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Vulnerability of Youth to Crime and Disruption of Lawful Careers in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Young adulthood offenders (YAO) are persons in a phase, a transition to added and/or new responsibilities, roles, and occupational careers. More specifically, the transition involves a progression from varied forms of basic education to varied forms of employment and enhancement of occupational careers. The transition is also a phase of high vulnerability, including a high vulnerability to crime. Accordingly, the study examined the effects of crime tendency (vulnerability) on the trajectory of careers among young adult offenders.*

Keywords: *Young Adult Offenders, Vulnerability to crime, Occupational Careers, Age -Crime Curve, Prisons*

1.1 Introduction

While considerable attention has been given to crime, imprisonment, and rehabilitation, limited attention has been given to the vulnerability of youth to crime and disruption of lawful careers in low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In this regard, the study examined the vulnerability of the youth to crime (tendency), specifically in terms of early lawful occupations, committing crimes, imprisonment, and disruption of the lawful occupations. Among the key theoretical perspectives included socioeconomic vulnerability theory and the life course theory, which were used to map out the life phases of the inmates and related vulnerabilities.

1.2 Background to the study

Among the 11.7 million imprisoned persons, the young offenders aged between 15 and 26 accounted for about 4.1 million, which is about 35% (UNODC, 2022, 2023). By 2019, 42% (or 200,000) of

homicides worldwide involved youth aged 10 to 29 years (WHO, 2020). In 2023, the prison population in SSA was around 1.4 million, of which 541,930 (42%) were young offenders between 15 and 26 years (Walmsley, 2018, and Walmsley, 2020). Of the 464,000 homicides globally in 2017, 35.1% were in Africa; again, a greater proportion was among young adult offenders. Similarly, in the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA), 430,103 were imprisoned by the year 2019, of which 193,547 (45%) were young offenders (UNODC, 2019). By 2023, the prison population in Kenya was 60,000 inmates, in which nearly 50% were young adult offenders under the age of 26 (KNBS, 2023). In addition, available reports indicated 67% of the crimes were committed by youth, specifically under the age of 26 (Faria, 2022; Ondigo, 2020; KNCAJ, 2017).

Young adult offenders (YAO) or inmates are persons in early adulthood accompanied by added and/or new roles, responsibilities, and occupational careers. The transition from adolescence to early adulthood has usually been characterized by biological, mental, and cultural changes accompanied by added and/or new responsibilities, roles, and occupational careers (ILO, 2021; WHO, 2021; Scott et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2014). The transition also involves a progression from basic education to varied forms of employment and enhancement of occupational careers, accompanied by intensive (severe) vulnerability consisting of accidental fatalities, suicide, and homicide.

Despite the various policy measures, the proportion of crimes attributed to young persons' remain considerably high; 35% globally, 42% in Africa, and 54% in Kenya (UNODC, 2021; NCRC, 2018; NCRC, 2012). Such a large proportion has been associated with fundamental disruption of career development, occupational experience (employability), and socioeconomic well-being. Of greater concern has been the likely conversion of the young adult offenders into criminal careers: i.e., repeated and more severe offenses and likely lengthy sentences in prison.

The study was intended, therefore, to examine the contribution of the adverse socio-economic conditions to crime tendency (vulnerability), imprisonment, and disruption of lawful and sustainable occupations, the nature of rehabilitation, and outcomes among young adult offenders. Specific objectives were to 1) identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the young inmates in prisons and 2) examine of young inmates to crime and disruption of lawful careers.

1.3 Research 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 the largest prison for men in 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 of Kamiti Youth Training and Correction Centre, Kamae Girls Borstal Institution, Kamiti Medium Prison and Kamiti Maximum Prison has 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. According to Makuba (2019) and Cheruiyot (2019), approximately 800 inmates were serving long-term and short-term prison terms.

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 these individuals 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.

In view of the fact that the target population in the two institutions of persons between 15 and 26 years was 391, the study used Yamene's (1967) formula for small and finite populations at 95% confidence. The overall sample size was therefore $170+105=275$. Sample size determination for Kamiti Medium prison and Langata Women's prisons was carried out separately to enhance homogeneity of the populations, reduce variance, and likely errors. To address non-responses, the study considered a 10% and 7% contingency sample in Kamiti and Langata prisons, respectively.

The study used systematic random sampling to draw individual samples in both Kamiti and Langata women's prison. 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.

