THE IMPACT OF CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURES ON NAIROBI CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT   Family life in Nairobi has undergone some major transformation in the recent past as a result of the changes in the wider socio-cultural-economic systems. This transformation has had adverse consequences for children who depend primarily or solely on one parent for care, protection and livelihood. This paper examines such changes in the specific salient features of the family system in Kenya and discusses the implications for the well-being of urban children, particularly those living in difficult and deprived circumstances in the slums of Nairobi. What emerges from the analyses is a situation in which changes in the structure and function of the family unit have generated conflicting conceptions of mutual kinship obligation. Such trends have led to the erosion of vital social support systems in the family and community and worsened the condition of many Nairobi children from poor families. The slowing economic growth and deteriorating social infrastructure have also heightened the level of deprivation and marginalization of the urban poor, particularly the children.

Key Words: Cohabitation; Child abuse; Single parents; Trial marriage; Urban poor.

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of change has taken place in the organisation, structure and function of the contemporary urban family in Kenya. The conditions of most Kenyan urban children in difficult circumstances have worsened through the combined impact of changing family structures, progressive erosion of social support systems and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. These changing processes have impacted on Kenyan urban children in many different ways. Social phenomena such as divorce, separation, single parenthood, weakening of the extended family system, congestion and unemployment in the context of urban poverty have exposed many children to the dangers of poor health, malnutrition, alcoholism, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and other destructive behaviour. While we recognize that the problems encountered by disadvantaged urban children in Nairobi are many and highly complex with multiple causes, this paper focuses on the effect of changing family structures on the psycho-social and economic conditions of children living in the slum communities of Nairobi. A major task of this paper is therefore to examine the changing trends in the family structure and support systems and the specific ways in which such trends impact on the welfare of children from poor urban families in Nairobi.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on data from a survey of 412 disadvantaged children drawn from three informal schools and four children's institutions in Nairobi. The children's institutions are Kabete Approved School, Nairobi Juvenile Remand Home, Kirigiti Girls Approved School and Mama Fatuma Children's Home. All of these are also located in the slums of Nairobi.

The survey was conducted over a period of eight months between September 1990 and April 1991. The study sites and sample were purposively selected based on specific indicators of poverty and deprivation. These indicators were: financial difficulties, learning difficulties, criminal record, street life, shelter, food, clothing, health problems including signs of malnutrition, child abuse (both physical and sexual), child labour, history of abandonment and neglect, family size and composition, socio-economic status of parents and age of the child in relation to school age.

The primary method of data collection was the survey technique involving the use of structured questionnaires which were administered to the children. However, in-depth interviews were also held with the parents of these children in order to generate information on the life histories of the children and their families and also to have a better understanding of the family situation which could have contributed to the circumstances under which the children lived.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

Most of the families in Nairobi are labour migrants from the rural areas. According to the survey results, the parents of the surveyed children originally came from Muranga district (20%), Kiambu district (11%) and Kakamega district (10%). The rest come from different parts of the country. Only 13% of the parents were born in Nairobi. About 49% of the surveyed children were of Kikuyu ethnic origin from Muranga, Kiambu and other districts in Central Province. Part of the explanation for the influx of the Kikuyu into Nairobi is their proximity to the city, severe land shortage in their home areas and the search for business opportunities in urban centres.

The parents came to Nairobi to seek wage employment (41%), to get married (24%), and to gain economic independence by starting petty trade enterprises (11%).

About 56% of the surveyed children were aged 11–15 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Age distribution of the children.

Age	n	%
6–10	127	30.8
11–15	230	55.8
16+	55	13.4
Total	412	100.0

The surveyed children came from very large families. The average family had six children, some of whom had dropped out of school. Over 95% of the surveyed children had primary education. Nearly 66% of them had been to school for only a period of four years or less. And only 3.5% had been to secondary school (nine years of schooling and above). All the children who had some secondary education came from Approved Schools and Mama Fatuma Children's Home. Many of the surveyed children started school late given their actual age and standard of education at the time of the survey. This was also reflected in the literacy question which revealed that 33% of the surveyed children in the informal schools could not read and write despite the number of years they had spent in school.

