

## **Factors Leading To Premature Deaths of Male Youths: A Case of Karūri Village, Kiambu County-Kenya**

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**ABSTRACT:** If there are people in today's society who need a lot of attention, it is the youth - more so the male youngsters. Statistics show that Kenya is predominately a youth country, the so called ambitious digital generation. Despite this reality, a keen observer will be seriously disturbed by the high rate of premature deaths among the male youth. The current study investigates the factors leading to numerous premature deaths of male youth in Karūri village, Kiambu County while engaging qualitative research using a case study design to collect data through documented sources, questionnaires and interviews. Among the findings is that the male youth is faced with several serious challenges including unemployment, peer pressure and lack of proper mentorship that trigger disturbing early demise among them. These challenges have lured them to acts which lead to their premature death. The study uncovers a lack of adequate action by parents, Church and the government aimed at averting the anomaly and helping the youth accept themselves together with their potentialities as they utilize their time, talent and potency towards becoming useful responsible members in society hence the concern of the study.

**Keywords:** Male youth, Premature death

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

If there are people in today's society who need a lot of attention, it is the youth - more so the male youngsters. A cursory examination shows that there are many sad malevolent forces and negative factors in our society today working singly or collectively to cut the life of the male youths prematurely reducing others to existential weaklings. It was traditionally inconceivable for a young man to die before the parents. Statistics show that Kenya is predominately a youth country with 75% of the population comprising of youth under 35 years, the so called ambitious digital generation and also the future leaders (GoK 2015). Youth is a condition of being immature, young and inexperienced. More and more of male youngsters are living hopeless and helpless lives rather than being vibrant and resourceful, and are not taking their responsibility within the family and society as expected. The lives cut short by premature death of these future leaders certainly exacerbate the situation and spells doom for the wellbeing of the society and the nation. A discourse on factors leading to such deaths with a view to seeking a lasting solution and bring the youth back to productive life is therefore necessary.

The phenomenon of today's numerous premature deaths of youth is undesirable. Considering the plight of the youth, one is reminded of the funeral procession of the only son of the widow of Nain, who the mother expected to live his full life (Lk 7:11-17). Jesus the liberator *par excellence* took the initiative empathizing with the mother as He resurrected her son to continue playing the expected role of a son for the good of the family in particular and the community in general. Such empathy could be extended to deal with the plight of the youth as witnessed in Karūri village which is a multi-ethnic Nairobi suburb in Kiambu County. The city lifestyles bring new values that cause negative influence on the youth in Karūri village which is predominantly Roman Catholic in faith affiliation. The Roman Catholic Church (henceforth RCC) is an ecclesial institution with numerous well performing schools and institutions catering for both gender, Church backed Microfinance banks, hospitals, and youth centers to its credit as well as strategically built Church centers and highly educated celibate Priests and Religious men and women. Moreover it is renowned for its reputable Encyclicals and Exhortations on family. Yet the critical problem of premature death of male youth is real even in Karūri village where the RCC Parish is situated. All these issues provoke our kind of investigation.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Under normal customary circumstances, it is the male youth who have the honor of burying their respective parents. That is why African parents are traditionally excited to mother or father male children proudly expressing their esteemed living fascination. It is an assurance that their sons will guarantee the parents' decent proper burials while also ensuring the continuity, prosperity and harmony of the family after the departure of the parents. They were brought up to be responsible people that would take their respective positions in society for the continuity and solidarity of the family and the community at large. The male youths were, therefore, socialized to play their role with minimal distractions whether physical, psychological or spiritual. It was, therefore, inconceivable for them to die young or before their parents. On the contrary quite the reverse is observed in Kenya today. A cursory observation shows a disturbing trend of more and more male youths dying prematurely hence the concern for the study.

The premature death of the male youth can hurt the wellbeing of the society and the nation since the youth are at the center of the nation's developmental agenda such as Vision 2030 (NACC 2015:vii). Youths' anxious restlessness, persistent dependence on their aging parents, fading virility, and lack of resourcefulness is becoming so pronounced and increasingly a liability not only to their respective families but also to the community and the nation as a whole. This has become a worrying trend particularly in areas like Karūri village in Kīambu County which surprisingly is predominantly a RCC enclave.

What is even more striking is that a good number of the affected families are staunch adherents of the RCC who socialize their children into Catholicism from their childhood, grounding the children's faith through catechesis. As earlier indicated, RCC is a mainstream Church which has powerful instructions, Synodal Documents and Encyclicals on and about families' welfare and community well-being and regards Church as "Family of God." To take but one example, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (*Ecclesia in Africa* 1995:71) calls for the young people to be assisted to overcome obstacles such as illiteracy, drugs, hunger and idleness that thwart their development. Indeed one of the basic Christian principles is Jesus came that people may have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Such is the problem this study grapples with and in light of Jesus Christ - the Liberator *par excellence* and therefore the study's main goal is to identify the causes of numerous premature deaths among the male youths in Karūri village, Kīambu County.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature is made up of two parts. The first part discusses death and the purpose of death and the second part looks at some effects of social change on the behavior of the Agikūyū youth.

