



Institute of Criminology

**Exploring Persistence and Barriers to Desistance for Young
Offenders in Isiolo, Kenya**

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	6
List of Figures	7
Introduction	8
Literature Review	13
Introduction	13
Desistance	13
<i>Individual and Agentic Theories</i>	14
<i>Social and Structural Theories</i>	14
<i>Interactionist Theories</i>	15
<i>Situational Theories</i>	17
Barriers to Desistance	17
<i>Social Exclusion</i>	17
<i>Coping and Survival</i>	19
<i>Lack of Capital</i>	19
<i>Gendered Barriers for Young Men</i>	21
<i>Gendered Barriers for Women</i>	22
Diversifying Desistance Theory	23
<i>Intersectionality</i>	23
<i>Global South</i>	24
Interdependency within Collectivist Kenyan Culture	25
<i>Interdependent Agency</i>	25
<i>Collectivist Culture</i>	26
<i>Communitarian Perspectives</i>	26
Kenyan Initiatives Addressing Youth Crime	28

Methodology	30
Introduction	30
Research Questions and Design	30
Research Sample	31
Data Collection Materials	33
Data Collection Procedure	34
Ethical Considerations	35
<i>a) Minimizing Harm Through Personal Reflexivity</i>	35
<i>b) Safeguarding and Informed Consent</i>	37
Data Analysis	39
Additional Considerations	40
Findings and Discussion	41
Introduction	41
1. Structural Barriers of Deprivation	41
<i>1.1 Desperation</i>	42
<i>1.2 Discrimination and Stigma</i>	46
<i>1.3 Exploitation and Legitimate Deficit</i>	49
2. ‘Wajibu’: Relational Barriers of Ethical Commitments	51
<i>2.1 Meeting Expectations</i>	52
<i>2.2 Fulfilling Relational Responsibilities</i>	54
<i>2.3 Kinship and Belonging</i>	55
3. ‘Uhusiano’: Relational Barriers of Social Networks	57
<i>3.1 Confidence and Self-Esteem</i>	57
<i>3.2 Safety and Security</i>	60
<i>3.3 Resting Times for Female Offenders</i>	63

4. 'Kuzoea': Cognitive and Emotional Barriers of Cultural Norms and Habitual Lifestyles	65
4.1 <i>Accepted Norms</i>	66
4.2 <i>Shame and Internalised Gendered Norms for Women</i>	69
4.3 <i>Drugs and Alcohol</i>	71
Conclusion	75
Implications	77
Limitations	79
References	82
Appendices	98
Appendix A Offending History and Frequency	98
Appendix B Contact with Criminal Justice System	98
Appendix C Demographic Differentials Across Sample	98
Appendix D Participant Tick Box	99
Appendix E Interview Schedule in English	100
Appendix F Participant Consent Form	102
Appendix G Participant Information Sheet	103
Appendix H Thematic Layers and Codes Analysis	105
Appendix I Confidentiality Agreement with Translator	108

ABSTRACT

Desistance is defined as a process of transforming identities and acquiring new roles and virtues that support non-offending lifestyle changes. It is commonly conceptualised as an individual journey, fraught with obstacles and relapses. However, interactionist theories have begun to highlight how people's responses to their social, cultural, and structural contexts shape their abilities to resist offending. This thesis further explores how social relationships and conditioning structures produce barriers to desistance for young adult offenders in Kenya. It presents an interdependent and socially embedded perspective of how agency is mobilised for survival, often to the detriment of desistance, in harsh socio-economic conditions where there is a lack of state support. For this qualitative research study, 14 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a diverse group (by ethnicity and gender) of persistent youth offenders aged 18-34 in Isiolo, Kenya. To increase salience for Kenya's youth development and crime policies, a wider age range for this transitional status than is commonly used in the West was adopted to reflect Kenya's definition of youth. Interviews explored structural, relational, situational, and future-oriented barriers that thwarted their ability to desist. Findings revealed the impact of marginalisation and socio-economic disadvantage on young adult's choices to pursue crime. Their agency was found to be directed towards social and ethical obligations within the young adults' immediate environment which often conflicted with paths to desistance. Implications for policy and practice suggest the significance of social relations and values as fundamental barriers to desistance within socio-economically disadvantaged African contexts and the need to address this aspect more fully. Variations across gender and age call for more targeted interventions that consider the interdependent nature of youth offenders' lives and the social and ethical commitments they are struggling to attain.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of Isiolo, 2020, Kenya	10
Figure 2. 'Snowballing' Referral Chart	32

INTRODUCTION

‘Desistance is the process of learning to live a non-criminal life when one has been leading a largely criminal life.’

(Bottoms, Shapland, 2016, p.109)

Often described as a journey, an offender’s orientation away from crime is increasingly conceptualised as a non-linear, ongoing, and highly complex change process (Phillips, 2017). Research on the difficulties persistent offenders face in actualising and sustaining this process has led to the development of multi-faceted theoretical frameworks for understanding how ‘people come to cease and sustain the cessation of offending behaviour’ (Weaver, 2019, p.642). Theories addressing desistance have focused both on the roles of structural forces forming obstacles to desistance such as cumulative disadvantage (Laub and Sampson, 2003), as well as the impact of subjective and relational dimensions preventing possibilities for meaningful social attachments and cognitive reorientation (Maruna, 2001; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002).

Though desistance has been widely researched and theorised by Western scholars, little is known about this phenomenon outside the Global North, with limited studies in sub-Saharan African contexts. This research responds to the need to decolonise theories of desistance (Graham and McNeill, 2019) and develop more nuanced understandings from ‘southern epistemologies’ (Carrington, 2017, p.183) that diversify Northern experiences by developing alternative perspectives that promote global inclusivity and challenge the superiority of criminology’s Western-centric universalist knowledge (Carrington et al., 2016). Despite

limitations and challenges in dismantling criminology's dominant Western-centric narratives (Blagg and Thalia, 2019) this research aims to further develop intercultural perspectives on barriers to desistance by generating theoretical insight from the lived experiences of young adult offenders in sub-Saharan Africa.

The research takes place in the town of Isiolo 285 km north of Nairobi. It lies within the Northern Frontier district in the Eastern Province of Kenya, commonly known as 'Texas', for its drylands and extreme weather conditions. The population is largely made up of Cushitic pastoralist communities such as Borana, Turkana, Samburu and Somali, half of whom are rurally-based and rely on livestock trade and production (Mkutu et al., 2017). Challenges include inadequate governmental funding, poor infrastructure and insecurity from cattle rustling (Serem and Ronoh, 2012), which combined with climate variability, have increased rural—to—urban migration among pastoralists seeking alternative livelihoods in town (Wako, 2022). Existing literature on social disorganization theory has emphasised the contextual relevance of place and ecological concentration of crime (Shaw and McKay, 1942); Isiolo has high levels of residential instability, and structural neighbourhood disadvantage, as well as high levels of substance abuse among the youth (NACADA, 2019).



Figure 1. (Map of Isiolo, Kenya, 2020)

The Population and Housing Census (2019) reported 80% of the 268,002 population in Isiolo were below the age of 35 (County Government of Isiolo, 2023). This represents a high percentage fitting Kenya's category of 'youth', identified as those 'individuals in the Republic who have attained the age of eighteen years; but have not attained the age of thirty-five-years' (National Council for Law Reporting, 2010). The majority of whom face economic, social and political marginalisation exacerbated by low educational attainment, lack of employment skills, poor health, and lack of support for those living on the streets and in slum areas (State Department for Youth Affairs, 2019). Limited economic opportunities for the youth typically include *boda boda* motorcycle driving, livestock buying and selling, casual labour and informal street hawking (National Council for Population and Development, 2017). Fractured government infrastructure and lack of necessities such as identification documents underpin an over-dependence on non-governmental and charitable organisations (Brass, 2010). This research is therefore of significant relevance for the third sector working with disadvantaged youth offenders by identifying barriers to building effective pathways out of crime.

Attending to family labour responsibilities instead of attending school is common for children in Isiolo (Ministry of Health and other partners, 2018). Harsh socio-economic conditions and interdependent familial survival strategies (Abebe, 2019) mean that children often hold increased responsibilities from a young age which reduces their ability to engage in education. This also leads to adultification as children are compelled to adopt adult-like roles without sufficient time to transition to adulthood (Jurkovic, 1997). Davis and Marsh (2022) argue that the impact of adultification among young black offenders in the UK, in which they forfeited much of their childhoods and suffered developmentally is a key vulnerability factor that needs to be acknowledged. This study elaborates on the effects of adultification in a developing context alongside often interconnected other youth criminality factors such as high rates of unemployment, poverty and substance abuse (National Crime Research Centre, 2018).

Isiolo has a majority Muslim and ethnically heterogeneous population, which offers a unique context to explore cultural diversity in desistance research. While it is acknowledged that experiences of desistance can vary depending on cultural and spiritual positions within specific socio-cultural contexts, such issues remain underdeveloped within desistance research (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Methodological focus on the individual limits alternative explorations of how social relations and cultural forces shape the interplay between agency and structure affecting offending and desistance. Moreover, despite the multiple ways in which agency has been deemed a necessary component of identity transformation and pro-social choices, there is limited understanding of its role and how it operates within the desistance process (Healy, 2013). By exploring barriers to desistance for persistent youth offenders in this culturally diverse setting, there is a valuable opportunity to further develop the 'missing link' of human agency (Laub and Sampson, 2003).

Through fourteen interviews with active high-frequency young adult offenders in the community, this thesis explores the obstacles that limit their ability to move away from offending, and what keeps them actively engaged in a life of crime. This thesis is framed by four research questions based on the broad theoretical underpinnings of desistance research:

- (1) What are the main barriers to desistance for persistent youth offenders in Isiolo, Kenya?
- (2) How do social relationships operate as barriers to desistance?
- (3) What are the environmental and situational barriers to desistance?
- (4) To what extent do their orientations to the future act as barriers to desistance?

To increase knowledge of barriers to desistance for youth in Kenya, the East African age range for youth of 18-34 years-old is employed to support Kenya's youth development and crime policy initiatives which aim to achieve a 'crime-free, secure, peaceful and united Kenya where no young Kenyan is left behind' (State Department for Youth Affairs, 2019, p.5). In addition to informing national policies aimed at reducing barriers out of youth crime, this study has international relevance for global crime prevention strategies that 'strengthen community resilience, paying particular attention to youth' (United Nations of Drugs and Crime Control, 2021, p.12).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter outlines the relevant literature informing this research by starting with a brief overview of the most relevant aspects of desistance theory. It then addresses barriers to desistance through research studies in the Global North. A section on diversifying desistance theory then discusses the relevance of intersectional and international desistance perspectives. The last section seeks to fill the gap in Western desistance research by considering the literature on communitarian values specific to the Kenyan context and interdependent agency. It includes a discussion of how this thesis contributes to policy and practice supporting desistance for Kenyan youth and concludes with a reflection on how this study enhances intercultural knowledge on barriers to desistance in sub-Saharan Africa.

Desistance

Desistance is conceptualised as a multi-dimensional process involving three interrelated aspects; 'act desistance' which refers to ceasing to offend, 'identity desistance' for the internalisation of a non-offending identity, and 'relational desistance' for recognition of change by others (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016, p.570). In this way, desistance extends beyond the abstinence from offending behaviour and involves aspects of moral, legal, psychological and social integration (McNeill, 2012). Within this highly complex desistance process, structural, situational, and relational dimensions of analysis are thereby required to build theories of how people perceive and respond to these interconnected influences. Four main bodies of theory to date have sought to theorise desistance: (1) individual and agentic (Maruna, 1997) (2) social and structural (Barry, 2007) (3) interactionist (Bottoms et al., 2004; Farrall and Maruna, 2004; Healy, 2013) (4) situational theories (Bottoms, 2014).

Individual and Agentic Theories

Some of the earliest desistance theories such as 'maturational reform' proposed an invariant relationship between age and crime (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 1983), suggesting a natural phasing out of intrinsic criminal behaviour with age (Glueck and Glueck, 1940). Such theories downplayed the role of contextual influences in favour of age as the most predictive factor of desistance (Wilson and Hernstein, 1985) and were criticised for not offering an adequate explanation of the change process (Maruna, 1997; Bushway et al., 2001). Subsequent individual and agentic theories challenged this perspective by using a rational choice framework, whereby pathways away from crime were considered based on an individual and cognitive analysis of the relative costs and benefits of offending (Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Within this body of work, 'crystallization of discontent' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009, p.1124) which describes dissatisfaction with one's criminal lifestyle, was found to be a key element supporting motivations for pro-social change and facilitating the desistance process by encouraging identity transformation. In this way, rational choice perspectives centred human agency as an essential factor in catalysing identity transformation to a non-offending self.

Social and Structural Theories

Social and structural theories of desistance take a different approach by examining personal choice within a situational context of social forces. They focus on structural influences such as changing socio-economic and cultural conditions, and how formal and informal ties to family, education, marital status and employment influence the desistance process (Laub and Sampson, 2001). A key body of work to emerge within this area has been social control theories (Hirschi, 1969) which correlate changes in criminality with the obligations and

expectations associated with educational, occupational, and marital roles (Laub and Sampson, 2001). Persistence has consequently been linked with the failure to attain strong mainstream institutional and conventional bonds required to increase 'informal controls' and enable desistance to occur (Laub and Sampson, 1993).

Social learning theories have since broadened the scope of social control theories to include the impact of friendship bonds and peer relations that reinforce deviance (Warr, 1998; Warr, 2002). This literature has contributed to a more socially embedded perspective of desistance than was perhaps suggested by previous social control theories. Social and structural theories recognise the role of social structures in shaping the desistance process, yet neglect to explore their effect on people's ability to reason and act (Weaver, 2016).

Interactionist Theories

Interactionist theories have since drawn on subjective perspectives of offenders to examine the interplay between changing structural opportunities and individual agency in the desistance process (Weaver, 2019; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Findings further reveal the dependency of agency on social context by underlining the role of individual reflexivity in perceiving and responding to structural constraints and opportunities needed for desistance to occur (King, 2014). Agency within interactionist theories has thus been inextricably linked to structure, defined as 'choices [...] taken within specific contexts' (Bottoms et al., 2004, p.376). Integrated perspectives have been developed to address the lack of consensus around the definition and operationalisation of agency in desistance (Healy, 2013). However, they have been criticised for taking an autonomous view of the self that fails to examine how social relations inform choices that shape identity (Weaver, 2016).

