

Relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Gang Participation Among Youth in Mombasa County, Kenya: From the Perspective of Household Challenges

Salma Ahmed Hussein¹ & Dr. Phelista Marura Musili (PhD)²

^{1,2}Department of Psychology, Kenyatta University

Corresponding email: salz.ahmed8015@gmail.com

How to Cite: Hussein, S. A., & Musili, P. M. (2024). Relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Gang Participation Among Youth in Mombasa County, Kenya: From the Perspective of Household Challenges. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious Studies*, 4(6), 17-29.

Abstract

Purpose: Gang participation has become a universal phenomenon attracting increasing attention in both developed and developing countries. Previous research denotes strong evidence that early life adverse traumas and events heighten the risk of delinquent behaviour among young people. This study aimed to find out whether there is a relationship between household challenges and gang participation among youth gang members in Mombasa County. This study was guided by the Interactional Theory by Terrence Thornberry (1987).

Methods: This study employed a correlational research design within the context of Ex-post facto research. The study population consisted of alleged, convicted, and reforming gang members in Mombasa. They were drawn from a database accessed by the Nyali District Peace Committee (DPC) which has 358 members aged between 15-31 years. Purposive, and snowball sampling techniques were used to gather data from the sample. Descriptive statistics namely, frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used. Inferential statistics namely the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, linear, and regression was then employed to establish the relationship between household challenges and gang participation.

Results: The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between gang participation and household challenges ($r = 0.876$, $p < 0.01$).

Implication: The findings of this study will guide the formulation of programs and interventions for the rehabilitation and reintegration of these gang members. These can be of help to Civil Society Organizations, law enforcement agencies, and probation officers.

Keywords: Household Challenges, Gang Participation, Youth in Mombasa County

Received: 30th September 2024

Revised: 26th October 2024

Published: 31st October 2024

1.0 Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been generally categorized into three broad indicators which are abuse, neglect, and household challenges. Abuse includes real or potential physical injury; disturbances in emotional and social development; and any sexual activity with or without penetration perpetrated on a child. Neglect is defined as the intentional and persistent failure of the parent and, or caregiver to meet their child's basic needs. This is corroborated through physical, educational, emotional, or medical abandonment (Pejović-Milovančević

2012). Household challenges are an umbrella expression holding parental issues such as divorce, mental illness, substance abuse, or a parent being incarcerated (CDC, 2018).

The effects of ACEs extend to the physical and mental health of children and adults and are both short-term and long-term. According to the Mental Health Surveys conducted by WHO, ACEs account for 29.8 percent of all psychiatric disorders in the United States of America (Kessler et al., 2010). Young adults with several issues, including an accumulation of psychological problems/disorders, substance misuse, and gang involvement, are likely to have had at least one ACE during childhood (CDC, 2018).

Gang participation has become a universal phenomenon attracting increasing attention in many countries. There is yet to be an accepted definition for 'youth gangs'. Nonetheless, a youth gang is characterized as a self-formed association of peers with features such as a name with identifying symbols, a structural leadership, a territory based on their geographical location, a meeting point, and intent to carry out illegal activities (OSAC, 2017). Research from the Euro Gang Network's survey measurement of gang membership, reveals three major indicators that measure level of participation. These include a degree of involvement in gang behaviours such as wearing clothes, colours, or logos that identify with their affiliation; tattoos, names, or symbols of the gang using hand signs or graffiti to communicate and a degree of involvement in criminal activity such as drug trafficking, theft, or violence, either to support the gang or to establish a reputation. The third indicator was a commitment to gang, including hierarchy, protection of territories, and duration of involvement in a gang (Maxson, 1999).

Youth street gangs are not a recent occurrence. The earliest documentation started around the 1600s. London was among the first city noted to have issues with youth gangs along with other American cities such as New York and Chicago (Conner, 2012). The famous Sicilian mafia, Cosa Nostra originated in New York, but now has affiliates worldwide. The Crips gang started in Los Angeles in 1969 as a small neighbourhood gang. Currently, they are one of the largest organized crime groups in the world (Garcia, 2014). In the African context, gangs were initially made for brotherhood and protection from danger and injustice. However, they are currently involved in violence and criminal activity mainly for political reasons. The Numbers Gang is considered to be one of the most ill-reputed crime organizations present in South Africa today. The gang formed as a result of the inhumane conditions being experienced by black miners.