Table 1. Young inmates in Kamiti and Langata prisons

Prison Facility		Population	Determined sample	Contingency	Total sample
Kamiti Prison		266	155	15(10%)	170
Langata prison	Women	125	97	8 (7%)	105
Sub total		391	254	23	275

Source: Field data, 2025

Using the key informant's interview guide, the research aimed at understanding in detail the study in-depth probing questions. Qualitative in-depth interviews (FGDs and key informant) allowed the collection of information from a wide range of individuals who have first-hand knowledge about the study problem. Mainly, they comprised officers in charge (OIC) in the respective study prison institutions and selected officers in charge of prison departments such as documentation, welfare, and

works. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample respondents. This consisted of structured open-ended responses. Specifically, the questionnaire was divided into five parts namely: 1) socio-demographics; 2) experiences and plans for lawful occupations; 3) crime tendency and disruptions of lawful careers; 4) rehabilitation and effects towards restoring lawful occupations; and 5) barriers to reverting to lawful occupations. Some of the responses were based on modern types of Likert scales and best practices.

To gather objective, in-depth participatory data on the study thematic issues that may not have been captured using individual youth questionnaires, the study focused on homogeneous focus groups. The informal group setting was believed to make people feel at ease and encourage them to express their views freely. They included carefully drawn officers in charge of various sections within each prison facility, and representatives of religious, NGO, and community-based organizations working in collaboration with prison services. Using a guide list, the researcher facilitated all the discussions, starting with a general introduction, the purpose of the study, obtaining consent from the participants, and then proceeding to the core themes of the study.

The pretesting study was conducted to assess the relevance, clarity, and precision of the questionnaire. Specifically, the process was essential in identifying sensitive and complex questions, the length of the questionnaire, and the inmates' degree of comprehension, interpretation, and ability to answer the questions as intended by the research. This process was carried out with a small group of inmates at Nairobi West Prison, as it shares similarities with Kamiti Medium Prison and Lang'ata Women's Prison. Notably, Nairobi West Prison has a significant population of young adult inmates and offers a range of rehabilitation programs.

1.4 Findings and Discussions

Socio-Demographics Characteristics of Young Inmates

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.

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 2.1) below because of inclusion of the Langata Women Prison in the sample; purposely with a view 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.

The Age of the Young Inmate

Age of the inmates was considered important as an indicator for of processes, including life phases, opportunities, and challenges. In this respect, the study assessed the age of the young prison inmates and responses (Table 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 behavior rising sharply in adolescence, peaking in the mid-20s, and gradually declining thereafter, mirroring life expectancy. Notably, the peak age for criminal behavior consistently occurs around 25 years, across virtually all types of crime.

Marital Status of the Young Inmates

The study considered 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 2.3) indicated that 59% were single and 39% had entered to the phase of marriage or establishing some other family with 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 correction institutions were married compared to 46% of those who had not been subjected to 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.

Number of Children Among Young Inmates

The number of children among the young prison inmates is usually considered a key indicator of the 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 2.4) 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 which 24% had one child, 18% had two children and 10% had three children.

Table 2. 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

Source: Field data, 2025

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 $\frac{1}{3}$ 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 behavior. In contrast, individuals without parental responsibilities are more prone to commit crimes, often due to unemployment or involvement in low-paying jobs.

The Type of Parental Structure

Different types of parental structure have been considered important dimensions (variables), particularly in respect to 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 3.1) 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 3. 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

Source: Field data, 2025

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

Number of Siblings for the Young Inmates

Similarly, the number of siblings at the childhood of a person has been associated with different life outcomes at the 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 that lived with the young prison inmates before incarceration. Responses (Table 3.2) indicated that 43% of the young inmates lived with relatively large siblings over the rate of 3.4 per woman (or household) based on 2022 projected census.

The findings indicated that 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, a number of 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).

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 with respect to the available livelihoods and prevailing challenges. Accordingly, the study assessed the rural-urban status of the residence of the young inmates. Responses (Table 4.1) 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 lived in some form of urban area or informal urban settlements (O'Neill, 2023; Cowling, 2022; Chebet, 2022).

These reports indicated also that 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.

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 4.2) 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 protestant (45%), Catholics (33%), and Muslims (13%).

Table 4. 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

Source: Field, 2025

Education of the Prison Young Inmate

Education is usually considered as 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 equalization in the society. In this respect, the study assessed the education levels of the young prison inmates and responses (Table 4.3.) generated four (4) interesting observations. First, 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 the young inmates with secondary education was higher by 15.1% to the national average and the proportion of the young inmates with primary education was lower by 5.8% to 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 characterized 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.

