



**THE ROLE PLAYED BY RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
REHABILITATION OF FORMER GANG MEMBERS IN THE DURBAN
METROPOLITAN**

BY

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Department of Criminology and Forensic Studies**

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DECLARATION

I, Zaheer Ahmed Soofie, declare that:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my work.
2. This research has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. The sources used in this thesis have been properly in-text referenced and they appear in the reference section.

Signature:  Date: 17 June 2025

Supervisor: Prof Nirmala D Gopal

Signature:  Date: 17 June 2025

DEDICATION

To my loving family, who have been my rock throughout this academic journey:

My father, Muhammed Jaliel Soofie

My mother, Saphia Ahmed Soofie

My sibling, Nabeel Ahmed Soofie

My aunts:

Fatima Ahmed Rajah, Rookaya Ahmed, Rajah, Zubeida Ahmed Rajah.

This achievement is not mine alone, but yours as well. I express my heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support, understanding, and patience during the pursuit of my Master's degree.

I also dedicate this work to the selfless individuals and organizations working tirelessly to rehabilitate and reintegrate former gang members into society. Your dedication to counselling, guidance, and support has transformed countless lives, and I salute your efforts.

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ABSTRACT

Gangsterism is not a new problem and is not inherent to South Africa alone. However, the problem is widespread in South Africa and within the city of Durban and its surrounding areas. Durban has been plagued by the overwhelming and increasing number of gang-based crimes. Minimal studies addressing this problem in Durban have been published. Most studies have been on the gangs of the Western-cape and the prison number gang system. It is not uncommon that active and former gang members try to desist from gang life and pursue a path of rehabilitation and re-integration into society. Nor is it uncommon for them to try to re-invent themselves to achieve pro-social identities. Religiosity has always been a powerful desister in combatting criminality. It has served as a platform for gang rehabilitation and disassociation amongst gang members globally. This study intricately studies the role of religion/spirituality in the lives of former gang-members by reflecting on the lives of people who had once adopted this aspect of criminality. This study adopted a qualitative approach embedded within the interpretivist paradigm. This study is founded on the Desistance theory of criminology. Data was collected using in-depth interviews with 10 purposively selected participants. The approach and techniques utilized in this study are described concisely to provide a clear picture of how data is collated, and the researcher has used what academics refer to as the "journey motif" to accurately and rationally describe the research setting as well as provide grounds for the research design considered ideal for this study. The findings have shown that each participant had life changing experiences that served as a precursor for desistance and that religion was at the core, filling in the gaps of the lives they once pursued. Findings revealed that life-changing experiences, alongside spirituality and religious practices, played a key role in gang disengagement. Psycho-social factors contributed to initial gang involvement, while desistance was met with challenges such as fear for safety, estrangement from family, and financial loss. Some participants maintained ties with former gang associates despite leaving the lifestyle. Spirituality facilitated identity reconstruction and personal growth. The study highlighted the significance of faith-based interventions in promoting long-term desistance and reintegration.

Keywords: *gangsterism, gang-members, desister, religion, spirituality, Sufism, Durban, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Religiosity and spirituality serve as a crucial role in constructing the behavior of groups and individuals, often providing improved solidarity and motivation to their members (Neuberg, et al., 2013). They argue that the role of religious doctrine and participation has been emphasized in the human services' professions. Lietz and Hodge (2011) note that spirituality plays an integral role in family reunification efforts. Their research explains spirituality, in greater detail particularly, participants in their study explained the power of spirituality within their narratives as a crucial descriptive factor they perceived as significant, leading to important changes. The findings emphasized the benefits some families obtain from their spiritual understandings, practices and religious communities when striving to obtain reunification, recommending child welfare proponents to be equipped to recognize and honor the strong familial bond. The "power of spirituality" as stated above which leads to crucial changes highlights the fact that spirituality as a practice can also serve as a buffer for former gang members to relapse back into a life of gangsterism and facilitate lasting, positive changes.

Sufism, as a specific spiritual tradition, was chosen for this study due to its significant presence in Durban and its profound impact on individuals seeking transformation and rehabilitation. Durban is home to a diverse religious landscape, and Sufism has historically played a role in fostering spiritual resilience and moral realignment. Its emphasis on inner purification, discipline, and communal support aligns with the desistance process, making it particularly relevant to individuals disengaging from gangsterism. A study by Amitay, Hawa-Kamel, and Ronel (2021) demonstrated that non-doing rehabilitation inspired by Sufi traditions fosters social inclusion and spiritual meaning among ex-prisoners, facilitating transformative processes. Furthermore, qualitative accounts from former gang members suggest that Sufi practices, such as dhikr (remembrance of God) and mentorship from spiritual leaders, resonate deeply with those seeking a structured yet compassionate path toward reintegration.

Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, O' Connell, and Smith (2015) revealed that long-standing drug addicted offenders find important relief from their addiction connected problems through spirituality and religious association. Their findings also reveal that among recovering people, elevated levels of religious faith and spirituality were related to a more optimistic life orientation, better seeming social support, higher hardiness to stress, and decreased levels of anxiety. This represents the biggest self-report study to date exploring the link between religious belief, spirituality, and mental health outcomes among people recovering from drug addiction. In an interrelated study, Pardini, Plante, Sherman, and Stump (2000) revealed substantial compensation from religious belief and spirituality in substance addiction healing. Support for the role of triumphant religious or spiritual interventions also acts as a helping hand for cancer patients (Ringdal, 1996) and Clinical Depression (Murphy, Ciarrochi, Piedmont, Cheston, Peyrot & Fichett,2000).This research also shares that there are both qualitative and quantitative research suggesting that religiosity assists people to cope better with hardships, either external challenges(hard environmental situations) or internal challenges (hereditary tendency or vulnerability to mental sicknesses).Both of the above studies highlight the strength of spirituality to serve as a desister for offenders coming from every walk of life and could be positively executed as a desister for former gang-members in their rehabilitation process.

