

Nature and causes of conflicts existing between and among women and Men Living in Informal Settlement Areas. A case of Kiandutu Informal Settlement in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The study focused on investigating the nature and causes of conflict existing between and among men and women living in informal settlement areas a case of Kiandutu Informal Settlement in Kiambu County, Kenya. There have been several international and national fora, campaigns and measures aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence. Conflicts still persist since they are inevitable in the society and thus a need to identify come up with possible measures to address them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and causes of conflicts between and among men and women living in informal settlement areas. The study made use of descriptive research design. Purposive sampling was used to select Kiandutu Informal Settlement. Simple random sampling was used to sample seventeen females and eighteen males living in Kiandutu Informal Settlement area as the respondents of the study.

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The chief, the sub-chief, village elders, Kiandutu Community Based Organization and religious leaders from Kiandutu Informal Settlement and Kianjau and Thika East OCPD were selected as the key informants of the study. The study utilized interview schedules to collect information from community members (selected male and female members) while open ended questionnaires were used to gather information from the key informants. The data collected was analyzed both quantitatively through the use of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) and qualitatively through the use of themes derived from research objectives while frequencies, tables and graphs were used for data presentation. The study revealed that sexual violence, social, domestic and political conflicts were the five major categories of conflicts existing between and among men and women living in Kiandutu settlement area. Further, the study found that these categories of conflicts are caused by poverty, life frustrations, abuse of power, drug abuse and lack of respect for human rights among others.



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INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Conflict is inevitable in every society as community members interact with one another. Conflict can be defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns (Mayer, 1990). In addition, Ury (1988) stated that conflicts are situations that naturally arise as people go about managing complex and stressful life situations in which clients are personally involved. Conflicts are brought about by the differences between individuals and their goals, needs, values, interests and motivations. According to Nkurunziza (2003), conflicts are by nature very complex. Whereas one aspect may be at the core of a conflict, other issues may arise and become the visible causes thus complicating intervention processes. He observes that conflicts emanate from two sources: First, are the proximate causes which refer to the events that immediately trigger a particular conflict. Second, are fundamental or long term causes which advances an atmosphere of hostility, leading to conflict. Nkurunziza further noted that attitude, structures and culture are causative factors of conflict. This means that the lifestyle of a people can be the base of conflict. According to Nkurunziza (2003), conflict can advance in form of personal or community interest and it can take the form of rising incompatibility in terms of political differences and social orientation.

Ball and Peters (2003) are of the opinion that the diversity that gives rise to conflict need not have an objective base such as economic or racial differences. Additionally, Halebsky (1976) has among other factors opined that racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other cultural traits are frequent sources of group differences and conflict. However, it appears as if self-interest is at the root of all conflicts. Thus, the self-interest games that manifest in Africa and indeed elsewhere as conflicts are turning into intractable issues. In understanding the nature of conflicts, first there is need to identify types of conflicts. There have been different ways of identifying types of conflicts. One way is in terms of complexity. It has been observed that in Africa there are simple and complex types of conflicts (Mwagiru, 2006). The second way is in terms of duration. In this context there are short lived and protracted conflicts. The third way is in terms of violence. There are conflicts which are violent and those which are non-violent. Some people have characterized the non-violent conflicts as latent or structured conflicts (Mwagiru, 2006). The fourth way of identifying types of conflicts is in terms of the scale of the conflict. In this context, conflicts in Africa have been categorized into internal, interstate and internationalized conflicts. The fifth way is in terms of necessity or legitimacy of conflicts. While some conflicts are regarded as necessary and legitimate, others are unnecessary and illegitimate (Mpangala, 2004).