### 3.1 Death and Purpose of Death

Humanity's awareness of its mortality, the nature of death and yonder life has been a concern of philosophical enquiry and faith traditions associated with Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Physical death is the irreversible cessation of bodily functions. On the other hand, spiritual death describes man's natural alienation from God, his lack of responsiveness to God, or his hostility to God because of sin (Dictionary of Biblical Theology 1993:115). Death is real and is experienced by every man, it is something that everyone should envisage for himself having been pronounced on men as a result of Adam's sin "for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:19). It is a journey that starts here on earth as a preparation of hereafter, and the African Christian was probably even aware of this life-death-yonder life before the early missionary enterprise. The Missionaries however are credited with revealing Jesus as the life-force and springboard of life thereafter. With many deaths witnessed today, it would be appropriate to regard death as "omnipresent" and although against African principles, it is necessary for death to be understood in order to appreciate life and living (Wachege 2002:26-30). Death influences the kind of relationships we have with other people and what forms our lives will take (McIlwain 1999:6).

Among the Christians, Christ's death was not an accident (Mk. 8:31) but redemptive meant. As Roman 6:10 indicates: "The death He died, He died to sin once and for all: But the life He lives, He lives for God." He willed to take on Himself our mortal nature in order to free us from the sway of death. The first purpose of death is "death to life." Such dying with Christ is in reality a dying to death itself when man was captive of sin, meaning to be dead (Col 2:13). This means man has returned from death and is now alive. Jesus death gives spiritual life. Secondly, bodily death takes on a new meaning for Christians. The Christian dies for the Lord just as the Lord lived for him. It can be inferred that "good death" needs to be seen as part of Good News and that should remove the fear of death because such death positivity is proved in Jesus' life, death, all the way to His glorification (Wachege 2002:244).

Looking at death from another perspective, a psychiatrist point of view, it is not conceivable for any one's conscious to imagine an actual ending of their life on earth - one can only be killed. Death is associated with frightening happenings; a bad act that itself calls for punishment and retribution (Kübler-Ross 2003:14). Ross looks at the attitude of man towards death and explains "psychologically man denies the reality of his own

death and does believe in his own immortality.” Departure of a loved one brings about worries, concerns and a feeling of loneliness and resentment. Despite the dismay that death brings, it can be argued from an African Christian theologian point of view that death is not a conclusion to life (Wachege 2002:225) but there is something to look forward to. For the African, nothing is more fundamental and central as life. The void that death creates is subjugated by the super eminent life vital force. Death only acts as a pathway to a more fulfilling blissful life free from all worries and pain, with never-ending joy. However, to acquire that enviable blissful life one has to constantly strive to live a sin-free life while still on earth. A similar view is expressed through the term “The Living Dead” (Mbiti 2015) and is to say the departed family members continue in communion with their living kin.

Although many people hope to live long, a reasonable proportion of individuals die prematurely. One could argue that any death before the average life expectancy age is premature and in Kenya, the average life expectancy age was 63 years by the end of 2015 (WHO 2015). Death strikes human beings in diverse ways: sickness, accident, alcohol & drugs, murder and genocide among others (Wachege 2002:110-213) and Christians need to acquire new attitudes, new mentality, and new spirit to prevent succumbing to challenges that provoke such death.

### **3.2 Effects of Social Change on Youth Behaviour**

The Agikūyū had a worthy cultural heritage where children were taught ideals of courtesy and diligence. They were naturally educationists, originally teaching through an informal system of education that equipped the youth to step into their responsibilities (Waweru 2011:17). Through this system children were taught ideals of courtesy and diligence. The young men were trained and made ready by their fathers to take up their respective roles in life as family uniters (Kenyatta 2015:67-88). They grew up to take care of their aged parents and finally buried them when they died. Similar sentiments (Cagnolo 2006:51) are shared that the Agikūyū family life was well organized and every member was well acquainted with their roles and duties. The father being the head of the family loved his family, offered guidance and united them. Still he ensured the socialization of the youth in the customary requirements through teachings and initiatic rituals. The male youth therefore had a role model in the father to imitate and just like the father he would live life fully not only to oversee his parents’ decent burial but also serve his family and society in the much esteemed eldership status (Wachege 1992:31-73). The youth mentor’s doctrine warned the young people to avoid shallow pastimes, to shun idleness, to disregard excessive comforts and to consider time as one of the life’s most precious resource. (Cagnolo 2006:103). The informal system of education since has been replaced by a formal education, thus affecting the mode of teaching the children (Waweru 2011:17).