While religion and spirituality provide meaningful support for crime desistance, they are not the sole approaches. Established frameworks such as community-based interventions and psychological approaches also play significant roles. Community-based programs, such as mentorship initiatives, restorative justice practices, and vocational training, offer structured social support that facilitates reintegration (Maruna & LeBel, 2012). Psychological interventions, including cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and trauma-informed care, address underlying cognitive distortions and emotional wounds that contribute to criminal behaviour (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Unlike these secular models, faith-based interventions rely on spiritual transformation and moral realignment as catalysts for change (Johnson, 2011). However, rather than functioning in isolation, religion and spirituality can complement community and psychological frameworks by reinforcing positive social bonds, instilling moral discipline, and providing emotional resilience (Jang, Bader, & Johnson, 2008)

This chapter also informs the reader of the researcher's background and motivation for the present study on the role played by religion in crime desistance among gang members in Sydenham. Following this information, the aim of the research study is clarified as a rational consequence of the background and motivation and a chapter outline of the present study is provided. The study elucidates an in-depth analysis of the lives of notorious ex-gang members within the Durban metropolitan and the pivotal role that spirituality/religiosity had in their reformation.

1.2 Background of the study

Offenders' offensive behaviour and rehabilitation have been addressed through the perspective of religious, cultural and spiritual cognitive methods and approaches (Maruna, 2012). Although, within contemporary criminology spirituality has been dismissed and disregarded, in recent times more attention has been paid to it. Often, though, it is applied from the secular scientific point of view, thus decreasing spiritual information into what is already recognized. The central theme of this study is on Jewish criminology as a descriptive case study and illustrates a spiritual Jewish outlook on good and evil, including factors that pave the road to criminality, the issue of free option, the goal of punishment and societal reaction, crime desistance, rehabilitation, and deterrence. The recommended formation of spiritual criminology can be further created by including corresponding schools of spirituality, to form an incorporated field in criminology (BenYair, 2018). The above study elucidates the crucial role of spirituality, the causes of criminality and rehabilitation through spiritual exercise which is also at the core of this study. Since this study creates a vivid image on the "outlook on good and evil" hence, the application of this regenerative study could very well be apt in addressing the integral role of religiosity in the rehabilitation of former gang members. It also advocates for the inclusion of correlating schools of spirituality which would create a clearer picture on the effectiveness of the spiritual element as a major desistor in the rehabilitation process. This salient element could be used as a regenerative exercise for not only gangsterism but also in dealing with offenders from every facet of the criminal world. Since it includes and draws on studies including that of correlating schools of religiosity, gangsters who wish to desist from their current lives, and former gangsters wishing to find a spiritual outlet as a desister will find multiple spiritual avenues to explore and find the one best suited for them in the Durban Metropolitan. Religion often refers to structured systems of belief and

practice centered around a higher power, while spirituality can be understood as an individual's personal sense of connection to something greater than themselves, which may or may not involve organized religious practices (Koenig, 2009). In the context of gang rehabilitation, specific aspects of spirituality or religious practice that contribute to desistance may include the development of a moral framework, a sense of purpose or redemption, and community support through faith-based networks (Caldwell et al., 2014). These elements can help individuals undergoing rehabilitation to reshape their identities, cultivate self-control, and adopt prosocial values (Halsey & Deegan, 2015).

These religious and spiritual practices differ from secular rehabilitation methods in that they typically emphasize transformation through divine intervention, repentance, and the creation of a new identity based on faith, which contrasts with secular methods that often focus on psychological interventions, behavioural modification, and social reintegration strategies (Giordano et al., 2008). While both approaches may promote desistance from criminal behaviour, religious and spiritual rehabilitation provides a unique avenue for individuals seeking meaning and redemption, often through a deep personal connection to faith, which can have a profound impact on their reintegration into society (Maruna, 2001).

One such spiritual method is meditation, which is integral to many religious and spiritual traditions. Studies on Transcendental Meditation (Alexander et al., 2003) indicate that it enhances well-being, reduces stress, and improves self-efficacy factors that are crucial for desistance. The use of such spiritual regenerative exercises in rehabilitation suggests that spirituality can be a transformative force for offenders. If properly implemented, spiritual approaches may provide an alternative framework for disengaging from criminal lifestyles

Meditation is known for its pivotal role in every spiritual discipline and has an overwhelming number of cases, which strengthens the effectiveness of this science, as a desister. The Transcendental Meditation technique, formulated by, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi "span the fields of psychology, physiology, and sociology" (Alexander et al., 2003). The factual research on this form of meditation, which falls under spiritual regenerative exercises, confirms an improvement in well-being experienced by an overwhelming number of participants who utilize it. It goes on further to state that this approach could be the most noteworthy rehabilitative instrument for offenders. If this

approach which is rooted in spirituality can facilitate the reduction of stress and an improvement in self-esteem, self-efficacy and serve as a buffer to recidivism to offending, then the execution of this method could also be effective in assisting former gang members from abstaining from a life of criminality.