Interactionist theorists using Archer's morphogenetic perspective have provided valuable contributions in exploring how social relations constrain individual choices (Weaver, 2016) and how structural disadvantage places people involuntarily within social structures (Dufour, Brassard and Martel, 2015). This literature highlights the limited accessibility of desistance to disadvantaged populations (Dufour, Brassard and Martel, 2015) and conceptualises persistent offending behaviour as 'stasis' (structural reproduction) and desistance as 'structural elaboration' (Weaver and McNeill, 2015, p.4). Moreover, such relational approaches within sociology encourage a focus on 'the network of social relations and interactions between actors' (Crossley, 2011, p.1); understanding more about offenders' positions within their social contexts hence avoids the temptation to perceive offenders as individuals rather than interconnected persons.

Archer's theory of personal reflexivity has also been used in the context of desistance as a useful way to developing this understanding of what enables and constrains individual choices in response to social structures (Weaver, 2016). Personal reflexivity involves the deliberation of people's 'ultimate concerns' – socially embedded '*commitments which are constitutive of who we are*' (Archer, 2006, p.263, emphasis in original), and thereby connects structural arrangements with people's motivations to act (Archer, 2000). In this way, structure and agency are inseparable 'by virtue of the fact that we deliberate about ourselves in relation to the social situations we confront' (Archer, 2007, p.42).

Situational Theories

Situational theories employ a different lens and examine the spatial dynamics of the desistance process (Flynn, 2010). A certain type of agency identified as 'diachronic self-control' (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011, p.256) describes the ability to avoid criminality by altering daily habitual patterns and changing the way people interact with their environment to avoid criminogenic places and social situations. Difficulties in achieving 'diachronic self-control' are seen to underline the importance of attachments to routines and relationships which are communicative of peoples' identity (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009).

Routines of social interactions are thus instrumental in shaping identity and are representative of individual preferences and priorities (Farrall et al., 2014). In this way, situational theories view obstacles to desistance as crucially informed by the social context including cultural, structural, and situational aspects of a given environment (Bottoms et al., 2004). Further exploration is needed to understand how situational forces might be especially pertinent in creating barriers for young adults who occupy a more 'liminal' societal position in the transitional phase between childhood and more established adulthood (Barry, 2006).

Barriers to Desistance

Social Exclusion

Postmodern philosophical and sociological perspectives of crime and penal policy theorise about norms that reflect a societal model of desired order (Bauman, 2000). Restrictive norms produce structural factors of disadvantage and social exclusion which limit the range of tolerable choices, thus trapping offenders in a guilty state of abnormality and moral failure (Bauman, 2000). Social exclusion thus acts as a barrier to desistance preventing the

internalising of non-offending identities, and the social recognition of change (Maruna, 2001). Obstacles in realising identity change are highlighted in specific UK research on the desistance barriers faced by sex offenders (Mann, Devendran and Lundrigan, 2021) in shedding their 'feared self' and realising their 'desired self' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009, p.1119). This highlights the importance of paying attention to groups that experience heightened levels of stigma and discrimination.

Desistance has been identified as a painful process involving isolation and lack of control across different levels of societal recognition, increasing the likelihood of goal failure and associated hopelessness (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). Exploring the relationship between desperation and offending, research has found offending to be utilised as a means of regaining control and resisting exclusion from society (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright, 2016). Without adequate support mechanisms, Halsey, Armstrong, and Wright (2016) identified that offenders lacked the practical and emotional capacity to resist returning to crime, leading to a fatalistic outlook that dissipates the will to desist termed nihilistic 'fuck it' scenarios. Such situations suggest the culmination of negative emotions that increase pressure to commit crime as a means of overcoming structural and relational stress (Agnew, 1992).

Indeed, General Strain Theory purports that when high in severity and perceived to be unfair, anticipated and experienced strains such as lack of money, unemployment, discrimination, familial abuse and homelessness increase incentives for coping through crime (Agnew, 2002). Crime in the context of survival thus provides affective relief from negative emotional states, underlining the role of social exclusion and absence of support as barriers to desistance. This is further supported by findings that reveal painful and frustrating experiences when trying

to give up a life of crime (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016; Wright, 2015) reinforcing a feeling of powerlessness in the face of unchangeable structural and societal forces.

Coping and Survival

Survival behaviours for children in and out of the care system in the UK further link offending to 'street lifestyles' and the production of 'survivor mentalities' that prioritise self-reliance in the here and now (Day, Bateman and Pitts, 2018). Such survival lifestyles, linked to chaotic and unstructured circumstances, block the development of reflective functioning due to a preoccupation with meeting the daily demands of immediate needs (Archer, 2000). This mode of 'coping-survival' (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2020,p.22) is similar to that of long-term prisoner experiences in the early years of their incarceration (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2020) in which agency is limited and held in a state of 'fractured reflexivity' – apparent in an 'inability to use the inner conversation to design purposeful courses of action' (Archer, 2012, p.317). 'Fractured reflexivity' reinforces vulnerability as people are unable to positively orient themselves towards alternative aspirations, blocking their capacity to creatively respond to opportunities (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002) and make proactive choices (Paternoster and Pogarsky, 2009). This underlines the inability of offenders to resist the temptations of offending and narratives which emphasise sentiments of feeling trapped and overwhelmed (Healy, 2012). In this way 'coping-survival' and 'fractured reflexivity' can be considered as significant emotional and cognitive barriers to desistance.

Lack of Capital

Research by Bottoms and Shapland on young adult recidivists in the Sheffield Desistance Study (2004-2007) has revealed that despite wishing to turn away from crime towards

conventional future aspirations, many 'would-be desisters' (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014, p.318) lived in a liminal state of uncertainty where crime helped them overcome financial difficulties (Shapland and Bottoms, 2011) and barriers to employment such as their lack of education qualifications (Shapland, Bottoms and Muir, 2012). Structural obstacles for disadvantaged young adults have been found to contribute to offending by preventing the complete realisation of adult identities through the obstruction of financial independence, legitimate employment, pro-social relationships and full civic participation (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland, 2010). Lack of socio-structural support and enduring stigma evident through reduced citizenship status have been identified as undermining offenders' desire and ability for new conformist identities (Uggen, Manza and Behrens, 2004). This underlines structural barriers to desistance as functions of the socio-economic and political context (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland, 2010).

In addition to limitations in accessing conventional sources of economic capital, Barry's study in Scotland (2006) emphasises the limited opportunities young adults have to gain cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital including friendships, reputation, and kudos. Barry adopts Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital, highlighting notions of 'sociability' (Uggen, Manza and Behrens, 2004) to describe meaningful bonds with family and friends that reinforce positive social recognition. Limited opportunities for 'giving back to others through one's actions', termed 'capital expenditure' (Barry, 2006, p.24) reinforce the inability to fulfil responsibilities and be productive (Maruna, 2001). This reduces the social status of young people and strengthens barriers to desistance as they are unable to meet social expectations through legitimate means (Barry, 2006).

Being on the way towards adulthood underlines the increased vulnerability of youth as 'transitional beings' (Turner, 1967), who use offending as a means of achieving short-term and inaccessible forms of capital (Barry, 2006). In Barry's sample of young people, peer groups offered temporary means of support and acknowledgement, underlining the importance of relational agreements among peers that maintain 'emergent relational goods' relevant to persistence and desistance (Weaver, 2016). Relational concerns thus form powerful barriers to desistance given the sacrifice offenders must make to 'knife off' their past including relationships with peers (Maruna and Roy, 2007). Research on the association between drug use and criminality (Bennett, Holloway and Farrington, 2008) further informs relational barriers to desistance for disadvantaged youth, as alternative forms of capital are readily available through deviant subcultures where drug use and crime are intrinsically enmeshed (Goldstein, 1985).

Gendered Barriers for Young Men

Stark contrasts have been identified in existing literature between barriers to desistance among young men and women, suggesting that financial, emotional, and personal problems act differently across genders. Meeting societal expectations of being a man (Gadd and Farrall, 2004) has been identified as a gendered barrier to desistance, particularly for young men struggling to transition into idealised norms of male adulthood (Carlsson, 2013). Studies of persistent male offender experiences have identified crime orientations as illegitimate means of 'doing masculinity' and fulfilling hegemonic masculinities by allowing them to achieve certain privileges advantageous for men (Messerschmidt, 1993). This vulnerability is linked to problems achieving economic independence, autonomy, and control which are all highly associated with normative cultural constructions of masculinity (Byrne and Karen,

2008). Social networks created through persistent offending have been found to mitigate young men's struggles to meet conventional expectations for adult men to be financial providers by providing alternative means of attaining 'masculine mastery' (Carlsson, 2013, p.684). Barriers to desistance are thus informed by gendered concerns that shape offending behaviour as a means of achieving masculine empowerment (Carlsson, 2013).

Gendered Barriers for Women

Research on crime orientations of women identifies coping as an important driving force in persistence due to heightened negative structural and social experiences (Byrne and Trew, 2005). Female desistance studies reveal the impact of guilt and shame as a barrier to desistance (McIvor et al., 2004) affecting women more harshly than men (De Boeck et al., 2018). This is due to their 'double deviance' (Rutter and Barr, 2021, p.176) defying both the rule of law and patriarchal expectations to be respectable and morally upright citizens. Neutralization theory has made a valuable contribution to the literature here in providing a way of understanding how offenders resist negative labelling by providing a rationale for their offending as a justified means of survival (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Nevertheless, the role of stigma and shame in desistance has been underdeveloped within the context of cross-cultural differences (Calverly, 2013).

Findings from Gålnander's (2019) longitudinal study of 10 Swedish female desisters identified the impact of gender, class, and age-graded aspects on agentic efforts to secure positive future aspirations. Their research builds on Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) identity theory by identifying salient factors that constrain and enable women's development of a positive possible future self. Age, linked to cumulative disadvantage, was also found by Sampson and

Laub (1997) to further hinder women's ability to imagine normative futures that would include them in mainstream society. This suggests the interplay of social, subjective, and structural factors in formulating future aspirations (Gålnander, 2020a).

Diversifying Desistance Theory

Intersectionality

Western desistance research can be argued to be limited in its applicability beyond the Global North given their Eurocentric focus, largely on white male samples in the UK. Studies which further consider racial and gender differences in desistance thereby make an essential contribution to counter the largely white male-dominated discourses in criminology. More dynamic concepts have been developed to account for multiple masculinities, the agency of women, local and regional constraints, and complex gender hierarchies (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Researchers such as Glynn (2014) built a new critical race theory of desistance, taking an intersectional approach to understanding the experiences of marginalised black offenders in the USA. These approaches valuably consider the multiple obstacles faced by disadvantaged groups concerning power and privilege and, in doing so, theories of desistance are transformed into 'a transformative paradigm rooted in the pursuit of social and racial justice' (Healy, 2012). These theories offer more nuanced understandings of race and gender, such as of the adultification of young black men in America which meant their offending behaviour offered means of fulfilling 'provider' roles within their families (Panuccio and Christian, 2019). These intersectional lenses are thus useful in identifying 'hooks for change' (Giordano et

al.2002) for different genders and across diverse ethnicities, particularly in conditions of extreme deprivation and socio-economic hardship.

Global South

There have been few desistance studies from the Global South to further develop and diversify contextualised perspectives of desistance (Graham and McNeill, 2019). Studies from South America such as by Villagra (2015) identified a combination of dynamic structural and agentic factors contributing to desistance pathways for her sample of Chilean adult male offenders, highlighting the impact of macro-level structural changes such as political leadership, criminal justice practice and economic development. Additional findings for persistent adolescent offenders in Chile challenge traditional ways of understanding desistance, by highlighting their conformist concerns about aligning themselves with mainstream society, and the ambivalence of those who were desisting (Droppelmann, 2017). Bugnon's analysis of identity being shaped by 'a logic of survival or family destiny' (Bugnon, 2019, p.136) support a relational perspective of how identity might be understood within the framework of persistence. Situations of 'impossible desistance' attributed to the lack of trust in both institutional and interpersonal relationships (Bugnon, 2019) further highlight the significance of destructive conditioning structures in blocking opportunities for desistance.

Research in the township areas of Cape Town, South Africa by Lindergaard and Jacques (2014) discusses agency as both a cause of crime and a significant factor in its continuation among young offenders. The 'dark side of agency' (Lindergaard and Jacques, 2014, p.86) is based on the need to gain different forms of status at different times, allowing young people to benefit from short and long-term rewards. This highlights the temporality and social embeddedness

of agency as a process intrinsically linked to changing circumstances and social structures (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Aspects of 'thin agency' (Klocker, 2007) further emphasise the role of restrictive conditioning structures that constrain agency by limiting their available options (Abebe, 2019). This reinforces the importance of specific socio-cultural contexts in constraining or enabling agency and suggests that structural and relational barriers to desistance are inseparable.

Interdependency within Collectivist Kenyan Culture

A relational approach to agency and structure within Western desistance literature (Barry, 2006; Weaver, 2016; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011) emphasises interlocking structures within young offenders' social networks. Interpersonal perspectives challenge neoliberal notions of individual personhood by emphasising the interconnected roles and positions of children and adults (Wyness, 2013), and are useful for exploring barriers to desistance for vulnerable young adults in collectivist cultures. These support the social theorist perspective that relationships are the 'dynamic, situational ties that define the actors, and not the reverse' (Fuchs, 2001, p.251).

Interdependent Agency

The reconceptualization of agency by Abebe (2019) as a continuum and as linked to interdependence, recognises the need for young people's agency in African contexts to satisfy both aspects of self-reliance and familial duty. This means that for young people striving towards adulthood, their agency is dependent on both their ability to lead an independent life and their capacity to support dependents (Abebe, 2019). Interdependency is thus a core aspect of social and cultural interactions and has implications for the desistance of young

adult offenders whose agency is embedded within their moral concerns for interpersonal care and survival.

