



## Spatial Distribution of Burglary at Residential Premises in the Newlands East Policing Precinct

Nokukhanya Neptune Mbonambi; Shanta Singh

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa

E-mail: mbonambinokukhanya@gmail.com; singhsb@ukzn.ac.za

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### **Abstract**

It is in the best interest of community members and policy makers to comprehend not only which crime prevention methods are most effective, but also where they are appropriate to apply. This study aimed at exploring the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct. This was deemed necessary as residential burglary had been reported as the highest property-related crime in the study area for the five-year period (2015-2019) preceding the study. To ensure that the aim of this study was achieved, a qualitative research approach was utilised which assisted the researcher to focus on the spatial assessment of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct. Data collection was achieved by means of Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews that involved a total of thirty-seven participants comprising of South African Police Service members, Community Policing Forum representatives, local Ward councillors, and ordinary community members. A set of pre-determined questions was used that enabled the researcher to explore themes and elicit responses that focused on achieving the objectives of the study. The findings of the study indicated that burglaries in the study area occurred spatially. This means that burglaries are highly concentrated at specific residential premises, particularly in the Newlands West area. The findings also indicated that various factors at local community level were instrumental in instigating this crime, and it is thus argued that SAPS and CPF members need to work collaboratively to develop strategies to curb the spatial distribution of burglaries in the study area. These findings suggest that a more concerted effort is required to forge collaboration among the government, the SAPS, and the community to effectively curb burglaries at residential premises. New evidence also highlights the role of construction/development companies as role-players in the fight against the scourge of residential burglaries.

**Keywords:** *Property-Related Crime; Burglary Residential Premises; Spatial; Repeat Victimisation; Environmental Design*

## Introduction

Burglary at residential premises is geographically concentrated. These geographic area concentrations can range in size from a single street address to a whole neighbourhood. The fact that crime is a geographic-related phenomenon is widely acknowledged as every crime can be linked to a certain location (Braga, Turchan, Papachristos & Hureau, 2019; Andresen & Malleon, 2013). Previous research has discovered that urban neighbourhoods experience more housebreakings compared to rural neighbourhoods (Du, Liu, Jiang, Long and Lan, 2019). Furthermore, empirical research has constantly demonstrated that housebreaking rates (and other crime rates in general) are higher in deprived neighbourhoods, racially mixed neighbourhoods, as well as neighbourhoods with high residential turnover when all were measured at various levels of geographical aggregation (Sun, Triplett & Gainey, 2004; Wiles & Costello, 2000).

Breetzke (2016) argues that in the South African context there is a noticeable increase in property crime in middle-class neighbourhoods in Tshwane compared to other neighbourhood quintiles. Earlier research also found that more affluent neighbourhoods in Tshwane are probable targets for property crime (Breetzke & Cohn, 2013). Louw and Shaw (2005, cited in Kaldine, 2007) agree with this notion and state that, in terms of geography, it is noteworthy that housebreaking is confined to middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods in South Africa as opposed to lower-class communities and townships where violent crimes are more common. According to Kaldine (2007:306), “the wealthy are more vulnerable to property crimes than lower-income populations which are more exposed to contact crime and violence”. This does not imply that the poor are excluded from falling victim to burglary, although the focus on higher class residences seems logical when considering that the motive is financial gain.

Another view is offered by Erasmus and Radebe (2013: n.p.) who explored South African Police Service (SAPS) 2012/2013 crime data. They argue that households in middle- and upper-income suburbs (formal settlements) that are in close proximity to a disadvantaged neighbourhood such as an informal settlement are at a high risk of residential burglary. In other words, the proximity of a wealthy area to a poorer one encourages burglaries as persons in the poorer area are inclined to desire and take what they want from the wealthier who live close to them (Erasmus & Radebe, 2013: n.p.). Durban in KZN is cited as an example where residential burglary hotspots are concentrated primarily in established suburbs (formal settlements) that are close to informal settlements or townships.

Moreover, criminal victimization is highly concentrated among prior crime victims. According to research, prior housebreaking victimization best predicts future housebreaking victimization risk (Johnson, 2008; Sidebottom, 2012; Townsley et al., 2000; Yang, 2006). The probability of being a repeat victim rises shortly after the first burglary and then drops to a baseline level in a couple of months (Shaw and Pease, 2000). In most cases of repeat housebreaking, the same criminals commit both the first and the follow-up burglary, especially if the time between the two incidents is short (Everson & Pease, 2001). Following a housebreaking, the danger of becoming a victim is temporarily increased not only for the household that was burglarized first, but for surrounding properties as well. This risk diminishes in time and space, spreads up to a few hundred meters, and lasts a month or two (Johnson et al., 2007). In the case of repeat victimization, the same perpetrators are frequently involved in both the first and the ‘near repeat’ housebreaking incident (Bernasco, 2008; Johnson, Summers & Pease, 2009).

## The Present Study

This paper aims to offer new insights into the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East Policing Precinct. Based on the South African Police Services (SAPS) Statistics, residential burglary in the Newlands East Policing Precinct has remained consistently high since 2015 as indicated below:

Table 1.1: Property-related crime (burglary at residential premises) in Newlands East Policing Precinct, Durban

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
380	310	407	325	394

Source: Crime Statistics South Africa (2019)

The available statistics on property-related crimes in the Newlands East policing precinct indicate that burglary at residential premises remained high over a five-year period (2015 to 2019), with high peaks in 2017 and 2019 and a slight decline in 2016 and 2018. Although the reasons for this decline were beyond the scope of the study, it is undeniable that the many residential burglaries in the Newlands East policing precinct have impacted this community negatively as burglary at residential premises does not only have financial implications for innocent and often poor residents, but victims may be harmed psychologically and emotionally.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative to understand where these burglaries are occurring in the Newlands East Policing Precinct to implement effective crime prevention strategies. Furthermore, knowing where most residential burglaries are likely to occur is vital in the policing and crime prevention sphere as this knowledge will allow law enforcement to allocate resources strategically. Andresen and Malleeson (2013:32) emphasize that “it is in the best interest of policymakers to understand not only which crime prevention methods are most effective, but [also] **where** and when they are appropriate to apply”.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To theorise the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premise, researchers have referred to the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and the Crime Pattern Theory (CPT). The rational choice theory developed by Cornish and Clarke (1987), states that offenders are rational being who rationalize whether the reward of committing a crime is worth the general risk or if the fear of punishment outweighs the perceived gains (Siegal and McCormick, 2006). Therefore, a person considering committing a crime goes through the process of evaluating perceived risks, gains, needs, apprehension possibilities, punishment possibilities, and specific factors regarding the situation and target (Lersch, 2007). For criminals, particularly burglars this theory translates into targeting houses that represent the greatest possible reward but also minimize their risk of arrest (Johnson and Bowers, 2004). Concentration of burglary at a particular place is believed to be expression of rational behavior because the households targeted correspond to the ideal target in the mind of the offender (Johnson et.al. 2007). A property is first burgled because of its potential for maximum reward and minimum risk. The same property or nearby properties are then frequently at risk for additional burglaries because of the information the offender gained from the first burglary (Johnson and Bowers 2004; Johnson et.al 2007). Given this additional knowledge of the risks and rewards associated with the initially burgled property and nearby burgled properties, offenders are more likely to return to the location, rather than burgle other relatively unknown properties.

The crime pattern theory, also known as environmental criminology, states that a crime occurs when five things are in confluence: “a law, an offender, a victim or target, a time, and a place” (Brantingham & Brantingham 1981:7). Eck and Weisburd (2015:6) explain that the place or location of the crime is vital to the CPT, which analyses the interaction of offenders, their environment, and how they select targets or victims. The CPT explains crime patterns as the distribution of willing offenders, the potential victim, targets, and capable guardians within space and time (Eck & Weisburd, 2015:6). Most crime types, like residential burglary, usually occur within a short distance of the offender’s home. People interact with the environment or surroundings and other people near their homes rather than further away. This is known as ‘distance decay’ (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984:344). The distance decay function

has been established in residential burglary, robbery, and rape (Bruinsma & Weisburd, 2014:27). Furthermore, according to Aantjes (2012:6) the crime pattern theory posits that crime follows patterns. The way people engage in time and space is one of the most important aspects of this theory which is embedded in three key conceptions: nodes, paths, and edges. Nodes is a concept taken from the study of transport and relates to the places where individuals travel to and from—for example the home, college, and places of entertainment. These places do not only generate crime in their own locus, but also nearby them. The word ‘paths’ refers to the main routes of travel between nodes, for instance streets and the public transport system. As individuals “travel along these paths from activity nodes with some regularity, the paths and narrow areas surrounding them become known spaces to the people who travel them” (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1998:35). Crime patterns thus tend to occur around offender and victim nodes and along interconnecting paths Burglars commit most of their burglaries within their awareness space along the nodes and paths intersecting with their routine activities. The CPT states that potential offenders usually search (or forage) for opportunities to commit crimes along the nodes and paths of their activity and awareness spaces (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995).

To conclude, ‘edges’ are the spaces where “...there is enough distinctiveness from one part to another that the change is noticeable” (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995:17). As individuals from different neighbourhoods do not know one another, edges are more likely to provide anonymity and, as a result, “...edges constitute areas that experience high crime rates”. Hill and Paynich (2014) agree, and further state that edges are those areas on the border of spaces where most crimes are committed because the level of diversity encountered limits the surveillance capabilities of potential guardians. According to the CPT, potential targets are flagged and catch the attention of burglars during their routine activities along the nodes and paths of their activity space. Recent research by Chen et al. (2013) and Wang and Liu (2017) applied the RCT, RAT and the CPT to explain the occurrence of residential burglaries and near-repeat residential burglaries in China.

### ***Methodology***

To explore the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct, the researcher adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research seeks to explore, describe, and analyse the meaning of individual lived experiences pertaining to a particular phenomenon to determine “how [the participants] perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002:104, cited in Marshall and Rossman, 2014). Furthermore, according to Creswell (2007, cited in Hadebe, 2017), a research problem may be addressed using a qualitative research approach that facilitates the inquiry in a natural setting using human subjects from whom relevant data are collected. A qualitative approach was therefore deemed appropriate to achieve the aim of this study as it enabled the researcher to explore the perceptions and views of SAPS officials, local Ward councillors, Community Police Forum (CPF) members, as well as community members on the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct.

The qualitative approach was also suitable to elicit the participants’ views and perceptions regarding the topic under investigation as it facilitated a setting in which the selected participants could frankly and comprehensively explain and describe their feelings and experiences. Some of the selected participants were usually the first people to respond to a crime scene and they were also the first to receive reports of crime incidences, while others had been victims or were familiar with victims of residential burglary and had therefore often witnessed the spatial distribution of residential burglary in the study area.

## **Study Population**

A sample is a subset of a population's constituents that is used to generate generalisations about the entire population. "The ideal sample is one that provides a perfect representation of a population with all the relevant features of the population (Blaickie, 2003:161). The study population for this study consisted of members of the SAPS, members of CPFs, Ward councillors, and ordinary community members. The study sample that was selected from these groups finally comprised of 37 participants in total.

## **Sampling Procedure**

According to Neuman (2014), not all empirical research uses sampling. Nevertheless, in the present study it was deemed critical to utilise a sample. Accordingly, to select the actual participants for this study, two sampling methods were used, namely purposive and snowball sampling:

### **Non-Probability Purposive Sampling**

Non-probability sampling, according to Bhattacharjee (2012), is a sampling approach in which some units of the population have a zero chance of being chosen or, when the probability of being chosen cannot be estimated. Furthermore, purposive sampling relies solely on the researcher's judgment. To guarantee that the sample obtained is representative of the relevant population, researchers depend on their experience, resourcefulness, and past study findings to purposefully recruit participants (Huysamen, 2001). Thus, purposive sampling was used primarily to select the key informants, namely the Ward councillors, the SAPS officials as well as some CPF members known to the researcher. 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. 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.

### **Snowball Sampling**

To select the participants from the general community, snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is a convenience sampling method that is used when it is difficult to access subjects target characteristics. To overcome this limitation, originally recruited study subjects were used to recruit other subjects from among their acquaintances (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017). Polit-O'Hara and Beck (2001), mention that this strategy which is also known as the 'chain method', is efficient and cost-effective in gaining access to people who might otherwise be difficult to locate. In this study the researcher asked the initially identified respondents who had been selected by means of purposive sampling if they knew anyone with similar ideas or circumstances who would be interested in participating in the study. The researcher communicated with the local Ward councillors and SAPS and CPF members who had originally been recruited and they assisted in recruiting CPF and general community members who had been victims of burglary or who knew of persons who had been targeted. Gatekeeper's permission was obtained from the Ward councillors to involve these selected community members in the study.

### **The Study Site**

To provide in-depth understanding of the context in which the participants were interviewed, some information on the historical background of the case that was studied is provided. The study was located in the Newlands East policing precinct in Durban. Newlands is divided into Newlands East and

Newlands West. During the apartheid era, the western side was designated for Indians and the eastern side was reserved for Coloured residents. This setting was compelled by the Group Areas Act (Parliament of South Africa, 1950) that segregated population groups into residential areas according to their ethnic classification. However, due to the new democratic dispensation in South Africa post 1994, Newlands is now an area that accommodates all races, except members of the White population group (eThekweni Municipality, 2006).

## Newlands East

Below are photographs of dwellings in Newlands East that show the typical design and layout of residential properties in this area.



Source: Mitula Homes (n.d.)

Newlands East accommodates about 30 000 residents (Bengtson, 2010), primarily of the Coloured and African ethnic groups. A substantial percentage of the people residing in the area have not completed high school, but those who have are facing an “overwhelming sense of hopelessness and apathy with respect to finding employment. Unemployment is well over the 40% mark in the community” (Onwards and Upwards Foundation, 2009, cited in Bengtson, 2010:5). Furthermore, this area is well known for the high prevalence of violence and drug abuse incidents that plague the community (Bengtson, 2010).

## Newlands West

Below are images of Newlands West that illustrate the typical design and layout of most dwellings in this area.



Source: Everipedia (n.d.).

The western side of Newlands is 1 330 hectares in size and, in 2011, accommodated a population in the range of 50 627 (3 798.83 per km<sup>2</sup>) people (Chunderduri, 2013). The area of Newlands West is bordered by the townships of KwaMashu, Ntuzuma, and KwaDabeka to the north and north-west, Reservoir Hills to the west, Newlands East to the east, and the Umngeni Business Park to the south. The democratic change caused this area to face numerous difficulties as families from rural areas flocked into the area where they erected informal dwellings. Due to challenges with accommodation, slums mushroomed, and this led to overcrowding. This overcrowding caused the slums to spill over into the sub-economic area of Westrich, which has been earmarked as a low-cost housing project (Stan, 2005). This has resulted in Newlands West facing numerous difficulties such as alcohol abuse, burglaries, and theft. The change in Newlands West forced some of well-off Indian and African families to migrate from the area, while the middle-class and less affluent have remained here to the present day (Chunderduri, 2013).

It is against this background that the Newlands area has become unsafe because many under-privileged residents have reverted to crime for survival and to feed their drug addiction. This background prompted the researcher's curiosity to understand how burglary is spatially distributed in the Newlands East policing precinct and how this crime is impacted by the various community-level factors that might exacerbate the magnitude and nature of crime in the two communities respectively. The knowledge that would be gained would facilitate the identification of burglary hotspots in this policing precinct with the intent of better managing and eventually preventing this crime through the deployment of effective and strategic police resources and community awareness and involvement. Moreover, the findings would augment gaps in the literature by offering insights into how the spatial distribution of burglary is affected by community-level factors such as types of housing (apartments, single-family houses, duplex/two-family houses, shacks), the prevalence of drugs and alcohol, different population groups, unemployment, and poverty.

## Data Collection

Individual or group interviews and the observation of people and study surroundings are the two most common methods of gathering qualitative data in the social sciences. The two main methods of

gathering data used in the present study were interviews (key informant interviews or KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). An interview schedule with pertinent questions had been devised to guide the discussions. Individual face-to-face and in-depth interviews were conducted with five SAPS officials and two Ward councillors (seven in total) as key informants, while focus group discussions were conducted with 10 CPF and 20 general community members in groups of 10 CPF members and 10 and 10 community members.

## **Data Analysis**

To analyse the data, the thematic analysis method was used. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (or themes) within data and thus the researcher can organise and describe an extensive data set in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method comprised six stages as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) becoming familiar with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the report. In the first stage, the researcher read and listened to the audio-recorded interviews multiple times to become acquainted with their content and to ensure reliability in decoding the information from the audio recordings of the in-depth interviews and FGDs in the transcripts. Familiarisation with the data also enabled the researcher to acquire an initial comprehension of the information. By doing so, it enabled the researcher in the second stage to be able to distinguish vital components and topics that were applicable to the problem, questions, and objectives of this study. The vital components and topics of information that emerged from the participants' data were examined, and this included both similar and contradictory elements that were examined according to their relevance to the objectives of the study. During the third stage, the researcher looked for common denominators and differences within and across the material and these common denominators and differences were formulated as themes. The researcher divided the key information into themes and those that were not applicable were discarded. Relevant themes were compared with those revealed by the literature review. The researcher could then, in stage four, review the themes to be certain that each was logical and that it would fit amongst the coded information and the other themes. In the fifth stage, the researcher defined all the themes, which enabled the final stage, which was the drafting of the report.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The data was interpreted with the purpose of understanding whether burglary at residential premises is spatially distributed in the Newlands East Policing Precinct. Based on the question: Which areas/locations in the Newlands East policing precinct experience the most burglaries? The responses indicated that the participants shared common perceptions concerning the spatial distribution of residential burglary in the study area. In essence, they agreed that burglaries at residential premises occurred more in Newlands West Area with targeted 'hotspots' being Westrich, Castlehill, and Earlsfield. The participants revealed this fact as follows:

"Newlands West, the most targeted houses in Newlands West are CastleHill, Westrich, and Hillgrove" (KII-A: 01:05).

"Burglaries are more predominant in the Newlands West area. Specifically, in Westrich and places near Westrich including Earlsfield, Riverdene and CastleHill" (KII-A: 01:01).

From the response above it is clear that burglaries in the study area are geographically concentrated. Some participants gave the impression that these concentrations were also due to repeat victimisation. According to research, prior housebreaking victimisation is a predictor of future housebreaking victimisation risk (Johnson, 2008; Sidebottom, 2012; Townsley et al., 2000; Yang, 2006). Simply put, repeat housebreaking victimisation occurs when housebreakers return to and again burgle the



same location/house. The study participants' statements supported this argument as exemplified by the following:

"I am not sure. However, what I am sure of is that it happens here in Westrich. I have been a victim three times already. On the first occasion they burglarised my house and attempted my neighbour's house. However, that attempt was unsuccessful since the house was more secured" (FGD-A: 03:01).

The rational choice theory posits that the concentration of burglary at residential premises in a specific location is indicative of rational behaviour as the houses targeted match the ideal target in the mind of the criminal (Johnson, Bernasco, Bowers, Elffers, Ratcliffe, Rengert, and Townsley, 2007). This theory explains that a house is initially burglarised due to its potential for maximum reward and minimum risk. The same house, or neighbouring houses, are then frequently at risk of more housebreaks due to the knowledge the housebreaker has of the environment (Johnson and Bowers, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). Considering the additional information on the risks as well as rewards connected with the originally burglarised house as well as neighbouring burglarised houses, housebreakers are more likely to go back to the same place instead of burglarising unknown houses. Hence these criminals tend to return to the same property and/or attempt to burglarise nearby properties.

Some participants highlighted that the houses targeted in Newlands West were mostly in the middle- and lower-class neighbourhoods rather than in more affluent areas:

"Burglaries occur more on the Newlands West side, specifically in the middle- and lower-class neighbourhoods. These include Westrich, Earslfield, CastleHill, etc. Well, the affluent areas are also targeted like Parlock and Hillgrove, but you get random housebreakings there and during those housebreakings most of the suspects come with vehicles. Also, most of the time in those cases we get video footages since those areas have cameras as well as proper patrols" (KII-A: 01:03).

To understand why some areas were targeted specifically, the researcher posed the following question:

Is there a reason that specific areas are targeted?

The participants provided several reasons why specific areas were targeted, one of these being that these areas were not active in the fight against crime. Residential burglary is one crime that requires active community participation as a critical element of a safe and secure society. Therefore, it is imperative for communities to work together and with the local SAPS to fight this crime. Participants offered the following insights:

"In Westrich, there are no neighbourhood watches, so this area is targeted more because of this. However, when we go to other places in Newlands West like Parlock, it is rare because there are community patrollers there. In Hillgrove as well, it is not so prevalent because there are neighbourhood watches there" (KII-A: 01:02).

The above responses were aligned with previous research findings that community crime prevention initiatives like neighbourhood watches can make a difference in decreasing the possibility of areas being targeted by burglars (Zinn, 2010). Various authors have noted a reduction in residential break-ins due to community-centred initiatives (Zinn, 2010; Goodwin, 2002).

It is noteworthy that in some areas mentioned above burglaries were rare due to neighbourhood watches. These seemed to be affluent areas which suggests that the implementation of the community

policing initiative in Newlands is more successful in affluent areas compared to poorer areas. This was also echoed by the participant below:

“People in Westrich do not want to work with the police to fight crime. There was a CPF there, however everything fell apart. They would call meetings and they did not pitch up for them. Like it is easy when you have community forums and good relationships in the community; you can tell them that you are leaving the house for vacation, to look after the house and suspicious people around. You see those big houses which they build there in Westrich need to come to the party. I mean, if they can afford to build those big houses, they need to set up cameras in the house so maybe for that street. You see in Westrich, you have a small house here, then a mansion next to it. Like in Hillgrove and CastleHill you will see that [a specific security company] has set up different cameras in the area. I am sure the community can also arrange something. You see, the security companies are also reluctant to go there as they have been attacked and robbed there. However, if the community says that they need them to come to the area for community protection, so probably they could come there and approach [a security company]. However, a good community structure is needed. [We need] people who can talk and have the best interest of the community at heart” (KII-A: 01:01).

Some participants felt that the environmental design in some areas in Newlands West was not favourable for proper policing as the SAPS could not easily access some houses and the streetlights there were not bright enough for proper illumination:

“We have a huge problem with burglaries, especially in Westrich. The reason is the environmental design of the properties there is not conducive for proper policing because the police must park a vehicle away from the houses and look for some houses on foot because the vehicle cannot go in. Also, there are no actual addresses on the post boxes. Some there are their boxes, but the numbers vary. They are not in numerical order as they have block numbers and numbers ranging from downwards and that is one of the problems. House numbers are not clearly visible from the street, so you cannot find addresses. Another problem is that there are no security companies that are involved in the patrolling of the area. There was a neighbourhood watch but it was just one street that is no longer active. Therefore, there are no neighbourhood watches that are functioning. The streetlights, especially at night when burglaries also take place, are not bright enough for the community. Also, 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).

From the response above it is apparent that crime clusters exist in Westrich as some families live in abject poverty. Living from hand to mouth means that they live “in a way that satisfies only one’s immediate needs because of lack of money with which to make provision for the future” (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2021). In harmony with this finding, some researchers have discovered that burglary rates are considerably higher in deprived neighbourhoods than in more affluent ones. One of the reasons for this is that most criminals themselves reside in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and they commit crimes “within their own awareness spaces” (Wiles & Costello, 2000). This is a phenomenon that is also addressed by the crime pattern theory (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1993). The latter authors suggest that criminals rather target the richest-looking houses in a deprived neighbourhood than those in other areas as they are familiar with the area and its conditions.

In agreement with the above response, the next participant explained that there was a high rate of unemployed in Westrich and that many youths there were using drugs. Furthermore, the participant also explained that a reason why Castlehill and Earsfield were crime hotspots was that they are closer to Westrich:

“Burglary is more in the Newlands West area, more in Castlehill, Earsfield and Westrich. The reason for this is that there is an area in Newlands West “Westrich” which is close to Castlehill and Earsfield. This area has been recently developed. The rate of unemployment is high there and you find the youth roaming around during the day doing nothing. The youth there are also involved in drugs, and especially iWonga in that 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).

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 and 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.

Some participants felt that individuals residing in Westrich were not concerned about security and that this was the reason why the area was targeted. Moreover, they argued that this area was populated by people that represented a variety of social classes, which they argued was a magnet for burglars. The following excerpts support this finding:

“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: 03:01).

“People in Westrich are not security conscious” (FGD-A: 03:03).

Based on all the comments above it can be concluded that burglary hotspots exist in the study area. Moreover, the participants also provided reasons why burglary is more concentrated in some areas rather than in others. It also became apparent that a considerable percentage of burglaries indicates repeat victimisation, which suggests that if burglaries can be prevented in those areas, then a considerable percentage of offenses can be avoided.

In order to ascertain and understand the spatial distribution of residential burglary in the study area the participants were asked the question: ...Is there a specific reason that this area [those mentioned] is being targeted? An analysis of the data revealed the following themes:

### **Theme: Reasons Why Burglary ‘Hotspots’ Exist**

The responses to this question addressed the reasons for the existence of burglary ‘hotspots’ and enriched the data for the most targeted areas for residential burglary. One response that provided information for this theme is the following:

“...Newlands West. Many of the houses have aluminium doors and window frames, which are easy to derail or break. Houses do not have adequate security, e.g., fences, burglar guards, alarms, etc. And when you go to Westrich, you would find that that area has extremely poor street lighting and overgrown bushes” (KII-A: 01:01).

The above response corroborates earlier responses that individuals residing in Newlands West and Westrich are not security conscious. Van Zyl (2006), who interviewed convicted burglars, also found that a reason for choosing a specific target was lack of security at a property such as no armed response or burglar guards. This implies that if people who head households in Westrich would be more security

conscious they might limit the likelihood of burglaries and thus keep their families and valuables safe. Furthermore, municipal intervention is clearly needed in the community to improve street lighting and to clear overgrown vegetation to remove cover for burglars.

The data also revealed that racial disparities were pronounced in the areas that were predominantly targeted. The participants mentioned that the Newlands West area was targeted more due to the Indian/Asian ethnic group that resides predominantly in this area, which is probably due to historic racial segregation policies. A South African Victims of Crime Survey also suggests that the most likely victims of housebreaking are Indian/Asian and White households rather than households headed by Black Africans and Coloureds (Statistics South Africa, 2019). A pertinent response in this regard is the following:

“Geographically, it is more concentrated in the Newlands West side. It goes with the type of community which resides in that area which criminals regard as soft targets. In Newlands West there are mostly Indians compared to Newlands East where you would find a community which is known to be a bit rough—Coloureds—therefore they are not easy or soft targets for criminals when it comes to burglaries” (KII-A: 01:03).

Some participants referred to size in hectares, population growth, and constant developments in the Newlands West area as reasons why this area was targeted. One participant voiced all these comments most aptly:

“If you compare Newlands West and East, Newlands East is not that big compared to Newlands West. On the east side, people know each other very well because there are no new developments in the area, no new people keep coming into that area, so most people know each other. In the Newlands West area, there are constant, ongoing developments. You know that there is a mall that has recently been built and more properties there. On the East side, there is none. Even though there are burglaries, there are not that many compared to Newlands West as there are few reported cases [from the latter area]” (KII-A: 01:05).

Some participants indicated that more residents in Newlands West were employed compared to those in the Newlands East area and so the former were mostly at work during the day which offered a fair opportunity for burglars. As most burglars avoid interacting with homeowners, they choose unoccupied targets (Montoya, Junger and Ongena, 2016), and more so in the Newlands East than West area. Also, research suggests that occupancy by neighbours may decrease the risk of residential burglary, and if neighbours are at work there are also no capable guardian/s to keep a watchful eye on their neighbours’ properties (Weisel, 2002). Comments in this regard are the following:

“In Newlands West most of the resident’s work, therefore they are not there during the day. In Newlands East it is a different story. They are not working. They are at home and that is why it is difficult for them to get opportunities to break into these houses because there are always people around” (FGD-A: 03:07).

From the above responses it is evident that houses that are not occupied during the day (employed residents) are at greater danger of burglary than those in areas where unemployment is more pronounced. Another participant also highlighted the point that, when there were individuals around during the day in the Newlands East area, this prevented burglaries:

“It is more prominent in the Newlands West area. Most of the houses in the Newlands East area are flats where you find people hanging around [loitering]. Most are unemployed so this mostly prevents burglaries. However, it is important to note that there are cases [of burglary] in the East side so basically you do not know whether the people living there in the community are the ones

committing these crimes mostly as there were people arrested from both the communities who were committing house burglaries. It is important to note that the very same neighbourhoods which are targeted in the Newlands East area are those areas without active neighbourhood watches. In those areas where the neighbourhood watches are active, they have little to no burglaries” (KII-A: 02:01).

The above response is supported by the rational choice theory. As most houses in the Newlands West area are unoccupied during the day, the rational consideration of offenders could be that the likelihood of being caught is limited, and as a result this increases the number of property crimes in the area. Furthermore, this rational consideration increases the predicted benefits of committing property crime because the most suitable target can be selected. Furthermore, if homes in the Newlands West neighbourhood are generally unoccupied when people are at work, the potential burglar gets to choose the most expensive home in the neighbourhood due to enhanced anticipation of monetary gain due to property crime.

### **Theme: Environmental Design**

The participants were also asked the following question to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to the spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises in the study area.

Do you think differences in design and planning in the two Newlands residential areas affect burglary at residential premises? Please elaborate on your answer.

As was briefly mentioned earlier, housebreakers want to minimise their chances of being discovered and apprehended, thus they must predict the level of surveillance as well as guardianship at the time of the break-in (Bernasco, 2009; Ratcliffe, 2002). Considering that the Newlands West and East areas have different types of houses and environmental design, it was posited that this factor might influence burglars’ choice of which residence to target. The participants were thus asked if they thought the differences in design and planning affected the rates of burglary in the two areas. The participants were of the view that housebreakers preferred targeting standalone houses to apartment complexes due to the probability that someone might be present at the time of the break-in in complexes where many people reside. Two participants’ responses are presented to underscore this finding:

“Yes, the standalone houses which are mostly in the Newlands West area contribute to that area being burglarised more often because, if you think of it, if we live in a block of flats like in the Newlands East area chances are that out of four families in that block one of them may be at home. Unlike standalone houses, once they do a survey there and discover that nobody is at home, they will reach the conclusion that once they get access there, there will be no interruptions” (KII-A: 01:03).

“Yes, it is quite simple. Housebreakers prefer to target detached homes like the ones in the Newlands West area. Just assessing if one family is present at their home is simple; however, assessing people living in a block of flats is not that simple. Besides that, there is a great possibility that someone may just come whilst the burglary is still occurring” (KII-A: 02:01).

The above comments underscore the notion that, before housebreakers target a particular location, they consider several factors. In terms of detection risk, single-family homes are more appealing than apartments for several reasons. The first is surveillance. Housebreakers are less likely to be seen entering standalone houses as they offer a greater level of privacy and invisibility when burglarised. Furthermore, considering that detached houses are usually bigger than flats, this may increase the rewards gained from the break-in.

Some participants reiterated the responses that had been provided previously by stating that the environmental design of some areas in the Newlands West area was poor and not conducive for proper policing, particularly as the police are not able to access certain areas in their vehicles:

“Yes, the environmental design of the Newlands West area, especially in Westrich and Riverdene, is poorly built” (FGD-A: 06:06).

It was established from the above that residential burglaries tended to occur more predominantly in the Newlands West area than in the Newlands East area. Spatial factors contributing to burglary in the study area were also examined and explained above.

### ***Conclusion and Recommendations***

This paper has explored the spatial aspects of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East policing precinct in the Durban area. Spatially, the findings suggest that burglaries at residential premises are highly concentrated in the Newlands West area. Many reasons account for this spatial trend, one of them being that a considerable percentage of these occurrences are repeated, which suggests that if burglaries can be prevented in this area, then a considerable fraction of all offenses can be avoided. Overall, this research has revealed important knowledge that will be useful when practical crime prevention initiatives are devised.

### ***Recommendations***

**Recommendation One:** Community members must be informed of areas where residential burglaries are most likely to occur. This could render targeted communities more vigilant, and they may take extra precautions to prevent themselves from being victims of this crime. Furthermore, members of the community should be educated on the importance of joining community safety structures to fight crime effectively, and the need to install security measures such as a burglar alarm and a sturdy gate and fence. However, as all these latter measures require extensive funds, vigilance and neighbourhood cooperation should be enhanced to counteract the nefarious intent of loiterers and to keep an eye on neighbours' property when they are not at home.

**Recommendation Two:** The local SAPS, private security companies, and community members should work collaboratively to increase visibility in areas that are mostly targeted by burglars. This will minimise opportunities for residential burglary and reduce the vulnerability of specific targets.

**Recommendation Three:** Community members are urged to take responsibility for their own safety as no single entity can effectively deal with burglary at residential premises on its own. Residential burglary is a crime that requires active community participation as a critical element of a safe and secure society. Therefore, the community should be taught that fighting crime is the responsibility of every individual within the community. It is recommended that community members be encouraged to join or establish a CPF, but more particularly neighbourhood watches that serve as the eyes and ears of the community. Active participation in such structures is crucial as only then will community members be mindful of their role and responsibilities. Many will also better understand the challenges that the SAPS encounter in trying to respond to residential burglary. It is imperative that residents, young and old, view themselves as role players in the fight against crime and that they engage in joint efforts to take responsibility for building a safer community. Furthermore, it is recommended that the local SAPS top management structure and the CPF executive members encourage other members to attend all the meetings where issues regarding crime in the community are addressed. Active participation in these meetings will ensure the effectiveness of partnerships in policing.

**Recommendation Four:** The research findings support the notion that most burglaries are motivated by a desire for money. Therefore, if the South African society is burdened by high unemployment and poverty, the societal conditions that they create will remain favourable for criminals and those who pursue a 'career' in burglary. It is therefore recommended that social crime prevention programmes be urgently implemented in areas where poverty and high unemployment are rife with the aim of addressing the socio-economic conditions that could be linked to the causes of crime in a particular area. These programmes should integrate the efforts of law enforcement agencies, local authorities, welfare departments, and the private and business sectors. The primary focus should be on job creation for the unemployed as governmental allowances merely perpetuate the problem of loitering. Programmes should also include skills development and training, a reservist system to support the police, the establishment of neighbourhood watches and the formalisation of their powers, housing projects, and educational and developmental programmes for children. An important aspect of social crime prevention is to change the perception in certain communities that it is acceptable to steal from the 'rich' and to buy or own stolen goods.

**Recommendation Five:** The local municipality needs to intervene by improving street lighting and clearing overgrown vegetation.

**Recommendation Six:** It is important that the Department of Human Settlement involves the SAPS and CPF when it develops housing or business centre projects so that the areas where they are developed are conducive for proper policing.

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