Vulnerability to Crime and Disruption of Lawful Careers

The study examined vulnerability to crime, disruption of lawful occupations (careers) and related trajectories among young inmates. I have indicated that the study was guided by the principle, the proposition and indeed the hypothesis that adverse childhood conditions (ACC) enhanced the propensity (tendency) to crime in early adulthood, or in transition to early adulthood, which in turn has negative effects on the development of lawful (acceptable) occupations.

Vulnerability to Crime and Imprisonment

Indicators of the vulnerability to crime included the age of the first crime experience, the number of the criminal experiences before conviction, the year of the conviction, availability of bond, the length of the sentence, and the time already served in prison by the time of the study.

Age of First Crime Incident

The study requested the young inmates to indicate the age in which they committed the first crime. Responses (Table 5.1) indicated that the young inmates committed their first crimes between 8 years of age and 24 years of age; with most (greater frequency) between 17 years of age and 22 years of age. Specifically, 77% of the young inmates committed their first crime between 17 years of age and the 22 years of age, and which also coincided with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood and increased vulnerabilities.

Table 5. The Age of First Crime, Number of the Crime Incidences and arrests before imprisonment

1. Age of the first Crime	Frequency	Percent
8-12	25	9.4
13-17	100	36.3
18-22	113	40.9
23-26	37	13.5
Total	275	100.0
2. Number of Crime Incidences	Frequency	Percent
None	175	64
1	39	12
2	20	08
3	13	05
4	15	06
5 and above	13	05
Total	275	100
3. Arrests before the present imprisonment	Frequency	Percent
None	184	67
1	54	20
2	13	05
3	14	05
4 and above	10	04
Total	275	100

Source: Field data, 2025

These observations were consistent with previous reports (WHO, 2022; Aboagye et al., 2021; NCRC, 2018; UN Habitat, 2004). WHO reported that young people commit crime at the age bracket of 10 to 29

years; with a greater frequency between 15 to 29 years of age. The WHO used homicide as a key indicator of youth crime and reported that on average 176 000 homicides are committed each year by young people between 15–29 years of age. UN Habitat (2004) operationalized young offender as a person between 14 and 25 years, had committed an offence against the norm or the law. The report indicated also that more than 50% of inmates were first time offender at the ages between 12 and 19 years. It will also be recalled that most of the life-course studies have conventionally focused on the onset of criminal behavior and its correlates in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood (Cinini & Mkhize, 2023; van Koppen, 2018; Loeber et al., 2013; Ou & Reynolds, 2010). The findings are echoed by narrations from a young adult participant; *I was around 13 years when I stole money from home and bought mandazi*. Another one stated; *I was with my friends, we stole bananas and avocados from a kibanda (local kiosk)*. The findings were clearly consistent with the view (proposition or indeed hypothesis) the assertion that the proportion of individuals involved in crime peaks during young adulthood and subsequently declines with age. The study showed that youngest people commit their first criminal offense upon reaching young adulthood, the age at which they are held criminally responsible. Furthermore, those who engage in criminal behavior early and maintain this pattern for an extended period are far more likely to progress to adult criminality than those who begin later and have only brief criminal careers.

Experience of Criminal Incidences

The study also assessed the number of criminal incidences committed before conviction. Responses (Table 5) indicated that while 64% had not committed any previous criminal incident before their conviction, 36% of the young prison inmates had committed one or more criminal incidences before their present conviction. These outcomes were consistent with previous reports (NPS2022, NCRC, 2018; SRIC, 2014; UN Habitat, 2011) which indicated that over a third ($\frac{1}{3}$) of the young people had committed varied forms of criminal incidences; most of which are never reported. From the above, the prevalence of offending typically begins early in life, increases with age, and then gradually declines. Petty offenses are more likely to peak earlier among offenders, whereas serious crimes tend to peak later in life. Additionally, chronic petty offenders are more likely to evolve into violent offenders as they grow older. However, not all crimes exhibit the same level of persistence. Those who continue to offend are more likely to escalate to more severe offenses over time.

The Number of Previous Arrests

The number of previous arrests has typically been used as an indicator of criminal tendency (vulnerability). Accordingly, the number of previous arrests were assessed and responses (Table 5.3) indicated that 67% of the young prison inmates had not experienced any previous arrests. Responses also indicated that 33% of the young inmates had experienced several arrests before the arrest that led to present conviction.