Collectivist Culture

Within the field of social psychology and beyond, cultures within the Global South including Kenya have been recognised as largely consisting of collectivist cultures (Vaunne Ma and Schoeneman, 1997). Collectivism refers to the preference of group over individualist orientations and the 'interdependent construal' (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p.227) which emphasises interdependent relational and collective identities. This thesis provides relevance for considering desistance and agency in a less individualistic context where identity is defined in relation to others. Gender differences in Vaunne Ma and Schoeneman's (1997) comparative study of American and Kenyan self-concepts found that women in Kenya have more socially entwined self-concepts than men. These inform tendencies to form subcultures of interdependent relationships that counter patriarchal structures (Sampson, 1988; Schoeneman, 1994). This is further supported by more recent psychological research on independent and interdependent self-concepts in South Africa, which revealed more relational self-concepts for women than men (Eaton and Louw, 2000). Moreover, Njue, Rombo and Ngige (2007) posit that the institution of family in Kenya is centrally upheld by the resourcefulness of women and underpinned by collectivist values and religious beliefs.

Communitarian Perspectives

This socially embedded perspective of identity is further elaborated by communitarian philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of persons 'embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never an isolated individual' (Gyekye, 1997, p.41).

Anthropological views on ethics further posit the role of autonomy and subjectivity within the constraints and opportunities of everyday life, as one that is tied to multiple and sometimes conflicting values (Laidlaw, 2014). Within certain societies, socio-cultural norms and values guide specific ethnic communities and determine an individual's existence by exerting strong demands that constrain decision-making capabilities and bind them to customary loyalties (Stjernfelt, 2012).

In pre-colonial Kenyan society, a life of moral character was based on relationships and belonging, entailing consideration of the community (Mundia and Martínez, 2020). Despite colonial forces fracturing communities (Murphy, 1986) as well as the strong forces towards urbanisation in post-colonial Kenya (Morgan, 1969), traditional communitarian values are still upheld in different ways across its 47 diverse ethnic groups (Mundia and Martínez, 2020). Notions of personhood defined within an ethical arena of moral achievement (Gyekye, 1997), and on the flip side 'non-person status' (Adeate, 2023, p.8) attributed to non-conformity and the failure to uphold cultural norms and values (Adeate, 2023), offer a virtue-centred perspective (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014) of how disadvantaged adults within African contexts might use their agency to attempt to achieve valued goals and reclaim aspects of 'personhood' (Gyekye, 1997, p.52).

Hence within this communitarian perspective of the historical context in Kenya, agency and structure shape people's choices through a legacy of commitments and duties towards a collective of the living, the dead and the unborn (Mbiti, 1970, cited in Adeate, 2023). This points towards potential boundaries around people's choices and suggests an alternative

framework for understanding how human agency might operate within the context of intergenerational obligations.

Kenyan Initiatives Addressing Youth Crime

Attending to the complexity of relational agency within desistance, this research seeks to provide useful findings to inform and enhance existing strategies used in Kenya to support community-centred problem-solving. Initiatives such as “Nyumba Kumi” (meaning ten households) select and bring together community leaders in specific locations to address felt needs that help bridge the gap between the police and the community (National Police Service, 2017). Without sufficient knowledge about how relational networks operate within the differing social contexts of young offenders, such initiatives are limited in the degree of change they can affect.

Moreover, the current lack of youth inclusivity within community policing has been argued to limit the effectiveness of their impact on reducing youth crime (Wamaitha, Nzioka and Kariuki, 2019). This suggests key limitations of formal and informal structures aimed at including young people in problem-solving strategies that uplift their position as recognised persons within society. Government initiatives targeting youth empowerment and tackling social exclusion through the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) are criticised for their top-down, blanket approach and failure to develop targeted approaches for young people most at risk of offending (Wairuri and Kimari, 2021). Developing more nuanced insights into how barriers to desistance are perceived by a varied sample of vulnerable young adult offenders will aid in the diversification of interventions needed to support the desistance process.

This thesis contributes to an intercultural dialogue on the role of structure and agency in desistance by examining how Archer's theory of 'personal and fractured reflexivity' mediates young adults' choices. Conducting research in a 'southern' context where communitarian values are more prominent than in the West offers an opportunity to explore in greater depth the socio-cultural and relational factors that act as barriers to desistance. This thesis adopts an intersectional perspective in its aim to diversify desistance literature by appreciating the multiple obstacles faced by a varied sample of young men and women in harsh socio-economic conditions. Given youth offenders' overlooked vulnerability due to their legal status as adults with full criminal responsibility this research is necessary to begin an appreciation of the challenges young disadvantaged adults in Kenya face in being able to realise desistance.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research questions and justification of the chosen research design. It details the participants' selection process and sampling methods used, followed by a description of the data collection materials and procedure. A reflection on pertinent ethical issues addresses the implications of my challenging and advantageous position as an insider/outsider researcher and outlines the safeguarding and informed consent procedures involved in the research. The chosen methods of data analysis with details of the techniques and reasons for selection are then discussed. The chapter ends with a reflection on the integrity and validity of the chosen research design.

Research Questions and Design

The research questions that framed this study were:

- (1) What are the main barriers to desistance for young adults in Kenya?
- (2) How do young Kenyans' social relationships operate as barriers to desistance?
- (2) What are the environmental and situational barriers to desistance for young adults in Kenya?
- (4) To what extent do young Kenyans' orientations to the future act as a barrier to desistance?

A qualitative approach was adopted to generate a depth of understanding regarding individual experiences (Mason, 2002) capturing complexity and context (Richards and Morse, 2013). Given the central focus of learning directly from participants about their lived realities, a semi-structured interview method was selected for this exploratory study, collecting primary data by engaging participants in dialogue around the research questions. Open-

ended questions were developed in advance, aimed at discovering salient aspects from a broad reading of the desistance literature.

Research Sample

Young adults aged 18-34 years-old were selected based on two criteria: participation in offending behaviour as any 'act, attempt or omission punishable by law' (Laws of Kenya, 2009, p.18) and high frequency of offending activity. While there are differing views and measures used to identify when desistance has occurred, a period of seven to ten years of refraining from offending is often required (Farrington, 1986). To ensure I did not include those who may be desisting, I restricted participation to those whose most recent offence occurred during the last three months, and whose frequency of offending was not less than five times during the last year. I included young active offenders who had been arrested, received formal convictions, and served prison terms as well as those who had not (see Appendix A).

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify participants through my workplace; the charitable organisation Pepo la Tumaini Jangwani (PLTJ) (Wind of Hope in the Desert), which has strong links with young people committing criminal offences in the community. The head of PLTJ, also an elder in the community, acted as a gatekeeper to the target population, identifying potential participants from the list of previous youth beneficiaries of PLTJ. The gatekeeper's trusted relationships with young offenders in the community proved essential in identifying and engaging suitable individuals to be interviewed.

After identifying five young people fitting the eligibility criteria, "snowball" sampling was used to access the most hard-to-reach young people. Asking participants to identify others who

might be willing to be interviewed helped to vouch for my trustworthiness among a group who are understandably uneasy about admitting to involvement in crime due to the possibility of arrest and prosecution (Tartaro, 2021). To help mitigate the risk of sample bias and to increase the likelihood of participants coming from a wider range of backgrounds, I used a respondent-driven sampling approach (Weisheit, 2015). This limited the number of referrals any participant could make to two. Referrals were made by four participants including two well-connected male offenders and led to an equal distribution of male and female participants amongst the total of fourteen interviewees, including two participants from the rural outskirts (see Appendix B).

This approach is similar to the chain referral system used by Watters and Biernacki (1989) and Wright et al. (1992). The strength of this ‘snowball’ sampling approach meant that I was able to include individuals who may have otherwise been difficult to engage or capture. Indeed, a significant number of the participants had never been reprimanded in community court and 21% had never been arrested, convicted, or incarcerated, and would have been missed if only accessing offenders through criminal justice channels (Wright et al., 1992). (See Appendix C).

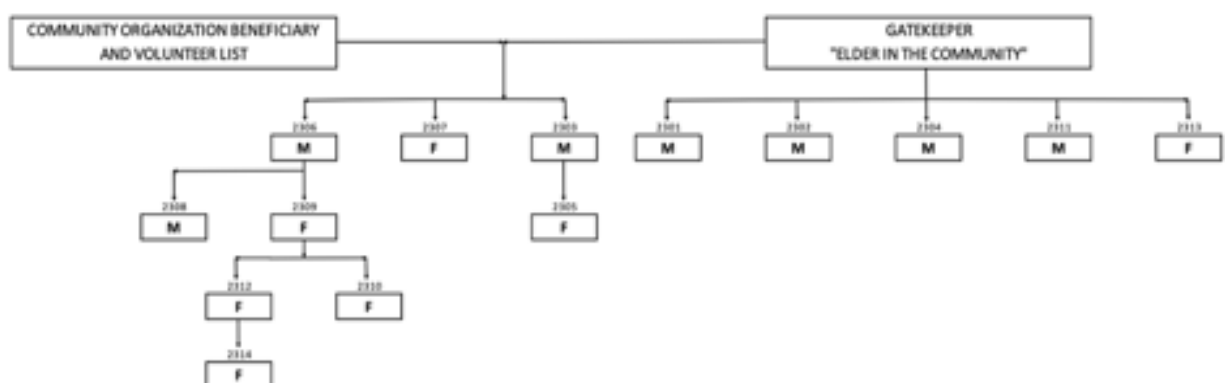


Figure 2. ‘Snowballing’ Referral Chart

A payment of Ksh1000 (the equivalent of £5) was offered as a way of responding to the potential loss of income participants might incur from giving up their time and paying for transport. While the funds were intended as transport allowance, the challenge arose when participants became 'locators' (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) and demanded a cut of the participation fee. The custom of 'pimping' is common in street culture economy, where low-level offenders look for ways to benefit from others' deals (Wright et al., 1992). Financial disputes were avoided by authorising the gatekeeper to handle and ensure payment distributions as intended.

Participants disclosed that they had committed a variety of offences including stealing, possession of illicit brews, robbery, assault causing actual bodily harm, burglary, drug trafficking, stock theft (including cattle rustling), and loitering for prostitution. These represent some of the most common offences committed by young people in Kenya (National Crime Research Centre, 2018). While rape, murder and defilement are also listed among the most common youth offences, information about this type of offending behaviour was understandably not revealed.

Data Collection Materials

A short tick-box survey was developed to help build demographic profiles of each participant (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, self-reported offences, length of offending history, time since last offence, frequency of offending behaviour, and contact with criminal justice system). This was verbally administered at the beginning of the interviews to collect basic quantitative data (see Appendix D).

The same interview questions were put to each participant, but the semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that there was flexibility to change the order or ask supplemental questions (Richards and Morse, 2013). The interview schedule (see Appendix E) was translated by a professional translator into the national language, Kiswahili. To reduce the risks of misinterpretation, particularly for participants with different mother-tongue languages and little or no schooling I practised interviews with other youth from the community as well as the gatekeeper. I was taught the pronunciation of popular 'Sheng' (street slang) terms and how to ask questions in colloquial language that could be easily understood. This helped to build rapport which was a key factor in assuring the quality of the interviews (Wright and Bennett, 1990).

Some questions and probes were constructed to elicit stories and narrative responses (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000) such as "Have you ever tried to stop offending?", and "What happened when you tried to stop? How did it make you feel?", which helped participants engage with their own understandings of why they felt unable to desist. Moreover, questions such as "When you look back over your life, are there any memorable moments that stand out which might have helped you avoid criminal behaviour?" sought to obtain significant autobiographical and contextual information.

Data Collection Procedure

All interviews were conducted in person at the easily accessible and well-known PLTJ offices. The administration office offered both privacy and visibility, with security staff available outside should any assistance have been required, although there were no threats to personal safety during the interviews. To minimise emotional fatigue, interviews were planned to be

carried out over two weeks with no more than two per day. However, due to the unpredictable availability of the young people, it was often difficult to schedule exact interview times. Nevertheless, thanks to the gatekeeper and locators, I was able to conduct fourteen interviews during the two-week time frame.

Most of the participants had basic knowledge of English, allowing me to use a mixture of English, Kiswahili, and 'Sheng' during the interviews to enhance understanding. Interviews varied in length between 35 minutes and 1 hour and 40 minutes due to the varying degrees of elaboration of participants in answering questions. While some particularly younger participants seemed to lack sufficient confidence to express themselves in detail, others were 'storytellers' and illustrated their answers with lengthy anecdotes. Feelings were not easily shared among the participants, with a limited vocabulary employed in this arena and often being reduced to *good*, *bad*, or "I don't know, maybe you can tell me". Adhering to the researcher's responsibilities towards protecting the interests and sensitivities of research participants (British Society of Criminology, 2006), I gave everyone time to find a way of sharing their experience in a way that felt meaningful to them.

Ethical Considerations

a) Minimising harm through personal reflexivity

While doing this research, I wrestled with the advantages and disadvantages of my otherness as a white British female researching vulnerable black Kenyan youth. Reflexivity offers a way of paying ethical attention to how the research process might be shaped by power dynamics in the research encounter according to characteristics such as age, gender, class, and ethnicity (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). Despite my insider position working for over 15 years at the

PLTJ organisation, trusted as a leader and counsellor in the local community and fluent Kiswahili speaker, it was evident that I was also occupying dual positions of power as both researcher and organisational leader.

Considering how I would manage the unequal distribution of power between myself and those I was interviewing involved establishing rapport in a supportive and conducive environment that would make the interviewees feel at ease. The gatekeeper and I had an informal teatime for 30 minutes with each individual before the interview, explaining the purposes of the research study and creating an opportunity to establish trust, or for participants to choose not to participate. I had the additional challenge of distancing myself from the 'far too familiar surroundings' (Bennett, 2015, p.292) to develop a critical perspective on a sub-group of individuals including some I already knew. It meant working against my prior assumptions, ensuring I asked participants to fully describe what they meant, rather than resting on my pre-existing knowledge that might limit the possibilities of 'alternative reframing' (Coghlan, 2003, p.456).

Reflecting on transference and countertransference as unconscious and conscious 'feelings, ideas, impulses, or fantasies' (Johanssen, 2016, p.106), I noticed that trying to understand the intersubjective dynamics of the interviews made the tensions of transference feel like 'the battlefield on which all the mutually struggling forces should meet one another' (Strachey et al., 1963, p.454). I became acutely aware of the affective responses happening in some interviews and noticed how I responded to those participants who perceived me as a 'white saviour' figure 'reinforcing Western authority' (Pennington and Rodríguez-Reche, 2023, p.16) who, if they answered 'correctly', might offer them support to start businesses. I tried to

probe the interviewees to think beyond their initial transferences by asking them questions like “What if there was no support to help you, what do you think would be possible?”.

