NAVIGATING LIFE ON THE STREET: EXPLORING CRIME, VICTIMIZATION, AND SUPPORT AMONG THE HOMELESS AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH IN DURBAN, KWAZULU NATAL

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Science in Criminology and Forensic studies in the College of Humanities,

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Discipline of Criminology and Forensic studies

By

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DECLARATION

This is to conform that:

This research is the result of my own independent investigation, except where appropriately acknowledged.

All sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete and accurate referencing.

This dissertation has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for any degree or examination at this or any other institution.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the appropriate university committee, and the research was conducted in accordance with approved ethical guidelines.

No part of this work has been copied or plagiarised. I understand that plagiarism is a serious academic offence.

Signature of candidate: .....[redacted].....

At: Durban

On the 09th day o[redacted]ember 2025

Signature of Supervisor: .....[redacted].....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to myself and to the people who carried me through this journey with love, strength, unwavering belief, and sharing their experiences. To my resilience, my courage, and the strength that carried me through this journey. I honour the woman I was, the woman I became, and the purpose that guided me from the start to the end. To my family, especially my parents, whose sacrifices built the foundation I stand on. Your encouragement gave me courage on the days I doubted myself, and your love reminded me why I had to keep going. Additionally, to every homeless and street-involved youth who shared their stories, their pain, their resilience, and their hope, THANK YOU. Your courage to speak your truth made this work possible. May your voices never be silenced, and may this study contribute, in some way, to the dignity, protection, and support you deserve.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, with a focus on their exposure to crime, experiences of victimisation, and the availability or absence of support networks. Although international literature on youth homelessness is extensive, research in the South African context remains limited, particularly studies centred on the voices of homeless youth and their everyday interactions with crime, safety, and support systems. Existing local research tends to focus on prevalence, service delivery, or broad social challenges, leaving a gap in understanding how homeless youth in Durban navigate risk, victimisation, and survival within their specific urban environment. This study addresses this gap by foregrounding the lived experiences and perspectives of young people residing in Albert Park and the Payless Shelter. Data were collected through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with 20 young people aged 18–27 residing in Albert Park and the Payless Shelter. The study is grounded in routine activities theory (RAT) and general strain theory (GST). While RAT illuminates the environmental and situational conditions that enable criminal activity, GST provides insight into the emotional and psychological pressures that may push youth toward offending.

The findings reveal that family neglect, abuse and violence, poverty and unemployment, peer influence, and substance use contribute significantly to youth homelessness. Participants described diverse forms of victimisation, including physical violence, harassment, sexual exploitation, and emotional and psychological harm. Many reported occupying dual roles as both victims and perpetrators of crime. Their daily survival involves navigating a precarious balance between vulnerability and self-protection, often relying on non-governmental organisations and informal peer networks for basic, emotional, and material support. Formal services including shelters, social workers, and law enforcement, were frequently perceived as inaccessible, judgmental, or threatening.

The study highlights an urgent need for family-strengthening initiatives, youth employment programmes, enhanced safety measures in both street and shelter environments, improved access to necessities, and expanded mental-health and psychosocial support. It also emphasises the importance of youth-centred policies and community-based support systems that acknowledge the agency of street-involved youth while addressing the structural drivers of their street involvement. By foregrounding youth perspectives, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on homelessness and street-involved youth in South Africa,

offering a nuanced understanding of resilience and risk within Durban's urban context, and proposing recommendations for more equitable and effective social interventions.

Keywords: *Homelessness; Homeless youth; Street-involved youth; Victimization; Crime; Support system; Durban*

GLOSSARY

Chommie – A popular South African slang term for a friend, buddy, or mate.

Ingidi Pill – A street name in South Africa for Mandrax (Methaqualone)

Iyooh – An exclamation to express a variety of emotions, including disbelief or shock

Mahosha – Zulu term meaning 'prostitute' or a person who sells their body

Mandrax – a sedative-hypnotic drug that was originally used to treat insomnia but is now highly restricted and illegal. It is often abused by being crushed and smoked, sometimes mixed cannabis mostly by the street dwellers.

Mfethu – is a popular South African Zulu slang meaning my friend, buddy, or brother. It is derived from umfowethu (my brother).

Nyaope – a smoked mixture of heroin, cannabis or marijuana, and antiretroviral based street drug that is highly addictive, and was primarily found in South Africa

Oga – South African slang referring to a Nigerian man.

Oskhotheni – A South African slang referring to people who are involved in drugs and who make end meets through petty crimes.

Phara – A South African township slang referring to a person struggling with substance abuse, and/or homelessness, and who are believed to be criminals of petty crimes

Qo – is not a widely recognized standard drug name, but it is high likely a reference to Nyaope

Sies – A strong expression of disgust. It is similar to ugh or yuck.

Sisi – This a Zulu term which primarily functions as a name to address a sister or woman whose name you do not know.

Whoonga boys, Amaphara, Amaferanja - These terms are stigmatizing labels used to describe street-involved or homeless youth, often associated with substance use, survival-based activities, their living on the streets and their appearance in public.

Zifa ngamvunye – It is a Zulu proverb meaning "they all die because of one," implying collective punishment where everyone suffers for the actions of one person.

It is commonly used when a group faces consequences for an individual's wrongdoing or when trust is lost due to the actions of a few.

Zol – A South African slang for a hand rolled cigarette, most commonly marijuana (dagga) or cannabis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Homelessness can be conceptualized as a state of inadequate or unsatisfactory housing, characterized by a lack of access to secure, stable, and suitable shelter (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2024). Globally, about 1.6 billion people live in poor housing, around 15 million people are forcibly evicted each year, and young people are the most vulnerable group to experiencing homelessness (UN, 2020). The most vulnerable age group to homelessness is the youth (UN, 2020). Youth usually refer to teenagers and young adults (commonly 15–34 years in Statistics South Africa, 2025). Profiles of gender are mixed many are single men, but women, children and whole families also experience homelessness (women and children are more represented among shelter users). Urban metros (Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal) show high concentrations of homeless youth, but non-metro areas also have notable rates. However, in this study, the term youth refers specifically to individuals between the ages of 18 and 27. Homeless and street-involved individuals lack stable and adequate housing, often relying on public spaces like streets and parks, abandoned buildings, and temporary shelters (Gauld, 2019) These individuals, particularly, conduct informal work to fulfil their basic needs, seek safety and community among peers, and a significant portion of this group includes youth who have fled their homes due to abuse, family conflict, poverty, or neglect, and experience high levels of poverty, discrimination, unemployment, and social exclusion. Recent official data show homelessness in South Africa rose sharply between 1996 and 2022. The 2022 Census/profile counted 55,719 people experiencing homelessness, of whom about 79.9% (44,512) were roofless (living on the street) and 20.1% (11,207) were in shelters (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Youth (15–34 years) make up a large share; around 44% of the homeless population.

Youth homelessness is a growing global concern and young people remain the most vulnerable population. They present unique social, economic, and safety challenges, particularly in urban contexts such as Durban, South Africa (Mthembu, Sibisi & Sadiki, 2025). These young individuals often navigate precarious living situations that expose them to various forms of violence, including both victimization and participation in criminal activities. Homeless and street-involved youth often live on the margins of society, where they are not only exposed to crime but may also engage in criminal behaviour as a means of survival (Ward & Seager, 2010).

Their experiences are shaped by systemic inequalities, lack of access to basic services, and ongoing exposure to violence, which collectively increase their vulnerability both as victims and perpetrators of crime (Mufune, 2015). Understanding the dynamics of crimes committed by and against homeless youth is essential for developing effective interventions and policies aimed at their rehabilitation and protection.

In the South African context, historical and structural factors such as poverty, family breakdown, abuse, and limited access to education, contribute to youth living on the streets (Richter et al., 2004). Furthermore, studies indicate that some youth end up on the streets due to a combination of personal factors, systematic barriers, and voluntary choices (Embleton et al, 2016; Brown, 2016). These include mental health issues, substance abuse, trauma and systematic or welfare failure, inadequate support services especially for the orphans, desire for independence, desire to go to the city, no clear reason, lifestyle preferences, and other (Embleton et al, 2016; Brown, 2016). Durban, being one of the country's largest metropolitan areas, has a significant population of street-involved youth who navigate complex social environments often characterized by police harassment, gang influence, and public stigma (Van den Berg & Makusha, 2018). These conditions create a cycle where crime becomes both a threat and a coping mechanism for survival.

Research indicates that homeless youth frequently become victims of violence, exploitation, and abuse, leading to a cycle of trauma that exacerbates their marginalized status (Whitbeck et al., 2002). The physical and emotional toll of such experiences can perpetuate a sense of hopelessness, making it difficult for these individuals to envision alternatives to their current circumstances. Moreover, the stigma associated with homelessness often results in societal ostracism, further alienating these youths and hindering their access to essential services, such as mental health support and education (Wright & Halsey, 2010). Conversely, the socio-economic pressures surrounding homelessness may also compel some street-involved youth to engage in criminal behaviour as a means of survival (Evans & Sutherland, 2015). The struggle for basic necessities, such as food and shelter, often drives homeless youth toward petty crime, drug use, or other illicit activities that may further jeopardize their safety and well-being (Morewitz, 2016). This dual phenomenon of victimization and criminalization sheds light on the urgent need for nuanced research that positions these youths as active agents in their narratives rather than mere statistics of crime and poverty.

Despite various policy interventions in South Africa such as the Emergency Housing Programme (EHP), the Children's Act, the Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy, and the Municipal Street People Policy, there remains a gap in understanding how homeless youth themselves perceive and experience crime. Much of the existing literature focuses on quantitative data, general youth crime trends, the perceptions of homeless, and homelessness in South Africa, neglecting the lived experiences of those most affected (Bornman, 2016; Swart, 2014; Statistics South Africa 2025; Obioha, 2021; Ngcaweni 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to explore the firsthand narratives of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban regarding crimes the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The study focuses on homeless youth exposure to crime, victimization, and the presence (or absence) of support networks.

Through the use of qualitative methodologies, this study aims to amplify the voices of youths who are homeless or involved with the streets by giving them a platform to openly share their personal experiences, viewpoints, and narratives. This amplification is achieved through in-depth interviews that allow participants to describe their lived realities in their own words. In the analysis and presentation of the results, their voices are further represented through direct quotations and in-depth narrative accounts. By centering participants' testimonies and interpreting them within their social and environmental contexts, the study highlights the complex interplay of factors that shape their behaviours and experiences on the streets. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the discourse on youth homelessness in South Africa, advocating for informed policy-making that prioritizes the protection and empowerment of this vulnerable population.

1.2 Background to the research problem

Statistics South Africa (2025) noted that homelessness in South Africa has been on the increase over the last two decades, with recent national counts showing a substantial increase in the number of people living on the streets and in shelters. Youth, broadly defined as people aged approximately 15–34, form a large and growing share of the homeless population (Statistics South Africa, 2025). This creates vulnerabilities, as many young people on the streets are still undergoing developmental, educational, and family transitions that heighten their exposure to risk and dependence on informal survival strategies (Buccieri et al., 2010). Youth, homelessness, and street involvement are complex issues. These individuals face myriad challenges that intersect with multiple public and private systems, significantly impacting their

physical and mental well-being. Their experiences often include exposure to violence, substance misuse, and engagement in survival crimes in order to meet their fundamental needs (Buccieri et al., 2010; Stewart, 2012).

Youth homelessness is frequently the result of parental conflicts, abuse, or neglect that forces young people to flee their homes (Roche & Barker, 2017). Violence is both a cause and consequence of youth homelessness as these young people are more vulnerable to physical and sexual assaults, human trafficking, verbal abuse, and other forms of violence (Santa Maria et al., 2020; Kipke et al., 1997). Their lack of a stable environment leaves them open to attack from predators, discrimination and unfriendly circumstances such as lack of food and clothing, exclusion, mistreatment by people and police (Johnstone et al., 2015). Santa Maria et al., (2020) and Gomez et al., (2010) further argued that youth homelessness and substance abuse are linked, with many homeless youth using drugs and alcohol as coping methods to ease the psychological anguish and harsh realities of life on the streets. But overuse make things worse for them, resulting in health problems, addiction, and marginalization. Drug abuse also makes it more difficult for them to receive support services, which contributes to their trauma symptoms and delays their healing (Dawson-Rose et al., 2020). Additionally, substance abuse not only affects their health but also increases their risk of engaging in criminal activities to fund their habits. Furthermore, homeless youth frequently engage in survival-related criminal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, or sex work, not as acts of criminal intent, but as strategies to meet essential needs, including food, shelter, personal safety, and, in some instances, to sustain substance use (Heerde, Jessica & Hemphill, Sheryl, 2013). These behaviours may result in criminal records, which could restrict future chances for housing, education, and work which further perpetuate their patterns of homelessness.

According to Bransford & Cole (2019), the homeless populations face numerous challenges that can exacerbate their vulnerability, exposing them to greater risks of harm, diseases, and trauma. Homeless youth are more likely to experience physical and mental health problems due to their increased exposure to violence and exploitation, social isolation and lack of support networks, lack of vaccines, unsanitary living conditions, and restricted access to healthcare or immunization. They are more vulnerable to infectious diseases, chronic conditions like diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and asthma, and mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety, which are frequently brought on by stress from the streets and previous traumas (Kashani et al., 2025; Butler et al., 2022; Raoult et al., 2001). These medical conditions have the potential to worsen into serious health issues. Furthermore, abuse of

substances also raises the chances of addiction and further health complications, as well as participating in dangerous activities, such as unprotected or unwanted sex, which can result in sexual transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies. To create effective interventions that meet the special needs of homeless and street-involved youths, researchers and social service providers must comprehend the distinctive experiences of these individuals (Lynch et al., 2017).

In South Africa, an estimated 55 719 individuals were homeless in 2022, comprising 39 052 men and 16 667 women. Of these, 44 512 were homeless or lived on the streets, and 11 207 were housed in shelters (O'regan & Louw, 2023). The statistics on homelessness in South Africa paint a devastating picture of the extent of the issue in the country. The alarming statistic that more than 55,000 people were homeless in 2022 highlights the critical need for action to address this crisis. The gender gap, where males make up about 70% of the homeless population, is consistent with global patterns that show men are more likely than women to become homeless (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The difference may be caused by several factors, such as the fact that males are more likely than women to experience substance addiction, mental health problems, and unemployment, as well as cultural norms and legislation that may favour women more, particularly those who have children. Additionally, the gender breakdown of the homeless population, with an abnormally large percentage of men affected, raises concerns about the unique vulnerabilities and difficulties that men face and points to a significant issue that requires immediate attention. Out of the total homeless population, 44,512 individuals lived on the streets, while 11,207 were housed in shelters. This indicates that 80% of the population live on the streets. The fact that a sizable majority of homeless people live on the streets indicates a serious gap in the availability or accessibility of shelters and emphasizes the urgent need for greater supportive housing and shelter services. In addition to being a secure place to sleep, shelters can offer basic needs, such as food, clothing, medical attention, and a route to more long-term housing options (Canham et al., 2022). Examining shelter policies, capacity, conditions, and access restrictions may help explain why a substantial percentage of people stay on the streets.

Hansen (2022) reports that there are over 16,000 homeless people in Durban, with black men and the youth making up the majority of the population. The Hansen research provides insight into the intersection of race and age in homelessness experiences in Durban, South Africa, stating that over 16,000 persons experience homelessness in the city, with black males and youth making up most of the homeless population. This points to demographic vulnerabilities

in urban areas, which may be related to structural injustices, a lack of work opportunities, and insufficient social services, resulting in greater rates of homelessness and poverty among the black males and youth South Africans. To create interventions that are both culturally sensitive as well as customized to the particular needs of various demographic groups, policymakers and service providers must take this knowledge into account. Moreover, in Durban, homeless individuals are significantly more vulnerable to crime and experience disproportionately high rates of victimisation due to the risks associated with urban areas (Mthembu et al., 2025).

Within Durban and the eThekwini metropolitan area, city-level surveys and situational analyses have documented a visible population of street-involved children and youth who rely on informal economies, shelters and peer networks to survive (Statistics South Africa 2022; Hills et al., 2016). Past censuses and qualitative studies estimate thousands of people living in the central Durban area, with a strong gender skew toward males, and point to complex pathways into street life including family poverty, abuse, breakdown of care, and migration for work or schooling that failed to materialize (HSRC, 2016; Hills, 2016). These local studies highlight how Durban's urban context is characterized by concentrated services, a busy central business district and transient populations; both attracting youth and complicating service delivery.

Homeless and street-involved youth face elevated risk of victimization and entanglement with crime, but the patterns are uneven and under-documented. Empirical work in South Africa points to frequent experiences of physical assault, theft, sexual violence, and harassment by both fellow citizens and state actors (Pophaim, 2019; Mthembu et al., 2023). At the same time some youth engage in survival-driven offending (petty theft, informal vending conflicts, substance trading, and in some cases more serious offences), often as adaptive responses to exclusion from formal labour markets and social safety nets (Sadiki, 2021; Pophaim, 2019). The relationship between victimization and offending is bi-directional and mediated by factors such as substance use, mental health, stigma and policing practices, yet systematic, youth-centred data from Durban remain limited.

Research indicates that the crimes committed by homeless youth are often linked to survival strategies rather than deliberate criminal intent (Ellsworth, 2019). Common offences include petty theft, pickpocketing, shoplifting, and drug-related crimes, which are frequently associated with substance abuse and poverty (Roy et al., 2014; Sadiki, 2021). In some instances, a minority of homeless youth engage in assault or interpersonal violence, often as a form of self-defense or within contexts of street survival (Mthembu, 2025). Studies conducted in Durban

and other South African cities suggest that these activities are primarily survival-driven responses to systemic deprivation and exclusion from formal employment (Sadiki, 2021; Mthembu, 2025). Conversely, homeless youth are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators. Numerous studies highlight alarmingly high levels of victimization, including theft, robbery, physical assault, sexual violence, and police harassment (Sadiki, 2021; Mthembu, 2025). In Durban, more than half of homeless youth report having experienced at least one form of victimization while living on the streets (Mthembu, 2025). Young homeless women are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and exploitation, reflecting broader gendered patterns of violence in street environments (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020).

Furthermore, research has indicated that youth who are homeless or street-involved are more likely to be victims of violence in one way or another, including exploitation, physical and sexual assault (Tyler & Wright, 2019). Studies reveal that homeless youth face higher rates of victimization compared to their housed peers and also that sizable percentage of young people who are homeless have experienced violence, underscoring the necessity of protective measures and social assistance (Milburn et al., 2024; Tyler & Ray, 2021). Additionally, a lot of young people who are homeless utilize drugs such as alcohol, marijuana, whoonga, and nyaope as a coping mechanism for the stress and trauma they encounter while living on the streets. According to research by Patel and Govender (2020), more than 80% of young people who are homeless abuse drugs and alcohol. Moreover, some young people who are homeless commit survival crimes like drug dealing, property crime, theft and public nuisance in order to meet their basic needs and survive on the streets (Hills et al., 2016).

Access to formal support, including shelters, statutory child and social services, healthcare, and specialized youth programs, is inconsistent in Durban (Dimba-Ndaleni et al., 2022). These reports and qualitative studies identify service bottlenecks (capacity limits, admission criteria, perceived or real discrimination), weak referral pathways, and distrust of institutions among street youth (Nicholas et al., 2016; Munson et al., 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2009). These gaps increase reliance on informal supports and heighten vulnerability to repeated victimization and criminalisation (Hlengwa, 2024). Despite pockets of NGO and municipal activity, service fragmentation and limited evidence on what interventions reduce both victimization and offending among youth mean that policy and practice lack a robust, locally grounded evidence base (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2018).

Taken together, these realities create a pressing research problem. While national and local sources document growing homelessness and document that youth are disproportionately affected, there is still a limited, empirically grounded understanding of how Durban's homeless and street-involved youth navigate the twin challenges of crime and victimization, what coping strategies they use, and how formal and informal supports help or harm their trajectories. This gap undermines the design of targeted prevention, protection and rehabilitation interventions tailored to youth in KwaZulu-Natal, and constrains evidence-based municipal and provincial planning. Recent scholarship highlighting the complex interplay of structural drivers (poverty, housing shortages), service failures and everyday survival strategies underscores the need for a focused mixed-method inquiry into the lived experiences of homeless youth in Durban, which is the central aim of this study (Mthembu, 2025; Pophaim, 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2025).

Effective interventions for homeless and street-involved youth must consider these intersecting issues of violence, substance abuse, and survival crimes. According to Anderson (2012) and Mkhize and Nxumalo (2021), helping young people to overcome the cycle of homelessness, being street-involved and disadvantage requires an all-encompassing strategy that considers both their short-term requirements for protection, counselling services, shelter, and support as well as their long-term needs for mental health care, education, and job training. Researchers and service providers can develop tailored interventions that address the unique needs of homeless and street-involved youth by learning about their experiences, which include exposure to violence, substance abuse, and survival crimes (Kolar, Erickson & Stewart, 2012). This research is crucial for improving outcomes for homeless youth and helping them build a brighter future. It is anticipated that the findings from this research will influence the creation of solutions meant to meet the requirements of this vulnerable population.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study is essential because it aims to give fresh and context-specific knowledge on the lived reality of homeless and street-involved teenagers in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, an under-researched group that is significantly affected both by victimisation and by involvement in crime. Understanding how these young people negotiate daily life, including their engagement in crime, victimization, and contacts with formal and informal support systems, is critical for tackling the structural and social causes that keep them marginalized.

At the theoretical level, the study contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between victimization and offending among street youths. By investigating these overlapping experiences within the same group, the studies will challenge established stereotypes that see homeless youths as either criminals or victims of crime. This comprehensive investigation will also help to broaden our understanding of how strain and routine activity theories apply to youth homelessness in South Africa's urban context, extending international theories into a more localized framework.

The study also has academic and societal value since it amplifies the arguments of the homeless people who are frequently excluded from mainstream policy discourse and social research. Their firsthand accounts will provide a more humane perspective of urban poverty, structural inequality, and institutional neglect in post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so, the study coincides with national development goals that seek to promote inclusivity, safety, and social justice for all residents, including those on the margins of society.

Ultimately, this study is significant because it addresses multiple interlinked research and policy gaps by integrating the dimensions of crime, victimisation, and support systems into one holistic investigation. Its outcomes will contribute to both scholarly literature and the practical improvement of social policies in KwaZulu-Natal, supporting the creation of informed, evidence-based strategies to protect and empower homeless and street-involved youth in Durban.

1.4 Aim of the study

The main goal of the study is to examine the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The study focuses on homeless youth exposure to crime, victimization, and the presence (or absence) of support networks. Violence, exploitation, and social exclusion are just a few of the serious risks that homeless youth face, but little is known about their experiences in South Africa, especially in Durban. This research aims to analyse the type and frequency of victimization, the kinds of crimes (such as theft, sexual assault, physical assault, and police harassment) that homeless youth experience, as well as their occurrence and circumstances. To recognize or understand the coping mechanisms and survival strategies of the homeless youth of Durban, particularly how this population of the homeless and street-involved individuals manage everyday risks, including their safety measures, access

to necessities (food, shelter, healthcare), and interactions with criminal networks or informal economies.

It also aims to evaluate existing support systems, to determine which formal support systems such as shelters, social services, and non-governmental organizations and informal support systems such as peer networks and community support systems are currently available to homeless youth and assess their efficacy and accessibility. The study draws attention to policy and intervention gaps by examining the structural shortcomings in youth welfare, law enforcement, and social protection that led to the marginalization of homeless youth and make suggestions for better interventions. Furthermore, to boost youth voices and views by putting the stories of homeless youth at the forefront to make sure that their needs and experiences are considered when developing policy and programmatic solutions. In order to improve the safety and well-being of Durban's street-involved youth, the study intends to address these goals and advance a more thorough understanding of the difficulties they face.

1.5 Location of the study

The research will be conducted in Durban, the inner-city District of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The research will specifically concentrate on youth living in Durban's urban regions who are homeless and/or participating in the street life. This study will be conducted in the inner cities of Durban, that is the Payless Shelter t/a Kickstart NPO in South Beach and the Albert Park now known as Whoonga Park in Berea (ward 32). This covers places where these people are known to gather and reside.

1.6 Research objectives

1. To probe the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban regarding crimes they experience and commit.
2. To understand the personal, social, and structural factors that contribute to the involvement of homeless and street-involved youth in criminal activities.
3. To examine the perceived impacts of crimes on the well-being and daily lives of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban.
4. To investigate the perspectives of homeless and street-involved youth on the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of current interventions and support services.

1.7 Research questions

1. What are the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban regarding crimes they experience and commit?
2. What are the personal, social, and structural factors that contribute to the involvement of homeless and street-involved youth in criminal activities?
3. How do homeless and street-involved youth in Durban perceive the impacts of crimes on their well-being and daily lives?
4. What are the perspectives of homeless and street-involved youth on the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of existing interventions and support services?

1.8 Chapter layout

Chapter 1: Introduction and study background

The introduction, provides the background and context of youth homelessness and street involvement in Durban, highlighting the vulnerability of this group to crimes both committed by them, their victimization and the support among them. It outlines the research problem and clarifies why this research is necessary. This chapter also includes the aims and objectives and the research questions for the study. Furthermore, it explains the significance of the study for policy and academic discourse.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents pertinent literature that will help contextualise the subject of the study. This is to help the reader understand the phenomenon of homeless and street-involved, the primary causes of homelessness, the victimization of the homeless youth, and the crime committed by the homeless youth. The literature review, explores key concepts such as definitions and types of homelessness, examines existing research on youth, homelessness, youth issues, and crime in Durban/South Africa. Furthermore, it will also present successful interventions for homeless and street-involved youth.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter describes the theoretical framework for the study, assisting the reader in understanding the reasoning, selection, practical application, and critical analysis of the selected theoretical viewpoint. The theoretical framework underpinning the study is the strain theory and routine activities theory.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter explains the research methods used in this study. The research design, data collection strategies, data analysis approaches, and any ethical considerations will all be covered in this section. It also provides an explanation of the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the findings of the study.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussions

The results of the data analysis are presented in this chapter. This chapter also explains the results that addresses the research questions and links them to the goals and objectives of the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings and discussions, and it also acts as the study's conclusion in light of the goals and objectives. The study's limitations are also discussed, along with recommendations

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the study by outlining the background, problem statement, research aims, and significance of exploring crime, victimisation, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. The chapter highlighted the complex realities faced by this marginalised group and emphasised the urgent need for research that centres their lived experiences. It also introduced the theoretical framework guiding the study, as well as the methodological approach that will be elaborated on in subsequent chapters. Overall, Chapter 1 establishes the foundation upon which the study is built, demonstrating why an in-depth exploration of the daily experiences, vulnerabilities, and survival strategies of street-involved youth is both necessary and timely. The next chapter will review relevant literature to further contextualise the phenomenon within local and global context.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the background to the study, highlighting the growing concern of youth homelessness in Durban and its intersection with crime. It further presented the problem statement, research objectives, and the significance of examining the dual positioning of homeless and street-involved youth as both perpetrators and victims of crime. Building on this foundation, this chapter situates the study within existing scholarly debates and empirical research, thereby establishing a coherent link between the research problem and the body of knowledge that informs it.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature relevant to the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth, with particular focus on the socio-economic and structural conditions that shape their vulnerability. Literature review serves as the foundation for scholarly and research endeavours, allowing researchers to identify gaps, trends, debates, and areas in need of further investigation while also helping academics to understand the current state of knowledge in their field (Hart, 1998). This chapter begins by defining and conceptualising youth homelessness and street involvement from different scholarly perspectives. The chapter then explores the underlying causes of youth homelessness, including poverty, family disintegration, and substance abuse, which collectively contribute to young people's migration to the streets.

Furthermore, the review examines the relationship between youth homelessness and crime by analysing literature that positions these young people as both perpetrators and victims of criminal activity. Attention is also given to the forms of victimisation and exploitation they encounter, as well as the survival strategies that may draw them into criminal networks. In addition, the chapter engages with existing studies on policy responses and intervention strategies aimed at addressing youth homelessness and crime, with particular reference to the South African context.

Overall, the literature review identifies key debates, gaps, and areas requiring further investigation, thereby providing a critical framework that informs the present study.

2.2 Historical context of homelessness and victimization in South Africa

The history of homeless victimization in South Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of social, economic, and political factors (Gaetz et al., 2013; Ponio, 2022). The nation's history of colonialism and apartheid has had a major impact on the systemic injustices that cause homelessness and the mistreatment of those who are homeless (Smith & Anderson, 2018). These elements, the background, and the current issues that continue to harm South African homeless people will all be covered in this conversation.

2.2.1. Legacy of colonialism and apartheid

Homelessness in South Africa has a long history, stemming from the country's colonial past and the apartheid government that imposed economic inequality and racial segregation. Black South Africans were denied access to resources and property rights during apartheid, when laws like the Group Areas Act of 1950 forcibly uprooted them from their homes and into undeveloped areas (Wilson, 2001). Homelessness was caused by this systemic displacement, which also produced a disenfranchised group that is still victimized today.

By restricting Black South Africans' freedom of mobility, especially in cities, the pass laws made homelessness even worse. Marutlulle (2022) reported that the pass restrictions during the time of apartheid made homelessness worse for Black South Africans by making it harder for them to dwell in cities if they do not have formal employment and proper documentation. Without proper identity documents or employment Black South Africans were detained or forcibly removed from cities. This system made Black South Africans carry documentation proving they were employed (Mlambo & Masuku, 2023). If they were unemployed, they lost their legal right to remain in urban areas, which constituted a criminal offence punishable by arrest, fines, or forced removal to rural homelands. Additionally, Kunnie (2000), added that the apartheid government demolished informal structures and settlements constructed without governmental authorization, leaving individuals homeless.

Furthermore, this system forced many men to work and reside far from their families, making it impossible for households to live together. Apartheid labour controls and housing restrictions meant that men were often required to stay in urban areas for work while their families remained in rural homelands, leaving them with few legal options to live together securely in cities (Mlambo & Masuku, 2023). As a result, many people were left without a safe place to dwell, which made homelessness in cities worse. These regulations made it illegal for Black

people to be in cities without the required paperwork, which resulted in many arrests and evictions (Maylam, 1990). The victimization of homeless people, who were frequently the targets of social exclusion and police brutality, was greatly exacerbated by the criminalization of homelessness and the absence of suitable homes for the Black community during apartheid.

Moreover, South Africa's history of homeless victimization stems from the apartheid era, when black South Africans were disproportionately affected by policies of segregation and forced relocation, which left many of them homeless. Homeless people had to deal with violence, harassment, assault, and frequent targeting by police enforcement during this period.

2.2.2 Post apartheid challenges and persisting inequality

Homelessness remained a major problem in South Africa even after the apartheid era, with many people living on the streets because of poverty, unemployment, and a lack of affordable accommodation (Cross et al., 2010). Homeless people are frequently the targets of violent crimes, such as robberies, sexual assaults, and assaults (Ellsworth, 2019). Additionally, they run the risk of being taken advantage of and mistreated, especially by powerful people.

Following the fall of apartheid in 1994, South Africa had the enormous task of resolving the systemic racism and economic disenfranchisement that had resulted in decades of deep-seated inequality. Although the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which included housing provisions, was one of the programs the new democratic government established to address these concerns, progress has been gradual, and many of the policies have not been fully implemented (Tomlinson, 1999).

Homelessness has continued to be exacerbated by the continuation of economic inequality and unemployment in South Africa since the end of apartheid. Many people have been forced into homelessness due to a shortage of affordable housing and high unemployment rates, leaving them exposed to victimization. Violence, discrimination, and a lack of access to social services are common experiences for homeless people in South Africa (Cross & Seager, 2010). Homeless people typically find it difficult to escape their circumstances since there are not sufficient social safety nets or support systems in place.

2.2.3. Current issues in the victimization of homeless people

Homeless people in modern-day South Africa still experience victimization at the hands of both the government and the public. According to Rule-Groenewald et al., (2015), there are still many homeless groups that report experiencing violent evictions and the destruction of personal property, in addition to police harassment and brutality. Furthermore, homeless people frequently experience social stigma, which often results in exclusion from opportunities for housing, work, and help from the community.

Numerous studies have shown that the police harass the homeless community (Daly, 1996; Hills, Meyer-Weitz, & Asante, 2016; Myburgh et 2015). Furthermore, in the study by Fromke (2018), participants described the burden caused by the routine actions of law enforcement officers and security guards, sharing accounts of being chased from their sleeping areas, called names, beaten, and forced to watch their shelters being demolished. This study revealed how harsh the guards could be on the homeless community. Furthermore, Fromke's (2018) study found that members of the homeless community were often forced to hide from security guards and law enforcement officers, seeking isolated corners merely to obtain a place to sleep. This indicates that homeless individuals experience heightened fear in the presence of security personnel and are effectively prevented from sleeping in public spaces, except in concealed or marginal areas. Moreover, Wagner (2019), explained that the way the guards believe they must enforce control and how they see these individuals as nothing, creates a very hostile environment. This situation leaves the homeless feeling extremely unsettled and disturbed.

Homeless and street-involved youth in Durban encounter multifaceted challenges. These young people frequently experience severe adversity that negatively affects both their physical and mental health, and they live risky and challenging lives (Tyler & Schmitz, 2020). Substance misuse, exposure to violence, and involvement in survival crimes are major obstacles to their well-being. In Durban, youth who are homeless or participating in the streets are often exposed to several types of violence (Huey, 2016). These types of violence include physical aggression from other homeless people, brutality from the police, and occasionally even violence from onlookers or neighbours who hold hostility or suspicion toward them (Mkhize et al., 2022; Mthembu et al., 2025). Constant exposure to violence can lead to serious psychological trauma, negatively affect relationships and trust, and keep youths in an endless cycle of aggression as a coping strategy or form of self-defence.

Another serious problem among young people who are homeless in Durban is substance abuse. Many homeless young people use alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism for the harsh realities of living on the streets, which include emotional misery, hunger, and cold weather (Hills et al., 2016; Sishuba, 2017). In addition to increasing the risk of health problems such as overdoses, infectious diseases, and long-term cognitive and physical impairments, substance abuse can quickly develop into a debilitating addiction. These young people frequently turn to criminal activity in order to live. Stealing, prostitution, and drug peddling are some examples of typical survival crimes. Usually, the necessity to obtain needs like food, clothing, and shelter is what motivates these behaviours. Unfortunately, engaging in these kinds of activities puts them at risk for further dangers, such as being arrested and imprisoned, which can keep them trapped in a cycle of marginalization and poverty (Mkhize et al., 2022). Moreover, involvement in criminal activities further stigmatizes homeless individuals, thereby intensifying social exclusion and creating additional barriers to their reintegration into society.

While homeless and street-involved youth may engage in criminal behaviour, they are also highly vulnerable to victimization. Their precarious living conditions make them easy targets for exploitation and violence. According to Olufemi and Reeves (2004), many of these youth face physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking, especially women. Their lack of legal protection, social support, and resources means that they are often unable to defend themselves or seek justice when they are victimized. Those who are homeless are susceptible to discrimination and stigma from the larger community (Olufemi, 2002). Throughout the project by Fromke (2018), experiences of stigmatization were brought up in line with this literature. In his study the homeless youth were labelled ‘bergie’ which functions as a dehumanizing term that reduces homeless individuals to a stereotype rather than acknowledging their full humanity. The rejection of this label underscores the harm caused by socially imposed identities rooted in stigma. It also exposes the class-based power dynamics at play, where those with greater wealth or social standing feel entitled to judge or insult others, reinforcing social hierarchies and deepening marginalization.

Research has made it evident that crimes committed against homeless and street-involved youth are often a result of their vulnerable status (Boyd et al., 2016). These individuals are at a higher risk of being victims of violence, sexual exploitation, and police brutality. The lack of protection and support for homeless youth leaves them marginalized and exposed to exploitation by criminal elements in society.

2.3 Homelessness and street involvement from a global perspective

Regardless of a nation's degree of development, Orufa (2024) argues that homelessness and involvement in the streets are widespread problems that impact many nations worldwide. These widespread issues can be impacted by a mix of systemic, structural, and individual variables. They are frequently complex and linked. Around the world, poverty, a lack of affordable housing, mental illness, drug addiction, and civil conflict are some of the main causes of homelessness and street involvement (Speak, 2019). Poverty is a major cause of homelessness because it makes it difficult for families and individuals to afford stable housing and to access necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare (Schmitz et al, 2001).

People are more likely to become homeless in nations with high levels of income inequality and lack social safety nets (Aldamen, 2025). Another major contributing reason to homelessness is a lack of affordable housing, as increasing housing costs and a lack of options for affordable housing can make it difficult for people to find stable residence (Ferguson & Xie, 2008). The cost of housing has increased dramatically in many cities across the world, making it challenging for those with low incomes to obtain affordable housing. Substance misuse and mental illness are also frequent causes of homelessness since they can make it difficult for those who are dealing with them to get support services and mental health care (Moulin et al., 2018). People with mental health and drug misuse problems may find it more difficult to avoid homelessness if they do not have access to the right supplies and services.

Furthermore, Filipenco (2023) stated that there are a variety of globally interconnected major causes of homelessness. Domestic and communal conflicts, he claims, encourage people to flee their homes, get lost, and seek shelter elsewhere. However, not everyone is fortunate enough to locate a suitable place to stay, and some people choose not to return home despite their ability to find a place to stay. They would rather not have a place to stay and live on the streets than return to their homes.

Natural disasters, including floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, and tsunamis, can demolish homes and leave families homeless (Ermus, 2023). These natural calamities have the potential to devastate communities, demolishing homes and leaving families without shelter. Floods can quickly rise and swallow entire neighbourhoods, hurricanes can tear apart houses with their powerful winds and heavy rainfall, tornadoes can level entire cities in an instant, flames can consume everything in their path, and tsunamis can destroy entire coastal villages. When these calamities happen, houses are frequently destroyed, displacing families and

disrupting entire neighbourhoods, leaving people homeless (Ermus, 2023). These disasters can be devastating, in the immediate aftermath, life can get hectic and chaotic as survivors try to reconstruct their lives, get access to basic goods, and find a place to reside. Families are left without a place to live and are forced to seek temporary shelter and assistance from relief organizations. Some do not get access to temporary shelters and end up living in the streets.