These responses were similar to previous reports (NPS 2022, NCRC, 2018; SRIC, 2014; UN Habitat, 2011) which indicated that nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the young inmates had not been arrested before the arrest leading to the present conviction and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the young prison inmates had been arrested once or several times before the arrest leading to the present conviction.

It turned out that the number of criminal experiences and the number of arrests before the arrest leading to the present conviction were nearly the same, which indicated that the two indicators addressed the issue of criminal tendency. During the focused discussion (FGD), responses similar to those of existing

reports indicated that a greater proportion of young inmates had not been arrested to their present arrest and conviction.

Similar sentiments were captured by FGD discussant:

“In most cases, economic hardships drive the majority of young adults into committing serious crime. In fact, most of the time young adults will tell you they never get arrested however, in some instances some of them find themselves on the wrong side of the law. These serious crimes include stealing, robbery, rape, violence, defilement and murder”.

Despite the lack of comprehensive statistical data on the number of young adults arrested and booked by police in the country, the findings from the above self-reported criminal behavior indicates young adults are arrested for a range of offenses, including underage drinking, arson, theft, and even murder. This highlights the importance of identifying early signs of criminal behavior among young adults and suggests that arrests may serve as an appropriate intervention to help redirect them toward a more positive career trajectory.

The Crimes Committed by Young Inmates

The study assessed the types of crimes committed by the young inmates leading to the present conviction and responses (Table 6) indicated that the crimes commented by the young inmates included 1) sexual offences including rape, defilement and/or indecent acts (28.4%), 2) murder and manslaughter (16.4%), 3) stealing and theft (16.4%), 4) robbery with violence (9.5%), and 5) drug trafficking (8.7%) among others.

Table 6. Crimes Committed by the Young Prison Inmates

Crimes Committed	Frequency	Percent
Muggings	9	3.3
Abuse of office	1	.4
Arson	1	.4
Assault	10	3.6
Cyber crime	1	.4
Defilement/sex offenses/rape/indecent act	78	28.4
Drug trafficking	24	8.7
Exportation of Ivory	1	.4
Fraud	4	1.5
Grievous harm	10	3.6
Illegal possession of firearm	3	1.1
Intent to commit a felony	3	1.1
Malicious damage	2	.7
Manslaughter/Murder/Human trafficking/Kidnap- ping	45	16.4
Mismanagement of public funds	1	.4
Mistaken identity	1	.4
Possession of stolen goods	2	.7
Robbery with violence	26	9.5
Selling illicit brew/drunkenness	6	2.2
Stealing/Theft and breaking	45	16.4
Traffic offence	2	.7
Total	275	100.0

Source: Field data, 2025

These responses were substantially similar to previous reports (NPS2022, NCRC, 2018; Borderland crimes, 2018; Crime mapping, 2016). These studies reported that young adults have been associated with crimes that include general stealing, assault, possession of illegal brew and drugs, malicious damage to property and creating disturbance. More specifically SRIC (2014) reported that among the crimes committed by the young prison inmates included general stealing (35.4%), mugging (23.2%), robbery (15.6%), and burglary/break-ins (10.7%).

The quote from the FGD demonstrates that most young adults were into crimes ranging from general stealing to robbery with violence.

“In most cases, socioeconomic hardships drive the majority of the young adults into committing serious crimes, among them stealing, robbery, rape, violence, defilement and murder”.

In addition, narration from a KI interviewee at Kamiti Prison was observed; *“Young adults are into committing serious crimes, some are here as condemned prisoners”.*

The statement was also supported by FGD discussant at Langata Maximum Prison who observed that;
“Majority of the young ladies are convicted for violent related offences. A good number committed crimes of passion, manslaughter, robbery, and gender-based violence. All of these crimes attract long term imprisonment. out of them a sizeable number are 'condemned prisoners' who are now serving life imprisonment”.

This evidence demonstrated that young adults engage in various crimes, from sexual offenses to violent acts. Many of these crimes result in serious consequences, including life imprisonment, which accounts for their disproportionate representation in the prison system compared to other age groups. Furthermore, this situation does not absolve them of responsibility for minor offenses such as truancy, public drunkenness, loitering, and pick-pocketing.

Availability of bond

Article 49(1)(b) of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010, states that any person who is arrested has the right to be released on bail or bond under reasonable conditions, pending their charge or trial, unless there are compelling reasons to deny such release. This right to bail is a crucial safeguard, ensuring that suspects or offenders are protected from unlawful detention and the arbitrary deprivation of their fundamental rights, liberties, and freedoms. Bail is typically applied and granted at four stages in the criminal justice process: 1) at the police station, 2) bail pending trial, 3) bail pending appeal, and 4) anticipatory bail. Accordingly, bail is a procedure (mechanism) of ensuring that a suspect (offender) will be appearing to attend court mentions and hearing as and when required until the trial is completed. It also compels the suspect (offender) to remain within the jurisdiction of the court. A bail bond on the other hand is a written understanding executed by the defendant or one or more sureties, providing that the suspect (offender) will show up in a selected criminal action of proceeding when his presence is required and submit himself or herself to the orders and processes of the court. It also provides that in the event that the suspect (offender) fails to do so, the signors of the bond will forfeit to the court the sum of money specified in the order setting up bond. It is therefore a pecuniary pledge in exchange for liberating the accused until the end of the trial.

If the accused person violates the terms of their bail or bond, the police are required to cancel the bail or bond, re-arrest the individual, take them to the police station, and subsequently present them to court. In relation to this, the study evaluated the availability of bond for arrested young inmates. The findings, in Table 7.1, revealed that 67% of the arrested young inmates were granted bonds. These responses were consistent with previous reports (NPS, 2023; NCRC, 2021; NCAJ, 2022; Mumbe, 2020; Karanja, 2018; Nduru, 2018; GOK, 2015). These reports indicated that in principle two-third ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the suspects, accused or offenders have been able to secure bond. These reports indicated also that administration of bond in Kenya has been characterized by a wide range of challenges including 1) granting of bail in Kenya is discretionary both at the police station and the courts, 2) inability of police to give bond on reasonable terms, 3) law enforcement agencies have been reported to use bond to extort bribes, 4) the bond by police is usually limited (restricted) to minor offenses, and 5) the bond for more serious offenses is typically the responsibility of the courts and would require production of the suspect (accused) within 24 hours of arrest. In this respect, a person accused of serious offenses such as murder or robbery with violence is likely to be detained in a police cell, and can only be released on bail once produced before court.

Table 7. Availability of Bond, Value, Length of the Sentence and Imprisonment

1. Bond availability	Frequency	Percent
Yes	157	67.1
No	77	32.9
Total	234	100.0
2. Value of Bond	Frequency	Percent
300,000-500,000	95	61
500001-1M	38	24
1000001-2M	15	10
2M and above	09	06
Total	157	100.0
3. Length of the Sentence	Frequency	Percent
Less than one year	1	0.3
1-5	84	31
6-9	64	23.7
10-14	56	21
15 and above	47	17
Life sentence	18	07
Total	270	100
4. Years of imprisonment	Frequency	Percent
Less than a year	18	6.5
1 year	104	37.8
2-3	67	24.4
4-5	48	17.5
6-7	23	8.4
8-9	10	3.6
10 and above	5	1.8
Total	275	100.0

These outcomes were also consistent with UNAFEI (2021) which reported that young adult offenders were processed once arrested as adult offenders including being subjected to laws of criminal trials such as the Evidence Act or the Criminal Procedure Code including administration of bail and bond terms. Evidently, most of the offenders secured bond as stated by a narration by an inmate at Kamiti prison; *My family secured the bond through land title deed.*

However, some were unable to raise the bond. As expressed in a statement by a young inmate at Langata prison; *My family could not raise the bond and I spent two years in remand.*

In conclusion, the findings showed that young adults in the country can access bonds on reasonable terms. However, those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to benefit from this opportunity. In fact, the law states that pre-detention should be reserved for cases where the courts find compelling reasons to deny bond.

The Value of the Bond

One of the key challenges in the administration of the bond is the value. In low and medium-income countries including Kenya the value of the bond may negate the principle of the bond to safeguard fundamental rights of liberty and freedom. Accordingly, the study assessed the value of the bond granted to

young inmates. Response (Table 7.2) indicated that the value of the bond ranged from KES 300,000 to 2million; where nearly 61% of the young inmates were awarded the bonds of KES 300 to 500 thousand. In some way, these responses were similar to previous reports (NPS 2023, NCRC 2021, NCAJ 2022, Mumbi 2020, Karanja 2018, Nduru 2018). These studies reported also that a greater proportion of the inmates have not been able to affordable the value of the bond. More specifically, the studies reported that a greater proportion of the accused persons have not been able to afford cash bails even as low as Kshs 1000 because of poverty and limited socio-economic capacity. In this case, a large proportion of the suspects, offenders and/or accused have opted to remain in detention waiting for the trial or completion of the trial process; and therefore, surrendering their fundamental rights to liberty and related rights. According to Adler et al., (2016) young inmates have been severely affected by the value of the bond, and their inability to meet the value of the bond. Lack of the consideration of the prevailing circumstances, the arbitrary and high value, and the inability of the young inmate to meet the value of the bond meant that the arrest, prosecution and sentencing process will have a severely devastating impact on the future and the socio-economic ability of the young inmates.