According to Maruna (2001) the development of pro-social identity is crucial for desistance thus offenders who desist from their criminal behaviour displayed high levels of self-efficacy. In essence this means that they had control of their lives and found life satisfaction with purpose and meaning. The creation of these pro-social identities also assisted them to better understand their past lives and even discover some redeeming worth in lives that had often been spent back and forth from institutions of incarceration to 'life outside'. The desisting ex-offenders that were interviewed often stated that they wanted to put these experiences 'to good use' by assisting others (mainly young people in similar conditions to their own) avoid the mistakes they made. For this study the creation of pro-social identities can work hand in hand with spiritual generative exercises to assist offenders viz. former gang members from dealing with their current positions in life and serve as constant desisters which will prevent any form of relapse. According to Butler, Slade and Dias (2018) current and former gang members view religious and spiritual organisations as non-judgmental platforms which relates to their innate human needs such as a sense of belonging and provides for passive re-integration into society. In addition, it offers a space for redemption scripts. Offenders who have achieved desistance in totality, tend to explain their narratives through 'redemption scripts'. This can be explained that in retrospect they see past offenses as learning opportunities that have paved the road through difficult yet important lessons. (McAdams,2006; Radzik,2009). The subjects of the study at hand can then view their past lives through the lens of spirituality and could better allow former gang-members to desist from relapsing back into their former lives and assist by giving them a arsenal of tools to deal with lifes' challenges overall.

In a study conducted by Deuchar (2019) which focused on discovering and scrutinizing the association "between masculinity, gang disengagement, desistance and spirituality, Deuchar maintained that "spirituality must clearly play a role in transitioning in and out of crime, of gangs and from antisocial to pro-social roles. These roles are complicated, rarely linear and nuanced at every step of the way" (Deuchar 2019: n.p). It is accepted that life is subject to continuous change and particularly with former gang

members as they transition into this new phase. Throughout this transition, White (2013) as cited by Deuchar (2019) suggests that gang members' lives are guided by spirituality, and this transitional stage affords them the space to be in a state of redemption. This study goes on to showcase insights from life history interviews done with a small sample of 17 male gang members, in Denmark, who on the path to reformation had become engrossed in a holistic spiritual intercession curriculum that focussed on meditation, yoga and dynamic breathing exercises. Involvement with the programme empowered the men to start performing wider versions of masculinity, experience an escalation of mental health and well-being and create a greater dedication to criminal desistance. A system that has spirituality as its foundation together with a holistic curriculum explained above can serve as a template to better guide former gang members from relapsing back into their former gang roles. Greater forms of masculinity, an increase in mental health and overall wellbeing would reinforce desistance for former gang members.

Maruna (2001) asserts that the development of pro-social identities is critical for desistance, as it allows offenders to take control of their lives and find meaning in their experiences. Former gang members often frame their past through 'redemption scripts' narratives in which past offenses are seen as valuable lessons leading to transformation (McAdams, 2006; Radzik, 2009). Spirituality may serve as a foundational mechanism for constructing such identities, enabling offenders to use their past experiences as stepping stones toward reintegration. Butler, Slade, and Dias (2018) note that current and former gang members perceive religious and spiritual organizations as non-judgmental spaces that fulfil their need for belonging and passive reintegration into society.

Deuchar (2019) underscores the role of spirituality in transitioning both into and out of criminality, noting that such transitions are rarely linear and often complex. A study involving life history interviews with 17 former gang members in Denmark found that holistic spiritual interventions including meditation, yoga, and dynamic breathing exercises helped participants redefine their masculinity, improve mental health, and commit to long-term desistance (Deuchar, 2019). These findings suggest that integrating spirituality into rehabilitation can foster emotional resilience and facilitate a sustainable exit from criminal networks.

Winton (2014) argues that it is evident that present research on gangs has largely focussed on the nature and reasons for gang affiliation in Central America, Brazil and South Africa (Winton, 2014). In this regard, little attention has been given on the rehabilitative role of spirituality and religion. It is noted from this study that there is a gap in this area and a need for research, hence the attempt of the current research into the role that religiosity /spirituality can play in the reformation of former gang members. Rodgers (2009) cites Wolf (1969) and maintains that within Central America the research focus has been on the paradigm shift from the “peasant wars” from the twentieth century to the “urban wars” which highlights how present-day urban violence has its roots in the political unrest of the past. Recognition of the role of the urban spatial distribution in Central American as causative factors is of key focus together with the Manodura which is the tough crime policies for gang violence by the Salvadoran government. (Rodgers, 2009). If tough crime policies are used in South Africa in dealing with gang members it might facilitate a robust change for gang members to find a safe alternative to gang life. The pursuit of hedonistic lives will look much more enticing than a life plagued with war, loss of loved ones, drugs abuse etc. This can even be of significance in the South African context with reference to gangs in the Durban Metropolitan. The violent political unrest during the Apartheid Era could attribute and shape present day urban violence.

A substantial number of studies were conducted on Brazil’s concentrated gangs within prisons. (Butler, Slade &Dias, 2018).In Brazil in 2018, Gonzalez (2018) maintains that “narco gangs that rule over Rio’s favelas; for the police and the military, either fight or accept bribes from them, hence the general population is caught in the middle.”This is true even in South Africa where certain gangs have infiltrated every level of society from the police on the streets, to colonels, lawyers, and politicians. This study aims to see to what extent gangs work with or control police by accepting bribes. Studies pertaining to gangsterism within South Africa are dominated by research conducted predominantly within the Western Cape and within the Department of Correctional Services and little attention is on gang desistance within the South African perspective. “Although gangsterism is a national phenomenon, Western Cape gangs are much more sophisticated and are believed to account for almost 70% of all crime in the Western Cape” (Kinnes 2000:5). It is for this reason that more research on

gangsterism within the city of Durban needs to be investigated since most studies focus primarily on the Western Cape.