2.3.1 International perspective

2.3.1.1 Asia

Asia's homeless population is highest in Pakistan, according to Greater Change (2022). There are 20,000,000 homeless persons in the country out of 242 million people, meaning 8.3% of the country's population experiences homelessness. On the other hand, the number of homeless persons in Syria is around 17.5 million, with a homeless population of 6 568 000 every night. Meaning Syria's homelessness rate is thus 37.5%. This essentially indicates that 4 out of 10 individuals do not have a formal or permanent place to live.

2.3.1.2 Syria

According to the World Population Review (2024), Syria has the highest rate of homelessness worldwide. In Syria, homelessness and engagement with the streets are multifaceted problems that can stem from a confluence of political, social, and environmental elements. Millions of people have been displaced by the ongoing civil war in Syria and many of them are now forced to live in cramped refugee camps or on the streets (Doganay & Demiraslan, 2016). This has led to a notable rise in homelessness and interaction with the streets in the nation, combined with high rates of poverty and unemployment (Gobat & Kostial, 2016).

The primary causes of homelessness and engagement with the streets in Syria are closely linked to one another and have their roots in the prolonged and continuous conflict (Alme. The civil war that started in 2011 is most likely the primary cause of the high number of homeless people (Zisser, 2019). According to Filipenco (2023), children have lost their lives, been injured, have been prevented from going to school, and about a million youngsters have been abandoned or separated from their homes, making them more likely to become involved in street life, ever since the civil war began. Sizzer (2019) argue that the war has caused massive housing destruction, infrastructure collapse, and the breakdown of water and sanitation systems, rendering many communities uninhabitable. These factors have left the populace impoverished. The pace and scope of rebuilding have not kept up with the requirements of the

displaced populace. When combined, these factors suggest that Syria's homeless population is growing, and the causes are interconnected.

2.3.1.3 The United States

In the US, there are many different elements that contribute to the complexity of homelessness and street involvement. The most prevalent reasons of homelessness in the United States include rising rents, poverty, mental health issues, substance misuse, job loss, and a lack of accessible housing (Filipenco, 2023). However, these factors frequently overlap. Burt (2001) claims another major cause of homelessness and involvement in the streets in the US is economic instability. Many individuals who are homeless in the United States are either unemployed or have unstable, low-paying jobs. In the absence of a reliable revenue stream, people find it difficult to cover essential expenses like shelter, food, and medical treatment, which could elevate their chance of ending up homeless. Colburn and Aldern (2022) state that shortage of affordable housing is also another cause of homelessness in the US. Finding permanent housing has become more challenging for low-income individuals and families in many American cities due to growing housing expenses. For individuals with low incomes, this is made worse by stagnating salaries and a dearth of affordable housing options.

According to Childress et al., (2015) substance addiction and mental health disorders are also frequent causes of homelessness and involvement in the streets in the United States. Anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are among the mental health issues that many people who are homeless also face. Substance abuse problems, such as drug and alcohol addiction, can also worsen the cycle of homelessness and involvement in the streets, particularly among young people. Homelessness and streets involvement are both caused by and result from substance abuse (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Early, 2005). Drug misuse interferes with employment, legal status, and eligibility for some housing programs, making it more difficult to find and keep a place to live. Substance misuse, on the other hand, can cause interpersonal problems, unemployment, and unstable finances, all of which can lead to homelessness.

Researchers have discovered that systemic shortcomings in the social safety net also have a role in homelessness in the United States. The absence of affordable housing options, inadequate mental health services, and inadequate support for low-income individuals and families are serious problems (Matthew, 2018). The social welfare system in the United States

frequently falls short of giving individuals in need prompt, all-encompassing help. For example, many people are unable to find secure homes due to lengthy waiting lists for public housing and Section 8 vouchers.

2.3.2 Local perspective

Nonetheless, homelessness is most prevalent in Africa, where over 73% of the world's homeless people reside (World Population Review 2024). On the data published by the World Population Review (2023) indicated that Africa had at least 54 167 000 homeless people. Africa though has a disproportionate number of the world's homeless with Nigeria ranked as the country with the highest number of homeless people on the continent, followed by Egypt and then DR Congo.

2.3.2.1 Nigeria

In 2023, Nigeria had 24.4 million homeless people living on the streets, in informal settlements, or in crammed slums, according to World Population Review (2024). Nigeria has the highest rate of homelessness ever caused by a variety of underlying causes, and the level of homelessness differs throughout geographical areas. Homelessness in some states is caused by armed conflicts and internal displacement, as people are compelled to depart their homes because of violence or sociopolitical persecution. For other regions, poverty and inflation, unemployment, rapid urbanization, family breakdown, and substance abuse are the main causes of homelessness, as more people migrate from rural areas to cities in search of shelter, money, and better opportunities (Enwin & Ikiriko, 2023).

However, according to Filipenco (2023), a lot of Nigerians find it difficult to adjust to city life because of the high cost of living, a lack of social support. They also face challenges in finding employment because of limited education and communication skills, experience abuse, and often take dangerous jobs for meagre pay. As a result, they find themselves in a situation where they have nowhere to call home and no stable, permanent, or safe place to live.

2.3.2.2 Egypt

According to Uroko (2024) and World Population Review (2023), there are 12 million people in Egypt that are experiencing homelessness. While studies indicate that millions of people face housing insecurity in Egypt, Abdel-Rahman et al (2023), discovered that homelessness in Egypt is a huge social issue caused by poverty, unemployment, population increase, and fast urbanization. According to the literature, homelessness in Egypt comprises persons living in

informal settlements, overcrowded households, abandoned structures, and other insecure surroundings (Egypt Watch, 2020; Homeless World Cup, 2023) as well as those sleeping on the streets.

Economic reasons such as poverty, unemployment, and high living costs have been recognized as significant causes of homelessness in Egypt. The demand for housing continues to rise due to population expansion, making it difficult for low-income people to find affordable housing (The Message, 2024). Family conflict, domestic violence, neglect, and abuse all contribute to homelessness, especially among children (Sealey, 2015). Many people leave home because of unstable family situations and a lack of financial assistance.

Street children represent a substantial share of Egypt's homeless population. According to research, millions of children live on the streets due to poverty and family troubles (Egypt Independent, 2011). Homelessness has a negative impact on children's physical health, emotional well-being, and education. Studies noted that homeless people frequently face mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as a lack of access to healthcare resources (World Health Organization, 2021; Okasha et al., 2025; Hassan & Elnoby, 2025).

2.3.2.3 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Democratic Republic of the Congo has 5 332 000 people experiencing homelessness and it is mostly caused by armed conflict, poverty, and inadequate social protection institutions (Uroko, 2024; World Population Review, 2023). The ongoing violence has displaced millions of people, causing many families to live in temporary shelters, overcrowded informal settlements, or on the streets (Jacobs & Kyamusugulwa, 2018). High unemployment and widespread poverty limit access to safe and affordable housing, increasing the likelihood of homelessness among vulnerable groups (Sasidharan, & Dhillon, 2022.). Furthermore, rapid urbanization has exacerbated housing shortages, leading in overcrowding and the expansion of informal settlements with limited access to utilities including water, sanitation, and healthcare (Citaristi, 2022.).

Children are among the most vulnerable to homelessness in the DRC (Mundibi, 2024). For instance, many children live on the streets because of family poverty, abuse, neglect, or the death of their parents (Mundibi, 2024; Rebecka & Bayongwa, 2026). Some children are abandoned because their family are unable to provide their fundamental necessities

(Foussiakda & Kasherwa, 2020). Furthermore, Mundibi (2024) noted that these homeless children frequently rely on informal businesses like street peddling or begging to survive.

2.4 Homeless and street involvement youth from South African perspective

According to News24Wire (2023), there were around 55 719 homeless individuals in South Africa in 2022. The gender distribution of these individuals was 16,667 women and 39,052 males. According to the census, 11 207 of them were in shelters and 44 512 were homeless (living on the streets). People with low or no income make up a large portion of the homeless population in South Africa. Gauteng has the greatest percentage of homeless individuals among the provinces in South Africa, with 45.6%, followed by the Western Cape 17.5%, and KwaZulu Natal 13.9 %. With 1.1% and 2.3%, respectively, the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga were found to have the lowest proportions (Mpedi, 2023). The disparity in homelessness between provinces serves as further evidence of the necessity of focused efforts in particular areas. The most populous province in South Africa, Gauteng, has a startlingly high percentage of homeless people, which raises the possibility that urbanization and economic inequality are local causes of homelessness. The difference of percentages between provinces like KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, and the Western Cape also point to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons of homelessness in each area.

Homeless individuals are moving to larger cities in search of employment, which exacerbates the housing crisis in these densely populated areas (Roets et al., 2016). Youth homelessness and street engagement in South Africa are multifaceted concerns that impact a great number of young people, families, and communities. These difficulties are driven by a combination of societal, economic, and individual variables. Poverty is one of the main causes of youth homelessness and streets involvement in South Africa (Hills et al., 2016). The Human Science Research Council (2024) estimates that 18.2 million South Africans were anticipated to be living in extreme poverty in 2023. Additionally, the 55 719 homeless people in the country, are thought to be among those most vulnerable to severe poverty. The nation's high youth unemployment rate, economic inequality, and restricted access to high-quality education all contribute to the poverty cycle that many families find difficult to escape (Tshishonga, 2019). Young people from low-income families frequently have financial difficulties that result in homelessness. Families that do not have a steady source of income or resources might find themselves unable to support their children, which could lead the young to turn to the streets in an effort to survive. According to Khambule (2020), homelessness and street involvement is

made worse by the absence of social safety nets, which deprives vulnerable youths of the resources they need to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, such as social support and RDP housing.

Family dysfunction, including domestic violence, substance abuse, and parental neglect, plays a critical role in youth homelessness in South Africa (Hills, Meyer-Weitz, & Asante, 2016). Young people frequently leave violent or neglected home circumstances in search of safety on the streets, where they are subjected to far greater risk and suffering. Without a supportive family structure, many young people struggle to cope with the challenges of homelessness and street life, and may prefer this to staying at home, where they are neglected, not supported and abused, making it feel like they have no home. Ncube (2015) further contend that abuse and exploitation, including verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual assault are important contributors to South Africa's youth homelessness problem. Many young people flee violent homes by moving out, but once they do, they expose themselves to further risk of exploitation on the streets. Abuse and trauma have long-lasting impacts, frequently resulting in mental health problems including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which make it difficult for victims to find permanent housing and reintegrate into society causing the cycle of homelessness. When street-involved youths turn to substance abuse and criminal activity as coping methods or means of survival, the cycle of abuse and exploitation continues.

Another prevalent cause of youth homelessness and street engagement in South Africa is substance abuse. Ndlovu (2019) claims that a lot of youths use drugs and alcohol to cope with the difficulties they encounter, which can make their circumstances worse and cause them to engage in harmful activities. Addiction to drugs and alcohol can also be a factor in mental health problems, which frequently go untreated and further alienate young people who are homeless and living on the streets. It is noted that there is a common belief that substance abuse and homelessness are mutually reinforcing, that substance abuse leads to homelessness (Allgood & Warren, 2003; Early, 2005) and that homelessness leads to substance use (Shinn et al., 1998; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Johnson et al., 1997; Neale, 2001). Youth who are homeless frequently utilize substance addiction as a coping method for a range of underlying problems, such as trauma, mental illness, dysfunctional families, and a lack of support networks. A lot of youths find themselves homeless because of substance misuse, family disputes, or mistreatment, all of which may worsen feelings of hopelessness and separation. Substance abuse may be used as a self-medication strategy for untreated mental health issues

or as a means of momentary reprieve from these stresses. According to Brown et al., 2019), homeless youths frequently turn to substance abuse and addiction as a form of therapy when dealing with trauma, stress, and the harsh reality of life on the streets. However, alcohol, nyaope, marijuana, bluetooth nyaope, glue, methamphetamine, and whoonga are among the drugs that homeless youth in Durban frequently abuse (Moyo & Gwaze, 2017; Patel & Patel, 2019). These young people are already vulnerable, and abuse of drugs adds to that vulnerability by increasing their risk of health issues, exploitation, and survival crimes.

2.5 Understanding homelessness and street involvement

Homelessness and street involvement are complex issues that encompasses a range of circumstances and situations. Homelessness is about more than just not having a roof over one's head and not having a place to live (Williams, 2016). It involves a wide range of living situations, such as going around sleeping at other people's homes, sleeping on the streets, staying in emergency shelters, or living in substandard or temporary housing. Homelessness is often characterized by a lack of stable and secure housing (Lee, Shinn, & Culhane, 2021). It can be caused by a variety of factors including poverty, abuse, mental illness, substance abuse, incarceration, family issues and neglect, violence, unemployment, and systemic issues like discrimination and inadequate social safety nets (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). Street involvement, on the other hand, refers to people participating in activities or lifestyles that are often associated with homelessness (Kelly & Caputo, 2007). This entails a direct participation on the street life such as sleeping rough, sleeping on the streets, panhandling, engaging in survival crimes such as theft, street sex work, or drug selling, and relying on shelters, petty crimes, or soup kitchens for necessities.

Fazel and Geddes (2019) defined homelessness as the absence of appropriate, secure, and stable housing. However, this term covers a wide range of experiences, from actual homelessness on the streets to unstable housing circumstances like couch surfing or staying in makeshift shelters. Homelessness arises from a complex interplay of structural and individual factors. Structural factors include the lack of affordable housing, economic inequality, and inadequate social safety nets. According to Cross et al. (2010), many people and families around the world cannot afford secure housing, even with full-time employment, and this is a major contributing factor to homelessness. Individual factors such as mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, family issues, unemployment and poverty, physical health issues, and previous incarceration, also contribute significantly to homelessness (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). The

effects of homelessness are profound and far-reaching. Homeless individuals face higher risks of physical and mental health problems, including chronic illnesses, depression, and substance abuse disorders (Andrea, 2015). They also encounter significant barriers to accessing healthcare, employment, and education, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

The term street involvement describes behaviours or ways of living that revolve around street settings and are frequently connected to homelessness, drug misuse, and criminal activity (Roy, Haley & Leclerc, 2016). Street involvement is the engagement of individuals, particularly youths, in activities or lifestyles associated with living or spending significant time on the streets. Street involvement encompasses a wide range of behaviours, conditions, and experiences, such as homelessness, street vending, begging, gang involvement, and substance abuse (Alam & Akter, 2017; Lima & Morais, 2019). It is frequently a sign of greater inequality in society and the economy. Among the main contributing variables are unemployment, poverty, family dissolutions and dynamics, peer influence, substance abuse, and lack of education. Many street-involved individuals come from disadvantaged backgrounds, lacking access to resources and opportunities (Goodman et al., 2020). Street involvement frequently causes or worsens mental health problems and substance abuse disorders (Deck & Platt, 2015). Trauma, drug abuse, and other psychological issues can arise from the unpredictable conditions and dangers of street living (Doja, 2020). In addition, those living on the streets may resort to dangerous activities, such as crime, to survive. From the body of knowledge presented, it is evident that street involvement often results from the interplay of multiple factors rather than a single cause. For instance, a youth from a low-income family experiencing domestic violence and struggling with mental health issues such as Trauma, PTSD and is a substance abuser is at a higher risk of becoming street involved.

There is a gender difference in the prevalence of homelessness, with men experiencing homelessness at a higher rate than women (Makiwane et al., 2010). The finding is consistent with larger body of studies showing that men are more likely to be homeless, frequently because of structural and societal reasons including gender norms and economic inequality (Montgomery et al., 2017; Winetrobe et al., 2017). It is essential to acknowledge that women experiencing homelessness frequently encounter distinct obstacles, such as an increased vulnerability to assault and exploitation. However, women may be underrepresented because they use alternative coping strategies, like couch-surfing or remaining in violent relationships, which can hide their homelessness. While the majority of those who are homeless are typically youthful, the population comprises individuals who are between the ages of 13 and 50 (Kok,

Cross & Roux, 2010; Makiwane et al., 2010,41). Experiences of parental neglect, lack of family support, addiction (drug and alcohol), violence and abuse, extreme poverty, unemployment, economic conditions and social services are the common leading factors that contribute to youth homelessness and to live on the streets (Oppong Asante & Meyer-Weitz, 2015; Seager & Tamasane, 2010; Ward & Seager, 2010). The high rate of youth homelessness draws attention to the vulnerabilities that young people encounter as well as the factors that led to their expulsion from their homes and onto the streets, where they are exposed to more risks and dangers. To preserve the safety and well-being of homeless youth, protective measures and social aid are desperately needed, as evidenced by the high number of these young people who have faced abuse, assault, and a lack of support systems.

2.6 Types of crimes committed by homeless and street-involved youth

2.6.1 Understanding crime

According to Thotakura (2011), crime is a public offense. It is an act of wrongdoing that breaches state law and is harshly condemned by society. Crime refers to illegal acts or omissions punishable by imprisonment or penalties. Murder, loitering, public intoxication, robbery and shoplifting, burglary, rape, abuse, drunk driving, child maltreatment, panhandling, and drug dealing are all examples of crimes (Hoffmann, & Stuntz, 2021). The term crime comes from the Latin word "crimen," which means both an offence and a wrongdoer (Szeghyová, 2022). Crime is regarded as an antisocial activity. Each civilization may define crime differently. Binder (2016) further claimed that illegal and punishable crime is defined as a violation of any administrative regulation or state legislation, as well as the practice of any conduct that is damaging to oneself or others, as established in criminal law.

No one is born a criminal; rather, it is the settings and conditions that cause an individual to act criminally (Thotakura, 2011). There are various reasons why someone becomes a criminal. The primary causes of crime are social (family dysfunction, substance abuse), economic (poverty, unemployment), psychological (mental illness, emotional instability), biological (gender, age), and geographical (cities or counties with a greater population have greater crime rates) (Claro et al., 2015). Furthermore, there are different types of crime. Personal crimes include robbery, rape, murder, assault, and sexual assault, among other crimes that specifically target a single person. Property crimes are those that target tangible possessions, including stealing, vandalism, panhandling, rough sleeping, arson fires, and public swimming. In addition, there is organized crime, which includes gang violence, money laundering, drug dealing, community

beatings, dacoits, and police brutality. Lastly, there is victimless crimes, it includes offenses like prostitution, illicit gambling, drug dealing (Hoffmann, & Stuntz, 2021).

2.6.2 Engagement in survival crimes

According to Butler (2024), crimes of survival, sometimes known as "crimes of poverty" or "petty crimes," are usually perpetrated by those who are in difficult social or economic circumstances and need to obtain necessities like clothing, food, or shelter. Rather than being committed with pure malice, these crimes are frequently attributed to systemic problems like homelessness, poverty, poor access to resources, or mental health problems. Survival crimes include stealing food or other necessities from stores since perpetrators are unable to pay for them, taking shelter on unoccupied, private, or deserted properties, participating in drug-related activities (selling or suppler) to survive and using sex labour as a means of financial assistance. People may turn to survival crimes to meet their immediate needs when they are denied access to fundamental essentials such as food, shelter, and medical treatment (Morewitz, 2016).

Studies have shown that one of the main factors contributing to survival crimes among homeless people is the lack of resources and support systems available to them (refs). Without a steady income or a place to reside, homeless people are forced to engage in criminal acts to survive. A lot of youths engage in these criminal activities because they have no other options and are desperate, perpetuating the cycle of marginalization and poverty. Resources like food, housing, and healthcare may not be available to people who are homeless. Research further indicates that most homeless people turn to criminal activity as a means of obtaining necessities and acting in a desperate manner. They might resort to stealing clothing or food, peddling drugs, or panhandling to survive. Even though it is against the law to do these things, homeless people frequently view them as their only option. Chowdhury, Whittaker and Richmond (2021), argued that homeless youth often turn to survival crimes, such as drug dealing, prostitution, trespassing, and shoplifting, to pay for and provide their necessities.

Homeless individuals engaging in survival crimes are often exposed to heightened risks of victimization, both from other homeless individuals and from members of the public. They are further disadvantaged by laws that criminalize homelessness, such as those that forbid panhandling or anti-vagrancy measures. Consequently, to avoid detection by law enforcement or circumvent punitive government measures, homeless people may resort to survival crimes (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2016). Participating in survival crimes can result in involvement with the criminal justice system, which worsens the difficulties homeless

people already experience. According to Greenberg, Rosenheck and Desai (2016), legal sanctions and jail might impede attempts to get stable housing and work, hence perpetuating cycles of homelessness and criminal activity. These youths become further entrenched in cycles of incarceration and reoffending through survival crimes, increasing the likelihood of continued involvement with the criminal justice system.

2.7 Incidents of crimes experienced by homeless, and street involve youth in Durban

2.7.1 Exposure to violence

According to Vorobej (2016), the concept of violence is complex and diverse, encompassing a broad spectrum of actions and behaviours that are intended to cause hurt, injury, or damage to people, groups, or property. It can take many different forms, such as structural, verbal, psychological, emotional, sexual, and physical violence. However, many studies on the types of violence experienced by homeless and street-involved youth es often identify physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological and emotional abuse, the latter of which frequently stems from verbal violence. Studies have shown that homeless youth are frequently victims of physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse, often perpetrated by peers, acquaintances on the streets, strangers, or even law enforcement (Fingerhut, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2004).

2.7.2 Verbal abuse

According to Prajapati & TS (2024), verbal abuse is a type of mental violence in which someone uses words to dominate, manipulate, denigrate, or belittle another person. It can manifest itself in several ways, such as relentless criticism, intimidation, threats, insults, and humiliation. Even though verbal abuse may not result in physical harm, its effects on the psychological and emotional health can be severe and persistent. Homeless people often experience verbal abuse because they are frequently stigmatized and stereotyped by society, which assumes they are lazy, drug or alcohol addicted, or morally deficient (Tripathi, 2022).

Homeless people often find themselves marginalized, powerless, and vulnerable, facing verbal abuse and harassment from those who feel superior, particularly due to their appearance or presence in public spaces. They are often called vagrants or junkies. In South Africa homeless people are also referred to as “Nyaope or Whoonga boys”, “Amaphara the Parasites”, and “Amaferanja”. These terms are stigmatizing labels used to describe street-involved or homeless youth, often associated with substance use, survival-based activities, their living on the streets and their appearance in public (Gwegwe, 2022; Mahlangu, 2020).

In a study conducted in major cities by Molnar, Goering and McVicar (2018) they documented frequent instances of derogatory language, insults, and threats directed at homeless people by members of the public. Furthermore, qualitative research suggests that verbal abuse often occurs in public spaces such as parks, streets, outside shopping centres, and transportation hubs or taxi ranks, where homeless individuals are highly visible and vulnerable to harassment (Jones & Peeples, 2019).

Verbal abuse can be a crime; however, it depends on the circumstances. According to De Wet (2016) and Steyn (2021), verbal abuse is a type of domestic violence classified as harassment and is illegal in South Africa. Unwanted, recurrent, and repetitive behaviour that violates someone's privacy or upsets them emotionally is referred to as harassment. In addition, verbal abuse may also be regarded as crimen injuria, a criminal offense including the wilful and unlawful violation of another person's privacy or dignity (Sibisi, 2023). Scholars have demonstrated that, in addition to being illegal, verbal abuse can also, on occasion, cause criminal action, primarily in the case of homeless youths. In severe situations, verbal abuse can result in murder or other violent deaths (Archer, 2022; Hills et al., 2015). Furthermore, verbal abuse directed towards homeless individuals has the potential to turn into physical or sexual harassment, kidnapping, extortion, and theft of personal property (Geldenhuys, 2018; Pophaim, 2019).

2.7.3 Physical abuse

Physical abuse is the most frequent kind of crime encountered by homeless individuals and involved in the streets. Physical abuse is defined as the purposeful use of force against another person, which causes bodily harm, injury, pain, or impairment (Hamby, 2017). Physical abuse is any intentional violation that results in harm or trauma to the body of another person. It can take many different forms, such as striking, punching, kicking, burning, restraint, or injuring someone with objects (Onapa et al., 2022). Physical abuse can have short-term and long-term effects. Homeless people are among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society, lacking resources, support networks, and legal protection. Perpetrators of abuse including law enforcement, shelter and street mates, and strangers may exploit this power imbalance to exert control and dominance over their victims. According to the study conducted by Sewpaul et al. (2012), male youths on the streets suffer from physical assaults and harassment at the hands of the police.

2.7.4 Sexual abuse

According to Conroy, Krishnakumar and Leone (2015), any unwanted sexual activity or behaviour that is imposed onto a person without that person's consent is referred to as sexual abuse. This can pertain to a broad spectrum of behaviours, such as touching, coercion, manipulation, harassment, molestation, rape, or any other type of sexual violence. There are many different settings in which sexual abuse can take place, including homes, close relationships, companies, institutions, and communities. The core of sexual abuse is a power dynamic in which the abuser dominates and controls the victim, and mostly victims are female (Côté et al., 2022). There are several variables that can impact this power dynamic, such as gender inequity, societal standards, cultural attitudes, and system injustice. Homeless people often lack stable and secure housing, forcing them to sleep in public places, abandoned buildings, streets, or seek protection in shelters. This puts homeless youths in situations where their safety and security are not guaranteed, making them more vulnerable to abuse in general and sexual exploitation in particular. It appears that, at least for women, sexual abuse occurs often on Durban's streets (Motala & Smith,2003).

2.8 Factors influencing involvement in criminal activities among homeless and street-involved youth

2.8.1 Substance abuse

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Thompson et al., 2015). It involves the overindulgence in these substances in a manner that negatively affects one's health, judgment, relationships, or other aspects of life. It can also result in legal troubles or interfere with one's ability to fulfil obligations to one's home, job, or school. Homeless and street- involved youth often believe that using drugs helps them cope with the harsh realities of living on the streets, such as cold weather, hunger since they rely on community soup kitchen due to lack of food and cooking equipment. They often feel that certain types of drugs reduce worry about their circumstances and give them courage to act. Additionally, substances can induce euphoria and hallucinations, allowing them to temporarily escape the reality of being homeless.

Further, drug use also appears to serve as a social glue among homeless youth, fostering a sense of community. According to the study conducted by Malindi and Theron, (2010) homeless people use drugs and substances as a cheap, albeit unhealthy, coping mechanism, and consuming drugs together on the streets can form social ties in an unusual way, serving as a

source of resilience. Another study has demonstrated the frequent correlation between substance abuse and criminal activity, especially among youth who are homeless or involved in the streets (Bah, 2018). This group is vulnerable to a wide range of problems, such as exposure to violence, mental health disorders, poverty, and a lack of family support. These issues are made worse by substance abuse, which starts an ongoing cycle that frequently results in criminal activity. Moreover, substance misuse significantly influences the extent to which homeless or street-involved youth participates in criminal activity. The relationship of addiction and criminal activity among this vulnerable demographic is influenced by several factors, including the need to support addiction, impaired judgment and decision-making abilities, and exacerbation of underlying mental health conditions.

One of the most significant ways substance abusers influence the criminal activity of homeless and street-involved youth is through the need to sustain an addiction. Abuse of drugs and alcohol can cause financial strain because users may put their addiction above taking care of their fundamental requirements (Grafova, 2018). This may force individuals to commit crimes like drug peddling, theft, or prostitution to support their habit. Their dependence may also lead them to engage in riskier or more violent criminal behaviour. For instance, research by Gaetz (2004) shows that because of their substance abuse, homeless youth are far more prone to commit survival crimes, crimes carried out of need, including stealing food or money. The desire to get drugs or alcohol frequently takes precedence over other considerations, such as the possibility of being caught or the moral ramifications of their behaviour.

In addition to impairing judgment, substance abuse increases the possibility of risky behaviour, which can result in criminal activity (Kipping et al., 2015). Substance addiction is frequently employed by homeless people as a coping strategy for trauma, abuse, or other mental health issues they may have encountered (Brown et al., 2019). On the other hand, substance abuse might exacerbate these problems and result in more emotional instability and impulsive behaviour, which can encourage criminal activity (DeMatteo, Filone & Davis, 2015). Alcohol and drug use can affect how the brain functions, increasing impulsivity and decreasing one's capacity to consider the effects of one's actions (Squeglia & Gray, 2016). Poor judgment resulting from drug use can increase the likelihood of engaging in criminal activity such as violence, vandalism, or drug-related crimes.

2.8.2 Poverty and lack of income

One of the main causes of youth homelessness in South Africa is poverty (Hills et al., 2016). Familial poverty causes a lot of youths to end up homeless and can lead to domestic violence, eviction, or unstable housing (Gilroy et al., 2016). Their vulnerability is increased by lack of income once they are on the streets. When these young people lack access to essentials like clothing, food, and shelter, they are frequently forced into survival mode, which blurs the boundaries between what is legal and what is illegal.

In addition, the dearth of educational and employment opportunities brought about by poverty may also play a role in the criminal activities of young people who are homeless, or street involved (Cheng et al., 2016). Many come from disadvantaged households and may have been unable to access adequate schooling or develop employment skills. Without the necessary training and credentials, they often struggle to secure jobs, leaving them with few options other than to engage in crime to survive.

For homeless and street-involved youth, the struggle to survive is a daily reality (Gould, 2019). Without money, many feel compelled to engage in illegal activities such as drug peddling, theft, or sex work in order to meet basic needs (Chowdhury, Whittaker, & Richmond 2021). In certain situations, engaging in criminal activity becomes the only practical choice due to the dearth of alternatives for earning a living and the ongoing need to provide for necessities. This survival motivated criminality is often not a matter of choice but of necessity (Jones, 2019). Even people who might not otherwise commit crimes may feel pressured to do so if they are not making money. Under such a scenario, criminal activity is a reaction to extreme circumstances rather than just delinquent behaviour.

For some youth, criminal activities may serve as a coping mechanism or an expression of anger and frustration (Agnew, 2020). These criminal activities include theft or damage of property, vandalism, violence or assault (Hoffmann & Stuntz, 2021). The strain of being homeless, along with the discrimination and shame they experience, can cause them to act in ways that are damaging to themselves and other people. Drug use, which is common among young people who are homeless, can also fuel criminal activity since the urge to get drugs can result in theft or other criminal activity.

Research has consistently shown that poverty and lack of income are major drivers of criminal activity among homeless and street-involved youth. People who are caught in the vicious cycle of poverty frequently turn to illicit activities as a last resort in an attempt to survive. Due to

their lack of access to permanent housing and financial resources, homeless and street-involved youth encounter several obstacles that may lead them to turn to criminal activity as a survival method.

2.8.3 Peer pressure and the influence of street culture

Youth who are homeless or involved in street life are more likely to engage in criminal activity due to peer pressure and the influence of street culture. These factors may encourage youths who are particularly vulnerable (emotionally, psychologically, or socially) to the pressures and risks of homelessness and street-life to participate in criminal activity to survive, get acceptability in their social networks, or manage the difficulties they encounter daily while living on the streets. Ribera, Miller and Dumford (2017), noted that peer pressure is a potent social force, especially for young people who are trying to find their identity, a sense of belonging, and acceptance. Peer groups on the streets can act as stand-in families for homeless and street-involved youth, who frequently lack stable family backgrounds and need a sense of protection and connection. Youth who are homeless or street-involved frequently live surrounded by others who could push or encourage them to commit crimes (Samara, 2005). Peer pressure can take the shape of manipulation, compulsion, or just the need to blend in with the group (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford 2017). These young people may end up engaging in behaviours they would not have otherwise considered, including stealing, drug selling, or violence, in their search for acceptance and friendship (Brown, 2016).

Homeless and street-involved youth are greatly influenced by street culture, which is defined by its own set of beliefs, standards, and behaviours (Frederick, 2020). The harsh realities of living on the streets, where survival frequently takes precedence over traditional moral or legal considerations, have a significant influence on this culture (Gould, 2019). The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of homeless and street-involved youth can be greatly influenced by street culture. Street culture frequently elevates criminal activity to a position of power and survival, depicting it as an essential reaction to the harsh reality of life on the streets (Ilan, 2017). Because of the normalizing of criminal activity, young people may become less sensitive to the consequences of their behaviour and may resort to crime as a means of gaining control over their circumstances.

Peer pressure and street culture often intersect and reinforce each other in ways that amplify the likelihood of criminal involvement among homeless and street-involved youth (Frederick, 2019). Peer groups' common standards and beliefs frequently reflect the larger street culture,

which feeds back into an endless loop that constantly encourages and validates illegal behaviour (Henry, 2018). Young people who are deeply rooted in these situations may find it increasingly difficult to leave because doing so might have serious social and psychological consequences, such losing the support of their peers or experiencing reprisals (Frederick, 2020; Ribera et al., 2017)

Furthermore, it is important to understand that street culture and peer pressure have a compounding effect on homeless youth's criminal activity (Karabanow et al., 2018). Wider socioeconomic variables that increase youth susceptibility to these impacts include mental health disorders, poverty, lack of access to education, and institutional shortcomings in social services (Ferguson & Xie, 2008). In addition, according to Gould (2019), the prosecution and stigmatization of homeless and street-involved youth by society can worsen their marginalization by encouraging them to join peer groups and street cultures where criminal activity is accepted.

The literature presented suggests that frequently, young people may feel pressured to partake in illicit activities in order to fit in or to prevent being rejected by their peers. Because there is frequently a culture of mutual support based on common experiences of hardship and exclusion, this social impact can be especially strong in communities connected with the street. The social identity and sense of belonging that these actions engender in young people might make it challenging for them to break free from the cycle of homelessness and criminality.

2.9 Impact of criminal behaviour on the lives of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban

2.9.1 Mental, psychological, and physical health consequences

Homeless and street-involved youth in Durban face numerous challenges in their daily lives, including the impact of criminal behaviour. These young individuals, often marginalized and struggling to survive, are frequently exposed to criminal behaviour, either as victims or perpetrators. Criminal activity, such as drug dealing, theft, and violence, not only affects the immediate safety and well-being of these young people but also has long-term consequences on their mental, physical, and psychological health (Caruso, 2017; D'Souza, 2021).

The mental health of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban is often severely impacted by exposure to criminal behaviour (Hills et al., 2017). Chowdhury et al., (2021), further argued that criminal behaviour among homeless youth is often a means of survival. Theft, drug dealing, and other illicit activities are common ways to secure food, shelter, or money. Constant

fear off arrest, stress, and anxiety associated with living on the streets and being involved in criminal activities can lead to high levels of psychological distress (Sewell, Jefferson, & Lee, 2016). In addition, many of these young people may also suffer from PTSD because of witnessing or experiencing violence or abuse on the streets (Scorgie et al., 2017). The lack of access to mental health services further exacerbates the situation, leaving these youth without proper support and resources to cope with their mental health challenges. Furthermore, involvement in criminal activities can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and hopelessness, deepening the mental health struggles of these youths (Osman & Wood, 2018).

The psychological toll of living on the streets and engaging in criminal behaviour can be devastating. Molnar et al., (2018) noted that individuals living on the streets may have a distorted sense of identity and self-worth, inherently "bad" or undeserving of a better life, which can create a sense of hopelessness and despair. According to Hills et al., (2016), the persistent exposure to criminal behaviour can have long-lasting effects on the psychological well-being of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. Many of these young people may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse or self-harm, to deal with the trauma and stress of their circumstances (Brown et al., 2019). Feelings of hopelessness, despair, and low self-esteem are common among this population, leading to an increased risk of developing mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Osman & Wood, 2018). The lack of stability, support, and positive social connections further contribute to the deterioration of their psychological health.

Criminal behaviour among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban often leads to physical harm and injury (Hills et al., 2017). Participating in violent activities or being victims of crime can result in serious physical injuries, chronic health problems, illnesses, infections, and even death (Mercy et al., 2017). Furthermore, Paudyal and colleagues (2020), argued that these young people are also more likely to experience poor nutrition, lack of access to healthcare, and exposure to environmental hazards, further compromising their physical health. Additionally, victims of sexual abuse are usually infected with STIs including HIV/AIDS and gonorrhoea. Motala and Smith’s (2003) study found that participants in their study slept in various places each night to avoid being raped. Violence perpetuates cycles of homelessness, substance abuse, and marginalization, hindering youths' ability to escape street life and access supportive services (Roy, Haley, & Leclerc, 2016).

Whether it is witnessing crime directly, experiencing it personally, or even just being exposed to it through media, the effects can be profound in a positive or undesirable way. However, on most victims of crime it is evident that crime has a harmful impact. Violence and abuse can have negative and protracted impacts on the victim's physical, mental, and emotional health. It frequently results in trauma, problems with trust, and difficulties establishing and maintaining healthy relationships (Brewer, 2022). Additionally, structural violence, such as harassment and discrimination, makes homeless youth even more vulnerable (Bender et al., 2010). Not only do these traumatic experiences worsen psychological discomfort, but they also make substance abuse problems worse in this population. Furthermore, violence has serious and complex consequences for youths who are homeless. According to Whitbeck et al. (2002), victims who frequently experience physical harm suffers from low self-esteem, and PTSD. Youths or individuals who witness or experience physical abuse may also develop behavioural problems and have difficulties forming healthy relationships in the future (Ouzounian, 2019).

2.9.2 Legal consequences and barriers to reintegration

Youth homelessness is frequently a result of the difficult living circumstances they experience. According to Morewitz (2016), a considerable number of homeless youths turn to petty offenses including drug trafficking, prostitution, and theft as a means of obtaining necessities like clothing, food, and shelter. The legal repercussions of these unlawful actions, such as arrest, incarceration, and criminal records, might further isolate them from society's norms (Askew & Salinas, 2019). Laws that target loitering, panhandling, and public intoxication disproportionately harm homeless people and push them further into the criminal justice system, which further exacerbates the problem of homelessness (Herring, Yarbrough, & Marie Alatorre, 2020). Homeless youth may have long-term consequences from this cycle of criminal activity and legal ramifications, making it more difficult for them to access future housing, job, and educational opportunities (Greenberg et al., 2016).