Gangs, in Kenya, are composed largely of juveniles and members aged between 12-28 years who commit various crimes such as extortion, robbery, and pickpocketing. In December 2016, 90 named gangs, majorly operating within the capital city Nairobi and Mombasa were banned by the Cabinet Secretary of Interior and Administration. More than half (51.1%) of these gazetted criminal gangs in Kenya operate in Mombasa (Republic of Kenya, 2016).

Gangs in the coastal area of Kenya are not a foreign scene. In 1997, hundreds of youth, known as the Kaya Bombo were armed with different weapons, and operated from thick forests. The gang struck with force during the infamous Likoni clashes in which hundreds of residents were killed. Security analysts believe this incident bore the foundations of current gangs. The Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), for instance, was formed shortly after in 1999 to address discrimination against the people of the coast province. It, however, stayed latent until 2008 after the group laid claims that the Kenyan coast should secede from Kenya (Serro, 2009).

According to Human Rights organizations such as HAKI Africa in Mombasa, current gangs in the region started as mere football teams before they mutated into hard-core criminal groups. Most of these are heavily populated by adolescents and young adults. They are believed to have

found inspiration from previous militia movements such as the Kaya Bombo and the Mombasa Republican Council. Initially, it was just Wakali Wao and Wakali Kwanza, but as of late November 2020, police reports show there are more than twenty criminal gangs each operating in the sub-counties of Mombasa (Hussein, 2020).

Theory and research have found a correlation between adversity in childhood and disposition to criminal tendencies. There have been studies that have shown evidence of increased rates of depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and aggression among adults who experienced childhood mistreatment (Lanigan, 2018). The concept of adverse childhood experiences is thus consistent with several theories of crime which have shown links between childhood abuse factors and criminal activities such as gang participation.

Research conducted in Missouri, USA, indicates that persistent exposure to stressors in childhood interferes with healthy brain development (Levenson, Willis, & Prescott, 2016). This can exhibit itself in the form of conduct problems in childhood, impulsivity, and risk-taking behaviours in adulthood (Levenson et al., 2016). The research concluded that these experiences increase the risk of delinquency, and the development of personality disorders such as narcissism (CDC, 2018). The study used a case study research design with a small sample of 12; However, this current study employed a correlational study with a significantly bigger sample size.

In Singapore, 168 gang-affiliated youth were compared to non-gang-affiliated youth in a bid to compare criminal attitudes and psychopathic personality traits. Chu (2015) found that 56% of gang-affiliated youth faced abuse and neglect from their families. Even though the study did not aim to include family dynamics, indicators of adverse childhood experiences were profoundly present. The study used a self-reporting sample while this current study used a sample of convicted and currently rehabilitated gang members.

In South Africa, where gang involvement is a worrying trend, a study reviewed the evidence for gang participation and group dynamics. The study attempted to show that gangs may offer a feeling of belonging to young people who feel isolated due to a lack of family or social relationships. Gang participation preys on these youths with troubled childhood histories and gives the illusion of belonging that builds into their social identity (Nkhosi, 2020). This study portrayed the essence of belonging and the current study will complement the literature to observe if any of the indicators of ACEs help mitigate this feeling of isolation right from childhood.

In a study conducted in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, Kabiru (2016) investigated how ACEs contributed to delinquent behaviour among 3,064 adolescents living in two slum dwellings. The study observed that over half of the participants lived in households with food insecurity or recent parental unemployment, and almost a fifth had experienced numerous adverse childhood experiences. Their findings concluded a strong association between ACEs and juvenile delinquency (Kabiru, 2016). In this study, participants were restricted to an analytical sample of adolescents aged 12-19 years. On the other hand, the current study's population target was the youth, defined by the Kenyan Constitution, to be aged between 18-34 years. This increases the sample size significantly because gang participation ranges between 15-25 years (UNODC, 2016).

1.1 Problem Statement

In Kenya, specifically Mombasa, there has been an upsurge in the public reporting of criminal behaviour among the youth population, particularly violent stabbings using machetes and operating as gangs. They have become a significant social issue impacting community safety and the overall well-being of residents in Mombasa. Despite efforts by parents, security actors, policymakers, and community members, gang participation has been exceedingly increasing with currently over 40 different gangs in Mombasa (Mwakio, 2017). Concepts of ACEs, that is abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction, have a wide-ranging effect on child development and the occurrence of mental health issues later in life and consequent involvement in crime.