Gang formation within South Africa finds its roots in the Group Areas Act of 1950, which forcefully removed non-whites from their homes and relocating them to certain areas. Overcrowding caused by this forceful removal created in-fighting which fragmented into gangs. The 2013 police reports predicted approximately 100,000 gang recruits in the Western Cape region (Tenpas, 2019). "The most notorious gangs are the Number's Gang, which is predominantly a prison gang, (which is divided into three tiers: 26s, 27s, and 28s with the highest the 28s being the most violent.), the Americans are the largest gang in Cape Town, followed by Hard Livings, the Sexy Boys, the Firm, the Mongrels, the Junky Funky Kids who all control territory in and around Cape Town." (FCN - South Africa - Pub (thefinancialcrimenews.com)). This can also be said of the gangs in Durban and needs to be further investigated. Sydenham was designated as a Coloured area during the Apartheid Era. It has a high concentration of residents in apartment buildings and is known for several gangs who are constantly fighting for territory or monopoly of the drug trade among other reasons. This also needs to be further investigated.

Gangsterism has been an ongoing 'plague' globally, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg being hotbeds for the formation of South Africa's most notorious gangs. Simone Haysom states that gangs are far reaching and expand past the Western Cape. She further states, "Now we find connections between gangs in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban."

'We find connections between gangs in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban'
(no date a) 702. Available at: <https://www.702.co.za/articles/354819/we-find-connections-between-gangs-in-cape-town-johannesburg-and-durban>
(Accessed: 11 January 2024).

It is against this background that there is a need for rehabilitative intervention and spirituality/Sufism can play a positive role in rehabilitating offenders.

The researcher argues that the rehabilitation process is subject to failure when some elements of nurturing one into adulthood are not considered as rehabilitative intervention methods and these elements include spirituality/Sufism.

While extensive research exists on gang structures and their social dynamics in regions like Central America, Brazil, and South Africa (Winton, 2014), limited studies focus on the rehabilitative role of spirituality in the South African context. Much of the research on gangsterism in South Africa is concentrated in the Western Cape, where gangs are more structured and sophisticated (Kinnes, 2000). Despite gangsterism being a national phenomenon, gang activities in Durban remain understudied, necessitating further investigation into their dynamics and rehabilitative possibilities. Historically, gang formation in South Africa has roots in the forced removals of non-white communities under the Group Areas Act of 1950. These displacements led to overcrowding, social fragmentation, and the emergence of gangs as alternative support systems. Police reports from 2013 estimated around 100,000 gang members in the Western Cape (Tenpas, 2019). Studies highlight the involvement of gangs in corruption, drug trafficking, and violent crimes, with some members infiltrating law enforcement and political structures (Gonzalez, 2018).

Deuchar's research on gangs and spirituality presents a global perspective on the intersection of religiosity and criminal desistance. He argues that spiritual transformation plays a fundamental role in guiding gang members from antisocial to pro-social roles (Deuchar, 2019). This study extends Deuchar's work by examining whether a Sufi-based rehabilitative framework can serve as a viable intervention model for gang members in Durban. MacGillivray, Sumsion, and Wicks-Nicholls (2016) emphasize that spirituality is a core component of mental health interventions, particularly among adolescent inpatient clients. If spirituality can significantly impact mental health and well-being, its application in gang rehabilitation warrants exploration.

Ross Deuchar's study entitled *Gangs and spirituality: Global Perspectives*, focal point being the unification of spirituality, religiosity, and religion in the research of gang members. The research states "spirituality must clearly play a role in transitions in and out of crime, gangs and from antisocial to pro- social roles. But the role is complicated, rarely linear and nuanced at every step of the way." As stated above, spirituality is crucial in the changing of current gang members to that of former gang members. This spiritual element could be utilized in transforming former gang members from the

Durban Metropolitan to law abiding citizens who will never intend to re-enter their former lives.

Hence the fundamental premise of this study is its intention to investigate the operationalisation of spirituality/Sufism in helping former gang members rehabilitate or desist from crime and gangsterism. The study conducted by MacGillivray, Sumsion and Wicks-Nicholls (2016) on the mental health of clients considered spirituality as one core element in occupational therapy.

This study states “elements related to the individual and lifelong pursuits of the individual were most closely associated with spirituality while those items traditionally connected with spirituality and with external pursuits, activities, and relationships are considered less relevant by this population. Results suggest that spirituality is important to a majority of inpatient adolescent mental health clients.” This study gives the impetus to explore the need to research how it can assist former gang members from desisting in the Durban metropolitan.

1.3 Problem statement

This study aims to explore the role of spirituality/Sufism in rehabilitating current and former gang members. Previous research has highlighted the importance of spirituality in occupational therapy for mental health clients, and this study argues that this approach could be effective in rehabilitating gang members as well. While several studies have been conducted on this topic, few have focused on understanding spirituality/Sufism as a key component of the rehabilitation process. Despite the availability of rehabilitation methods, the problem of gangsterism continues to persist, suggesting that existing remedial techniques may be insufficient or not implemented correctly.