The criminalization of homelessness also makes it more difficult for young people who have been homeless or street-involved to reintegrate into society. Young people's cycle of homelessness and criminal conduct may be prolonged by a criminal record that hinders their access to social services, meaningful work, and stable housing (Greenberg et al., 2016). Furthermore, discrimination and social stigma towards homeless people impede their attempts at reintegrating into society, resulting in social exclusion and isolation (Srinivasan & Sahayam, 2024). Youth with criminal history are frequently stigmatized by society and seen as dangerous or unreliable (Denver, Pickett & Bushway, 2017). According to Greenberg et al. (2016), this

stigma not only lowers their self-esteem but also makes it harder for them to get housing, work, and other necessities. This stigma may cause homeless youth in areas where resources for marginalized communities are already few, to be excluded from programs that could aid in their reintegration.

Access to a variety of support services, such as education, career training, mental health care, and drug addiction treatment, is necessary for effective reintegration (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2017). But in areas such as Durban, the most vulnerable people cannot always access these services because they are underfunded. Greenberg and colleagues (2016) argue that due to legislative constraints or discrimination by service providers, homeless youth with a criminal history may find it more challenging to receive these programs (Greenberg et al., 2016). They further state that criminal behaviour and its legal consequences often trap homeless and street-involved youth in a cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Without the means to secure stable employment or housing, these young people may be forced back onto the streets, where they are at risk of re-offending (Chowdhury et al., 2021). This cycle is further perpetuated by the lack of social safety nets and support structures that could provide a pathway out of homelessness and criminality.

Based on existing research, criminal activity has a negative impact on the lives of homeless and street-involved youth. It can lead to lifelong legal repercussions and create significant obstacles to their successful reintegration into society (Greenberg et al., 2016). But overcoming these obstacles calls for a multipronged strategy that incorporates changes in society perceptions of underprivileged youths, the provision of sufficient support services, and legislative reforms. Youth who are homeless can be assisted in breaking away from the pattern of criminal conduct and rebuilding their lives by addressing the underlying causes of their situation, focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration rather than criminalization, and offering extensive support services (Ngubane & Dlamini, 2019).

2.9.3 Increased vulnerability and victimization

Due to their lack of secure housing, restricted access to resources, and social isolation, homeless and street-involved youth are more susceptible to exploitation (Finkerlhor, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2004). Due to these circumstances, criminals can easily prey on individuals and take advantage of their despair. Human traffickers, drug dealers, and gangs frequently prey on street-involved youths (Brown, 2016). They are frequently forced into risky situations where they are forced into illegal acts due to their need for basic requirements including food, shelter, and

protection (Butler, 2024; Morewitz, 2016). For example, young girls are more susceptible to sexual exploitation, where they could be coerced into prostitution in return for cash or housing. Boys could be used as drug couriers or recruited into gangs. These young people are criminally exploited, which not only keeps them involved in criminal activity but also feeds the cycle of homelessness and poverty (Ndlovu, 2019).

Criminal activity affects homeless and street-involved youth beyond bodily harm (Caruso, 2017; D'Souza, 2021). Crime victims could go through emotional anguish, feel guilty or ashamed, and feel helpless (Osman & Wood, 2018). This may further damage their self-esteem and make it more difficult for them to turn their lives around and get assistance. Furthermore, these already vulnerable individuals are further marginalized by the criminalization of homelessness and street involvement (Harring et al., 2022). Homeless people may become the target of law enforcement for infractions like loitering and panhandling, which could result in more interactions with the criminal justice system and worsen the cycles of homelessness and criminality (Hoffmann & Stuntz, 2021).

Furthermore, Hills et al., (2017), argued that the constant exposure to criminal behaviour, whether as victims or perpetrators, has severe psychological repercussions for homeless and street-involved youth. Scorgie et al., (2017), noted that the trauma of exploitation, violence, and abuse can lead to a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health services are often inaccessible to this population, untreated psychological trauma can result in chronic mental health problems (Kidd et al., 2014), substance abuse (Brown et al., 2019), or increased involvement in criminal activities as a coping mechanism (Agnew, 2020).

2.9.4 Stigmatization and social isolation

Youth involved with street life and those who are homeless are often stigmatized. Society frequently perceives these youth as delinquents, linking their homelessness to criminal activity (Mkhize et al., 2022). The stigma surrounding street youth is reinforced by media representations that paint them as dangerous and unreliable (Denver et al., 2017). According to Molnar et al. (2018), the term "criminal" takes on a unique significance, overshadowing any chance of recovery or social rehabilitation. The effects of being stigmatized are extensive. Youth who are stigmatized frequently face barriers to employment, social assistance, and educational prospects, which serves to further solidify their marginalization (Ferguson & Xie, 2008). Additionally, they might absorb these unfavourable ideas, which would result in low

self-worth and despondency (Molnar et al., 2018). Due to their perceived lack of other options for survival, homeless and street-involved youth who have internalized stigma may engage in criminal activity more deeply.

2.10 Crimes by and against homeless youth and street-involved youth

Youth homelessness and street engagement are complicated issues that are frequently linked to criminal activities. Like numerous other cities globally, Durban, South Africa, is home to a sizeable community of homeless and street-engaged teenagers who encounter a range of obstacles, such as poverty, joblessness, substance abuse, and violence. This vulnerable group is both targeted by crime and involved in committing crime, reinforcing a continuous cycle of offending and victimization.

2.10.1 The interconnectedness of perpetration and victimization.

According to Hoffmann and Stuntz (2021) there is a close connection between crimes committed against homeless and street-involved youths and crimes committed by them. This youthful criminal behaviour frequently results from the same vulnerabilities that make them victims (Sadiki, 2016). For instance, a youth who steals to survive might be more vulnerable to adult exploitation if they give them safety in return for criminal activity (Jones, 2019). Brown (2016) also pointed out that while being a part of a gang may give young people a sense of security, it also exposes them to violent confrontations and retaliation from competing organizations.

A lack of proper social services and support networks in Durban contributes to the link that exists between crimes against and committed by homeless and street-involved youth (Greenberg et al., 2016). These young people must make ends meet for themselves on the streets without access to housing, healthcare, education, or mental health services, which increases their vulnerability to victimization and encourages them to get further involved in criminal activity (Khambule, 2020).

Furthermore, a cycle of victimization and criminalization may result from the stigma and discrimination experienced by young people who are homeless, or street involved (Srinivasan & Sahayam, 2024). Due to the societal belief that these youth are innately criminal, they may face more severe penalties from the legal system and law enforcement, increasing their likelihood of becoming both offenders and victims of crime (Mkhize et al., 2022). According to Greenberg et al. (2016), their victimization frequently goes unrecognized or is disregarded,

which keeps them deeper enmeshed in a life of crime. This is because there is a lack of empathy and understanding for their circumstances.

2.11 Challenges in crime reporting and justice seeking for homeless and street involved youth in Durban

2.11.1 Fear of retaliation and lack of trust in authorities

One major obstacle keeping homeless and street-involved youth from reporting crimes is fear of retaliation (Gould, 2019). Many these young people are from homes where violence and intimidation are commonplace, and they regularly witness or experience severe consequences for anyone who speaks out against the perpetrators (Hills et al., 2016; Whitbeck et al., 2002). This fear stems from their regular interactions with the harsh realities of life on the streets (Brown et al., 2019). According to Ward and Seager (2010), young people who are homeless are particularly vulnerable to violence from peers, gangs, and occasionally even law enforcement. According to Klement (2019), retaliation is not just a perceived threat but also a real, present danger that might result in additional injuries, social isolation, or even fatalities.

In addition, criminal elements often prey on young people who are involved in street life, taking advantage of their unstable living conditions. The pursuit of justice can be a potentially fatal undertaking due to the possibility of violent reprisals for reporting crimes against certain individuals or groups (Harris, 2019). Retaliation can have a range of harmful outcomes, from physical attack to social banishment from their groups, which leaves them even more vulnerable and alone (Klement, 2019); Sadiki & Steyn, (2021). As a result, even in the face of extreme injustice, silence becomes an act of survival (Mthembu, 2023). This fear of vengeance allows perpetrators to act with impunity because they know that their victims will not come forward and report their crimes (Gould, 2019).

Youth who are homeless or involved in the streets not only fear retaliation but also have low trust in authorities, which makes it much more difficult for them to approach the legal system. A significant number of these individuals have had negative experiences with social services or law enforcement in the past, which has made them extremely wary of those in positions of power (Finkerlhor, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2004; Sewpaul et al., 2012). They are concerned that the very organizations meant to protect and benefit them are not going to accept them or will not believe them which makes them reluctant to seek help or report crimes (Gould, 2019). If these young people do not have a good and trustworthy relationship with the authorities, they

are unlikely to come forward with their experiences of victimization, which will perpetuate the culture of silence and impunity.

Furthermore, a lot of young people who are involved in street life have had poor or hostile relationships with authorities. Studies have shown that police officers frequently abuse, harass, and mistreat homeless (Schwan, Fallon, & Milne, 2018; Sewpaul et al., 2012). These occurrences serve as proof to them that the government's goal is not to protect them but rather to control or penalize them. They may consequently view reporting crimes as meaningless or even detrimental since they fear they will not be taken seriously or that they might become the victims of additional crimes (Gould, 2019). In addition, the historical legacy of apartheid and socioeconomic differences in Durban and South Africa at large have engendered a pervasive mistrust between state institutions and marginalized communities, which contributes to a lack of trust (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005).

2.11.2 Legal barriers faced by homeless and street-involved youth

Research has shown that the primary legal barriers that homeless and street-involved kids face are associated with their lack of official identification cards (Bouclin, 2015). Without the proper identity, they might not be able to report crimes to the police or receive certain services. Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2018) state that many of these young people do not have birth certificates, identity cards, or other essential paperwork, which is often required in order to file police complaints or get legal aid. Furthermore, according to Maphumulo (2019), young people experiencing homelessness typically do not have permanent living arrangements or a fixed place to live, which makes it difficult for them to obtain identity cards or birth certificates. Their inability to provide identification may hinder them from obtaining legal assistance services or seeking redress for crimes against them (Bouclin, 2015).

In addition, children experiencing homelessness or involvement in the streets may find it challenging to understand their legal rights and navigate the judicial system (Quirouette et al., 2016). Many of these individuals come from disadvantaged backgrounds, therefore it is likely that they do not have the same access to opportunities for education or resources as other young people (Goodman et al., 2020). The South African judicial system, like many others, is intimidating and complicated, especially for those who are unfamiliar with it (Anderson, 2016). The South African judicial system can be intimidating and complicated for homeless and street-involved youth because it involves complex legal procedures, uses formal language they often will not understand, and requires navigating multiple institutions such as the police, courts, and

social services. The environment of uniformed officers, strict rules, and formal court settings can feel threatening. Additionally, homeless and street-involved youth often lack legal documentation, support, and legal knowledge, making it harder to participate confidently or understand their rights. Their lack of knowledge about the legal system may make it more difficult for them to report crimes or seek justice, which in turn makes it more difficult for them to acquire assistance and protection (Greene, 2015). Many youths may fear that they will not be believed, struggle with legal language, and often have negative past experiences with law enforcement. Furthermore, Skelton (2013) notes without legal assistance, lawsuits are often dismissed, or verdicts are rendered unfavourably in circumstances when an individual is unable to adequately plead their case.

2.11.3 Stigmatization and discrimination

The term ‘stigmatization’ refers to the negative societal stereotypes and misconceptions that are directed towards children who are homeless or participating in the street. These stereotypes often portray them as criminals, delinquents, or social misfits (Weiss & Ramak, 2016). Youths who are homeless or involved in street life are often viewed by society as ‘troublemakers’ or ‘delinquents’ (Molnar et al. 2018). Because of this negative stereotype, authorities may find it difficult to believe them when they report crimes. According to a study by Atak (2022), homeless youth felt ignored and alienated by law enforcement. Homeless individuals who experience or witness crime may be discouraged from seeking help because of this suspicion (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Additional evidence of this mistrust comes from their past bad interactions with law enforcement, where they may have been the subject of abuse, harassment, or false accusations due to their appearance and social position (Mubangizi, 2020).

According to Hills et al. (2016), discrimination in the judicial system exacerbates the issues that homeless and youth-involved streets face. Discriminatory practices can take many different forms, such as the prejudiced opinions of law enforcement, unfair treatment of parties in court, and a general lack of empathy or understanding of the unique circumstances encountered by young people who are street involved (Swart, 2020). Because of this systemic bias, their rights might be abused, their opinions might be disregarded, and their issues might be badly or never examined (Greene, 2015). Moreover, bias in courtrooms is often caused by the social stigma attached to their status, where witnesses' testimony may be viewed with suspicion or outright denied (Mubangizi, 2020). This discrimination keeps the young people

stuck in a cycle of victimization where their perpetrators go unpunished and they suffer in silence, in addition to deterring them from seeking justice.

Additionally, homeless and street-involved pupils may face discrimination because of their socioeconomic background (Greenberg et al., 2016). They are more likely to be the target of criminals due to their vulnerability and lack of resources. Furthermore, according to Gould (2019), homeless people could become unwilling to disclose crimes for fear of discrimination or reprisal, which can result in a cycle of victimization. In a 2003 study, Motala and Smith reported that homeless youth indicated that they stayed away from urban areas where they had experienced violence out of fear that they would run across the attackers again.

2.12 Current interventions and their effectiveness for homeless and street-involved youth

2.12.1 Outreach and support programs

Outreach initiatives are essential for reaching homeless youth who might be hesitant to reach out for assistance (Van Leeuwen, 2004). Many young people who are homeless have been subjected to trauma, abuse, or neglect, which frequently results in a lack of faith in authorities or care providers. Through outreach programs, organizations can interact with homeless youth in a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening way, gradually gaining their trust. Outreach initiatives such as Umthombo have demonstrated efficacy in engaging this population (Wes Alan Films in Umthombo- Durban Street team, 2012, 00:04:19). In addition to providing counselling and connections to further support services, outreach programs supply necessities including food, housing, and medical attention. Integrated interventions that combine mental health counselling with substance abuse treatment have demonstrated positive outcomes (Drake et al., 1998). Initiatives like the Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) provide holistic support, including counselling, detoxification, and rehabilitation services, tailored to the unique needs of homeless youth (Ngubane & Dlamini, 2019).

In South Africa, the right to shelter is enshrined in various legal documents and policies. The Constitution in Section 26 provides for the right to adequate housing, stating that everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing. This includes measures to prevent homelessness, as well as to improve access to housing and basic services for those who are inadequately housed. Shelter services are vital for homeless youth, providing them with a safe space and access to basic amenities. Shelters also promote the right to health care, food, water, and social security. Vulnerable youth have benefited greatly from Durban's shelters, such as The Haven

Night Shelter (Johnson & Naidoo, 2020). These shelters offer supportive temporary housing and try to promote the basic needs of South African citizens. Capacity limitations and the transitory nature of youth homelessness, however, may limit these shelters' efficacy.

In terms of support systems, several interventions have been established at national, provincial, and municipal levels to assist homeless individuals, including youth. The Department of Social Development (DSD) has introduced initiatives such as temporary shelters, rehabilitation programmes, and the National Policy Framework for Homelessness, which aims to coordinate services across government and non-governmental actors (Department of Social Development, 2021). At the local level, the eThekwini Municipality provides shelters, drop-in centres, outreach programmes, and reintegration services through its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and partnerships with NGOs and faith-based organisations (eThekwini Municipality, 2023). However, despite these efforts, service capacity remains limited, and many shelters in Durban and surrounding areas are often full or inadequately resourced (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020; Sadiki, 2021).

Interventions that prioritize mentorship, education, and vocational training are crucial in enabling homeless youth to end the cycle of homelessness and poverty and in creating positive role models. It has been demonstrated that initiatives like Skills Development for Youth (SDY) can help young people become more independent and provide them with employable skills (Mkhize & Govender, 2018). Through providing training in a range of crafts and occupations, these programs help homeless youth to gain better opportunities for long-term employment. Youth Connect and other similar programs enable peer-led support groups and mentorship partnerships, which in turn help homeless youth to develop social integration and resilience skills (Khumalo & Mtshali, 2020). These interventions improve the psychosocial wellbeing of young people who are homeless by creating supportive relationships and role models.

2.12.2 Harm reduction strategies

Harm reduction tactics should focus on creating safe spaces where young people can access support services without fear of being harmed, to address the issue of violence. Street-involved pupils in Durban receive vital services including counselling, medical attention, and legal support directly from outreach programs run by non-governmental organizations like The Denis Hurley Centre (Denis Hurley Centre, DHC). These initiatives build trustworthy relationships in addition to providing quick support, which helps motivate young people to ask for assistance when they are in danger. Harm reduction approaches offer a pragmatic response

to the complex needs of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. For example, needle and syringe programs try to lower the risk of bloodborne diseases among drug injectors (Smith, Jones & Patel, 2018). Another important harm reduction strategy that helps young people manage their substance dependence and lessen related consequences is the availability of opioid replacement therapy (Dube, Mokwena & Hlahane, 2021). Additionally, outreach and peer support programs are vital to harm reduction efforts because they give young people participating in the streets access to information, resources, and support systems (Johnson & Reddy, 2019). These programs use a client-centred approach, recognizing the special needs and experiences of young people who are living in unstable situations.

2.13 Chapter summary

The literature on youths who are homeless or participating in street life reveals a concerning cycle of criminalization and vulnerability in which young people are frequently both the victims and offenders of crime. Youth are more exposed to criminal activity and violence because of the complicated social and economic issues, such as substance misuse, family breakup, and poverty, that push them to live on the streets. Considering Durban's distinct socioeconomic situation, there are still large gaps in our knowledge of the entirety of their experiences, despite the existence of some research. The literature review concluded by pointing out gaps in the literature and existing research, opening the door for more investigation into this important issue. In the following chapter, the theoretical framework applied to understand the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth is presented.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presented the theoretical framework adopted for this research. By linking the study to preexisting theories and concepts, the theoretical framework guided the investigation and provided the framework for the research. It offers an organized perspective on the research problem, helping to define key variables, clarify their relationships, and shape the direction of the study. By situating the research within a broader theoretical context, the framework ensured that the study is grounded in established knowledge, allowing for a more thorough evaluation and interpretation of data. Gupta (2025) argues that a theory is a rigorously supported explanation of phenomena in the natural or social world, grounded in evidence and reasoning, which provides a framework for understanding, interpreting outcomes, and guiding further research. Theories were created by experimentation, observation, and synthesis of the body of current knowledge. According to Kerlinger and Lee (2000), theories are collections of related constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that give a systematic explanation and prediction of phenomena by defining relationships between variables.

Various criminological theories can offer significant insights into analyzing the experiences of crimes perpetrated by and against homeless and street-involved children in Durban. These theories include the Strain Theory, Social Disorganization Theory, Routine Activities Theory, Labeling Theory, and Victimization Theory. However, this research was guided by a combination of two criminological theories which are Cohen and Felson’s Routine Activities Theory (RAT) and Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST). Together, these theories helped in gaining an understanding of the complex issues that Durban's homeless and street-engaged youths face as well as in the creation of successful solutions that will assist them.

3.2 The general strain theory (GST)

3.2.1 Historical background of the general strain theory

Agnew's (1992) GST was based on his critical assessment of Merton's (1938) classic strain theory and its revisions by Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960). Agnew (1995) stated that prior theories had not fully recognized the potential or unique contribution that strain theory could offer to the explanation of crime. He presented GST as another revision at the

social psychological level. Additionally, he adopted a comprehensive stance toward other theories of crime, particularly the social control and social learning theories (Akers, 1985; Hirschi, 1969), employing their central ideas to clarify the reasons behind the ability of some individuals to use criminality as a means of coping with stress. To achieve this, Agnew (1985) proposed that strain theory should define strain more broadly, emphasize the mediating role of negative emotions more explicitly, and identify a wider range of factors that affect the likelihood of criminal coping.

3.2.1.1 Early theories leading to GST

1. Durkheim's Anomie Theory (1893/1897): The foundation for strain theory was established by Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie, which was first presented in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893) and then in *Suicide* (1897). According to Durkheim, shifts in society may result in anomie, or normlessness—a condition in which people do not feel connected to the larger good. Deviant behaviour could arise from this disconnect.
2. Merton's Strain Theory (1938**)**: In his seminal work *Social Structure and Anomie* (1938), Merton expanded Durkheim's idea of anomie. He claimed that strain results from the pressure to attain socially acceptable goals, like financial achievement, without granting everyone access to the resources needed to do so. This stress might cause people to act abnormally as they attempt to accomplish these objectives by acting illegally.
3. Cohen's Status Frustration (1955): In his 1955 book *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, Cohen expanded on Merton's theories by highlighting the ways in which stress can give rise to delinquent subcultures. He popularized the idea of "status frustration," a phenomenon in which youths from lower socioeconomic classes feel pressured to adopt middle-class ideals because they are unable to achieve it.
4. Cloward and Ohlin's Differential Opportunity Theory (1960): In *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (1960), Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin expanded on the strain theory by stating that access to illegal means varies as well, giving rise to distinct kinds of deviant subcultures based on the availability of opportunity for crime.

According to Agnew and Brezina (2019), strain in GST refers to any negative connection or occurrence that is viewed as unfair, creates negative feelings, and has a significant impact. Jang & Agnew (2015) define strain as a combination of adverse social interactions and

circumstances, events, and situations that are either subjectively or objectively viewed as unfavorable (e.g., parental abuse, chronic unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, and the urgent need for a large amount of money). Agnew (1992) specifically suggests three categories of strain: strain as the actual or anticipated presentation of negative stimuli (e.g., child abuse); strain as the actual or anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli (e.g., the violent death of a close friend); and strain as the actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals, which includes the classic conception of strain (i.e., the inability to achieve monetary goals). People who are under stress may become unreasonably angry, frustrated, or experience other bad feelings, which may cause them to act criminally or to engage in criminal behaviour.

In general, GST has become a significant criminological viewpoint that aids in the explanation of why people commit crimes. General strain theory provides a thorough framework for understanding the connection between strain, negative emotions, and criminal behaviour. Researchers and practitioners can better understand and address the underlying causes of criminal behavior and create successful intervention and prevention programs by looking at the sources of strain, mediating factors, and coping mechanisms. Furthermore, GST has shed light on how social and psychological variables affect crime by emphasizing the role that strain plays in driving criminal behaviour.

3.2.2 Critiques of general strain theory

A critique of General Strain Theory (GST) is its extensive scope, which encompasses various forms of strain, hence complicating empirical testing of all potential strains and their impact on deviant behaviour. The inclusion of numerous sources of strain in General Strain Theory makes the theory overly broad, which can hinder accurate measurement and empirical validation in research (Agnew, 2017; Agnew, 2007). These sources include the failure to accomplish positively valued goals, the introduction of negative stimuli, and the removal of positive stimuli (Froggio, 2007). Furthermore, critics have noted that the GST ignores the possible benefits of positive strains in favor of concentrating largely on negative ones, such as racial and gender discrimination, poverty and homelessness, abusive peer or marital relationships, child abuse and neglect, and criminal victimization. Agnew (2001) points out, for instance, that while success or other good things can happen, they can also cause stress because they raise expectations or put more pressure on oneself to keep reaching goals.

Another critic against GST is that it sometimes fails to take into consideration individual variations in coping strategies, which can influence how various people react to the same strain. According to Mazerolle and Piquero (1998), some researchers contend that the theory undervalues the significance of personality attributes like self-control, which may reduce the association between strain and criminality. Furthermore, GST has come under criticism for paying too little consideration to structural and cultural elements that could affect how pressures are experienced and perceived. For instance, pressures may differ dramatically depending on many social settings, such as cultural background or economic status, which GST does not adequately address (Eitle, 2010). Additionally, some academics have expressed concern with the suggested causes of strain in GST's lack of specificity. Although the theory outlines a variety of potential sources of strain, Agnew (2006) contends that it lacks a coherent framework for comprehending how various strains result in criminal behavior.

3.2.3 Prior studies related to general strain theory

General strain theory (GST), developed by Robert Agnew, posits that individuals who experience stress or strain are more likely to engage in deviant or criminal behaviour as a means of coping (Agnew, 1992). This theory has been widely studied and applied to various contexts and populations. For instance, Agnew's (1992) study discovered that people who face strains like poverty or discrimination are more prone to turn to criminal activity to deal with their negative feelings. Agnew (2017) broadened the scope of GST by recognizing various strains that trigger unfavorable feelings and, in turn, abnormal behavior. He placed emphasis on how negative emotional states like anger play a mediation role in the link between strain and criminality. Furthermore, the study by Broidy (2001) on how men and women experience different types of strain and how these strains influence their involvement in crime. It found that the kinds of strains that men and women encounter and the ways in which they respond to them, affect how likely it is that they would commit crimes.

Additionally, Broidy and Agnew's (1997) study on the connection between gender and strain found that men commit crimes at a higher rate than women. Because of variations in coping mechanisms, social support, opportunity, societal control, and predisposition for crime, men may be more prone than women to respond to a given degree of strain or anger with major property and violent crimes. The notion of GST has been proven to be useful in understanding a range of criminal behaviours, such as drug use, violence, and property crime (Mazerolle et al., 2000). Research has indicated that people who are under strain are more prone to commit

crimes, and that negative emotions and coping strategies play a mediating role in this link (Agnew, 2013; Lee, 2024).

Furthermore, research on GST has broadened to include more situations and demographics. For instance, Hay (2003) examined the effect of strain on delinquency in youths living in underprivileged neighbourhoods and discovered that exposure to both economic hardship and communal violence raised the probability that young people would commit crimes. In a similar vein, Mazerolle and Piquero (1998) investigated the relationship between personality traits, strain, and criminal behaviour, emphasizing that those with poor self-control are more prone to act criminally under strain.

3.2.4 Application of general strain theory

According to the GST, people who are under stress or strain in their lives may turn to criminal activity as a coping method. According to the notion, people who are experiencing negative emotions like anger, frustration, or disappointment are more prone to committing crimes. This idea is especially relevant to the experiences of Durban's homeless and street-involved youth, who frequently deal with a variety of stressors, such as exposure to violence, family dissolution, and economic hardship. In Durban, homeless and street-engaged youth often face severe social and economic challenges daily. These stresses include lack of access to education, work opportunities, stable family support, homelessness, poverty, and substance misuse (Ward et al., 2007). According to GST, the stresses or stains these young people are going through might cause them to feel depressed, angry, or frustrated, which may make them more likely to turn to crime as a coping mechanism (Agnew, 2006).

Furthermore, Durban's homeless and street-engaged youths not only commit crimes, but they also have a higher likelihood of becoming victims of crime (Mkhize et al., 2022). Predators, gangs, law enforcement, and other persons frequently target them because they perceive them as simple targets for theft, assault, and exploitation (Brown, 2016; Hoffmann & Stuntz, 2021). Their sense of strain may be worsened by this victimization, which may lead them to consider turning to crime as a kind of safety or self-defence. Additionally, a study has demonstrated that the ongoing fear of violence can intensify despair and hopelessness in young people participating in street crime, which feeds the cycle of victimization and offending (Martinez & Abrams, 2013).

It is critical to consider both the broader social context, which includes systemic poverty and marginalization, as well as the individual-level stresses, such as substance abuse and mental health issues, when applying GST to understand the crimes committed by and against homeless and street-involved youth in Durban (Agnew, 2001). Applying GST to the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban can help one to better understand the factors that contribute to their involvement in criminal activities, both as offenders and victims. In order to reduce the strains and stresses that these young people experience such as homelessness, poverty, and a lack of support services, researchers can try to identify ways to help them stay out of trouble and enhance their general wellbeing.

3.3 Routine activities theory (RAT)

3.3.1 Historical background of routine activities theory

The theory of routine activities was initially created in 1979 by criminologists Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in response to the shortcomings of traditional criminological theories in explaining the variation in crime rates (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The theory explained patterns of crime occurrences based on daily activities. This argument stems from the knowledge that possibilities found in everyday life are directly associated with criminal activity. Moreover, Cohen and Felson (1979) posited that three factors motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians converge in space and time to produce crime.

The RAT was historically created in reaction to the shortcomings of more well-known criminological theories, such as the societal disorganization theory and the strain theory, which focused on large-scale societal difficulties (Schaefer, 2021). According to Cohen and Felson (1979), these theories ignored the situational element of crime and the role that personal decision-making plays in criminal behaviour. The routine activities idea focused on people's daily routines and behaviours, highlighting how important it is to comprehend how criminal possibilities are created and used in everyday situations.

According to Schaefer (2021), RAT was originally proposed as a sociological approach when Cohen and Felson looked at general links between social developments and the possibility of victimization, such as changes in family activity and urbanization. Eck (2003) and Schaefer (2021) claim that their research found a link between increased crime rates and changes in Americans' daily lives after WWII. Routine activity theory was first developed as the "crime triangle," which provided a framework for analysing criminal issues. According to Schaefer

(2021), the triangle depicts how criminal events occur when motivated offenders and appropriate targets come together at a certain area and time without monitoring. Research has further delineated that three crime control measures, along with these elements, intervention for offenders, protection for targets, and regulation for locations, can mitigate criminal occurrences.

Routine activities theory was a departure from previous criminological theories that emphasized the characteristics and motives of criminals. Rather, it highlighted the role that opportunity plays in the commission of crime, implying that crime is a product of daily life rather than just an individual's choice or society's shortcomings (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Numerous academics have improved and expanded the theory over time. For instance, Eck (1994) integrated the theory into a more comprehensive framework for preventing crime, highlighting the importance of lowering crime opportunities in order to lower crime rates. By connecting Routine Activities Theory to situational crime prevention, Clarke (1995) demonstrated how its ideas could be applied in real-world ways to lower crime through situational and environmental restrictions. Comparably, Felson (1998) expanded the theory to include situational crime prevention, showing how altering surroundings can lower the chance of criminal activity. Additionally, scholars like Clarke and Cornish (2003), further developed the approach by creating situational crime prevention, which focuses on lowering crime possibilities by altering environmental and situational factors.

Furthermore, the RAT focuses on how the regular, everyday activities of individuals and groups can affect the opportunities for crime. It emphasizes the importance of environmental factors and the role of social structure in shaping criminal opportunities (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Additionally, the RAT main postulates that:

1. According to the theory of routine activity, crime happens when three factors come together: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians. Examining situations with only two elements can help understand situations where risks and vulnerabilities are present, but they may not necessarily lead to crime in the absence of the third element. Routine activities theory typically requires all three elements to explain the occurrence of a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

2. The presence of motivated offenders: The idea of routine activity states that crime happens when people are motivated to engage in crimes. The idea makes the assumption that there are always people willing to commit crimes rather than delving deeply into

the reasons behind the offender's motivation (Cohen & Felson, 1979). These criminals may be motivated by a variety of things, including revenge, thrill-seeking, or money gain. An individual must possess the willingness and ability to commit a crime for it to take place.

3. Existence of suitable targets: The existence of suitable targets for criminal behaviour is another essential element of routine activity theory. A person, thing, or location that is easily accessible to criminals, appealing to them, and quickly exploitable might all be considered suitable targets. Value, visibility, accessibility, and inertia (the ease with which the target can be moved or taken) are some of the characteristics that frequently determine appropriateness (Cohen & Felson, 1979). For instance, someone would consider a parked car that has valuables left out in the open to be a good target for theft.

4. Absence of capable guardians: The absence of capable guardians in the environment is highlighted by RAT in addition to motivated offenders and appropriate targets. Someone or something that has the ability to successfully discourage or stop a crime from happening is a capable guardian. Both official (police officers, security systems) and informal (neighbours, friends, bystanders) guardians can exist. Crime is more likely when there are no guardians in place (Cohen & Felson, 1979). For instance, security personnel, surveillance cameras, or watchful neighbours can serve as guardians and deter criminal activity.

In general, RAT highlights how important it is to comprehend daily activities, the conditions that lead to criminal activity, and the behaviours that provide such circumstances. Crime prevention measures can be more successfully targeted to lower the chance of criminal activity by considering how these routines connect with the presence of capable guardians and motivated offenders (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

3.3.2 Critiques of routine activities theory

In the study of criminology, the RAT is a commonly used and recognized theory. Nonetheless, over time, certain academics have brought forward certain criticisms of RAT (Von Lampe, 2011; Guerette & Bowers, 2009). Routine activities theory has been criticized for emphasizing opportunistic crime while neglecting other types of crime that do not conform to the model of spontaneous, situational decisions. The situational model does not seem to fit properly for organized crime activities. Crimes like organized crime, politically motivated crimes, and white-collar crimes frequently need planning and do not just happen when a motivated

offender, a suitable target, and an absent guardian happen to come together at the same time (Miller, 2013). The approach ignores the larger socio-economic and political aspects that impact more complex criminal behaviours since it concentrates on routine activities and immediate conditions (Miller, 2013). The theory has also been criticized for being deterministic and overly emphasizing logical decision-making, which has led to a disregard for the part that situational elements, impulsivity, and irrational behaviour play in criminal activity (Clarke & Cornish, 2017.)

The RAT has been accused of overlooking the deeper socio-psychological aspects that influence an individual's decision to commit a crime. The critics of the theory argue that it ignores how crucial it is to comprehend the offender's motives, upbringing, and psychological condition (Tibbetts & Gibson, 2002). Due to its primary focus on the situational context of crime, RAT fails to adequately address the social and economic disparities that may encourage criminal behaviour as well as the reasons why some people are more likely than others to become motivated offenders (Tibbetts & Gibson, 2002). However, it highlights the fact that a motivated offender is always someone who is willing to violate the law.

Routine activities theory is also criticized for failing to sufficiently take into consideration how social and structural variables influence crime trends. The theory ignores the impact of societal structures, norms, and disparities on criminal conduct, despite focusing on the convergence of motivated criminals, appropriate targets, and the lack of capable guardians (McNeeley, 2015). The theory has also come under criticism for failing to acknowledge the influence of psychological and individual traits on criminal behaviour. For instance, studies have demonstrated that emotional states, cognitive functions, and personality factors can all influence criminal behaviour, which the theory does not adequately account for. Due to its failure to address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour, which are rooted in social structural constraints, RAT may thus provide an inadequate explanation of crime (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001).

3.3.3 Prior studies related to routine activities theory

Prior research on the RAT focused on determining the relationships between chance of victimization, criminal potential, and everyday routines. The idea holds that the presence of motivated criminals, appropriate targets, and incompetent guardians all increase the likelihood of criminal action (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In this debate, three earlier studies on RAT will be reviewed with a focus on their benefits, drawbacks, and contributions to the field.

First, there is the 1979 study by Cohen and Felson that looked at the connection between ordinary daily activities and criminal activity. For instance, compared to people with more irregular and unpredictable habits, those with more structured and predictable lifestyles have been shown to have lower crime rates. Additionally, Kennedy and Forde's (1990) research examined individual victimization risk using RAT. According to Kennedy and Forde's 1990 study, lifestyle choices like frequent nighttime outings or risky conduct raise the likelihood of victimization since they increase exposure to potential offenders and reduce the availability of capable guardians. These studies emphasize how important daily activities and lifestyle decisions are in defining a person's likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. People who follow regular, structured routines are less likely to become targets for criminal activity. On the other hand, people who follow unpredictable schedules or engage in risky behaviours are more likely to become victims because they are more likely to move through unprotected areas on a regular basis. People who spend time in high-crime neighbourhoods or travel through remote locations late at night without protection, for example, are more likely to encounter criminal activity. All things considered, this research highlight how important RAT is to be comprehending how routine tasks and crime are related.

Second, most routine activity theory tests have shown that guardianship has a positive, significant impact on crime (Hollis-Peel et al., 2011). The significance of guardianship in homes during the day can be demonstrated by looking at a few instances. For instance, according to Walker and Dagger (1993), the number of people living in a home significantly influences the likelihood that it would be the victim of burglary. Furthermore, compared to other family types, married couples are less likely to become victims in their homes (Phillips 1995). On the contrary Lindsay and McGillis (1986) claim that single parent households are in danger since they typically rent alone and leave their homes unattended for extended periods of time. One can perceive the same point of view through RAT, as the theory's creators believed that a family's number of children could indicate potential home guardianship. One of the children is more likely to be home if there are more in the household. The likelihood that a family has close relationships with neighbours who can spot odd activities increases with the length of time the family has lived in the house. Ultimately, it is evident that a home with guardianship is a less appealing target for burglars. There is a target and a potential perpetrator in this case, but the third component the absence of guardianship is missing. As so, it is impossible to draw a picture of the crime.

Thirdly, the research done in 1990 by Kennedy and Forde used information from the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey, which examined both ordinary activities and criminal victimization of people in Canada's largest cities. This study looked at the relationship between ordinary individual behaviours and the following categories of crimes: robbery, assault, automobiles theft, and breaking and entering (also known as residential burglaries). Kennedy and Forde (1990) examined several control factors, including age, income, marital status, single-parent homes, unemployment, and routine activity theory-based variables. These variables are regarded as significant in sociological theories of crime. These researchers discovered that time spent in bars and pubs was positively correlated with experiencing any of the four types of crimes, which are burglary, theft, assault, and robbery. Attending athletic events, working or attending school, walking or driving, and having a full-time job were all positively correlated with residential burglary. Working or attending school was also positively correlated with car theft, and both working or attending school and walking or driving were associated with assault. Finally, walking or driving was positively correlated with robbery. The RAT makes sense of these findings. In essence, spending time outside of one's home's generally safe setting raises the possibility of both personal victimizations outside of one's house and one's home being broken into.