Despite my familiarity with working with young offenders, the interviews offered unusual and at times emotive encounters with their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I noticed how some of the accounts triggered emotional responses that created an internal tug within me to not probe deeper. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to stay with what was being shared and when it felt respectful to probe deeper, asked further questions such as, “that’s really interesting, can you tell me more about that”. In such cases, rather than maintain a blank neutrality, it felt ethically important to honour and reflect the strength of their emotions by saying things like, “It sounds like that was hard for you, can you tell me more about how that affected you?”. My reflexive journal acted as an essential tool to help make sense of my impressions and sensibilities during the interviews. Confidential online meetings with a UKCP-registered therapist during the fieldwork period reduced the risks of adverse effects on my mental health that might have impacted my safety or that of the participants.

b) Safeguarding and Informed Consent

Safeguarding was a priority as part of my responsibility to ensure that the young people’s physical, social and psychological well-being was not adversely affected by participation in the research (British Society of Criminology, 2006). This included sampling from as wide a range of offending behaviours as possible to protect the participants from potential further ostracization and stigmatisation by members of the community identifying them as “drug dealers” or “prostitutes”. Given that many of the young offenders were drug and alcohol users, it was important to assess if they were sober to be interviewed and provide informed

consent. Safeguarding the participants from emotional distress, such as arousing negative feelings about themselves or feelings of insecurity about having revealed sensitive information about their offending behaviour, was also a key consideration and was addressed such as by discussions around options for withdrawal and breaks if needed. Moreover, the gatekeeper met with the participants after the interviews to follow up on any emotional triggers that they might have experienced. While there were some tears during the interviews, none of the participants expressed extreme distress or required additional support.

To reduce the risk of participants being identified and arrested by the police, I signed the consent forms on behalf of each participant using their pseudonyms to avoid any trail of paperwork that might pose a risk to their safety (see Appendix F). Furthermore, to protect their identities, I allocated everyone a code number and asked the participants to choose their pseudonyms. Complications arose when I noticed that a couple of the women gave the names of others in their peer group. To ensure that participants were not adversely affected by their participation in the research (British Society of Criminology, 2006), I asked permission to replace their chosen pseudonyms with those which could not mistakenly identify someone else. After seeking agreement from the participants that a recording device could be used to record informed consent and the interviews, I recorded the verbal agreement to the consent form and checked that the participants understood the details read out in the information sheet (see Appendix G). After each interview, data was deleted from the recording device, removing any voice-recognisable trail. Digital recordings were securely stored on a password-protected storage device, only containing participant identification numbers and pseudonyms, in a locked cabinet in my private office.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) was selected as a way of being led by the participants' perspectives to develop substantive theories that would reflect the realities experienced by my sample. Rather than analysing data within existing desistance theories, this approach allowed emergent theories to come from the data, or direct new, nuanced readings of existing theories (Glaser, 1978). Implementing grounded theory involved labelling segments of data that stood out, with analytic notes supporting comparisons and the development of more abstract analytical categories that eventually became themes (Charmaz, 2006).

Initial familiarisation of the data involved listening back to the audio of interviews in Kiswahili and using a system of open coding to identify and capture recurring concerns evident in the English transcripts. To help avoid bias I probed for nuanced thoughts and explanations about apparent contradictions and underlying desires that influence people's choices (Tuck, 2009). An iterative approach was used to sort through the data and find what was relevant by 'visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights' (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009, p.77). NVIVO digital analysis software was used to group the initial codes into emergent themes that captured broader meanings relating to participants' attitudes, behaviours, motivations, views, and ideas. A handwritten process of mind mapping was then used to identify, develop, and refine the themes from the existing evidence.

Thematic layers emerged that captured the way barriers to desistance were perceived through findings related to what keeps young adults actively engaged in crime (see Appendix H). Findings were grouped into a framework for understanding behavioural choices without

distorting or imposing a pre-existing theory onto the data. Only after this data-led process were substantive theories developed through the lens of interdependent agency to enable more in-depth theorisation about relational barriers to desistance.

Additional Considerations

To improve research integrity and validity, I worked with independent translators to help transcribe the interviews and translate them into English, ensuring privacy by signing a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix I). This lengthy process involved back-and-forth discussions to clarify key terms and anecdotes, adjusting the data accordingly to accurately reflect the meanings being shared. Moreover, asking questions exploring participants' lives as they presently experience in a single interview holds the strength of eliciting responses reflective of their current situation. However, conducting just one interview with each participant has limitations for the grounded theory approach. Furthermore, despite efforts to reduce sampling bias, those who were interviewed were limited to those who were available during a short time frame.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter explores the research findings, which revealed overlapping aspects of socio-cultural structures and agency, which are central to the study of desistance (Bottoms et al., 2004). Firstly, there is an overview of conditioning structures that surround the youths' offending behaviour, which presents a backdrop of extreme social-structural disadvantage. Discussion of how the socio-cultural context is mediated through interdependent agency is presented across three core conceptual themes that form the main barriers to desistance for the young adults in this research: (i) 'Wajibu' (Swahili word for duty) which captures relational and interdependent social commitments; (ii) 'Uhusiano' (Swahili word for connections) which represents social networks gained through offending so participants can access crucial resources to meet their social and individual needs; (iii) 'Kuzoea' (Swahili word for 'get used to') which describes cultural norms and habitual lifestyles which enable the youth to maintain their relational commitments in their immediate environment.

1. Structural Barriers of Deprivation

Archer's morphogenetic approach and theory of personal reflexivity (2000) felt pertinent to this group as structure and agency appear inseparable under powerful conditioning structures. This section explores the participants' attitudes toward local socio-economic, political, and cultural factors, which emerged in the interviews as key structural barriers to desistance. Three key themes emerged – desperation, discrimination, and exploitation and legitimacy deficit. Together they characterise the young adults' struggle for survival as outcasts in their communities.

1.1. Desperation

As in Bottoms and Shapland's (2003-2007) longitudinal Sheffield Desistance Study the most common barriers to desistance for persistent young offenders also resulted from structural socio-economic and political conditions, including lack of money, employment and 'opportunities for easy money' (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014, p.326). Exacerbated by the increasing cost of living and rapid urbanisation in Isiolo, unemployment and poverty contributed towards an urgent sense of desperation, expressed as 'njaa' (hunger). This encompassed the inability to meet basic needs, such as not having money for rent, school fees, or to feed themselves and their families:

'The main barrier is njaa [hunger]. Not just my own hunger but also my family's hunger. I can't watch my children go hungry. There are people who dump food in the dustbin when my kids go hungry. That's difficult, especially when the cost of flour has gone up and there's no work [...] Why shouldn't I commit crime to fulfil my needs?'

Kabaja (male 34-years-old)

The narrative provided by 26-year-old male participant Generale, describing his experience of hunger, homelessness and rejection when attempting to desist revealed an episode of 'frustrated desistance' (Wright, 2015) or a 'fuck it' scenario (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright, 2016):

'My life changed [when I tried to stop offending]. My wife lacked food and ran away. The house I was renting was locked up. I went back to the streets. I had nowhere to

sleep. When I thought life had become too tough, I went back to stealing so that life could go back to normal.' *Generale (male, 26-years-old)*

He describes how returning to criminality enabled him to reclaim his dignity, save his marriage and rejoin society. In this way, his offending provided him with a way to regain control over his life in desperate circumstances where state support was absent:

'When I went back to crime, it made life a bit easier and better. I was able to bring my wife back home. I was able to pay my rent. I stopped sleeping on the verandas. I started buying clothes. Life just became better. I could wash myself, dress well and I started appearing like a normal person in society, like a good person.' *Generale (male 26-years-old)*

His concerns, like so many interviewed, were not only about himself but were also shaped by ethical and social concerns to provide for one's family as a moral achievement inherent in notions of personhood (Gyekye, 1997). Offending presented an opportunity to escape 'shameful differences' (Goffman, 1963, p.131) and reduce aspects of their 'non-person status' (Adeate, 2023, p.8), as a way of avoiding ridicule or contempt from mainstream society. This made offending a social act influenced by the reactions of others (Weber, 1991). Barriers to desistance are therefore not only a function of local socio-economic and political context (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014), but are also embedded in social and ethical concerns around survival in society. Desperation thus informed their ultimate concerns (Archer, 2000) within the context of their 'relational concerns' (Donati, 2011), emphasising the powerful connection between social systems, relations and individual actions (Weaver, 2016).

Opportunities for legitimate casual work in Isiolo were said to offer poor alternative means for earning, hence limiting their access to conventional sources of capital and legitimate social recognition (Barry, 2006). Options were limited to gender-stereotyped activities, including construction work for men and housemaid work for women. Attempts at trying to engage in such activities had reinforced already low levels of self-esteem, further entrenching their status as social outcasts, and increasing levels of desperation. This was especially the case for women and Cushite youth including Somali, Arab and Borana men. Nomadic pastoralist traditions meant that these young men lacked intensive labour work experience which was more common among agriculturalist Bantu tribes (Amutabi, 2023):

‘I get tired easily doing construction work and am not used to it like others, so I’d rather do what I’m good at like stealing phones or moving stuff with my bike.’ *Abdul (male 23-years-old)*

‘The person I was working for treated me badly paying me so little for so much work. [...] It’s like they see you as someone not worth anything, because they have money, so they can just treat you the way you want. After 3 months I left and went back to my crimes.’ *Kendi (female 25-years-old)*

Inabilities to cope with being told what to do and having to engage in labour-intensive activities for small amounts of money made crime a more attractive option. Unlike legitimate employment which meant having to wait until the end of the month for payment, offending offered the youth an immediate way of sustaining themselves and their families by giving them fast and easy money.

'You know doing this crime you get money quickly. Now the problem is when you're employed, or you are given work somewhere the time it takes to wait for that salary I'm going to suffer but if I carry on selling drugs for example by the evening time, I'll have something I'll have some money I'll get the money quickly that I need for that day.' *Zaitun (female, 33-years-old)*

Desperation acts as a significant barrier to desistance by reinforcing here-and-now survival strategies, constraining future orientations (Day, Bateman and Pitts, 2018). Desperate hope was expressed through aspects of 'wishful thinking' (Walker, 2006, p.54) entangled in tension and striving. In the absence of an unexpected rescue intervention, women depended on the high demand for their crimes to sustain themselves and their families. This hindered their ability to imagine an alternative (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) that would help build a positive future narrative free from offending (Maruna, 2001):

'This work is impossible to stop. Unless a miracle happens, and someone decides to open a business for me. Otherwise, in five years, my prostitution work will have more market. I'll be doing more business with more clients and getting more money than I'm getting now.' *Zaitun (female, 33-years-old)*

'I am just hoping to continue selling drugs, so I can raise the children [...] I see that I'll still be selling drugs, but with more stock and at a higher level than I'm at now [...] the demand is getting higher.' *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

Hence in this context of poverty, inequality, and structural limitations, the youth were confronted with 'njaa' (hunger) or desperation, showing an undeniable aspect of survival and undermined hope for non-offending options (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016).

1.2. Discrimination and Stigma

Experiences of social exclusion, stigma, and discrimination emerged as underpinning the young adults' lower social status. Experiences of shame strongly reduce their motivation and ability to find legitimate avenues to achieving respectable and pro-social roles and identities crucial for desistance (Barry, 2006; Farrall, Sharpe and Hunter, 2011). However there are known difficulties in gaining legitimate employment identified as a common barrier to desistance (Hlavka, Wheelock and Crossyleon, 2015), including a lack of educational certificates and job skills. Moreover, fractured government systems reinforced the youths' 'liminal' position within society as they were denied full citizenship rights, preventing them from accessing legitimate options to acquire and spend capital (Barry, 2007):

'Most people ask for school certificates and an ID. I have none [...] I went to the chief and filled in some papers. I had to put my uncle's name coz that's all I know. I was told to return after two weeks, but when I did there was nothing, maybe I should go again, but I know they won't help me.' *Frederic (male, 28-years-old)*

Frederic's despondency and lack of motivation to follow up on his application for a national identification card is suggestive of the trapping effects of stigma which prevent offenders from reformulating how they see themselves (Maruna, 2001) and undermine their desire for conformity (Uggen, Manza and Behrens, 2004). Not having an identification card blocked the

majority of youth in the sample from full civic participation and the realisation of a complete adult identity (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland, 2010), reinforcing their liminal state of uncertainty as 'would-be desisters' (Bottoms and Shapland, 2014, p.318). Kabaja described his anger about not being trusted by the local community and the limitations this produced on accessing local jobs:

'[...] You find that someone who knows you, and knows you have a history of crime won't give you a job. Instead, they prefer to hire someone from outside. Then we end up missing out. It makes you feel terrible. You become angry. Pushes you more into crime. [...] You have broken the trust with the people in your neighbourhood. It's hard for them to believe you. Even now, if I come into a room like this one, people are suspicious.' *Kabaja (male, 34-years-old)*

His frustration was echoed among many male participants, which seemed to prevent them from engaging creatively with potential opportunities (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002), further entrenching their involvement in crime (Caspi et al., 1994).