Various studies which have been carried out in Africa tend to point out at economic, political, ethnic, ideological, resources and religious causes (Mwagiru, 2006). Resources and ethnicity are ranked third and fourth respectively. Ideological and religious factors have the lowest ranking. Another aspect which concerns the nature of conflicts is identification of the main actors in the conflict. Actors are those who are involved in a conflict. As a basic attitude, ethnocentrism promotes the belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to other ethnic groups and that one's cultural standards can be applied universally (Hooghe, 2009). This causes strife among people, leading to discrimination, genocide and prejudice. According to these studies, segregation on the basis of ethnicity brings about conflict in the society. Gecaga (2002) blames poverty for societal instability. He argues that where there is poverty there is illiteracy, poor health, insecurity, unemployment and conflict over scarce national resources. As a result, disgruntled community members rise against one another. Lack of human development explains most of today's mounting violence and instability. Inaccessibility to basic resources, knowledge and skills thwart efforts towards developing structures for peace-building (Seth, 2009).

In Cairo women discussed conflict over neighborhood drug use particularly when used on balconies, upsetting the sensibilities of neighbors. They described quarrels that broke out over ordinary things, like one woman throwing dirty water in front of another woman's home. Quarrels between children playing in the streets were also described as commonplace; when young men fought, women described more serious forms of violence and use of weapons including knives and switchblades (Wikan 1980). El-Kholy (2002) noted that those fights and disputes could often escalate into physical violence.

Statement of the Problem

Conflicts are a common occurrence in most communities. This has resulted mostly from internal and external disputes within the communities. The cost of inability by individuals and communities to manage and resolve disputes contributes to intensive wrangles and more complex crises, which can be counterproductive. On the other hand, peaceful coexistence promotes individual and community development, especially through team work and projects undertakings. It is in this respect that peace building is a useful ingredient for a vibrant community development in any given society. It is therefore on this basis that the study investigated the nature of conflicts existing between and among men and women living in the informal settlement areas. The study was done in Kiandutu, an informal settlement in Thika Municipality, Kiambu County.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

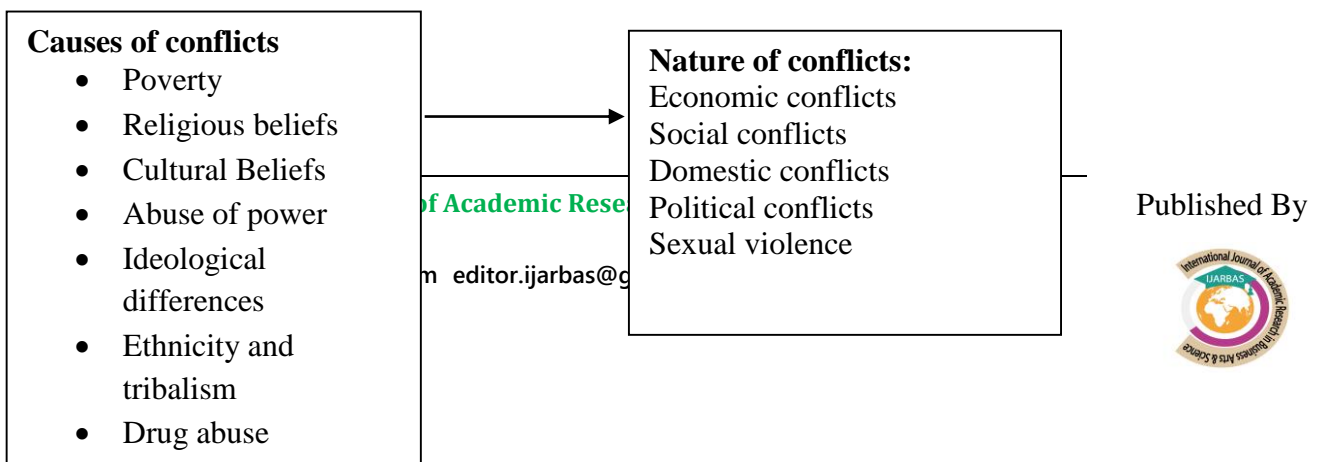
- i. To examine the nature of conflicts that exists between and among women and men in Kiandutu Informal Settlement area
- ii. To establish the causes of conflicts existing between and among men and women living in Kiandutu Informal Settlement area.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Modern conflict theory by C. Wright Mills in 1960. Mills distinguishes between the micro-level of individual action and the macro-level of social structure in relation to each other. According to Modern Conflict theory, social structures are created through conflicts between people with differing interests and resources based on day to day interactions. Competition over scarce resources including power and reproductive resources in society bring about conflicts. Individuals and resources are in turn influenced by these structures and by the unequal distribution of resources in society. It is therefore important to see social structures and personal actions in their interrelations because the community action and interrelations result in conflicts due to conflicting individual and community interests. It is then clear that in areas of high deficiency and poverty there is an increased rate of conflicts. This theory, therefore, help in understanding the nature and causes of conflicts in the informal settlement areas

Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature and guided by the Modern Conflict theory explained above there are diverse causes and nature conflicts that exist in any society. The Modern conflict theory explains that conflicts exist in our day to day life due to competition over scarce resources and the inequality that is brought about by unequal access and control of the resources, opportunities, and benefits that the society has to offer. Additionally, the literature, the nature of the conflict is multi-variant in that conflict is categorized based on causes such as economic, political, cultural, ideological, resources and religious. Additionally, conflicts are fueled by factors such as poverty, abuse of power, drug abuse, religious and cultural beliefs. The figure below shows the interrelationship between variables in the nature and causes of conflicts in an informal settlement area.



2.1: Analysis of the nature and causes of conflict existing between and among men and women living in the informal settlement

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study adopted the descriptive research design that targeted the people living in the informal settlement including male and female members of the community living in Kiandutu informal settlement area, village elders, chief, sub-chief, police officers and religious leaders. The study was carried out in Kiandutu Informal Settlement (KIS). Kiandutu Informal Settlement is located in the outskirts of Thika Town in County, Kenya

The target population of this study included the women and men, chief, sub-chiefs, village elders, religious leaders, Kianjau and Thika East Police Division. These groups are engaged in conflict resolution and other activities that are aimed at ensuring peaceful coexistence and peace building in Kiandutu Informal Settlement area. Purposive sampling was used to sample Kiandutu Informal Settlement. Simple random sampling was used to sample seventeen (17) women and eighteen (18) men living in Kiandutu informal settlement area as the respondents of the study, the chief, the sub chief and two village elders in Kiandutu Informal Settlement area and Kianjau and Thika East OCPD and three religious and two Kiandutu Community Based Organization leaders were selected as the key informants. The study used open ended questionnaires to gather information from the key informants while interview schedules was used to collect information from community members. To measure reliability and validity of the data collection instruments, pre-testing of instruments was done to ensure their suitability in collecting relevant data in order to achieve the objectives of the study. Piloting of data collection instruments before the actual research was done in Matharau Informal Settlement area.

Since the data from this study was both quantitative and qualitative, its analysis required triangulation of quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. Qualitative data analysis was guided by the major themes derived from the study objectives. While quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to generate tables, frequencies and percentages that facilitated descriptive statistical analysis. The data presentation was done through the use of tables. Before the commencement of the data collection, the study respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and their informed consent to participate was sought. Confidentiality was also affirmed to the respondents with

the assurance that generated data is used for academic purposes only. Each and every potential respondent was informed in advance that participation in this study was on voluntary basis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The presentation of the findings is on the basis of the study objectives which were to investigate the nature of conflict existing between and among men and women in informal settlement area and to assess the causes of conflicts between and among men and women living in informal settlement areas.

Nature of Conflicts Existing in the Informal Settlement Areas.

Data analysis revealed five main categories of conflicts existing between and among men and women living in the informal settlement, as shown in table 1. The analysis was done on the basis of gender. As shown in Table 1 below, all male and female respondents reported sexual violence as one of the major conflicts in the informal settlement area. In addition, majority of the female respondents reported social and domestic at 94.4% each as the major conflicts existing between and among men and women living in the informal settlement areas. On the other hand, male respondents reported economic conflicts at 100% as the major conflicts that exist in the informal settlements.