3.3.4 Application of routine activities theory

Due to their unsafe circumstances, homeless and street-involved youth in Durban frequently fit the criteria of RAT. Youths in Durban who are homeless or involved in the streets are frequently forced to commit crimes in order to survive. Barker (2018) claims that these young people's wandering lifestyle, lack of access to legal revenue sources, food insecurity, and lack of secure housing can all serve as motivations for them to commit crimes including theft, drug trafficking, and assault. The streets itself may act as a setting where there are plenty of suitable targets, typically other vulnerable people, particularly where there are generally no capable guardians such as law enforcement officers. Due to lack of supervision, motivated criminals can take advantage of opportunities to commit crimes (Siegel, 2001). Furthermore, the adolescents frequently have opportunity to commit crimes due to their usual activities, which include sleeping in public places, begging, and taking up informal jobs (Felson, 2017). These activities also put them in close proximity to possible targets. For instance, these young people might see possibilities to pickpocket or commit petty theft in busy markets or busy transit areas. These are crimes that need little effort and have quick rewards (Clarke, 1995).

Studies have indicated that youth who are homeless and street-involved are frequently both victims and offenders of crimes (Hills et all., 2016; Maepa, 2021; Silver et al., 2024). According to the RAT, these young people are frequently exposed to potentially hazardous situations, are isolated, and are therefore perceived as suitable targets (Felson & Boba, 2010). Research has indicated that there is an increased likelihood for these young people to encounter violence, sexual assault, and exploitation (Ward & Seager, 2010). Their regular behaviours, including sleeping in unsafe places or hanging around with potentially harmful people, expose them to criminals who are driven and look for easy targets (Cinini, 2015). These young people's susceptibility is increased when there are no capable guardianship figures, including family members or social agencies. Capable guardianship, according to Cohen and Felson (1979), entails both official and informal social control systems that discourage criminal activity. Youth who are homeless are vulnerable to recurrent victimization due to their lack of social support networks and the insufficiency of institutional protections (such as shelters and police presence).

The experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban can be analysed using RAT to help researchers and policymakers better understand the causes that lead to crimes committed by and against this community. Additionally, it offers a useful lens through which to view the high rates of victimization and offending among young people in Durban who are homeless or living on the street through emphasizing the significance of contextual and environmental elements, such as the lack of adequate objectives and competent guardians. This knowledge can help develop interventions and tactics that deal with the underlying causes of these crimes, offer at-risk youth support services, and create safer spaces for everyone in the community.

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has analysed the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban on crimes committed by and against them, using the GST and RAT as a framework. By using these theoretical frameworks researchers can better understand the circumstances that lead to the engagement of homeless and street-involved youth in criminal activities in Durban. While RAT offers insight into the environmental and situational factors that facilitate these crimes and that criminal activity requires a motivated offender, a suitable target, and a lack of capable guardianship, GST explains the internal, emotional, and psychological pressures that drive youth toward crime. When taken as a whole, these theories show how the strains these youths

face and the dangerous environments they live in intersect to provide chances for both victimization and crime. The research approach employed in the study is explained in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

4.1 Introduction

Burns and Grove (2012) define methodology as the systematic and logical strategy for data collection and synthesis. This chapter outlined the research approach and design used in the study. It also discussed the study's population, and the sampling technique. The data collection technique and instrument, as well as the ethical considerations and data management issues that underpin this study, are detailed in further detail.

4.2 Research approach

The study will use a qualitative research approach, which allows researchers to learn the common language and judgments of people being interviewed, as well as the unique aspects of their experiences and perspectives (Neuman, 2011). Using qualitative research approach will enable a more in-depth examination of the experiences of youths in Durban who are homeless, and street involved. Qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations can help to provide a better understanding of the complex issues facing this vulnerable population. The study will employ a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban regarding the crimes they commit, their victimization and the support structures. Using this approach the researcher can gather detailed information about the factors contributing to youth homelessness, their interactions with the criminal justice system, and the types of crimes they commit or are victims of. Additionally, by amplifying the voices of homeless and street-involved youth, qualitative research can help raise awareness about the challenges they face and advocate for more appropriate and effective support services.

4.3 Research paradigm

This study will use an interpretivist paradigm, which is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals assign to their own experiences. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) stated, instead of pursuing objective or generally applicable truths, interpretivism emphasizes the subjective, context-specific, and profoundly

personal dimensions of human experience. This paradigm emphasizes comprehending social phenomena from the participants' point of view, experiences and acknowledges the subjective aspect of reality (Merriman, 2008). Under an interpretivist paradigm, the research aims to comprehend how people generate their own subjective meanings and experiences within a given social situation. Applied to this study, an interpretivist approach seeks to fully understand the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, South Africa, paying close attention to how these young people perceive, interpret, and explain their encounters with violence, substance use, and involvement in survival crimes. The goal is not merely to document these challenges but to understand how the youth themselves make sense of these experiences, the meanings they attach to them, and how these meanings shape their behaviour, coping strategies, and identities. Through this lens, the study prioritizes the voices of the participants and positions them as experts of their own lives.

4.4 Research design

Exploratory research design will be employed in this study. Exploratory research design is a method used to investigate a topic when little is known about it or when previous research is inconclusive. It aims to explore and understand a phenomenon in-depth, generating insights and hypotheses rather than testing specific hypotheses (Kimmelman, Mogil & Dirnagl, 2014). The exploratory research design for this study will include conducting in-depth interviews with homeless and street-involved youth in Durban to acquire their experiences on crimes committed by and against this marginalized youth to obtain thoughts and opinions on effective interventions for this demographic. By applying exploratory research design and its methods, one can gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, particularly regarding their exposure to crime, factors contributing to criminal behaviour and homelessness, and crimes committed against them. The insights generated from exploratory research can inform future studies, policy decisions, and interventions aimed at supporting this vulnerable population.

4.5 Profile of Durban

The study was carried out in areas inside the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality’s greater inner-city area of Durban. Located on the eastern coast, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is the main urban centre in KwaZulu-Natal province and the third largest city in the country (District Economic Profile, 2021). Durban is situated on the Indian Ocean on South

Africa's eastern coast. All year long, the city's humid subtropical climate is marked by warm temperatures and heavy humidity. The natural environment of Durban consists of sandy beaches, coastal plains, and a large harbour that facilitates economic activity and international trade. Durban is a well-liked travel and migration destination due to its warm climate and seaside setting. The study focuses on the Central section of the eThekwini Municipality. As it has a diverse population made up of different racial and cultural groups and contains a mixed residential and commercial sector (Berea) as well as two well-known business centres (The Workshop and English Market). Additionally, the Payless Shelter is located in the city. This specific location was chosen because people are moving to the city in search of work and better living conditions and the growing number of homeless people who had moved there and were now living there. Likewise, this area's homeless population is diverse, representing a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Black, Indian, White, and Coloured persons without secure homes are included. Furthermore, although social workers and local authorities continue to carry out safety and development projects to enhance living conditions, provide appropriate intervention, and security within the city, Durban, like many major urban centres in South Africa, encounters crime in some areas, such as theft and drug-related activities, and victimization.

4.6 Research sample and study population size

A sample is the subset of individuals or objects chosen for research or analysis out of the entire population (Levy & Lemeshow, 2013). Samples are selected because in some instances it could be unfeasible, expensive, or time-consuming to examine the full population (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). For researchers to draw reliable conclusions or forecasts about the population as a whole, sampling must be done with the intention of choosing a sample that accurately reflects the characteristics of the population from which it is obtained. This study's sample consisted of 20 homeless and street-involved youth participants. The study selected 20 participants because qualitative research focuses on obtaining rich, detailed information rather than large numbers of responses. In an interpretivist approach, the aim is to deeply understand participants' experiences and perspectives, therefore a smaller sample size is appropriate as it allows the researcher to collect in-depth data and reach data saturation. More participants could make the data difficult to analyse in depth, while fewer participants might not provide sufficient variation in experiences.

Of these 20, 10 participants are youth from the Albert Park, and the other 10 participants are from the Payless shelter who are primarily based in Durban, South Africa. This sample of 20 participants, was equally divided by gender (10 female and 10 male), ranging in age from 18 to 27 years. Participants who did not exhibit severe untreated psychosis or intoxication at the time of the interview were chosen to ensure safety and valid consent. An additional inclusion criterion is that participants must have experienced homelessness and street life for a period ranging from ten months to ten years. This requirement ensures that the youth have sufficient lived experience to provide meaningful insights into the phenomena being explored.

4.7 Research sampling technique

This study used non-probability sampling, which is sampling technique that does not include selecting participants at random from the population. Instead, participants are selected based on the researcher's own judgment or convenience (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). From the types of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling was used to choose study participants from the Payless Shelter and the Albert Park famously known as Whoonga Park in Durban, due to the demographics of these communities, which consists largely of homeless and youth living on the streets. Purposive sampling, according to Pilot and Beck (2017), is the process of selecting participants based on the study's evaluation of which potential participants will be most informative. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants with rich and in-depth experiences relevant to the research topic (Campbell et al., 2020), which is especially important when studying a marginalized and vulnerable population such as homeless and street-involved youth. Furthermore, utilizing a purposive sample might assist researchers collect varied perspectives and experiences from the population of interest. This can be useful for examining a complicated subject such as crimes committed by and against homeless and street-involved children, as it allows researchers to capture a variety of experiences and insights.

4.7.1 Procedure followed to recruit the participants

The recruitment of participants for this study followed a structured and ethical process to ensure voluntary participation and access to a hard-to-reach population of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Prior to the recruitment of participants, ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu Natal research ethics committee. As well as the permission was also requested from the ward 32 councillor and the Payless Shelters

that work with homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. These approvals ensured that the study complied with ethical standards for conducting research with vulnerable populations.

4.7.2 Recruitment strategy

A key component of guaranteeing the representativeness of results is participant selection. Participants were recruited from the Payless Shelter and the Albert Park, to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented. The researcher approached the CEO of the Payless Shelter NPC Mr Ahmed and the ward councillor of Whoonga park in Berea ward 32 Mr Mngonyama Rotas, to gain access to the participants. These individuals acted as gatekeepers to the respective organisations. The researcher requested that they arrange a meeting with youth within the preferred age group and introduce them to the study. Those who expressed willingness to share their experiences of crimes committed by or against them were considered potential participants.

The ward councillor for the area in which the Payless Shelter is located was not asked for permission because the shelter is an independent NPO not funded by the eThekwini Municipality; it is sustained through fees paid by the homeless residents on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. The researcher informed the CEO and the councillor that this study was for scholarly purpose. Additionally, participants were chosen for the study based on their willingness to participate or voluntary participation, willingness to answer questions about their experiences living on the streets, and whether they were homeless and had been living on the streets or in shelters for at least eight months. The researcher ensured that clear communication with the participants was maintained. The purpose of the study, risks, and benefits of the study were explained in simple language.

However, to minimise undue pressure on the participants, the researcher obtained informed consent from each participant before the study began. The consent form outlined the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, and participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished. The researcher assured participants that their responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. In addition, the researcher offered support and resources to participants who experienced distress or discomfort during the study. Support was provided through a team of ward social workers available at both the Payless Shelter and Albert Park (Ward 32), should participants become triggered or distressed during data collection. Participants were given access to social worker assistance as well as health and mental wellness services, including trauma-informed therapy, crisis intervention for victims of

abuse, victim support, and assistance with accessing government services such as shelter linkages, SASSA grants, and government youth programmes.

4.7.3 Inclusion criteria

The study's inclusion criteria were created to guarantee that participants had relevant firsthand knowledge of homelessness and street activity in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Individuals were considered eligible to participate if they identified as homeless or street-involved youth, were currently living at Albert Park, Payless Shelter, or spent a significant portion of their time in public spaces or informal sleeping areas in the Durban metropolitan area. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of issues like exposure to crime, experiences of victimization, coping mechanisms, and access to support systems among this vulnerable population, the study specifically focused on youth who had firsthand experience navigating life on the streets. Participants were required to fall within the youth age category, typically between the ages of 18 and 27 years, as this age group represents a significant portion of the street-involved population and often faces unique social, economic, and safety challenges associated with homelessness.

In addition, participants needed to have spent a minimum period of time one year and above experiencing street life in Durban in order to provide meaningful reflections on their experiences. This guaranteed that participants had enough street experience to provide detailed accounts of crime, victimization, and available support resources. The study comprised individuals who expressed a willingness to engage in the research and were able to offer informed consent. Before participating, all potential participants were informed about the aim of the study, what participation included, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Only individuals who demonstrated a knowledge of the study and voluntarily volunteered to participate were considered. This strategy ensured that the study's participants could provide meaningful and trustworthy information that was consistent with the research aims.

4.7.4 Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria were developed to guarantee that the study stayed focused on the target group and that participants could participate effectively in the research process. Individuals who did not fall within the study's designated age range, which was 18 and 27 were not eligible to participate. Because the study focused solely on youth experiences of homelessness and street engagement, persons who were much older, younger or did not fall into the youth group

were not considered eligible. Similarly, persons who were not actively homeless or street-involved, or who did not spend a year on Durban streets, Albert Park or Payless Shelter were omitted from the study since their experiences did not directly connect to the major research objective.

Individuals who were unable or unwilling to provide informed consent were excluded from participation. Participation in study involving vulnerable homeless youth population was strictly optional due to ethical considerations. Potential participants who expressed discomfort with the research process or declined to participate were excluded in the study. People who looked to be in serious emotional or psychological distress or who were under the influence of drugs at the time of recruiting may also be temporarily or permanently restricted from the interview process. This was done to guarantee that the data gathered would be trustworthy and that participants could interact with the study questions in a clear and safe manner.

4.8 Data collection site

The study site is located in Durban, a major coastal city in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Within the eThekwini metropolitan area, according to Durban Population (2026), Durban is home to about 3.9 million people. The city is among South Africa's most densely populated urban areas. African, Indian, Coloured, and White communities make up the majority of Durban's ethnically and culturally varied population. Due to migration from rural to urban areas and the city's economic potential, the population is still increasing (Maharaj & Moodley, 2000).

According to Samuel et al., (2024), Durban is in top 5 on the crime rankings in South Africa, the crime index points to a very high crime rate, making safety a prominent issue for residents. Due to Durban's setting, it population, and the rates of crime and homelessness A researcher chose to perform this study in Albert Park and the Payless Shelter since the region has direct access to a large number of homeless people, making it perfect for gathering rich and reliable data. The site is especially useful for researching key urban socioeconomic issues like homelessness, substance misuse, victimization, unemployment, and crime, all of which are prevalent in Durban's central business district. Furthermore, the presence of Payless Shelter allows the researcher to investigate not only the lived experiences of persons on the streets, but also the function and efficacy of intervention programs designed to help them.

Data on homeless and street-involved youth residing in Albert Park, and Payless Shelter was collected by the researcher using ethical and non-intrusive methods that protect participants' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Data was collected through interview in which the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study and requested voluntary consent. The researcher gathered information at the Albert Park where the homeless and street-involved youth voluntarily engage. These locations included community outreach sites, food distribution points, and public spaces frequented by outreach workers. However, the researcher was sometimes in a single room provided by the ward councillor or in the offices of Adventists community services, speaking to one participant at a time, and no one would hear the conversation between the researcher and the participant when collecting data. In Payless Shelter, the CEO provided the researcher with a private room for a one-on-one, in-depth interview to facilitate data collection.

4.9 Data collection procedure

According to Sutton and Austin (2015), data collection refers to the process of gathering information or data from various sources for analysis, interpretation, and eventual decision-making. To address the experiences of homeless individuals and those living on the streets regarding violence, drug misuse, and survival crimes, the study used in-depth interviews as the method of data collection. This method provided a balance between flexibility and guidance. It also focused on gathering rich, detailed narratives, personal experiences, and the meanings participants derived from these issues. An in-depth interviewing approach invests a significant amount of time with each participant employing a conversational format (Rutledge, 2020). An interview schedule was developed to guide the data collection process and ensure consistency across all interviews. The schedule outlined key questions and thematic areas relevant to understanding crime, victimisation, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. While it provided structure, the schedule was used flexibly to allow participants to share their experiences in their own words and to enable the researcher to probe for deeper insights where necessary. This approach ensured that all essential topics were covered while still accommodating the fluid and conversational nature of qualitative interviewing (Adams, 2015). All interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately between 35 minutes to an hour. However, to minimise limitation, the researcher ensured that questions were asked in simple, clear English and allowed participants to request clarification where needed. Where possible, participants were encouraged to express themselves in a language they were

comfortable with, and the researcher remained attentive to ensure meaning was accurately understood.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and all recorded data were transcribed in English. The researcher was aware that discussing life on the streets could trigger painful memories, including experiences of violence, grief, addiction, or systemic failure, and some questions addressed these difficult moments, such as times when participants felt unsafe, experienced abuse, or had to make difficult decisions to survive. To minimize harm, the study implemented several ethical safeguards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the form clearly outlined the sensitive nature of the discussions while reminding participants of their right to skip questions or withdraw at any point. If a participant displayed signs of distress, the interviewer paused the conversation and used neutral, non-judgmental language to support their comfort. On-site counsellors at Albert Park and the Payless Shelter were available to provide immediate debriefing or referrals for emotional support, and ward social workers at both sites offered follow-up check-ins for high-risk individuals. To protect anonymity and prevent potential trauma or retaliation, the researcher used pseudonyms instead of real identifiers and stored all data securely, with access limited to the researcher and supervisor for a period of five years.

In this study, data saturation was understood as the point at which additional interviews no longer produced new information or insights relevant to the experiences of crime, victimisation, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. Saturation signalled that the data collected were sufficiently rich and comprehensive to capture the diversity and depth of participants lived realities (Guest et al., 2006). Once interviews began yielding repetitive themes, the researcher determined that further data collection would not offer additional understanding, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

4.9.1 Interviews

The in-depth interviews were conducted in a single room provided by the ward councillor or in the offices of Adventists Community Services for the safety, private, and conveniency of the participants who reside in Albert Park, one participant at a time. In Payless Shelter, the CEO provided the researcher with a private room for a one-on-one where participants felt comfortable speaking openly, in-depth interview to facilitate data collection. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was used to ensure that key research topics were

covered while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their personal experiences. Topics explored during the interviews included experiences of living on the streets and/or shelter, exposure to crime and violence, experiences of victimization, coping and survival strategies, as well as access to support services and social networks. Furthermore, the study included 20 participants who were interviewed. Ten of these participants were from Albert or Whoonga Park (5 males and 5 females), while the remaining ten were from the Payless shelter (5 men and 5 females). To protect participants' anonymity, they will be referred to as P1 male or female Albert Park or P1 female or male Payless Shelter.

4.10 Data analysis

The analytic framework for this study was informed by the qualitative research design. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher to preserve participants' precise wording and narrative flow. The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to produce a rich, detailed, and flexible account of patterns within qualitative data and is particularly suitable for explorations of complex social phenomena such as crime, victimisation, and support among homeless and street-involved youth.

The first phase consisted of producing verbatim transcripts and repeatedly reading these transcripts while listening to audio recordings. This close, iterative engagement described by Braun and Clarke (2006) allowed the researcher to become immersed in participants' narratives, note initial ideas, and identify salient examples and emotions relevant to experiences of crime, victimisation, coping strategies, and support networks. In the second phase, transcripts were systematically coded. Coding involved identifying and labelling meaningful features of the data that captured the essence of a data segment. The researcher used an inductive approach where codes were developed from the data rather than imposed priori, while remaining open to theoretically relevant concepts drawn from the literature. All coding decisions were documented in a codebook that recorded code definitions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and exemplar quotations.

During the third phase, related codes were collated into candidate themes. The researcher examined how codes clustered together to form coherent patterns and explored relationships between codes. Candidate themes were iteratively refined, some merged to form broader themes, others split into subthemes, and a small number were discarded when insufficient

supporting data existed. The fourth phase entailed two levels of review. First, each candidate theme was checked against its coded extracts to ensure internal coherence and adequate supporting evidence. Second, themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to verify that they represented the dataset's overall meaning and that important contradictions or minority perspectives were not overlooked. A thematic map was produced to visualise how themes related to one another and how they collectively addressed the research questions.

In the fifth phase, themes were defined and named to capture clearly what each theme encompassed and how it contributed to the study's aims. Where appropriate, the researcher linked themes to theoretical constructs and existing literature on youth homelessness, victimisation, and social support in order to situate findings within a broader scholarly context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final phase involved synthesising themes into an analytic narrative that answered the research questions and contributed to theoretical and practical understandings of the phenomena under study. Key illustrative quotations were selected to give voice to participants and to demonstrate how interpretations were grounded in the data.

4.11 Ethical considerations

Because the participants are vulnerable young adults, ethical guidelines and consent form restricted certain probing questions. This prevented deeper exploration of traumatic events such as violence, sexual abuse, and criminal victimisation, which may have limited the completeness of some narratives. Ethical considerations and the consent process were emphasized to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Despite these safeguards, ethical limitations remained. The reliance on consent within an environment marked by instability, trauma, and power imbalances may still have affected participants' understanding or willingness to share sensitive information. In addition, ethical guidelines restricted the depth of probing into traumatic events to avoid re-traumatization, which limited the scope of data collected. Nonetheless, the procedures used, including a carefully explained consent form, ongoing assent checks, and trauma-sensitive interviewing ensured that the study prioritised the safety, rights, and wellbeing of all participants.

4.11.1 Informed Consent

Participants who met the eligibility requirements were asked to sign an informed consent form before participation. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality and anonymity measures, potential risks and benefits, as well as the voluntary nature of participation *(See appendix 2).*

4.12 Limitations and challenges of the study

4.12.1 Limitations of the study

By reviewing the study's findings on the everyday reality of homeless and street-involved youths in Durban, it is critical to recognize some limitations that may have influenced the interpretation and generalizability of the results. Understanding these limitations can help to contextualize the findings and identify opportunities for further investigation. The primary limitations of the study are the restricted population size and sampling, geographical constraint, lack of participation from authorities, reliance on self-reported data, and ethical considerations.

4.12.1.1 Sampling and small population size

Participants were drawn mainly from Payless Shelter and Albert Park. This creates selection bias by excluding youth who do not reside in Payless Shelter but resides in other shelters in Durban, or live in hidden areas, the inner roads of Durban or other informal spaces. These harder-to-reach groups and excluded homeless youths may have different experiences that were not captured in the study. Furthermore, the study relied on a small group of participants, which were 20 participants and that restricts the ability to generalise the findings to all homeless youth in Durban or South Africa. Although the sample allowed for rich, in-depth data, it does not fully capture the diversity of experiences among all street-involved youth.

4.12.1.2 Sample size limitation

Furthermore, the homeless youth are demographically disadvantaged, meaning they have limited access to essential services like job opportunities, education, healthcare and basic needs like food, clothes and shelter. So, them being geographically disadvantaged it made it hard for the researcher to get participants to participate on the study. These youths would want something in return if they participated in the study. Some would want food in return, some would want to be paid a night in the shelter, and some would want something else that he or she is in need of.

4.12.1.3 Geographical constraint

The study was conducted only in the Durban metropolitan area. As a result, the findings reflect the local socio-economic, cultural, and policy environment of Durban and cannot fully represent experiences of homeless youth in rural areas like Manguza or other cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, or East London.

4.12.1.4 Non-participation from authorities

This study only focused on the experiences of the homeless and street-involved youth of Durban but excluded stakeholders such as police officials, social workers, municipal departments, and shelter managers. Including their perspectives could have strengthened data triangulation and offered a more balanced understanding of service-related challenges.

4.12.1.5 Reliance on self-reported data

The findings rely heavily on participants' personal accounts, which can be affected by memory challenges, trauma, fear of judgement, or reluctance to speak openly about illegal activities, abuse, or sensitive personal information. This can influence the accuracy and completeness of some responses. Participants may have altered their responses due to the presence of the researcher, either to gain sympathy, avoid judgement, or secure potential assistance. This interpersonal dynamic may have created unintentional bias in the information shared.

4.12.2 Challenges of the study

Several problems arose over the course of this research, which must be acknowledged. Accessing and recruiting homeless and street-involved youth was one of the main obstacles. Due to their frequent relocation and unpredictable living conditions, homeless and street-involved youth are seen as a difficult-to-reach demographic. With their now and then movement, it was difficult to regularly locate potential participants. In some cases, mainly to their transitory lifestyle, some homeless and street-involved youth who initially consented to participate were unable to be found for additional interviews.

Developing trust with the homeless and street-involved youth was another major obstacle. Many young people who are homeless have encountered stigma, prejudice, exploitation, or unfavorable encounters with institutions and authorities. Because of this, some prospective participants were unwilling to share personal experiences and were wary of researchers, especially when talking about delicate topics like crime, victimization, and street survival tactics. The researcher has to take their time, be patient, and be sensitive in order to build rapport and earn their trust. Additionally, discussing experiences of crime and victimization occasionally triggered emotional distress among participants. The researcher had to approach these conversations with caution and ensure that participants felt comfortable and supported throughout the interview process.

Another problem was the participants' intermittent availability and dedication. Due to the unpredictable nature of street living, several participants appeared late for scheduled interviews, while others did not show up at all. Daily survival efforts, such as finding food, housing, or informal labor, frequently took precedence over study pursuits. And even after participation they would expect something in return. Substance abuse and intoxication frequently caused problems during recruitment and interviews. Some potential participants were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when solicited for participation, making conducting interviews improper or difficult at the time. In such instances, interviews must be postponed or terminated to ensure ethical and meaningful participation. In addition, communication hurdles periodically hampered the interview process. Participants came from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with some having limited formal education. This required the researcher to simplify questions and explanations so that participants understood the study's goal and the questions being asked.

4.13 Trustworthiness

To ensure the quality and rigour of the study, multiple strategies were applied consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness framework. These strategies addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, all of which are essential for producing trustworthy qualitative findings.

4.13.1 Credibility

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and the research setting, enabling the researcher to build rapport and gain an in-depth understanding of the lived realities of homeless and street-involved youth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking, conducted where feasible, allowed participants to review and comment on preliminary interpretations, helping ensure that the findings accurately represented their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing with the research supervisor further strengthened credibility by allowing the researcher to scrutinise coding decisions, challenge assumptions, and refine emerging themes based on critical feedback (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

4.13.2 Transferability

Transferability was supported through rich, thick description of the research context, participant characteristics, and relevant social and environmental conditions. Providing detailed accounts of the settings in which crime, victimisation, and support experiences

occurred enables readers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013).

4.13.3 Dependability

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail, which included raw data, transcript versions, coding records, codebook revisions, analytic memos, and documentation of methodological decisions. This systematic record-keeping allows external reviewers to trace how data were collected, coded, and interpreted, thereby supporting procedural transparency and consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Lastly, confirmability was enhanced through transparent and systematic documentation of analytic steps and close linking of interpretations to participants' verbatim accounts. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process to document personal assumptions, emotional reactions, and potential biases. This reflexive practice helped ensure that findings were grounded in the data rather than shaped by the researcher's subjective perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together, these strategies contributed to a rigorous, credible, and ethically grounded qualitative study that accurately reflects the voices and experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban.

4.13.4 Confirmability

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), confirmability is making sure that the findings of the researcher and interpretations are drawn directly from the evidence that was gathered. This study's confirmability was ensured by gathering data directly from homeless and street-involved youth through one-on-one in-depth interviews, which allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed to confirm the accuracy of the material gathered. In situations where recording was not possible, extensive field notes were obtained. An audit trail was also kept throughout the research process, including interview guides, field notes, and data processing processes. Furthermore, the researcher demonstrated reflexivity by being conscious of personal biases and ensuring that interpretations were based on the participants' accounts. Direct quotations from participants were also used to present the findings, ensuring that the results truly reflected their lived experiences. These measures helped ensure that the study's findings were reliable and grounded in data collected from the participants.

4.14 Chapter summary

This chapter described the study's methodology and research design, which sought to investigate victimization, crime, and support networks among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the participant which are homeless and street-involved youth, a qualitative research approach was employed. To capture the subjective viewpoints and emotional realities of young people navigating street life, the study used an exploratory design. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, which ensured that people with relevant life experiences were represented. In-depth interviews were used to gather data. Complete conformity was maintained to ethical principles, which include informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The study also used youth-sensitive and trauma-informed interviewing methods to account for the participants' vulnerability. The following chapter is the findings and recommendations chapter this chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, based on the analysis and interpretation of data collected through in-depth interviews with homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. Given the complexity of their lived experiences, the chapter explores how participants navigate daily survival amid crime, victimisation, and limited support systems. Using thematic analysis, patterns, similarities, and differences in their narratives were identified through systematic coding and interpretation. A hermeneutic lens guided the analysis, allowing the researcher to explore both the challenges participants face and the strengths they draw on to endure their circumstances. The findings are organised thematically and supported with direct quotations to ensure that participants' voices remain central. As Braun et al. (2019) note, themes function as summaries of what participants express in relation to specific topics, providing a structured way to present qualitative insights.

This study was guided by the following research questions, to achieve the aim and objectives:

- What are the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban with regard to crimes they experience and commit?
- What are the personal, social, and structural factors that contribute to the involvement of homeless and street-involved youth in criminal activities?
- How do homeless and street-involved youth in Durban perceive the impacts of crimes on their well-being and daily lives?
- What are the perspectives of homeless and street-involved youth on the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of existing interventions and support services?

5.2 Socio-demographic data for study sample

This study had 20 participants (n=20) that were interviewed. Of these, 10 participants were from the Albert or Whoonga Park (5 males and 5 females), and the other 10 participants from the Payless shelter (5 males and 5 females). The participants will be referred to as P1 male or

female Albert Park or P1 female or male Payless Shelter to ensure anonymity. The naming of themes was based on repeated data information by 3 or more participants (n=/<3).

Table 5.1: Participants' socio-demographic characteristics

Site/Group	Total participants (n)	Male	Female	Age Range
Albert/Whoonga Park	10	5	5	18-27
Payless Shelter	10	5	5	18-27
Total	**20**	**10**	**10**	**18-27**

Source: Researcher's Summary

Six main themes emerged from the findings. The first theme focused on factors influencing homelessness. This theme explored how family neglect, abuse and violence, peer influence and substance abuse, as well as poverty and unemployment led youth to leave their homes. The second theme, experiences of victimization, highlighted the multiple forms of harm these youth faced, including physical violence, sexual exploitation and harassment, and emotional and psychological victimization. The third theme examined how youth became entangled in criminal activities as a strategy for survival. Theme four addressed the interconnected drivers of youth criminal involvement. This theme presented the personal, social, and structural factors driving criminal involvement among homeless youth. Theme five focused on the impact of crime and/or victimization on homeless youths' well-being and daily survival. This theme considered the psychological and emotional impact, physical and health-related impact, social impact, as well as the economic and daily survival impact of crime and/or victimization on the youths' well-being. The sixth and final theme presented both formal and informal support systems, including NGOs, government services, peer networks, and coping strategies developed within the street and/or shelter community.

Table 5.2: Table Summarizing themes and subthemes

Theme number	Theme	Subthemes
1	Factors leading to homelessness.	• Family neglect • Abuse and violence • Peer influence and substance abuse • Poverty and unemployment.

2	Experiences of victimization on the streets and/or shelter.	• Exposure to physical violence • Sexual exploitation and harassment • Emotional and psychological victimization
3	Navigating crime as a daily reality on the homeless youths.	• Involvement in crime as survival strategies: theft, robbery, and informal hustles
4	The interconnected drivers of youth criminal involvement	• Personal factors driving criminal involvement in homeless youths • Social factors • Structural factors perpetrating criminality on homeless youths
5	The impact of crime and/or victimization to the youth's well-being and daily survival.	• The psychological and emotional impact of crime and/or victimization • The physical and health-related impact on the homeless youth • Social impact • Economic and daily survival impact
6	The mixed perceptions of support services and interventions	• Experiences of inadequate or distrust support • Recognition of helpful and positive interventions

Source: Researcher's Summary

5.3 Factors leading to homelessness

Millions of individuals around the world are impacted by the complex social issue of homelessness. It symbolizes a condition of social isolation, vulnerability and instability that extends beyond the lack of a physical shelter. Homelessness, according to Fazel & Geddes (2019), is the lack of suitable, safe, and stable housing. There are a variety of interrelated personal, structural, and societal variables that contribute to homelessness. According to Parsell & Parsell (2012), a lot of people think that being homeless is a decision, and many more think that those who are homeless could simply change their circumstances if they so choose. Nooe

& Patterson (2010) stated that homelessness is also largely caused by a variety of individual reasons, many of which are complex and frequently connected, including mental illness, substance misuse, domestic violence, family problems, unemployment and poverty, physical health concerns, and prior incarceration. Participants indicated that issues such as family neglect, abuse, violence, peer influence, substance abuse, poverty, and unemployment forced them to leave home as situations often became unbearable.

5.3.1 Family neglect

Family neglect constitutes not merely a lack of care but a continual deficiency in a caregiver's provision of emotional, psychological, or physical support essential for children or dependents, which can negatively impact a child's development and well-being (Lee et al, 2008; Kapeleris, & Paivio, 2011; Hughes et al., 2017). It extends beyond material deprivation, encompassing abandonment, rejection, lack of protection, and emotional invisibility (Stanley & Okpala, 2025). However, Guliyeva and Uyi (2024), argued that family neglect, which mirrors the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, psychological, and emotional needs, can also be seen when the young fail to provide adequate care, protection, and support for the old, resulting in serious harm, abandonment, or impaired well-being. When families fail to create a nurturing and secure environment, young people often become vulnerable to abuse, alienation, and exploitation. In the context of homelessness, neglect is not just the absence of care but the active breakdown of trust and protection, pushing youth to seek refuge on the streets or in shelters where they find a sense of belonging and safety otherwise denied at home (Lee et al., 2008). Neglect can be defined as a lack of sufficient attention, responsibility and protection that matches the age and needs of the child (Avdibegoviü & Brkiü, 2020). Participants defined neglect as not only a lack of care, but also betrayal, abandonment, favouritism, and contempt for their well-being.

P1 Female Payless Shelter felt deceived when her family selected an outsider over her, her sexual abuser over her, and valuing money over dignity. She was compelled to adjust by leaving home, despite having no resources, after the legitimate family support mechanisms failed. P1. Female Payless Shelter said:

> *"Late last year made me chose to leave the family house with no plan, no money, just me and God, and now I am safe in this shelter. My family, especially my brother's kids kicked me out with actions not words. They failed me in my lowest where I needed care, support, and protection. My family believed an outsider who was my*

brother's kids friend who had raped me multiple times over me. All because of what? Because his friend has tenders, he has hired him, and he promises to hire the whole family. My own family abandoned me, failed me, and showed carelessness towards me. My own blood turned a blind eye to my pain, traded my dignity for money, and leaving me to face the streets alone."

The participant expressed how she was disregarded by her own family and her own brother's kids, who preferred to trust an outsider, a sexual assaulter, over her. She emphasizes how her family's neglect was motivated by materialism, putting money and status ahead of her safety and dignity. In an identical manner, P2 Male Payless Shelter highlighted that his family prioritized money, strangers, and silence over his well-being. P2. Male Payless Shelter highlighted the sensation of being invisible and unwelcome in his own home, which is an established representation of the strain brought on by emotional rejection.

P2 Male Payless Shelter shared:

"I did not leave home because I wanted freedom. I left because my own family made me feel unwanted. They chose outsiders over me, money over me, and silence over my pain. In the house where I should feel safe, I felt invisible; I felt like an unwanted total stranger. That is how I ended up on the streets not because I was lost, but because my family discarded me first. So, yeah that's how the streets became my home, and now this shelter is my only home, and I am safer here."

P2 Female Albert Park stated:

"*Living on the streets was my only way out of that negligent, abusive, and toxic family. That family failed me, and it shows that there were not my parents but my extended family. My very own biological mother chose to move in with every man she gets, and abandon me, her very own nine months of pregnancy. Worse, I could not go to stay with my mother because her man was abusive towards her."*

The narratives shared by P1 Female Payless shelter and P2 Male Payless shelter with P2 Female Albert Park, participants shared stories of familial betrayal and abandonment, in which parents and other family members disregarded their needs and made them feel unwelcome. Participants felt abandoned in favour of money, outsiders, or toxic relationships, which made them feel invisible and disposable, leading to deep mistrust and forcing them to seek survival on the

streets. Family neglect was more than just a lack of provision; it was also a betrayal in moments of vulnerability.

Furthermore, P2 Male Payless shelter narrated about experiencing emotional neglect, which includes being disregarded, neglected, or treated as if he did not exist. The feeling of belonging was undermined by their invisibility, and the only place he could go to recover his identity and survival was the streets. In addition, P5 Male Albert Park shared similar experience of feeling invisible, neglected, and unwanted:

> *"I am a boy from the hood KwaMashu. My story on how I ended up on the street is not something I want to speak about but what I can say is that: parents when you decide to marry someone or to start a new family, please get yourselves a new house, do not invite strangers in the name of love to your kids' lives. That is where family neglect begins. I was pushed aside, treated like I did not belong, and my needs stopped mattering. In my own home, I became invisible, and that is how the streets became the only place left for me."*

P4. Male Albert Park described life on the street as tough, however life at his home was worse. His mother protected him even when he did wrong, and he now questions why she shielded him instead of guiding or disciplining them. P4. Male Albert Park said:

> *"Living on the street is not an easy thing but I chose to run away from home because I saw that my very own mother is destroying me and the neighbours were planning to burn my family alive. She knew that I was involved in many kinds of criminal activities, but I got caught she would protect me, even give me bail money. Why shield me and favour me, when you should be disciplining me because you know that I am at fault?"*

Supporting these narratives, researchers have found that family maltreatment can lead to homelessness (Biel et al., 2014; Widom, Courtney, & Do, 2024). Further, it demonstrates that different types of familial neglect, abuse, and conflict are substantial, albeit complicated, causes youth homelessness. According to studies, neglect frequently drives young people out of their homes, whereas persistent physical, mental, or sexual abuse compels many to depart for safety (Ferguson, 2009; Tyler & Schmitz, 2020). Physical abandonment, emotional mistreatment, familial betrayal, and poor parental supervision are the most regularly cited reasons for leaving (Hyde, 2005; Rew, 2008). The narratives highlight the varied forms of parental neglect, which includes physical abandonment, emotional detachment, betrayal for monetary or interpersonal benefit, and a failure to shield kids from abuse or dangerous situations. Parental neglect

therefore served as a push factor, making the streets appear safer than their homes, pushing young people out from their families. Many participants saw living on the streets as a last resort after being abandoned by their families, leaving them feeling unsafe, unwelcome, and unsupported. Literature describes a wide range of manifestations of parental neglect, including emotional detachment and inability to provide basic requirements, betrayal for financial or interpersonal benefit, and a lack of protection from violent or harmful surroundings (Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Whitbeck et al. 2009). Such neglect frequently serves as a potent motivator, making the streets appear safer or more predictable than home (Milburn et al., 2024; Tyler and Melander, 2015). As a result, many young people regard street life as a last alternative after desertion or serious family disintegration. They frequently leave their homes not because they want to, but because they feel uncomfortable, undesired, and unsupported by their families (Kurtz et al., 1991; Ungar et al., 2007).