The significance of this study lies in highlighting the potential of spirituality/Sufism as a valuable tool in the rehabilitation of former and active gang members. The findings could inform stakeholders such as the Department of Correctional Services and NGOs in improving their rehabilitation programs and provide insights that could be applicable to other forms of rehabilitation as well. By recognizing the role of spirituality/Sufism in

rehabilitation, appropriate stakeholders can work towards enhancing the rehabilitation process for gang members and potentially reduce the prevalence of gangsterism in society.

1.4 Justification of the research

Despite bits and pieces of research on spirituality as a potential method for gang desistance, no comprehensive study has been conducted to make sense of the contrasting work in this field. Moreover, little research has been done on the role of religion or spirituality in rehabilitating offenders. This study aims to explore the gap in the literature by investigating how religion, spirituality, or Sufism played a role in rehabilitating former gang members.

The study highlights the significance of spirituality/Sufism as a rehabilitation remedy that is often overlooked during the process of helping former gang members to rehabilitate. The findings of the study are expected to benefit stakeholders, including the Department of Correctional Services and NGOs, by advancing the process of treatment for former gang members in the rehabilitation stage. It is important to note that the study's argument is based on the premise that spirituality/Sufism can be applied in conjunction with other forms of rehabilitation interventions.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the potential of spirituality/Sufism as a valuable tool for rehabilitating former gang members and calls for further exploration of its role in the rehabilitation process.

1.5 Aim of the study

The study aims to unearth the role played by spiritualism in rehabilitating gangsters in Durban. The focus is drawn on ex-gang members who were notorious in Durban and how they managed to shun away from crime using religion as their point of reference.

1.6 Objectives of the study

1. To explore the nature of gangsterism in the Durban Metropolitan.
2. To explore the role played by Sufism/spirituality in the rehabilitation of former and current gang members.
3. To explore the challenges encountered in the utilisation of Sufism/spirituality in rehabilitating former gang members.

1.7 Research questions

1. What is the nature of gangsterism in the Durban Metropolitan?
2. What is the role played by Sufism/spirituality in rehabilitating former and current gang members?
3. What challenges are encountered in the use of Sufism/spirituality in rehabilitating former gang members?

1.8 Definition of terms

(i) Sufism/spirituality

The definition of the term tassawuf which is the Arabic root of the term Sufi has the practice of all the great masters of this discipline. Shaykh Ahmed Zaruq indicated that "Sufism has over two thousand definitions, all of which go back to the sincerity of one's relationship with god (Qawa'id al-tasawwuf, year) Shaykh Ibn Qayyim states in Madarij al-salikin (2:307) "Sufism means good character." This study has used spirituality and Sufism interchangeably, according to its stance they are fundamentally similar. Furthermore, they both constitute the religious elements, the only difference lies on the point that Sufism is an Islamic dimension of spirituality. These concepts are used in this study so as to accommodate both Muslim and non-Muslims beliefs alike.

(ii) Gang

Jackson (2016) asserts that this is a group who spend time together particularly for crime commission purposes and they mostly share similar identities, signs and symbols. A gang for the purpose of this study is a group that has a similar purpose of breaking the law hence displaying their common identity.

The researcher has classified:

- a) Hijacking gangs whose job specification is the hijacking of vehicles in demand. They have a hierarchy.
- b) Taxi gangs – Highly organized with certain taxis only given permission to cooperate within a limited location. They are notorious for instigating 'wars' for territories.

c) Existing Gangs- The researcher is of the opinion that these gangs do have a certain hierarchy. They have control of drugs, prostitution rings etc.

d) Legal 'mafia' – generally made up of gang members who pre-dated the first South African elections. They have shunned the lime light and are now searching for life outside of crime. They are well connected and are 'respected' with both the Durban underworld as well as the Criminal Justice System hence referred to as Legal Mafia. They have established 'respect' which was earned throughout the history of their involvement.

The terms mentioned above are coined by gangsters or criminals with no formal basis.

The Colloquial terminology listed below is used in the thesis but does not derive from any formal convention hence it lacks referencing. Most terms are derived from Indian English which was used to connect people of Indian origin with different vernacular and was widely spoken.

1.9 Colloquial terminology

The Iani – a term that generally meant a person's boss in the work place, but in this context leader of the gang.

Main ous are those who have made a name for themselves and are well respected within the gang.

Crew of ous – members affiliated with a certain gang.

TDK- a group whose name originated from the Old Dutch Road in the Durban CBD.

1.10 Theoretical terminology

a) Desister: a person who has desisted or in the process of desisting from criminal/delinquent activities, gang affiliation or both (Healy, 2014). In this context it refers to ex gang members and those who resist engaging in gang activities.

b) Ex- criminal gang members: "are individuals who have previously been involved in criminal street gangs but have since left the gang lifestyle behind.

They have made a conscious decision to disassociate themselves from the gang and its activities.”

c) Gang associates: are peripheral members of the gang who are not yet accepted into or have already exited the gang but have ties through friendship or familial connections (Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2014).

d) Generative exercises: is a pro-social activity that can include guidance, care and nurture of others who need support (Erickson, 1965).

e) Redemption self: is a technical term used in criminology. It refers to the phenomenon in which ex-offenders by practicing generative exercise redeem themselves and adopt a pro-social identity. The adopted pro-social identity assists the former reformed offenders in maintaining desistance from crime and being accepted by the conventional society (Maruna 2001).