Several attempts have been made to show how exposure to ACEs may relate to gang participation (Thompson, 2023), however, there is a paucity of research focused on the psychological factors driving gang participation in Kenya. There are a few studies conducted that have yielded contradictory results (Kabiru, 2016 & Kiburi, 2021). Most research on gang participation and ACEs have been conducted in Western Contexts, with limited applicability to the unique socio-cultural and economic landscape of Mombasa. This geographical gap has underscored the need for localized studies that can provide relevant insights as well as interventions. This research aimed to bridge these gaps by investigating the relationship between household challenges and gang participation among youth in Mombasa County.

1.2 Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between household challenges and gang participation among youth in Mombasa County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study adopted and integrated the Interactional Theory whose main proponent is Terrence P. Thornberry. The fundamental idea of this theory asserts that human behaviour can best be explained by models that focus on interactive processes occurring within social interactions (Thornberry, 2005). This theory, initially developed in 1987, suggests that gang participation is because of a shared connection between an individual and their friends, and family, and a social learning dynamic that encourages and builds up delinquency.

Because of the steady rise in gang-related murders over the past few decades and the growing awareness of the negative effects that gang membership can have on a person's trajectory through life, the question of what draws young people to join gangs in the first place has become an important one for the field of research (Krohn & Howell, 2017). The Interactional theory helps to answer this question on the basis that an individual's behaviour (e.g., gang participation) cannot be understood in seclusion from their societal environment.

This theory is an embodiment of the Social Control Theory (SCT) as well as the Social Learning Theory (SLT). SCT asserts that the underlying cause of deviant conduct occurs when their bond to society is weakened (Hirschi, 1969). This considerably increases behavioural freedom. For this to significantly lead to deviant behaviour, however, forces that reinforce delinquency are required. In contrast, Social control theory, on its neglects to recognize the effect of antisocial consequences, for example, having delinquent friends (Esbensen & Weerman, 2005). This is complemented by Social Learning Theory which postulates that crime is taught through; the belief that criminal tendencies are tolerable in some circumstances; the positive reinforcement of delinquency (e.g. approval of friends, financial gains); and the

imitation of the criminal behaviour of others, especially if they are role models that the individual looks up to (Anda, 2020).

The interactional theory suggests a reciprocal relationship between developmental life stages and the onset of criminal behavior. According to this theory, adolescents who do not form strong attachments to their parents are less likely to develop conventional beliefs, which can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities (Thornberry, 2005). Although the causal mechanisms that lead to gang participation are not well understood, there is still more to learn about risk variables in general. There is still a need to identify critical childhood and developmental variables to improve preventative efforts. That is where Adverse Childhood Experiences come in.

The concept of adverse childhood experiences offers a basis for measuring and identifying these traumas through the lens of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction. These unfavorable exposures that have a wide-ranging effect on child development the occurrence of mental health issues later in life and consequent involvement in crime, are best captured throughout childhood and can potentially have deleterious impacts on one's health as an adult.

2.2 Empirical Review

Various global, regional, and local studies show a relationship between household challenges and gang participation. Household challenges are dysfunctions in the family and within the context of adverse childhood experiences including parental divorce or separation, poverty, living with parents and family members addicted to alcohol or other drugs, family members incarcerated, or household members living with a mental illness (Spratt, 2011).

Research done by Howell, Braun, and Bellatty (2017) on family conflict and domestic violence provided a comprehensive analysis of gang dynamics, noting that adolescents exposed to high levels of family conflict are more likely to seek refuge in gangs. They examined the perceptions of 3072 youth who were either on probation or have been incarcerated in Oregon, USA. The selection of the participants targeted those perceived to be vulnerable to delinquency and gang members who had been referred by the juvenile justice system, social services agencies, and other correctional facilities. The study's sample comprised African Americans, Jamaican Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

Howell et.al, (2017) collected qualitative and quantitative data through interviews, and the collected data was later analyzed. The results showed that household challenges were associated with increased gang participation risks. In particular, Howell et al. (2017) reported that household issues that cause parents to shift their attention and concern from their children cause the children to join gangs to replace the lack of parental concern, involvement, and attention. Family discord, including fighting and an unending argument in the house, might cause adolescents to join gangs to evade their families' issues. In contrast, others might join to model the fighting they experience in their families. Poor parental role model is another household issue that might cause adolescents to join gangs, anticipating finding better role models in the gang to avoid copying their parents' behaviours. At the same time, adolescents from families where fathers are absent were more vulnerable to joining gangs because the gang members may serve as father figures.