The sex distribution of the children was equal, which suggests that both male and female children are equally disadvantaged. The survey revealed that 35% of the parents were married, 27% separated, 22% never married (single), 14% divorced and 2% widowed.

OCCUPATION OF PARENTS

Children were asked to state the occupation of their parents and the results in Table 2 show that 36.6% of their mothers were self-employed while 35% of the fathers were in permanent employment in low-paying jobs. Although most of the parents were petty traders, the mothers were mainly hawkers and vegetable vendors. 90% of the parents spent 8–12 hours away from home each day working to support their families. The length of time spent outside home sometimes led to child neglect.

The study also reveals that 24% of the mothers were housewives which means that they were neither self-employed nor gainfully employed in the formal labour market.

It was difficult to determine the actual income of most parents. However, 60.5% of the parents said they received incomes of 500–1,500 Kenya shillings a month. Only 8% of the parents reported a monthly income of over 3,000 Kenya shillings. Children's contribution to family income was found to be quite minimal. Only 17.3% of the children were working part time but some parents did not even know

Table 2. Percentage distribution of parental occupation.

Occuptation	Father (%)	Mother (%)
Self-employed	20.0	36.6
Casual labourer	20.0	8.4
Percent employment	35.0	11.4
Unemployed	9.2	9.4
Housewife	—	24.0
Barmaid	—	2.8
Peasant Farmer	4.2	4.4
No idea	10.0	2.9
No Response	1.5	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0

what work their children were doing and how much they were earning.

FROM EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM TO NUCLEAR FAMILY

Approximately 59% of the surveyed children had step-mothers which indicates that they came from polygynous extended families. Another 24% reported that they were living with step brothers and sisters in the same household. Furthermore, 62% of the parents said that they depend on their relatives and friends for support whenever their families are faced with problems. The other 38% of the parents reported that they relied on their immediate family members for assistance. These findings point to the fact that the extended family support system is still effective among the low income familes in Nairobi. For example, some older siblings with better education and steady jobs are still expected to help educate their younger brothers and sisters and also to assist them secure jobs.

Although polygyny is also still practised, it has become relatively more expensive and dysfunctional in an urban environment. The gradual decline of polygyny in urban families is closely linked to the rising cost of living in the city, housing scarcity, high unemployment and changes in social values. Besides, the animosity which often arises from fights between co-wives does not create a conducive atmosphere to bring up children.

Also as the husband attempts to remain impartial and emotionally neutral, the household is polarized and the children begin to identify with their biological mothers as they alienate and isolate their father and step-mothers. As a result, the father may begin to deny his children the love and care he used to give them previously.

The acquisition of extra wives often depletes the resources available to the households. The members experience a sense of deprivation as the resources are spread thinly between a large number of people. The competition for scarce resources within the family context often generates tension and animosity which are usually reflected in gossip, malice and the accusation of witchcraft. In an urban slum environment, polygyny tends to be more oppressive to women and children than in the rural areas in the sense that poverty and powerlessness exarcebate women's subordination and deference to the powerful and children of the poor become child workers, wage labourers and, in some cases, beggars.

Monogamous nuclear families are becoming more common as polygyny loses much of its traditional appeal. Currently, due to unstable economic conditions and the rising cost of living, many parents can barely afford the vast expenses of providing food, clothing, education and health care to their children. Furthermore, many households live in abject poverty in the Nairobi slums with most of their members mainly concentrated in low-paying, low security jobs with little prospect for advancement. This is an issue of great moral concern because, as Weerakoon (1986: 14) the Secretary-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, has pointed out, "it is dangerous to have an island of prosperity in a sea of misery." Proverty coupled with migration and the gradual erosion of the extended family system have contributed to an increase in social problems such

as alcoholism, malnutrition, child abuse, drug abuse, inadequate housing, teenage pregnancy, poor health and various facets of family discord and children's distress.

LIVING TOGETHER

One of the emerging trends in Nairobi and other urban areas in Kenya is the increase in the number of young men and women who are living together without a formal marriage. Cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common type of domestic and sexual arrangement among young urban residents. In some cases, the couple may have known each other for a very short period of time, often as little as four month or less. Sometimes the parents may not be aware of or give consent to the relationship and may only be informed after the couple has started living together. This "flight of fancy" could arise out of romantic love or it could be based on more practical considerations or a combination of both (Muganzi, 1987).