1.11 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

As illustrated above, Chapter One is an introductory chapter which provides a background to the study, outlines study objectives, and explains the need for the study as well as the research questions the study sought to answer.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Two is an overview of the literature review pertaining to gangsterism on a global scale, highlighting the common notoriety of famous gangs such as the Italian Mafia and Yakuza. It is narrowed down to fit within not only the South African context, but it is further confined to Gangsterism within the Durban metropolitan. Also it brings to the fore the crucial role of ‘Desistance Theory of criminology’ which can be a major turning point for almost any hardened criminal or gang members. Empirical research into spirituality or religiosity as a practical method of pushing the trajectory of cold-blooded killers is explored as well as the method utilized for total rehabilitation. In so doing the researcher can locate the gap this study seeks to fill.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The chapter describes the methodology employed in the study making use of qualitative ethnographic methods in order to make possible the gathering and analysis of data. Particular focus is given to 'life-story' research, where the subjective lived experiences of the researched is central. It describes the research setting, data collection instruments, data collection, and data analysis. It also describes in detail how issues of rigor and ethical considerations were addressed.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings and data analysis

The chapter provides the reader with an insight into the findings derived from the data set. A map of emergent themes is provided in tabular manner and the Chapter further captures the socio-demographic information of the participants before presenting the findings. Findings are drawn from the interviews with 10 participants and to key informants on the role of spirituality or sufism on the rehabilitation of gangsters.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter summarises and assesses the key findings in the dissertation and makes propositions toward further research in this area. It makes recommendations for further research and policy formulation to the Department of Correctional Services as well as religious clerics for the urgency and execution of spiritual or religious re-generative exercises for total rehabilitation and reintegration of criminals into society.

1.12 Summary

This chapter's main objective was to provide background information for the study. It briefly explored the idea of spirituality or sufism in crime desistance. This chapter outlined the research questions and objectives that guided the study's focus, as well as a detailed summary of the entire dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically evaluates and analyses prevailing global literature on gangsterism and gang violence whilst strategically narrowing it down to the city of Durban, South Africa. This study aims to explain the nature of gangsterism within the Durban Metropolitan. Review of literature indicates that most gang studies conducted in South Africa are mainly dealing with gangs of the Western Cape and the infamous prison number gang. Hardly any research into gangs in Durban has been conducted and most of the information is taken from newspaper articles which serve as the primary source to understand the nature of gangsterism in Durban. The review of literature will include empirical studies to substantiate the connection between Sufism/spirituality and other rehabilitation remedies.

2.2 Gangsterism Globally

Gangsterism is defined as the culture of belonging to organized gangs with the aim of committing violence and crime (Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). Gangs are a global phenomenon found in most societies around the world. By definition, gangs are social groups located in geographical territories that use symbols, verbal and non-verbal communication to express their belonging to the group (De Wet, 2016; Cooper & Ward, 2012). Most gangs are characterised by violence (Winton, 2014). Many countries experience gangsterism and battle to curb it. In current times, its growing emergence has largely been attributed to poverty, inequality and unemployment (De Wet, 2016). For many years, gang violence has received attention from both academics and the media (John, 2005). Despite this, the problem continues unabated.

Although multilateral aid agencies have been established to work against rising gangsterism, figures demonstrate a marked lack of success. In 2012 the United States recorded a 15% increase in number of gangs from 2006 to make a total of 30 700 gangs (National Gang Center, 2012). The United States alone has 2000 gang-related deaths each year (Pyrooz & Densley, 2018). In the United Kingdom, the National Crime Agency states that close to 5000 gangs are operating and that they use billions of

pounds not only for employment but for also having on their payroll high ranking officials within the government (ref).

Globally gangsterism has become a very organised form of crime. For example, Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar from India leads an organization involved in drug smuggling and terrorism. His organisation has been described as a “corporate empire with multiple verticals looked after by separate managers. It is spread across Asia, Africa, Europe and even North America, with distinct wings that run guns, plant bombs, print fake currencies, buy and sell real estate, run factories, smuggle drugs and kill people” (Ahuja, 2021). In Japan, the ‘Japanese’ Yakuza are the strongest force in organised crime and gangsterism. According to Jake Adelstein (2017), “Japan currently has over 22 designated separate organized crime groups with office buildings, corporate logos (代紋), and some even have pension plans; they are collectively referred to as “the yakuza”

The Italian Mafia is the most widely known name in the gang world and gang lore. It has set the standards in terms of operations, hierarchy, and philosophy in the world today. To highlight the extensive problem of gangsterism and the size of some of the most influential gang organisation, one journalist was cited to have said “Italy’s largest mafia trial in three decades has begun, with 900 witnesses testifying against more than 350 people, including politicians and officials charged with being members of the powerful ‘Ndrangheta,” (Tondo, 2021).

2.3 Measuring the Extent of Gang Problems

The National Gang Centre reveals that annual estimates of the number of gangs have averaged around 27,000 nationally compared to previous times. From 1996 there was a decline in the number of gangs up to 2003, after which there was a steady increase through 2012. The most recent estimate of more than 30,000 gangs represents a 15 percent increase from 2006 and is the highest annual estimate since 1996. (National Gang Center, n.d.)

Table 2.1: Estimated Number of Gangs, 1996-2012

Year	Estimated Number of Gangs
1996	30,800
1997	30,500
1998	28,700
1999	26,200
2000	24,700
2001	23,500
2002	21,800
2003	20,100
2004	24,000
2005	26,700
2006	26,700
2007	27,300
2008	27,900
2009	28,100
2010	29,400
2011	29,900
2012	30,700

Source: National Gang Center (n.d.)

