

## The influence of neighborhood victimization on offending trajectories among children in conflict with the law at Shikusa Borstal institution in Kakamega County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Juvenile offending is a global problem with profound implications for child development and community safety. This study examined the effect of neighborhood victimization on juvenile offending trajectories among children in conflict with the law at Shikusa Borstal Institution in Kakamega County, Kenya. The study was grounded in General Strain Theory. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, with a sample of 198 juvenile offenders selected through simple random sampling from a target population of 356. Quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and linear and multiple regression analyses, while qualitative data were gathered from 11 key informants and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that peer verbal abuse (65.66%) and peer physical abuse (60.10%) were the most prevalent forms of neighborhood victimization. Neighborhood victimization had a statistically significant relationship with juvenile offending ( $r=0.523$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and regression analysis revealed a coefficient of determination ( $R^2=0.219$ ), meaning that 21.9% of the variance in juvenile offending was attributable to neighborhood victimization. Community violence emerged as the strongest beta predictor ( $\beta=0.329$ ), followed by peer violence ( $\beta=0.107$ ) and cyberbullying ( $\beta=0.094$ ). The study concludes that neighborhood victimization significantly contributes to juvenile offending in Kakamega County. The study recommends targeted community-based interventions, anti-bullying programs and awareness campaigns against cyberbullying, alongside broader stakeholder engagement to address neighborhood-level risk factors that predispose juveniles to criminal behavior.

**Keywords:** Community Violence, Cyberbullying, General Strain Theory, Juvenile Offending, Neighborhood Victimization, Peer Violence

### I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood victimization is increasingly recognized as a potential risk factor that intersects with other influences to shape the trajectory of juvenile offending. The relationship between juvenile offending and victimization is multifaceted, while juveniles may become victims due to their involvement in delinquent activities, they can also become offenders as a result of prior victimization experiences. The victim-offender overlap denotes a complex criminological phenomenon whereby experiences of victimization serve as a precursor to subsequent offending. Exposure to victimization often engenders profound feelings of anger, disempowerment and resentment, which, if left unresolved, may foster retaliatory motivations and increase the propensity for engagement in delinquent or criminal behavior (Turanovic, 2023).

The neighborhood milieu holds a social structural substantial role in shaping the social and emotional development of children, acting as a secondary sphere of influence after the family. Within this landscape, neighborhood victimization pertains to the exposure of children to a spectrum of violence, criminal activities and social disorder within their communities. In instances where children are subjected to elevated levels of violence, crime and social unrest within their neighborhoods, a heightened propensity for engaging in delinquent behaviors emerges. An analysis by Turanovic, (2023) scrutinizing research from diverse countries corroborates a robust link between neighborhood victimization and adverse outcomes, encompassing aggression, substance misuse and participation in criminal activities.

Despite preventive programs and policies, juvenile offending rates remain high. Ndikaru (2021) highlights that over half of reported offenses in Kenya are committed by young people, illustrating the prevalence of juvenile offending and raising concerns about the effectiveness of current interventions. Data from Kenyan juvenile institutions show a troubling increase in admissions, suggesting a link between neighborhood-level victimization experiences and

subsequent criminal behavior. This study sought to examine the effect of neighborhood victimization on juvenile offending, addressing a critical gap in data that could inform more effective intervention programs and policies aimed at breaking this cycle.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

While an ideal upbringing should provide children with security, supportive relationships, educational opportunities, psychological health and the freedom to grow into their own identities, this standard is largely unmet in Kenya, as reflected in the rising rates of juvenile offending. Existing intervention efforts have fallen short, evidenced by the dramatic increase in readmissions of minors to correctional facilities. Despite various government-led interventions, the number of juveniles admitted to the institution has continued to rise, pointing to persistent upstream risk factors. Studies in comparable Kenyan settings have documented a strong association between child victimization and juvenile delinquency (Kabiru et al., 2014; Mutiso et al., 2019), yet evidence specific to the western Kenya context remains limited. Moreover, these studies tend to examine one form of victimization at a time, ignoring how multiple ways of abuse can overlap and intersect within broader social structures. As a result, these studies underestimate the full scope and consequences of childhood harm. This narrow focus has hidden the influence of victimization, viewed from a social structural angle on a child's development and subsequent overlap to offending, creating a clear gap in knowledge. This study therefore examined the nature and extent of neighborhood victimization spanning community violence, peer victimization and cyberbullying and its effect on juvenile offending among children committed to Shikusa Borstal Institution. The findings are intended to inform evidence-based policies and targeted interventions suited to the unique needs of victimized juveniles in conflict with the law.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

To examine the influence of neighborhood victimization on juvenile offending among children in conflict with the law at Shikusa Borstal Institution, Kakamega County, Kenya.