During the survey, some young mothers living in the slums of Nairobi pointed out that because of the high and increasing divorce rate in modern marriages, many young men and women are currently delaying marriages (but having children), "until they know each other a bit more" (Perez, 1991). Some of these relationships may last only a few months. Others take several years before they are eventually formalized. But quite a number of such relationships also break up when the couple realize and accept that it cannot work for some reason. Some of the people who opt to live together seem to regard a formal marriage as a severe restriction of personal liberty. About 40% of the mothers we spoke to also felt that marriage "spoils" a relationship and gives the man too much power and control over the woman. But perhaps the most disturbing aspect of cohabitation is the welfare and future life of the children born to a couple living together outside marriage.

The major issues that are often raised with respect to children of cohabiting parents are the children's identity, their custody (in the event of separation) and their parent's rights and obligations to them. The nagging question is, can such children be regarded as illegitimate, considering the sexual exclusiveness (or the appearance of it) which seems to characterize the relationship between some couples living together (Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984). One of the problems with this arrangement is that although the biological parents of a child are known, there are often some confusion as to whether the biological father should take on the social role of the father and be responsible for the care and protection of the young. The confusion and ambiguity are not only restricted to the obligations of the parents and children in the context of cohabitation but they also affect the reciprocal role expectations and mutual obligations between the cohabiting parents themselves. For all practical purposes, a man and a woman living together generally operate and function as husband and wife except for the legal formality. However, complications regarding the custody of children and property inheritance do often arise when the relationship breaks up or when one partner dies.

Another factor which has had an impact on the life of many children in Nairobi

is family instability exemplified through divorce and separation. Only 2% of the surveyed children said that their parents were divorced while 27% reported that their parents were separated. Our informal interviews with the parents revealed that family instability is a consequence of multiple factors which include lack of economic, social and moral support, the prevalence of extra-marital affairs, barrenness, incompatibility, the acquisition of a co-wife, the changing role of women, violence against women and the weakening importance of the cultural practices and customs that used to enhance stability. Most of the elaborate pre-nuptial rituals and practices which were intended to stabilize marriages in a traditional society have either diminished in importance or are no longer observed by many urban couples. Many urban marriages are increasingly becoming more of an affair between two individuals and less of a relationship between the families (Kelly & Swatz, 1979). Part of the explanation for this shift is that access to education and wage employment opportunities have increased individual freedom and economic independence among men, women and children. These changes have also led to weakening parental authority and control over their children.

CARE AND UP-BRINGING OF CHILDREN IN SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

One of the major changes which has occurred in the last couple of decades and one which may have far-reaching consequences for the welfare of urban children is the emergence of one-parent families, particularly those headed by women. Until recently, single parent households were rare in Nairobi but the study found that 62.6% of the households were headed by women. This trend has been created by a combination of divorce, urbanization, women's participation in the labour force, the tendency to delay marriage and the rising rate of illegitimate births which is due partly to increased sexual permissiveness and the absence of legal abortion.

A growing number of urban families are becoming somewhat more isolated from friends and relatives than the traditional extended families. With a shift towards monogamous marriages and nuclear-type families, child-care responsibilities have been transferred to the mother who usually plays this role single-handedly. The data on Table 3 show that about 49% of the surveyed children were cared for by both parents, compared to 33% who were cared for by their mothers alone. Only 4% of them said they were cared for by the father. Another 14% were cared for by other people, mainly friends and relatives. Relatively inexpensive domestic help is becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain and decent day

Table 3. Distribution of persons responsible for the up-bringing of the children.

Parents	n	%
Both	204	49.8
Mother alone	137	33.4
Father alone	16	3.9
Grand Parents	32	7.8
Relatives	21	5.1
Total	410	100.0

care centres are equally few and largely unaffordable to the poor families in the slums (Clark, 1984; Kilbride & Kilbride, 1990).