Although Howell et.al. (2017) extensively highlighted the relationship between household challenges and gang participation, the study focused on a specific sample of youth in the juvenile justice system in Oregon, which may limit the generalizability of their findings to other regions or populations.

Locally, Wairimu (2013) also reported a relationship between household challenges and gang participation by examining perceived factors influencing deviant conduct among young people. The study was conducted in the Njathaini community in Kenya. The study's target population was people aged 15-35 years. The study's sample was 395 participants. The study employed a descriptive survey design methodology, and the data was collected through questionnaires. Ms. Excel and SPSS were used for data management. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the study's data. The study's findings showed that parental survivorship determined youths' gang participation. In particular, youths from families devoid of biological parents and those with a single surviving parent were at risk of participating in gang activities than children from families with both existing parents. This study had one major limitation emanating from selecting the study's participants through purposive sampling. The selected sample size through this method did not represent the entire population; hence, the results cannot be generalized.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a correlational research design within the context of Ex-post facto research. The study population consisted of alleged, convicted, and reforming gang members in Mombasa. They were drawn from a database accessed by the Nyalii District Peace Committee (DPC) which has 358 members aged between 15-31 years. Purposive, and snowball sampling techniques were used to gather data from the sample. Descriptive statistics namely, frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used. Inferential statistics namely the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, linear, and regression was then employed to establish the relationship between household challenges and gang participation. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Identification of Household Challenges of Respondents

Respondents also indicated in the ACE-IQ, responses to statements on household challenges that they experienced during the first 18 years of their lives. The variations were characterized into four, thus, substance abuse problems, incarceration, mental illness, and divorce. The respondents were asked to respond with "Yes" or "No" respective to the instances of household challenges. Table 1 shows the extent of household challenges experienced by the participants.

Table 1: Identification of Household Challenges of Respondents

| Experiences | Yes | No |
|--|------------|-----------|
| “Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?” | 96.0 | 4.0 |
| “Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal?” | 54.0 | 46.0 |
| “Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail?” | 42.0 | 58.0 |
| “Did your parents ever separate or get divorced?” | 94.0 | 6.0 |
| “Did your mother, father, or guardian die?” | 79.3 | 20.7 |
| “Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being yelled at, screamed at, sworn at, insulted, or humiliated by their partner?” | 98.0 | 2.0 |
| “Did you see or hear a parent slapped, kicked, punched, or cut with an object, such as a stick, knife, whip, etc. by their partner?” | 92.7 | 7.3 |
| “Did you see or hear a parent or household member in your home being hit or cut with an object, such as a stick (or cane), bottle, club, knife, whip, etc.?” | 82.7 | 17.3 |
| “Were you bullied?” | 98.7 | 1.3 |
| “Were you forced to go and live in another place due to any of these events?” | 81.3 | 18.7 |
| “Did you experience the deliberate destruction of your home due to any of these events?” | 44.0 | 56.0 |
| “Were you beaten up by soldiers, police, militia, or gangs?” | 64.7 | 35.3 |
| “Was a family member or friend killed or beaten up by soldiers, police, or gangs?” | 77.3 | 22.7 |

Respectively, in the identification of household challenges experienced by the participants, 96% indicated that they lived with household members who had issues including mental health, alcoholism, and drug problems. A further 58% indicated that they lived with a household member who had a history of incarceration. Where household abuse was concerned, 98% of the participants indicated that they had witnessed insults and humiliation between their household members.

On average, the respondents' experience of household challenges was 78.8%, highlighting that gang participation for youth in Mombasa County was significantly associated with challenges in the home. These results agree with Bacchini et al. (2020) who posits that gang participation is significantly influenced by the familial microsystem, which is crucial for development. The family presents risk factors that are associated with how the family is structured, presence or absence of both parents, and the quality of the familial environment which is instrumental in ensuring that healthy and holistic relationships are developed and maintained. Bacchini et al. (2020) further aver that without quality and appropriate structures in the familial environment, individuals have a higher likelihood of participating in gang activities.