### **1.3 Research Question**

How does neighborhood victimization affect juvenile offending among children in conflict with the law at Shikusa Borstal Institution, Kakamega County, Kenya?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

#### **2.1.1 General Strain Theory**

The study is primarily anchored on General Strain Theory (GST), originally posited by Agnew and White (1992), which identifies three key sources of strain: failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positively valued stimuli and the presentation of negatively valued stimuli. GST focuses on the negative treatment of individuals by others and highlights the role of negative emotions in the etiology of offending. As further elaborated by Agnew and Brezina (2019), living in a high-crime neighborhood can generate strain through the fear of victimization, limited opportunities and the presence of deviant peers. This strain can lead to negative emotions and a sense of injustice, which may prompt some juveniles to engage in delinquent acts as a way to cope or seek revenge. Research by Worthington (2019), found that neighborhood victimization significantly predicted juvenile offending, supporting the applicability of GST in understanding this relationship.

Children who are exposed to neighborhood forms of victimization such as community violence often adapt and learn that crime is a desirable, justifiable or excusable act, adjusting from legal coping mechanisms and embracing criminality (Cavell & Malcolm, 2023). The perception of strain is relative across different individuals, but victimization by peers deemed undeserved by the victim may result in forethought revenge on the perpetrators of the strain, (Kushner & Fagan, 2023). The neighborhood milieu holds a substantial role in shaping the social and emotional development of children. The distinct characteristics of a neighborhood, such as its structural disadvantages and collective efficacy, have demonstrable direct impacts on phenomena like bullying victimization and the emergence of depression in adolescents (Choi, et al., 2021). Molnar et al. (2017) further underscore the role of neighborhood attributes such as elevated rates of crime, poverty and substance abuse in influencing the prevalence of child maltreatment within the community.

The exposure to violence and crime in the neighborhood setting heightens the likelihood of children embracing aggressive or delinquent behaviors (Pittman & Farrell, 2022). Witnessing acts of violence within the neighborhood can gradually desensitize children to aggression, thereby fostering a normalization of violence as a means of conflict resolution. This process, coupled with a paucity of positive role models and limited access to essential resources, can propel the adoption of antisocial behaviors. Furthermore, the dearth of secure recreational

outlets and limited educational opportunities in disadvantaged neighborhoods further elevates the odds of engagement in delinquent behaviors.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Community Violence and Juvenile Offending**

Community violence entails acts of violence such as serious fights and stabbing, either experienced or witnessed by an individual outside the home (Overstreet, 2000). Community violence is attributed to low-income families and urban neighborhoods, with youths in these localities manifesting forms of aggression (Pittman & Farrell, 2022). Childhood victimization, particularly through exposure to community violence, has been identified as a significant factor in the development of delinquent behavior among juveniles (Cilliers, 2018). Research on the effects of community violence indicated that primary and secondary exposure to community violence has a high prevalence of causing further violence among youths (Mohammad et al., 2015). In instances where community violence was high, children who experienced primary victimization had a high probability of secondary victimization. In Kenya, studies conducted in urban areas such as Nairobi and Mombasa have found a direct relationship between exposure to violence and engagement in criminal activities among children (Kabiru et al., 2021; Mutiso et al., 2019). According to a meta-analysis by Wright et al. (2019), exposure to community violence was associated with a higher likelihood of involvement in criminal behavior among children and adolescents. Non-state actors such as militia, gangs and community-based armed groups promote violence within society in many developing countries. Mono-ethnic groups such as Mungiki have been shown to contribute to spatial segregation along ethnic lines with adverse effects on children's victimization (Schuberth, 2023). Community violence heightens social disorganization, leaving children unmonitored and thereby more likely to engage in deviant acts due to the lack of supervisory authority.