Diverse cultures and strong religious beliefs informed the socio-cultural expectations influencing stigma against those who failed to meet approved standards. For example, discrimination was often felt to be amplified by cultural prejudice against those not from the 'right' tribe:

'In the society here in Isiolo, if you're not among the cliched tribe even if you go and ask for work somewhere you won't be given it. Like me I'm a Nubian with *nywele*

ngumu ['hard hair' - a hair texture identified as typical to Nubians with lower social status], I'm rejected by the community; then on top of that they know I do prostitution and sell changa [illegal home brew] so I'm rejected even more by the community. Even if I have a problem no one will help me, so I just have to do the crime and there's no way to stop it.' *Zaitun (female, 33-years-old)*

Women shared a greater variety of discriminatory experiences than men, including being denied hospital treatment and school bursaries for their children. The effects of being outcast from the community increased female offenders' resolve to engage in criminality as a means of survival against all odds. Prostitution in particular, however, perpetuated feelings of shame and guilt as they were unable to uphold cultural and religious gender norms making them guilty of 'double deviance' (Rutter and Barr, 2021, p.175). This was evident in women's future aspirations which imagined a respectful life free from 'aibu' (shame), although they could perceive no means of achieving it:

'[A life without offending] would be very smart I think, I'd be respected, and my kids would eat something halaali [clean]. I would be able to go in the mosque, not that people stop me from going, but I don't feel clean. I really want my life to go well but I need support.' *Ashura (female, 34-years-old)*

Women's failure to live up to the gendered expectations of a 'good' mother reinforced barriers to desistance as their offending provided a means of coping with societal rejection (Byrne and Trew, 2005). A combination of social, subjective and structural factors increased

feelings of shame associated with hopelessness, depression and social withdrawal (Lewis, 1992) impactful on the despair felt by women:

‘It feels bad, being among women who are married and don’t have to do prostitution. Sometimes my kids get problems, with what other kids say to them, like oh your mum is a prostitute, go away. This doesn’t make me feel good to hear that when my kids are playing, but what can I do?’ *Kendi (female, 25-years-old)*

Discrimination due to diverse socio-cultural expectations and patriarchal structural forces on these young offenders blocks their opportunities to desist, as the imputation of ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman, 1963) prevents the establishment of trust and respect needed for supportive relationships fundamental for desistance (Rutter, 2019). This reflects existing evidence pointing to increased barriers for women as perpetuated feelings of shame placed internal and external limits on their choices (Schwartz and Steffensmeier, 2017). Gendered difference is further elaborated through the young adults’ experiences of exploitation, reinforcing their vulnerability and delegitimising police authority.

1.3. Exploitation and Legitimacy Deficit

Structural dynamics of corruption and exploitative, patriarchal culture within the police emerged as socio-cultural barriers by reducing opportunities for female offenders to be helped and increasing the likelihood of them being victims of abuse and gender-based violence:

'If [a male police officer] points to you and says you're the one he wants then you have to go [to his place for sex]. Some might give you 200ksh and tell you to go home afterwards, others nothing, they just beat you up and leave you. If you try to report a police officer has assaulted you, you get chased out of the station and there's nowhere else you can file a complaint or report anything other than that police station, so you just leave it.' *Zaitun (female, 33-years-old)*

Such violent victimization further isolated them from mainstream society and reinforced a sense of powerlessness, further entrenching the women in offending behaviour, and hindering efforts to desist from crime (Gålnander, 2020b).

While male offenders did not experience the same levels of abuse and physical violence as the women, they did report being forced into collusion with certain police officers to commit crimes. Moreover, betrayal from the police produced disdain for the law among many of the offenders. A legitimacy deficit became clear as the police were perceived to fail to uphold procedural and distributive justice, legality, effectiveness and behavioural consent (Tankebe, 2013). The perceived immorality and illegality of the police produced a lack of confidence and reduced impetus for the youth to comply with the law (Eisner and Nivette, 2013):

'The government themselves have become criminals. Even a policeman will tell you where there's an opportunity to commit a crime and send you there in the hope that you will split the loot later. If you don't give them their share that is when they will arrest you and set you up.' *Kabaja (male, 34-years-old)*

Negative attitudes toward the government combined with the lack of opportunities, and a sense that their life was governed by uncontrollable circumstances contributed to perceived injustices that reinforced participants' desperation and fatalistic outlook (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright, 2016):

'The thing that makes us all come together and engage in crime is idleness. We wake up and there's nothing to do except crime. People just sit around and eat miraa. To be honest the government has no capability or capacity to help the youth. The only youth who get assistance from the government are those who are born of the rich.' *Hussein (male, 18-years-old)*

Desperation, discrimination, exploitation, and legitimacy deficit were identified as oppressive socio-cultural factors that act as structural barriers to desistance. The effects of this reduced their opportunities for alternative pathways out of crime and prevented the youth from experiencing a sufficient 'crystallization of discontent' to catalyse desistance (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Age and gendered vulnerability further strengthened barriers for the youth who felt unable to access and generate social capital (Barry, 2006). The next section discusses how interdependent agency acts as a barrier to desistance through the relational commitments of the research participants.

2. 'Wajibu': Relational Barriers of Ethical Commitments

The young adults in the study described meaningful relational commitments, most commonly named as tribe, family, and friends, which encompassed indispensable social ties to those in their immediate environment. The most common barriers to desistance emerged as meeting

the socio-cultural expectations of family and tribe, fulfilling intergenerational responsibilities to children, and realising their sense of kinship and belonging to friends. These relational commitments constituted their 'ultimate concerns' (Archer, 2006) and essential factors in shaping their identities.

2.1 Meeting Expectations

The narrative provided by Abdul below highlights the common practice of extended family care in Africa which underpinned the offending decisions of many participants in the study. This supports the notion of 'everyday agency' linked to coping with the daily struggles of socio-economic adversity (Payne, 2012). He admitted that despite the risks of tarnishing his family's reputation through acquisitive offending, it was worth it to ensure he fulfilled his 'wajibu' (duty) as the firstborn son to meet the cultural and familial expectation to support his mother, father and six siblings:

'I'm the firstborn you see, so there's a lot of pressure on me to provide for the family [...] it's my duty, especially during celebrations like Eid when I am expected to provide for my younger siblings and make sure they have new clothes [...].' *Abdul (male, 23-years-old)*

All the participants emphasised their role as providers and described how this pushed them towards offending. This supports the communitarian perspective of interdependency that is largely based on honouring ethical principles of inherited duty and obligation (Mbiti, 1970, cited in Adeate, 2023):

‘When my father was still alive, I had to engage in criminal activities because his rule was very simple - I am the firstborn of the family and so I need to do everything I can for the survival of the family. I have to meet the expectations of my family to provide food for them and protect our land and cattle no matter what.’ *Laban (male, 28-years-old)*

In this way, the agency of the research participants emerged as interdependent within a context of communitarian values (Gyekye, 1997), which stands as an ‘antipode to the notion of autonomous selfhood and personal freedom’ (Abebe, 2019, p.11). Moreover, for Laban, rejecting intergenerational obligations in favour of abiding by Kenyan law would result in being ostracised from his tribal community. Desistance thus becomes a moral quandary, as the definitions of criminality become blurred between opposing value systems:

‘Those who break the customary law in my community are caught and have their hands and legs tied up. The individual is then tied to a tree and beaten for the whole day as a form of punishment [...] I have seen someone being punished, so I do not want to go against the laws of the community as I am not ready to undergo such punishment, I’d rather go to prison.’ *Laban (male, 28-years-old)*

Similarly, participants living in town expressed fear of ‘mob justice’, when failure to meet the moral expectations of those in their immediate environment results in the community taking the law into their hands by inflicting injury or death on those accused of wrongdoing (Ng’walali and Kitinya, 2006):

‘Most of the time we are afraid of the mob because that’s who we live among. That’s who scares us the most, not even the cops. It’s better when I’m inside, there’s nothing I’m losing. I still get food. I just miss my daily comforts.’ *Keisha (female, 24-years-old)*

In this way, meeting communal expectations and the ever-present prospects of stigmatising shame and violence within their communities formed a key barrier to desistance, reducing their fear of being caught by the police and going to prison.

2.2. Fulfilling Relational Responsibilities

Obstacles to desistance based on fulfilling relational responsibilities were further reinforced for the female participants who were all single mothers, largely living with their children, their own mothers, and younger siblings, in the absence of men. They expressed feeling bound to their role as providers, forced to rely on their resourcefulness at any cost to meet the needs of their children and extended families. Their lives appeared determined by intergenerational obligations shaped by their social and cultural context (Abebe, 2019). For example, Zipporah was responsible for her mother and her deceased sister’s children alongside her own:

‘My mother depended on me to steal for the family [...] I’m the only one they rely on. If not for me there’s no way those kids will succeed without me [...] The house is a rental, life is hard. I think it’s only selling drugs that can give me enough money to keep us going and pay our expenses.’ *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

Zipporah’s situation was common among female offenders, many of whom grew up as young carers sharing responsibilities with their mothers, who would encourage them to commit

crimes to provide for the family. This reflected heightened levels of vulnerability embedded in complex interdependent webs of responsibilities between adults, youth and children within the household (Mizen and Yaw Ofosu-Kusi, 2013).

Women working as prostitutes expressed great strain in managing their offending, household chores, and the responsibilities of their children. Their accounts revealed conflicting supportive and damaging bonds arising from their commitment to meeting their children's needs to be fed, clothed, and educated, revealing the contradictory nature of their agency as simultaneously constructive and destructive (Gigengack, 2008):

'Most of the time when I go to work, I lock the kids in the house, give them Piriton and they sleep. Mostly in the week Monday to Saturday I don't spend much time with them. When they come home from school, I get things ready before I go out to work [...] It feels bad that I can't spend time with them, but I don't have a choice.' *Zaitun*
(female, 33-years-old)

Contrary to the general assumption of familial responsibility and generative concerns as being supportive of women's desistance (Barry, 2007), this combined with extreme financial hardship and weak support networks for these single mothers featured as a significant barrier to desistance.

2.3. Kinship and Belonging

Furthermore, experiences of social exclusion encouraged the young adults to seek substitute avenues for belonging that pull them further towards offending. The participants expressed

spending most of their time with other offenders, organised into groups that worked together. Bonds Keisha described with her 'fellow survivors' created powerful alternative kinship structures sustaining offending behaviour as a way of showing resilience by denying notions of victimhood (Rutter and Barr, 2021). Their stigmatised position in society increased their mutual dependency, compromising individual agency for the sake of meeting the expectations of the group (Weaver, 2016):

Which relationships are most meaningful to you?

'My fellow survivors, because when I don't have, they help me out. [...] We also support each other to offend and get ideas from each other.' *Keisha (female, 24 years-old)*

'I tried to stop stealing and focused more on the sale of solar panels in Marsabit and Moyale towns. My friends in Isiolo put pressure on me to pretend I was robbed while transporting the solar panels and then they'd help me to sell them on the black market. It's hard to say no coz you already owe them so much.' *Mozamil (male, 18-years-old)*

For Mozamil and others, debt to criminal peers reinforced allegiance, providing them with status and credit to ensure protection for future crimes. In this way the offenders 'dark side of agency' (Lindergaard and Jacques, 2014, p.86) gave them short and long-term rewards increasing motivations for offending. In the absence of family support, choices embedded in these interdependent social structures became the youths' 'ultimate concerns' (Archer, 2006) as they allowed them to overcome structural factors of deprivation:

‘My friends are my family because my real family doesn’t help me [...] They try to advise me not to do crime, but they don’t help me.’ *Kendi (female, 25-years-old)*

‘[My friends] I feel like they are my family. I cannot go more than two days without seeing them. My other family is at home, but when I’m out of the house I look for this other family that helps feed my other family at home. If I just stay by myself, I will die from hunger.’ *Kabaja (male, 34-years-old)*

Their belonging to the group thus acted as a significant barrier to desistance as their persistent involvement in offending strengthened what became non-disposable social bonds with their criminal peers (Weaver, 2016), at the cost of breaking the law.

3. ‘Uhusiano’: Relational Barriers of Social Networks

This section explores how the youth further perceived relational barriers embedded in their social networks. Social networks showed the influence of criminal peer groups in persistence (Gadd and Farrall, 2004) as they provided the youth with opportunities to develop ‘social world’ conventions that enabled them to ‘mobilize resources and networks of relations and interdependency’ (Becker, 1982, p.29). The themes that emerged included self-esteem, security, and resting times for female offenders, underpinning how the youth felt attached to their social networks and how they made it hard to stop offending.

3.1. Confidence and Self-Esteem

Disadvantaged backgrounds and lack of emotional support restrained the youths’ choices by offering them limited opportunities, forcing them to rely on criminal peer groups to

accumulate social capital (Barry, 2007) and 'sociability' (Bourdieu, 1986). Anecdotes of childhood experiences highlighted aspects of child vulnerability and 'thin' agency under conditions of mistreatment and abject poverty (Klocker, 2007). Being taken care of through their social networks was thus an important way for the youth to regain self-esteem and made it hard for the youth to break away from their criminal 'uhusiano' (connections):

'Joining a life of crime with other survivors like me was better than being beaten every day and sleeping hungry, at least we could share what we got, and the older guys looked out for us.' Frederic (*male, 28-years-old*)

A significant motivating factor for the men's offending appeared to be praise they received from male bosses within their criminal networks, boosting their confidence. Such opportunities to moderate their subordinated social position were readily available in their networks if they committed to offending (Carlsson, 2013):

'[Selling drugs] is quite easy. I realized it was way better than working at construction sites since you didn't get tired. Later on, I began transporting *bhanghi* [weed] with a motorbike and delivering it to the boss who would pay quite well. I enjoyed it since the pay was quite good. After a while, the boss loved my work and promoted me to a seller since he trusted me. In my mind, my life had changed for the better.' Hussein (*male, 18-years-old*)

The youths' vulnerability was further expressed through hopes and opportunities for protection and support via a 'godfather' figure, suggesting a drive for a protective older paternal figure among the younger men, all of whom grew up without fathers:

'What would make me stop is if I found a good godfather to take care of me in life so that I can leave this life behind.' *Mozamil (male, 18-years-old)*

Social networks also provided some of the youth with opportunities to alleviate their insecurity through relationships with men in government leadership positions reinforcing the stark barriers of legitimacy deficit to desistance, as this gave increased impetus to commit crime. Their hopes for emotional and financial support further emphasised the generational vulnerability as 'transitional beings' without status (Turner, 1967), increasing their dependency on offending as a means of acquiring alternative sources of social and economic capital (Barry, 2007):

'[When the politicians need me] In that moment, I feel powerful of course, I'm in good books with leaders. I've been given assurances of protection. In those moments, I feel like I have a godfather.' *Generale (male, 26-years-old)*

Opportunities within these social networks to enact hegemonic masculinities as a way of boosting their self-esteem were found to further orient the men towards offending (Messerschmidt, 1993). Indeed, self-presentations during the interviews with the older men in the sample revealed demonstrable displays of 'masculine mastery' (Carlsson, 2013, p.684):

'It becomes difficult to stop. Because how do I stop? You know, for instance, I go to my Turkana friends and in their culture, they have to steal. I have boys out there in the bush in the rural manyattas [village] who host me when I need to run away from town. So, I live among the Turkana and become like one of them. I get morale from them. The same with the Meru people. When I run away to the Meru, they tell me, when you have a bad encounter with someone, chop them up and bury them in the ground. At the same time. I am a young man, you know, I feel strong' *Generale (male, 26-years-old)*

Involvement in criminal networks thus represented important interdependent commitments that further entrenched the young male offending behaviour through easily accessible means to gain confidence and self-esteem tied to notions of idealized masculinity.