In keeping with the routine activities theory (RAT), youths who grow up in neglectful home circumstances (without guardianship) are more likely to be victimized, abused, and identified as ideal targets by a motivated criminal. They are also more likely to be pushed into dangerous street situations where they are exposed on a regular basis, increasing the risk of further harm. The RAT explains how young people are vulnerable to victimization and criminal activity when neglect and abandonment are coupled with the lack of capable guardians (parents, caregivers, etc.). Youth are exposed to abuse, exploitation, and destructive coping strategies when families are unable to provide protection or supervision. These narratives portray the streets as both unavoidable and unsurvivable because negligence not only took away protective guardianship but also put young people in dangerous settings and motivated perpetrators.

Similarly, strain theory argues that when individuals face pressure, blocked opportunities, and obstacles in achieving safety, dignity, and social acceptance within their families or communities, they may resort to alternative coping mechanisms such as running away or adapting to street life (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992). Participants in this study described experiences of betrayal, abandonment, and emotional invisibility as forms of social strain that intensified feelings of hopelessness and pushed them toward the streets, where some unexpectedly found a sense of belonging and relief. This aligns with existing research showing that familial rejection and emotional neglect are central pathways into street involvement for young people (Richter et al., 2015; Ward & Seager, 2010). Collectively, the participants illustrated how experiences of invisibility, emotional neglect, and chronic familial strain encouraged withdrawal from their families and reinforced the decision to choose the streets

over their homes, as an outcome extensively observed in studies of homeless and street-involved youth across South Africa (Van der Heijden & Swart, 2020; Ward & Seager, 2010).

5.3.2 Abuse and violence

Abuse and violence within families are among the most devastating drivers of homelessness, as they turn the very spaces meant to offer safety into environments of fear and trauma. Abuse can take many different forms, such as neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Violence can happen in intimate relationships, families, or the larger community settings, putting people in continual danger. Violence and abuse undermine stability and force vulnerable people to seek safety elsewhere, which frequently leads to homelessness and street involvement. They also create unsafe settings in homes and communities. Bearsley-Smith et al., (2008) noted that young people experiencing homelessness are a marginalized and vulnerable population group. Many of these young people have experienced violence and abuse within their family of origin.

The participants detailed many types of abuse, including as verbal, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, which were frequently committed by family members, caregivers, or those in trusted positions. Their relocation and eventual homelessness were directly caused by patterns of exploitation, betrayal, and neglect, as the accounts demonstrate.

P1. Female Payless shelter describes being repeatedly raped by a family friend, yet her family chose to protect the abuser over her due to financial incentives. She shared:

> *"I have found shelter on the street when my family chose a rapist over me. That guy did not rape me once, but multiple times. When I needed love and protection, they chose the man who raped me over and over, because his money and promises meant more than my pain."*

Likewise, P2. Female Albert Park was also a victim of sexual abuse, but differently for her, she experienced long-term sexual abuse by her own uncle compounded by her aunt's denial and physical punishment when she reported the abuse. She said:

> *"I was raised by my extended family, and my uncle was sexually abuse me. Mind you the raping has been happening for years. And when I tell my aunt she would beat me up, and say I am lying. My aunt would report me to my uncle, and my uncle would say I am lying, and they would accuse me of trying to break the family. They were not only sexualizing me, but they were also calling me names. I would go to my mom to report*

them; however, my mom would kick me out to her house since she was staying with her abusive man who claims he loves her!"

Similarly, P3. Female Payless shelter also narrated experiences related to sexual abuse. The participant was sexually violated as her stepfamily would sell her sexually explicit pictures without her consent.

"My stepfamily was sexually exploiting me. They were using me online to make money. They would put my naked pictures online, force me into sexual activities and live stream it, and sell disturbing sexual videos of me. One day I was tired of living like that. They then kicked me out, but I was also thinking of leaving the house."

Participants P1. And P3. Females Payless Shelter and P2. Female Albert Park noted that family members or stepfamily members were frequently the perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation. Sexual abuse refers to any non-consensual sexual intercourse obtained through force, harassment, or when the victim is incapable of providing consent (Flannery, 2021). Exploitation entails being manipulated, compelled, or pressured into performing actions against one's will for the benefit of another. However, in this scenario participants are referring specifically to sexual exploitation. Participants experienced numerous bodily abuses, but when they sought assistance, they were also not believed and silenced. In certain instances, families put their financial gain or social reputation ahead of the child's protection, which is a sign of profound betrayal and the acceptance of abuse in homes. Such abuse frequently compelled victims to leave their homes in search of safety, sometimes on the streets, and was associated with lasting emotional consequences.

P4. Male Payless Shelter described running away from home because of severe mistreatment. He narrated that he grew up with adoptive parents who were physically abusive, emotionally cruel, and treated him like a servant rather than a child. He was beaten for small mistakes, insulted, denied food, and generally dehumanized. Because of this harsh environment, P4 Male Payless Shelter expressed that anyone in his situation would have chosen to run away from home. He explained.

"The chance I got, I used it very well on running away at home. I am an orphan I think my parents died, but I am not sure. I was raised by my adoptive parents; I am sure about that. I do not kwon whether they wanted to baby me be their child or they needed those antient slaves. You know those colonization slaves, right? One mistake is equal to sjambok. They would call me names, spit out on me, refuse to give me food. My sister,

as young as I am I have experienced a lot! If you were me, wouldn't have you ran away?"

P5. Male Albert Park shared almost similar experiences of abuse. He highlighted that he experienced every kind of abuse including physical, mental, and verbal. He felt overwhelmed and exhausted by the constant mistreatment and toxic environment in his life, which pushed him to leave his home. P5. Male Albert Park shared:

"There was no kind of abuse or victimization I did not receive; physical, mental, verbal you name them. I was also tired of the abuse, bad treatment and toxicity I was experiencing within my life."

Supporting these findings studies across South Africa and globally show that physical abuse, neglect, and harsh punitive discipline are major pathways into youth homelessness (Martins, 2014; Ward & Seager, 2010). Male participants reported physical abuse, neglect, and demeaning treatment. The harsh, violent, and degrading discipline was compared to colonial harshness or slavery. Feelings of rejection, alienation, and unworthiness have been created by these kinds of interactions. The ongoing cycle of violence produced dangerous surroundings that drove youths to flee, even if it meant living on the streets. In addition to physical and sexual abuse, individuals suffered mental injury from caregiver rejection, neglect, and insults. Instead of being supported, their reports of abuse were treated with disbelief, blame, and punishment. Research on street-involved youth in Durban similarly reports that violent and degrading treatment at home creates chronic fear, shame, and emotional withdrawal, pushing young people to escape to the streets (Tuxen-Meyer, 2020). Additionally, parents and guardians frequently supported abusers, putting money, relationships, or family reputation ahead of the well-being of the youth. The narratives underscore that abuse and violence within families are powerful drivers of youth homelessness. Evidence shows that families often protect abusers to preserve social standing or financial stability, leaving young people without reliable support (Kruger & du Plessis, 2017). The participants demonstrated how the home, which was meant to be a place of protection, turned into a place of rejection, exploitation, and pain. The youth had no alternative but to seek safety on the streets because there were few or no support systems in place. In addition to robbing them of their childhood, abuse influenced how they perceived trust, safety, and family. Evidence shows that families often protect abusers to preserve social

standing or financial stability, leaving young people without reliable support (Kruger & du Plessis, 2017).

In consonance with Routine Activities Theory (RAT) (Cohen & Felson, 1979) sheds light on why these youth were so vulnerable to abuse in the first place. The RAT outlines how the absence of capable guardians (e.g., protective family members, protective parents, trusted relatives) left these youths open to predatory abuse and exploitation, ultimately leading to homelessness. Furthermore, these narratives shows that the participants were suitable target of victimization occurred on them.

5.3.3 Peer influence and substance abuse

Peer influence and substance abuse are powerful, often intertwined forces that can push young people toward homelessness. They act together as both catalysts and reinforcers of youth homelessness in Durban. Peer influence is widely acknowledged as a significant component in affecting young people's decisions, behaviours, and life paths (Leung, Toumbourou & Hemphill, 2014). Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Reichert et al., 2021). In the context of homelessness substance abuse plays a significant and often cyclical role, acting both as a cause and a consequence of homelessness.

P1. Male Albert Park highlighted that peer pressure initiated his journey into street life. However, he expressed regret for allowing himself to be influenced to live off the streets:

> *"Living on the streets was not something of which I have always dreamed. I ended up on the streets because of peer influence since high school and two I have years living on the streets. And I am forever regrating why I was easily influenced by them."*

Peers transmit norms about acceptable behaviour (Crooks et al., 2022). If a peer group normalizes substance use as a coping strategy or a rite of passage, newcomers quickly adopt these behaviours to belong and avoid exclusion. P8. Male Albert Park similarly revealed that his first exposure to substances came through peers at the age of thirteen, and highlighted a desire of belonging:

> *"I was barely thirteen when I first tasted smoke and alcohol, just to fit in. My friends laughed, called me 'brave,' made me feel like I belonged. At home, no one noticed I was slipping away, or maybe they did not care. Soon, the streets felt safer than the walls of my house."*

Some youths face direct pressure to participate in illegal activities or substance use as proof of loyalty or to stay in group. In addition to encouraging substance use, peer pressure also led to delinquent behaviour. P10. Male Albert Park disclosed that his friends urged him to steal at home in order to satisfy their addictions as well as his. This behaviour resulted in family discord, a loss of trust, and eventually being locked out of the house and living on the streets.

P10. Male Albert Park stated:

> *"My sister, with the cravings of Ingidi (Mandrax) and Qo I ended up stealing at home. And my friends would influence me to steal at home since it more comfortable than theirs and some were already street-involved. Time goes by, I ended up selling everything in my room and at home they would lock me outside, but my lovely sister would sneak food and clothes for me to keep warm. I got used to sleeping outside and I ended up on the streets."*

Peer influence around substance abuse can overpower parental teachings and values. P3. Female Albert Park narrated falling into clubbing, drinking, and cocaine use at university under the influence of friends, leading to addiction and parental estrangement.

> *"I had a good life with my adoptive parents, everything I needed and more. But at varsity I fell in with friends who pulled me into clubbing, drinking, and eventually cocaine. What started as fun became an addiction I could not shake. Rehab did not work because the drugs kept finding me, my friends would sneak them into the rehab and soon my parents gave up on me. Now it has been almost two years on the streets. All because I followed the wrong crowd, influenced by the wrong people, and the drugs never let me go."*

P4. Female Payless Shelter expressed similar experiences regarding peer influencing and stated:

> *"Chommie, I don't want to talk much but my friend, the fear of missing out 'FOMO' and the haze of drugs didn't just steal my childhood; they pushed me into the cold, into homelessness."*

The examination of these narratives reveals a recurring theme: substance use is sparked by peer pressure, which normalizes deviance, weakens family bonds, and makes it easier to enter the streets. Furthermore, risk factors that increase vulnerability to street involvement. Studies show that because of their developmental stage and need for belonging, adolescents and young adults

are particularly vulnerable to peer norms (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Tomova, Andrews & Blakemore, 2021). Individuals struggling with addiction may find themselves unable to sustain basic life necessities, increasing their vulnerability to homelessness. The processes that lead to homelessness are greatly impacted by this dynamic. For these youth, drugs and street life become coping mechanisms for managing strain, even though they lead to deviance and homelessness.

In line with strain theory, the participants' accounts reveal how social pressure and the inability to access acceptable pathways to belonging contributed to deviant coping behaviours that ultimately shaped their trajectories into homelessness. The young people described how peer expectations created significant strain, particularly when conventional sources of emotional support were absent or weakened. Findings indicate that these youths began experimenting with alcohol and smoking just to fit in. The findings reflected on long-term regret over being easily influenced by peers during high school, demonstrating how early susceptibility to social pressure led to decisions with enduring consequences. Furthermore, it described how drug use, clubbing, and a fear of missing out gradually drew homeless and street-involved youth away from supportive family environments, indicating that when healthier avenues for acceptance felt inaccessible, risk-taking became an alternative coping mechanism. These narratives align with prior research showing that peer influence is a strong predictor of substance use and risky behaviour among vulnerable youth (Slesnick et al., 2016; Tyler & Johnson, 2006) and that the desire for social belonging often pushes adolescents toward deviant peer groups when family support is limited (Ungar, 2013; Ward & Seager, 2010). South African studies similarly emphasise that peer pressure and nightlife involvement frequently contribute to street migration and substance use among homeless youth (Mkhize & Dlamini, 2019; Van den Berg et al., 2020). Thus, consistent with strain theory, the participants' experiences illustrate how unmet social needs and peer-induced strain foster adaptive yet harmful behaviours, contributing to their movement toward homelessness.

Routine activities theory highlights that the combination of suitable targets, motivated offenders, and a lack guardians leads to crime or deviant conduct. According to these accounts, young people were exposed to and given opportunities for risky behaviours through their everyday surroundings and interactions with peers. P10. Male Albert Park provided an example of how continuous exposure to deviant peers normalized criminal behaviour by describing stealing from home with friends' approval and eventually growing accustomed to sleeping outside. The theory explains that P9. Male Albert Park was a motivated offender in the

influence of his friends, motivated to steal at his home to buy more substances when no was noticing which led to deviant conduct.

5.3.4 Poverty and unemployment

Poverty is one of the most relentless forces driving people to the margins of society. It limits access to critical resources, while unemployment exacerbates financial insecurity, resulting in an ongoing pattern of suffering from which it is extremely difficult to break. Poverty and unemployment stand out among the many causes of homelessness as the primary and interconnected elements that force people and families onto the streets. Many youths have no choice but to turn to the streets in an attempt to survive because of this cycle. Zulkifli and Abidin (2023) noted that poverty is a multifaceted condition defined by a lack of resources to meet necessities for human life. Poverty forces many people to leave impoverished homes, if only temporarily, in pursuit of greater social and economic opportunities in developed cities or towns.

P8. Male Payless Shelter highlight how economic necessity prompted migration to Durban P8. Male Payless Shelter recounted:

> *"Poverty made me leave my home in Soweto to look for employment in Durban. But unfortunately, things did not go as planned."*

Similarly, P7. Female Albert Park, originating from a rural village in Limpopo, migrated in search of better prospects but ended up homeless:

> *"I am from a rural village of Limpopo, and I came to Durban hoping for a better life. Now, I am on the streets of Durban, alone, trying to survive."*

These narratives demonstrate that poverty-driven migration, without adequate safety nets or employment guarantees, places young people at high risk of homelessness. Poverty and unemployment are closely related, and unemployment increases vulnerability and economic instability. Poverty-driven internal migration in South Africa, particularly among youth from rural or under-resourced regions, is linked to substandard housing, unstable livelihoods, and an increased risk of homelessness. For example, Mthiyane et al. (2022) found that many migrants to urban municipalities relocate due to a lack of sound economic opportunities in rural areas, with inadequate rural infrastructure and service provision driving people to cities, only to be met with limited housing and job prospects. According to Evers (2012), rural-to-urban migrants in South African cities may have social and economic vulnerability due to insufficient support

networks. Furthermore, Mlambo's (2020) review of rural-urban migration dynamics in South Africa emphasizes how systemic neglect of rural development and persistent economic inequalities drive migration flows to urban areas, exacerbating strain on urban housing and infrastructure and increasing risk for migrants.

Participants also linked homelessness to the loss of family income. P5. Male Payless Shelter shared:

> *"We were renting then my dad lost his job, he was the only provider. Living in the shelter was the only best way out."*

The participant descriptions emphasize how family systems may become unstable when a household breadwinner suddenly loses their job, leading youth and the whole family to look for refuge outside the home. Youth homelessness is directly correlated with economic vulnerability within households.

Furthermore, P10 Female Payless Shelter narrated homelessness as an on-going daily survival choice. She asked:

> *"Which one would you prefer to be unemployed, going to bed hungry, and sometime eat your neighbour's leftover or volunteering to a shelter, eat two times a day, and sleep worry about what you going to eat tomorrow? Exactly! That is why I also stay in this shelter.*

Poverty and unemployment are generally identified as factors leading to homelessness. Migration in pursuit of employment, loss of familial income, and the inability to meet basic needs pushes individuals onto the streets or to the shelters. From the body of literature, homelessness, poverty, and unemployment have a strong connection (Hanratty, 2017). Many people experiencing homelessness claim that their lack of housing is due to financial difficulties and/or job loss (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2020). Poverty restricts access to basic resources such as housing, healthcare, and education, while unemployment worsens financial instability, increasing the risk of homelessness (Padgett, 2020). Extreme poverty, coupled with limited opportunities for youth and their families, forced them to the streets to seek income. The narratives indicate that poverty and unemployment are systemic factors contributing to homelessness, rather than just individual disasters. They demonstrate how young people are stuck between survival requirements and lost economic prospects.

Shelters provide temporary relief, but the root causes of unemployment and poverty remain unresolved, perpetuating the cycle of homelessness.

From a theoretical perspective, Merton's strain theory provides a useful lens to understand these experiences. Strain theory posits that people who are experiencing a disconnect between the desired goals of society (like financial security and upward mobility) and the legally available methods (like work and education) become stressed and may resort to other survival tactics. In the context of P8. Male Payless Shelter and P7. Female Albert Park, the objectives of society (financial security and self-sufficiency) and the available, legal resources such as employment chances are quite different for these young people. The strain that results from not being able to accomplish these objectives by traditional means leads to their homelessness as an adaptive reaction to systemic obstacles. Additionally, for P5 Male Payless Shelter explained how sudden loss of a family breadwinner led to displacement. Economic strain at household and individual levels leads to youth relying on survival strategies outside the family home

Furthermore, the routine activities theory clarifies how regular behavioural patterns might expose youths at risk to the dangers of living on the streets. The hypothesis states that the combination of available targets, motivated criminals, and the lack of adequate guardianship raises the risk of victimization or participation in informal activities driven by survival. The decisions made by participant 10 Female Payless shelter, the choice to work as a food security volunteer at a shelter, show how common survival techniques influence risk exposure and strengthen reliance on social safety nets.

5.4 Experiences of victimization on the streets and/or shelters

Youth who are homeless and streets involved experience various types of victimization that are frequently accepted as part of their daily existence, whether they are living in temporary shelters or navigating the harsh realities of life on the streets. Life on the streets means being exposed to crime constantly and experiencing instability and insecurity. This victimization can take many different forms including exposure to physical assault, sexual victimization, emotional and psychological abuse, economic victimization, and structural or institutional victimization, with perpetrators ranging from strangers to law enforcement. Due to their lack of social support and protection, these youths frequently become easy targets. Research has indicated that young people participating in street crime are especially at risk since they lack resources and rely on public areas to survive (Brown, 2016). The homeless are often stigmatized, dehumanized, and treated more like criminals than victims, in addition to being

directly assaulted. Police harassment, such as forceful removals or confiscation of property, indicates systemic victimization by institutions sworn to protect residents. Likewise, while shelters are intended to give protection and support, they are not immune to victimization dynamics. Overcrowding, lack of privacy, and strained resources create environments where interpersonal violence thrives (Bekele, 2024). Residents frequently report verbal abuse, bullying, and theft of personal property, especially among youths. In some cases, shelter staff themselves may perpetrate abuse through neglect, discrimination, or exploitation, highlighting the power imbalance within these supposedly protective spaces. Briefly introduce the sub-themes to be discussed below

5.4.1 Exposure to physical violence

Homelessness is more than just a state of deprivation; it is also an environment that promotes numerous layers of vulnerability. Physical violence exposure is one of the most common hazards that youths who are either homeless or temporarily housed in shelters must deal with. Furthermore, homeless youths are frequently viewed by the public as a nuisance or a threat, which makes them prime targets for hate crimes, harassment, and assault. Despite having different structures, the streets and shelters are both dangerous places where surviving is frequently linked to criminal subcultures, power struggles, and a lack of official protection. Research has indicated that those who are homeless are more likely than those who are housed to become victims of violence (Whitbeck, 2019).

Peer violence is common and frequently takes the form of arguments over limited resources like sleeping, accommodation, food, or money. P10. Male Albert Park shared his experience of violence on the streets caused by peers. He described the terrifying experience of being attacked by three friends who mocked and criticized him before beating him and robbing him of his little belongings, including a precious picture of his sister. This story demonstrates how victims of peer assault lose hope and emotional support in addition to suffering physical trauma. He shared the following:

> *"I was just looking for a place to sleep when they found me. Three peers they live on the streets like me; I knew their faces. They laughed, called me names. dog, rubbish, before the first punch knocked the air out of me. Kicks followed, sharp and merciless. I held on to my plastic bag, the only things I had was my torn shoes, a piece of bread, and my sister's photo. They ripped it away. That photo was my hope, and they stole it like it was nothing. I lay on the ground, blood in my mouth, ribs aching, wishing*

someone would hear me. No one did. When they left, I whispered, 'I just want to live'. Then I forced myself up. On these streets, if you don't rise, you don't survive." P10. Male Albert Park

For homeless youth, the streets are frequently a harsh environment. Young people who lack consistent protection face violence from a variety of sources, including strangers, adults, peers, and law enforcement. Some of the homeless youths are victims of violence associated with stigmatization and false accusations. P1. Male Albert Park indicated how societal stigma and stereotyping increase their vulnerability to violence by considering them as a homogeneous group of criminals rather than individuals with rights. he explained that:

"Us as homeless people, my sister we are always victims of hit and run. If not hit and run, we are wrongfully accused. Sometimes it may happen that another homeless or a phara like me commits a crime, they would hit me because they say we all look alike plus I want to say it in my home language 'zifa ngamvunye' [they all die because of one]. If you would see me naked you would see the bruises on my body and all of them I got them here on the streets."

The participant emphasized how homeless people are frequently wrongfully victimized and beaten because of being collectively held accountable for crimes committed by other homeless people. He clarified that they are subjected to arbitrary violence since they are perceived as being indistinguishable ("zifa ngamvunye"). His description of bodily bruises underscores the regularity of such attacks.

Some homeless youths are victims of violence from authorities and structural oppression, P4. Male Albert Park noted that:

"I do not know whether it was because I have always got away with criminality that my mom would come to rescue and shield instead of disciplining or it is because when we were caught in action committing a crime the police and the community would easily let me go but under my mom's influence. But somehow, somewhere I think I am paying for those escapes. The reason I am saying this it because I am always a victim of police brutality, if not the police the securities would hit me for no reason. Even, last week this traffic cop slapped me and honestly I do not know what I did wrong."

The young homeless people reported being regularly victimized on the streets, including being physically attacked, having their personal things stolen, and being harassed by older people,

neighbours, and even police officers. These incidents show how exposed and unprotected they are. P2. Female Albert Park shared:

> *"I am a drug addict so I cannot sleep without my Xanax pills. This one night on my way to the street where I sleep. I saw these people, they were clean and fine. Not sure whether they were 4 or 5, but they were mix of both genders. They cornered me near the bus station, shoving and hitting until my body ached. I clutched my blanket tight, but they tore it away like I was nothing. Lying on the pavement, bruised and shaking, I told myself, I have to get up. But what saddens me is that they did not only beat me up, but they took my Xanax pill and asked me to fight the girl with whom they were going. Even now I am hurting."*

Not only do homeless youth experience victimization, but those living in shelters are also subjected to physical violence. Shelters are meant to offer protection, yet they frequently perpetuate vulnerable situations (Abramovich, 2017). Physical altercations are common in an atmosphere that is overcrowded, poorly supervised, and lacks privacy. Young people commonly describe being bullied, intimidated, or assaulted by senior citizens, as well as being taken advantage of by staff members who abuse their power. P6. Female Payless Shelter shared that:

> *"When I was one week old in here, while I was sleeping these two siblings beat me up and pour a 20-litre bucket of cold water at me. Worse I could see their faces, but they swear on their abusive auntie's grave that if I snitch on them, I will end up in hospital."*

Similarly, P4. Male Payless Shelter shared his narrative on him being victimized in the shelter by the people he stays with. He believes that one of the workers was involved in his victimization. He explained:

> *"This one night when I was peeing on the urinals in the toilet. So, you know as men we pee while standing and facing the urinals, not seeing what is happening behind us, right? So, these gents sneaked towards me, they covered my face with a black plastic. Obviously, I am a man I am going to fight. When I fought, one of them putted his hand directly to my nose. Mind you, I am still covered with plastic. I was struggling to breath when I was only covered with plastic, but matters were worse when this gent covered my nose. I felt like I was dying! They then pushed me to a toilet seat, putted my head inside then they flushed the toilet. I felt like I was drowning, in the hot mist of the plastic struggling to breath, at the time they were not letting me go, they were pinning me inside*

the toilet seat through holding the back of my neck. When they saw that I was submissive not fighting them anymore, they picked me up checked whether I am still breathing, and they told me to count from 1 up to 5 slowly then remove the plastic. I did exactly that and I am not going to lie, I still have this anger and this thing raises depression! From the rumours I heard that the night security officer was part of them, he was the one who was guarding the toilet door, checking whether is there anyone coming, and sees my abusers when leaving."

It is important to note that both street and shelter settings mirror broader structural violence marked by exclusion, neglect, and inequality that make homeless youth vulnerable. Constant exposure to physical violence compromises not just one's physical safety but also one's mental health. Many young people experiencing homelessness internalize trauma, grow suspicious of institutions, and accept violence as a normal part of life (Toolis & Hammack, 2015). The existence of security and police personnel does not always lessen exposure to violence; rather, some young people describe aggressive evictions, random beatings, and police brutality as commonplace occurrences. Despite their differences in structure, shelters and the streets both carry some risks, according to a critical analysis of exposure to physical violence among homeless and street-involved youths (Fingerhut, 2008; Pain & Francis, 2004). Violence is normalized in day-to-day life, sustained by institutional neglect, and rooted in survival. In order to ensure that youths not only break free from patterns of victimization but also acquire avenues for long-term stability, safety, and dignity, it is essential that these realities be acknowledged and addressed immediately.

The narratives of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban emphasize the pervasive and often brutal exposure to physical violence as an unavoidable part of their everyday existence. Far from being isolated instances, these incidents demonstrate patterns of assault, police brutality, and peer-inflicted damage that reflect larger social, institutional, and environmental processes. According to strain theory, youth victimization is the result of blocked opportunities, social marginalization, and the inability of lawful institutions to offer stability. Strain not only drives some people to commit crimes, but it also puts them in positions of heightened vulnerability when anger and survival struggles express as violence against one another.

Simultaneously, the theory of everyday activities provides insight into the structural conditions that enable these violent interactions. According to this hypothesis, three factors come together to cause crime and victimization: a suitable target, a motivated offender, and the lack of capable

guardianship. These kinds of situations are created in the streets and shelters where participants live. This convergence is demonstrated by the attack on P2. Female Albert Park by a group of people who appeared to be well off; her isolation, drug use, and visibility made her a suitable target, and the absence of community or police action furthered her exposure. Similarly, the planned attack that P4. Mal Payless Shelter detailed, which allegedly involved even a security officer, emphasizes the institutional lack of guardianship that gives offenders more confidence in settings that ought to provide protection

5.4.2 Sexual exploitation and harassment

For homeless and street-involved youth, sexual victimization, exploitation, and abuse are commonplace experiences that deepen their marginalization and vulnerability. Life on the streets or in shelters exposes young people to uncontrolled types of sexual violence, unlike in formal settings where safety systems may exist. These experiences cover a variety of relational contexts, such as peers, law enforcement, shelter authorities, and transactional exchanges, and they are not limited to interactions with strangers or gender. Due to their lack of access to social services, stable family support, and suitable housing, these youths are frequently among the most disadvantaged groups. Youth who are homeless are particularly vulnerable, making them more likely to be sexually exploited. According to studies, these youths frequently leave home because of familial abuse, neglect, or financial difficulties, which leaves them vulnerable to predatory actors who take advantage of their lack of protection (Avdibegoviü & Brkiü, 2020; Bearsley-Smith et. al., 2008). Sexual exploitation is used as a transactional way of survival in situations where there is no parental or guardian supervision and everyday necessities like food, housing, and money are present.

Ironically, shelters that are meant to offer protection can occasionally become places where sexual harassment and exploitation take place. Youths are left vulnerable by a lack of resources, a shortage of qualified staff, and insufficient child protection procedures. There have been reports of adult residents, workers, or volunteers taking advantage of the young individuals at shelters, which feeds the patterns of mistrust and abuse (Motala & Smith 2003). Crucially, because of overcrowding, inadequate supervision, or unclear reporting procedures, shelters may also unintentionally expose young people to sexual pressure or peer harassment.

Participants described being victimized by individuals in positions of authority, including law enforcement and shelter managers. P2 Male Payless shelter reveals how a shelter manager exploited institutional power, trading free accommodation for sexual acts. He narrated that:

"At my previous shelter, this old manager who we pay to seduced, touched my private part, unzipped my pants, and licked the top of my private part. I was shocked, did not respond nor say anything. She then lifted up her skirt and put my private part inside hers and asked me to move in and out, in return of a week free stay. I also played along."

Similarly, P3. Female Albert Park's story illustrates how law enforcement officers weaponize their power by coercing sexual favours in exchange for safety. She recounted:

"When I was new in the street, I was sexualized, even the law enforcement during nighttime they would want sexual favours and say they will protect me."

The narratives shows that the homeless youths are often victims of structural and institutional victims, the institutional actors victimize them. Furthermore, these incidents show how systemic abuse occurs when people who are supposed to shield or assist youths who are at risk turn into sexual assaulters. The misuse of power shows how law enforcement and shelters lack accountability systems, leaving victims helpless.

Homeless and street-involved youths are also victims of peer-perpetrated and gang sexual violence P6. Male staes that he is not proud to share his experience as he was raped by other males living in the streets like him. P6. Male Albert Park said:

"I am not proud of sharing this, but I will share it with you because you are not taking any pictures of me, and you promised to keep me anonymous. This one night when we were keeping ourselves warm around the fire. I was left with these two gents; I did not know them because I was new on that street. When they saw that others are fast asleep and no one was passing by. They asked me that when last did I had sex. I smiled and did not respond. They said for us it has been forever! They did signs, I sensed something is off. I tried to run but I knew that I will not outrun them because I have this injury I got before I stayed in the streets. They caught me, took off my pants, and gang sexed me in my bums."

Similarly, P9. Female Albert Park i narrated that she was also a victim of gang rape whilst she was looking for casual work by men, she presumed to be Nigerians. She shared the following:

"When I was searching for piece job because I usually do recycling or clean the yard. I was gang raped by these guys who reside at this complex, and they sounded like Oga (Nigerians)."

Sexual exploitation was also framed through survival strategies. Although it provides money, survival sex exposes women to abuse, deceit, and violence because clients have more power. P7. Female Albert Park shared:

> *"I stay here on the streets, but I make money through flirting and selling my body to the big boys at the clubs or even here (pointing a pavement). It has always worked for me even before I was homeless this was how I used to pay rent. This one night I flirted with a wrong guy at the club and when we got to his place he forced himself on me and he did not pay. He then chased me out of his house, and I had walk to my spot. And worse this has not only occurred once but multiple time with different people."*

This female participant uses sex work as a means of subsistence, but it is frequently exploited as some clients attack her, use force, or do not pay. This shows how abuse and disempowerment are sustained when economic desperation blurs the distinction between consensual sex work and sexual victimization.

Additionally, shelters which are frequently thought of as places of protection were described as dangerous. The residents of the shelter highlighted that they are also sexually abused within the shelter. P7. Female Payless Shelter narrated:

> *"It all started as a joke; my roommate would touch me sexually and compliment me in a sexualizing manner. But it ended as me being a victim of finger rape. If knew from the word go that she was sexually harassing me (I was a female being harrassed by another female that I was sharing a room with), I would have asked to swap roommates."*

P7. Female Payless Shelter explains how harassment from a roommate turned into finger rape, or sexual assault. The incident shows how peer-on-peer abuse is made easier in communal living situations when there is no oversight or accountability. In contrast to attacks on the street, these crimes take place in supposedly safe environments, where victims frequently do not notice the first indications of sexual harassment until it becomes more serious.

The social and structural circumstances surrounding homelessness result in sexual victimization, exploitation, and abuse as systematic effects rather than individual events in the lives of homeless and street-involved kids. The researcher found that sexual violence is frequently accepted as a necessary component of life due to a lack of safety, poverty, and marginalization. By using theories of strain and routine activities, participants' experiences are

not seen as personal tragedies but rather as part of larger structural and environmental realities. While routine activities theory discusses how the absence of guardianship in shelters and on the streets exposes homeless adolescents to sexual victimization on a continual basis, strain theory explains why homeless youth are forced into situations where they must compromise their safety in order to survive.

Additionally, the researcher found that the topic of sexual victimization, exploitation, and abuse reflects multiple layers of vulnerability, including economic factors such as transactional exploitation, social factors such as peer aggression and predatory dynamics, and structural factors like institutional corruption and abuse. Importantly, both male and female participants reported sexual victimisation, challenging gendered stereotypes and the underlying prevalence of abuse directed at homeless youth. Collectively, these testimonies demonstrate that sexual exploitation is systemic rather than incidental and is deeply embedded in the lived experiences of homeless youths.

5.4.3 Emotional and psychological victimization

For homeless youth, living in shelters, and street-involved, emotional and psychological abuse is frequently invisible but extremely harmful aspect of life. This type of victimization describes situations that compromise an individual's wellbeing and sense of self without necessarily resulting in bodily harm. Youth living outside stable family homes in Durban, are frequently subjected to stressors that damage their mental health, identity formation, and prospects for the future. The psychological health of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban may suffer long-term consequences from ongoing exposure to criminal behaviour and victimization (Hills et al., 2017). The findings indicate that the homeless youth of Durban are often victims of repeated verbal abuse, shaming, social exclusion, and dismissive encounters from peers, community members, religious figures, and institutions leading to internal, relational, and structural scars. Additionally, the researcher also found that the participants are victims of labelling, avoidance, whispered judgments, and exclusion from everyday social life.

P9. Female says that it hurts being pointed and whispered on because o he way she looks and people who tends to do that do not know the whole story on how and why she ended up living on the streets. P9. Female Albert Park narrated the following:

> *"I sit outside the shop, clutching my bag like it's all I own, because it is. People walk past without looking, but I hear the whispers:* 'She's dirty… probably a thief.' 'Why

don’t she go home because for sure she has one’. ‘Sies a girl phara.’ *A mother pulls her child closer and tells them not to end up like me. People are judging me without know the full story of how I ended up here on the streets. Each word stings deeper than the hunger in my stomach. I try to tell myself I’m strong, but their voices follow me into the night. Sometimes I start to believe them, and that hurts more than sleeping on the cold ground.”*

Similarly, P5. Male Albert Park shared his account of victim of public stigma and social exclusion. He said:

“You know what is funny, is that I used to think the streets were just a place to sleep, but they became a mirror that reminded me every day that I did not belong anywhere (laughs sarcastically). People walk past me like I am part of the pavement, yes sliding away, as if I am contagious. When I try to speak, my words feel heavy, unwanted. Some laugh, some spit cruel names, and some act as though I am invisible. The hardest part isn’t the hunger or the cold; it is the silence, the way the world tells me I do not matter. And worse even at home I was treated like I do not matter, like I do not belong, like I am invisible. But now, slowly, I have started to believe them.”

The participants narrated that they face direct insults, demoralizing statements, being advised to "disappear," and being blamed by proxy for family hardship. They are also subjected to moral blaming and verbal humiliation. Molnar et al. (2018), noted that these youths might start to believe that they are essentially "bad" or undeserving of a better life, which can lead to a skewed sense of identity and self-worth. Furthermore, from the reports, verbal abuse is not a random act of cruelty; rather, it is often morally coded, with the homeless youths being viewed as immoral or held responsible for family failures and struggles (Prajapati & TS 2024).

P10. Female Payless Shelter shared the following:

“You know what hurts the most about being me and living here? Let me tell you! I am always reminded by almost everyone that how I ended up here. I know I left home because we were suffering but you do not have to remind me. The people that I stay with in here when they have leftovers, they would call me to finish up their food and sometimes they will ask me to keep it safe for tomorrow morning. This is not only just bullying but they are abusing me with what they are saying!”

P8. Male Payless Shelter spotlighted the pastor's dismissive reaction; he was rejected by a pastor a trusted religious leader and that led to a deep psychological injury because betrayal occurred in spaces meant to provide care and opportunity. And this reduces trust, encouraging negativity and withdrawal.