### **2.2.2 Peer Victimization and Juvenile Offending**

The discourse of peer victimization is associated with abuse by the same age group and age set (Fogleman et al., 2016). Peer victimization occurs within the interactions of children within the neighborhood context and includes physical abuse, verbal abuse, rejection and social isolation. Many studies have found that juveniles who experience victimization at the hands of their peers are more likely to become involved in juvenile offending (Duah, 2023). The homogeneity of victim-offender populations suggests that victimized children may process and construct social information differently, increasing their propensity for aggressive responses (Ajisukumo, 2021). The range of peer victimization has been documented as between 22% and 65% across multiple study reviews (Tucker et al., 2020). Pavri (2015) assert that peer victimization has detrimental effects on victims who endure psychological torment and loneliness due to lack of social networks. A study by Ndikaru (2021) revealed that neighborhood isolation may push young people into leaving the community to seek recognition elsewhere, where they may end up identifying with offending peers. Being a target of peer victimization also increases the propensity of alcohol and cigarette use during early adolescence (Lee et al., 2022). In African countries, research conducted in Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa has demonstrated a strong correlation between peer victimization and childhood offending (Adu-Mireku, 2002; Kinyanda et al., 2010). Studies in Kenya, particularly in urban areas like Nairobi and Kisumu, have consistently highlighted the detrimental effects of peer victimization on children's psychosocial well-being and subsequent engagement in delinquent behaviors (Opačić, 2021).

### **2.2.3 Cyberbullying and Juvenile Offending**

Cyberbullying refers to the intentional use of technology to harm individuals or groups through harassment, cyberstalking, flaming, trickery, denigration, masquerading and exclusion (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). Victims of cyberbullying experience significant psychological, emotional and social distress, including fear, shame, embarrassment and low self-esteem, which may contribute to the development of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020). Research has revealed a concerning association between cyberbullying experiences and an increased risk of engaging in juvenile offending (Guo, 2022). General strain theory suggests that cyberbullying experiences create strain and frustration that may lead to delinquent behavior as a coping mechanism (Alsawalqa, 2021). In Kenya, cyberbullying is a growing concern with numerous negative effects on adolescents' well-being, particularly following increased internet access accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Manthi & Ndubi, 2023).

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design, as it is suitable for investigating human behavior and identifying relationships between variables at a specific point in time (Spector, 2019). The researcher was interested in identifying recurring statistical patterns connecting neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending, rather than

establishing a cause-and-effect relationship. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study phenomenon.

### 3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted at Shikusa Borstal Institution, located in Kakamega County in western Kenya. Kakamega County covers an area of approximately 3,033 square kilometres and had a population of 1,867,579 according to the 2019 Kenya National Housing and Population Census. Shikusa Borstal Institution is the primary custodial facility for male juvenile offenders in the western Kenya region, drawing admissions from across Kakamega and neighbouring counties. The institution falls under the Kenya Prisons Service and accommodates juveniles aged 15 to 18 years who have been committed by magistrate courts. Its location within a peri-urban setting characterised by socioeconomic disadvantage, substance abuse and gang activity makes it a pertinent site for studying the nexus between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending.

### 3.3 Target Population

The study targeted a total population of 412 respondents comprising 356 juvenile offenders, 1 officer in charge of the institution, 12 wardens, 15 probation officers, 10 Children's Officers, 12 matrons and 18 teachers.

### 3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

From the target population of 356 juvenile offenders, simple random sampling was employed to select the sample using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = target population (356) and  $e$  = margin of error (0.05). This yielded:

$$n = 356 / (1 + 356(0.05)^2) = 356 / 1.89 \approx 188$$

Accounting for non-response, the sample was adjusted upward to 198 participants. The study recorded a response rate of 94.20%. Purposive sampling was used to select 11 key informants comprising wardens, probation officers, Children's Officers, matrons and teachers for in-depth interviews.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires employing both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were pre-tested through a pilot study involving 20 participants drawn from a comparable institution to ensure reliability and validity of the instruments. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy returned a value of 0.862, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis and subsequent parametric testing. Shapiro-Wilk normality tests confirmed approximate normality of the data distributions. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 key informants.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to establish the presence, direction and strength of the relationship between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending and linear and multiple regression analyses to determine the magnitude and independent contribution of each predictor. The regression equation  $Y = a + b_1CV + b_2PV + b_3CB$  uses unstandardized coefficients ( $B$ ) to express absolute effects, while standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are reported for comparing the relative importance of predictors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining and reporting.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Prior to fieldwork, ethical approval was obtained from the Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology Ethics and Research Committee, Kenya and research authorization was secured from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Kenya. Approval was further obtained from the Kenya Prisons Service Department and the officer in charge of Shikusa Borstal Institution before data collection commenced. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, their rights including the right to withdraw at any point and the intended use of data. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were assured throughout the research process, with all data stored securely and de-identified prior to analysis.

#### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

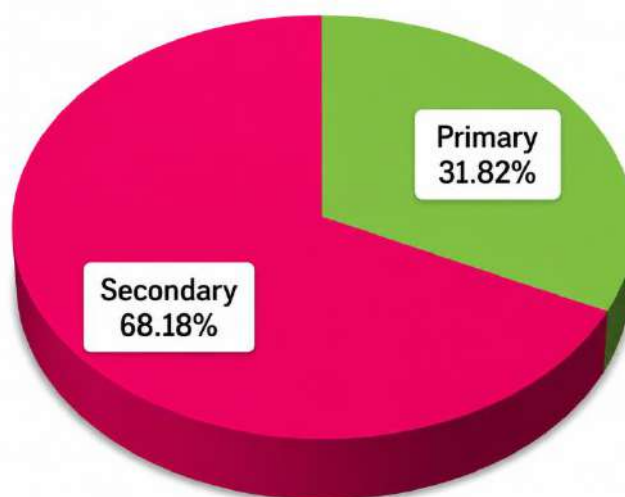
**Table 1**

*Age Characteristics of the Respondents (n=198)*

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15 – 16 years	20	10.11
17 – 18 years	97	48.99
18 years and above	81	40.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 198 respondents involved in the study. All respondents (100%) were male, because Shikusa Borstal Institution admits only male juvenile offenders.. The largest proportion of respondents, 97 (48.99%), were aged between 17 and 18 years, followed by 81 respondents (40.90%) who were aged 18 years and above, while only 20 respondents (10.11%) were between 15 and 16 years. These findings indicate that offending was more prevalent among older adolescents, a stage often characterized by increased independence, peer influence, and exposure to risk factors associated with delinquent behaviour. The concentration of offenders within the older adolescent age groups supports the view that late adolescence is a critical period during which exposure to neighbourhood victimization and other criminogenic influences may increase the likelihood of offending.

Respondents were asked to state their level of education and findings presented in figure 1.



**Figure 1**

*Education Level of the Respondents*

From the results in figure 1, more than half of the sample 68.18% (135) were pursuing secondary school education while 31.82% (63) were at Primary school level. This reveals that majority of the respondents were at secondary school level of education at the time of the study. Lower educational attainment has been associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior. These factors can increase the risk of involvement in criminal activities as a means of economic survival or a response to a lack of legitimate opportunities. Peer relationships and influence can have a significant impact on adolescent behavior. In certain communities or neighborhoods with gang activities, secondary school students may face pressure to join youth gangs or engage in delinquent behavior to gain acceptance or protection.

**Table 2***Family Composition of the Respondents (n=198)*

Family Composition	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single Parent Mother	52	26.26
Single Parent Father	21	10.61
Both Parents	46	23.23
Total Orphan	61	30.81
Other	18	9.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 presents the family composition of the 198 juvenile offenders included in the study. The findings show that the largest proportion of respondents were total orphans, accounting for 61 participants (30.81%), followed by those from single-mother households at 52 participants (26.26%). Respondents living with both parents comprised 46 participants (23.23%), while those from single-father households accounted for 21 participants (10.61%). A further 18 respondents (9.09%) belonged to other family arrangements. The results indicate that the majority of juvenile offenders originated from disrupted family structures, with only a minority being raised by both parents.

#### 4.2 Forms of Neighborhood Victimization Experienced

Respondents were asked to identify forms of neighborhood victimization they had experienced prior to incarceration. Findings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Forms of Neighborhood Victimization Experienced (n=198)*

Form of Neighborhood Victimization	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peer Verbal Abuse	130	65.66
Peer Physical Abuse	119	60.10
Peer Rejection	97	48.99
Community Violence	41	20.71
Cyberbullying	29	14.65
Peer Sexual Abuse	0	0.00

Table 3 shows that 65.66% of respondents experienced peer verbal abuse, 60.10% experienced peer physical abuse, 48.99% experienced peer rejection, 20.71% reported community violence and 14.65% reported cyberbullying. No respondent reported experiencing peer sexual abuse. Peer verbal abuse and peer physical abuse were the most prevalent forms of neighborhood victimization, consistent with the range of 22% to 65% established in multiple study reviews (Tucker et al., 2020).