3.2. Safety and Security

External concerns for safety and security offered an additional barrier to desistance leading the youth to use interdependent agency to protect each other. Lack of safety was frequently mentioned by female participants, describing threats and regular experiences of physical violence which exacerbated their vulnerability and ultimately further trapped them in crime:

'If I tell the people dealing drugs that I'm not going to sell anymore they might think it's a setup and I'm trying to get them in trouble with the government. They can beat me up and even kill me, that happens. It's not safe to stop once you're already in and you've gotten used to it.' *Zaitun (female, 33-years-old)*

‘Girls are not like boys, we get beaten up a lot, even within us when we get mad with each other. Girls get raped, especially after taking drugs or like if someone isn’t sober, they can hurt you. In this town, people pay you to let them use you any way they want, and they use you badly [...] There are a lot of risks.’ *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

They described turning to patriarchal social networks of youths, where men held elevated positions of power, to reduce their vulnerability. While these male peers provided women with protection, women were beholden to them through payment and tip-offs:

‘The boys are there to help you in case someone doesn’t want to pay you, then they come and get the money for you. They take most the money, but you get some. We feel close together, like some kind of protection from the boys, so at least it helps to give us some strength, otherwise it's hard to manage.’ *Fatuma (female, 28-years-old)*

This echoes findings in existing desistance literature that identify pressure from coercive offending partners and pimps as significant barriers to desistance for women (Ward, 2007). Moreover, male participants emphasised the functional nature of their support systems with fellow offenders providing security by sharing money and bailing each other out of jail:

‘My friends are my security [...] If one of us is arrested, we work hard to make sure everyone comes out to help and get the guy released. There are many of us. Maybe up to 50 or up to 100. Just a bunch of friends, from the age of thirteen up to forty, and we think of ourselves as brothers.’ *Kabaja (male, 34-years-old)*

The men also described rules, in this case referring to a set of constitutive agreements that offenders are expected to adhere to for the mutual benefit of everyone in the group (McNeill and Weaver, 2010), reducing risks of danger or arrest:

‘We have certain rules that make some guys jailbirds who, when we are caught or, they are the ones to offer themselves up, they kind of sacrifice themselves to be the one who is arrested. Sort of like Jesus.’ *Frederic (male, 28-years-old)*

This revealed aspects of relational interdependence and social solidarity as a means of resisting structural obstacles of deprivation and establishing security mechanisms which strengthened barriers to desistance. This furthers Weaver’s (2016) findings that underline the importance of relational agreements among peers that maintain ‘emergent relational goods’ relevant to persistence and desistance.

Female offenders described how they organised themselves into savings and welfare groups, although these were hard to maintain as they were often short of payments. Nevertheless, they represented valued circles of security that gave them opportunities to talk and helped to mitigate some of the risks they faced for themselves and their children. Their collective efforts reinforced their relational self-concepts (Eaton and Louw, 2000) and interdependent relationships as a way of countering patriarchal structures (Sampson, 1988; Schoeneman, 1994):

‘We have a merry-go-round like a welfare group, there's one for the prostitutes one for those of us selling *changa* [illegal brew]. We give something either every week or

every month so in case you get arrested we go back to the group then they come and bail you out or they stay and look after your children while you have your case. That's our agreement.' *Kendi (female, 25-years-old)*

The safety and security obtained through peer support mechanisms acted as a significant barrier to desistance by reassuring youth of protection from both the dangers inherent in their offending lifestyles and the lawful consequences of their crimes. As shall now be discussed, they also offered opportunities to reduce the women's stress associated with offending by providing periods of respite.

3.3. Resting Times for Female Offenders

Female participants spoke of relying on their social networks to attain opportunities described as resting times when they could take a break from offending and live 'normally' for some time. This meant taking advantage of times when they could be helped either by family or community. Family connections outside of their immediate offending environment enabled some of the women to access short-term solutions to move beyond structural barriers to desistance. Staying with family members enabled them to share food, sleep safely and avoid the necessity and temptation to offend:

'I like going to stay with my sister in the village. When I go to stay with her, I rest. She tells me not to do crime and drink *pombe* [alcohol], that it's not a good life, to be getting sick all the time. But I can't live with her because she has a husband and a kid in one room. So, after spending like a week with her I come back to town.' *Fatuma (female, 28-years-old)*

They expressed attachment to such nurturing opportunities which provided them with temporary assistance, countering the impact of negative relational experiences often experienced by criminalised women (Singh, Cale and Armstrong, 2019). Community support offered during religious times such as Ramadhan also helped to temporarily lift structural barriers to desistance, meaning they did not have to engage in prostitution or stealing to earn money to feed themselves and their families:

‘During Ramadhan, I can get help to fast if I explain my problems and I can get help to get food for a month so I can rest and be with the children. During that time, I don’t do any crime. During that time is when I pray.’ *Zaitun (female, 34-years-old)*

Moreover, expressions of future aspirations for ‘rest’ from offending could be argued to suggest an underlying wish to one day desist. While many of the women were unable to imagine anything different for themselves in the present, they hoped that their children would be able to take care of them in the future. This emphasised the perceived hopelessness of their current circumstances and diverted hope towards their children as a means of working towards a future possibility of desistance:

‘Having children is a blessing when you can take care of them. They give me a reason to keep going and to find something for them to go to school and to eat. I just hope my kids finish school, I pray to God to help them get work, so they can help me. You know I didn’t finish school; I don’t have any certificates. If they helped me, I would stop doing prostitution and all this bad stuff.’ *Ashura (female, 34-years-old)*

In this way, the narratives of female offenders reveal additional contributing factors of gender and socio-cultural differences that shaped how the youth used their social networks to protect themselves in a hostile climate. This supports desistance perspectives that focus on holistic approaches that take the impact of socio-structural and gendered differences on individuals into account (Farrall and Calverley, 2006). The next section goes on to explore how cultural norms and habitual lifestyles make it hard for the youth to stop offending.

4. 'Kuzoea': Cognitive and Emotional Barriers of Cultural Norms and Habitual Lifestyles

'Kuzoea' – being 'used to' offending – was a frequently used term among participants when expressing why it was hard for them to consider giving up crime.

'You know when you're used to something it's hard to stop, when you're used to going certain places and doing certain things, it's hard to stop.' *Fatuma (female 28-years-old)*

Hence 'kuzoea' represented cultural norms and habitual lifestyles which had developed over time and underlined how the youth offenders' lives were entrenched in coping mechanisms and support systems that damaged their ability to see a way out of criminality. 'Kuzoea' was captured across three themes including accepted norms, internalised gendered stereotypes, and drugs and alcohol use which will now be explored. Archer's (2012) concept of 'fractured reflexivity' will also be applied in this section as a useful way of conceptualising their difficulties in being able to orient themselves to alternative aspirations.

4.1. Accepted Norms

Accepted norms refer to the socially acceptable practices that guide people's behaviour (Bicchieri, 2017) and were found to offer 'culturally acceptable legitimations' (Murphy, 1999, p.205) in line with neutralization theory (McAdams, 1993). The urban youth based their beliefs about their offending behaviour on the criminogenic norms and values within their peer groups that solidified their belonging to each other by reinforcing their social identity as 'hustlers'. This links to existing research that shows the influence of shared criminal norms on the acceptance and prevalence of certain crimes (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974). 'Hustlers' according to the youth meant adopting a 'needs must' attitude that justified their offending behaviour as a means of survival.

'It's just hustling. This is what we believe. It's just a part of our life. Just like one is a doctor. There's a teacher, a driver and there's us, we're hustlers.' *Frederic (male, 28-years-old)*

Rationalisations in their societal context of stigma and shame build on existing neutralisation techniques as the young adults sought to protect themselves from further labelling and exclusion (Maruna and Copes, 2005). By employing moral reasoning about their crimes, attached to their belief in God, they were able to downplay the stigma associated with offending, minimising its internalising impact. Moreover, sharing an oppositional attitude towards the government saw them position their offending as a legitimate rebellion against mainstream social order (Elmer and Reicher, 1995):

‘We are not the criminals; the criminals are the big people who are hiding behind the law. The politicians. They've just figured out how to hide behind the law. For us God is the law, we don't recognise this other law [...] stealing is not the problem, being caught is the problem.’ *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

This emphasises cognitive barriers of desistance as none of the youth identified themselves as criminals or expressed seeing anything wrong with their offending behaviour. According to Aronson (1992), this strategy is used to preserve a morally good and stable sense of self by avoiding psychologically inconsistent cognitions that produce cognitive dissonance. Mikela normalised and neutralised her offending in the town – prostitution and stealing – by comparing it to her previous experience of raiding and killing in the rural village:

‘You know the war and killing we do in the village is worse than the offending I have to do to survive in town for my own needs and those of my children. It’s helping me to send my kids to school and to get something to eat, it’s not a threat to our lives. It’s not that bad, it’s understandable and it’s helping. It’s something I have to do, so life can move forward.’ *Mikela (female, 23-years-old)*

Participants in the sample all spoke about what they felt was ‘normal’ offending behaviour, based on expectations that everyone else would be doing the same. Normative beliefs varied between subcultural norms in urban spaces and cultural norms in the village, indicating different value systems within local contextual structures. For Laban and Mikela from the ‘rural manyatta’ (village), ‘kuzoea’ was shaped by their community’s traditional way of life:

'You know with us and how we live, offending can never stop. As long as we have livestock to rear and take care of there will always be fighting, theft and killing. If the Samburu steal our livestock, we must go fight to get them back, so it will always go on. It's just normal, any time, all times, it has just become a normal way of life for my people, not a crime.' *Mikela (female, 23-years-old)*

'It has become the norm since the whole community is used to it. I am so used to the sound of a gunshot that I can tell you where it is coming from, where it is going or even if it has killed a person or not. I can even brag and say that I am way better than most police officers when it comes to handling a gun. It becomes part of life. *Laban (male, 28-years-old)*

Accepted norms were also influential on how the urban male youth thought about their futures. While they individually thought about achieving masculine status through marriage and family, as a group they opted for a 'live for today' attitude. Their shared survival strategy strengthened their group identity by providing them with consistency and the ability to keep up their offending behaviour (Giddens, 1991). Suggestive again of 'fractured reflexivity' (Archer, 2012, p.301), many youth expressed a limited and defensive form of agency hindering their ability to 'move beyond themselves' (Bottoms, 2006, p.270) and the immediate present towards a future free from offending:

'The only thing I worry about is my daily existence. What I will eat, what I will use. That's all that keeps me thinking. In my crew, this is what we live by. We say that we

live for today and tomorrow is up to God. For us the future is today. Future is now.'

Frederic (male, 28-years-old)

'With the guys I hang out with, the only thing we think about is finding money for today's drugs. We never think about their future.' *Abdul (male, 23-years-old)*

Accepted norms supported the youths' rationalisations about their offending behaviour. Their 'fractured reflexivity' further enabled them to avoid the need to confront emotive feelings associated with shame and guilt, and held them in a state of 'coping survival' (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2020, p.126).

4.2. Shame and Internalized Gendered Stereotypes for Women

Limitations on agency and positive cognitive associations were further suggested by women's resignation to constrictive patriarchal structures informing negative beliefs about their identities. A heightened sense of helplessness and vulnerability was evident among most of the female participants as they invoked negative female stereotypes that reinforced their denial of victimhood further entrenching their self-perceptions as survivors (Phipps, 2014):

'Like I went to school up until form three and then I dropped out. You know I was just doing what girls do and I got pregnant, and I had to give up school...' *Kendi (female, 25-years-old)*

This suggested potential for discernment required during the first stages of desistance (Vaughan, 2007), limiting possible lifestyle choices through perpetuating perceptions of their

damaged female status. Women further described aspects of patriarchal oppression that reinforced self-stigma, which can generate the most damaging forms of shame (John Braithwaite, 1989; Tangney, 1995) through negative emotions (Tangney et al. 2007):

‘We just have to stay with our husbands and do what we are told and give birth to his children. To my people, if you give birth to a girl, that is the key to the men’s property. As a girl, you get given out to be married at an early age before your time to someone much older than you. You are forced into things which you don’t want, so you just get used to it.’ *Mikela (female, 23-years-old)*

Patriarchal expectations embedded women’s disempowerment within the accepted norms of their immediate environment, reinforcing barriers to desistance as feelings of shame and stigmatisation increased their inability to overcome their problems through legitimate means (Rutter and Barr, 2021):

What happened to the father of your children?

‘I fell out with him a long time ago. He was a drunk, he wouldn’t help me. My people tried talking to him then they just said it was my problem and that I’d done it to myself. He used to beat me up, he wouldn’t bring anything home [...] You know it makes you believe you have nothing, only your body, and that’s all you have to sell, and make money from.’ *Ashura (female, 34 -years-old)*

In this way, barriers to desistance were located beyond their control, sitting within the structural constraints of overwhelming patriarchal structures (Rutter and Barr, 2021).

4.3. Drugs and Alcohol

The habitual use of drugs and alcohol had become culturally normalised by the youth interviewed, raising additional barriers to desistance by pushing them further away from conventional lifestyles (Schroeder, Giordano and Cernkovich, 2007). For ten out of twelve participants, dependency on illicit drugs, medications, and alcohol was a key strategy for coping with emotional and physical strain. They frequently mentioned stress, guilt, and depressive feelings that stemmed from concerns over meeting their familial expectations and responsibilities:

‘I mostly feel depressed at night. I cannot sleep without painkillers. My mind is always thinking about where I will get money the next day. At times I am owed money, my father is sick and needs money for treatment or even school fees have not yet been paid. With all that in mind, I end up going to steal at night.’ *Hussein (male, 18-years-old)*

Youth expressed that drugs and alcohol increased their mental and emotional ability to engage in criminal activities and reinforced persistent offending as a means of relieving the pressures of their immediate environment. As well as offering a means to regulate affective experiences, this ‘maladaptive coping’ showed an intentional motivation to achieve a desired state (Hull and Laurie, 2004):

‘It’s a life of constant stress and worry (anxiety)...I told you my head spins. This is why I have to cool it with something, anything, *myrah* [khat], weed, heroine, anything so long as my head can calm down [...] whatever anyone brings me I just share, even if I

don't sell it. Like heroine, I don't sell but I use when we are sharing.' *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

'You know drinking is a problem, you become dependent on it. The drinking also helps give you morale and the courage to go out and do what you need to do, it helps you to fight when you need to. The two go together.' *Fatuma (female, 28-years-old)*

This furthers psychopharmacological explanations that link drug intoxication to impaired judgement and crime (Goode, 1997).

An overwhelming sense of entrenched helplessness was strongly evident among the participants as they failed to see a way out of their offending lifestyles unless they could be saved, further reinforcing their 'fractured reflexivity' (Archer, 2012, p.301). This limited their hopes for the future by preventing the youth from making proactive considerations of how they might realise an alternative self, free from offending (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002). Their responses were suggestive of the self-narratives of persistent offenders found to be similar to those of depressed persons who employ condemnation scripts to doom themselves to deviance (Maruna, 2001):

'The thing that makes us use drugs is to escape our problems. It helps us not to think too much about our futures or thinking any deep thoughts [...] I can't think too far ahead. But if I stopped, maybe I'll be able to think about the distant future and plan.'

How come you don't stop?

'There's no other way, this life is what we are used to [...] But if someone could get us out of this situation, maybe open up a business for us or get us well-paid work then there would be a reason to stop.' *Generale (male, 26-years-old)*

Substance abuse represented both a normative shared and individual activity among the youth, obstructing their hopes and desires for desistance. Their internalised depressive states further increased their susceptibility to drug use as an internalised criminal act (Agnew, 1992). Habitual drug use rewarded the youth with belonging to their peer group as a means of coping with psychological strain from the effects of social exclusion. Criminogenic social dynamics unique to drug use reinforced barriers to desistance by enabling the youth to reclaim denied aspects of social and economic capital (Schroeder, Giordano and Cernkovich, 2007):

'If I stay well and don't steal and don't take drugs, when will I ever be able to be with my people? I don't want to be left out [...] What will I get so that I can also have what others have? Nothing - so I have no other choice but to just decide this way because it's the only way [...]' *Keisha (female, 24-years-old)*

However, damage to their individual health and well-being and increased barriers to personal development and desistance. In this way, the sub-cultural norms of drugs and alcohol abuse enabled the youth to simultaneously use their agency both constructively and self-destructively (Abebe, 2019):

'I've never tried to stop [offending]. Even using drugs, I just use more and more excessively, I even have to pay for it by getting sick and I've been told it's because of the smoke, but I still keep using.' *Zipporah (female, 30-years-old)*

Overall, the findings indicate a backdrop of extreme structural deprivation and overwhelming patriarchal forces perpetuating offending behaviour as an act of desperation and survival. The 'perceived strength, quality and interdependence' (McNeill and Weaver, 2010, p.56) of the youths' socially embedded 'ultimate concerns' (Archer, 2006) emphasises the importance of meaning attached to social relations as barriers to desistance.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore why Kenyan youth persist in offending behaviour and what prevents them from desisting, enhancing intercultural understandings of desistance and informing youth policy and practice in Kenya. The research focused on four main areas: (1) structural disadvantage; (2) social and cultural relations; (3) situational and environmental factors; and (4) future aspirations. Semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of high-frequency young adult offenders revealed a combination of structural and agentic barriers to desistance.

Effects of structural disadvantage were evident throughout the sample as collective desperation, economic strain and relational concerns increased pressure to find fast and profitable options that would meet their own needs as well as those of their dependents. The perceived illegitimacy of law enforcement reinforced structural barriers to desistance within the socio-economic and political context (Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland, 2010). Moreover, the small set from the sample of traditional rural communities faced particularly pertinent structural and agentic obstacles, as they were torn between conflicting value systems that reduced their ability to comply with Kenyan Law.

It was clear from the findings that ethical obligations towards friends and immediate family members were deeply valued by the offenders as a means of reclaiming moral aspects of personhood (Gyekye, 1997). This reveals a virtue-centred perspective that shows how the youth's moral and ethical concerns prevented them from desisting. These ethical commitments and social networks shaped the youth's 'ultimate concerns' (Archer, 2006) emphasising the connection of 'personal reflexivity' (Archer, 2000) with relational interests

supporting existing desistance literature highlighting the importance of social relations (Weaver, 2016).

For younger participants in the phase of emerging adulthood, limited opportunities for social capital increased their desperation to meet their 'ultimate concerns' through illegal means. Interpersonal survival identities preserved through socially embedded coping strategies acted as barriers to desistance and encouraged offending behaviour. This builds on findings by Lindergaard and Jacques (2014), Carlsson (2013) and Droppelmann (2017) that identify agency within persistence as a resource to gain status, control and power. For the male sample, findings supported gendered perspectives of agency in persistence whereby offending presents opportunities to meet the expectations of 'macho' male stereotypes as a way of 'doing masculinities' (Carlsson, 2016).

Cushite ethnicities, women and younger participants showed heightened levels of vulnerability as they experienced increased difficulties in overcoming the effects of patriarchal structures including stigma, discrimination, and low self-esteem. Neutralizations served to entrench the youth in offending behaviour as protective measures against social exclusion by reinforcing their belonging to criminal sub-cultures (Maruna and Copes, 2005). Findings underlined the shaming effects of patriarchal structures on women (Rutter and Barr, 2021) evident in their internalised gendered stereotypes, preventing them from providing for their children through non-offending means. The notion of 'resting times' emerged as an unexpected finding among women, temporarily lifting barriers to desistance and highlighting the different protective functions of social networks among the sample.

Implications

Implications of these findings that underlined offending as a social act (Weber, 1991) support the pressing need to develop social capital and pro-social family bonds among young people in Kenya (Moffatt, 2014). The role of interdependent agency suggests a more central focus on structural interventions which seek to support a sense of belonging (McNeill, 2016), and counter damaging cultural norms and habitual lifestyles that perpetuate offending behaviour. For example, alternative forms of legitimate belonging linked to income-generating activities and mentorship would respond to the male youths' desire for belonging and benevolent 'godfather' figures. Psycho-social interventions aimed at reducing emotional and cognitive barriers of guilt and shame would be of further benefit among female offenders. Preventative family-based interventions addressing the structural economic concerns of single mothers would further contribute to youth policy recommending targeted programme design for specific categories of youth (Wairuri and Kimari, 2021).

Findings revealed how the youth experienced helplessness and despair, undermining hope for alternative non-offending identities. The protective role of their social networks highlights the need to promote strengths by further developing their security mechanisms. This offers a different strengths-based perspective to that developed in Western desistance theory that focuses on developing individual agency to develop 'redemptive narratives' (Maruna, 2001). Given the cultural relevance of communitarian values and the influence of gender, age, and ethnicity in shaping how the youth formed attachments to social networks, it suggests the importance of increasing opportunities for social achievements to improve confidence and self-esteem. An example could be building on pre-existing support systems, such as women's welfare groups to strengthen capital that could reduce structural barriers to desistance.

Developing socially-oriented interventions as a way of alleviating barriers to desistance would be useful for third-sector organisations and international crime prevention strategies focused on building community resilience (United Nations of Drugs and Crime Control, 2021).

The clear importance of interdependent agency in preventing desistance suggests the need to strengthen community-based interventions. However, the perceived illegitimacy of the police evident in the findings undermines their policy on community policing practices and highlights the importance of the aim of the police service to build trust among communities (National Police Service, 2017), and overcome this legitimacy deficit. Moreover, further efforts need to be made on a governmental level to enable disadvantaged youth to gain improved access to civic participation through the acquisition of identification documents. Enabling the youth to acquire fully recognised Kenyan legal identities would lessen structural barriers to desistance by increasing their opportunities for formal employment and improving capital and chances for positive social recognition.

Overall, the evidence supports a socially embedded perspective of desistance that requires interventions to consider relational expectations. This would expand the lens of change away from individually focused interventions recommended to support desistance such as cognitive-behavioural therapies (CBT) and instead encompass family and community system intervention approaches. Indeed, despite success in CBT and cash grants reducing criminality among young men in Liberia (Blattmann, Jamison and Sheridan, 2017), findings in this study emphasise the influence of social and ethical commitments in shaping gendered, ethnic and age-related barriers to desistance. The diverse sample of experiences and perceptions of

barriers to desistance emphasises inclusivity for all youth in crime prevention strategies (Gadd and Farrall, 2004).

Limitations

The practicalities of this study meant that the research was limited to single interviews with participants. Moreover, the semi-structured interview questions that sought to capture broad themes in desistance literature may have limited the scope of findings and fuller exploration of persistence and barriers to desistance not previously identified in desistance research. Macro-level aspects of socio-historical context were also missing from this thesis which would have enriched the examination of structural barriers in a rapidly changing developing context.

Future research should consider developing additional data collection cycles checking and refining emergent categories of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Increasing data collection and analysis phases would improve the advancement of theory development and lead to a refined sampling of smaller groups in greater-depth instead of aiming for general population representativeness (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987). A strengthened grounded theory approach would increase insight and inclusivity between researcher and participants, developing a more accurate conceptual basis for the research topic based on pertinent aspects of participants' lived experiences. This would further enhance a decolonised approach towards developing 'southern epistemologies' by expanding the framework beyond mainstream Western theory.

Despite taking a reflexive approach to challenge my own assumptions as much as possible when conducting the interviews, the capacity to develop trusted bonds with the participants

was limited within the research structure and limited timeframe. Future research could incorporate more participatory methods and creative approaches given their methodological and ethical potentials to minimise the hierarchies between researcher and participant. Such methods would increase reflexivity about how researchers influence cross-cultural relational dynamics with vulnerable cohorts of disadvantaged youth (Yin, 2016) and further contribute to a deeper, bottom-up understanding of cultural practices relevant to theorise culturally-specific aspects of desistance (Hayward and Young, 1999). Integrating beneficial creative activities into research design needs attuning to cultural relevance (Kara, 2015); for example, understanding the creative method that feels most familiar to participants such as drama for the youth could support the expressions and development of authentic narratives that enhance the quality of data while furthering a participant-led approach. Alternative qualitative methods such as longitudinal studies and ethnographic approaches could also provide additional ways of improving accuracy and acquiring rich primary data relevant to a phenomenological exploration of persistence and barriers to desistance.

Future research would also benefit from a larger sample size, allowing for a more in-depth examination of demographic variation and specific crime types. This research was unable to establish links between specific crime activities and barriers to desistance which could be useful in further developing targeted interventions supporting youth desistance. A larger sample would reduce the temptation to make generalised assumptions based on ethnicity, age, or gender, enhancing a more intersectional approach. Despite its limitations, this thesis makes an important contribution to existing desistance literature, highlighting the voices and challenging lived experiences of a vulnerable group of young offenders in sub-Saharan Africa who have been hitherto little studied. Theoretical contributions highlight the complex

interplay of structure and agency in a socio-cultural context based on interdependent practical and ethical concerns.

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Appendices
APPENDIX A
Offending History and Frequency

		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Time since last offence		
Within last week		13	93
Within last month		<u>1</u>	7
		14	
	Frequency of offending		
At least once a week		13	93
At least once a month		<u>1</u>	7
		14	
	Length of offending behaviour		
1 year		1	7
5 years +		2	14
10 years +		<u>11</u>	79
		14	

APPENDIX B
Demographic Differentials Across Sample

		<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Gender Differences		
Females		7	50
Males		<u>7</u>	50
		14	
	Age Categories		
18-25		6	43
25-34		<u>8</u>	57
		14	
	Area Allocation		
Urban Central		12	86
Rural Outskirts		<u>2</u>	14
		14	

APPENDIX C
Contact with Criminal Justice System

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
	Ever Arrested, Convicted or Incarcerated?		
Arrested		2	14
Convicted, jailed or prison		9	64
None		<u>3</u>	21
		14	
	Ever received admonitions in Community Court?		
No		8	57
Yes		<u>6</u>	43
		14	

APPENDIX D
Participant Tick Box Sheet

Project title: Exploring Barriers to Desistance for Young Adults in Isiolo, Kenya
 Researcher: Sarah Kruger (Mst. Student at Cambridge University)

Participant Pseudonym.....Date.....

Age

- 18-21
- 21-25
- 25-30
- 30-34

Gender

- Male
- Female

Ethnicity

.....

Employment

- Formal (Permanent or contract)
- Casual (Temp/ad hoc)
- Hustle (unemployed)

Location

- Urban Central
- Rural Outskirts

Details.....

Time since last Offence

- Within last month
- Within last 3 months
- Within last 6 months
- Within last week

Frequency of Offending

- At least once a month
- At least 3 times in the last 6 months
- At least 5 times in the last year
- At least once a week

Contact with CJS (Informal/Community)

- None
- 1-3
- 4-6
- More than 6

Contact with CJS (Formal/State)

- None
- 1-3
- 4-6
- More than 6

Details.....

Details.....

Length of Offending

- More than 2 years
- More than 5 years
- More than 10 years

Details of contact with CJS (if willing to share)

- Arrested
- Convicted, jailed or prison
- None

Additional details.....

APPENDIX E

Interview Schedule in English

Project title: Exploring Barriers to Desistance for Young Adults in Isiolo, Kenya

Researcher: Sarah Kruger (Mst. Student at Cambridge University)

Interview Schedule:

Participant pseudonym:

Date of interview:

Read and explained the information sheet to the participant? []

Signed and completed Consent Form on behalf of a participant? []

Obtained recorded consent? []

Agreed to have the interview recorded? []

Interview preamble: Agree on the use of a pseudonym to protect the participant's identity and ensure anonymity. Reassurance about the use of code numbers for storing information securely and confidentially. A reminder of limits to confidentiality should there be concerns around harm to self or others. Talk about the interview being about participants' views and experiences about the barriers that prevent them from moving away from criminality, NOT details of their offences. Explain what we will discuss in the interview. A reminder that the participant is free not to answer anything he/she feels uncomfortable with or to end the interview at any time, without detriment. Discuss the availability of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) in case he/she might feel distressed during the interview.

Opening Conversation Starter: Can you tell me a little bit about your life at the moment - what is going well for you, what is going less well?

Section One: Main Barriers to Desistance

This section is about the main barriers that prevent you moving away from crime, whether this is something you've tried to do or not, and what you feel stands in your way.

1. Can you tell me about the main barriers that prevent you moving away from crime?
2. Are there any other barriers that you haven't managed to capture in the photos?
(Prompt to question 1 if needed).
3. Have you ever tried to stop offending? Can you tell me about this? What happened when you tried to stop? How did it make you feel?
4. When you look back over your life to this point, are there any memorable moments that make you think "If that certain thing, or certain things, had or had NOT happened I would be able to stay out of criminal behaviour?"

Section Two: Social Relationships as Barriers to Desistance

This section is about how your culture and different relationships with your family, friends and community impact your ability to move away from crime.

1. Who do you spend most of your time with? Why? Why do you say you enjoy (or do not enjoy) your time with them?
2. What relationships are most meaningful to you? Can you tell me why they are important to you? What effect do the relationships have on your offending behaviour? *Do they help or obstruct your movement away from criminality?*
3. Is there anything about your culture that stops you moving away from crime? Are there any customs or traditions that encourage offending behaviour? How important is this to you and why? How does this make it hard for you to stop engaging in criminal activities?

Section Three: Environmental and Situational Barriers to Desistance

This section is about the situations and circumstances you might find yourself in at different times and what the different barriers are that make it hard for you to avoid crime.

4. Are there certain times of the year that make it difficult for you not to engage in crime? *If yes, tell me more about that.* Is there anything that would help you during these times to avoid crime?
5. Are there certain places that make it harder to resist offending? *If yes, tell me more about that.* Do you ever wish you were able to live in a different place because you think it would help you stop committing crime?
6. How do you spend your time? Do you often wish you could spend your time differently? *If yes, tell me more about that.*

Section Four: Orientations to the Future as a Barrier to Desistance

This section is about your future aspirations, your hopes, and dreams and how this impacts your desire to stop offending.

7. What does a life without offending look like to you? (PAUSE) Is it something you want? Can you tell me more about this? What if anything would encourage you to stop?
8. What do you hope for? (PAUSE) Is there something you want to achieve? Does your offending make this more or less likely to happen?
9. How do you see yourself in 5 years' time? (PAUSE) Is there anything you don't want to become or are afraid of becoming in the future? How might this act as a barrier to you moving away from crime?

The End

Thank participant for their time.

Offer a chance for the participant to ask or tell me anything they might not have been given the opportunity for.

APPENDIX F
Participant Consent Form

Project title: **Exploring Barriers to Desistance for Young Adults in Isiolo, Kenya**
 Researcher: **Sarah Kruger (Mst. Student at Cambridge University)**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEWS)

Please answer YES or NO to the following two statements by ticking the appropriate box. Please note that these are essential conditions for the interview to take place.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I understand the information I have been given and have had a chance to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that the decision to take part in the research is my choice and that I am free to not answer questions or to stop taking part at any time, without giving reason. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I can withdraw at any time, without giving reasons until 1st October 2023. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. If I say anything that makes the person interviewing me think I am going to hurt myself or someone else, I understand that this will be discussed with the head of PLTJ. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to the interview being digitally recorded. I understand that the recording will be stored securely and deleted when the study is finished. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree to let the researcher use written quotes from our interview and conversations as long as no one will know it is me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree to take part in the study, which means being interviewed by the researcher and taking some photographs. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I confirm that I am 18 years old or above and of age to give my consent for being involved in the research study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I, as the researcher, have completed this form on behalf of the research participant:

Pseudonym..... who has understood and agreed to the above statements.

Name of researcher.....

Signature of researcher.....

Date.....

APPENDIX G

Participant Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT RESEARCH ON BARRIERS TO DESISTANCE

My name is Sarah Kruger. I am a student at the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge in England and as part of my studies, I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about barriers to desistance for young adults in Kenya.

What is the research study about? The aim of this study is to find out what prevents young adults from turning away from crime. What you have to say will help people understand why young people continue to be involved in offending behaviour.

Do I have to take part? No, you don't have to take part if you don't want to. You decide.

What will I have to do? As part of the research, I would like to understand the reasons that you do not stop taking part in criminal behaviour. To help me understand this, I would like to ask you if you would be happy to:

Do an interview with me – I would like to ask you to answer some questions about how you experience barriers that prevent you from turning away from criminality. I would like to record the interview on a digital voice recorder, so I have an accurate record of what you say. If you don't want me to record our interview that is ok, you can still take part. You can say no to answering any questions or you can stop taking part in the research at any time, without giving me a reason.

Are there any risks to taking part? Some questions might make you think about things that make you feel unhappy, such as sad memories. You can stop at any point, and you do not need to answer anything that you do not want to. You can also say if you don't want the interview to be used in the study, without having to explain why. You will have until 1st October 2023 to make this decision and I will destroy the interview recording straight away. The Designated Safeguarding Lead from PLTJ and I will be around after the interview to talk through anything that came up for you. The Founding Director from PLTJ will make a follow-up visit after the interview to check on your emotional well-being.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

Taking part has no advantages or disadvantages. Possible benefits to taking part include:

- Talking about your experiences to someone neutral might be helpful.
- You will be helping people outside of Kenya to understand what life is like for young people in Kenya who struggle to desist from a life of crime.
- You will be helping me to make recommendations (based on what you and others say) to the organisations that support young people in Kenya, including PLTJ.

I am here to listen and to accept you as you are without judgment.

What will happen with my information? I will collect some personal information from you - your age, your gender, your ethnicity, the amount of time you have been involved in a pattern of regular offending behaviour, and the time passed since your last offence. To protect your personal safety and reduce the risks of needing to break confidentiality, I will request that you do not share any details of the nature of your offending behaviour. Whatever you tell me, or anything you share about yourself during the research, will be confidential. This means that I won't pass on anything you say to anyone at PLTJ or anyone else. However, if I feel that you may hurt yourself or someone else, or you tell me something about an offence that is not already known about to the police or PLTJ, I will talk to you about discussing this further with the Head of PLTJ to ensure that you and anyone else is protected from harm.

When I write up the study, I won't use your name or any other information that could identify you. I will give you a code and a new name. When using direct quotes, I will change any details about your life that might risk revealing your identity. The information you provide will be password protected and stored securely until 1st July 2024, after which it will be deleted and removed. The only person who will have access to your interview will be me and a contracted transcriber from outside of Isiolo who will be bound by a confidentiality agreement to protect your identity.

How do I agree to take part in the study? You will need to give recorded verbal agreement to confirm that you have indicated yes or no to the statements written on the consent forms. You will need to confirm that you understand what the study involves and have had a chance to discuss any questions with me the researcher.

What if there is a problem with the research study? If you are unhappy about any part of the research study, you can talk with the researcher, Sarah Kruger, or the Head of PLTJ. You can also contact Professor Ben Crewe at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, CB3 9DA. bc247@cam.ac.uk.

If you have any other questions at any stage of the research, just ask me. I also work as the Executive Director of PLTJ. Nothing we discuss will be held against you or affect the level of support you receive from the organisation. I am doing this research study to pass my course in Criminology.

Researcher contact details: Sarah Kruger (Mst. Student at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge) sbk38@cam.ac.uk

Sarah Kruger

APPENDIX H Thematic Layers and Codes Analysis

THEMES	Codes	Descriptors
Structural Barriers		
Desperation	Unable to meet basic needs and those of family, causing desperation	
	*No money	Economic strain
	*No food	Hunger
	*No job	No adequate work options, no skills, work too hard
	*Work is too hard	Legitimate work is too strenuous
	**More free this way	Feel more autonomy offending
	**Not enough money	Don't get what I need when I work
	*Absent fathers	Single mothers left to raise kids alone
	Don't have what it takes	Missing necessary requirements
	*No papers	No qualifications, certificates or identity documents
	*No skills	Have limited capacity
	** limited school	Could not finish school (lacked fees, early pregnancy)
	*No savings	Can't save any capital to open a business or plan ahead
	Needs Must	Use what you have available (body/ any opportunity)
	*Fast money	Can't wait for money later need it today
	*Easy Money	Take advantage of easy wins
	*Nothing better to do	Idleness, nothing better to do
	* Best price	Follow an opportunity for money (can be mobile)
Stigma & Discrimination	Socially excluded	Stigmatised by society for known offending behaviour
	*Rejected	No one can help you, ostracised by family and community, labelled
	*Ashamed	You need to hide what you do from kids/mum, can only share with friends
	*Abused	Get violated by police, violent partners, abused by caregivers, friends listen and understand
	*Outcast	Not like others, known in the community
	*Neglected	Left to fend for yourself, your needs are ignored, you are known
Exploitation & Legitimacy Deficit	Betrayed by police	Corrupt government officials increasing familial/ customary allegiance over the law
	*Used and betrayed	Government officials pay you to commit crime and don't help you/ husbands abuse you and leave you
	*Don't want to help	Police don't try to understand they want to help themselves not us

THEMES	Codes	Descriptors
Relational/ Interdependent Barriers (Wajibu)		
Meeting expectations	Duty bound to my family/ tribe	Abiding by familial and cultural norms (Desistance means betrayal)
	*Our culture	The way we do things (status quo)
	*Conflicted	living in between opposing routines in rural and urban spaces
Fulfilling Responsibilities	Fulfilling responsibilities	Pressure to provide for dependents (Desistance means failure)
	*Gives me dignity	Offending allows me to reclaim my dignity by allowing me to provide for my family
	*Most important thing to me	The ones closest to me
	** Ashamed	Feel ashamed
	**Have to hide	Don't want them to know what I do
	*Conflicted	Torn between providing for my family and trying to go straight
Kinship & Belonging	Belonging found in friendships	Importance of friendships (brothers, sisters, aunt) over family ties (Desistance means insecurity)
I belong to my own people (fellow survivors)	*Friends are family	Alternative family structures
	*Fellow Survivors	Connected through shared experience

THEMES	Codes	Descriptors
SOCIAL NETWORKS (Uhusiano)		
Confidence & Self Esteem	Dependent on opportunities (masculinities)	Depend on eachother for illegal work. Working together or as part of a network
Part of a community	* People that give you jobs	Illegal job opportunities through people who know you
	* Influenced by friends	See what others are doing and want to do the same
	*Work together	Collaborate with friends like a working group
Safety & Security	Reliant on know how for success	Empowered through aquired skills and sense of mastery
Feeling in control	*Learnt navigation skills	Knowing how to navigate challenges, come through practice
	*Tricks of the trade	Knowing how to play the game, how to manage yourself
	*Organised systems of support	Methods for taking care of eachother provide solidarity
Reduced vulnerability	*Agreements	Agreed terms and rules to follow for everyone to benefit
	**Rules to follow	Certina rules you have to follow (pimp system etc)
	*Welfare groups	Orgained savings groups
	*Depend on eachother	Reliant on certain individuals friends or mum, aunt
Resting Times for females	Reliant on children for hope	Future hope in the children (deferred hope for desistance)
Interdependent hope	*No one to depend on	Limited trust and limited support (among friends, neighbours, community)
	*No future	Can't see a way out unless a miracle, future is out of reach
Tied to available opportunities	*Times of the year	Take advantage of times of the year (for rest and offending)

THEMES	Codes	Descriptors
Cultural Norms & Habitual Lifestyles (Kuzoea)		
Accepted Norms	Habitual and normalised behaviours	Regular behaviour patterns that have become the norm (Desistance makes no sense)
Don't see anything wrong with it	*Normal way of life	Customary norms to raid and kill
	*The police help us	Work with the police to make deals
	*Moral reasoning	A way of reasoning that what they have to do is ok by avoiding certain things
	*Not good/ not bad	Don't feel anything really its just ok
	*Impossible to stop	No way out
	*Dependent on being rescued	Depend on certain individuals or places when times get tough, to bail you out, give you work or escape
	*Hard to stop	Can only think about reducing, not stopping completely/ dangerous to stop
Internalised Gendered Stereotypes	Resignation to patriarchal forces	Accepted negative beliefs from patriarchal sociocultural structures
Women	**self-stigma	self-depreciating, live up to negative stereotype
	** helplessness	heightened vulnerability
Drugs & Alcohol	Used to this way of managing hardship	Hard to stop offending, maybe reduction but not stopping completely (Desistance is impossible)
Hardened - survival suit	*Dependent on Drugs/ alcohol	Using substances as a way to keep going
	**Boosting morale	Giving yourself courage to do what you need to do
	**Depressed	Help you forget and sleep
	**Stressed	Stop your head from racing
	**Enduring hunger	Keeps hunger at bay
	*Dependent on mindset	Setting your mind to deal with the hard lifestyle
	*Used to the Hard life	You have to do what you need to do to survive
	**No fear	Hardened to this way of life
	**Self-Destructive	Don't care might as well destroy myself and those around me, so we all go down together
	**Live for today	What matters is getting through today, not tomorrow
	**Belief in God	Rely on prayers to see me through (Reduced agency?)

Barriers to Desistance

Interdependent Agency	TIED	CONNECTED	ATTACHED
WAJIBU - obligations (commitment to relationships)	MEETING EXPECTATIONS	FULFILLING RESPONSIBILITIES	KINSHIP & BELONGING
UHUSIANO- social networks (connected to opportunities)	CONFIDENCE & SELF- ESTEEM (males)	SAFETY AND SECURITY (support systems)	RESTING TIMES (females)
KUZOEIA - used to it (Cultural norms & habitual lifestyles)	ACCEPTED NORMS (nothing wrong)	SHAME AND INTERNALISED GENDERED STEREOTYPES (female resignation to patriarchal forces)	DRUGS & ALCOHOL (dependence)

APPENDIX I
Confidentiality Agreement with Translator

RESEARCH TRANSLATION & TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
Exploring Barriers to Desistance for Young Adults in Isiolo, Kenya

Researcher: Sarah Kruger (Mst. Student at Cambridge University)

I, will be translating and transcribing recorded interviews from Swahili into English for this research project which will be conducted between 15th August and 31st December 2023.

I agree to:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in the form of audio files and transcripts with anyone other than the researcher Sarah Kruger.
2. Keep all research information in the form of audio recordings and transcripts secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return and remove any copies of all research information in the form of audio recordings and transcripts to the researcher when I have completed the tasks assigned to me.
4. Only use the research material for the assigned tasks and not keep or use any of the information for any other purpose.

Translator/ Transcriber:

Researcher:

Date: _____

Date:

(Print name)

Sarah B Kruger
(Print name)

(Signature)

(Signature)