A close look at the family in its socio- cultural context shows the African family has undergone numerous transformations in structure, form and functioning, resulting into various dimensions with distinctive characteristics (Zani 1999:53). Zani continues to explain these changes have been necessitated by the need to adapt to the changing situations such as modernity and different religious forms. For instance the nuclear family has gained root in a large way in the modern African society due to the pressure of social change created by industrialization and urbanization. Such state of affairs has alienated the extended family from mentoring the young people. Modernity has also affected the economic aspect of the society thereby influencing the quality of life the children and more so the youths live.

Children make up an integral part of Agikūyū society. For many parents it is not only the idea of being able to bear children that matters but their quality as well. The more successful the child is, the greater the parent’s joy. Thus, the kind of person the child turns out to be goes a long way to hurt or boost the parents’ ego. The general expectation is that children should be useful members of the society both now and in future (Getui 1998:72). But, despite the importance attached to children Getui reports there is a widespread cry that many are not living to the expectation of their parents and this is causing a lot of concern. A study by Kīnoti raised similar concern citing widespread social evils among the youth (Kīnoti 2013:13). These concerns signify a need for further discourse on issues facing the youth.

A rapid decline in moral standards in the Agikūyū society arose partly because of lack of moral guidance and the failure of what had replaced traditional African moral system (Kīnoti 2013:15). Kīnoti notes that the Church had failed to create moral values that the people respected and followed, and secondly, loss of respect for traditional values had created a moral vacuum that Christianity had failed to fill. The continued dwindling of morality as the reasonable order of things hitherto contributed in shaking the very foundation of Agikūyū moral stool. In relation to this, Getui, while looking at the irresponsible behavior of the youth, with some of their deeds leading them to the grave prematurely, considers a possible way forward and comes to the conclusion that there is need for the family and Church to cooperate in the upbringing and training of young people, in order to make them well-equipped to face the future, of which they will be leaders (Getui 1998:73). Hopefully some way forward for the good of the challenged youths of Karūri Village will be provided through the present work.

Families are reminded that no nation or people can have a future without the young generation, who would ordinarily have received from their parents a heritage of values, duties, and aspirations of their society. Pope John Paul II puts forth a call for the concern for each and every family to have a distinctive characteristic of showing acceptance, love, emotional, educational and spiritual concern to each and every child from infancy to youth years (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981:No. 26). On the other hand, the Synod Fathers see children as living members of the family who ought to be keen to respond with gratitude, love, and trust to the kindness of their parents. The child needs to stand with their parents in their old age that brings loneliness in the moments of their difficulty, thus calling the male youth to responsible living (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965: No. 48). However the youth are challenged, needing help as Pope Francis observes and laments that even the youth ministry has also not been spared by the impact of social change affecting institutions such as the Agikūyū family structure. Consequently, the youth often do not find responses to their needs, concerns, problems and hurts within the usual structure (Pope Francis 2015).

The transformed constitution tasks the government with the responsibility of ensuring the youth have the right to opportunities that give them a chance to participate in social, economic and other spheres of life and that they are protected from harmful cultural practices and exploitation. For instance, although the law allows the cultural practice of taking beer it also has measures to protect those who indulge in it (The New Constitution of Kenya 2010: Chapter 4, Part 3 and Article 55). In the traditional Gikūyū society beer was consumed in social ceremonies like those of initiation rites. They did drink responsibly then but today the youth of Karūri village abuse such rights. Hence the seeming conflict between the spirit of the new law in this regard and the distorted implementation more so on the side of male youths. Empowering the youth through liberating programs is the way forward.

In drawing out the way forward the youth are strongly advised to emancipate themselves from naive approach to life and to assert themselves as special people created in the image and likeness of God thereby not undermining their self-esteem (Boesak 1977). Boesak also assists in explaining that “The search for true and authentic human identity and liberation is also to acknowledge that one’s Africanness is a God-given blessing to delight in rather than a fate to be lamented.” In addition his book helps us to appreciate, be proud of and assert our African values and for the male youths to accept themselves as youths gifted with respective identity, worthy history and culture as well as the talents to excel if they strive to live a disciplined life-style.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

Two theories that gave guidance to the present work are Mediation theory and Redaction Criticism theory. Mediation theory gives three major aspects for a worthwhile involvement in Christian liberation theology as; socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutic mediation and praxis mediation (Boff & Boff 1987:24-39). Social-analytical mediation assisted the researcher to insert herself into the situation on the ground in Karūri village and get first-hand information on the challenges of male youth. Hermeneutical mediation was engaged to relate the findings in the first moment to the will of God found in the Bible and Tradition and to determine whether it is in the will of God for the male youth to die prematurely. This gave the work a theological reflection thus distinguishing it from sociology or anthropology. Based on the above two mediations, praxis mediation gave an inspiration to come up with viable way-forward as the contribution of the work. The practical outcome for the welfare of the challenged youth was drawn with the hope of resulting in intended transformation for better.