Further analysis of frequency revealed that 29.8% of respondents experienced peer verbal abuse more than twice, 22.7% experienced peer rejection more than twice, 18.2% experienced peer physical abuse more than twice and 7.6% experienced community violence more than twice. From the results, 75.25% (n=149) of respondents agreed that they were affected by the neighborhood victimization they experienced. One juvenile offender illustratively narrated his experience:

*"My friends from home used to abuse me that I was a coward and that I always behaved like a girl because I used not to smoke marijuana. Due to constant pressure and shaming, I started smoking marijuana to please them and I was later detained with the offence of being in possession of 3 rolls of marijuana and sentenced to serve 3 years at Shikusa Borstal Institution. (JO 49, Shikusa Borstal Institution, October 2023)"*

#### 4.3 Forms of Juvenile Offences for committal

First, respondents indicated the type of offense for which they were committed to Shikusa Borstal Institution, selecting from four categories: violent offending, drug and substance abuse, sexual offenses and property offenses. This served as the primary categorical operationalization of the dependent variable and enabled multinomial regression analysis examining the influence of different forms of neighborhood victimization on different offense types.

**Table 4***Distribution of Offense Types among Respondents (Dependent Variable) (n=198)*

Offense Type (Juvenile Offending)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Violent Offending	47	23.74
Drug and Substance Abuse	46	23.23
Sexual Offense	43	21.72
Property Offense	62	31.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100</b>

Results in Table 4 show that property offenses were the most prevalent offense type (31.31%, n=62), followed closely by violent offending (23.74%, n=47), drug and substance abuse offenses (23.23%, n=46), and sexual offenses (21.72%, n=43). Property offenses were often committed out of necessity to meet basic needs such as food and clothing. Violent offending and drug-related offenses were also prominent, suggesting that the psychological and social strains arising from victimization manifest in diverse criminal behaviors. These figures confirm that juvenile offending among the study population was distributed across all four categories, warranting the use of multinomial regression to examine the differential influence of neighborhood victimization on each offense type.

#### 4.4 Inferential Statistics

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to establish the relationship between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending. Pearson correlation was the appropriate test statistic given the linearity of the data, absence of extreme outliers and the paired nature of the variables. Findings are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5***Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Neighborhood Victimization and Juvenile Offending (n=198)*

Variable	Neighborhood Victimization	Juvenile Offending
Neighborhood Victimization (Pearson r)	1	.523**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.001
N	198	198
Juvenile Offending (Pearson r)	.523**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	—
N	198	198

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Research Data, 2023.*

Findings in Table 5 reveal that neighborhood victimization had a statistically significant positive relationship with juvenile offending ( $r=0.523$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), indicating that respondents who experienced higher levels of neighborhood victimization were more likely to engage in juvenile offending. Pei et al., (2022), corroborates this finding, noting that the neighborhood environment is an important component of a child's development and any form of abuse within the neighborhood may derail the emotional, social and psychological development of a child, leading to juvenile offending.

Since the correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship, linear regression analysis was subsequently conducted to establish how much variance in juvenile offending was attributable to neighborhood victimization as a composite construct. Findings are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6***Linear Regression Model for Neighborhood Victimization and Juvenile Offending (n=198)*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.468a	.219	.206	.47593	1.607

a. Predictors: (Constant) Neighbourhood Victimization (composite). b. Dependent Variable: Juvenile Offending.  
Note:  $R = \sqrt{R^2} = \sqrt{0.219} \approx .468$ . Source: Research Data, 2023.

Research findings in Table 6 reveal a coefficient of determination ( $R^2=0.219$ ), implying that 21.9% of the variance in juvenile offending in Kakamega County was a result of neighborhood victimization. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.607 falls within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, confirming the absence of autocorrelation issues in the model. The remaining 78.1% of variance is attributable to other factors not captured in this model, such as family dynamics, school environment and individual psychological characteristics.