P8. Male Payless Shelter shares his story on how he tried to talk to this Pastor and share with him his life story and actions that led his life to live on the streets, but the Pastor did not seem interested, and his looks showed his was irritated or rather annoyed and offered the least help. P8 Male Payless Shelter states:

> *"This other time I approached this pastor, I will not say his race, I told him my full story on how I ended up homeless. He looked at me like I am a rotten piece of I don't know what, and he responded by telling me that it not his problem, my parents should have worked hard to provide for me, he not father Terresa and I should disappear in front of him worse his facial expression said the rest!"*

P8. Male Payless Shelter's encounter with a pastor is especially significant because it shows how authority figures weaponize moral judgment, betraying expectations of care and reinforcing exclusion. This population of homeless individuals frequently experiences feelings of hopelessness, despair, and low self-esteem, which can increase the risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. These experiences can also foster mistrust and in some cases lead individuals to give up entirely (Osman & Wood, 2018). Similarly, with P5. Male Payless Shelter narrated that constant school-based bullying and mockery led him and his sisters to believe that quitting school was the only way to escape the abuse, and ultimately, they all withdrew from school. P5 Male Payless Shelter stated:

> *"I am eighteen; me and my young two sisters we do not go to school anymore! At school they were making a joke about us since we reside in a shelter, do not have new uniform, and we depend on school soup kitchen.*

According to strain theory, individuals experience stress that manifests as frustration, alienation, or maladaptive coping when they are unable to achieve socially valued goals, such as education, stable family life, or economic security through legitimate means (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992). Research shows that systemic barriers to education intensify emotional strain for poor and homeless youth, reinforcing feelings of worthlessness, stigma, and isolation (Ward & Seager, 2010; Richter et al., 2015). This is evident to the findings which described being teased at school for living in poverty and in shelters, an experience consistent with studies

showing that educational exclusion and peer ridicule exacerbate youth vulnerability (Donald & Clacherty, 2005). Another finding intensified psychological strain when P8. Male Payless Shelter was rejected by a pastor such an event that not only heightened feelings of moral shame but also represented a lost opportunity for emotional support. Such incidents align with literature illustrating how unmet social expectations and institutional betrayal generate humiliation and deepen hopelessness among marginalized youth (Theron & Donald, 2013; Van der Heijden & Swart, 2020).

Routine activities theory further supports this interpretation by demonstrating how the everyday environments of street-involved and homeless youth expose them to heightened risks of abuse and victimization. The theory posits that victimization occurs when three elements converge: suitable targets, motivated offenders, and the absence of capable guardians (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Due to their visible vulnerability and lack of consistent guardianship, homeless youth are frequently treated as "suitable targets," particularly for emotional humiliation and symbolic violence (Baron, 2011). This is reflected to the experiences of being labelled "dirty" and "a thief" while sitting outside a store; an example of how public exposure and societal stereotypes enable ongoing verbal abuse. Even institutional spaces that should offer protection can fail to provide effective guardianship. Furthermore, the findings reported micro-abusive behaviour from peers, this illustrating how these youths and shelters may replicate harmful social dynamics and fail to prevent emotional victimisation (Richter & Van Rooyen, 2015).

5.5 Navigating crime as a daily reality on the homeless youth

For many young people, Durban's streets are more than just thoroughfares; they function as their homes, workplace, classrooms, and danger zones. Crime is not a one-time occurrence for homeless, shelter-based, and street-involved youths; rather, it is a chronic condition that moulds their identities, habits, survival techniques, and interactions with the government. Crime is frequently treated as distinct and episodic in traditional criminology (Wilcox & Gialopsos, 2015). However, criminality is deeply rooted in the lives of many young people participating in street crime. Rather than being manifestations of antisocial disorder, theft, drug sales, transactional sex, and underground economies are often survival strategies in response to poverty, starvation, and marginalization. At the same time, these young people are frequently the victims of sexual exploitation, robbery, harassment, and abuse by peers and adults. In this context, victimhood and offending do not conflict; rather, they reflect limited agency, as young

people are both targets and actors in unstable social environments. Crime is not a unique disturbance for Durban's homeless, shelter-based, and street-involved youth; rather, it is a part of everyday life and may be both a source of harm and a means of survival.

5.5.1 Involvement in crime as a survival strategy: theft, robbery, and informal hustles

Youth homelessness is a global issue characterized by vulnerability, poverty, and social exclusion. Homeless and streets involved youth frequently face challenges related to criminality, marginalization, and survival. Adopting survival methods is common among homeless youth in situations where social safety nets are insufficient. Among these difficulties, robbery, informal hustles, and theft stand out as important realities that mirror their day-to-day hardships. Even though these behaviours are socially unacceptable, they are usually justified by necessity rather than free will or choice. These acts are not only symptomatic of social and economic exclusion but are also rooted in structural inequalities that perpetuate homelessness and crime. Examining theft, robbery and informal hustles among homeless youth critically reveals how environmental factors, survival tactics, and systemic failures come together to normalize crime as a way of life.

One of the most prevalent crimes among young people experiencing homelessness is theft (Ellsworth, 2019). Food, clothing, and minor items that can be swiftly turned into cash are frequently taken. Stealing is more about meeting urgent requirements than it is about pursuing personal benefit. However, there are disadvantages associated with theft as it exposes young people to patterns of criminal activity, arrest, beating, and sometimes to murder. Crucially, despite society's condemnation of theft, it hardly ever questions the systemic injustices that push young people to make such decisions. Recognizing theft as both a criminal offense and a reasonable reaction to poverty and marginalization creates moral ambiguity (Levin, 2020). Participants highlighted that they steal from one another, including toiletries, food, and phones inside the shelter, this shows that crime is not only street-based but also internal to shelter.

P6. Female Payless Shelter shared the following: explain first

> *“Mina, I never thought I’d end up stealing, but I steal because I am tired of them steal from me. Meaning I do not steal I am just returning the favour, and they are plenty of us doing so. Here in the shelter, I have an experience in taking misplaced toiletries, uncooked foods and taking people’s phones when they are not watching and sell them.”*

Male participants narrated how hunger, cold nights, and socialization on the street pushed them into robbery. Robbery is a more aggressive tactic, especially violent theft or street-level mugging. Robbery frequently offers homeless youths rapid financial gains that would not be possible through other methods. However, the use of violence reinforces negative perceptions by further stigmatizing homeless youth as dangerous and criminal. Akem-Vingir (2020) noted that participating in robberies demonstrates how survival tactics escalate in situations of serious hardship, where morality and legality fall victim to desperation. However, it also calls into question how violence feeds exclusion and fear, further separating homeless youth from the rest of society. The researcher has found that these youths do robbery unwilling but it necessary for surviving, it is framed as an exchange of dignity for survival.

P10. Male Albert Park shared the following: explain first

> *"My friends made the streets look exciting, I am talking fast money, freedom, no parents shouting. So, one night, I just left. Never went back. At first it was fun, but the fun ended quick. Hunger came, cold nights came, no one to run to. My friends started showing me the real hustle which was robbery. They proved to me that what I thought was something, it was mothing. They showed me that what I was steal back at home before I was a street kid it was a joke. They gave me a knife, told me,* 'You want to eat? This is how.' *I didn't believe I could do it, but the first time I grabbed a man's phone at the robots, my stomach stopped crying for a day. Now, this is my life. I wake up under a bridge, wondering whose face I'll scare next just to eat, plus we disgust them. Sometimes, I remember my mother begging me to respect the world because out there its dog eats dog type of world. I wish I had listened, but it's too late now. The streets don't give you second chances. Robbery is not what I wanted BUT it's what I became, because survival leaves no room for regret."*

In the narratives of P10. Male Payless Shelter showed being reluctant at first, he describes how he supported himself for a day by snatching a phone at traffic lights. Similarly, P8. Male Payless Park frames his first heist reluctant but necessary as it was his way of survival.

P8. Male Payless Shelter explained:

> *"The first time I did a jack-roll, I didn't want to. But the streets are cold and brutal, mfethu [my friend, buddy, or brother]. I had no blanket, no food, nothing. I pulled a screwdriver that I stole on a guy for his old Samsung by the taxi rank. My hands were shaking coz I know you never survive if you are caught by the taxi driver's committing*

a crime, but I told myself: 'just this one time.' The look in his eyes; fear and shock still burns me. I never wanted to be that guy, but survival doesn't ask what you want. Phones mean quick cash, maybe a meal, feeding my addiction, maybe a safe spot to sleep. People say we're criminals oskhotheni, but we we're just trying not to die. Every robbery feels like I'm trading a piece of my soul for another day on these streets."

The researcher found that informal hustles, such as drug running, often emerge as gendered activities, with women's bodies being used to transport drugs and hide them. Female participants narrated being used as couriers for drugs due to their appearance ("beautiful, well-built, and clean," "no one will suspect you").

P3. Female Albert Park stated:

"As you can see me I am a very beautiful, well-built, and a clean lady, so to the police I am not very suspicious, to them I am just a clean homeless chick. I am a Beyonce here. I used to sustain myself through dealing drugs and I sometimes used to transport them to a designated location. (laughing sarcastically) Please do not snitch me to the cops because……"

Similarly, P1. Female Payless Shelter narrated the following:

"They said I was perfect for it, 'You're a girl, no one will suspect you.' I was thinking otherwise, but the hyping, caring, support, and protection I got from them made me not neglected like my family did. I used to tuck mandrax in my bra, sometimes hide zol in my hair. Each step I took, my heart felt like it would burst. I imagined cops stopping me, searching me. But I kept going. Why? Because the money meant food, pads, and safe bed in a shelter since nothing is free. Every time I counted those notes, I felt both strong and broken. Strong, because I survived. Broken, because I knew I was helping poison my own people. Still, when you're hungry and cold, morality feels like a luxury."

However, not all females engaged in drug running as their survival strategy, some were involved in sex work as means of survival. P3. Female Payless Shelter told her story:

"Selling my body was never my dream, sisi, actually it was the reason I left home. I thought when I left home where I was a victim of sexual abuse, in my life I will never go through that path again, but the streets said never say never. Hunger and cold nights push you into things you swore you'd never do. The first time, I was shaking coz it was my first time doing it for me and to support myself. A man stopped me near the

beachfront, said he'd give me R50. My stomach was empty; I hadn't eaten in days. I told myself, 'Just this once.' But once turned into many. It is not easy. Some men treat you like dirt, like you're not even human. Others get violent, you pray you'll survive the night. Sometimes they refuse to pay, and you can't fight because you're just a girl with nothing and no one to try too. You walk back to your spot with tears burning, but you hide it. People judge us, call us mahosha, but they don't know the pain behind it. They don't know that R50 can mean food, pads, or a safe place to sleep. Hustling through prostitution breaks pieces of me every night. But when the cold wind bites, when my belly cries, I tell myself: better to sell my body than to die starving."

According to P3. Female Payless Shelter, prostitution emerged as a last-resort survival strategy, simultaneously life-saving and deeply damaging, reflecting vulnerability.

Not all homeless youths are perpetrators of crime; they also experience victimization in the street economy. P5. Male Payless Shelter narrated the following

'I know we are often looked as crooks but for me it is different. I was robbed by this lady by the robots here, up the road (pointing the road) when my dad sent me to buy bread (we both stay at the shelter). She called me I came close to her coz I have seen her around a lot. She asked for a R2 I told her I do not have any, she saw the R10 change from the store, I told her that this is my dad's change. She tried to take the money fast out of my hand, but I reacted fast. She did a loud whistle that when I knew it was going to go down. As she was whistling, she took out an Okapi knife fast and pointed it straight to my chest. Out of shock I fell, and I always thank God for making me fall that night. As I fell, I knew from there that I should not stay down I should run for my life. I ran as I was running I saw 2 people approaching me, in my mind it clicked that the whistle was calling them to be a backup. You know what is funny is that when this whole event was happening, I was holding the money and the bread, none fell. I entered the shelter screaming and the guys in here went out to search for her, but they never found her. Even today we've never seen her."

The incident demonstrates that young people experiencing homelessness are also victims of the same street economy in which they sometimes engage.

Furthermore, not every survival tactic qualifies as crime. Informal ways to survive such as begging, selling recyclables, cleaning car windows, or providing services on the street, are

innovative, non-violent ways to make money. However, law enforcement usually criminalizes these acts because they generally occur outside of established markets (Herring, 2019).

P9. Female Albert Park recounted

> *"Me, I do not engage in criminal activities, I rather do recycling then commit a crime"*

P1. Male Albert Park similarly shared

> *"I sometimes beg for money by the robots, sometimes dance in front hotels where most tourists come, do recycling, or wash cars by the road. I rather do this because I know I won't sleep with an empty stomach."*

Crime and other informal ways of surviving among youth experiencing homelessness also has gendered implications. Many young males may associate robbery with attempts at street dominance, belonging to a group, or power assertion. Thievery can be more prevalent among females as a less combative survival tactic. Without considering the structural factors of poverty, unemployment, breakdown of families, and educational exclusion, it is impossible to comprehend how homeless youth participate in criminal activity. Youth frequently have few options except to turn to stealing, robbery, or informal jobs when they are unable to access formal opportunities for earning a living. Systemic neglect, marginalization, and unequal resource distribution are examples of structural violence, which fosters an environment in which crime is accepted as a necessary survival strategy.

According to the strain theory, people commit crimes when they are unable to use legal ways to gain socially acceptable objectives like stability, financial independence, or acceptance. In the setting of homelessness, youth are often shut out of family support systems, labour, and school, making it impossible for them to obtain resources in traditional ways. Robbery, theft, drug peddling, and sex work are examples of adaptations that reflect the frustration and desperation of unfulfilled demands, whether they be for food, housing, or basic hygiene. Merton's (1938) argument that people innovate (via illegal means) when legitimate options are restricted is echoed by participants such as P10. Male Albert Park and P8. Male Albert Park, who explained how hunger and a lack of protection forced them into thievery. Similar to this, the stories of young women involved in drug transportation or sex work (P1. Female Payless Shelter and P3. Female Payless Shelter) are consistent with Agnew's strain theory, which holds that criminal coping mechanisms are more likely to be used when negative emotions like fear, guilt, and despair result from missed chances, neglect, or past abuse.

The findings illustrate how visibility, motivation, and inadequate guardianship shape opportunities for offending, aligning closely with Routine Activities Theory. According to Cohen and Felson (1979), crime is most likely to occur when a suitable target, a motivated offender, and the absence of capable guardians converge. This framework helps explain how the open, highly trafficked environment near traffic lights creates easy access to visible targets, particularly when young people experience hunger-driven motivation—an aspect reinforced in studies showing that survival needs often intensify opportunistic behaviour among homeless youth (Baron, 2011).

Similarly, the findings reveal how the spatial routines of urban life facilitate both vulnerabilities and opportunities. For example, the sex work conducted near beachfront spaces reflects established research showing that public, unregulated urban areas expose street-involved youth to exploitation while simultaneously offering them income-generating possibilities (Richter et al., 2015; Ward & Seager, 2010).

Additionally, the findings highlight that even within shelters, spaces theoretically designed to offer protection the unguarded moments still create openings for petty theft. This aligns with studies demonstrating that institutional environments with inconsistent supervision often fail to provide the "capable guardianship" necessary to prevent victimisation or opportunistic offending (Van der Heijden & Swart, 2020; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). The situational logic described in Routine Activities Theory is therefore evident across multiple contexts: public streets, beachfront areas, and even shelters exhibit structural vulnerabilities that shape everyday survival strategies for homeless and street-involved youth.

5.6 The interconnected drivers of youth criminal involvement

Youth homelessness is more than just the lack of a place to live; it's a complicated situation influenced by a convergence of societal anxiety, personal vulnerabilities, and systemic injustices. For youth experiencing homelessness, surviving on the outside of society frequently entails either direct or indirect involvement with criminal activity, either as victims or offenders. The findings of Gupta (2024) states that personal, social, and structural factors rarely function independently, comprehending their criminal involvement necessitates a thorough investigation of the interrelated forces at work. Rather, they intersect, creating endless criminalization, stigmatization, and isolation.

The structural, societal, and personal factors influencing homeless youth's involvement in crime are deeply interconnected. Structural injustices and social exclusion often intensify personal struggles, including trauma and substance abuse. This interdependence highlights the cyclical nature of marginalization where personal vulnerabilities keep youths involved in high-risk activities, social networks legitimize crime as a means of surviving, and structural failures drive them into homelessness.

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In summary, the criminal involvement of homeless youth is best understood as the outcome of multiple, overlapping personal, societal, and institutional factors, rather than as discrete personal failings or deviance. Factors such as childhood trauma, mental health issues, substance abuse, peer influences, housing instability, poverty, institutional discrimination, and service shortages all contribute to their engagement in criminal behaviour. Empirical research supports these pathways, noting that the high prevalence of adverse health and social problems among people experiencing homelessness may result directly from these factors or indirectly through associated conditions. For example, food insecurity has been found to be several times higher among people experiencing homelessness compared to the general population (Leclair et al., 2019). These findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions that address mental health, stable and accessible housing, social support systems, and institutional improvements

5.6.1 Personal factors driving criminal involvement in homeless youth

At the personal level, individual situations and coping strategies have a big impact on how homeless youth relate to crime. Many young people living on the streets struggle with substance misuse, mental health issues, and trauma brought on by early abuse or neglect. Some people use drugs as a coping mechanism to deal with the harsh reality of street life or to ease psychological suffering. However, some are fighting hunger, places to sleep, and fear of revictimization, this frequently results in drug dealing, small-time thievery, or other illegal acts.

Chowdhury et al. (2021) found that the homeless youth view crime as an instantaneous reaction to material deprivation, a survival reasoning. When basic needs are unmet, behaviours that would ordinarily be unacceptable or criminal can become rational survival strategies. Hunger, in particular, compresses time and moral judgement, as immediate necessity overrides concern for long-term consequences. P1. Female Payless Shelter shared:

> *"Chommie, hunger makes you do things you never thought you would. I remember when the police saw me trading pills, I didn't plan to run, but my body just moved. The police and people chased me, but I made sure that I am never getting caught. They say I'm a criminal and a drug runner, but all I see is a girl who didn't want to starve."*

P1. Female Payless Shelter presents illegal behaviour as an embodied, instinctive reaction to urgent necessity rather than deliberate criminality. The expression "my body just moved" emphasizes how hunger, or physiological urgency, can override rational decision-making. This lends support to the claim that material scarcity is the driving force for some impulsive offenses.

Repeated victimization fosters a street logic in which hatred and aggression are internalized as a preventative mechanism. Violence turns into an instrument to prevent further victims and to establish a reputation that lowers danger right away. P2. Female Albert Park recounted:

> *"Weakness will kill you faster than hunger. On the street, if you look soft, you'll get robbed, stabbed, even raped. I learned that lesson early when a group of 5 people tore my blanket, beating me up, took everything I had, even my drugs, just because I didn't fight back. From then on, I promised myself I'd never be weak again. So, I fought, robbed, and carried knives. I didn't want to be that girl crying on the pavement again. People say I'm a criminal, but really, I'm just afraid of being a victim again."*

P4. Male Payless Shelter:

> *"In here, softness will kill you, take it from me. If you don't fight, you're a target. Mina my sister, I was once a victim of being flushed on the toilet, of being beaten while sleeping and steal my stuff, and they would laugh at me. I cried once and they beat me harder; I played along they fooled me. That's when I learned fists talk louder than words. Now when someone tests me, I hit first. People started respecting me, even fearing me including the security officer that is part of my abusers. Shelter mates that*

get along with me say I'm violent, but it's the only way I survive. These people don't feel your pain, they only feel your fists."

Both participants P2. Female Albert Park and P4. Male Albert Park describes a learnt causal chain: victimization, resolution to never be vulnerable again, and adoption of violence for self-protection. The reasoning is performative (projecting toughness to gain respect/fear) and instrumental (violence lowers the chance of re-victimization). Thus, criminal behaviours such as robbery, carrying a weapon, and assault are reframed as defensive tactics rather than to acts of needless violence.

Power abuse and humiliation by authorities or other influential people can produce anger and a desire for revenge which is expressed through criminal acts. Therefore, offending is partially a reaction to perceived injustice. Police practices are viewed as dehumanising and abusive, provoking trauma and anger. These experiences often lead young people to seek revenge or to reclaim a sense of power. P4. Male Albert Park said the following:

"Cops once caught me sleeping under the bridge. They kicked me awake, slapped me, called me "scum." They laughed when I cried. That night, I swore I'd never let anyone treat me like that again, and I know I am not the only one. From then on, I started robbing, breaking, fighting, whatever it took to feel powerful again. People say I'm angry, but they don't know what it's like to be beaten for just trying to rest. My crime is my revenge on a world that kicked me first."

According to this narrative, experiences with official social control contribute to the adoption of criminal activity as a psychological means of restoring dignity, power, or sense of value. In this context, crime serves as a symbolic reversal of power dynamics.

P3. Female Payless Shelter noted:

"When you've been abused enough, your body doesn't feel like it's yours anymore. I was still young when I sold mine the first time. Just for what? For small packet money. After that, it didn't feel like such a big deal to trade my body. Every time I did it, a piece of me disappeared. I think I can commit any crime now easily because my soul is already broken. Out here, innocence is the first thing the streets steal."

P3. Female Payless Shelter connects a wider breakdown of moral self-control to sexual exploitation. Once basic bodily autonomy has been violated, moral inhibitions against hurting

people or disobeying the law are undermined, as the metaphor "piece of me disappeared" shows. Offending is perceived as expressing a broken subjectivity as well as being utilitarian.

The rapid transition from necessity to pill-trading in P1, the adoption of robbery and firearms by P2 to prevent recurrent attacks, and P4's statement that they were formerly revered for their violent behaviour all demonstrate social learning and that is haw they respond to strain , which is the process by which criminal methods are passed down and accepted. Criminal activity is socially learnt as well as personally motivated; newcomers watch what works and imitate it to stay alive. Externally imposed labels such as "criminal" fail to recognize this socialized reasoning. These narratives support Frederick (2020) findings that young people quickly pick up behaviours that are modelled and rewarded in the street microculture, such as stealing to get things, carrying knives to protect themselves from harm, and trading sex or pills for cash.

Furthermore, the need to survive forces young people to commit crimes motivated by necessity. Transactional sex, squatting, robbery, and theft are not just personal preferences; they are reactions to unfulfilled basic needs. Critics argue that merely labelling these behaviours as criminal ignores the situational pressure that motivates them (Tibbetts & Gibson, 2002). The personal vulnerabilities of homeless youth are linked to criminal involvement, but not because of inherent criminality, but rather because they are adaptive reactions to an unsafe environment. Together, the stories demonstrate that the human variables that push homeless youths into criminal activity are best understood as embodied, adaptive reactions to chronic victimization, hunger, humiliation by authorities, and and catastrophic loss of identity (Pophaim, 2019). Through critical analysis, criminal behaviour is reframed from personal pathology to contextual survival strategies that are a part of a violent social ecology.

Recognizing the structural, emotional, and situational forces influencing homeless youths' decisions is crucial to understanding why they commit crimes rather than focusing only on oversimplified ideas of deviance. The narratives of Durban's homeless youth show that engaging in criminal activity is frequently a result of stress and the survival logics of the streets rather than just a sign of personal weakness. Here, strain theory is helpful since it describes how people are forced to employ alternative, frequently illegal tactics when they are unable to access legal ways to meet their fundamental needs and stay safe. P1. Female Payless Shelter specifically attributes her choice of selling drugs to hunger, for instance, highlighting the way that physiological deprivation causes stress that leads to criminal behaviour. Likewise, P3. Female Payless Shelter's story of recurrent sexual exploitation demonstrates how trauma and

disillusionment shatter traditional moral boundaries, making survival-based crime the only realistic option. In sum, the strain theory illustrates how the pressure to offend is created by unfulfilled needs and blocked opportunities.

This analysis is further enhanced by RAT (Cohen & Felson, 1979), which places these behaviours in the dangerous everyday contexts of shelters and the streets. According to the theory, crime happens when a motivated criminal meets an appropriate. Findings reveal that vulnerability itself can serve as an invitation to victimisation. For example, instances of robbery and physical assault against street-involved youth who appeared “soft” illustrate how exposed individuals are targeted in unprotected settings (Baron, 2011; Van der Heijden & Swart, 2020). Subsequent findings indicate that repeated exposure to predatory environments can prompt youth to adopt survival strategies that reverse roles of victim and perpetrator. Reports of carrying weapons and engaging in robbery reflect a rational response to unsafe surroundings, where self-protection and retaliation become necessary coping mechanisms (Theron & Donald, 2013; Ward & Seager, 2010). Similarly, findings regarding assaults within shelters and experiences of police harassment demonstrate that the absence of protective guardianship creates conditions where aggression and theft are perceived as justified means of self-preservation (Richter & Van Rooyen, 2015). Overall, RAT provides a useful framework for understanding how the rationales and opportunities for criminal behaviour are structured by the daily realities of hazardous environments, highlighting the interplay between environmental exposure and adaptive responses among homeless and street-involved youth (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Baron, 2011).

5.6.2 Social factors encouraging homeless youth criminal activities

Beyond personal hardships, the social environment has a significant impact on how homeless youths become involved in criminal activity. Homeless youths' engagement in criminal activity is intimately related to their social settings and everyday battles for survival. According to their stories, poverty, peer pressure, substance misuse, social rejection, and institutional shortcomings are the main causes of crime rather than purposeful intent. These elements work together to make crime appear normal, necessary, and perhaps the only means of surviving on the streets. Furthermore, street networks serve as an alternative family for many, where belonging and safety are provided by solidarity.

These youths commit crime because of peer influence and fear of belonging. For them crime turns into a requirement for acceptance. For many, the decision is between security through

joint criminal action on the one hand, and loneliness and danger on the other. According to P10. Male Albert Park, street peer networks can be a source of safety as well as a point of entry into criminal behaviour. He embraces the expectations of belonging, which include engaging in hustling or thievery, in order to prevent isolation. P10 Male Albert Park unfolded:

> *"When I came to the streets, I found a group of boys who became my family. We shared everything including food, Bluetooth, cigarettes, pills, even blankets. But there was a rule: if you're with us, you hustle with us. Hustling meant snatching phones and pickpocketing. At first, I just watched because I know that stealing under the influence of friends I what got me to the streets, but being alone on the street is dangerous, so I joined in. I didn't want to be left out or seen as weak. Now I know c rime is wrong, but with my crew, it feels normal. Like it's just the way we survive."*

P9. Female Payless Shelter highlighted that shelters and other support services frequently fail to meet the unique needs of homeless youths. He said:

> *"I tried staying at this shelter not far from here, before I even moved in this shelter. They had too many rules I am talking no being late, no missing chores. One mistake of me forgetting to close the tap when we had no water, and they kicked me out. After that, I had nowhere to go. On the street, I found older girls who looked out for me, but their way of surviving was crime. Sometimes we'd lure men and set them up to be robbed. I hated it, but at least I had a place to belong. Society talks about shelters and help, but when you're out here, the only system that actually takes you in is crime."*

Some participants introduced drug use as a foundation to criminal activity. P8. Male Albert Park stated that:

> *"I was 13 when my friends introduced me to substances. They said it would make me forget about the problems of this world. He was right! For a while, it felt like I was floating. But then I couldn't stop. Every day, I needed more. To pay for it, I started stealing things like phones, and something on the drying line, anything I could sell fast. Later, I started robbing people, my first victim was that guy by the taxi rank. It's not that I wanted to hurt anyone, but the drugs had me hooked. On the streets, once you start using, crime becomes part of the package."*

Drugs are initially offered to escape personal problems, but they soon develop into an addiction that costs money every day. Once addicted, youth often resort to robbery and theft to sustain

the habit. The researcher discovered that substance misuse turns crime from a one-time incident into a regular means of surviving. Addiction embeds the youth in an ongoing pattern of criminal behaviour that makes it unavoidable and regular.

Furthermore, youths' separation from mainstream society is further exacerbated by stigma and discrimination. Society influences homeless youth into criminal activity through society rejection, the struggle of visibility, and labelling. P5. Male Albert Park narrated:

> *"Living on the streets makes you feel invisible, as I was at home. People pass by like you're nothing begging for food, asking for help, they just look away. The police and the community don't see us as human; they call us criminals before we even do anything wrong. At first, I tried to survive without stealing, but hunger and cold don't wait for sympathy. One day, I took some food from a shop. My heart was racing, but I felt alive for the first time in months. Crime gave me something society never did; a way to be noticed, a way to exist. People treat us like we are worthless, like we shouldn't even be here. When I steal or fight back, at least then the world sees me. Out here, being invisible feels worse than being hated, so crime becomes a way to remind the world I'm real."*

This narrative demonstrates how labelling and social rejection drive young people to further engage in criminal conduct. Feelings of invisibility and rage are brought on by being ignored or regarded as less than human all the time. Some people commit crimes in order to gain attention as well as to survive. When disregarded and marginalized, committing crimes turns into a means of making society accept their presence, although in a negative way.

These accounts show that rather than being motivated by personal deliberate intent, homeless youth' engagement in criminal activity is a result of larger societal issues. Addiction, social rejection, peer pressure, and institutional failures all combine to make crime a necessary part of daily life. For these young people, committing crime is not only a means of surviving; it is also a means of coping, belonging, and demanding acceptance in a society that would otherwise ignore them. Importantly, social drivers draw attention to the contradiction of the situation of homeless youth: whereas social connections provide identity and survival, they also put young people at higher risk of victimization and criminal activity. However, these same networks frequently perceive illegal activity as a viable way to survive, including stealing and gang-related acts.

The mix of social factors, daily routines, and structural disadvantages that define homeless youths lived experiences best explains their involvement in criminal activity. Their experiences show that, in an environment of exclusion and limited opportunity, crime is more about surviving, belonging, and coping than it is about wilful deviance.

Applying strain theory and RAT, these narratives demonstrate that Durban youth' criminality is a socially created result of unfulfilled needs, frequent exposure to criminal possibilities, and the lack of protective social institutions rather than being random or solely individualistic.

5.6.3 Structural factors perpetuating criminality among homeless youth

The experiences of Durban's homeless and street-involved youth demonstrate that larger institutional factors significantly influence their involvement in criminal activity rather than being solely a matter of personal preference. The narratives highlights that systemic poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, lack of identifying documents, poor housing policies, and weak rehabilitation programs are some of the factors that combine to produce situations in which crime becomes a survival strategy. These institutional barriers function as "push factors," continually drawing youth into criminal activity. P5. Male Payless Shelter emphasized that schools serve as opportunity gatekeepers, and when they exclude other students, they have limited options. Institutional exclusion pushes young people into environments where crime and survival strategies replace formal education, shaping how they understand and navigate the world. He stated:

> *"When schools shut us out, the streets become the only classroom, gangs become the only teachers, and street life is what we now know."*

This testimony demonstrates how educational systems have failed to provide for the needs of vulnerable youth and fight for them against their bullies. When students are "shut out" of schools, the informal educational structures of the street fill the void, with gangs and criminal peers serving as stand-in teachers. This illustrates how homeless youth are pushed into criminal networks by systemic exclusion from formal schooling, which frames criminality as a socially learned alternative rather than a deviant choice. Institutions of higher learning indirectly foster criminal pathways by neglecting to integrate or assist disadvantaged youths.

Lack of documentation and identity locks youth out of the formal economy and employment, forcing reliance on illicit means. P8. Male Albert Park recounted:

"Without IDs, without addresses, without jobs, every locked door pushes us closer to theft and drugs."

P8. Male Payless Shelter shared: explain

"Unemployment is more than a statistic; it is a slow suffocation. For homeless youths, it means no hope of work, no way to earn a living. Crime becomes the only economy they are allowed to enter, not because they want to, but because society has left them no alternative."

Here on P8. Male Payless Shelter's narrative unemployment is seen as a structural suffocate in this context. Young people are deprived of both financial independence and personal dignity due to a lack of employment options. Instead, of being presented as a desirable alternative, crime is framed as a survival economy that is structurally inevitable. By portraying criminal conduct as a forced adaptation to socioeconomic deprivation, this narrative eliminates the notion that young people choose crime voluntarily.

P10. Female Payless Shelter demonstrated how deep structural poverty normalizes crime. Stealing, drug peddling, and sex work are not seen as moral failings, but rather as logical continuations of survival for many homeless youth. Poverty reduces the moral boundary between crime and survival, demonstrating how structural deprivation reshapes societal standards in ways that normalize criminal behaviour. P10. Female Payless Shelter stated:

"Poverty makes crime and victimization feel natural, not sinful."

These vulnerabilities are further strengthened by institutional failures. For instance, youths are left with few acceptable options due to limited access to social assistance, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation facilities. The acknowledging of homeless youth as vulnerable people in need of protection and support, is not shown in their narratives. Rather, shelter systems demand daily fees from these unemployed and impoverished individuals and the rehabilitation centres fails to address their addictions effectively. P7. Female Albert Park shared this:

"A shelter that requires money per day is similar to asking for a way of guidance to a blind person! Where do they think we will get the money from? They know exactly what we are, what are our daily struggles, we are unemployed, we are swimming in poverty, we barely have money, and we are neglected individuals! That is why we are sex workers, and some are hustles, because we want to pay the day fees of the shelter."

P3. Female Albert Park sincerely said:

> *"Only if the rehabilitation centre had tight security system and did not let me leave before I was fully a non-drug addict. Maybe I am now at home with my adoptive family happy and not a drug dealer."*

This narrative emphasizes how inadequate rehabilitation facilities are in treating addiction. Inadequate rules permit early departures, which encourage relapse and later drug-related criminal activity. In rehabilitation facilities, structural flaws prevent long-term recovery and stability, which indirectly encourages criminal activity. This demonstrates how health and social support systems, which are designed to restore rather than recycle vulnerable adolescents, are systematically neglected.

The concept of strain theory, as proposed by Robert K. Merton, suggests that criminal activity arises when people are not provided with lawful ways to obtain goals that society deems valuable, such as job, education, and stability. For homeless youth, "blocked opportunities" whether through a lack of identifying documents, exclusion from schools, or unemployment create stress that drives them to seek alternate, often illegal, methods of surviving.

5.7 The impact of crime and/or victimization on well-being and daily survival

Crime and victimization have a major impact on young people's life, particularly those who are homeless, street-involved, or otherwise vulnerable. In addition to endangering their immediate safety, exposure to violence, exploitation, and criminal activity also jeopardizes their long-term development and general well-being. Although crime is frequently viewed through its legal and societal aspects, its impacts on young people's lives go far deeper, influencing their everyday survival tactics, social development, and psychological well-being. Being exposed to crime, whether as witnesses, victims, or offenders, triggers insecurities that restrict their capacity to develop, grow, and prosper. Crime and victimization have multiple impacts on the well-being of homeless youth, including psychological and emotional effects, physical and health-related consequences, social impacts, and economic and daily survival challenges.

5.7.1 The psychological and emotional impact of crime and/or victimization on the homeless and street involved youth

Victimization can cause serious mental health damage to youth. Trauma, sadness, and increased anxiety are common among young people who encounter crime, whether as direct victims or as witnesses to violence. The absence of emotional support systems worsens these situations and leads many people into depression. For example, frequent exposure to violence normalizes aggression and creates a persistent sense of uneasiness and anxiety, which makes it harder for homeless youth to trust other people. Additionally, the psychological effects of trauma might show up as unhealthy coping mechanisms like alcohol misuse, social disengagement, or joining a gang for safety. Even though these actions offer temporary respite, they make people more susceptible to being victims again, which feeds perpetuation. As a result, the psychological effects go beyond personal hardship to affect how young people interact with others and manage their surroundings.

P2. Female Albert Park expressed the experience of living with fear because something harmful has happened to her before. She worries that the same thing could happen again, so she feels unsafe and cautious in Whoonga Park. P2. Female Albert Park said:

> *"I'm just afraid of being a victim again."*

Whereas P4. Male Payless Shelter is still haunted by the occurrence of being suffocated and humiliated in a toilet, causing fear in everyday circumstances such as flushing or standing at urinals:

> *"After my victimisation incident where my face was covered with a black plastic and flush my head inside the toilet seat, I started dreaming about it over and over again. Even now, when a person comes behind me in the urinals, I get scared, worse when I flush the toilet."*

P6. Male Albert Park has intrusive memories and aural flashbacks of rape. He recounted:

> *"When I close my eyes, the rape plays very clear in my head. I even hear the voices of people who raped me even when they're not around. It's like they live in my head, reminding me that they can do it anytime if they want to."*

P7. Female Albert Park has narrated restless mind that replays repeated violations. She narrated:

"My mind never rests. I keep replaying everything the raping, the refusal to pay for my service, the insults, the forceful brutal kickouts, the betrayals. I don't know how to switch it off, plus this makes me not want to do sex work again."

These accounts show that trauma is ongoing rather than episodic for youths living on the streets. Bransford and Cole (2019) found that the challenges faced by the homeless population lead them to further harm, trauma, fear and hypervigilance. Several participants expressed how traumatic events continue to haunt them long after the incidents. Participants described continuous fear and re-experiencing of previous traumatic events. Post-traumatic stress symptoms, including hypervigilance, nightmares, intrusive memories, and avoidance behaviours, are common. Everyday stimuli, such as toilets, urinals, and casual exchanges, can reactivate traumatic experiences, making the streets themself a constant source of psychological triggers, with the threat of revictimization ever-present. This heightened awareness erodes homeless youth' sense of security, trapping them in cycles of trauma that hinder healing and increase their vulnerability.

P10. Female Payless Shelter explained emotional suppression as a survival mechanism. She explained:

"I laugh with others during the day even with my bullies and I act as if them making them a bin of leftovers doesn't affect me! But alone at night I cry quietly. The darkness makes me remember everything I try so hard to forget even my past sufferings, why I left home and my current victimization."

Similarly, P1. Male Albert Park admitted:

"I pretend to be strong around others, but when I'm alone, I feel empty. I've lost so many friends to violence, drugs, wrongfully accused, and I don't even allow myself to grieve anymore. If I start crying, I don't think I'll ever stop. So, I bottle it all up and act like I don't care, but inside, I'm dying."

Furthermore, P3. Female Payless Shelter concluded with hopeless resignation:

"I do not care anymore; my soul is already broken"

The responses highlight that many individuals survive the street environment by embracing emotional numbness and denial. Although this promotes short-term resilience, it also prolongs loneliness and hinders emotional healing, which increases long-term psychological distress.