The results showed that the value of bail or bond depended on the nature of the offense, the offender's previous criminal record, and the likelihood of them absconding court trial. Although denying bail or bond may not be in the best interest of young offenders, the primary concern of the courts is public safety. However, the data above indicated hefty bails/bonds. As a result, the young offenders from poor socio-economic backgrounds often struggle to raise the necessary funds for bail or bond. More often, they are likely to be remanded in custody throughout their entire trial period.

Length of Sentence

Sentencing is the process by which a court imposes a penal sanction once an accused person has pleaded guilty or has been convicted of an offence following a trial. In view of the foregoing, the study assessed the length of the sentence (imprisonment) of the young inmates. Responses (Table 7.3) indicated that 31% of the young inmates were sentenced for a period between one and five (5) years; and cumulatively 55% of the inmates were serving sentences for a period of one to nine (9) years. There were also cases of longer periods and even life sentences of the young inmates. These outcomes were also consistent with previous reports (NPS, 2023; KNBS, 2022; NCRC, 2021; NCAJ, 2022; Mumbi, 2020; Karanja, 2018; Indiazzi, 2017; GOK, 2015B). These sources reported that nearly 1/3 of the sentences have not met the threshold (standards) of the optimal sentence for their respective cases. These studies reported that powers that enable the court to determine the most suitable sentence for each individual offender, among other factors, also contribute towards the disparities of the sentences imposed upon offenders who have committed similar offenses under similar circumstances.

Other sources have reported that 67.3% (about $\frac{2}{3}$) of the inmates have been serving a period between one month and less than 2 years (NPS, 2023; KNBS, 2022; NCRC, 2021; NCAJ, 2022; Mumbi, 2020; Karanja, 2018; Indiazzi, 2017; GOK, 2015B). This was slightly in contrast to the present study which indicated that 31% of the young inmates were serving sentences for a period between one and five (5) years and cumulatively 55% of the inmates were serving sentences for a period of one to nine (9) years. This contrast (discrepancy) arose from the concentration of the population with serious offenses in both the Kamiti Prison and Langata Women Prison. The two institutions are usually reserved for serious offenses and long-term sentences. The FGD discussants at Langata and Kamiti Maximum Prisons were consistent with the primary responses. The discussants noted that a significant number of young adult

inmates were convicted for violent related offenses. Among the crimes were murder, manslaughter, robbery, indecent acts, and gender-based violence.

This situation was captured by FGD discussants at Langata Maximum Prison who supported the study findings by noting that;

“Majority of the young ladies were convicted for violent related offenses. This is because most of them find themselves in compromising situations that expose them to violent offenses. This includes the murder of their sexual partners or predators. Apart from murder, most have committed crimes of passion, manslaughter, robbery, and gender-based violence. All of these crimes attract long term imprisonment”.

The length of imprisonment is directly determined by the nature of the crime. In other countries such as the Netherlands, young offenders are appropriately sent to rehabilitative institutions for a maximum of two years. In contrast, Kenya often incarcerates young offenders in adult prisons, where many serve lengthy sentences. Those under the statutory age are directed to juvenile rehabilitation centers, such as Kamae Girls Correctional Centre and Kamiti Youth Training and Correctional Centre. Juveniles serving long-term imprisonment are transferred to adult prisons upon reaching the legal age of criminal culpability, which is 18 years. This study has demonstrated that young adults are actively engaged in serious offenses that warrant maximum sentences.

Period Served for the Conviction

The study assessed the period in which the young inmates had served the present conviction. Responses (Table 7.4) indicated that the period that the young inmates had served ranged from less than one year to over ten (10) years. More specifically, 80% of the young inmates had served a period between one year and five (5) years; in which 62% had served between one and three (3) years. These outcomes were consistent with other secondary sources (NPS, 2023; KNBS, 2022; NCRC, 2021; NCAJ, 2022; Mumbi, 2020; Karanja, 2018; Indiazzi, 2017; GOK, 2015B). These sources indicated that a greater proportion of the inmates in prisons in Kenya serve an average of one to three (3) years.

