

Juvenile Delinquency and the Law: Causes and Types of Crimes Committed In Temeke District, Tanzania



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ABSTRACT: Juvenile delinquency is a social malady that exposes youth to conflict with the law. Establishing causal factors of juvenile delinquency will help to prescribe effective measures for controlling diverted behaviour for the future protection of children. The main objective of this paper was to examine juvenile delinquency and the law: causes and types of crimes committed. Specifically, this paper aims to examine the reasons that drive juveniles to commit crimes and the types of crimes committed by juveniles in Temeke District in Tanzania. The study on which this paper is based employed a cross-sectional design whereby 50 respondents were involved and 233 records of young offenders were reviewed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, a checklist for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews. It was found that the major causes of juvenile delinquency were family problems, Poverty and the effects of mass media. It was further found that the leading crimes committed by juveniles were stealing, rape and possessing narcotic drugs. It is recommended that government and religious institutions can reduce juvenile criminality by working together to strengthen family structures through support programs, moral guidance, and community outreach. It is recommended that the Ministry of Information should reinforce the former mechanisms that were used to screen music, film and news for public consumption. It is also recommended that Stakeholders in youth and development and NGOs should join efforts and raise awareness of the effects of drug abuse.

KEYWORDS: Juvenile delinquency, causes, types of crimes, Tanzania

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The issue of juveniles engaging in criminality is a global agenda as the rate of children who are victims, witnesses, or involved in legal conflicts is on the rise (Kiche *et al*, 2020 UNICEF, 2024). Although the world rate of children in conflict with the law is 28 per 1000, there is alarmingly, the prevalence of juvenile delinquency varies significantly by region: in Venezuela, there are 381 juvenile delinquents per 1,000; in Uruguay, 137 per 1,000; in North America, 72 per 10,000; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 63 per 10,000 (Zai and Wan, 2020: UNICEF, 2024). However, the problem of juvenile delinquency has a long-standing historical presence worldwide, with various literature tracing its origins back to the 18th century (Chowdhury and Fahim, 2019; Smith and Smith. 2021: Muncie, 2020). During this time, young offenders were tried and convicted, sometimes facing imprisonment alongside adults in the same legal institutions, including police stations, courts, and prisons (Springer *et al.*, 2011).

A notable case from 1831 involved a thirteen-year-old boy in Madison who was charged with theft, underscoring the enduring issue of juvenile crime (Watson and Austin, 1975). The rise of community crime during this period was often attributed to young individuals' associations with criminal influences (Hirsch, 1959). Additionally, Zai and Wan, 2020: Harris and Doleac 2023; Dmitrieva and Eley, (2022) suggested that some individuals were predisposed to criminality due to biological degeneration from birth. While Sampson and Wilson, 2021; and Shaw and McKay, 2020) argued that social disorganization was a primary cause of crime rather than biological factors (Morabito, and Klahm, 2023) emphasized that social stratification also significantly contributed to juvenile delinquency. According to Everson (1997), there has been a rapid increase in juvenile delinquency since the end of the Cold War in countries such as Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Overall, juvenile delinquency remains widespread and endemic globally (Bosiakoh and Andoh, 2010: Zai and Wan, 2020). Juvenile delinquency has consistent consequences for communities, with a common concern that youth involved in crime may become adult offenders, leading to increased criminality. This underscores the urgent need to understand and address the complex factors driving juvenile delinquency.

From the 1960s onwards, several African nations, including Ghana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Kenya, and South Africa, underwent rapid socioeconomic transformations as they aligned with Western civilization. This period marked a significant rise in youth crime, particularly among individuals aged 12 to 25, with activities such as theft, car theft, and burglary becoming more

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common. The increase in juvenile delinquency was accompanied by a rise in arrests and legal charges against young people. Contributing factors included poverty, lack of educational opportunities, family dysfunction, and exposure to violent media content, all of which were seen as fueling the growing problem of youth crime (Ellen & Liones, 2018; Mallya, 2023; Waruiz *et al.*, 2021; Kimbosho, 2023)

In Tanzania, juvenile delinquency became a more pressing social issue during the mid-1980s, coinciding with the country's shift toward free-market and economic liberalization policies. The socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes in Tanzania, particularly during the 1980s economic liberalization, led to increased exposure of young people to violent and deviant behaviour through mass media, including television, film, and print. This exposure contributed significantly to the rise in juvenile delinquency, as it normalized aggressive and unlawful behaviours among youth, further exacerbating the problem. (UNCHS, 1996; Perullo, 2005). Major urban centres, such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Arusha, and Mbeya, witnessed an upsurge in youth criminal activities, including drug abuse, theft, and gang involvement (Kimbosho, 2023). With approximately Tanzania's 62 million population, 29 million people are under 18 among them 28 per 1000 children conflict with the law (UNICEF, 2023).

Despite government efforts to address juvenile delinquency, including the ratification of international children's rights conventions and the implementation of the Child Act in 1996, the problem persists. While juvenile courts, probation centres, and rehabilitation programs have been established, they have been ineffective in curbing delinquency rates, which continue to rise. The influence of family breakdowns and the growing impact of technology on youth behaviour have exacerbated the issue, leading to higher rates of recidivism among young offenders (Henley *et al.*, 2010; Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). These ongoing challenges highlight the urgent need for more comprehensive and effective interventions to tackle the root causes of juvenile delinquency in Tanzania and across the continent

Various scholars across criminology, psychology, and philosophy have long sought to understand the reasons behind juvenile immoral behaviour (Maganga, 2005; Mahende, 2015; Chanila *et al.*, 2023; Abhisheka and Balamurugan, 2024). While much research has focused on different aspects of juvenile justice, there is a notable lack of studies specifically addressing the situation in Temeke. This gap in the literature has led to the current study, which aims to investigate the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency and to examine the common crimes committed by children in Temeke Municipality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Main Objectives:

The main objective of this paper was to examine the causes and types of crimes committed. Juvenile at Temeke Municipality at Dar es Salaam. Tanzania

Specific Objectives are to;

1. examine the reasons that drive juveniles to commit crimes, and
2. identify types of crimes committed by juveniles in Temeke District in Tanzania.

LITERATURE

The lack of a unified definition for the terms "juvenile" and "child" presents a significant challenge, largely due to variations in age thresholds across different jurisdictions (Zai and Wan, 2020; Puzzanchera *et al.*, 2022). Many legal frameworks define individuals under the age of 18 as juveniles (Huntington and Scott, 2020; URT, 1977). Similarly, defining "delinquency" is complex, with some scholars suggesting that it encompasses a broader range of behaviours than just "crime," including various forms of socially deviant behaviour exhibited by juveniles (Roberts, 2000). Delinquency can thus be understood as any activity that deviates from societal norms as defined by law (Chowdhury and Fahim, 2019).

Some researchers propose the term "deviant" to better describe these behaviours, highlighting their departure from accepted social standards (Kumar, 2020). Therefore, juvenile delinquency (J.D.) refers to behaviours that fall outside parental control, where young individuals violate specific legal norms, leading to legal consequences (Miller, 1958). Furthermore, juvenile delinquency is often equated with misbehaviour among children, with the term "Juvenile Delinquency" applied when a young person engages in criminal activities (Kumar, 2020). Consequently, any individual under 18 who commits an act considered a criminal offence for an adult is classified as a "child in conflict with the law" (Chowdhury and Fahim, 2019). This complexity and fluidity in definitions highlight the nuanced nature of juvenile delinquency and its intricate relationship with legal and societal contexts.

The study argued that children are taught from an early age to respect their elders, honour spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions, follow rules of proper behaviour, and uphold their responsibilities to family, community, and country. However, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) explains how individuals, especially juveniles, learn behaviours by observing and imitating others. The theory emphasizes that behaviour is learned through watching the social environment, with individuals modelling behaviours and imitating others. The theory is structured around four key mediational processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. First, individuals must pay attention to a behaviour to learn it. Next, they need to retain the observed behaviour in media, magazines and family memories. Then, they must have the ability to reproduce the behaviour they've observed. Finally, motivation, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic, determines whether or not the individual will engage in the behaviour.

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Motivation is seen as the most important factor in whether a behaviour will be imitated. If an individual perceives a reward or positive outcome from a behaviour, such as social approval, material gain, or emotional satisfaction, their motivation to replicate the behaviour increases. On the other hand, if no reward is identified, or if negative consequences are expected, motivation to reproduce the behaviour is low. This helps explain how juveniles may engage in both positive and negative behaviours based on the social rewards or punishments they associate with those actions.

This has important implications for understanding juvenile behaviour, including delinquency and prosocial actions. When juveniles observe peers or adults engaging in antisocial or criminal behaviours and receive rewards for those actions, they are more likely to imitate them. Conversely, if they observe positive behaviours being reinforced, they are more likely to adopt those as well. The theory suggests that both negative and positive behaviours can be learned and influenced by the social environment, offering insight into how juvenile behaviour can be shaped by observation, reinforcement, and motivation.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Temeke municipality in the Dar es Salaam region. The region was selected because Dar es Salaam is among the largest city in Tanzania, that had been affected by the problem of socioeconomic that influences changes (Kimbosho, 2023). The study focused on Temeke Municipality was identified as an area of high Juvenile offending in the city compared to other municipalities (Philip, 2015). The study used a cross-sectional design with questionnaires administered to 50 respondents, supporting the idea that a minimum sample size of 30 is sufficient for statistical analysis (Tabachnick *et al.*, 2019). To enrich the data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and observations were conducted with participants aged 4 to 6. This age range was chosen based on legal definitions regarding criminal responsibility (CAP 16, 2022). Four FGDs took place in various public gathering areas (*Kijiji*) where unemployed youth convene to discuss employment strategies at Temeke Mwisho stand, Mbagala -Kiburugwa (Yamba), Tandika and Keko Magurumbasi area (Perullo, 2005). Additionally, purposive sampling was applied to interview 6 key informants, including two Police Officers, Prosecutors, Magistrate, Remand homes Offices and Community Development Officials. The research also reviewed 233 files from police and community records to analyze the causes and extent of youth crime. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Qualitative data collected from FGDs, observation, and key informant interviews were content analysis, whereby information was summarised into themes and sub-themes to reflect the specific objective of the study. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software and data were presented in tables and figures.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Respondent's sex, age and education characteristics

Table 1 indicates that the majority (66%) of respondents were men, contrary to 34% of women. More than five-fifths (66%) of the respondents were between 15 and 19 years and 24% were in the age group between 20 to 29 years. This implies that data were collected from all age groups in both sex categories. The findings further show that 36% of respondents completed secondary education while 11% of respondents were schooling. This indicates that the majority of the respondents interviewed had secondary education. This level of education not only serves to prepare students for higher education but also prepares youth to become productive and more effective human resources.

Place of living Location

Table 1 results reveal that 30% of respondents were living in Tandika and 26% of respondents were living in Mbagala Kiburugwa. This implies that the majority of respondents were living in highly concentrated and unplanned areas where roads were not properly constructed, houses were not planned, far from hospitals, schools were few and where interaction among people was high. These findings tally with those by Casimir, (2023) who found that juveniles living in communities with high populations experience challenges, including poverty at the family level, inadequate access to resources, low development process and great exposure to violence. UNCHS (1998) added that overcrowding and congestion of urban areas resulted from migration, and they influence residents' low-quality life, which culminates in different threats such as growing insecurity and rising crime rates among youth.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 50)

Variable	Frequency	%
Sex		
Men	33	66
Women	22	34
Age (years)		
15-19	33	66
20-29	12	24
30 and above	5	10

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Education level		
Attended school	5	11
Completed Primary education	14	27
Not completed primary education	5	9
Not attended School	8	16
Completed secondary education	18	36
Location		
Mbagala Kiburugwa	13	26
Temeke Mwisho	9	18
Keko	13	26
Tandika	15	30

Causes of Juvenile Delinquency in Temeke Municipality

Family Breakdown

Table 2 shows that Two-fifths (40%) of the respondents indicated that family problems, including the death of one or both parents, separation and divorce, were the major difficulties contributing to juvenile delinquency. This implies that most children remain with one parent their mothers or fathers which exposes children to a lack of caring and support, which causes failure to meet basic needs, including education, food and missing love, affection, and guidance of both parents. This finding is online with Campbell *et al.* (2020) conducted assessments to identify the risk factors associated with juvenile recidivism, including familial issues, socioeconomic status, and mental health. This finding is also supported by Ruiz-Casares, (2024) who observed that children who grow up in families with inadequate supervision are more likely to involve themselves in crimes because the problems affect the whole process of children's upbringing. This maintained that single-parent families, due to divorces or separation, cause adolescents to experience a low level of parental attachment and supervision, thus leading toward deviant behaviours.

It was noted that, causes juvenile crimes categorised into two sides. First, broken family problems affect children, including desertion, divorce, separation and disagreement between parents. Second, children lose one or both parents due to death. This shows that children experience a grievous injury to emotional development that may lead to delinquent behaviours.

One key informant has different views:

“When a child has both parents, excessive freedom may cause parents to neglect their authority, leading to delinquency, such as theft in boys or prostitution in girls. Similarly, overly strict discipline for minor mistakes can have the same effect”

This implies that both lack of parental control (due to excessive freedom) and overly harsh discipline can contribute to juvenile delinquency.

Table 2: Causes of Juvenile Delinquency

Causes	Frequency	Per cent
Family problems (death, separation and divorce)	20	40
Poverty	11	22
Mass media	8	16
Drugs abuse	5	10
Unemployment	3	6
Pimples (<i>Vijiwe</i>)	3	6

Poverty at a family level

Additionally, the findings from Table 12 indicate that 22% of the respondents agreed that poverty at a family level was the cause of juvenile delinquency. This implies that poverty has a wide-ranging impact on various aspects of life, including health, education, and economic stability.

One key informant explained that;

“Unplanned home construction and dense populations are features of some Temeke Municipality neighbourhoods. The area's setup has caused a cultural shift that has eroded communal ethics and values. Because of these developments, youth are not being adequately supervised, which makes it more difficult for parents, guardians, and society at large to give young people the social direction and assistance they need”

Furthermore, the findings reveal that 16% of the respondents reported that media influenced children to commit crimes (Table 2). This suggests that the introduction of various forms of mass media after economic liberalization, including immoral magazines,

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radio stations, television, and videos, has negatively impacted traditional and local values by promoting foreign cultural influences. Parents have observed this challenge, noting that media often expose children to violence, which can lead to aggressive behaviour and sexual acts, as children imitate what they see in the media. During data collection, it was observed that 20 unauthorised video rooms had been established as sources of income, with adults required to pay TZS 500 and children TZS 200. These rooms featured a variety of videos, including comedies, local films, and violent or pornographic content (e.g., *Pilau*). This suggests that frequent exposure to violent behaviours or inappropriate content can influence children to adopt ideas and behaviours that were previously unfamiliar to them, potentially integrating these behaviours into their daily lives.

Type of Offences Committed by Juvenile

Age and Education

The findings for this objective were derived from data on juveniles arrested and registered at the Police Station, Remand Home, and District Social Welfare Office. The findings in Table 3 indicate that 47% of the respondents were 15 to 17 years old. This shows that children of their age in their late teen years were more exposed to juvenile criminal acts. It was also noted that young persons 10 to 11 years conflicted with the law. A study by Ademi, (2023) also found that early adolescence, typically between the ages of 14 and 16, is often the period when juveniles first commit crimes.

Gender Distribution of Crimes

Out of 233 juveniles, 73% of the crimes were committed by boys, while 27% were committed by girls (Table 3). This indicates that both male and female juveniles are at risk of engaging in criminal activities, although male juveniles appear to be more vulnerable to deviant behaviour than their female counterparts. The data suggests that male juveniles may be more exposed to or influenced by factors that lead to deviant behaviour, while female juveniles, though still at risk, are less likely to engage in criminal acts. This finding are in line with O'Neill, (2020) and Ademi, (2023) who argued that the gender gap in crime is universal as adolescent boys engage more in delinquent and criminal acts compared to girls because women are rarely presented in the role of perpetrators of criminal offences.

Offences Committed by Juvenile

Stealing

The findings presented in Table 3 highlight that a significant proportion (51%) of juveniles were convicted for stealing, making theft the most prevalent crime among children in the study. This suggests that for many juveniles, particularly those who exhibit deviant behaviours, stealing may serve as an alternative means of livelihood, especially in the context of running away from home or lacking proper support systems. This observation is consistent with Maganga's (2005) study, which similarly found that stealing was the most common offence committed by juveniles in urban areas such as Mwanza, Tabora, Dar es Salaam, and Mbeya. Maganga's findings reinforce the notion that theft is often linked to socio-economic factors, such as poverty or lack of family support, which drive children to engage in criminal activities as a way to meet their needs.

During FGD at Keko, discussants narrated a story of their friend as follows;

"After losing my parents a few years ago, I lacked support, and I began selling items along the main roads to provide for myself and my siblings. However, the income from trading was insufficient to cover basic needs like food, medicine, and school fees. Eventually, he resorted to stealing to meet these needs"

2. Possession of drugs

The findings reveal that approximately (11%) of juveniles were apprehended for possessing narcotic drugs, including Cannabis Sativa (Marijuana), cocaine, and heroin (Table 3). This suggests that drug use may play a role in facilitating criminal behaviour among juveniles, as they often use drugs to gain the courage needed to engage in criminal activities. Observations also indicated that informal gatherings, often referred to as "vijiwe," were used as training grounds where some youths—who were not attending school—came together to learn how to use drugs, such as marijuana, consume illicit alcohol, and engage in other criminal behaviours.

Rape

The findings indicate that 9% of juveniles at the Remand Home were charged with rape, with the offence being more prevalent among male juveniles aged 10 to 17. This suggests that certain age groups may be more susceptible to engaging in sexual offences, potentially influenced by exposure to sexual content through media.

Participants in an FGD at Mbagala Kiburugwa said that:

"There are no limitations on the type, timing, or manner of film that kids can view in video theatres in our community. Some viewers are elementary school students, and the video presentation typically starts early at 10:00 and runs until midnight. The majority of the films are violent and contain graphic images, or pornography videos, and are only meant for adults above the age of 18"

During an in-depth discussion with a young offender of 11 aged old at the Police Station, he explained how he adopted sexual behaviour as follows:

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"I am the eldest son in my family, and we share a room at Keko Juu. I saw my parents making love once. I'm used to seeing my mother in her underwear because she always gets dressed before me. To induce deviant sexual fantasies, these two techniques were sufficient. To investigate what I had witnessed, I wanted to have sex when I was five years old. When I was in standard two, my pals and I would most often engage in sexual activity in the school restrooms. Teachers discovered me having sex in a toilet while I was ready-handed after word of my behaviour went viral"

This finding is similar to what McGregor & Devaney, (2020) reported that in a child's development, a child tends to learn and cope with what is happening in the family.

3. Types of Crimes Committed by Juveniles at Temeke District.

Offence	Ages of the Juvenile		Schooling			Total	
	M	F	10-11	12-14	15-18		Boy/Girl
Stealing	106	13	23	46	55	27	117(51%)
Refuges	2	-	-	1	1	-	2(0.9%)
Narcotic drugs	26	-	4	6	14	1	25(11%)
Attempt Murder	6	8	-	5	8	2	14(6%)
Assault	11	-	3	6	3	1	11(5%)
Rape	21	-	4	7	10	-	20(9%)
Possession of stolen goods	2	-	-	-	2	-	2(0.9)
Burglary	9	-	-	3	6	1	9(4%)
Unnatural offence	0	-	-	2	4	3	6(3%)
Truancy	5	4	-	3	6	-	7(4%)
Robbery	5	-	-	3	2	1	5(2%)
Abortion	-	3	-	-	3	3	3(1%)
Trespass	1	-	1	-	-	-	1(0.4%)
Abusive Language	1	4	1	1	3	-	4(2%)
Indecent Assault	3	-	1	1	1	-	3(1%)
Grievous harm	2	1	-	3	1	2	4(2%)
Total	200	33	37	87	119	41	233
	73%	27%	13%	31%	43%	13%	

Source: Police Station, Remand Home and Probation office

Murder offence

The study also reveals that approximately 6% of juveniles attempted to commit murder, regardless of their gender. This suggests that young people, irrespective of sex, are involved in serious crimes such as theft, murder, abortion, rape, and burglary.

This finding contradicts the argument by Abhishek and Balamurugan, (2023) that most children in conflict with the law have committed petty crimes or minor offences such as vagrancy, truancy, begging or alcohol use.

The observation revealed that, out of the 233 juveniles arrested, only 13% were attending school. This suggests that approximately 87% of the juveniles were either absent from school or not engaged in any form of education. This lack of schooling could be a contributing factor to the involvement of these children in criminal activities in the study area.

One key informant explained that:

"A Good thing is associated with God, and A bad one is associated with the devil. Devils follow people whose minds remain idle and lead them to commit unlawful acts".

A similar situation contributed to juveniles engaging in unlawful acts, as they were not attending school, which is crucial for their development and prospects. One key informant further explained:

"Temeke Municipality is impacted by the cultural norms of the dominant ethnic group, which generally does not prioritize educating children. Additionally, the area's low economic standards, compared to other municipalities like Ilala and Kinondoni, force many children to seek their livelihood. This often leads them to associate with negative peer groups, fostering delinquent behaviours. As a result, many children drop out of school and turn to unlawful activities"

The findings are consistent with the LHRC (2018), which identifies several contributing factors to children engaging in unlawful activities. These include a lack of proper care and guidance from parents or guardians, insufficient knowledge of parenting and child care, leading to poor upbringing, household poverty, and situations where girls, in particular, are exploited by men offering money

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and food. This highlights that children from broken families often miss out on educational opportunities, and the lack of education becomes a significant factor contributing to deviant behaviour in Temeke District. The absence of proper upbringing and parental support is a key driver behind these challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study conclude that juvenile delinquency in Temeke Municipality is largely influenced by family issues such as the death of one or both parents, divorce, and separation, which result in a lack of close parental supervision. It also concludes poverty and the influence of mass media are identified as the second major contributing factors to juvenile delinquency in the area. It is further concluded that major crimes omitted by juveniles were Stealing, drugs abuse and rape

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that government and religious institutions can reduce juvenile criminality by working together to strengthen family structures through support programs, moral guidance, and community outreach. It is also recommended that the Development Welfare Office of Temeke District, Ward Executive Officers, and NGOs working on youth issues collaborate to change the attitudes of youth, particularly those in local gathering spots ("pimples") around the district. Efforts should focus on promoting the importance of education, raising awareness about the dangers of drug abuse, and addressing the negative effects of mass media, with particular attention given to empowering youth in these areas.

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