Table 2.2: Estimated Number of Gang Members 1996-2012

Year	Estimated Number of Gang Members
1996	846,500
1997	816,000
1998	780,000
1999	840,500
2000	772,500
2001	693,500
2002	731,500
2003	710,500
2004	760,000
2005	789,500
2006	785,000
2007	788,000
2008	774,000
2009	731,000
2010	756,000
2011	782,500
2012	850,000

Source: National Gang Center (n.d.)

The number of gang members swings up and down and this still leaves the phenomenon of gangsterism unresolved. There are numerous crimes committed

owing to gangsterism and are categorised as such because of their 'nature'. The number of gangsters seems to be increasing yearly and creating a more difficult task for law enforcement. Over the past decade, annual estimates of the number of gang members have averaged around 770,000 nationally. The most recent estimate of approximately 850,000 gang members represents an 8.6 percent increase over the previous year. (National Gang Center, n.d.)

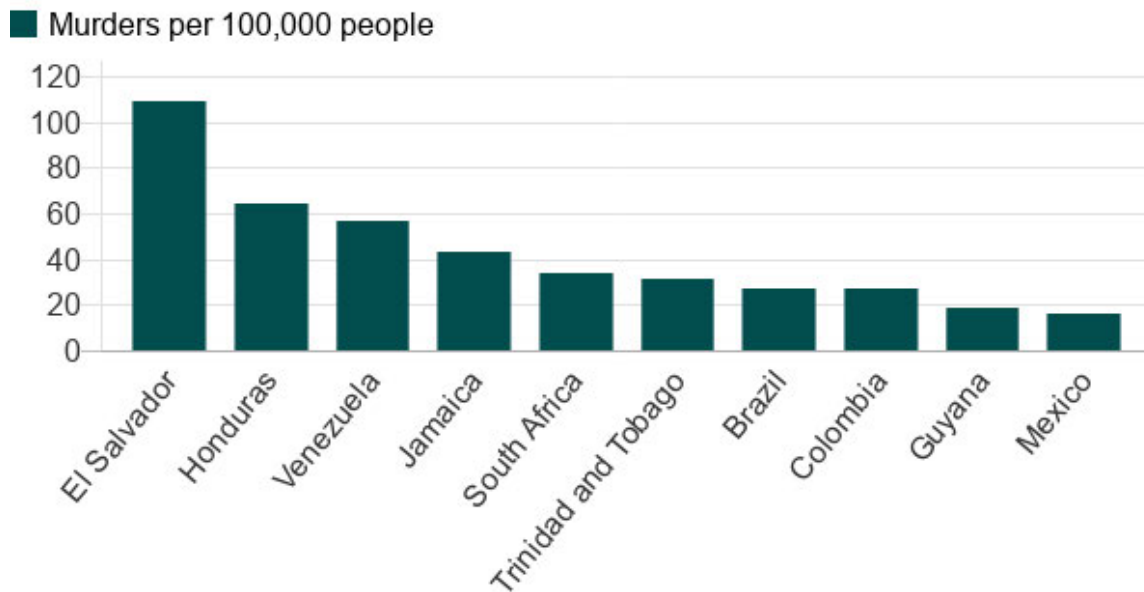
2.4 Gangsterism within South Africa

Gang violence is a plague to the world, not exclusive to South Africa. The issue of gangs, and ensuing gang-related violence, predates democracy in South Africa. Raga and Heleta (2021) claim that gangsterism has existed in South Africa from as early as the 1950s. During this period, disadvantaged coloured, Indian, and black working-class communities used group vigilantism as a mechanism for protection from apartheid authorities. As the vigilante groups grew in size, criminal elements began to filter through their ranks and subsequently their focus turned to organized crime. Gradually, people released from prisons infiltrated the vigilante groups, and these groups became indistinguishable from the criminal gangs they were initially supposed to eradicate (Raga & Heleta, 2021). However, concerning is that more than after 28 years of democracy, gangsterism continues to affect safety of many communities in South Africa.

Looking at the South African context, gangsterism has been increasing over the last several years. Studies show that 900 people died from gang-related violence in the first six months of 2019 (Davis, 2019). Charles (2019) states that the murder rate in Cape Town rose 70% between 2009/10 and 2017/18. Businesstech (2020) reports on a Gallup poll in which it concluded that South Africa is the 5th most dangerous country in the world out of 144 reviewed. Gang activity has become prevalent in many schools in South Africa. A study by Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) suggests that gangsterism is a cause for concern in South African schools and is an important external factor that exacerbate violence in schools. Various attempts have been made by the government to curb the rise of gangsterism. The government introduced an integrated National Anti-gangsterism Strategy (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2017).

Figure 2.1: Graph showing countries with the highest murder rate in 2015

Countries with the highest murder rate in 2015



Source: UNODC



Data by the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) in 2015 ranked South Africa fifth amongst the top ten countries with the highest murder rate in the world. Statistics from sap.gov.za placed gang-related violence sixth in the categories of contact crimes a total of 2598 reported gang-related crimes in South Africa during 2019/2020. This shows the magnitude of gangsterism within South Africa.

2.4.1 Gangs of the Western Cape

In South Africa there are areas that have marked cases of gangster activity such as the townships on Cape Flats in Cape Town. In the early 1980s it was estimated that there were between 90 000 and 100 000 gang members on the Cape Flats (Pinnock, 1985). Du Toit (2014) citing McMaster, states that gang recruitment in the Western Cape region is between eighty and one hundred thousand and goes on to cite Kinne's writing that gangs are "believed to account for almost 70% of all crime in the Western Cape." The Western Cape government (2019) reports that the province accounted for 83% of the national total of gang-related murders between 2017 and 2018. A recent report indicates that in the period 2018/19 there were 938 gang-related murders in the Western Cape (Business Tech, 2019). Community efforts to counter gang activities in

the Western Cape included establishing neighbourhood watches, anti-crime forums and police community forums, however with little success (Van Wyk & Theron, 2005).