4.2 Gang Participation of Respondents

The respondents were further asked to indicate which gang-related activities they participated in using an adaptation of the Eurogang Network’s Survey. This was in acknowledgment that the participants were all involved in different activities that were either destructive or criminal. Table 2 illustrates responses to the gang activities.

Table 2: Gang-Related Activities of Respondents

| | Gang Activities | N | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|-----|--|----------|------------|------------|-------------|------------------|
| Q1 | “Do you wear clothes with logos, colours, or symbols of gang?” | 150 | 1.00 | 3.00 | 3.4348 | .80710 |
| Q2 | “Do you use hand signs or symbols to communicate with other members of the gang?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.2957 | .67504 |
| Q3 | “Do you paint or spray walls with graffiti of your gang?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.4783 | .62615 |
| Q4 | “Do you have to participate in group activities and rituals such as hanging boots when a member dies?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.3217 | .75566 |
| Q5 | “Do you purposely destroy property that does not belong to you?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.6261 | .53739 |
| Q6 | “Have you gone into or tried to go into a building to steal something?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.6348 | .51861 |
| Q7 | “Have you carried a hidden weapon for protection?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.7304 | .51846 |
| Q8 | “Have you stolen or tried to steal something worth less than Ksh 1000?” | 150 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.5565 | .71563 |
| Q9 | “Have you stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle or motorbike?” | 150 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 2.4870 | .50202 |
| Q10 | “Have you hit someone with the idea of hurting them?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.7043 | .47709 |
| Q11 | “Have you attacked someone with a weapon?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.7130 | .45432 |
| Q12 | “Have you used a weapon or force to get money or things from people?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.7304 | .44568 |
| Q13 | “Have you been involved in “gang fights” within or with other gangs?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.5739 | .49667 |
| Q14 | “Do you have a leader or someone calling the shots?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.6870 | .46576 |
| Q15 | “Do you spend a lot of time together in public places like the park, the street, shopping areas, or the neighborhood?” | 150 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.1130 | .93438 |
| Q16 | “Has your group let other groups come into this area or place or constantly defends it?” | 150 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 4.9217 | .26976 |

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that the participants often participated in gang-related activities. Respectively, the results were, wearing clothes with logos, colours, or symbols of gangs ($M = 3.43$; $SD = .807$), using hand signs or symbols to communicate with other members of the gang ($M = 4.29$; $SD = .675$), painting or spraying walls with graffiti of the gang ($M = 4.47$; $SD = .626$), participating in group activities and rituals such as hanging boots when a member dies ($M = 4.32$; $SD = .755$), purposely destroying property ($M = 4.62$; $SD = .537$),

going into buildings to steal ($M = 4.63$; $SD = .518$), carrying hidden weapons ($M = 4.73$; $SD = .518$), stealing items worth kshs. 1,000 ($M = 4.55$; $SD = .715$), stealing vehicles or motorbikes ($M = 2.48$; $SD = .502$), hitting someone with the idea of hurting them ($M = 4.70$; $SD = .477$), attacking someone with a weapon ($M = 4.71$; $SD = .454$), using a weapon or force to get money or things from people ($M = 4.73$; $SD = .445$), involvement in “gang fights” within or with other gangs ($M = 4.57$; $SD = .496$), having a leader or someone calling the shots ($M = 4.68$; $SD = .465$), spending a lot of time together in public places like the park, the street, shopping areas, or the neighbourhood ($M = 4.11$; $SD = .934$) and letting other groups come into the gang area or place or constantly defending it ($M = 4.92$; $SD = .269$). The average mean and standard deviation for gang participation among the youth was $M = 4.38$ and $SD = 0.575$, indicating that gang participation among the respondents was high. The findings supported Van Hellemont and Densley's (2019) supposition that gangs are involved in myriad activities. Just hanging out in public constitutes concern for the safety of the general public. While not all activities may render a group of youths to be referred to as a gang, Van Hellemont and Densley pinpoint that specific illegalities are characteristic of gang behaviour for instance property crime, drug dealing, and violent crime. Generally, the consensus is therefore associated with aggression and violence.

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

The objective of the study was to assess the predictive role of household challenges on gang participation among youth in Mombasa County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between household challenges and gang participation among youth in Mombasa County, Kenya.

4.3.1 Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

To establish the correlation between Household Challenges and gang participation, the researcher used Pearson’s Coefficient of Correlation, r , to analyze the degree of relationship between the two variables.

Table 3: Correlation between Household Challenges and Gang Participation

| | | Gang Participation |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | Pearson Correlation | .876** |
| Household Challenges | Sig. 2 Tailed | 0.01 |
| | N | 150 |

Further, the data in Table 3 reveals the relationship between the independent variable (household challenges) and the dependent variable (gang participation). The result shows that there is a positive and strong correlation ($r = 0.876$, $p < 0.01$), between the variables. The findings establish that an increase in household challenges leads to an increase in gang participation among the youth in Mombasa County, Kenya.

4.3.2 Linear Regression

The researcher used Regression analysis to examine the degree to which the predictor variable (in this case, household challenges) can predict the response variable (gang participation).

Table 4: Relationship between Household Challenges and Gang Participation

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|-------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 272.110 | .337 | | 6.109 | .000 |
| | Household Challenges | 21.404 | .126 | .876 | 4.047 | .000 |

The data in Table 4 shows that household challenges are a positive and significant predictor of gang participation ($\beta = 21.404$; $p = .000$). The data shows that for every unit increase in household challenges, gang participation increased by 21.40 units among the youth in Mombasa County, Kenya.

Further, the study analyzed the relationship direction between household challenges and gang involvement as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of the Model

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 |
| 1 | .876 ^a | .773 | .734 | .31486 | .524 | 15.489 | 1 |

The data in Table 5 shows R Square of .773, which gives the impression of a positive and strong relationship between household challenges and gang participation. The findings also indicate that gang participation among youth in Mombasa County is explained by 77% variation in household challenges, hence other variables account for 23%. The data shows that there is a strong link between problems at home and young people joining gangs in Mombasa County. Specifically, 77% of the reasons why youths join gangs can be explained by these household problems. This means that there are other factors accounting for the remaining 23%. Further, considering these results, the null hypothesis was rejected. The study is consistent with Wegner et al. (2016) who concluded that household challenges, including fathers belonging to street gangs, exposed young boys to gang life early in their lives, increasing the risk of the boys' gang participation. At the same time, increased hardships in the family, including abuse from alcoholic parents, caused some boys to run from their homes to join gangs. Similarly, Wairimu (2013) surmised that parental survivorship determined youths' gang participation. In particular, youths from families devoid of biological parents and those with a single surviving parent were at risk of participating in gang activities than children from families with both existing parents.

4.4 Summary

The hypothesis of the study tested the relationship between household challenges and gang participation of youth in Mombasa County, Kenya. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.876$, $p < 0.01$) between the two variables. The findings also revealed that household challenges are a positive and significant predictor of gang participation ($\beta = 21.404$; $p = .000$). The data showed that for every unit increase in household challenges, gang participation increased by 21.40 units among the youth in Mombasa County, Kenya. Subsequently, the study analyzed the relationship direction between household challenges and gang involvement and showed R Square of .773, which gave the impression of a positive and strong relationship between household challenges and gang participation. The findings also indicated that gang participation among youth in Mombasa County is explained by 77% variation in household challenges, hence other variables account for 23%. According to Howell et.al, (2017), household issues can cause parents to shift their attention and concern from their children causing the children to join gangs to replace the lack of parental concern, involvement, and attention. Family discord, including fighting and an unending argument in the house, might cause adolescents to join gangs to evade their families' issues. At the same time, increased hardships in the family, including abuse from alcoholic parents, may lead some boys to run from their homes to join gangs.

5.0 Conclusion

The study highlights the experiences of gang participants and the consequences of adverse childhood events. The participants in the study indicated that they were exposed to traumas which led to their involvement in gangs. Exposure to household challenges was thus a normalized occurrence, and membership in gangs was perceived as a reprieve from these occurrences.

Childhood experiences have been documented in previous studies, which lead to associated gang involvement. However, this does not disregard the fact that gang members are personally affected by the traumatic experiences they went through. For the youth in Mombasa County, having undergone various incidences of household challenges, gang participation is a way of coping. The relationship between household challenges means that gang participation is a pathway through which protection is received and they get a reprieve from the prevailing situations at home.

Most youths are lured into gang involvement due to the excitement, money, and friendship. In addition, in instances where youth come from disadvantaged homes, they usually have a bleak outlook that leads them to make the decision that regardless of the consequences, be it death or jail, the gang is the only way to have a semblance of a better life.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that the effects of adverse childhood experiences be addressed through the development and enhancement of supportive relationships and resource enrichment. Supportive relationships, in this case, refer to having gang members volunteer in community programs which would give them the same sense of belonging and protection albeit without the dangers of being in a gang, and providing them with mentors through whom change can be modeled, for example, football teams. In addition, social support, positive parenting, and belongingness have been concluded to be pathways through which empathy, social competency, and self-regulation can be cultivated in the development years of children, thus

preventing the outcome associated with adverse childhood experiences. This can be achieved through family-centered programs and positive parenting lessons for community members.

Implementing community-driven initiatives can help alleviate the effects of socioeconomic challenges. Key components include community centers, educational programs, and access to mental health services.

Parental support programs are to be initiated where they will offer parenting classes, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment options for parents.

References

- Anda, R.F., Porter, L.E., & Brown, D.W. (2020). Inside the adverse childhood experiences score: Strengths, limitations, and misapplications. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 1-3.
- Chu, C.M., Daffern, M., Thomas, S.D., Yaming, A., Long, M., & O'Brien, K. (2015). Determinants of gang affiliation in Singaporean youth offenders: social and familial factors. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 7, 19-32.
- Esbensen, F., & Weerman, F.M. (2005). Youth Gangs and Troublesome Youth Groups in the United States and the Netherlands. *European Journal of Criminology*, 2, 37 - 5.
- Garcia, M. (2014). Perceptions of service providers on the factors influencing gang membership.
<http://dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/122143/Combined.pdf?sequence=1>
- Howell, J., Braun, M., & Bellatty, P. (2017). The practical utility of a life-course gang theory for intervention. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 40(1), 1-18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2017.1329836>
- Kabiru, C. W., Elung'ata, P., Mojola, S. A., & Beguy, D. (2016). Adverse life events and delinquent behaviour among Kenyan adolescents: a cross-sectional study on the protective role of parental monitoring, religiosity, and self-esteem. *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health*, 8(1), 1-11.
- Kessler, R. C., McLaughlin, K. A., Green, J. G., Gruber, M. J., Sampson, N. A., Zaslavsky, A. M., Aguilar-Gaxiola, ... Williams, D. R. (2010). Childhood adversities and adult psychopathology in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys. *The British journal of psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science*, 197(5), 378-385.
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.110.080499>
- Kiburi, S. K., Molebatsi, K., Obondo, A., & Kuria, M. W. (2018). Adverse childhood experiences among patients with substance use disorders at a referral psychiatric hospital in Kenya. *BMC Psychiatry*, 18(1), 1-12.
- Krohn, M. D., & Howell, J. C. (2017). Editors' introduction. Special issue: Gangs in a developmental perspective. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 40(3), 247-251.
- Lanigan, J. D. (2018). The association between adverse childhood experience (ACE) and school success in elementary school children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(1), 137-146. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000256>

- Levenson, J. S., Willis, G. M., & Prescott, D. S. (2016). Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Lives of Male Sex Offenders: Implications for Trauma-Informed Care. *Sexual Abuse*, 28(4), 340–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063214535819>
- Mwakio, P. and Ombati, C. (2013) “Sunday grenade attacks in Mombasa, Nairobi leave 15 injured.”<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000085594/sunday-grenade-attacks-in-mombasa-nairobi-leave-15-injured> Accessed 16 January 2021.
- Nkhosi, N., (2020) Risk factors associated with youth gang involvement: An exploratory criminological case study analysis, *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 30:5, 459-465, DOI: 10.1080/14330237.2020.1821314
- Thornberry TP (2009) The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree (or does it?): intergenerational patterns of antisocial behaviour. *Criminology* 47:297–325
- UNDOC (2016) “Global status report on violence prevention 2014” World Health Organization, Geneva/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, New York/United Nations Development Program, New York
- Van Hellemont, E., & Densley, J. A. (2019). Gang glocalization: How the global mediascape creates and shapes local gang realities. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 15(1), 169-189.
- Wairimu, M. W. (2013). Perceived factors influencing deviant behaviour among the youth in Njathaini Community, Nairobi, Kenya. *Unpublished master’s thesis*. Kenyatta University, Kenya.<http://irlibrary.ku.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/9044/Mbuthia%20Winnie%20Wairimu.pdf?sequence=1>