they would otherwise have done. Van Skike, Zandy and Matthews, (2016) affirm this statement by stating that there is a hike in mental health problems in the world today among 13–18-year-olds, but they are reluctant to seek for professional help. Further research (Olivan, 2017 & Divin, Harper, Curran, Corry & Leavey, 2018) assert that despite the fact that juvenile delinquency is on the rise, victims rarely seek help. The reluctance is probably because of the myths and misconceptions. Lachman, Zweig, Dank and Yahner, (2019) state that only 9% of teen dating violence and abuse ever seek help.

Emanuelsson, (2020) conducted a study in Italy to establish the association between mental health problems and delinquency among adolescents. He found that young people who do not receive help for mental health issues ended up engaging in delinquency. This is probably because too much strain on an individual leads them to commit crime deemed to ease the strain. Furthermore, the WHO (2017) states that a whole 75%-85% of people from developing countries have neither sought nor received sufficient help for their problems despite the fact that there are enough resources. This fact puts adolescents in developing countries at great risk of developing delinquency, which is why this study sought to highlight the prevalence of JD in Kisii with the hope of attracting some help. A study by Demeter and Rusu, (2018) in Romania found out that youth who received social support, particularly parental support, engaged in little antisocial behaviour as opposed to those that did not receive any support. Motlagh, Kelishadi, Qorbani, Keikha, Jafari, Ardalan, Heshmat & Jari, (2016) state that children and adolescents who consult their mothers about their problem issues have a low prevalence of behavioural problems. This assertion is true to some extent in that guidance by a mother to her child is always meant for the good of the child, but a friend's guidance may include malice sometimes.

Lynch, Moorhead, and Long, (2020) report that many young people are reluctant to seek help despite the rising mental health problems. Gulliver, Griffiths and Christensen, (2010) further state that the percentage of those who have the problem, but don't seek for help is as

high as 70- 75%. Furthermore, Rowe, French, and Henderson (2014) indicate that self-harm thoughts are frequent among teenagers, yet most young people who are at risk of self-harm do not seek help. The WHO, (2018a) confirms that many campaigns to promote availability of mental health services have been conducted, but there are still problems in engaging and maintaining youths in mental health care. According to Roberto, (2020) and Hassett, Green, and Zundel, (2018) youth who are in desperate need of mental health treatment are hesitant to seek for it. (Meagley, Schriver & Norris, (2016) confirm that many of the young people who seek for any help at all choose to use informal sources. This is because they dread loss of their self-worth in case their opening up might get known. Only a few use formal help-giving sources for mental health problems. As stated earlier in this study, the reluctance to seek help is occasioned by misconceptions, myths and negative attitudes towards mental health problems. They also get concerned about staining the family name, because certain societies regard mental health problems as a curse. This is an indication that there is urgent need for social and psychological intervention on the issue of help-seeking behavior and JD. Relevant institutions need to sensitize people on the fact that little acts of delinquency committed consistently grow into full-blown crime; victims should also know that help is available if only they seek it. This behaviour resonates with both the social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. When youth associate with friends who have a negative attitude to help-seeking, they too learn to view the service negatively and plan not to seek help.

A number of factors are behind this apparent unwillingness to seek for help. In their study, Rowe, French, Henderson, & Ougrin, (2014) state that youth are unwilling to seek for help for mental health problems and other issues because: they fear the negative reactions they might receive from acquaintances, friends and relatives, stigmatization, fear of a possible breach of confidentiality and an unwillingness to be perceived as attention-seekers. In a given school, some students said that they were reluctant to disclose their problems to teachers because the revelations were later made subjects of staffroom debate. Roberto, (2020) and Wilson, & Deane (2012) listed stigma, unfavorable perceptions about mental health and mental health professionals, a previous negative experience with mental health services, and a lack of proper information about mental health as the reasons why people get reluctant to seek for help. (Longeveld et.al. 2020) adds to the list by stating that adolescents do not like to have their parents get to know about their problems plus the fact that they have a conceited high sense of self-confidence which makes them think that they are capable of solving their personal problems. Finally, youth lack emotional intelligence (Williams, 2015).

In the USA, Radez, Reardon, Creswell and Lawrence, (2020) found that little information about mental health issues, social stigma, embarrassment, perceived breach of confidentiality, inability to trust the professionals, lack of finances to meet the costs and scarcity of helpers are also a barrier to seeking for help. Furthermore, many adolescents find doctors, parents, family members and even friends to be inappropriate people to give information about their personal problems because of: embarrassment, fear of being ostracized by friends, lack of someone who can listen to their problems without judgement, a hope that the problem can heal without being attended to and fear of rebuke from their parents if they should disclose their problem (Flink, Beirens, Butte & Raat 2013). Further reasons which stop adolescents from seeking help are: problems recognizing symptoms (poor mental health literacy, an inability to distinguish between “real distress” and normal distress, (Velasco, Cruz, Billings, Jimenez, & Rowe, 2020). According to Corry and Leavey (2017), teenagers are hesitant to seek help because they are afraid of: unfriendly physicians, receiving a stigmatizing mental health diagnosis, and “being treated like a child” by the clinicians. With this host of negative factors surrounding help-seeking behaviour, it is no wonder that youth choose to do without it. All these barriers to help-seeking agree with the Theory of planned behaviour by Azjen & Fishbein, (1985) which posits that what one does is influenced by ones’ intention to engage in the activity, attitude or belief about the activity and perceived social norms and controls over the activity. The researcher concluded that there is a critical need for counsellors to be sensitized on the importance of observing confidentiality so as not to discourage would-be clients from seeking for help which might be critically needed.

From the findings of the foregoing researchers, it has been established that adolescents are very sensitive about who they reveal their confidential matters to. It is also a known fact that almost all secondary school students are adolescents; with probably only a negligible number who are not. According to the researcher therefore, schools are best placed to put up intervention measures aimed at giving help to struggling or hurting students/juveniles. One common delinquent act committed by many secondary school students is bullying. Itegi, (2017) affirms that bullying is a serious problem in Kenyan secondary schools. Schools can prevent bullying by teaching appropriate social skills to learners (Department of Education, Nebraska, 2020). A study conducted at the university of Florence, Italy, by De Luca, Nocentini & Menesini, (2019) to find out the extent of bullying among secondary school students and the competence teachers had in giving help to bullied students; found that bullying was minimal in schools where the teachers knew how the vice was carried out and had the skills and competence to handle it. On the other hand, Haataja, Sainio, Turtonen & Salmivalli, (2016) report that in most cases teachers never get to

know about the bullying because perpetrators threaten victims with dire consequences should they dare to report. The bullied also fear further bullying from peers who may keep calling them weaklings after reporting. Besides, some bullied victims hold the opinion that plus a perception that “teachers can’t offer much help anyway”. In order to understand the different needs of their students and to have the ability to help student victims and perpetrators of bullying, teachers should be empowered by being trained in guidance and counselling. Oyieyo, (2012) gives emphasis the affirmation by stating that Guidance and counselling is and must be an integral part of the education system. Guidance and Counselling was and still is intended to address learners’ physical, emotional, social, personal, and intellectual concerns. Itegi (2017), like Haataja *et al.*, (2016) recommends that teachers should be empowered with the necessary skills needed to nurture a supportive and friendly school environment.

Mogambi (2019) suggests that the following three steps can help teachers to create safe environments for all students. The first one is to teach appropriate social skills to learners, the second one is to let students have mentors who can take them through social-emotional learning (fostering a sense of community) and lastly, they should find ways of helping the victims of bullying and ways of rehabilitating bullies. Juniors students who are bullied become bullies themselves in their senior years in school so as to get even with the system. Thus, the existence of an unchecked and an unjust social system leads a student who had not thought of or intended to become delinquent to become one. A last resort that can help in stopping bullying in schools, thanks to technological advancement, is to install CCTV cameras to capture student movements. It is hoped that this could arrest the vice. However, technology today offers a more discreet, more prevalent and more emotionally hitting method for bullies to continue in their trade; it is known as cyber bullying. Accredited Schools Online (ASO) (2021) states that cyber bullying occurs when someone repeatedly intimidates, harasses, torments, threatens or humiliates another person through the use of technology. Tokunaga, (2010) also says that cyberbullying is the repeated transmission of hostile and offensive communication with the intent of inflicting injury, discomfort or embarrassment to another person by use of electronic or digital media. The existence of this avenue for bullying must be the origin of the apparent delinquent behavior among students in schools like fighting, issuing of threats and stealing by the bullied in order to service the financial demands of the bullies. Cyber bullying can take place both in and out of school. Communities and families should therefore be sensitized to intervene in educating the victims to seek help and to give the needed help to them as it arises. Giving help to victims of the crime.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was investigating the relationship between help-seeking behavior and juvenile delinquency among secondary school students in Kisii county, Kenya.

PROBLEM STATEMENT OF THE

In numerous schools worldwide, including those in Kenya, adolescents are involved in drug use and drug trafficking, theft, physical altercations, sexual misconduct, destruction of valuable property, and even incidents of teacher and peer assault or homicide. Guidance and Counselling programmes were introduced in Kenyan schools to address problematic behaviour, but a significant challenge persists. The national and devolved governments, religious institutions, communities, and families have at times attempted to implement measures to combat this issue, but juvenile delinquency still persists. Besides, studies on juvenile delinquency which have been done in secondary schools in Kisii have not focused on the variable of help-seeking behavior. This is what warranted this study; to offer another perspective to juvenile delinquency in the region in order to give stakeholders and policy makers

important information to help them in addressing adolescent delinquent behaviour.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Descriptive survey research design, mixed methods, was used in the study. According to Shaughnessy *et al.*, (2011), a research design enables a researcher to describe various experiences, events, and behaviors and to search for connections between them. This study used the descriptive survey research design because the phenomena of the study were just described and reported as they were found without any intervention. Osbaldesto (2021), states that the research design enables the researcher to collect data, normally from a small group of people, that is rich, detailed, and sometimes emotionally driven according to the respondents' opinions. It was therefore chosen for use in the study.

RESULTS

Help- Seeking Behaviour and Juvenile Delinquency

The researcher was interested in finding the relationship between help-seeking behavior and juvenile delinquency. The results are shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients, and their Significances in Predicting Juvenile Delinquency

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.365	.105		13.059	.000
SUICIDAL	-.168	.031	-.218	-5.498	.000
HELPSEEKING	.216	.040	.215	5.427	.000
MEDIA	.063	.021	.119	3.043	.002

a. Dependent Variable: DELIQUENCY

From the Table 1 above, the significance levels (p-values) $\alpha = 0.05$ implying that all study variables were good indicators of juvenile delinquency. The results indicated that help-seeking behavior had a coefficient of +0.215. This means that help-seeking behavior increased delinquency by 21.5%. There is therefore a positive relationship between help-seeking behavior and juvenile delinquency. These findings were contrary to usual expectations; normally, seeking and receiving help is

expected to decrease problem behavior, not to increase it. This interesting finding requires a study to establish states that in most cases.

The study also sought to determine the correlations between help-seeking behavior and other study variables namely: suicidal ideation, the media and juvenile delinquency. Results are shown on Table 2 below.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients for the constructed four variables

		Suicidal	Helpseeking	Delinquency	Media
SUICIDAL	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (1-tailed)				
HELPSEEKING	Pearson Correlation	.163**	1		
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000			
DELIQUENCY	Pearson Correlation	-.174**	.183**	1	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.000		
MEDIA	Pearson Correlation	.045	.026	.122**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.132	.262	.001	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 2 presents the relationship between juvenile delinquency, help seeking behaviour, suicidal thoughts and, the media. The significances are shown at $\alpha = 0.01$, indicating that if the correlation is significant at that level then they must be significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The findings indicated that all the variables had a significant relationship with delinquency, i.e., suicidal thoughts and delinquency $r = -0.174$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$, delinquency and help seeking $r = 0.183$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ and delinquency and media $r = 0.122$, $p\text{-value} = 0.001$. These were important findings because they confirmed that the variables of: Suicidal ideation, help-seeking behavior and the media can serve as predictors of juvenile delinquency, the dependent variable.

The results showed that suicidal thoughts and help seeking behavior had an $r = 0.163$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ which is significant. Suicidal thoughts and the media, however, had $r = 0.045$ with $p\text{-value} = 0.132$, and help seeking behavior and the media had a significance level of $r = 0.026$, $p\text{-value} = 0.262$ so they were not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. What this suggests is that the variables were measuring completely different phenomena so they were independent of one another and could measure different aspects of delinquency. The study also sought to find out the relationship between help-seeking behavior and juvenile delinquency according to family type. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. The results are shown on Table 3.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA for Delinquency and Help Seeking Behaviour According to Family Type

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
DELINQUENT	Between Groups	1.107	4	.277	1.230	.297
	Within Groups	134.808	599	.225		
	Total	135.916	603			
HELPSEEKING	Between Groups	3.680	4	.920	3.444	.009
	Within Groups	160.286	600	.267		
	Total	163.966	604			

All mean differences in delinquency were found to be non-significant ($F = 1.230$, $p\text{-value} = 0.297$) in the preceding table. This implies that delinquency is consistent across all family structures.

Considerably less than 0.05, an $F = 3.44$, and a $p\text{-value} = 0.009$ indicate significant differences in the groups' help-seeking behaviors. The results support Cometto's (2014) assertion that children brought up in families that are cohesive, have good communication habits and where parents encourage children to ask for assistance when it is required are more likely to ask for

assistance than those from households without these attributes. They agree with Boyles, (2019) assertion that some parents notice delinquent tendencies in their children, but trivialize or ignore them until they get serious. This could be because communication between them and their children is not free. Because close-knit parents can better identify problematic behavior in their kids and intervene before it gets out of hand.

