

Sustainable solution to the links between socio-economic factors of poverty, inequality, and burglary at residential premises in the Newland's East policing precinct of the KwaZulu-Natal Province

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Abstract: Several social ills such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment frighten South Africa, which all contribute to the high levels of burglary at residential premises in the country. This paper explored the factors contributing to burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East Policing Precinct in Durban. Data collection was achieved by means of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and semi-structured interviews with a total of seventeen (17) participants comprising of South African Police Service (SAPS) members, Ward Councillors, and the Community Policing Forum (CPF) representatives. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyse the data that was provided by the SAPS officials, ward councillors and CPF representatives.

The main objective of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to residential burglary in the study area. This was deemed necessary as burglary at residential premises is not just an invasion of privacy, but it is also a way of depriving individuals of their valued possessions that often have high sentimental value. Moreover, it fosters an environment where fear and anger prevail. As a result, it was envisaged that a study of this nature would elicit insightful knowledge that could assist to curb the scourge of burglary in the Newland's East policing precinct in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

Consequently, the study sample consisted of five (5) SAPS officials at police station level, (2) ward councillors and ten (10) CPF executive members. The categories of participants as set out were selected to gain the most accurate responses regarding the challenge at hand. This was predicated on the belief that conducting interviews with all the officials and stakeholders would be difficult in practice due to time, cost, and geographic constraints. As a result, purposively sampling was used to select the study's population which was limited to a carefully selected sample. The population of the current study comprised all the SAPS officials at the Newlands East police station, and executive members of the Community Police Forum associated with this police station. As this population was far too large to be included in the study, sampling was conducted to select appropriate participants.

The findings of this study reveal that various socio-economic factors including unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, inequality and poverty contribute to the commission of burglaries at residential premises in the study area. A clear perception was that housebreakers in the study area commit burglaries to survive and to feed their drug addiction. These findings suggest that by reducing poverty, inequality and unemployment in the study area, a significant portion of burglaries could be prevented. It is, therefore, crucial for the government and civil societies to make a concerted effort in creating jobs for the unemployed in order to lower the high rate of unemployment and poverty, and hence burglary at residential premises, in the Newlands East Policing Precinct.

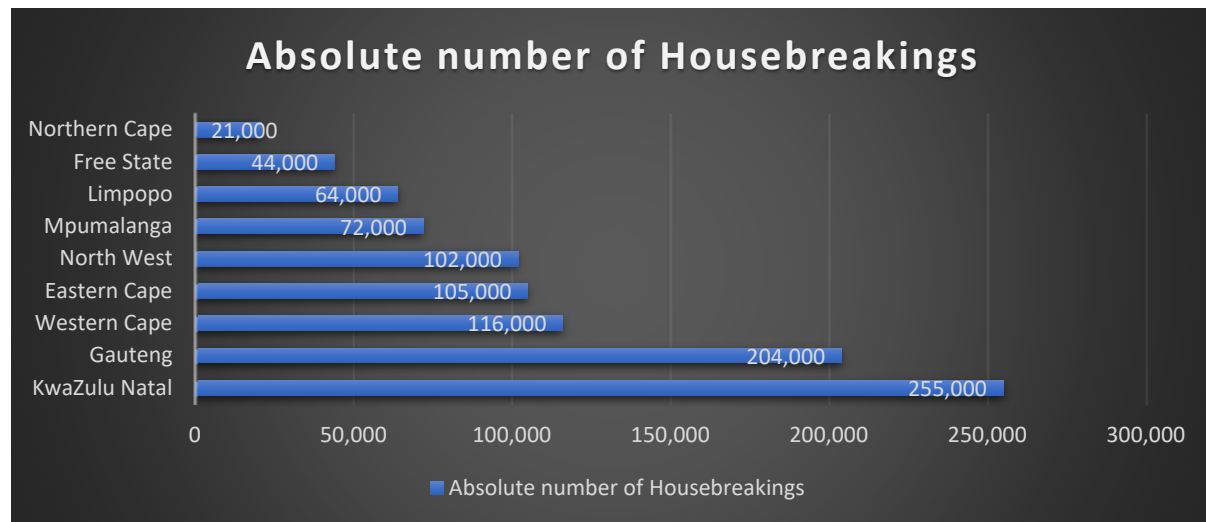
Keywords: burglary at residential premises, drugs, and alcohol, inequality, Newlands East Policing Precinct, poverty, South African Police Services, unemployment.