The effect of lack of a father's presence on a child can be traumatic at times. The life of a child in a troubled home can equally be a nightmare. Similarly, the fate of a growing number of children of unmarried teenage mothers in the slums of Nairobi hangs on the balance with many of them ending up on the streets or in institutions. Child abuse and neglect are usually major problems in low-income single-parent families which live in the slums of Nairobi. The study revealed several welfare problems associated with children who are brought up by single mothers in low-income urban families. Since most of the mothers were either unemployed or had low-paying jobs, most of them were unable to provide adequate shelter, food, clothing, education, health care, and companionship to the offsprings (Table 5).

The case study provided below illustrates a typical circumstance of a child in a large low-income family in Nairobi headed by a single parent. Julius is featured in this case study to illustrate how a broken family in an impoverished social and physical environment can adversely affect the social, emotional and cognitive development as well as the health and physical growth of a child from a poor family in Nairobi.

CASE STUDY

Julius is 12 years old and the ninth child in a family of ten. He has seven sisters and two brothers aged between 8 and 30. He is in Standard Five (the fifth year of Kenyan primary education) in an informal school, located about a kilometre from his mother's house. He is the only child in the family who is attending school since his younger sister (aged 8) is not yet in school and all his older brothers and sisters dropped out of school because of pregnancy and lack of fees.

Julius is too small for his age but over-age for his class. He could easily pass for a nine year old. He looks malnourished and has skin rashes on his face and arms. He is withdrawn, but becomes aggressive when he plays with his friends in school and at home. He usually chases them away whenever they try to take his wooden toy guns which he makes himself.

His school attendance is irregular due partly to illness, lack of school fees, uniforms and books. His academic performance is far below average because of poor attendance. He speaks good Kiswahili (the national language) and fluent Kikuyu (his vernacular), but very little and broken English. His teachers say he has a problem with reading and writing. He shows little interest in school and his homework.

Julius' mother is 45 years old, divorced and heads her own household. She has no formal education. She was married for only six years to a carpenter and had three children with him and got the rest (including Julius) with other men whom she could not marry because they were already married. Julius does not know his own biological father. The mother came to Nairobi with her former husband from Muranga District 25 years ago to seek wage employment. They could not find a

job and divorced soon after. She cited cruelty and drunkenness as the major causes of their divorce. She said she was constantly battered. She also said the ex-husband was irresponsible and could not provide for her and their three children. After divorce she changed residence several times due to non-payment of rent, and finally built a small house with only one room, measuring about 10 × 10 feet in one of the city slums. The house is poorly ventilated, made of mud walls and iron roof with no electricity and running water. She owns the plot where she lives.

There are twelve people who live and eat in this one room. They include Julius' mother, her six children and five grandchildren. Only five of her seven daughters stay with her in the same household and each of them has a child, although none of them is married. Some of her grandchildren work on the streets as parking boys but sleep at home. Two of her daughters who are also unmarried but have children stay with her in the same estate and mainly depend on her for support. The daughters are unemployed.

Julius' mother is a hawker. She buys and sells fruits and vegetables in an open air market within the slum area. She says she has no land or relatives in the rural areas and no plans to ever go back there. She has only one brother in the rural areas but they rarely exchange visits. When she is away in the market the younger children are usually cared for by their older sisters. One of her older sons, who also lives with her in the same household, works as a matatu (privately owned public transportation) tout in town. He would like Julius to quit school and become a tout like himself. Only the mother and her older son contribute income to the family but their earnings are too meagre to provide for the bare necessities of life like food, clothing, water and health care. The mother has problems paying school fees and buying school books for Julius. According to her, the books are too expensive. The school fees for Julius is Ksh. 100 (about US$ 1.5 in 1993) per month. No other member of the family is employed. Sometimes when the family has completely run out of food, they go to a local church organization to beg for food and other gifts like used clothing. The resources of the organization are, however, dwindling due to heavy demand from the needy. When the children are sick, she usually takes them to the nearest health clinic which is about four kilometres away. She identified malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea as some of the most common diseases afflicting the family.