The second theory, the Redaction Criticism theory of historical critical method of Biblical study as propagated by candid scholars like Kasemann, Bornkamm and Fuchs (Collins 1983:196-229) aided ~~that~~ the study in doing proper exegesis with reference to the relevant Biblical Scriptures (Wachege 2010). The theory assists in authentic sourcing from the Bible taking each whole Gospel as a literally composition considering each author, his peculiar preferential purpose, his audience, his approach, creativity and theological perspective. The theory helped the researcher to draw inspirations from the Scriptures at an academic level for the good of the challenged male youths and their families. The Word of God was defined from this major source of Christianity, giving the study a comprehensive Christian guide.

The descriptive case study research design was used (Oso and Owen 2009:75). A sample of 44 respondents was selected from the population which comprised the parents, the youth, the Clergy and the local administrators in Karūri village, Kīambu County. Through purposive sampling method samples of two priests, six administrators and twenty parents were selected while the snowball sampling method was used to select a sample of sixteen male youths respectively. Questionnaires and structured interviews were the instruments of primary data collection. The questionnaires were checked for completeness before being collected from the respondents, coded and sorted thematically according to objectives of the study, and then interpreted before being integrated with the secondary data to enrich the findings. To ensure validity and reliability, a pilot study was carried out. Further, the researcher availed the questionnaire to colleagues and the supervisor for review and any corrections and suggestions adapted in the final questionnaire.

## V. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Challenges Facing the Male Youth

In their youth period the young people have increased needs, aspirations and face many challenges. They portray particular characteristics like strong desire for upward mobility and are eager to live their role model (Ime & Unwanaobong 2014:40). Consistent with this assertion, the Karūri male youths harbour these aspirations and are too faced with numerous unique challenges. The study found out that an overwhelming number of youth identified unemployment as the major challenge they are facing. Similarly, the finding from the youth is collaborated by the parents' opinion that the youth are too idle for lack of something to do. Other challenges identified were peer pressure and indiscipline, lack of education and financial constraint and lack of proper mentorship.

#### 5.1.1 Unemployment

The major challenge facing the Karūri male youth is lack of employment, which leaves them with idle time thus giving them opportunity to engage in unhealthy alternative ways of time usage. Any person aged above 15 years is unemployed if during a specified reference period of time (usually a continuously six months period), that person has been without paid employment; available for salaried work but cannot get it; seeking for work by taking active steps to get employment or self-employment but failing (ILO 2012). A report on unemployment shows youth unemployment rate in Kenya at 67% (GoK 2014). The same report shows that youth aged between 18 and 25 years are twice more likely to be unemployed compared to their counterpart aged 26 to 35 years. With an employment rate of 30% among university graduates, the likelihood is a weak positive association between education and employment. Moreover, the finding on youth unemployment corroborates a recent World Bank report and Kenya government statistics, which show that out of 800,000 jobseekers that entered the labor market in 2011, only 50,000 (6.25%) could find employment in the formal private sector of the economy (Awiti & Scott 2016). Finding themselves with a lot of time in their hands, most of the jobless youths engage in anti-social behavior that leads to early death. The youth's behavior is to a large extent fueled by several factors such as peer influence.

#### 5.1.2 Peer Pressure and Indiscipline

Parents in Karūri village are faced with a serious challenge of peer pressure influence in upbringing their children. Similarly a significant number of youth identify influence of peer pressure as something that seriously obstructs them. The parents see indiscipline and irresponsibility of the youth as a direct influence from peers and the negative effects of semi-urban environment that sometimes make some of the male youth to have a "know-it-all" attitude. Regrettably, many youth are pulled into anti-social behavior such as indiscipline by those they associate with. The social learning theory of personality supports this view (Bandura 1977). The theory is based on the premise that behavior is learned and personality can be explained in terms of cumulative effects of a series of learning experiences, simply put the theory posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling. Some youths do not regard much or are not keen on the counsel and guidance given to them through their youth years leaving the parents to watch them helplessly as they veer off the correct path to their own destruction. Quite a number of them do not want to take any responsibility at home, but still expect parental support in terms of education and financial resources. Available statistics on youth unemployment lists lack of relevant skills and experience, and lack of financial resources as the limitations to youth employment.

#### 5.1.3 Lack of Education and Financial Constraint

A number of male youths in Karūri, after attaining their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, or Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, don't advance their studies due to various reasons. The problem is compounded further by lack of affordable training facilities like polytechnics that train on skills, the lack of casual jobs, and guidance on best options to take. There is another group that has successfully completed their schooling but too lack employment opportunities. Overall, the economic situation of the youth is dire and becomes worse when they fail to see any hope of employment even after attaining some level of education. The relationship between education and future work is at best not direct and at worst completely incomprehensible. The youth therefore do not find positive outlet for their energies. Other than these setbacks still the requirements needed by institutions that provide youth with business capital are regarded as mostly beyond their qualification. As a result, some youth hang around the market places and construction sites with the hope of landing some menial job (GoK 2014). Astonishingly, most youth lack someone to turn to for advice and direction during these hard times.

#### **5.1.4 Lack of Proper Mentorship**

The parents themselves agree that they do not spend quality time with the youth as required. This is demonstrated when a father figure for mentorship and role modeling to emulate is lacking for majority of young men where the father is mostly absent or arrives home in a state of drunkenness. In the absence of the father, the family is gravely affected in the upbringing of children and more so deprived of an appropriate role model of paternal behavior because of the father's physical, emotional, physiological or spiritual absence. Given that most youth see their father as one who should be their role model, then, his absence leaves a gap that sometimes gets filled by the youth's peers. The matter is compounded further when the mother, who should also instill moral values in the youth, has to work to provide for the family and she too is unavailable for the children most of the time. As such, parents are no longer standing on their firm position to direct and guide the youth. As a consequence, the lack of parental care due to the working situation of one or both parents and the disintegration of the extended family have encouraged the youth to diverge in anti-social behavior. It is worth noting here that for whatever its causes, quite a number of families in Karūri village are single parent families (Wachege 2003:130-150). The family crisis in Karūri is dire to the extent that the issue of parental negligence has caught the attention of the clergy and the local administration.

There is a unanimous agreement by clergy and administrators that the parents are not playing their parenting role properly. They have left it to teachers and the Church while they are busy working or engaged in other activities. They seem to have forgotten they are the primary educators of their children. The local administrators shed light on the issue by explaining from their point of view why the family in Karūri is in crisis. According to them most parents leave early in the morning to attend to their day's activities, and the sons go about their own business undeterred. No one seems mindful of what the other one is doing. They later meet in the evening, and the cycle continues. Society has turned its face the other way and behaved as if the male youth's problem does not exist within it or the youths' fate is sealed. Long gone are the days when a child was corrected by the older in society.

It is not surprisingly then that the Karūri community blames the fathers and the mothers for failing in taking care for their children, though the community members themselves take no initiative in counseling the youths. The administrators sums it thus "even parents now live in denial of their own sons' evils. They shield them from correction with the full knowledge that they are abusing drugs or are involved in some kind of illegal activity" (Interview 2013). In agreement, the first public inquiry into youths' crime carried out by Goldson and Jamieson revealed indeed the improper conduct of parents is identified as one of the principal causes of juvenile delinquency, therefore proclaiming without hesitation that neglect of parental authority, improper conduct, weakness, laxity of morals and other deficits combine to cause delinquency and could extend to some circumstances that lead to premature death (Goldson & Jamieson 2002:82-99).

### **5.2 Causes of Premature Deaths of Male Youths**

The premature deaths among the male youth in Karūri village are caused by various factors. The overwhelmingly majority of the youth pointed out that the effect of abuse of drugs especially alcohol was the main cause of the deaths among them. The youth and the staff at the local health clinic pointed out that in addition to abuse of drugs the youth also die from suicidal acts, insecurity related incidents and accidents. The abuse of drugs causes them to engage in dangerous behavior such as crime and sex hence the high rate of HIV/AIDS infections. Substance abuse and more so alcohol therefore comes out clearly as a major contributor to the premature deaths of Karūri village male youths. This in itself can be a motivator or trigger for the young person to engage in other activities that seriously endanger his life. The national statistics for Kīambu County show an increasing death rate among the male youths (GoK 2009-2012).

#### **5.2.1 Abuse of Drugs**

Abuse of drugs especially alcohol consumption remains the major cause of male youth death. Drugs are defined as any substance other than that required for maintenance of normal health (WHO 2012). Drug abuse is deliberately using a substance to induce physiological or psychological effects or both for the purpose other than therapeutic ones and when the use contributes to health risks. The National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) identifies the frequently abused drugs and substances in Kenya as alcohol, bhang, tobacco, inhalants and prescription drugs (NACADA 2002). There is a connection between drug abuse and HIV/AIDS prevalence as seen when alcohol affects decision making and judgement leading the youth to perilous sexual behaviour that exposes them to sexually transmitted infections. AIDS among adolescent and youth remains a leading cause of death with approximately 29% of new infection in the group (MOH 2015). To the youth abusing alcohol or drugs comes as a satisfying form of recreation.

Due to joblessness and other unfavorable life situations coupled with idleness, hope is lost thus driving the young men to excessive drinking of illicit brews like *chang'aa* (distilled local liquor) and other cheap unregulated locally made brews. Boredom or fear of it is a motivation for youth to engage in anti-social

behavior (Chesang 2013). According to the situation on the ground, the Karūri male youth drink excessively thus exposing themselves to the consequences. Drinking too much on a single occasion or over time can take a serious toll on one's health in form of a broad range of psychological and physiological dangers such as memory defects, impaired vision, blackouts, hallucinations, and seizures, all of which expose the youth to the danger of death (The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism 2013). Excessive drinking could also lead to impaired judgment, apathy, introversion, antisocial behavior, inability to concentrate, and deterioration of relationships with family, friends, and co-workers.

Many youth die as a result of alcohol related complications that get them into crime, motor accidents or situations that lead to murder. It is unfortunate that alcohol abuse negatively affects reproduction raising concern for the alarming drop in Central Kenya region's birth rate (KDHS 2015). An observer walking casually around Karūri will not miss the sight of a dirty, unstable male youth either seated or lying down, a victim of excessive drinking. Evidently, age-old taboos and traditional social control mechanism have ceased to have force, opening the door to permissiveness that has led the youth to indulge in antisocial behaviour including alcohol abuse. Unscrupulous, brewers entertain even underage children for financial gains disregarding the spirit of the law.

Alongside alcohol the next cause of death to the male youth is the abuse of drugs such as Marijuana (*Bhang*) and Heroin. The drugs interfere with their mental ability, thus rendering their lives useless or helpless. These dangerous and illegal substances are easily accessible to the youth in Karūri. Scholars (Muthigani 1995; Karugu and Olela 1993) argue there is a substantial relationship between one's drug usage behaviour and the participation of their friends in drugs. In confirmation, it has been found out that peer pressure inspires the youth to use substance under false impression that some of the drugs are stimulants for food appetite or increases wisdom and courage for facing life issues (Kiiru 2004). Studies explain that the most important variable in predicting a possibility of drug use is the youth's degree of involvement in peer activities, friends' attitude towards drugs and the number of friends using drugs (Masese, Joseph and Ngesu 2012). The condition on the ground in Karūri can easily be compared to this narrative and can be traced to youth idleness and the collective consciousness within the unlawful groupings. The influence by peer pressure and role modelling provided by colleagues go to affect the youth's behavior formation or modification.

Still some youth engage in crime to make a living and in some cases to enable them to continue with their substance usage. They engage in unlawful group activities and in other crimes like robbery within the Karūri area and in Nairobi city and its neighborhoods as an option in their predicament. Occasionally the youth who commit crimes are arrested and risk their very lives, including entertaining thoughts of suicide.

### **5.2.2 Suicide**

Wikipedia defines suicide as "the act of intentionally causing one's own death" and list the risk factors as depression, alcoholism and other drug abuse, personality disorder and, family and social situations. The abuse of drugs is explained as the second most risk factor causing death through suicide (Wikipedia 2017). However this study findings show that abuse of drugs is the primary cause of death especially in Karūri village. About 2.2 – 3.4 % of those who have been treated for alcoholism at some point in their lives die through suicide (Sher 2006). There are a number of psychological states that increase suicide risk. They include hopelessness and loss of pleasure in life. Staring to what they describe as "hopeless life" and not knowing when or how the issues confronting them could come to an end, there are isolated cases of male youths committing suicide to escape the harsh reality of life. Religion has been described as a relief from oppression "religion is the opium of the masses ... the sigh of the oppressed creature, the spirit of a spiritless situation" (Karl Max 1844). Some of the male youth, claiming to be Christians, do not give religion a chance to be a conduit of letting out their frustrations and save their own lives from ungodly insecure lifestyle.

### **5.2.3 Insecurity and Accidents**

The proximity of Karūri village to Nairobi exposes the youth to several dangers of being mugged, knocked down by vehicles while drunk, having confrontation with security personnel, and receiving mob justice even for slightest provocation which are all situations that potentially can result in loss of one's life. According to the local administration, some youth get involved in unlawful acts in the city and using Karūri as their hideout with an average of 5 youth getting interrogated for being involved in a crime incident. Shockingly, the local medical center treats an average of 35 male youths daily on cases relating to HIV/AIDS, alcohol and drugs use or accident. Records from the medical center reveal that a number of youth have died as a result of serious accidents caused while driving under the influence of alcohol. According to the Social Control theory, weakening of social controls allow anti-social behavior as seen through the effect of rapid industrialization and urbanization where new lifestyles have welcomed new values that have replaced the old ones, creating conditions under which behavior can carry different definitions (Nye 1958). All in all it looks like the male youth is a lone ranger thus calling the participation of the parents, Church, government and the larger society into question.