The table below displays a post-hoc analysis to determine which groups differ in help-seeking behaviors according to family type.

Table 4: Post-Hoc Analysis for Group Differences in Help-Seeking Behavior According to Family Type

(I) What type of family do you come from?	(J) What type of family do you come from?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Single	Biological parent	-.02164	.05461	.692
	Step family	-.59627*	.20142	.003
	Separated/divorced	-.06198	.14218	.663
	Grand parent family	.38052*	.18921	.045
Two Biological parents	Single	.02164	.05461	.692
	Step family	-.57463*	.19682	.004
	separated/divorced	-.04034	.13559	.766
	Grand parent family	.40216*	.18431	.029
Step family	Single	.59627*	.20142	.003
	Biological parent	.57463*	.19682	.004
	separated/divorced	.53429*	.23659	.024
	Grand parent family	.97679*	.26750	.000
separated/divorced	Single	.06198	.14218	.663
	Biological parent	.04034	.13559	.766
	Step family	-.53429*	.23659	.024
	Grand parent family	.44250	.22628	.051
Grand parent family	Single	-.38052*	.18921	.045
	Biological parent	-.40216*	.18431	.029
	Step family	-.97679*	.26750	.000
	separated/divorced	-.44250	.22628	.051

According to the table above, respondents who were raised up in single families and stepfamilies, (p -value = 0.003), grandparents and single families, (p -value = 0.045), and two biological parents and stepfamilies (p -value = 0.004) all showed significant differences in help-seeking behavior. Significant variations were also observed in the help-seeking behavior of respondents from grandparent families and two biological parents families (p -value 0.029). The results indicated that differences in help-seeking behavior were higher in respondents from stepparent families than those from other family types. This interesting finding suggests that children in stepparent families rarely seek for help from the stepparents themselves or from anybody else. This is an indicator that there is poor trust between stepchildren and other members of the family or lack of freedom in the children.

DISCUSSIONS

One of the objectives of this study was to find out the relationship between juvenile delinquency and help-seeking behavior. Analysis of the relationship between help-seeking behavior and juvenile delinquency indicated that efforts to seek help increased delinquency by 21.5%. This seems to suggest that help-seeking is a risky factor in influencing juveniles to engage in crime, that if youths were to be encouraged to seek help for their problems, delinquency would increase! The most likely situation, however, could be that those who scored high in help seeking behavior in the study are probably those that were already aware that they have a problem and had tried to talk it over with friends and peers or the respondents did not fully understand what help-seeking meant in this case. Meagley, Schriver & Norris (2016) offers an explanation to this scenario when he reports that the informal sources of help, according to the adolescents, offer less threat to their self-worth.

The study also was about establishing the differences in juvenile delinquency in relation to family type. It was found that delinquency is similar in all family types of: two biological parent family, step family, separated/divorced family, single parent family and grandparent family. Analysis of differences in help-seeking behavior according to family type, however, found that children growing up in step-families rarely seek help. This is so probably because stepparents, mostly stepmothers, treat their stepchildren cruelly, causing a distance in their relationships. A child going through a strained or painful relationship at home may be wary of any other associations, they may think that other people too will treat them as they are treated at home, so they will not approach anyone for help. Another reason why this set of children may not seek for help is probably because they might have resolved within themselves to deal with their problems independently. Mistic, (2020) states that children brought up in stepfamilies are at risk of suffering violence because they don't have close emotional ties with their adoptive family

members. The principal from school A also said that children in step-families get oppressed, some even get disinherited.

Other than in the step family, strained relationships can occur in other family set-ups also, actually, even in two biological parent families. If a child is already delinquent, for example, the parents and even siblings are not going to be warm in their association with him/her; they will most probably treat them harshly. The harsh treatment definitely will lead to a strain in their associations making the child wary of seeking any help from them. In other cases, a parent may be very demanding and critical about a child's efforts either at school or at home. The critical and unappreciative attitude of a parent sometimes destroys a child's self-esteem leading sensitive children to give up trying doing anything at all or turn into crime. Children require encouragement and appreciation from parents and significant others in for the efforts they put in doing little tasks order to keep on trying.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that if students who sought for help were the ones who scored highly in juvenile delinquency than those that had a low score, then there must be something not right with the sources of help that they use. Perhaps students considered casual talking about their problems to peers as seeking for help. It was also concluded that parents to the affected respondents may probably not be involved in and may not even be aware of their children's struggles. It was therefore recommended that all school going children should be sensitized about the availability of professional help-giving sources, and they should be encouraged to seek help from these professional sources otherwise they are at risk of getting wrong information. Finally, the study recommended that there should be further research conducted to establish the sources of help used by adolescents.

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