Multiple regression analysis was further conducted to determine the individual and collective influence of the three forms of neighborhood victimization community violence, peer violence and cyberbullying on juvenile offending. Findings are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7***Multiple Regression Analysis for Neighborhood Victimization and Juvenile Offending*

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.578	.361	—	2.852	.002	—	—
Community Violence	.018	.0295	.329	3.107	.001	.807	1.531
Peer Violence	.030	.0346	.107	2.925	.001	.886	1.432
Cyberbullying	.013	.0483	.094	1.743	.002	.913	1.396

*Dependent Variable: Juvenile Offending. B = unstandardized coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized beta coefficient. Source: Research Data, 2023.*

Findings in Table 7 reveal that all three predictors were statistically significant. In terms of standardized beta coefficients, which allow direct comparison of relative predictor strength, community violence was the strongest predictor of juvenile offending ( $\beta=0.329$ ;  $t=3.107$ ;  $p=0.001$ ), followed by peer violence ( $\beta=0.107$ ;  $t=2.925$ ;  $p=0.001$ ) and cyberbullying ( $\beta=0.094$ ;  $t=1.743$ ;  $p=0.002$ ). The unstandardized coefficients (B) reflect the absolute change in juvenile offending scores per unit increase in each predictor in their original measurement scales. The unstandardized regression model is expressed as:

$$Y = 1.578 + 0.018CV + 0.030PV + 0.013CB$$

Where: Y = Juvenile Offending; CV = Community Violence; PV = Peer Violence; CB = Cyberbullying (unstandardized B coefficients).

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors ranged between 1.396 and 1.531, well below the threshold of 10, confirming the absence of multicollinearity in the model.

Table 8 presents the multiple linear regression analysis examining the relationship between neighborhood victimization and specific types of juvenile offending. Note that, given the nature of the offense classification variable in this study, the analysis employs multiple linear regression with offense type as the outcome, rather than multinomial logistic regression, which would require a nominal categorical outcome variable in a single model. The standardized beta coefficients reported below allow comparison of the relative association between neighborhood victimization and each offense type.

**Table 8***Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Neighborhood Victimization and Types of Juvenile Offending*

Type of Offense	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.303	.414	—	3.119	.018
Violent Offending	.385	.059	.225	1.423	.012
Drug Offenses	.391	.043	.197	1.396	.015
Sexual Offenses	.337	.047	.164	1.373	.028
Property Offenses	.329	.031	.176	1.365	.024

*Predictor: Neighborhood Victimization (composite score).  $\beta$  = standardized beta coefficient. Source: Research Data, 2023.*

Table 8 shows that neighborhood victimization was significantly associated with all four types of juvenile offending. The association was strongest for violent offending ( $\beta=0.225$ ;  $p=0.012$ ), followed by drug offenses ( $\beta=0.197$ ;  $p=0.015$ ), property offenses ( $\beta=0.176$ ;  $p=0.024$ ) and sexual offenses ( $\beta=0.164$ ;  $p=0.028$ ). These results suggest that neighborhood victimization has the most pronounced influence on violent and drug-related offending, which is consistent with prior research indicating that exposure to community violence primarily shapes aggressive and drug-related behavioral outcomes (Mohammad et al., 2015).

**4.5 Qualitative Findings**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 11 key informants comprising 2 matrons, 3 Children's Officers, 2 probation officers, 2 wardens and 2 teachers. Thematic analysis generated two main themes: peer-induced strain and offending and deviance amplification and the role of community disorganization.

*Theme 1: Peer-Induced Strain and Offending*

Six out of eleven informants identified peer bullying and peer pressure as the most prevalent drivers of juvenile offending. Respondents emphasized that youth subjected to sustained peer abuse and shaming were pushed toward delinquent peer groups as a form of social protection and validation, consistent with GST's proposition that strain motivates maladaptive coping. A matron stated:

*"Juveniles that I have interacted with were victims of neighbourhood victimization in the form of peer bullying, harassment by neighbors and confrontation by officials working in local administration, mostly chiefs, assistant chiefs and Nyumba Kumi officials. These youths were branded as offenders just because*

*they were sometimes seen with people of deviant behaviour. Some ended up being labelled as criminals and sometimes harassed in the community. Such harassment made some of these juveniles to actualize the label and ended up offending.” (MT 2, Shikusa Borstal Institution, November 03<sup>rd</sup> 2023)”*

#### **Theme 2: Community Disorganization and Limited Supervision**

Informants also highlighted that broken family structures and a lack of positive adult supervision within neighborhoods created fertile conditions for both victimization and offending. A probation officer observed that areas with high concentrations of single-parent households and orphans lacked informal social controls that could shield children from peer victimization and recruitment into delinquent gangs. A warden added that economic hardship in the catchment areas straining parents or guardians into long working hours, leaving children unsupervised and exposed to neighborhood-level risks for extended periods each day.

#### **4.6 Discussion**

The findings from this study reveal critical insights into the connection between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending in Kakamega County. With 75.25% of respondents reporting having been affected by neighborhood victimization, the neighborhood context constitutes a significant criminogenic environment for juveniles. Peer verbal abuse (65.66%) and peer physical abuse (60.10%) emerged as the dominant forms, consistent with Tucker et al.(2019) review, which placed the range of peer victimization between 22% and 65%.

The significant correlation ( $r=0.523$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending aligns with General Strain Theory (Agnew & White 1992), which posits that strain arising from negative neighborhood experiences produces negative emotions that motivate delinquent coping mechanisms. The regression analysis confirms that neighborhood victimization accounts for 21.9% of the variance in juvenile offending, underscoring its independent and significant contribution to criminal behavior. The moderate effect size suggests that other factors, such as family dynamics and institutional victimization, also contribute to juvenile offending, pointing to the need for multi-level interventions.

In terms of standardized beta coefficients, community violence was the strongest predictor of juvenile offending ( $\beta=0.329$ ), followed by peer violence ( $\beta=0.107$ ) and cyberbullying ( $\beta=0.094$ ). The dominance of community violence aligns with research by Wright et al. (2019), who associated community violence exposure with aggressive behavioral cascades among urban youth. Peer violence also displayed a significant predictive influence, supporting findings by Ndikaru (2021), who found that neighborhood isolation may push young people into seeking recognition among offending peers. Cyberbullying, while exhibiting the weakest beta, still demonstrated statistical significance, reflecting the growing role of digital victimization in juvenile offending trajectories given increased internet accessibility among Kenyan youth (Manthi & Ndubi, 2023).

The regression findings by offense type show that neighborhood victimization has a greater influence on violent and drug offenses than on property or sexual offenses. This aligns with prior research indicating that exposure to community violence primarily shapes aggressive and drug-related behavioral outcomes (Mohammad et al., 2015). The qualitative findings powerfully reinforce the quantitative data. The narrative of JO 49, whose peer-induced shame propelled him into drug offending, provides a vivid illustration of how peer victimization creates strain which, in line with through general strain theory, is resolved through offending trajectories.

### **V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

The study concludes that neighborhood victimization has a significant effect on offending trajectories among children in conflict with the law at Shikusa Borstal Institution in Kakamega County, Kenya. Peer verbal abuse and peer physical abuse were the most prevalent forms of neighborhood victimization, experienced with high frequency prior to incarceration. Neighborhood victimization accounted for 21.9% of the variance in juvenile offending, with community violence being the strongest beta predictor ( $\beta=0.329$ ), followed by peer violence ( $\beta=0.107$ ) and cyberbullying ( $\beta=0.094$ ). The findings confirm that neighborhood-level risk factors constitute an important and partially independent pathway to juvenile delinquency. Neighborhood victimization showed more pronounced effects on violent and drug-related offenses than on property or sexual offenses.

#### **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the study’s findings, the following recommendations are made. First, community members, local administration officials and opinion leaders should actively support young people displaying signs of vulnerability rather than applying stigmatizing labels. Education campaigns targeting youth on the consequences of criminal behavior should be integrated into community outreach programs. Second, targeted interventions in high-risk neighborhoods should address specific drivers of victimization, including increased community patrols, environmental improvements and structured outreach to at-risk children and families. Third, stakeholders should implement

comprehensive anti-bullying programs and evidence-based peer victimization prevention strategies within schools and community centers. Fourth, cyberbullying prevention should be integrated into digital citizenship curricula, equipping adolescents with skills to navigate online environments safely. Fifth, community-based mentorship programs and after-school activities should be established to provide positive alternatives that reduce children's exposure to neighborhood-level risk factors. Sixth, the Kenya Prisons Service and relevant stakeholders should develop a pre-release protocol that prepares juvenile offenders for community reintegration, explicitly addressing the strain dynamics that heighten re-offending risk. Ultimately, these initiatives can contribute to better rehabilitation outcomes, enhanced social reintegration of offenders and a long-term reduction of juvenile crime in Kakamega County. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to establish causal pathways between neighborhood victimization and juvenile offending and should extend inquiry to female juvenile offenders in other custodial settings.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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