Experience of Disruption by Young Inmates

In view of the criminal journey from the crime incident, arrest, detention, trial, bond, conviction and serving conviction sentence, the study requested the young inmates to rate their experience of disruption of the life plans, lawful occupations and career development by the crime tendency and imprisonment in a graduated scale of 1) less than 10%, 2) by 30%, 3) by 50% and 4) by 70 across the six (6) dimensions (indicators) of the life plans, lawful occupations and career development.

Responses (Table 8) indicated varied levels of disruptions on the six (6) dimensions 1) family relations, 2) family well-being, 3) education, 4) lawful occupations (careers), 5) life plans and trajectories, 6) income security and 6) livelihoods security.

Table 8. Crime Disruption of Young Adult Trajectories

Disrup- tion By	Family rela- tions	Family Well-be- ing	Educa- tion	Lawful occupa- tions (careers)	Life plans trajecto- ries	Income Security	Liveli- hood Security
Less than 10%	15.8%	13.8%	35.7%	7.7%	10.0%	7.1%	6.7%

Up to 30%	16.2%	12.6%	7.2%	10.0%	11.2%	9.7%	12.3%
By 50%	16.9%	23.4%	22.1%	25.3%	24.9%	21.3%	29.0%
Above 70%	51.1%	50.2%	34.9%	57.1%	53.9%	61.9%	52.0%
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275	n=275

Source: Field data, 2025

Specifically, responses indicated severe (acute) disruption (over 50% on the disruption scale) in various areas including family relation (68%), family wellbeing ((73.6%), education (57%), lawful occupations (78.8), life plans (78.8%), income insecurity (83.2%) and livelihoods insecurity (81%). These outcomes were consistent with previous studies (Githui et al., 2023; Cinini & Mkhize, 2023; Lee, 2019; van Koppen, 2018; Apel & Gary Sweeten, 2010; Allgood et al., 2007). These studies reported fundamental disruptions by the early adulthood crime tendencies on the development of lawful occupations (careers). More specifically, some of the studies reported that early onset of criminal behaviour had detrimental outcomes in later adult years and increased negative outcomes. Some of the key disruptions that have been reported in various studies included education plan and trajectory, development of the vocational skills, employment experience and progression, income and livelihood prospects. Fagan & Freeman (1999) demonstrated that crime and legal work involve trade-offs and that crime rates were inversely related to expected lawful wages, particularly among young males with limited job skills or prospects. In addition, previous studies emphasize that the early onset of criminal behavior in young adults heightens the risk of encountering various secondary issues and developmental setbacks later in life (Wiesner, Kim, & Capaldi, 2010; Bartlett, Jennifer & Domene, 2014; Barnert et al., 2017, SAC, 2019). These may include academic failure, substance abuse, difficulties in maintaining employment, poor family relationships, and distorted life paths. One young offender, for example, highlighted how her involvement in crime disrupted her life trajectory, leading to career interruptions and missed opportunities; “*I wanted to be a lawyer or a doctor but now I am in jail*”.

1.5 Conclusion

Socio-Demographics Characteristics of 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 because of 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 majority of the young inmates (64%) were aged between 24 and 26 years-old which was also consistent with the previous studies. The study established also that 59% of the young inmates were single and 39% had entered to the phase of marriage or establishing some other family with 29% married and 10% separated. The children for the young inmates ranged from zero to 6. While 42% did not have children, 58% of the young inmates had children in which 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 marriage, either were experiencing varied challenges or still single. The study established also that 43% of the young inmates lived with relatively large siblings over the rate of 3.4 per woman (or household) based on 2022 projected census. Large siblings and therefore large households (or families) have been demonstrated to outpace severely available resources, particularly financial resources and/or livelihood assets; thereby increasing vulnerability to poverty and disruption of the career prospects. The data indicated 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 established also 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 the young inmates with secondary education was higher by 15.1% to the national average and the proportion of the young inmates with primary education was lower by 5.8% to the national average. These observations reflected a paradox 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.

The study concluded therefore that 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, and 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 concluded also 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 marriage, lived with large siblings with depleted livelihoods and therefore increased vulnerability to poverty and disruption of the career prospects.