Introduction

Escalating incidences of burglary at residential premises, also known as housebreakings, is a severe problem in South Africa and will remain a problem as long as so many people face unemployment, poverty, and financial deprivation (Van Zyl, Wilson, & Pretorius cited in Mpofu, 2019). In 2021/22, an estimated 1,4 million incidences of housebreaking occurred in the study area, representing 5,4% of all households in the country. About 59% of households that experienced housebreaking reported some of the incidences to the police. The percentage of households that reported the incidences to the police increased from 56,1% in 2020/21 to 59,2% in 2021/22 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). It was argued by Olutola (2014), that the type and nature of criminality or criminal behaviour tends to follow the pattern of socio-economic development of a particular society.

The province of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) has the greatest number of households who experienced housebreaking. Northern Cape province had the lowest number of housebreaking households as presented in the table below.

Table 1.1 Number of households that experienced housebreaking by province (2021/22)



Source: Statistics South Africa (2021/22)

The selected study area in KZN, Durban is notoriously prone to burglaries at residential premises, and this was the case at the time the study was designed and conducted (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Burglary at residential premises in Newlands East Policing Precinct, KZN, Durban

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
310	407	325	394	393

Source: Statistics South Africa (2020)

Based on the table above residential burglary has consistently been high in the Newlands East Policing Precinct. The objective of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to residential burglary in the study area. This was deemed necessary as burglary at residential premises is not just an invasion of privacy, but it is also a way of depriving individuals of their valued possessions that often have high sentimental value. Moreover, it fosters an environment where fear and anger prevail (Brown, Esbensen & Geis, 2018). As a result, it was envisaged that a study of this nature would elicit insightful knowledge that could assist to curb this scourge.

Brief Literature Review

A variety of factors contribute to burglary at residential premises and crime in general, surveyed housebreakers frequently specify that the desire for cash is to purchase drugs and/or alcohol, which is a primary motivator for choosing criminality (David, 2003; Palmer et al., 2002). At a rate of 90%, active burglars who were interviewed by Wright and Decker (2006) indicated that they had broken into residences primarily to get money. Many offenders in another study stated that they committed burglaries solely to obtain money to buy drugs (Goodwin, 2006). Likewise,

Mothibi (2014) discovered that the main motive for committing an offence as indicated by their sample of housebreakers (all of them were drug users) was their need for money to purchase drugs and alcohol, or for the purpose of 'partying'.

The South African Police Service (2016) indicates that, in some South African provinces such as Limpopo, the Northern Cape, and Northwest, drug abuse is recognized as a driver of residential burglary. Drug addicts commit residential burglaries and trade their loot for drugs such as *nyaope*, which is a very potent but dangerous street drug. Cox (2004) and Thompson (2004) assert that unemployment, combined with substance abuse (particularly alcohol abuse), is highly prevalent among South African inmates and that this behaviour contributes to the country's high crime rate. The authors further state that, substance abuse reduces an individual's inhibitions and shifts the threshold of self-discipline closer to criminality, and thus socially unacceptable behaviour such as committing burglary at a residential premise becomes a viable and even desirable option.

Jenkins and Thomas (2004:391) believe that unemployment is still South Africa's most pressing problem and that highly impulsive people will 'improvise' to attain desirable goals such as money, status, and power. People will thus devise innovative means to achieve their socially deviant or criminal goals. Gxubane (2010:309) points out that it is commonly agreed that young individuals turn to crime because they are unable to find work due to a lack of marketable job skills. Nomoyi (2000) assert that this is due to low levels of education that are linked to elevated levels of criminality which, in turn, result in unemployment and/or low-income opportunities. Thus, it is arguable that failure to manage mass urbanisation in South Africa contributed and still contribute to the state's failure to provide infrastructure like schools and hospitals that cater for the poor.

Ali (2014) states that unemployment in rural areas encourages youngsters between the ages of 15 to 35 to migrate to cities in search of work, and this has exacerbated uncontrolled urbanisation. Maree and Prinsloo (2002) echo this notion, stating that people who migrate to the cities are young people in search of employment who must survive without a social or parental support network. Maree and Prinsloo (2002) suggest that a strong feeling of relative deprivation may then emerge in relation to the material possessions of the rich that are regarded as markers of success. These markers have become very desirable in the context of South Africa's history of deprivation and marginalisation. Even today, many youngsters have dropped out of school or are unable to attend school due to financial constraints (Holmes & Holmes, 2008), and their lack of financial income then becomes a magnet that draws them to attain the possessions the wealthy have.

Fumba and Magadze (2022) discovered that socio-economic factors including poverty, inequality, substance abuse and unemployment contribute to the occurrence of housebreaking in the Ntabankulu Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. The findings indicated that unemployment, which is exacerbated by low levels of education and lack of skills, is a major contributor to the crime of housebreaking. As a result, this research suggested that jobs need to be created through better schooling or skills development programs to minimize the high rate of unemployment and poverty, and hence housebreaking, in the area of study (Fumba & Magadze, 2022).

Methodology

To fully comprehend the contributing factors to burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East Policing Precinct the researchers used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data; it further seeks to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Dangal, 2021). Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020) further argue that "one of the main distinctive features of a qualitative research is that the approach allows the researcher to identify issues from the perspective of [the] participants, [and the researcher should also] understand the meaning and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events, and objects". This distinctive feature rendered the qualitative approach imminently suitable for this research study as it enabled the researcher to explore the perceptions and views of SAPS officials, ward councillors and Community Police Forum (CPF) members on the contributing factors to burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct.

Study population, sample size and sample procedure

The target population is the population to which the researcher would ideally like to generalise his or her results (Welman et al., 2005:122). White (2005:113) defines population as "all elements that can be included in the research". The population can be people, television programs, curricula, or anything that is investigated as the focus of the research project. The population of the current study comprised all the SAPS officials at the Newlands East police station and executive members of the Community Police Forum associated with this police station. As this population was far too large to include in the study, sampling was conducted to select appropriate participants.

Consequently, the study sample consisted of five (5) SAPS officials at police station level, (2) ward councillors and ten (10) CPF executive members. The categories of participants as set out were selected to gain the most accurate responses regarding the research challenge at hand. This was predicated on the belief that conducting interviews with all the officials and stakeholders would be difficult in practice due to time, cost, and geographic constraints. As a result, the study's population was limited to a carefully selected sample.

To select the participants for this study, the researchers used purposive sampling technique. This type of sampling uses purposeful selection of participants because of the attributes the participants hold. To put it in much simpler terms, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002). Baxter and Babbie (2003:135) also offer a comprehensive definition and define it as a method “where a researcher uses his/her own judgment to select a population that reflects an important aspect of the research, it is obtained according to the discretion of someone who is familiar with the relevant characteristics of the population”. Thus, purposive sampling in this study entailed selecting individuals from the target groups (the SAPS, ward councillors and CPFs) by hand. This sampling approach was appropriate because the participants who were selected were well able to inform the researcher’s understanding of the topic under investigation as they provided detailed information on the study subject. Bhattacharjee (2012) clarifies that experts are likely to be more familiar with the subject matter compared to non-experts, and that views obtained from a sample of experts are more trustworthy than those from a sample that consists of non-experts, even though the outcomes based on such a research sample are still not generalisable to the entire population under study.

Data collection techniques

Interview technique was used to collect data in this study. The purpose of interviewing is to elicit rich empirical data to answer the study’s key research questions. The principal researcher conducted individual (one-on-one) interviews with the five SAPS officials and two Ward councillors while focus group discussions were conducted with ten CPF executive members to collect relevant and rich data. According to Valenzuela and Shrivasta (2002), interviews are particularly effective for eliciting stories and learning from the story underlying a participant's experiences. In this sense, the interviewer can pursue in-depth information on the topic. Interviews can also be used as a follow-up to investigate specific participants' responses to the questions posed.

Data analysis

To analyse the data that was provided by the SAPS officials, ward councillors and the CPF representatives in this study, the researcher used a data analysis method suitable for qualitative research which is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data as it organises and describes data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher followed Braun and Clarke (2006) six stage guide which included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and lastly producing the report. Thematic analysis helped the researcher in sourcing out helpful data from all the aggregate data that was gathered and to recognise patterns of importance over the information that gave a response to the research questions and objectives of this study.

Findings and Discussion

In any society, crime is an extraordinarily complex social and economic problem. It is truer for South Africa than for many other countries because of its unique political history and erstwhile apartheid system. South Africa has overcome the specific risks of instability exceptionally well in the preliminary stages of radical political transformation. The unfolding of the transformation process in terms of economic and social dimensions has not only been complex and multi-dimensional, but it has also been a time-consuming and lengthy process that had to be strategically planned and professionally managed. When the participants were asked about the factors associated with residential burglary in the study area, a variety of factors were mentioned which included unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, inequality, and poverty. The extent of poverty and inequality is of such a nature that it cannot be rectified overnight, particularly as about 18.2 million individuals live in extreme poverty (Statista, 2023) and South Africa (SA) is the most unequal country among 164 nations (World Bank, 2022).

Theme One: Poverty, unemployment, and drug use

The participants emphasised that housebreakers in the study area committed some of these burglaries to survive. These cited contributing factors are in harmony with the findings of other South African studies such as those that were conducted by Cox (2004) and Thompson (2004). The just cited authors claim that there is a direct connection between criminality, drug usage, and unemployment as there are few honest job opportunities accessible during tough economic

times. Smith (2015) additionally states that the worsening social and economic circumstances in South Africa may attract more individuals to crime. It was posited by Olutola (2012) that crime rate will continue to rise if society continue to rely majorly on the criminal justice system for its prevention. Shabangu (2006) concurs that unemployment breeds poverty, which consequently breeds criminality. Below are responses that highlight this theme:

“The social standing of the community is that people are living from hand to mouth and cannot afford to have proper security measures for example security monitoring, burglar bars, gates, and fencing of properties” (KII-A: 01:03).

“The contributing factors include a whole lot of sociodemographic factors, drugs, and socio-economic factors” (KII-A: 01:01).

“There is elevated level of unemployment in the area, people are not working. Also, the youth in the area are heavily involved in drugs” (FGD-A: 03:06).

“The reason for this is that there is a high rate of unemployment and poverty in the area, so people use the opportunities they get to burglarise, steal, and go sell those stolen goods. Furthermore, there is a high rate of drug abuse in the community. The drug addicts in area even steal things from their own homes just to get something to sell and buy those drugs” (FGD-A: 03:04).

“Burglary is increasing at an alarming rate in my Ward, and this is mostly due to the area's high unemployment rate. The council is frequently criticised for this, but there is only so much we can do” (KII-A: 06:04).

The above responses are also consistent with findings reported in studies that were conducted in the United States and that revealed that "inadequate employment opportunities amongst lower economic African American teenage boys contributed to this group's social marginalization and, as a result, they perceived 'hustling' as a viable path towards achieving economic needs, social respectability, and a sense of self as a man" (Whitehead, Peterson & Kaljee as cited in Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning, 2001). ‘Hustling’ is described as engaging in money-making activities that may or may not be considered legal by the public.

Some participants emphasised high levels of drug usage in the area as one of the contributing factors to burglary. According to Khumalo, Shumba and Mkhize (2019), the problem of substance abuse is a big concern in South Africa. The latter authors mention that substance abusers in Durban are known as 'nyaope' guys or 'amaphara', which are alternative terms for parasites. Groups of young guys who are heavily involved in drugs are often the ones that perpetrate burglaries in low-income neighbourhoods. Below is an excerpt that exemplifies this viewpoint:

“Drugs! There are so many drug addicts in the area. However, there were some which were arrested” (KII-A: 01:02).

“There are drugs in the area, alcohol abuse, and differences in socioeconomic statuses” (FGD-A: 03:01).

“Several young people residing in my Ward are subjected to peer pressure from their peers. Whereas some of these criminals commit burglaries to support themselves as well as their families, others engage in these burglaries to feed their drug addiction and consume alcohol. Well, the youth here are heavily involved in drugs. There is even a crossroad where they consume the drug ‘whoonga’ and they call it ‘cross leWhoonga’ here” (KII-A: 06:06).

From the participants’ viewpoint there is a definite link between poverty, unemployment, the use of intoxicating substances, and the burglary of residential premises. Brown, Esbensen and Geis (2007:281) explain that the general strain theory clarifies that when people (who have criminal tendencies) are under strain, feel stressed, or are frustrated, they are likely to commit a crime, and these crimes are usually perpetrated "as a result of failed goals". These authors further state that this theory posits that many such individuals commit a burglary because their circumstances frustrate them. Thus, most burglars commit burglaries because they are unemployed and unable to make ends meet to survive and feed their families. As a result, they steal and resell stolen products to get money. These findings highlight the need for government and private enterprise intervention to create jobs.

Theme Two: Inequality

Dauids et al. (2005) state that, while poverty refers to a lack of resources, inequality refers to the unequal distribution of those resources. Some participants in the study explained that housing inequality contributes to residential burglary in the study area:

“The rate of unemployment is high there and you find the youth roaming around during the day doing nothing. The youth here are also involved in drugs, and especially iWonga in the area is problematic. You also have some informal settlements and temporary shelters there in Westrich which causes problems as they bring people from different areas and all those people are unemployed and currently waiting for houses from the government and not working so they would do anything to survive” (KII-A: 01:05).

“The area of Westrich has a mixture of people; people who are middle class and those who are lower class. So, this is what is attracting housebreakers to that community” (FGD-A: 03:09).

“Socio-economic reasons. Some of the properties in Newlands West area are lavish as compared to others and this gives the impression that the residents are affluent. There are so informal shacks next to formal apartments and homes here which leads to burglaries” (FGD-A: 03:08).

From the response above it is evident that the proximity of a well-off neighbourhood to a poorer area encourages burglary as persons in the poorer area are inclined to commit this crime in the adjacent area for personal gain (Erasmus & Radebe, 2013: n.p.). This finding corroborates the latter authors’ statement in a newspaper article about SAPS 2012/2013 crime data, arguing that households in middle- to upper-income suburbs (formal settlements) that are next to, or close to, a disadvantaged neighbourhood (such as an informal settlement) are at a higher risk of residential burglary than those that are further away.

Conclusion And Recommendations

Various factors that contribute to the commission of burglaries at residential premises in the study area were identified. These included unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, inequality, and poverty. A clear perception was that housebreakers in the study area commit burglaries to survive and to feed their drug addiction. Moreover, Newlands East Policing Precinct is an area that is characterised by both affluent and deprived neighbourhoods and this fact results in the affluent-looking homes being targeted because of the perception of high financial rewards to be gained from burglarising such houses. As a result, this study recommends the following:

Recommendation One: Effective residential burglary prevention can only be achieved through an integrated strategy towards crime prevention. Such a strategy must incorporate the efforts of individual families, entire local communities, law enforcement, and development/construction agencies to ensure crime prevention. Such agencies should also include schools and juvenile rehabilitation bodies as there is overpowering evidence in the literature that juvenile delinquency is encouraged by drugs, alcohol, and unemployment, leads to residential burglary. Crime prevention programs and initiatives in the community should thus focus on the employment of strategies that discourage criminal behaviour, particularly by the youth. Moreover, crime deterrent measures and changing criminogenic factors will contribute to curbing criminal tendencies and behaviour.

Recommendation Two: It is recommended that the local SAPS form a task team to increase drug arrests as community members mentioned that there are areas in the community which are known for selling and dealing with drugs “Wonga cross.” This would result in less crime in the community as - there would be fewer “Wonga” addicts who are continually looking for ways to finance their drug addiction. Furthermore, parents are urged to take their children to rehabilitation Centres when they have discovered that they have a drug problem.

Recommendation Three: This research backs up the idea that most burglaries are motivated by a desire for money. As a result, if South African society is burdened with high unemployment and poverty, the societal conditions are expected to remain favourable for criminals to pursue a career in burglary. Therefore, it is highly recommended that social crime prevention programmes be implemented in areas of poverty and high unemployment, with the aim of addressing the socio-economic conditions that could be linked to the causes of crime. These programmes should integrate the efforts of the law enforcement agencies, local authorities, welfare departments, and the private and business sectors. The primary focus should inter alia be on job creation or state allowances for the unemployed; skills development and training; reservist systems to support the police; Neighbourhood Watch; housing projects; and educational and developmental programmes for children.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respects to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethics

Ethical standards were upheld in line with TUT and UKZN stipulated ethical guidelines.

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