Julius' approach to work is remarkable. He is hard-working and plays multiple roles at home. Occasionally he helps his mother sell vegetables in the nearby open air market although it was reported that sometimes he keeps part of the proceeds to buy cigarettes without his mother's knowledge. His mother disapproves his smoking habits and occasionally reprimands him. He also sells old newspapers and cans, works as a parking boy and washes cars in the company of some street boys who are his friends. He engages in such activities mainly after school and on weekends to get "an independent income," as he puts it. Sometimes he skips school to go and work. It was not possible to establish what exactly he does with the money but he claims he gives his mother part of the income although she denied it. On more than one occasion, however, he had been found with a half-full packet of cigarettes and a plastic bottle containing glue. He is believed to be smoking and sniffing gum. His elder brothers are heavy smokers. They also drink

quite a bit. Julius has been found fighting other boys in school on several occasions, and each time the teacher punished them. One day they started fighting as they were walking home. This time they were seen by one of the askaris (law enforcement officers) patrolling the area and were picked up, warned and released the same day.

Table 4. Who buys food for the family?

Household Members	n	%
Both parents	90	22.6
Mother alone	182	45.6
Father alone	61	15.3
Others	66	16.5
Total	399	100.0

The survey results showed that mothers tended to assume greater responsibility for the care and support of their children. About 50% of the children reported that their school fees, clothing and school supplies were provided by their mothers alone compared to 28% who said that these were the responsibility of their fathers. The mother was also found to be primarily responsible for buying food for the family as shown in Table 4.

Some working single mothers without child care facilities either lock their children in the house when they go to work, or leave them with the neighbours or sometimes just leave them alone in the compound until after work (Lujan, et. al., 1989). Only 8.6% of the working mothers had access to paid domestic labour.

CHILD ABUSE

Some unmarried women living and raising children alone do occasionally display aggressive behaviour towards them as a consequence of stress associated with "unwanted" or unplanned children and the hardship of raising young children without emotional and economic support from the father (UNICEF, 1990). The majority of the surveyed children (84.5%) reported having been physically abused. Most

Table 5. Problems faced by children.

Problems	n	%
Lack of money	50	26.7
Lack of food	50	26.7
Lack of clothing	48	25.7
Lack of shelter	23	12.3
Lack of education	7	4.0
Sickness/poor health	3	1.6
Frequent punishment	3	1.6
Parents whereabouts not known	3	1.6
Valid cases	187	100.0

Table 6. Correlation matrices for parental characteristics and children's behaviour.

Variables	Age	Age at marriage	Marital status	Income	Occupation	Time spent out
Age	1.00	0.21	0.18	−0.01	−0.08	0.00
Age at marriage	0.21	1.00	0.42**	0.08	0.08	0.24
Marital status	0.19	0.42**	1.00	0.04	0.21	0.28
Income	−0.01	0.08	0.04	1.00	0.16	0.28*
Occupation	−0.08	0.08	0.21	0.16	1.00	0.19
Time spent out	−0.00	0.24*	0.28*	0.28*	−0.19	1.00
Education	0.07	0.13	0.28*	−0.20	0.20	0.18
Family size	0.20	0.04	−0.09	−0.14	−0.22	0.15
Household head	0.05	−0.27*	0.17	−0.08	0.13	0.05
Alcohol/drug intake	0.07	−0.20	0.20	0.00	0.13	0.04
Sexual abuse	0.09	0.04	0.21	−0.34	0.12	0.00
Child labour						
Male						
Female	−0.04	0.00	0.35	0.10	−0.03	−0.09
Arrested Children	−0.02	−0.06	0.09	0.37	0.04	−0.17

* P<0.01; ** P<0.001.

of the punishment was given by the mothers who were also responsible for the discipline of the children. About 33% of the children said that the punishment they received was very severe. However, only 3% of the children said they had been sexually abused and quite a few had sought professional help. As a result of this and other problems in the home and school environments, 50.4% of the children said they would prefer to leave home to go and stay in a better place elsewhere. Those children who preferred to leave home described their families as unstable (90%), unreliable (86%), violent (63%), divided (73%) and unsupportive (77%).

THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE CHILDREN

When the children were asked to identify the major problems they faced, 26.7% indicated lack of money and food as their main problems. Over 90% of the children who were attending informal schools said they stayed in school without anythig to eat. They could not return home for lunch, not because of the distance, but because either there was no one at home to prepare lunch for them, or there was no food at home nor money with which to buy it. The majority of the children (85%) had only one meal a day and much of their diet was unbalanced.

When the children were asked what they would do about their problems, 32.4% said they would do nothing and 13% said they would go and ask for help (beg) from anybody within the neighbourhood or on the streets. These findings clearly demonstrate the level of deprivation experienced by these children in difficult circumstances.

Education	Family size	Household head	Alcohol/ Drug intake	Sexual abuse	Child labour		Arrested children
					Female	Male	
0.05	0.07	0.20	0.07	0.09	−0.04	−0.02	−0.02
−0.27*	0.13	0.04	−0.02	0.04	0.00	0.05	−0.06
0.17	0.22	−0.09	0.20	0.21	0.03	0.11	0.02
−0.08	0.20	−0.14	−0.04	−0.03	−0.90	−0.06	−0.37**
0.13	0.15	−0.22	0.13	0.12	0.03	0.14	0.04
0.05	0.17	0.15	0.04	0.01	−0.09	−0.05	−0.17
1.00	0.01	0.06	−0.04	−0.01	−0.18	0.07	−0.14
0.06	1.00	0.04	−0.16	−0.22	−0.22	0.00	−0.07
0.01	0.01	1.00	0.16	−0.02	0.02	0.07	−0.02
0.00	−0.40	0.16	1.00	0.69**	0.65**	0.60**	0.57**
−0.02	−0.01	−0.21	0.69**	1.00	0.60	0.64**	0.57**
			0.69**	0.64**	0.77	1.00	0.54**
0.02	−0.17	−0.22	0.65**	0.60**	1.00	0.77**	0.57**
−0.02	−0.14	−0.07	0.51**	0.57**	0.57	0.54**	1.00

DRUG ABUSE

The children were also asked if they had used or were using drugs or displayed certain habits which would be regarded as anti-social. The survey results reveal that they were in the habit of sniffing petrol (45%), sniffing glue (26.7%), smoking bhang (20%), chewing *miraa* [(5%), a drug they chew to keep them awake], and smoking cigarette (3.3%). In terms of their involvement in illegal activities (and other forms of misdemeanour), 73% of the children said that they had been arrested at least once, while 38% said that they were taking alcohol.

The study further revealed that many children were engaged in one or more of these habits at the time of the survey. It was also found that over 60% of the children started using drugs and other substances at the age of 12–14 either at home or on the streets through peer influence. The major reasons given by the children for abusing the substances were pear influence (47%), to forget their problems (19%) and to feel good (7%). The rest said they took the substances to make them sleep.

SOME RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR

The study also sought to examine the relationship between parental socio-economic characteristics and the behaviour of children. Selected parental characteristics included age, age at marriage, marital status, income, occupation, time spent away from home, education, family size and single parenthood. Some of the children's behaviours or experiences were alcohol and drug use, being arrested and taken to approved schools, sexual abuse and child labour.

The results of the analysis shown in Table 6 indicate that children from low in-

come families were more likely to engage in petty crimes which often led to their arrest $(r = -0.37)$. Such children ended up in juvenile courts and were eventually taken to approved schools.

The size of the family also appears to be negatively associated with child labour in that children from large families were more likely to work because the parents were unable to provide adequately for every child in the family. Thus, a large family size increases the chance of child labour. Female children who were working either as domestic hands or on the streets were also taking alcohol or drugs $(r = 0.65^{**})$ and were sexually abused $(r = 0.60^{**})$ and were prone to be arrested $(r = 0.57^{**})$. It was also observed that children from broken homes and from single parent families were likely to be taking alcohol and drugs $(r = 0.20)$.

In-depth analysis of the families where these children came from revealed a significant relationship between age at marriage, marital instability and female-headed households. Thus, the majority of parents of the surveyed children tended to have been married early, were single and were heading their own households. Most of these were women who were either divorced, separated or never married.

CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with changes in the family structure and how they affect Nairobi children in especially difficult and deprived circumstances. The erosion or weakening of social and economic support systems in the context of urban poverty have exposed many children to the dangers of malnourishment, poor health, illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, drug abuse, neglect, exploitation through child labour, street violence, petty thefts and homelessness.

The distress experienced by the surveyed children in the Nairobi slums can be attributed in part to unemployment, unstable and inadequate incomes, broken families, impoverished households headed by single parents (mostly women), increasing illegitimacy and urban congestion.

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