Nature of conflicts	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Sexual Violence	18	100	17	100
Social Conflicts	15	83.3	17	100
Domestic Conflicts	17	94.4	17	100
Economic Conflicts	18	100.0	12	66.7
Political Conflicts	15	83.3	5	27.8

Table 1: The nature of conflicts existing between and among men and women living in informal settlement areas

Each nature of conflict is discussed below in detail.

a) Sexual violence

This form of conflict was reported by all male and female respondents as one of the most common violence in the area. It was reported that it is in form of rape and sexual assault and majority of the victims are women and girls. This was closely associated to consumption of cheap liquor and drug abuse and the fact that the area is congested with temporary houses constructed close to another thus making it conducive as a hide out for criminals.

b) Social conflicts

Data analysis revealed that 83.3% of male and 94.4% of female felt that majority of the conflicts that exist in the informal settlement area is social conflicts. According to the data analysis, social conflicts consist of the minor and major fights between neighbors and members of the community living within a close proximity. The social conflict existing in the informal settlement area consists of but are not limited to insults, physical fights, emotional and psychological fights. The respondents reported that this type of conflicts arose from the day to day interactions in the community. The community elders confirmed that they were involved in conflict resolution on matters involving conflicts between neighbors. They also confirmed that these conflicts are very common in the area mainly because of the congestion. These findings are in line with the findings by Wikan (1980) in Cairo who found that quarrels broke out over ordinary issues, like one woman throwing dirty water in front of another woman's home. Quarrels between children playing in the streets were also described as commonplace; when young men fought, women described more serious forms of violence and use of weapons including knives and switchblades.

c) Domestic conflicts.

The data analysis revealed that majority of both men and women at 94.4% each felt that domestic violence is among the most common conflicts in the area. The study revealed that the fights within the family between husband and wife, parent/guardian and children are very common. The community and religious leaders reported that majority of the domestic fights that occur in the area, the victims are mainly the women and girls. They also reported that the availability of cheap liquor and illicit drugs and misuse of the same are mainly the main cause of such conflicts.

d) Economic conflicts.

Majority of the male respondents at 100% reported that majority of the conflicts existing in the area are economic conflicts compared to 66.7% of the female respondents. The economic conflicts were associated with the poverty level whereby people get things on credit from a nearby shop expecting to pay at the end of the month but due to lack of income, they are unable thus fueling a conflict between the shop owner and the debtor. It was reported that majority of the victims are men although it was reported that even women face this challenge. The findings are in line with the report by Mwangi (2006) that economic causes are some of the causes of conflict in Africa.

e) Political conflicts.

The data analysis revealed that majority of the male and female respondents reported that this nature of conflicts are rare in the area, very few respondents at 83.3% for male and 27.8% for women. They reported that this form of conflicts arises during the political campaign seasons

only and even during those season they are very rare because people in the area are more concerned with life sustenance given that they are poor. The findings support the report by Mwangiru (2006) that political and ideological differences are some of the major causes of conflicts in Africa.

Causes of Conflicts In Informal Settlement Areas

The data analysis identified seven factors that cause conflicts in the informal settlement areas as shown in Table 2 below. The commonly mentioned cause of conflicts in the informal settlement is poverty at 94.4% for men and 100% for women followed by life frustrations at 94.1% and 94.1% for men and women consecutively. The least mentioned cause of conflict was drug abuse for men at 66.7% and ideological differences and ethnicity for women at 58.8% each. The finding revealed that as discussed by the Modern Conflict theory, conflicts are brought about by both the micro and macro issues that exist between the individuals and the society at large.