### **5.3 Intervention of the Church and Government**

RCC is an ecclesial institution with powerful instructions, Synodal documents and Encyclicals on and about families' welfare and community well-being and embraces Church as extended family of God. It socializes children into Catholicism from their childhood. The Karūri RCC believes that it is making a reasonable contribution in the community as far as male youths' lives are concerned. The youth is a recognized group within the Church and many of them are active in the youth's programs such as prayer retreats and choir. The Gospel message preached is expected to create awareness that choosing right actions leads to life and choosing wrong actions leads to death and therefore is a way of preparing the youth to make informed decisions. Accordingly the Church does not preach against alcohol consumption but lays emphases on drinking moderately so that one still remains responsible. The Church expects the youth to use alcohol responsibly and to avoid other substances and lifestyles harmful to their lives. Getting involved in youth sports and choir provides an avenue for recreation and keeps away boredom and sometimes idleness. A passionate call is made for help to be extended to the young people such as the youth of Karūri to overcome obstacles such as illiteracy, drugs, hunger, and idleness (*Ecclesia in Africa* 1995:71).

On the other hand the youth would like to see the Church concentrating more on guidance and mentorship, and providing a platform where they can air their views and get practical solutions to real life concerns, problems, needs and hurts. The youths' view is that the current structures which are the "usual" structures are not performing as far as their issues are concerned. At the same time some of the youth who do not attend Church feel like they do not miss much, quickly observing that Church going peers equally appear hopeless because one thing equalizes them, that is joblessness. To the outsider the Church appears slow in recognizing and reacting to the effects of rapid social change on the youths' lives. Intuitively, the youth have given up hope on any substantial help even from the government, as an agent to facilitate them out of their predicament.

Even though the country has initiated several investments targeting the youth, their benefits have not been realized by the youth. Further, the Kenyan labour market is one that is characterized by inadequate employment opportunities against a large and growing population of unemployed people especially the youth. It is dual in nature, presenting a small formal sector alongside a large informal sector. The government highlights the difficulties contributing to youth unemployment as: Few available employment opportunities against a fast growing pool of employment seekers, lack of requisite skills sought by industry due to mismatch of acquired skills and industry expectation, poor access to information on available opportunities, unfavourable geographical distribution of jobs, limited career guidance and corruption (GoK 2014).

Despite these challenges, the government has put in place some measures to enable youth to access employment. Firstly, in the long-term the Government is putting massive investment in infrastructure development to lower cost of business, attract investors, grow the economy and create jobs in the formal sector. Secondly, in the short and medium-term the government in partnership with the private sector has invested in enhancing internships for college leavers. Thirdly, there are programs that directly employ youth in government initiated labor-intensive constructions and a fourth measure is provision of low cost credit for youth (GoK 2014).

Notwithstanding whatever programs have already been rolled out, majority of the youth complain that they have not benefited from any government-initiated projects. Their observation is that the government has not taken tangible measures to alleviate their suffering. For instance, the sensitization effort on the procedure of acquiring funds for business development from youth empowerment fund does not reflect the hurdles encountered in the practical process that fail many. To a large extent the youth feel and rightly so that the government should make the process of accessing such facility easier for them. Although the administrators on the ground are supposed to be on the forefront understanding and deliberating on the way forward concerning the youth challenges, they do not. This brings to the fore the gap that exists between the youths' problems and the supposed solutions by the government. Alongside addressing the issue of unemployment the government and the concerned institutions should also think of rehabilitating the addicted youths by establishing affordable rehabilitation centers to restore them to employable state.

In discussing the issues confronting the male youth it is inconceivable to continue without mentioning the considerable efforts made by various stakeholders in addressing girl child issues. Much concern has been raised regarding the overemphasis on promotion of the girl child and empowering her for successful life while life-skills enhancing programs for the boy are ignored. Such trend has been set mainly by the many gender - based organizations and, the parents and community seems to have believed that the boy child does not need much guidance way up to his adulthood. This is unfortunate as the belief is based on the conviction that the girl appears more vulnerable to many negative forces in society.

## **VI. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This section will discuss the implications of the findings, the proffered recommendations and finally the conclusion of the work.

### **6.1 Implications**

- i) Karūri community, faced with many life challenges, has to grapple with the issue of the premature deaths of its male youth. The deaths in effect cut short the lives of the much desired youths and the wellbeing of the future society is consequently threatened. Jesus understood the principle of living abundant life and restored many young people's lives as recorded in the Gospels. In that case then the parents, community, Church and the government have a serious task ahead of them to liberate these young males from premature death for the purpose of rescuing the society.
- ii) The abuse of alcohol and other drugs result in many consequences well-articulated in this paper leading to premature death of the youths in Karūri village. The ultimate impact would be that the future family will be gravely affected as these youths graduate to be parents themselves, parents with no proper grounding on values thereby perpetuating the problem. It can be speculated therefore that families will become dysfunctional and the nation will run the risk of having a generation that cannot be trusted to push its agenda locally or globally. Such an outcome will hurt the nation's growth strategy like Vision 2030 for lack of human resource.
- iii) Youth unemployment, characterized by the increasing number of job-seekers is a ticking time bomb that the government needs to take seriously. Investments in human capital are the motor of any development. Therefore, long-term unemployment can be particularly damaging for young people, leaving them with little hope of earning a decent wage throughout their lives, consequently getting into undesirable activities. Moreover, youth joblessness also puts pressure on the parents as they continue to support overgrown children.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

- i) The continuing premature deaths of male youths and the continued dwindling of morality as the reasonable order of things must be a driving imperative to wake up and come back to ourselves, to the family, nature and community. This is to be done by each person taking responsibility for what they are and towards moral development of the youth. Youths must create networks that encourage them when faced with challenges that make them succumb to forces like peer pressure influence. In living a disciplined life-style the youth will be able to realize his potential and talents to excel.
- ii) In solving a delicate problem for example that of abuse of drugs, we should not delude ourselves that there are short, swift or easy solutions to it. As a first step to prevent and control it, parents should be knowledgeable about drugs and signs of drug use and when symptoms are observed, response should be prompt. Being sensitized on the dangers of drug abuse, the attendant problems and their functions as the child's role models is crucial. The family being the base structure must begin to correct the wrongs in respect to restructuring their value systems because it is in the family the youth learn from their elders. It thus follows that if there has to be a positive change in the youths' lives, the family's role as a major socialization agent must be played. Morality ultimately derives its authority from God and therefore the youths' moral standing cannot be separated from religious belief. Such being the case then the teaching of moral values must be a key part of Church's instructions.
- iii) The steps taken by the government through institutions like NACADA are laudable but there is an urgent need to set up adequate and affordable rehabilitation centers to compliment the current efforts and for the reclamation of the youths' lives. Recovery programs should employ a holistic approach with collaboration between all stakeholders. Programs and work opportunities which promote the youth's dignity, wellbeing and social inclusion should be a foundational right for every generation. Further, the government needs to mainstream youth programs into the national strategies that integrate social measures intended to address youth issues. Of much necessity also is an investigation of those government programs targeting the youth seen as not effective.
- iv) The paper puts forward the argument that youth employment is the responsibility of everyone who has the ability to influence change in this area. Employment will keep youth away from the dangerous vices they are engaged in courtesy of idle time. Everyone should be concerned of the weak economic situation in the country, vices like corruption, poor prioritization of development and the inappropriateness of the education system for the job market. Areas for the government to consider include promoting the existing manufacturing industries and re-opening those closed, maintaining a database of all unemployed youth and skills they hold and matching them with job opportunities that arise, and eradicating corruption. The process that the Cabinet Secretary of education has initiated in an endeavor to equip students with right skills is to be lauded though it is still at its initial stages.

### 6.3 Conclusion

The study investigated the factors leading to premature death of male youths in predominantly RCC Karūri village using Christian Liberation Approach. It is clear that the youth die due to various behavioural causes including abuse of drugs mostly excessive alcohol consumption, suicide, insecurity and accidents. The fundamental causes of this behaviour stem from lack of employment, peer pressure, lack of education and financial constraint, insecurity and indiscipline, and lack of quality time with parents.

Such an unfortunate thing can be partially traced to the effects of social change that seems to have consumed the youths with devastating effects. The situation the male youth of Karūri are in today mirrors the rest of the country and reveals a family and by extension a nation in crisis. The premature death of these future leaders spells doom for the wellbeing of the society and the nation. Therefore the restoration of the youth is the only option.

Generally, many youths feel ignored by the society, the Church and the government. Government strategies targeting the youth do not seem to be working, the parents are too committed with work to give enough attention to them and the Church programs do not seem to fully suite the youth's needs. It is here argued that considering the purpose of death, the premature death of the male youths in Karūri is wasted life and should not be allowed to happen. As such, there is an urgent need to address the menace. For the sake of perpetuating the family and society the premature deaths should not be allowed to occur. We argue that curbing the death of the youths and bringing the youth back to productive life will require the full participation of the parents, government, Church and even the youth themselves.

Our work is limited in that it was a case study in a sub-urban area. More studies could be carried out in areas of divergent environments so as to enable drawing of a general conclusion on the topic across the country. Further, considering the current findings and supported by contributions of writers such as Goldson and Jamieson (Goldson & Jamieson 2002) who observed that the improper conduct of parents is identified as one of the principal causes of juvenile delinquency, ~~the authors~~ we recommend future studies to focus on the place of parenting in the face of the challenges identified. (Goldson & Jamieson 2002).

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