Emotional suppression allows youths to project a sense of power in difficult situations, but it masks significant emotional pain. Their sadness over lost friends, tragedy, and repeated betrayals is channelled inside, resulting in emotional isolation. This perspective is consistent with trauma research, which indicates that unprocessed sorrow can lead to prolonged miserable, numbness, and feelings of emptiness (Osman & Wood, 2018). In this scenario, suppression serves as a short-term survival strategy while reducing long-term well-being.

Victimization not only creates individual trauma but also creates anger, distrust in relationships and institutions, and breakdown in social ties. An institution meant to protect, instead becomes a source of anger and hatred. After being mistreated by police officers, P4. Male Albert Park displays intense rage and a desire for payback against law enforcement, demonstrating how those in positions of authority who ought to provide protection instead turn become targets of hatred. Anger at the police is a sign of how systemic violence contributes to individual suffering, stoking hate and maybe starting violent loops. P4. Male Albert Park described police brutality:

> *"I used to respect the law officials but after they have beaten me for reason they created this anger, this hatred. When I see a policeman, my blood boils. I want to revenge for myself."*

Similarly, P9. Female Albert Park argues that they can only trust South Africans, generalizing mistrust along national lines. P9. Female Albert Park declared:

> *"Will I ever trust any nationality? No! I only trust my South African people."*

Similarly, victimization undermines solidarity in places intended for safety, as evidenced by P7. Female Payless Shelter, who no longer trusts even other women in her shelter. While P7. Female Payless Shelter said:

> *"I do not feel safe anymore, I used to feel secured and free around other females. But now I am afraid I do not even wear my bathing towel to the shower. I have lost trust in other females plus I have fear of revictimization."*

These stories illustrate how social bonds are shattered by trauma. Shelters and public areas are characterized by mistrust and fear rather than togetherness. Social alienation is also reflected in the collapse of trust, which makes rehabilitation and seeking support more challenging

Some participants revealed hopelessness and existential questioning. P5. Male Payless Shelter questioned:

> *"I always ask myself that if I did not fall that day would I be death? Would have that lady really stabbed me only just for R10?"*

P6. Female Payless Shelter admitted:

> *"I am not going to lie; the victimization had all kinds of impact. Because mentally they gave me trauma I ended up attending social workers, physically I was bruised because they had beaten me, I wanted to change shelter because I could not leave with this society."*

These statements reflect despair, helplessness, and questioning of life's meaning. Emotions of hopelessness, despair, and diminished self-esteem are prevalent in this demographic group, resulting in an elevated risk of mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety. Such hopelessness indicates the deep loss of resilience caused by recurrent victimization. When safety, dignity, and trust are taken away, people lose their feeling of purpose and belonging. The repeated questioning of 'why me?' or 'would I still be alive?' underscores the disorientation and loss of meaning common in trauma survivors. The ultimate psychological result is submission to misery and the lack of hope for recovery. This is consistent with views of learned helplessness, which hold that people who have experienced trauma repeatedly come to believe that they cannot recover or flee (Bender et al., 2018)

Based on strain theory, the repeated acts of violence, neglect, and humiliation that these young people have experienced reflect blocked opportunities and systemic marginalization. Many of them left home because of abuse or poverty, only to experience renewed suffering on the streets; for instance, P1. Male Albert Park's admission that he has lost a lot of friends but no longer permits himself to grieve demonstrates how unresolved strain results in emotional numbness, anger, and hopelessness; P10. Female Payless Shelter's attempt to appear strong during the day while tearing down in private reflects how the stress of blocked aspirations and repeated victimization erodes psychological resilience. In this way, the emotional trauma that these young people endure is not just the consequence of isolated incidents, but rather a cumulative effect of ongoing strain that denies them legitimate means of coping or achieving stability.

The analysis of these accounts shows that crime has a significant and complex psychological and emotional impact on homeless and street-involved youths. Fear, intrusive memories, and hypervigilance are some of the symptoms of trauma. Coping mechanisms like suppression increase feelings of loneliness and hopelessness while providing momentary strength. Hopelessness weakens their will to recuperate, while mistrust of people and institutions shatters social ties. When these results are rigorously analysed, it becomes evident that victimization is a continuous phenomenon that affects how young people view the world, other people, and themselves rather than being a singular incident. These stories demonstrate the critical need for safe spaces, trauma-informed interventions, and psychosocial support catered to the vulnerabilities of young people experiencing homelessness. Their daily realities will be dominated by patterns of trauma and estrangement until such steps are taken.

5.7.2 The physical and health-related impact of crime and/or victimization on the homeless

The physical effects of crime and victimization are serious. Youth may be harmed by abuse from offenders, assaults, or accidents while engaging in criminal activity. Young people who are homeless or involved in the streets, in particular, frequently do not have access to adequate medical care, which makes even minor injuries potentially fatal. Additionally, victimization raises vulnerability to health hazards including STIs and HIV/AIDS when exploitation or survival sex is involved and the absence of consistent healthcare worsens these conditions (Bransford & Cole, 2019). Among the most severe consequences of such exposure are the physical and health-related impacts, which manifest in lasting injuries, untreated illnesses, sexual health complications, substance dependency, and chronic pain. Unlike individuals who can access timely medical assistance, homeless youth lack stable shelter, adequate nutrition, and financial resources, which exacerbates the severity of even minor injuries.

Victimization produces visible and invisible injuries, bodily injuries and lasting scars. The normalization of violence against homeless adolescents in their daily routines creates a vicious pattern in which physical harm is accepted, tolerated, and infrequently treated. These young people's vulnerability is increased by the absence of health services, which turns treatable injuries into chronic illnesses. P10. Male Albert Park stated:

> *"The scars on my body tell my story better than my words. I have been stabbed, punched, and kicked, maybe burned also. Each injury healed without proper treatment,*

leaving me marked for life. Sometimes the wounds get infected, and I just pray it does not kill me because I cannot afford a doctor."

P2. Female Albert Park shared:

"After being beaten by that group 4 or 5, I could not move properly for days. My body felt broken, but I had no one to take care of me."

P6. Female Payless Shelter:

"I won't lie; the victimization affected me in many ways. Mentally, it left me traumatized to the point where I had to see social workers. Physically, I carried bruises from the beatings. It got so bad that I wanted to leave the shelter because I could no longer cope with that environment."

P1. Male Albert Park unfolded:

"You see my knee is swollen, it was not an accident, but I was hit by this man who mistaken me with some other phara. I tried to explain he said Zifa ngamvunye."

Such accounts show that physical harm caused by direct violence, whether from law police, intimate partners, other homeless people, or strangers is frequently ignored. Unlike those who have permanent housing and access to healthcare, homeless youth do not have the opportunity to recover in safe environments. This fact supports the main idea of the strain theory, which holds that people frequently turn to survival tactics that could put their health at e greater risk when they are denied access to appropriate coping mechanisms, such protection, medical care, or social support. In this circumstance, untreated wounds get infected, respiratory diseases worsen without medical attention, and substance abuse becomes a short relief from hunger, pain, or cold, despite its harmful long-term consequences.

P9. Female Albert Park reported experiencing painful, swollen genitalia, STDs, and injuries that hindered their capacity to engage in sex labour, a survival sex practice that was required due to their economic disadvantage. P9. Female Albert Park shared the following:

"My private part was hurting, itchy and swollen, for sure I have the diseases that you get after sexual activities. Being gang raped is not for the weak."

Similarly, P3. Female Albert Park describes the physical harm resulting from violence, showing how forceful assaults cause bruises, swelling, and injuries that directly affect her ability to work and function. P3. Female Albert Park said:

"I have minor bruises almost all over my body these bruises are from forceful kickouts and some from when they use force while trying to force themselves inside me. Sometimes I just fail to work properly as a sex worker because my private part I swollen or wounded. And that is a loss for me."

P6. Male Albert Park brought attention to the hidden reality of male rape, a topic that is frequently ignored in public conversations. P6. Male Albert Park spoke:

"I could not sit down for days, being raped as a man has a lot of impact, I do not want to talk about doing number 2 in the toilet. Iyooh, IT HURTS!"

The physical effects of sexual victimization reflect the interplay between economic vulnerability, gender inequity, and violence. Furthermore, it highlights the link between trauma and physical health deterioration, as repeated violence leads to pain, injury, and loss of livelihood. These incidents demonstrate that sexual victimization is a profoundly embodied trauma with long-lasting physical effects, in addition to being an emotional or psychological violation. Crucially, the RAT helps explain why these young people are selectively targeted: they are particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation and assault due to their frequent exposure to dangerous public areas, lack of protective guardianship, and reliance on risky behaviours like transactional sex.

Their physical resilience is further weakened by substance abuse and malnutrition. These health issues restrict their ability to seek chances for stability and growth in addition to endangering their immediate lives. Harsh living conditions make them easy targets for exploitation and violence directly translate into respiratory illnesses and weakened immune systems (Olufemi & Reeves, 2004). P3. Female Payless Shelter explained:

"I got sick after sleeping on the floor for days outside the police station after reporting my sexualization case. My chest used to hurt when I breathe or cough, sometime my mucus would have a slight blood. I knew I should go to a clinic, but I was scared on how they going to treat me. So, I just continued, hoping my body will heal itself somehow."

P1. Female Payless Shelter:

"To get through the cold nights, I usually take few pills. Even though it affects me as I used to be a transporter. At first, it numbed the hunger and the pain. But now my body

feels weaker, my head always hurts, and sometimes I cannot even remember what I did the day before. I know it is killing me, but it is the only thing that helps me survive."

Narratives about illness such as respiratory infections, chest pain, and pill self-medication, demonstrate how structural negligence in healthcare contributes to victimization. From the study of Paudyal et al., (2020), which claimed that the structural neglect of healthcare access forces homeless youth to rely on harmful coping strategies that aggravate their conditions. The lack of easily accessible healthcare and protective services reflects systemic shortcomings that put young people in risky situations and prolong harmful patterns. Youth experiencing homelessness often fear maltreatment or discrimination in clinics, which leads them to become self-reliant and adopt unhealthy coping strategies. This concern reflects larger systemic exclusion, in which institutions of government that are supposed to provide care instead perpetuate alienation and stigma. The normalization of untreated sickness among street youth over time is a sign of how health disparities solidify and how survival depends more on fortitude than on structural change.

P4. Male Albert Park's narrative highlights how encounters with law enforcement can cause not just immediate physical harm, but also long-term damage to the body. Even when the intent is not to kill, the inflicted trauma can leave lasting effects on physical health, showing the deep connection between social experiences of violence and bodily well-being. He narrated:

"If you have never been beaten up by the law official then you know nothing. Iyooh my sister, does people they hit you with a concept that makes you think they are killing but for them their intention it is not to kill but to leave your body parts dead."

The P4. Male Albert Park accounts of police brutality emphasize the contradiction of institutionalized violence. The participant highlighted that instead of being protected, state authorities injure young people by physically assaulting them, causing long-lasting trauma to their bodies. This institutional betrayal reinforces vulnerability and alienation by increasing mistrust of formal systems. Crucially, this implies that victimization and criminality among homeless youths are not simply interpersonal but also structurally rooted, with harm being perpetuated by the very organizations entrusted with providing protection.

These findings cast challenge the notion that victimization and crime happen at random. These are structured realities for homeless youth, entwined with societal stigma, systemic neglect, homelessness, and poverty. Their bodies are scarred by crime, their wounds go untreated in

institutions, and their survival tactics make their health worse. Therefore, it is necessary to view the physical and health effects of crime and victimization as the tangible result of systemic injustice, state failure, and societal desertion rather than just as personal tragedies.

5.7.3 The social impact

Youth homelessness is a profoundly social issue in addition to a personal, financial, and/or a structural one. The real-life experiences of homeless and street-involved youth demonstrate that social marginalization, exclusion, and stigmatization are interwoven with criminality and victimization, rather than occurring independently. Homeless youth are often excluded from society at large and rejected by their families, neighbourhoods, schools, and even the organizations that are supposed to protect or rehabilitate them. In response, this alienation frequently drives them toward criminal activity or alternative networks, such as gangs, as a means of survival, identity formation, or resistance. P10. Male Albert Park reflected:

> *"Gangs became my family because the real world pushed me out. On the streets, they offered protection and respect, because being alone on the street is dangerous. Yes, it came with crime, but at least with them, I wasn't invisible, and we are always together. I was somebody, even if that somebody was feared instead of loved."*

This story demonstrates how gangs and criminal networks provide protection, recognition, and company when there are no supportive family or community structures. Similarly, P1. Female, Payless Shelter explained that crime is a means of attracting attention:

> *"Crime gave me something society never did: a way to be seen, a way to exist. People treat us like we're worthless, like we shouldn't even be here. But when I steal or fight back, at least then the world notices me. Out here, being invisible feels worse than being hated, so sometimes crime is the only way to remind the world that I'm real."*

According to such data, committing crimes is frequently driven by social pressures and serves as a coping strategy to get recognition, visibility, and a feeling of belonging in a society that marginalizes them.

P9. Female Albert Park recounted the humiliation of being treated as inherently guilty:

> *"People look at me like I'm dirt. When I walk past, they hold their bags tighter or cross the street. It doesn't matter if I'm just minding my own business, to them, I'm already*

guilty of something. The shame of being judged before I even speak makes me feel less than human."

Similarly, P5. Male Albert Park described exclusion from public spaces by both community members and law enforcement:

"The community and the police don't want us around. They chase us away from shops, parks, and bus stops. They call us names or beat us and say we are dangerous. Their hatred makes survival even harder. But sometimes their perceptions helps because whatever crime we think of doing we are testifying up on their words."

Based to these testimonies of P9. Female Albert Park and P5. Male, Albert Park, homeless youth encounter societal alienation and rejection from both their peers and the larger community. Beyond interpersonal relationships, stigmatization affects young people's self-perception and restricts their social engagement chances, which furthers their feeling of excluded.

Homeless youth face institutional neglect and lack of support, and that further increases their social vulnerability. P7. Female Albert Park described being turned away from shelters and support services:

"When I tried to get help at a shelter, they told me it was full. Another time they would make another excuse. It felt like even the places meant to save us were closing their doors. They rather let me go back to the streets be exposed to multiple forms of victimization. I realized then that out here, you have to depend on yourself, or other people like you, because no one else cares."

Likewise, P5. Male Payless Shelter spoke about exclusion from education:

"School was supposed to be our escape, but we dropped out. The other kids bullied us for being homeless, and some teachers treated me like we did not belong. Without school, I felt cut off from any chance at a future. The streets filled that empty space, giving me something to hold onto."

These narratives suggest that formal institutions, schools, shelters, and other social services often fail to provide accessible support, leaving homeless youth to rely on street-based networks or criminal involvement for social connection and survival.

The youths shared their intense experiences of trauma, loss, and mistrust brought on by social rejection and victimization. P4. Male, Albert Park talked on the long-term psychological effects of police physical violence. He narrated:

> *"I've been beaten by police for no reason. They accused me of stealing just because I was standing near a shop. The bruises heal, but the way they looked at me, like I wasn't even human, that's what really stays with me. It's hard to trust anyone after that."*

P1. Albert Park, a man, considered losing friends to crime and indifference in society:

> *"I've lost friends to crime. Some were stabbed, some disappeared, some overdosed. Society never asks why we end up like this; they just blame us. Sometimes I feel like people would rather see us dead than alive, and that thought eats at me every day*

These testimonies demonstrate how trauma erodes social and emotional trust in addition to physical protection. Social marginalization is sustained, interpersonal trust is damaged, and isolation is brought on by experiences of betrayal, loss, and recurrent rejection. The stories also imply that homeless youth adjust socially to the difficulties of being victimized. P10. Male Albert Park, P1. Female Payless Shelter, and P5. Male Albert Park emphasizes that establishing relationships with peers, acting in protective or opportunistic ways, and avoiding social situations that exclude others are all essential survival tactics. As a social adaptation, the participants' involvement in crime, peer networks, and street groups helps them deal with marginalization and rejection.

In summary, these narratives highlight several significant societal effects of crime and victimization on young people experiencing homelessness. First, in a society that continuously rejects them, many turn to gangs or street networks as surrogate families in search of safety, acceptance, and recognition. Second, their dignity is undermined, and feelings of invisibility and inferiority are reinforced by widespread stigmatization and social exclusion from peers, the police, and even the public. Third, they become vulnerable and must rely on one another or criminal networks to survive because of institutional neglect, such as being denied shelters or subjected to discrimination in schools. Finally, youth who are frequently exposed to violence, loss, and betrayal by authority adults develop mistrust, trauma, and loneliness, which makes them feel alone and unsupported. Collectively, these findings demonstrate how crime and victimization profoundly influence identity, social relationships, and the day-to-day lives of homeless youths, perpetuating to exclusion and discrimination.

5.7.4 The economic and daily survival impact

The economic and everyday survival realities of Durban's homeless and street-involved youth are strongly influenced by both the persistent danger of victimization and the structural lack of resources. In this setting, crime arises as an adaptive reaction to severe deprivation rather than just as a social offence. Young people experiencing homelessness live a hazardous life in which obtaining food, housing, and personal safety frequently requires them to partake in behaviours they would otherwise avoid. This is consistent with the survival principle, which holds that people put their basic physiological demands ahead of moral or legal requirements when faced with severe adversity (Thomas, 2017). Economic marginalization, exposure to criminality, and everyday survival techniques are all intertwined. Underpinned by the ongoing fear of violence, police harassment, and societal stigma, Chowdhury et al. (2021), exposed a range of survival tactics, from recycling and informal labour to engaging in illegal activities. Their economic actions are further impacted by victimization, which increases their susceptibility and sets off an endless loop in which their survival tactics put them at greater risk.

One key finding is that crime frequently arises as a necessary survival mechanism rather than a free or preferred choice. Participants repeatedly underlined that economic necessity was the main driving force for participation in criminal activities such drug sales, theft, and transactional sex. P1. Female Payless Shelter explained:

> *"I never thought I would sell drugs, but desperate times changes you. I hated it, but I needed money for food, to pay for the shelter, and to sustain myself. Each sale put me in danger with the police and rival gangs, but at least it meant I would not go to bed starving."*

In a similar vein, P6. Female Payless Shelter admitted to lying and stealing, and she even thought about selling herself if forced to do so. She said:

> *"Survival means doing things you swore you'd never do. I've stolen, lied, and if a situation pushes me, I would have even sold myself."*

These stories show that survival needs take dominance over ethical or legal issues. Extreme poverty and social exclusion cause people to turn to crime as a coping strategy. This is consistent with the "strain theory" in criminology, which holds that people may resort to crime as a substitute for lawful resources when they are experiencing structural stress. In this situation, systemic deprivation, not personal deviance, is the cause of criminality.

The narratives also highlight that street youth always experience economic precarity and that informal labour is fragile. Participants talked of taking part in a variety of low-income activities, such as car washing, recycling, begging, and entertaining visitors. P1. Male Albert Park described inconsistent earnings and social harassment:

> *"I try to wash cars by the road, sometimes beg for money at the robots, recycle, or dance in front of the most visited hotels. Some days I make a few coins, but other days people shout at me, police and security officers chase me away, and some people would accuse me of stealing when they see me around the neighbourhood carrying recyclable good. At the end of the day, I count the coins, and sometimes they are not even enough for my immediate need. Still, it's better than going back to street empty-handed."*

P10. Male Albert Park similarly highlighted the daily pressure to hustle or starve, emphasizing the relentless nature of survival:

> *"I know that every day I don't hustle, I don't eat. Simple as that. There's no safety net, no one to catch me if I fall. The pressure of survival pushes me into risks of fights, theft, dangerous jobs. It's a constant gamble with my life"*

Street labour is unpredictable and unstable, frequently providing little enough money to cover necessities. Because of this economic uncertainty, young people are constantly improvising and taking risks, which may involve engaging in illegal activity. The outcomes reveal that poverty is a systemic situation that influences homeless youth's everyday decision-making in all spheres and is not only a lack of money.

The ability of street youth to make a living and survive is greatly impacted by victimization. P3. Female Albert Park reported experiencing physical abuse that interfered with her ability to work:

> *"The minor bruises all over my body and the painful wounded and swollen private part costs me too much. Like this, I cannot work. Which is a loss for me."*

In addition to physical harm, experiences of humiliation and exploitation; especially when begging or confrontations with employers were indicative of social victimization. P9 emphasized the negative psychological effects of social stigma:

> *"People think begging is easy, but it's the hardest thing I've ever done. Sitting on the pavement while people spit insults, throw coins like you're an animal, or ignore you*

completely, it destroys your dignity. Sometimes I'd rather ask for an inside the house job and steal than beg, because at least stealing doesn't make me feel so useless. But the issue with domestic worker we are vulnerable to exploitation."

Economic engagement is hindered by victimisation on both a physical and psychological level. Physical injuries limit mobility and productive capacity, while social stigma undermines self-esteem and restricts access to legitimate income opportunities. These patterns reflect broader findings that street-involved youth in South Africa experience high levels of violence, harassment and theft, all of which impede their ability to participate in economic activities (Hills 2016; Sadiki 2016). Research also shows that stigma and exclusion further reduce confidence and willingness to seek formal employment or services (Maepa 2021). Together, these results highlight a cyclical vulnerability: being a victim limits one's economic possibilities, which raises exposure to further harm and reinforces marginalisation (Sadiki 2021).

Additionally, the survival tactics used by Durban's homeless youth have important gendered, psychological and moral implications. Studies of street livelihoods emphasise that criminal activity, degrading labour and transactional survival strategies are often used out of necessity, but typically result in emotional distress, shame, and feelings of worthlessness (Ticknor 2009; Hills 2016). Gender differences identified in prior research mirror the present findings: males more commonly encounter physical altercations, public harassment and policing, whereas females are at higher risk of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence (O'Grady & Gaetz 2009; Osthus 2014). Notwithstanding these challenges, street-involved youths demonstrate considerable resilience, creatively adapting to socio-economic pressures through a range of coping mechanisms, even though such resilience remains constrained by the structural conditions in which they live (Kerman 2023; Maepa 2021). These findings reinforce that survival on the streets is not merely a material struggle but one embedded in moral, psychological, social and structural realities.

In conclusion, the findings show that structural deprivation and exposure to crime and victimisation profoundly shape the everyday and economic survival of homeless youth in Durban. Victimisation limits earning potential and self-esteem, informal labour remains unstable, and crime frequently operates as a survival strategy — all of which have been widely documented in prior studies of street-involved youth in Durban and internationally (Hills 2016; Ticknor 2009). Moral and psychological challenges are persistent, while gendered

vulnerabilities further influence lived experiences (Osthus 2014). Although resilience is a crucial coping mechanism, it cannot compensate for systemic failures. Taken together, these narratives confirm that homelessness and street living involve interconnected moral, psychological, social and structural dimensions rather than simply material or economic circumstances (Kerman 2023).

5.8 The perceptions of support services and interventions

Support services and interventions are often positioned as critical lifelines for vulnerable populations, particularly homeless and street-involved youth. These services include shelters, rehabilitation programs, social work interventions, food distribution initiatives, and psychosocial support mechanisms. However, the perceptions of these services are far from uniform. While some youth report positive and transformative encounters, others highlight deep-seated distrust, feelings of neglect, or experiences of inadequate assistance.

5.8.1 Experiences of inadequate or distrustful support

Street-involved and homeless youths frequently experience alienation from the very structures that are meant to protect and support them, in addition to from their families and communities. Many young people in Durban come across state and non-state assistance systems that reinforce mistrust and marginalization rather than meeting their immediate needs. This theme draws attention to exclusionary behaviors, discrimination, administrative rigidity, and systemic neglect that exacerbate vulnerability. According to research, rigid regulations, a dearth of trauma-informed practices, and ingrained stigma frequently make it difficult for homeless populations to obtain services (Fadipe, 2022; Parsell & Clarke, 2020). The testimonies of the participants show how government shelters, non-governmental organizations, law enforcement, and medical facilities usually fail to fulfil their responsibilities, hence sustaining rather than ending patterns of disempowerment.

Participants described exclusion from shelters and from government help due to lack of space or failure to produce identity documents. P3. Female Albert Park shared:

> *"Every time I go to the government shelters, they tell me it's full. I feel like they don't even try to help us anymore. They don't even initiate giving a sponge to sleep on the floor. They rather let me go back to the street in the cold and exposure to the outside world dangers."*

P8. Male Albert Park recounted:

> *"Government services always say we need documents, but how can I get documents when I live on the streets?"*

Such structural constraints demonstrate a disconnect between administrative procedures and the actual realities of homeless youths. International research demonstrates that identification requirements and long waiting lists generate barriers that systematically penalize homeless people (Edidin et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2017). Rather than offering immediate assistance, these strict procedures perpetuate exclusion.

There is a widespread belief that health care services represent more hazards than they provide benefits. P5. Male Payless Shelter explains why he and his family refuse to take his sick mother to the hospital. His reasoning reflects a combination of fear, lived experience, mistrust in healthcare systems, and personal circumstances. He shared:

> *"Sisi, my mother is sick we rather nurse her here at the shelter. As family we agreed that she will not go to this hospital because we have noticed at every time a person who is from a shelter, especially my mom's peers, they go to the hospital and come back with a coffin. So, we do not want that for my mom. Either way I left school due to the school failed me and I was bullied. So, why not don't I look after my mom because I am around and yeah! But my mom will not go to the hospital we do not want her dead."*

P5. Male Payless Shelter refused to take his mother to the hospital since it is commonly believed that people who are transported from shelters to hospitals frequently do not come back alive. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2019) found that medical negligence, long wait times, and broken promises limit homeless people's willingness to seek professional treatment. This leads to a vicious circle of mistrust, with services regarded as performative rather than really supportive (Parsell & Clarke, 2020). In a similar vein, P8. Male Payless Shelter voiced dissatisfaction with social workers who promise things but never deliver, implying a shallow and fake dedication to helping. Health and social care services were portrayed as causes of fear, not protection. P8. Male Payless Shelter unfolded:

> *"The social workers make promises, but after that, they disappear. It's like they only care when people are watching. Plus, their procedures are very long, and they are a very process for us youths worse if you are homeless. Same police they are very ignorant."*

Law enforcement emerges as both neglectful and abusive, compounding the vulnerability of victims rather than providing redress. P4. Male Albert Park shared:

> *"The police are also supposed to protect us, but instead they chase us away and beat us. How can I trust any support system? I am not going to the police system has failed to protect us homeless individuals."*

The P3. Female Payless Shelter describes how, after fleeing her family due to sexual abuse and online sexual exploitation, she went to the police for help. Instead of protecting her or arranging safe shelter, the police made her wait outside for days, was given minimal support, and only after about a week did they began to believe her story. Her experience shows how the system failed to respond urgently or appropriately to a vulnerable victim seeking safety. P3. Female Payless Shelter explained:

> *"When I decided to finally leave my family because I was tired of being a victim of sexual abuse. I went to the police station to close to the Durban Workshop, when I got there, I told them what made me leave home they made write an affidavit and a statement. Instead of making a law enforcement move they told me to wait outside. Hours passed I went back inside, I told them that it is getting dark, instead of going to my exploiters they rather provide me with a place to sleep. I was told that the police station does not provide that kind of help. I knew they were lying but I went back outside to the cold. This one male officer gave a blanket for me to keep warm; I slept outside the police station that day. In the morning, I went inside again, I told them the same thing, that it is fine I do not want to arrest my exploiter but rather provide me a place to sleep maybe a shelter. They said they will talk to the state's social workers and other departments because my case is different since I am a victim of sexual abuse, sexual online live streaming and of online naked pictures sale. They said my case is different plus I am woman. To tell you something, I slept there, outside the police station for a week if not 10 days, sometimes they would give me something eat. After 10 days of sleeping in outside cold of the police station, people verbally criticizing me, they told me inside and they told me that no one reported me as a missing person maybe I am telling the truth. Maybe I am a victim of sexual exploitation."*

Police are represented as perpetrators of violence and neglect, despite their traditional role as guardians. P4. Male Albert Park reported police following and beating homeless people, while P3. Female Payless Shelter shared a heartbreaking experience about being denied protection

and support after fleeing sexual abuse. Despite filing formal complaints, she was forced to sleep outside a police station for many days, her exploitation maximized, her trustworthiness questioned, and her basic need for protection ignored. This is consistent with research demonstrating that homeless people worldwide frequently face police harassment and criminalization rather than protection (Belcher & DeForge, 2012; Cooper, 2016). Secondary victimization by law enforcement exacerbates trauma and hinders future reporting among abuse survivors (Richards et al., 2020).

Participants reported that shelters and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) reinforced perceptions of deviance and criminality. P9. Female Payless Shelter claimed to have been expelled rather than assisted, whereas P1. Male Albert Park: was considered as a potential criminal when he wanted work rather than food. Stigma and moral judgement are persistent hurdles to service delivery, with staff frequently viewing homeless kids as "undeserving" or intrinsically untrustworthy (Fadipe, 2022; Toro et al., 2011). This perpetuates social exclusion rather than promoting empowerment.

P9. Female Payless Shelter:

> *"Sometimes I feel judged by the people who are supposed to help us. Kicked out by people who should protect us. Instead of correcting me or giving a warning, they kicked me out to the street. I will forever remember the badness of that shelter."*

P1. Male Albert Park:

> *"I once asked for a piece job at an NGO, but they looked at me like I was a criminal. Instead, they gave food, I told them that I can get food anywhere, but employments only the few that can give me that, only does who knows our background stories. They chased me out like a dog and said maybe I want to rob them. I never went back there again."*

Even within shelters, participants observed a lack of safety, with P6. Female Payless Shelter explaining that inhabitants are not immune to internal attacks. P6. Female Payless Shelter stated:

> *"If you are thinking that we are safe because we live in the shelter, think again. Yes, we are safe from the outside world, but we are not safe from the people we reside within here."*

This is consistent with broader findings that overcrowded, or poorly managed shelters frequently expose inhabitants to interpersonal violence, substance misuse, and exploitation (Edidin et al. 2012). Thus, while shelters provide physical protection from outer hazards, they typically fail to ensure overall safety. The experiences of inadequate or distrustful support demonstrate how structural exclusion, stigma, and institutional neglect exacerbate the vulnerabilities of street-involved youth. Administrative constraints hinder access to fundamental needs such as housing and safety (Watson et al., 2017), and suspicion of health and social services highlights the erosion of trust in protective institutions (Parsell & Clarke, 2020). Taken together, these stories demonstrate that inadequate or distrustful assistance is caused not only by a lack of resources, but also by exclusionary behaviours, systematic neglect, and structural violence. The participants' daily situations reflect a range of institutional failures that erode trust, dignity, and the prospect of meaningful reintegration into society.

5.8.2 Recognition of helpful and positive interventions

Homeless and street-involved youths frequently experience circumstances characterized by isolation, maltreatment, and systemic impediments. Despite these challenges, positive support and acknowledgment play a critical role in their perseverance, dignity, and reintegration attempts. The theme of helpful and positive interventions gathers participants' stories about how churches, shelters, police, hospitals, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided hope, care, and transformation. These treatments not only meet basic survival requirements like food, shelter, and safety, but they also promote psychosocial healing, skill development, and empowerment. By highlighting these positive experiences, the data shows how compassion-based and inclusive interventions balance out experiences of violence, exclusion, and stigma, impacting both long-term life trajectories and individual well-being (Cloke, May & Johnsen, 2010; Fitzpatrick et al., 2019).

Individuals underlined the importance of food, shelter, blankets, and healthcare. P1. Male Albert Park narrated that some interventions recognize the homeless as equals, rather than as societal burdens, which reinforce self-worth:

> *"There are people who see us as human beings, not just street people. Thanks to the Durban Central Adventist Community Services (Soup kitchen). Every Sunday they always make sure that they bring us fresh home cooked meal. They always remind me that there is still kindness out there, and to other people we are same regardless of our circumstances."*

P7. Female Albert Park said: explain the quotes

> *"There is this church called Durban Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. They only come here on Sundays giving us nutritious food with joy in their faces, and us as receivers we really enjoy the food. So, this one day I asked from one of the ladies to please give us sanitary pads. We requested and they delivered! Once a month they now come with sanitary pads. I will forever praise this church even though they come once a month, but they give this big impact on our lives"*

P9. Female Albert Park stated:

> *"There was one shelter that gave me a blanket and food when I was cold, bear in mind that in this shelter you pay R30 a day. That night, I slept in peace for the first time in weeks. I so wish they teach other institutions or organization."*

P4. Male Albert Park unfolded:

> *"After being brutally beaten by the police. My body all bruised, my bones joint some broke, and myself all dirty. Councillor Mngonyama sent me to the hospital; they treated me without asking questions. I was so grateful because they treated me with dignity and value. I felt belonging in world of human beings"*

P1. Male Albert Park and P7. Female Albert Park highlights the Durban Central Seventh-day Adventist Church's constant food and sanitary pad deliveries, whilst P9. Female Albert Park describes finding calm at a shelter that gave warmth and food, although briefly. Similarly, P4. Male Albert Park remembers receiving respectful hospital care following police abuse, which restored his sense of humanity. These interventions show that tiny, regular acts of care have a significant influence on restoring dignity. Previous research by Parsell, Clarke and Kuskoff (2020), has shown that access to food, clothing, and healthcare is critical in changing how homeless people feel their worth and place in society.

The responses of the participants highlight the positive intervention of psychosocial healing and safety, that go beyond basic relief to provide emotional healing, safety from violence, and structured support. P3. Female Payless Shelter explained:

> *"Not to lie I was mad at the police officials but at the same time they helped me! After 10 days of sleeping outside the police station. Some people came for me to help me. they are from the Safe Place. A Safe Place is a place where abused women like me go*

too, to get psychological and physical healing for 3 months. There are plenty of these places in KZN, but we are not supposed to say the exact location of the Safe Place. After that place you will the difference in your life plus you also as an individual you feel the change personally. From the Safe Place, I came to this shelter. And Ahmed has helped me a lot, I am now doing my training at this chicken factory near the harbour. A week after I will be a permanent employee of the factory. I so happy and I glad that I stayed at the police station, received help from the Safe Place and chose this shelter because now I see a bright future towards me."

Interventions permitted not only survival but also growth and opportunity. P8. Male Payless Shelter narrative of getting a job with Ahmed's guidance demonstrates how practical assistance promotes reintegration into the formal economy. P8. Male Payless Shelter shared:

"Remember this place is a place of safety, we are safe from the outside world when we are here, but at the same time Mr Ahmed and Mr Martin, they do not want us to forever be in here they want progress in our lives. Ahmed has helped a lot and now I have gotten a job in Morningside as a security officer. I have never thought that this day will ever come but I always pray about it. I am forever grateful for the opportunity handed to me."

Safety came out as an important subject, especially among female participants. P3 explains her experience from police involvement to placement in the Safe Place, where she received both psychological and physical healing. This intervention enabled her to transition into training and employment, demonstrating how safety is linked to empowerment. Similarly, P8. Male, Payless Shelter describes his shelter as a secure sanctuary safe from the outside world, encouraging personal achievement rather than dependency. Scholars say that supportive and safe surroundings are critical for homeless people, particularly women, because they protect them from gender-based violence and facilitate psychosocial recovery (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Watson, 2016).

Similarly, P1. Female Payless Shelter plans to teach a baking class through sponsorship links, she shared:

"The Haven of Hope was the first shelter that gave me a roof over my head when I was kicked out of family house. However, I moved to Payless. This shelter forever highlights that even though we have scratches on our lives, but we will heal. They are forever

impowering us. Me I will soon be teaching a baking class the equipment and ingredients I will be using in class will be provided by a sponsor that I got through them."

P5. Male Payless Shelter mentions the shelter's informal education, which allowed even a previously illiterate 13-year-old to read. P5 Male Payless Shelter Noted.

"Here in the shelter, we have our very own teacher, Mr Martin. He teaches mostly the children maybe from 3 and up above. My sisters learn there too since we quitted school. But there is this one girl who is 13 years old, who has never attended any school but managed to read a whole book through this school. Mind you she only has attended his classes maybe for 6 months, but I am not sure."

These narratives demonstrate the transforming power of programs that provide skills, mentorship, and empowerment. This is supported by Shier, Jones and Graham (2011) who found that empowerment-oriented treatments, notably education and occupational training, are associated with long-term resilience and effective homelessness exits.

P10. Female Payless Shelter narrated the following:

"I remember when I first came here in this shelter, I had nothing and no one. I left home because we were suffering, poor, we are all unemployed, my siblings just bring babies in our small home, and we would go to bed hungry. I offered a trade that they let me stay here and receive their services; in return I will do every chore that needs to be done including managing the place. They agreed! And now I am living not my best life though, but at least I eat twice a day, I have a safe place to sleep, I do not eat my neighbours' leftovers, yes it a lot.

P10's narrative illustrates the importance of shelters as transitional spaces where immediate survival is met with dignity, while also enabling personal agency. Her ability to negotiate chores in exchange for services reflects the agency of vulnerability paradox often observed in homeless populations: although constrained by poverty, individuals adopt creative strategies to secure safety and resources (Parsell & Clarke, 2020).

P8. Male Albert Park stated the following:

"We know that people who provide us with our necessity are the Non-Governmental Organization. We are forever grateful for their beautiful hearts. We know sometimes they use their own money and sometimes from the donation. The government does not

care about us the homeless even on near government soup kitchens when we get there, they would tell us that they ran out of food!"

P8. Male, Albert Park highlights the importance of community and faith-based organizations in promoting a sense of belonging by contrasting government indifference with NGO contributions. Through expressing their humanity and societal worth, these actions combat estrangement. Rebuilding identity and combating social stigma among the homeless requires acknowledgment and community acceptance, as stated in the literature (Johnsen, Cloke, & May, 2005; Parsell & Clarke, 2020).