Causes of conflicts	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Poverty	17	94.4	17	100
Life frustrations	17	94.4	16	94.1
Abuse of power	15	83.3	17	100
Lack of respect of human rights	13	72.2	17	100
Drug abuse	12	66.7	16	94.1
Ethnicity and tribalism	16	88.9	10	58.8
Ideological Differences	14	77.8	10	58.8

Table 2: The causes of conflicts between and among men and women living in the informal settlement areas

Each cause of conflict as identified by the respondents is discussed in detail in the following section.

a) Poverty

Poverty as a cause of conflict in the informal settlement was mentioned by 100% of female and 94.4% for male respondents. It was reported as the major cause of social, economic and domestic conflicts in the area. Majority of the respondents felt that lack of basic needs, competition over meagre resources, congestion and limited sources of money are the major causes of conflicts in Kiandutu Informal settlement area. The finding are in line with the report by Gecaga (2002) which blamed poverty for societal instability. They argued that where poverty abounds, there is illiteracy, poor health, insecurity, unemployment and conflict over scarce national resources.

b) Life frustrations.

The data analysis revealed that life frustrations due to lack or low income and economic activities in addition to family instability results into life frustrations that lead to social, domestic and sexual violence and conflicts in the informal settlement. As a major cause of conflict, life frustration was reported by 94.4% of men and 94.1% of women. These findings are in line with findings by the Ury (1988) that conflicts are situations that naturally arise as we go about managing complex and stressful life situations in which clients are personally involved.

c) Abuse of power.

As a cause of conflict in the informal settlement, abuse of power was mentioned by majority of the female respondents at 100% and 83.3% of men as shown in Table 1. The study revealed that in most cases conflicts are caused by people who have power over the victim instead of protecting the weak they end up violating them. This cause was mainly associated with sexual violence, domestic and political conflicts. The OCPD reported that they have been able to get hold of bhang with a worth Sh.5million from a house in *Kiandutu* informal settlement area.

d) Lack of respect for human rights.

This cause was reported by majority of women at 100% compared to 72.2 % of men as shown in Table 2. It was reported that majority of the perpetrators of conflict do so because they do not have respect for the human rights of the victims. It is mostly associated with sexual violence, domestic and social conflicts.

e) Drug abuse.

As a cause of conflict it was mentioned by majority of the female respondents at 94.1% compared to male at 66.7%. It was reported that cheap liquor and other illicit drugs are the major drivers of conflict in the area. Availability and use of cheap liquor and illicit drugs was blamed for increased sexual violence for both domestic and social conflicts in the informal settlement area.

f) Ethnicity and tribalism

The data analysis revealed that 88.9% of male respondents and 58.8% of the female respondents reported ethnicity and tribalism as some of the causes of conflicts in the informal settlement. The study revealed that tribal and ethnic stereotypes are some of the factors that fuel community conflict and disputes in *Kiandutu* Informal settlement. However, they reported that such kind of disputes and conflicts mainly occur during the campaign period. The finding supports the report by Halebsky (1976) that racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other cultural traits are frequent sources of group differences and conflict. In addition, studies have indicated that ethnocentrism promotes the belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to other

ethnic groups and that one's cultural standards can be applied universally (Hooghe, 2008). This causes strife among people, leading to discrimination, genocide and prejudice.

g) Ideological differences.

The data analysis revealed that 77.8% of male and 58.8% of the female respondents reported that ideological differences between community members sometime can fuel conflicts and disputes in the area. The community leaders confirm that this is one of the causes of conflicts especially during electioneering period and football matches season. It was reported that these conflicts are mainly among men and boys. This finding are in line with Nkurunziza (2003) who indicated that attitude, structures and culture are some of the factors that fuel conflict.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that conflicts existing in the informal settlement can be categorized into five that is sexual violence, social, domestic, economic and political conflicts. The study identified poverty, life frustrations, abuse of power, lack of respect for human rights, drug abuse, ideological differences, ethnicity and tribalism as some of the major forces that fuel conflicts in Kiandutu informal settlement area. Based on the above finding there is need to come up with participatory strategies to reduce or eliminate conflicts in the informal settlement areas.

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