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

Vulnerability to Crime and Disruption of Lawful Careers

The study established that while the young inmates committed their first crimes between the age of eight (8) years and the age of twenty-four (24) years, 77% of the young inmates committed their first crime between 17 and 22 years of age, and which also coincided with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood and increased vulnerabilities. These observations were consistent with existing reports including WHO report which indicated that young people commit crime at the age bracket of 10 to 29 years; with a greater frequency between 15 to 29 years of age. In addition, the study established that although majority (64%) had not committed any previous criminal incident before their conviction, 36% of the young prison inmates had committed one or more criminal incidences before their present conviction. This was also consistent with the number of arrests before the arrest leading to the present conviction which indicated that 67% had not been arrested before the arrest leading to the present conviction and 33% had been arrested once or twice.

The study established also that crime committed by the young inmates included 1) incidences related to sexual offenses including rape, defilement and/or indecent acts (28.4%), 2) murder and manslaughter (16.4%), 3) stealing and theft (16.4%), 4) robbery with violence (9.5%), and 5) drug trafficking (8.7%) among others and which were also consistent with previous reports. The study established also that nearly 81% of the young inmates were arrested in the last five (5) years (2018-2023). The study established that 67% of the arrested young inmates were granted bonds and which was consistent with previous reports which indicated that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the suspects, accused or offenders had been able to secure bond. Although the value of the bond ranged on average from KES 300,000 to 2 million, nearly 62% of the young inmates were awarded the bonds of KES 300 to 500 thousand. The study established that the bond's value was high for majority of young inmates, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. The study established that nearly 77% of the young inmates were convicted in the last four (4) years (2020-2023), with an average of 1 to 2 years of detention and trial. Although, there were cases with longer periods and even life sentences among the young inmates, the study established also that that 31% of the young inmates were sentenced for a period between one and five (5) years; and cumulatively 55% of the inmates were serving sentences for a period of one to nine (9) years. The study established that 80% of the young inmates had served for a period between one year and five (5) years; where 62% had served between one and three (3) years.

The young inmates were requested to rate their experience of disruption of the life plans, lawful occupations and career development by the crime tendency and imprisonment. Responses indicated that young inmates experienced severe (acute) disruption (over 50% on the disruption scale) in a number of dimensions (indicators) including 1) plans toward family relation (68%), 2) plans toward family wellbeing (73.6%), 3) plans toward education (57%), 4) plans toward lawful occupations (78.8%), 5) life plans (78.8%), 6) income insecurity (83.2%) and 7) livelihoods insecurity (81%).

With the use of multiple regression, and based on the R^2 (square) and other statistical procedures, the study established that socioeconomic insecurity (vulnerability) contributed nearly 20% of the disruption of the family relation, 25% of the disruption of the education, 22% of the disruption of the lawful careers, 28% of the disruption of the career plans; all of which were significant at the probability of error $P < 0.001$

In respect to crime vulnerability, the study concluded that while they committed their first crimes between the age of eight (8) years and the age of twenty-four (24) years, a greater proportion (77%) of the young inmates committed their first crime between 17 and 22 years of age, and which also coincided with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood and increased vulnerabilities. In addition, the study concluded that although majority had not committed any previous criminal incident before their conviction, slightly over $\frac{1}{3}$ of the young inmates had committed one or more criminal incidences before their present conviction. This was also consistent with the number of previous arrests before the arrest leading to the present conviction. The study concluded also that majority of the young inmates were granted bonds which on average ranged from KES 300 to 500 thousands. Although there were longer periods and even life sentences, the study concluded that young inmates were sentenced on average for a period between one and five (5) years. By the time of the study, a greater proportion of the inmates had served for a period between one year and five (5) years.

The study concluded also that early adverse economic conditions, crime tendencies (vulnerabilities) and imprisonment disrupted life plans of the young inmates, development of career plans and futures. Dimensions (indicators) that were severely disrupted included plans toward family relation, plans toward family wellbeing, plans toward education, plans toward lawful occupations, life plans, income security and livelihoods insecurity. More specifically, the study concluded that the socioeconomic insecurity (vulnerability) had contributed to disruption of the life plans, lawful occupations and career development as reflected by the responses and the regression analyses in various indicators. More importantly, the study concluded also that the crime tendencies (vulnerabilities) and the subsequent imprisonment to disrupted life plans, lawful occupations and career development of the young inmates as reflected by the responses and the regression analyses in various indicators.

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