The narratives collectively show that recognition of helpful and positive interventions has a profound impact on the lives of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. Support from shelters, churches, NGOs, and medical professionals offers more than simply financial assistance; it also restores dignity, establishes safety, and cultivates hope. In addition to providing for immediate necessities, participants explain how having access to food, shelter, blankets, healthcare, and education strengthened their feeling of their worth as people.

Interventions that supported skill development, job prospects, and psychosocial healing provided more than just short-term respite; they also provided avenues for empowerment and reintegration. These accounts demonstrate how even small acts of kindness, like a hot meal, a blanket, or educational chances, may turn everyday hardships into possibilities for resiliency and hope. The contrast between the government's disregard and the kindness displayed by NGOs and faith-based organizations is a recurring topic in all the reports. This reveals the inadequacies of state responses while simultaneously emphasizing the critical role that non-governmental actors play in bridging structural gaps. Furthermore, all things considered, the narratives emphasize that successful interventions are transforming processes that restore humanity, foster a sense of belonging, or pave the way for future stability they are not just charitable endeavours.

5.9 Chapter summary

The lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youths in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, were thoroughly analysed and interpreted in this chapter using a qualitative technique and the voices of 20 participants. The findings showed intricately intertwined realities of vulnerability, resilience, and survival that clearly address the study's main research issues.

The analysis began by highlighting the main causes of homelessness, which included peer pressure, substance misuse, family neglect, violence and abuse, and long-standing unemployment and poverty. These factors highlight how dangerous home settings, broken family structures, and socioeconomic challenges all play a big part in driving young people to the streets. Both on the streets and in shelters, homeless youth face numerous layers of victimization, as the second theme revealed. The participants reported experiencing severe psychological trauma, sexual exploitation, harassment, and regular physical aggression. Their sense of safety was affected by this victimization, which also fuelled their vulnerability and mistrust.

Furthermore, the results showed how young people deal with crime daily and frequently turn to theft, robbery, and informal hustling as coping mechanisms. These behaviours challenged perceptions about youth crime by being characterized as responses to urgent survival demands rather than as intentional criminal intent. The chapter also outlined the structural, social, and personal factors that contribute to criminal involvement. These factors included broader systemic problems like homelessness, unemployment, and restricted educational opportunities, as well as internal struggles like substance abuse, peer pressure, and the lack of significant adult support. Collectively, these interrelated factors demonstrated how young people are positioned structurally in settings that encourage or legitimize criminal behaviour.

Equally important were the debates about how crime and victimization affect youth well-being and daily survival. Participants discussed experiences of profound psychological trauma, emotional anguish, bodily harm, and long-term health effects. The results further solidified their marginalization by reflecting the ongoing struggle to meet basic economic demands, stigmatization, and wider societal exclusion in addition to the personal toll. The chapter concluded by highlighting differing opinions about treatments and support services. While several participants lamented the insufficiency, inaccessibility, and at times exploitative character of offered services, others recalled instances of genuine help, such as housing, food provision, and counselling, which provided hope and short relief.

Overall, the results show that a combination of social contexts, personal histories, and institutional limitations impact the lived experiences of young people who are homeless or participating in the streets of Durban. Victimization and crime were not separate events; rather, they were a part of a larger survival system that was intricately linked to the absence of long-term assistance from the state, the community, and families. Although there are interventions,

their inconsistent efficacy and accessibility point to the urgent need for new youth-centred, comprehensive, and responsive strategies to combat homelessness and criminality. Thus, this chapter ends by reaffirming that a multifaceted perspective that considers the individual hardships, everyday realities, and structural obstacles that influence young people's life is necessary to comprehend homelessness and street engagement. The offered insights serve as a critical basis for the next chapter, which will evaluate the findings considering the body of existing literature and offer suggestions for future study, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings and presents the study recommendations. This study aimed to explore crime, victimization, and support among homeless and Street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Six themes were uncovered after the data was collected and analysed, namely; factors leading to homelessness, experiences of victimization on the streets and/or shelter; navigating crime as a daily reality on the homeless youths; the interconnected drivers of youth criminal involvement; the impact of crime and/or victimization to the youth's well-being and daily survival and the mixed perceptions of support services and interventions. Findings obtained in this study reflect the complex realities of street survival, the relationship between crime and victimization, and the inadequacy of support networks accessible to these vulnerable groups.

6.2. Conclusion of the study

The direct narratives shared by the homeless and street-involved youth of Durban during data collection process showed that these individuals they do not they flee from their homes but there are factors that pushes them out of their homes and lead them to the streets. These narratives voiced out the evidence of their experiences of life on the street and in the shelter, their experiences of victimizations, why they commit crime, the impact of crime and/or victimization on their daily life and well-being, as well as the mixed perceptions of support they get.

This study's findings indicate that the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban are influenced by a complex interaction of personal histories, societal pressures, and structural disadvantages. The data indicates that youth homelessness, victimization, and criminal activity are not isolated phenomena but arise from interconnected systems of familial dysfunction, poverty, violence, exploitation, and institutional inadequacy. Collectively, the findings show that crime, whether experienced or perpetrated, is integral to daily survival, while support programs yield variable and often contradictory outcomes.

The experiences of homeless and street-involved youths are characterized by continual exposure to crime, both as victims and as reluctant offenders. Everyday existence entails

dealing with thievery, emotional abuse, sexual exploitation, and physical assault in both homeless and shelter settings. Violence is normalised, expected, and even unavoidable, with participants reporting frequent assaults by peers, strangers, and even official actors like police officers and shelter management. At the same time, criminal behaviour, such as stealing, robbery, or informal hustling, emerges as a survival response to hunger, insecurity, and systematic neglect, rather than an inherent trait. Many participants explained that crime provides temporary security or sustenance in the absence of supportive structures. This duality of victimhood and perpetration reflects harsh realities of street life, where survival frequently necessitates navigating hazardous and criminalized surroundings.

The findings illustrates that criminal activity among homeless youths is the result of complex personal, societal, and systemic factors. On a personal level, experiences of family neglect, abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional), and unresolved trauma create settings in which young people flee home and enter the street with pre-existing vulnerabilities. Socially, peer influence and substance abuse enhance harmful and risky behaviours and normalize crime as a means of belonging or safety. At a structural level, youth have no access to education, secure housing, or prospects for gainful employment due to poverty, unemployment, family financial collapse, and the breakdown of institutional safety nets. These interrelated elements foster an environment where committing crimes becomes a logical and occasionally necessary survival tactic. Therefore, rather than being the result of personal moral failings, criminal behaviour is viewed as a consequence of broader socioeconomic realities.

Participants characterized the effects of victimization and crime as extensive, ongoing, and multifaceted. They described psychological symptoms that are typical of long-term trauma, such as persistent fear, anxiety, emotional numbness, intrusive memories, and a sense of worthlessness. Physically, their general health is jeopardized by untreated bodily injuries, exposure to harsh weather conditions, sexual assault, and declining health due to substance abuse. All in all, most of them have poor, physical well-being as they are either wounded or, unhealthy. Socially, repeated victimization weakens trust, intensifies emotions of rejection, and separates young people from institutions and peers. Many of them discover that they are drawn to criminal networks or gangs as substitute sources of safety and community. In terms of the economy, victimization makes it more difficult for young people to work informally, exacerbates poverty, and drives them more into criminalized survival tactics. In general, victimization influences their thoughts, emotions, survival strategies, and interactions with the outside world.

Responses from participants on the current support systems were mixed and contradictory. Many expressed intense dissatisfaction, distrust, and disappointment with government agencies, shelters, social workers, and law enforcement. Paperwork challenges, discrimination, a lack of identification papers punitive attitudes, and unsafe shelter conditions all contribute to the prevalent perception that services are ineffective or even harmful. At the same time, participants recognised the importance of consistent, compassionate and effective interventions. Positive outcomes were associated with faith-based organizations, healthcare professionals, shelter services, trauma therapy, skill development activities, and targeted safe-space initiatives. These programs were viewed as sources of hope, dignity, and belonging, proving that supportive systems may have a significant impact when they prioritise human connection, safety, and empathy.

Collectively, the findings suggest that homelessness and street engagement are caused by interrelated cycles of family breakdown, socioeconomic hardship, violence, and institutional failure. In this context, crime becomes a risk as well as a necessity, formed by victimization, unfulfilled needs, and a lack of stable support structures. Although many programs fail to engage homeless teenagers meaningfully, the study shows that trauma-informed, accessible, and compassionate care can greatly increase their feeling of well-being and pave the road for stability. The findings therefore underscore that addressing youth homelessness and criminal involvement requires holistic, multi-level responses that recognize the complexities of their lived experiences, the structural roots of their challenges, and the transformative potential of empathetic and consistent support.

6.3 Contribution of the study's findings to the body of knowledge

The findings of this study make several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on homelessness and street-involved youth in South Africa, particularly within the urban context of Durban. This investigation explored the factors that led to homelessness among youth of Durban, their experiences of victimization on the streets and/or shelters, and how crime is seen as a survival strategy on their daily reality. Furthermore, this study examined the interconnected drivers of youth criminal involvement, and how crime and victimization impact the youth's well-being. Additionally, it also talked about the mixed perceptions of the services of support and interventions they get.

First, the study offered an in-depth understanding on the factors that leads youths to leave their homes and decides on living on the street and/or shelters which highlighted the complex interplay between family breakdown, poverty, trauma, substance use, and systemic exclusion. Furthermore, it showed a thoroughly, context-specific understanding of the lived realities of homeless youth. While international literature has documented similar patterns, this research provides a localized perspective that captures the unique socio-economic and cultural factors shaping youth homelessness in Durban, thereby enriching the limited South African scholarship in this field.

Secondly, the study's findings revealed the gaps in service provision. Participants indicated that they are victims of violence and exploitation and are frequently, exposed to abuse, including within shelters. They face difficulties accessing social services and obtaining identity documents, have inadequate psychosocial support, and maintain strained relationship with the law enforcement, issues that are often underrepresented in the literature. The study contributes new insights into the limitations of existing interventions by foregrounding the voices of the youth themselves. This youth-centred, qualitative evidence challenges assumptions about the effectiveness of current systems and underscores the need for reform grounded in the lived experiences of those directly affected.

The study also contributes to theoretical knowledge by demonstrating how structural violence and institutional neglect create cycles of homelessness and survival-driven crime among young people. The study uses ideas like trauma-informed care, social exclusion, and developmental criminology to show how psychological, social, and environmental variables interact to affect behavioural outcomes. This adds to the criminological and social work literature by demonstrating that youth crime in street settings is mostly adaptive and survival-oriented, rather than innately abnormal. The study also broadens the conversation about youth agency by demonstrating that, despite significant adversity, homeless youth actively navigate complex urban spaces, form support networks, and make strategic decisions to survive, contributing to emerging scholarship that shifts away from viewing homeless youth as passive victims.

Furthermore, the findings give empirical information that may be used in policy debates about youth protection, urban safety, and social development. The study provides practical knowledge for designing more comprehensive and youth-responsive treatments by outlining barriers to reintegration, such as a lack of documentation, restricted career paths, insufficient family support, and gaps in mental health services. This localized evidence base might help

municipal agencies, NGOs, and national governments develop programs focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and long-term reintegration. Finally, by focusing on the views of an often marginalized and understudied community, the study amplifies the voices of Durban's street-involved youths, ensuring that their experiences, needs, and ambitions are incorporated into scholarly discourse and future intervention approaches. This research not only covers a vital knowledge gap but also provides the framework for future studies that will delve further into policy implementation, service improvement, and long-term developmental outcomes for South African homeless youths.

6.4 Study recommendations

Based on the participants narratives several recommendations are proposed to address the complex personal, social, and structural challenges faced by homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. These recommendations aim to reduce youth homelessness, prevent victimization, minimize criminal involvement, and strengthen the effectiveness of support interventions.

6.4.1 Strengthen family support, prevention, and early identification of at-risk youth

Firstly, family strengthening programs should be implemented, with families participating at least once a month if they feel at risk of losing a family member due to substance use, peer influence, abuse, family breakdown, or any factor that could lead a child or youth to leave home live on the streets. Additionally, governments should organize community-based workshops on parenting in every area emphasizing the principle that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. These workshops should address neglect, abuse, communication breakdown, substance abuse, and ways to make one’s family member valued and visible. However, in this program any family member has the right to request that they should attend the workshop program if they feel illtreated including the young ones. The government working together with the community members should provide early-intervention family counselling through schools, clinics, and community centres to prevent youth from leaving home due to violence and neglect. Teachers and school social workers should be trained to identify early signs of abuse, trauma, or neglect early. Strengthen collaboration between schools, child protection services, and NGOs to intervene before youth abscond to the streets. Furthermore, enforcement of mandatory reporting for child abuse cases should be improved, with faster response times from social workers. Additionally, strengthen accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse, particularly within families.

6.4.2 Address structural drivers: poverty, unemployment, and lack of documentation

The government or private sectors should expand access to youth employment programmes focusing on skills training, apprenticeships, and short-term job placement for homeless and at-risk youth. Provide stipends or incentives to reduce dependency on criminal survival strategies. For instance, in every community they should have a garden, a furniture making centre, or shoe making place, where earnings are partially reinvested into equipment and partially paid as salaries to participating youth. The government should create fast-track mobile Home Affairs units that visit shelters and street hotspots monthly. Partner with NGOs to assist youths with paperwork and transport for ID applications, while conducting background checks to prevent fraudulent issuance of identification documents. Moreover, they should strengthen social grants, food security programs, and emergency housing support for households at risk of homelessness. Improve coordination between the Department of Social Development (DSD) and local municipalities to prevent family displacement.

6.4.3 Enhance safety and protection in both street and shelter environments

To enhance safety, shelters should adopt trauma-informed management practices emphasizing safety, dignity, and respect; and they should also be provided a mandatory staff training on de-escalation, child protection, and ethical conduct. Shelters should increase supervision and strengthen oversight and accountability to prevent victimization maybe through CCTV, night staff rotation, and regular inspections, and establish confidential reporting systems for youth to report abuse by staff or peers. Furthermore, street outreach teams or street outreach safety measures should involve collaboration among social workers, youth workers, South African Police Services (SAPS) and trained peers to monitor safety risks, provide first aid, and respond to incidents promptly. Additionally, SAPS, Metro Police and neighbourhood watch should partner to prevent harassment, brutality, and exploitation of homeless youth, reduce harassment and ensure safer street environments.

6.4.4 Addressing survival needs to reduce youth criminal involvement

Because survival-driven crime is a direct consequence of hunger, insecurity, and exclusion, there is a strong need to reduce youths' reliance on risky and criminal activities by ensuring reliable access to food, hygiene items, safe sleeping spaces, and emergency support. Establishing 24-hour drop-in centres with meals, showers, lockers, and psychosocial services would offer essential relief and reduce exposure to harm. Complementing these basic services, with harm reduction strategies; including substance use counselling, detoxification support,

and rehabilitation programmes tailored specifically for homeless youth should be expanded to address substance dependence without stigmatization or punishment. Furthermore, establishing dignified and safe economic alternatives could reduce youth criminal involvement. This could include income-generating activities such as recycling cooperatives, street cleaning programmes, urban gardening, and craft markets managed in partnership with NGOs. Providing micro-grants or start-up kits to help youth build lawful and sustainable livelihoods can further empower youth economically and reduce reliance on illegal hustles.

6.4.5 Improve mental health and psychosocial support

Mental health and psychosocial services should be increased to include free mobile clinics, trauma counselling, and training for service providers in youth-sensitive and nonjudgmental treatment. These services should also serve the shelter population and street hotspots. Youth participation must be promoted by developing young advisory committees and peer mentorship programs to ensure interventions are relevant, positive, and grounded on lived experiences. Provide trauma counselling, group therapy, and peer-support circles facilitated by skilled professionals. Social professionals, nurses, police officers, and shelter personnel should be trained in trauma-informed care, youth development, and nonjudgmental communication. Emphasize trauma, stigma, and emotional injury as important to service delivery.

6.5 Suggestions for future research

The researcher offers the following recommendations for future research on the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth

- Future researchers should conduct research on the homeless and street-involved youth living only in shelters or on the street. Studying them separately can provide clearer insights into their unique needs, risks, coping strategies, and service gaps; leading to more targeted interventions and policies that truly address their lived realities. The researchers should also conduct comparative studies on examining the life on the street of youth but across different cities. The research could be located within or outside the province of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Larger and more diverse samples are needed to explore the experiences of youth who do not engage with shelters, NGOs, or street outreach services, as these individuals remain largely invisible within existing research. Studies conducted across multiple cities including rural areas and smaller towns, would also allow for comparative

insights into how geography, service availability, and community dynamics shape youth homelessness dif ferently across South Africa.

- Future research should delve into the lived experience of people who have family members who are homeless, people who work with them, and people who are victims of crime perpetrated by the homeless. Understanding their experiences could inform more holistic intervention strategies.
- Future research should explore youth-led or peer-supported models of intervention, recognising the importance of agency, resilience, and self-determination among homeless young people. Such approaches could contribute to developing more responsive, sustainable, and empowering solutions to youth homelessness in South Africa.

6.6 Summary and conclusion

This study investigated the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, concentrating on the crimes they experience and perpetrate, as well as the personal, societal, and institutional elements that influence their daily lives. The research shows that being homeless is rarely a single event, but rather the result of a series of interconnected obstacles such as familial neglect, physical and sexual abuse, peer influence, drug misuse, and widespread poverty and unemployment. Experiences of betrayal within family systems, where youths expected safety but encountered violence and rejection, contributed to their decision to leave home. These factors are entrenched in larger social and economic disparities, insufficient support networks, and long-standing patterns of intergenerational trauma.

This chapter concludes that personal trauma, societal exclusion, and institutional inequity affect the lived realities of Durban's homeless and street-involved youths. According to the research, youth homelessness is largely caused by family dysfunction, abuse, poverty, and systemic neglect, not wilful choice. Once homeless, young people endure ongoing abuse and exploitation, jeopardizing their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Crime, both experienced and committed, originates as an adaptive reaction to unmet needs, insecurity, and a lack of readily available, supportive alternatives.

This study concludes that homeless youth's criminal activity cannot be understood in isolation from their living situations. Rather, it is a survival strategy in environments characterized by deprivation, peer pressure, institutional failure, and socioeconomic marginalization. The

cyclical interaction between victimization, poor well-being, and criminal activity repeats a pattern in which young people find themselves caught between seeking safety and ensuring their daily existence. Finally, while current interventions produce both positive and negative results, the findings highlight the critical need for trauma-informed, youth-centred, and empathetically provided programs. Effective interventions should emphasize safety, dignity, accessibility, and empowerment. When these qualities are present, youth display resilience, adaptability, and a desire to interact with support networks. Overall, the chapter underlines that resolving homelessness and youth criminal activity involves more than punitive approaches; it necessitates comprehensive, compassionate, and systemic solutions that restore agency, safety, and hope to vulnerable young people in Durban.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

29 August 2025

Naledi Akhona Molife (220012710)
School of Applied Human Sc (Prior Restructuring)
Howard College Campus

Dear NA Molife,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00008593/2025
Project title: Navigating life on the streets: exploring crime, victimization, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 28 August 2025 to our letter of 30 May 2025 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid for one year until 29 August 2026
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

Doctor Shamila Naidoo (Interim Chair) /nng

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 11 June 2025

Greetings Participants

My name is Molife Naledi from the School of Applied Human Science under the discipline of Criminology and Forensic Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Contact Number [redacted], email address- [redacted] / 220012710@stu.ukzn.ac.za

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves Navigating life on the streets: exploring crime, victimization, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, it explores the lived experiences of homeless and street-involved youth (aged 18–27) in Durban, focusing on crimes, victimization access or barriers to support of the homeless and street-involved youth.

The aim and purpose of this research is to understand the challenges faced by homeless and street-involved youth (aged 18-27) in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, by examining their experiences with crime, victimization, and access to support services. Through interviews the research aims to uncover how these young people navigate daily survival, including their encounters with violence, exploitation, and systemic barriers to shelters, healthcare, and legal protection. By centering their voices, the study will highlight gaps in current policies and programs while advocating for more effective, youth-informed solutions. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform NGOs, policymakers, and social services on how to better address the unique needs of this vulnerable yet resilient population.
The study is expected to enroll a sample of 20 participants which are homeless and street-involved youth primarily based in Durban, South Africa. Out of the 20 participants in the sample, 10 of whom are female and 10 of whom are male, and they ranged in age from 18 to 27. The duration of homelessness and street life experienced by the participating youth must range from ten months to ten years. It will involve the following procedures:

- You will be asked to take part in a one-on-one in-depth interview.
- The interview will take approximately 35 minutes to an hour.
- With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription.
- All information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts some of the questions may be personal or bring up difficult memories as these individuals will be sharing more of their personal perspective and complex issues, and being in-depth about their lived experiences of homelessness and living on the streets with regard to the street life, crimes they commit, their victimization, and Support Among Homeless and Street-Involved Youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The study will provide no direct benefits to participants; however, your participation will help researchers, social workers, and policymakers better understand the needs and the lived experiences of the homeless and street-involved youth in Durban. Furthermore, Participants will be provided with the Social worker assistances and, Health and Mental Wellness Services like trauma-informed therapy and crisis intervention for victims of abuse, victim support, and get help accessing government services (shelter linkage, SASSA grant, Government youth programs). If participants want more information, the participant may talk to his/her recruiter.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [redacted]m OR [redacted], the Supervisor, Dr Nomakhosi Nomathemba Sibisi at [redacted] OR SibisiN@ukzn.ac.za, or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants are under no obligation to take part and may choose to withdraw from the study at any point, without providing a reason. Should a participant decide to withdraw, they will not incur any penalty, nor will they lose access to any treatment, support, or other benefits to which they are normally entitled, including those provided by the Payless Shelter and by Councilor of the Albert Park.

Consequences and Procedure for Withdrawal
There are no negative consequences for withdrawing from the study. If a participant wishes to withdraw, they simply need to inform the researcher. Once a withdrawal request is made, no further data will be collected from the participant. The participant will be asked whether they wish to allow any previously collected data to be included in the study or to have it destroyed. This decision will be respected and documented accordingly.

Researcher-Initiated Termination
The researcher may terminate a participant's involvement in the study under the following circumstances:

1. If the participant becomes physically or emotionally distressed during the process and continuation may cause harm.

2. If the participant engages in disruptive, aggressive, or threatening behavior that compromises the safety of others.

3. If the participant provides false or misleading information that significantly affects the integrity of the data or research process

Participation in this study will not require participants to incur any costs. The researcher chose to conduct interviews at locations that are accessible to the participants and, where possible, at places where participants already receive services. Additionally, the researcher will not provide any modest incentive to the participants.

Describe in detail the steps that will be taken to protect confidentiality of personal/clinical information, and the limits of confidentiality if applicable. Describe the fate of the data and stored samples.

For confidentiality and anonymity
The researcher will ensure to keep participants anonymous, and rather the researcher will call them by P1 up to 20, and on the side indicate whether this participant is a female or male from Albert Park or Payless shelter. For example: P1 Female Payless Shelter.

For storage
The recorded interview data will be of encrypted storage device USBs, and when transcribed and translated will be of physical paper interview data. These data will be stored in the locked cabinets of the supervisor's office. For access control, only myself and the supervisor will have access to the data.
When it comes to disposing of the data, the researcher will ensure that all files are securely deleted from the USB, the USB will be fired up, and any physical copies are shredded or destroyed in a manner that prevents retrieval of the information. The researcher will also document the disposal process to ensure that it is carried out in compliance with data protection regulations.

Use of Data: The anonymized data may be used for academic publications, presentations, or reports. No identifying audio recording, will be published unless explicit, written consent is obtained for such use.

CONSENT (Edit as required)

I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled Navigating life on the streets: exploring crime, victimization, and support among homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal by Molife Naledi.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study which is to comprehend and appreciate the challenges faced by homeless and street-involved youth (aged 18-25) in

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, by examining their experiences with crime, victimization, and access to support services. Through interviews the research aims to uncover how these young people navigate daily survival, including their encounters with violence, exploitation, and systemic barriers to shelters, healthcare, and legal protection

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at [redacted] OR [redacted]m.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Witness (Where applicable) **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Translator (Where applicable) **Date**

APPENDIX 3a: INTERVIEW GUIDE (English)

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and how you ended up on the streets? How long have you been homeless or street-involved?
2. Can you describe your own personal experience being homeless or street-involved in Durban
3. Can you describe any specific incidents or patterns of crime experienced by homeless and street-involved youth in Durban?
4. Can you share with us some of the common crimes that homeless and street-involved youth in Durban are both victims and perpetrators of?
5. How do homeless and street-involved youth in Durban perceive their safety and security on the streets?
6. Have you personally struggled with substance abuse, and if so, what challenges have you faced in seeking help?
7. What are some of the main factors that contribute to homeless and street-involved youth engaging in criminal activities?
8. How do societal attitudes and perceptions towards homeless and street-involved youth impact their experiences with crime and victimization?
9. What are some of the challenges faced by service providers and organizations working with homeless and street-involved youth in addressing issues related to crime and victimization?
10. Have you experienced or witnessed crime while living on the streets? If so, can you describe some of those experiences? And how did it impact your mental and physical health?
11. Have you encountered law enforcement, neighbourhood watch, or legal consequences as a result of being criminal behavior? Please explain how?
12. What barriers do homeless and street-involved youth face in accessing resources and support services in Durban?
13. What interventions or programs have you participated in that aimed to reduce victimization and criminal activities within the homeless and street-involved youth in Durban (e.g., violence prevention programs, substance use rehabilitation, housing first)? How effective were these interventions in reducing your victimization and criminal activities?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences, or the challenges faced by homeless and street-involved youth in Durban?

APPENDIX 3b: INTERVIEW GUIDE (IsiZulu)

IFOMU YOXOXO LWENTSHA ENGATHOLI IKHAYA KANYE NABAHILELEKE EMGAQWENI E-DURBAN

Ukuhlola Okuhlangenwe Nakho Kwentsha Engatholi Ikhaya Kanye Nabahileleke Emgaqweni e-Durban Mayelana Nobugebengu Obenziwayo Kanye Nobubhekiswe Kubona.

1. Ungangitshela kancane ngawe nangendlela ogcine ngayo usuphila emgwaqweni? Sekuyisikhathi esingakanani ungumuntu ohileleke emgwaqweni futhi ohlala khona?
2. Ungachaza isipiliyoni sakho sokuba ngumuntu ongahlali futhi ohileleke emgwaqweni e-Durban?
3. Ngicela uchaze izehlakalo ezithile noma amaphethini obugebengu enibhekana nawo njengabantu abangahlali emakhaya futhi nabahileleke emgwaqweni e-Durban?
4. Ungabelana nathi ngamanye amacala ajwayelekile enibhekana nawo njengabantu abahlukumezekayo nabenza ubugebengu?
5. Njengomuntu ohlala Emgaqweni, uma ubuka ukuphepha kwabo nokuvikeleka kwakho emigwaqweni kukhona? Kukanjani?
6. Ingabe uke wabhekana nenkinga yokusebenzisa izidakamizwa? Uma kunjalo, hlobo luni lwezinselelo obhekane nazo ekufuneni usizo?
7. Yiziphi izimbangela eziyinhloko ezinenza nizimbandakanye nezenzo zobugebengu?
8. Engabe imibono nezinkolelo zomphakathi ngentsha zinomthelela muni ekuzizweni kwenu mayelana nobugebengu enibenzayo, obenziwa kunina, kanye nokuhlukunyezwa kwenu?
9. Yiziphi izinselelo abahlinzeki bezinsiza kanye nezinhlangano ezisebenzela ekusizeni Nina okanye abantu abafana nani ababhekana nazo ekubhekaneni nezindaba zobugebengu kanye nokuhlukunyezwa?
10. Ingabe uke wabhekana noma wabona ubugebengu ngenkathi uhlala emgwaqweni? Uma kunjalo, ungachaza izimo ezithile? Futhi lokhu kwaba nomthelelo onjani kwimpilo yakho, engokwengqondo neyomzimba?
11. Ingabe uke watholana phezulu neziphathimandla, ukugada umakhelwane, noma wabhekana nezingozi zomthetho ngenxa yokuzibandakanya nobugebengu? Sicela uchaze ukuthi kwenzeke kanjani?

12. Yiziphi izithiyo noma izinto enibhekana nazo ekufinyeleleni izinsiza kanye nosizo njengabantu abaphila emgwaqweni e-Durban?
13. Yiluphi uhlelo noma izinhlelo ozibambe iqhaza kulezi ezihlose ukunciphisa ukuhlukunyezwa kanye nemisebenzi yezobugebengu phakathi kunina bantu abaphila emgwaqweni e-Durban (isb. Izinhlelo zokuvimbela udlame, ukubuyiselwa kwezidakamizwa, i-housing first)? Lezi zinhlelo zaba namuphi umthelela ekunciphiseni ukuhlukunyezwa kwakho noma kwenu kanye nezindaba zobugebengu?
14. Ingabe kukhona okunye ongathanda ukukhuluma ngakho obonayo ukuthi asikuthintanga kodwa kuyahambiselana nalukho ebesikuxoxa? Mhlampe mayelana enibhekana nakho zinsuku zonke njengabantu abaphila emgwaqweni.

APPENDIX 4: LETTER OF EDITING

Mufasa Research Consultancy SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

Serving with distinction

09 December 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Editor's Letter

NAVIGATING LIFE ON THE STREET: EXPLORING CRIME, VICTIMIZATION, AND SUPPORT AMONG THE HOMELESS AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH IN DURBAN, KWAZULU NATAL

Below is the scope considered during language editing of the above titled dissertation:

- Grammar check
- Sentence construction
- Spelling check
- Punctuation
- In-text referencing
- Formatting/document layout

As a professional editor, I pledge that the above aspects of the manuscript were, to the best of my knowledge, meticulously and correctly done at the time the work was sent to the candidate. However, I am not responsible for any corrections that were made after the editing process finalised.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

Venencia Nyambuya (PhD)

PhD in Media & Cultural Studies: UKZN (RSA)
Master of Arts in Media & Cultural Studies (*Cum laude*): UKZN
Bachelor of Science Honours in Media & Society Studies: MSU (ZW)
Editor of the *BSSJ Journalism & Media Studies*
London, United Kingdom
Cell: [redacted]

Cell: + [redacted] Email: info@mufasarc.co.za Web: www.mufasarc.co.za
Address: 7 Chartham House, 180 Brand Road, Glenwood 4001, Durban, South Africa

APPENDIX 5: TURNITIN REPORT

Naledi M 1-6 Turnitin Copy -01....docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

4%	2%	3%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

MATCH ALL SOURCES (ONLY SELECTED SOURCE PRINTED)

1%

★ "Clinical Care for Homeless, Runaway and Refugee Youth", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2020

Publication

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 15 words
Exclude bibliography	On		

APPENDIX 6: GATEKEEPERS LETTER(s)

(i) Permission letter from eThekwini Municipality

ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

To Whom It May Concern.

I am writing to grant permission for Molife Naledi Akhona, a Masters degree student in Criminology and Forensic Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to conduct a research study at Albert Park famously known as Whoonga Park, from the 10th of October to March 2026.

The proposed study, titled "Exploring the Experiences of Homeless and Street-involved Youth in Durban on Crimes Committed by and Against them", which aims to explore the provocations, needs, and perspectives of homeless and street-involved youth at Albert Park, and to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, specifically regarding crimes committed by and against them. Furthermore, to uncover the refinements of their situations, challenges, and vulnerabilities, as well as their resilience and coping mechanisms. We believe that this research has the potential to contribute valuable insights into the lives of this vulnerable population and inform strategies to support them.

We have reviewed the research proposal and are satisfied that the study will be conducted with the necessary ethical considerations, including:

- Informed consent from participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Respect for participants' privacy and dignity
- No disruption to park operations or activities

We hereby grant permission for the student to access the park and conduct interviews, observations, or surveys with homeless youth that resides at Whoonga Park, as per the agreed-upon methodology. We will provide access to park facilities and resources as needed.

Please note that the student will be required to:

- Wear identification while conducting research
- Follow park rules and regulations
- Ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity
- Comply with organization procedures and policies
- Share findings with park administration (if desired)

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindly Regards,

[redacted]

COMMISSIONER OF OATHS
ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY
EX OFFICIO DISTRICT OF DURBAN IN
TERMS OF SECTION 6 OF ACT 16 OF 1983
(AS AMENDED) CITY HALL SECRETARIAT
DR PIXLEY KA SEME STREET, DURBAN, 4001

(ii) Permission letter from Payless Shelter

"To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to grant permission for Naledi Akhona Molife, a Masters degree student in Criminology and Forensic Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to conduct a research study at our homeless shelter, Payless Shelter NPC, from the 10th of October 2024 till March 2026

The proposed study, titled "Exploring the Experiences of Homeless and Street-involved in Durban on Crimes Committed by and Against them", which aims to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of homeless and street-involved youth in Durban, specifically regarding crimes committed by and against them. Furthermore, to uncover the refinements of their situations, challenges, and vulnerabilities, as well as their resilience and coping mechanisms. We believe that this research has the potential to contribute valuable insights into the experiences and needs of our clients, and we are willing to facilitate the data collection process.

We have reviewed the research proposal and are satisfied that the study will be conducted with the necessary ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' privacy and dignity.

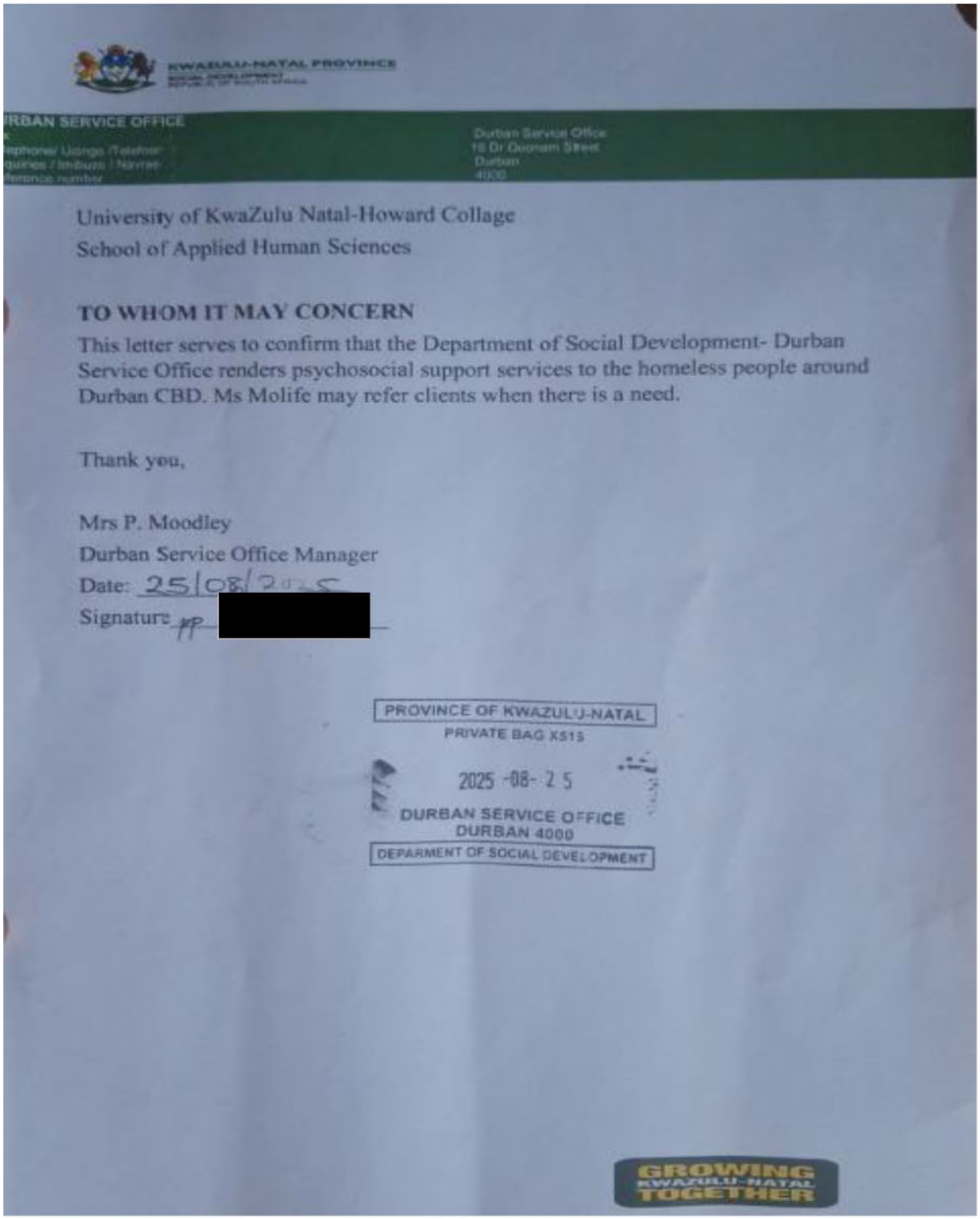
We hereby grant permission for the student to access our facility and conduct interviews/observations/surveys with our clients and staff, as per the agreed-upon methodology. We will provide the necessary support and resources to ensure the success of the study.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information or clarification.

[redacted]

PAYLESS SHELTER NPC
1 DR LANGALIBALILE DUBE STREET
CONTACT NUMBER 081 338 9966

(iii) Permission letter for psychosocial support



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

RBAN SERVICE OFFICE

Durban Service Office
16 Dr Quinam Street
Durban
4000

University of KwaZulu Natal-Howard Collage
School of Applied Human Sciences

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves to confirm that the Department of Social Development- Durban Service Office renders psychosocial support services to the homeless people around Durban CBD. Ms Molife may refer clients when there is a need.

Thank you,

Mrs P. Moodley
Durban Service Office Manager
Date: 25/08/2025
Signature [redacted]

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
PRIVATE BAG X515
2025 -08- 25
DURBAN SERVICE OFFICE
DURBAN 4000
DEPARMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER