Homelessness and Social Crimes among Adolescents in Ilala District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study was done in order to examine the determinants of homelessness and social crimes among adolescents in Ilala District; and expose the noticeable effects and ways to alienate its severity. Qualitative approach and case study design were used to collect qualitative data through the use of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) within a sample population of 10 police officers, 20 homeless adolescents, 11 social workers and 09 community members, which was obtained through snowball and purposive sampling. The obtained data were subjected to thematic analysis and presented in quotations of respondents' voices. The findings indicate that most adolescents become homeless due unresolved family conflicts and suicidal attempts imposed to them, and deaths of parents and relatives' dismissals, thus, enforced to engage in robbery, illegal drug dealing, commercial-sex work (prostitution), and kidnapping or raping young peddlers along streets for their survival. Those who happen to engage in such social crimes do face psychological complications, physical harms/burns, poor health supports and deaths, together with lockups and imprisonments. Therefore, as proposed by respondents in the study, the government authorities should set funds in order to either accommodate the homeless adolescents or send them back in their homelands, so as to uproot all the hooligans' gangs that seem detrimental in the communities and maintain social homeostasis.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a terminology used to refer a state of not having a stable and secure permanent residence (Lydia, 2014). The lack of permanent residence is accompanied by not having permanent places to sleep, keep personal belongings and other stuffs, thus residing along corridoes of public buildings and other premises as street children. Similarly, it is regarded as a hopeless state that is accompanied by departures and separations from the family of origin to other known/unknown place while lacking socio-economic support/services and failing to meet basic needs.

The prevalence of homelessness is determined by a lot of issues along social, economic, relationship, health and political aspects (Gasana, 2015). Studies have shown that issues like family breakdowns due to parental conflicts that result divorce and untied attachments have been one of the cause of homelessness. In places like the USA, homelessness of about 200,000 people was reported after US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) failed to discharge its functions in the year 1980 (Jencks, 1995; Zhao, 2023). It was also found that the failure of paying house rents had made Americans to face homelessness in the year 2007 to 2015 (Tsai, 2018). Also, in areas like New York in the USA, it was reported that about 130,000 people in 2018 and 3,588 people in 2019 faced homelessness due to natural calamities and other issues (Koh & O'Connell, 2016; NYC Department of Homeless Services, 2019). Furthermore, in places like Tanzania, about 978 adolescents in Mwanza, 544 adolescents in Arusha, 954 adolescents in Iringa, 347 adolescents in Dodoma, 586 adolescents in Mbeya and 2,984 adolescents in Dar es Salaam were reported to encounter homelessness due to death of parents that was accompanied by dismissals, abandonments and departures from their families (The Citizen News, 2021).

The prevalence of homelessness is currently associated with committed social crimes among adolescents. Studies have revealed that homeless adolescents in the in USA, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda, and other countries have engaged in illegal substance use and drug trafficking, theft and robbery, commercial-sex work, conflict and aggression, and raping and sodomization along bushes/hidden places (Gasana, 2015; Umuhoza & Uwase, 2018; Lyndsey and Silenzio, 2020). Similarly, in areas like in Toronto, homelessness has made 73% of male and 27% of female adolescents to engage in commercial-sex work (prostitution), robbery, banditry, and drug trafficking (Gasana, 2015; Lyndsey & Silenzio, 2020). However, elsewhere like in Tanzania, about 10,000 adolescents were to engage in street begging and robbery, illegal substance use/abuse, commercial sex work, and sexual abuse/harassments (Daniel, 2017).

The social crimes that are committed by homeless adolescents are reported to affect the adolescents and society at large. Regarding the society, studies have revealed that homeless adolescents have faced negative impressions, stereotypes and social segregations due to homelessness identity (Lugala & Mbwambo 1999). Others after reaching in urban areas have suffered unemployment in both formal and informal sectors due to illiteracy and incompetence. Others have also encountered stifles when accessing socio-economic services like health, educational and transport services due to living in absolute poverty (David and Angel, 2010; Lyndsey, 2020). Elsewhere like in Rwanda, about 7000 homeless adolescents were reported to encounter psychological disorders and critical mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to overthinking, tension, stress, and feelings of shame, guilt, and isolation as caused by homelessness (Linda, 2011; Robert, 2017; Lorrie & Hagewen, 2020). Furthermore, in developing countries like Tanzania, adolescents were reported to be summoned in prisons, be ill of chronic and uncured diseases like cancers and HIV/AIDS, and attain induced cognitive impairments and other physiological problems due to homelessness and engaging in social crimes like theft and robbery, and unsafe commercial-sex work (Aaronson, 2000; Clarke & Cooper, 2000; Mohanty & Raut 2009; Lorrie & Holland, 2020).

Regarding ways and methods that would rescue adolescents from homelessness and committing social crimes, some studies have tried to discuss and expose its reality. Issues like government provision of safe and secure place to stay in Nigeria has controlled the incline of homelessness and minimize the risk of social crimes along streets (Elizabeth, 2015). It was also found that the provision of education, entrepreneurial skills and charities have made homeless adolescents to be skilled and abled to generate personal income, thus not convinced to engage in social crimes (Lugalla & Mbwambo, 1996; Kopok, 2015; Ellen, 2016). Furthermore, from the report of the Citizen Newspaper of (2021) in Tanzania, it was argued that community (social workers and citizens) should minimize social challenges and ensure homeless adolescents along street access basic needs. However, in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam—Tanzania, there seem to be little studies pertaining homelessness and social crimes in Tanzania. Therefore, this study was set to:

1. Examine the determinants of homelessness and social crimes among adolescents in Ilala District
2. Expose the noticeable effects and ways to alienate its severity in Ilala District

METHODOLOGY
Research Approach
This study used qualitative research approach in order to intensively examine the determinants of homelessness and social crimes among adolescents; and expose the noticeable effects and ways to alienate its severity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Creswell, 2014). The approach helped the researcher to identify the design, sort out the tools/instrument necessary for data collection, employ the non-probability sampling [snow ball and purposive sampling] in obtaining the sample size, together with using thematic approach in data analysis. Hence, through the use of this approach, the study managed to obtain result in terms of text-data.

Research Design
This study employed case study design in order to concentrate and keenly investigate the research phenomena based on research objectives (Halinen & Törnroos, 2004; Yin, 2009; Kapinga., 2012). The design helped the researcher to employ interviews and focus group discussions as tools for data collection, purposive and snow ball sampling as sampling techniques, together with thematic analysis during data analysis. Hence, through it, the study ended with text data.

Area of the Study
Ilala District in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania was the area that accommodated the study. It contains 36 wards and 159 streets within an area of 364.9 km². It is also documented with 1,649,912 residents, who daily integrate with trading centres, educational institutions, health centres, together with legal centres such as police stations, courts and prisons. Furthermore, the selection of this area was determined by police reports that justify the existence of homeless adolescents who have engaged in social crimes. Therefore, through purposive sampling, Vingunguti ward, Ukonga ward, Buguruni ward and Mchikichini ward were visited through the use of private and public transport (motorcycles and buses) during data collection.

Population and Sample Size
About 50 people drawn from homeless youths, police officers, social workers and community members participated in this study. Snowball sampling was used to obtain 20 homeless youths along streets while purposive sampling was used to obtain 10 police officers, 11 social workers, and 09 community members. The main reasons of having such a population and sample size were

determined by the experience of being homeless or dealing with its severity. Hence, they were helpful in providing accurate data that informed the study.

DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTATION

Data were collected through the use of interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were done to homeless youths and community members through conversations, while focus group discussions were conveyed to the police officers and social workers through jotting down major points based on the given themes of discussions. Hence, these instruments enabled the study to collect text data out of respondents' opinions and experiences regarding the topic understudy (Bowling & Shah, 2005; Kombo & Tromp, 2006; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Park et al., 2007; Kapinga, 2012).

Data Analysis and Presentation

The obtained data were thematically analysed based on identified themes during conversations and discussions with the respondents. The presentation of result is done in quotes, indicating independent voices of the respondents during the study.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting this study, permits from Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) of Dar es Salaam region and the District Administrative Secretary (DAS) were requested and granted to the researcher. Afterwards, he went to the field to meet respondents and made arrangements for data collection. During data collection, the researcher informed the respondents what was to take place and asked respondents' consent. For those who accepted to participate in the study, they were ensured with safety and freedom to withdraw from the study due to less imposed conflict of interest and bias. Furthermore, citing by using APA style is considered because there are borrowed concepts that were used to inform the study. Hence, through all these, the researcher managed to collect authentic data beyond reasonable doubts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the obtained results and discussion based on the specific objectives of this study. For such a case, the following are the results and discussions.

Study Objective 1: To examine the determinants of homelessness and social crimes among adolescents in Ilala District

To answer this objective, homeless adolescent respondents were independently interviewed. The findings indicate that there are homeless adolescents in Ilala District, who have also engaged in social crimes due to (1) unresolved family conflicts and suicidal attempts imposed to them, (2) deaths of parents and relatives' dismissals, and (3) inadequacy provision of social services and basic needs. Then beginning with the first determinant, respondents said:

> "I decided to run away from our home due to endless conflicts within our family. Our father used to quarrel with our mother and most of times beating us when we tried to side with our mother. As if is not enough, he used to tell us that he is ready to kill us and be imprisoned. Therefore, due to such issues, I decided to run away and finally landed in Dar es Salaam, where I have no relative or place to stay" (Homeless Adolescent 1, Ward A).

The other one continued to say:

> "Our parents entered in unresolved nags and quarrels to the extent of divorcing each other. When they separated, our father thought that we would suffocate and still depend on him. Unfortunately, we struggled with our mother and became financially stable to extent of being able to go to school. Later on, our father came to our new residence and disturbed our peace, while showing interest of wanting to harm us. Therefore, due to that, I was totally scared, thus decided to escape to Dar es Salaam, where I live a homeless life" (Homeless Adolescent 8, Ward C).

In support of those findings, Mallett et al. (2009) made the same study and found that family conflicts in Australia contributed to about a quarter (¼) of the homeless population. Other studies have found that family conflicts that enhances adolescents to encounter poor family support and abuses and neglects have determined the trend of homelessness in different countries (Heinze, Jozefowicz & Toro, 2010). Studies have furthermore found that family conflicts accompanied by verbal arguments, aggressions, criticisms, negativity and violence have made adolescents to depart from their families and live a homeless life (Whitbeck, Hoyt & Ackley, 1997; Ferguson, 2009; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). Hence, due to such facts, unresolved family conflicts are the determinants of homelessness among adolescents.

Others talked of how the death of their parents and relatives' dismissals have made them to be homeless and later on engage in social crimes like stealing, so as to meet basic needs and other social services when reaching in towns and cities. For instance, one of the homeless youth said:

> "I am living a homeless and helpless life due to the death of my parents and lack of support from my relatives. My mother passed away some years ago before my father. When my father also passed away, his relatives chased us out and claimed for his belongings. Afterwards, my brethren and I lived as street children, begging food or sometimes eating food leftovers along garbage pits. Later on I decided to

start stealing so that I may be able to get clothes and food consistently" (Homeless Adolescent 3, Ward A).

The other one said:

> "I am an orphan living a homeless life. I have nowhere to hold or get assistance since I departed from my homeland. Such a situation has made me to encounter insufficiencies and socio-economic stifles, thus opted to engage in commercial-sex for earning living and survival. Also, in some occasions I am convinced to steal some properties and money of my commercial-sex clients without considering its consequences" (Homeless Adolescent 7, Ward B).

Furthermore, another homeless adolescent said:

> "It is true that I have joined bad companies of drug abusers and thieves although it was not my intention. I do believe that my previous life experiences have led me to reach this far. Upon reaching in Dar es Salaam, I had no any friend or relative to accommodate me. I finally met with my fellow homeless boys who daily used illegal substances like cannabis sativa (marijuana) and heavy-alcoholic beverages (spirits), thus I was moved to also use until now. Furthermore, due to difficult life we often do robbery and theft for the purpose of earning living and attain funds whenever needed to access some social services like bathing/toileting, etc." (Homeless Adolescent 17, Ward D).

In support of the findings, Greenblatt and Robertson (1993) have similarly agreed that there are homeless adolescents in towns and cities due to deaths of their parents and relatives' dismissals. Those who became homeless due to dismissals are known as "throwaways" while those who willingly depart due to life situation are known as "runaways". When reaching in towns/cities, homeless adolescents tend to live a hopeless life that is accompanied by lack of basic needs and other socio-economic services due to stigmatization and lack of employment qualifications that may sustain their living (Kipke et al., 1995). Their lives in towns and cities are found to be hazardous and vulnerable because most adolescents tend to engage in unsafe illegal-sex works (prostitution), drug trafficking and abuse, together with mugging and theft (Unger et al., 1998, p.343). Other studies have found that some homeless adolescents using drugs tend to kidnap and inject children/women passing in solitary roads with syringes, so they may rape them (Kipke et al., 1997).

Study Objective 2: To expose the noticeable effects and ways to alienate its severity in Ilala District

To answer this objective, social workers and police officers were subjected to interviews and FGDs. The findings indicate that homeless adolescents engaging in social crimes do face psychological complications, physical harms/burns, poor health supports and deaths, together with lockups and imprisonments. For instance, one social worker said:

> "Homeless adolescents do live in unsupportive environments. Most of them have engaged in social crimes and finally acquired psychological turbulences. For instance, there are those who engaged in illegal-sex work for earning living and ended with sexual harassment that have continually lowered their self-esteems and confidences. Others have been forced to practice penile-anal sex, be posted while naked and ended with suicidal ideations/attempts" (Social worker 2, Ward A).

The other social worker said:

> "Homeless adolescents have regularly encountered psychological complications due to homelessness and social crimes. For instance, there are those whose moods were affected after recalling previous experiences that made them to be homeless. Others have often encounter insomnia due late sleeps along corridoes of city premises/shops. Furthermore, others have undergone eating disorders and conduct disorders due to lack of meeting basic needs and social stigma" (Social worker 4, Ward A).

On another angle, police officers have argued that homeless adolescents engaging in social crimes have been facing lockups and imprisonments, while others have encountered physical harms/burns and deaths due to poor health supports. For instance, one police officer said:

> "Homeless adolescents engaging in social crimes like theft and robbery have always been canned and beaten to the extent of being bruised or injured. Other communities have attempted to burn them alive or harm them with stones and sharp objects like knives/machetes. Furthermore, those who were always found along bushes smoking marijuana and other illegal substances were severely injured by the polices whenever resisting or striking them back" (Police officer 3, Ward A).

The other police officer added:

> "Homeless adolescents do encounter limitations whenever wanting to access health services due to inability to cover medical costs. Those who become severely ill tend may likely faced death due to poor access to health services and lack of medications. Furthermore, those who engage in social crime and be harmed/burned are usually subjected to death" (Police officer 7, Ward C).

Furthermore, police officers have argued that homeless adolescents engaging in social crimes have been arrested and put into lockups or sometimes being taken to courts and be imprisoned. For instance, one police officer said:

> "I have been dealing with some criminal cases and appear before the court for legal issues that penalize homeless adolescents engaging in social crimes like robbery, drug trafficking, raping, and kidnapping people along the streets" (Police officer 5, Ward B).

The other police officer added:

> "There are some of homeless adolescents who have engaged in robbery and be associated with murder cases. That has made the victims to be put in lockups, waiting for subpoenas to appear before the courts and defend the accusations. The end of it all is to be imprisoned after the courts have evidently found the victims guilty" (Police officer 2, Ward A).

In support of such findings, studies have also reported that adolescents living a homeless life have often encountered several effects like physical tortures and sexual abuses due to negative impressions regarding homelessness (Kurtz, Kurtz & Jarvis, 1991; Whitbeck et al., 2001). Those who happen to engage in commercial-sex work (prostitution) have amply been manipulated to do penile-vaginal sex, unsafe sex (condomless sex), or sometimes be physically harmed by their clients (Silbert & Pines's, 1981). Others were sodomized and experienced identity confusion that at last altered their sexual orientations—some thought to become gays, lesbians and bisexuals (Janus, Burgess & McCormack, 1987; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2012; McCann & Brown, 2019). Furthermore, studies have similarly found that homelessness has brought a lot of psychological disorders, especially to children and adolescents. Such disorders were found to be developmental delays, learning difficulties, impaired reasoning, anxiety and depressions, mood disorders, sleeping disorders and stress disorders due to low self-esteem, abuses and neglects, mood disturbances and late sleeps (Zima et al., 1999; Woan, Lin & Auerswald, 2013; Tyler & Schmitz, 2019). Finally, studies have similarly found homeless adolescents to encounter lockups and imprisonments after engaging in robbery, illegal drug dealing, and kidnapping or raping young peddlers along streets (Bardine, 2008). This happens when the accuser opens a file case in the police station/magistrate, investigation is done, the accused is sent before the court and the judge declares imprisonment for a specific time as outline in the statutes.

However, the study managed to find possible ways of controlling or alienating the severity of homelessness and social crimes in Ilala District. The findings indicate that the government through policy/law enforcers and social workers should set social systems and do advocacy for homeless adolescents to engage in production activities even on cheap-paid basis. For instance, one community member said:

> "There is a need of setting socio-economic systems that will also favor homeless adolescents to engage in temporal economic activities. Policy/law enforcers should advertise the necessity of employing both skilled and unskilled labor in business firms, so that homeless adolescents may be eligible for such opportunities. This will enable them to attain financial independence and meet their basic needs" (Community member 3, Ward A).

The other one added:

> "Social workers and other authorities need to support homeless adolescents regarding socio-economic issues. I see there is a need of having a registered committee that will specifically deal with issues of homeless adolescents and ensure their basic needs are met through provision of grants. Others may be helped through provision of basic life skills that will assist them to generate their own income" (Community member 4, Ward B).

Also, the findings indicate that the government should set budget and funds so as to either send back homeless adolescents to their homelands or accommodate them in towns. For instance, one respondent said:

> "There is a need of either sending back those identified as homeless adolescent in streets or finding a secure place for their residence. This will bring peace and socio-environmental effects that would be brought by social crimes" (Police officer 6, Ward B).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that parents/guardians and those living with adolescents should abandon conflicts/misunderstanding that will finally influence adolescents to run away and live a homeless life elsewhere. For instance, one respondent said:

> "Parents and guardians should find possible ways of resolving their regular conflicts in families, so they may maintain peace and reassure children's safety. They should make sure they don't involve their children in such conflicts even if children they reside on one parent's side. This will not influence adolescents to feel uncomfortable and run away from their homes (Social worker 1, Ward A).

The other respondent added:

> "Parents in conflicts should not harass or intimidate their children anyhow. They should control their statements and conversations, so that children may not feel discouraged, insure or unloved. This will minimize the increase of runaway adolescents, who will tentatively reach in towns, live a homeless life and engage in social crimes for their survival" (Community member 1, Ward A).

In support of such findings, studies have similarly recommended that the governments of particular countries need to ensure affordable housing to homeless adolescents and educational programs that will sustain their living and limit them to engage in social crimes (Roy, 2007). Other studies have argued that parents/guardians need to protect their privacies and not involve children in their unresolved conflicts, so they may not run away and influx as homeless adolescents along the streets in towns/cities. Studies have furthermore argued that sending back the homeless adolescents may eliminate the gangs of homeless adolescents who have been rotating along streets and threatens people's security.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Conclusions
Based on the findings, it is discovered that most adolescents become homeless due unresolved family conflicts and suicidal attempts imposed to them, and deaths of parents and relatives' dismissals. That has made them to face inadequacy provision of social services and basic needs when reaching in towns/cities, thus enforced to engage in robbery, illegal drug dealing, commercial-sex work (prostitution), and kidnapping or raping young peddlers along streets. Alongside, it is discovered that those who engage in social crimes do face psychological complications, physical harms/burns, poor health supports and deaths, together with lockups and imprisonments. Furthermore, it is discovered that the influx and severity of homelessness and social crimes may be alienated through different strategies such as setting social systems and doing advocacy for homeless adolescents to engage in production activities even on cheap-paid basis, setting budget and funds so as to either send back homeless adolescents to their homelands or accommodate them in towns, together with educating parents/guardians on how to abandon conflicts/misunderstanding that will finally influence adolescents to run away and live a homeless life elsewhere. Hence, when such strategies will be met, the problem of homelessness and social crimes among adolescents will controlled.

Recommendations
Based on the drawn conclusions, the following are recommended:

i. Married couples with children should make sure they resolve their disputes and not involve their children anyhow. This will maintain adolescents' peace and not plan to run away and become homeless;

ii. The government through its authorities should find means of reaching all the homeless adolescents and see how to either accommodate or send them back to their homelands. This will maintain uproot all the hooligans' gangs that seem detrimental in the communities;

iii. Life skills should be taught at homes and schools so as to empower adolescents to not live a hopeless/unproductive life and finally engage in social crimes; and

iv. The ministry of health should do something so that homeless adolescents may have an access to health and psychological treatments whenever in need. This will enable them to regain health stability and not encounter deaths at a young age.

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