2.4.2 Gangsterism within the Durban CBD (and surrounding areas)

Most of the research into gangsterism in South Africa focused on the Cape Flats and there is very little research on the issue within the Durban central district and the surrounding areas. In the last four years, the suburbs of Durban have experienced gang violence with some of the major figures being executed. Among them are Magesh Naidoo (Mngadi & Njoli, 2018) who was associated with the gang known as the 'Town Duchin Kids' and Yaganathan Pillay known as Teddy Mafia, a drug dealer and mob boss (Goba, 2021). Newspaper reports in the past decade on incident of gang related violence have been increasing in the province. The Independent reported that while figures could not be independently verified by police, community members say more than 20 people have been killed in the past three months alone, paying the price for the 'Hard Livings' gangsters trying to wrest control over the lucrative illicit drug trade in Sydenham (December 11, 2021). In other parts of KwaZulu Natal it was reported that a war erupted between two youth-based gangs, namely the Last Warning and the Juveniles in Osizweni (Swemmer, 2022). Another news story reported on how Children as young as 13 recruited into gangs in Durban's Wentworth town (Singh, 2023). Recently, a gang of young men was arrested in Durban in connection with a string of robberies at schools around the Pinetown district (eNCA, 2023).

Contextualizing the role of religion and spirituality in Durban

In the context of Durban, South Africa, gang violence is often linked to socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality. These systemic issues contribute to the allure of gang membership as a means of survival and social belonging. Durban's unique socio-political and economic landscape plays a significant role in both the challenges faced by former gang members and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs. For example, the high levels of unemployment, social marginalization, and economic disparity in certain neighborhoods of Durban often create an environment where gangs provide a sense of protection, identity, and economic opportunity, even if those opportunities are criminal in nature. These factors are pivotal in understanding why individuals join gangs and why gang membership can be so difficult to escape without significant external support (Schutte & Reddy,

2012). Therefore, it is crucial to consider how local religious practices and spiritual frameworks, including Sufism, fit within the broader cultural and community landscape, as well as how they intersect with or complement secular rehabilitation models. For instance, community-based secular programs such as job training, educational support, and family reintegration programs can be critical in addressing the root socio-economic causes of gang membership and in providing former gang members with practical tools for rebuilding their lives (Schutte & Reddy, 2012).

2.5 Causes of Gang Involvement

Gangsterism is not a new phenomenon, but it is still a problem that needs to be urgently addressed. Criminal street gangs are responsible for most of the crimes in recent years. They have been categorised amongst the most serious crime problems in South Africa (Coursehero, n.d.). It is important to understand the factors that may cause individuals to be part of a gang. There are several risk factors that can make people vulnerable to join gangs. Risk factors have often been studied from a multi-level perspective, namely at an individual level, within the family, from peer friendships, at school and within the community (Howell & Egley, 2005).

On an individual level lack of responsibility, reduced self-control, low morality, poor interpersonal skills and weak prosocial bonds were identified as predictive risks for gang affiliation (Alleyne & Wood, 2013; Salaam, 2011). Economic disadvantage was also identified as a predictive risk as gang affiliation may appear to be an effective way of achieving financial gain in difficult economic situation (Howell & Egley, 2005). Gang affiliation is seen as an avenue to gain status and money. Parenting and familial relationships also influence gang affiliation. Low parental supervision, familial gang involvement and difficult family dynamics such as abuse and neglect increased chances of gang affiliation (Kakar, 2005; Sirpal, 2002). Hence, gangs are perceived to provide members with a sense of friendship, camaraderie, and family that they are not receiving at home. For others joining a gang is part of family tradition.

Peer influence is another factor to consider on gang affiliation. Gang members before joining the gang usually had friendships with 'deviant peers' or they had been friends with gang-involved individuals (Farmer & Hairston, 2013). Thus, they are more likely to be frequently motivated to also join gangs to satisfy their need for companionship. Communities with highly visible gang presence may present a risk of gang affiliation

(Alleyne & Wood, 2013; Howell & Egley, 2005). In such cases gang affiliation seems to be motivated by seeking protection as individuals feel that their survival may depend on joining a gang.

The above reasons include many, but not all, of the contributing factors to gang involvement. Recognising and acknowledging the causes of gang involvement should lead to establishing ways to combat them. These combative ways fall under the category of prevention. Sufism as a religion can be categorised as one of the prevention mechanisms used by people who were gang members and those who are still gang members. The government also has a huge role to play in curbing the scourge of gangsterism.

2.6 The role of government and society in facilitating desistance from gangsterism

Desisting from committing a crime is always accompanied by a myriad of challenges, particularly for those who have been indulging in crime for quite some time. In that regard, it becomes challenging to prevent recidivism in gangsters, and it is believed that the only way to help offenders preclude recidivism is by assisting them to desist from crime (Nel, 2017).

The South African government is too seeped in corruption to create any proper model for gang formation desistance. The biggest names in South Africa's underworld network have presidential level affiliation and in instances offer protection similar to the Yakuza's position in Japan. An era of "legal Mafia" is now what plagues South Africa. In an article by investigative reporter Sam Sole, he states that "The war for the soul of the ANC is a war for the country. Gangsters, cops, gangster-cops and gangster-politicians have a big stake in the outcome." (Sole, 2019)

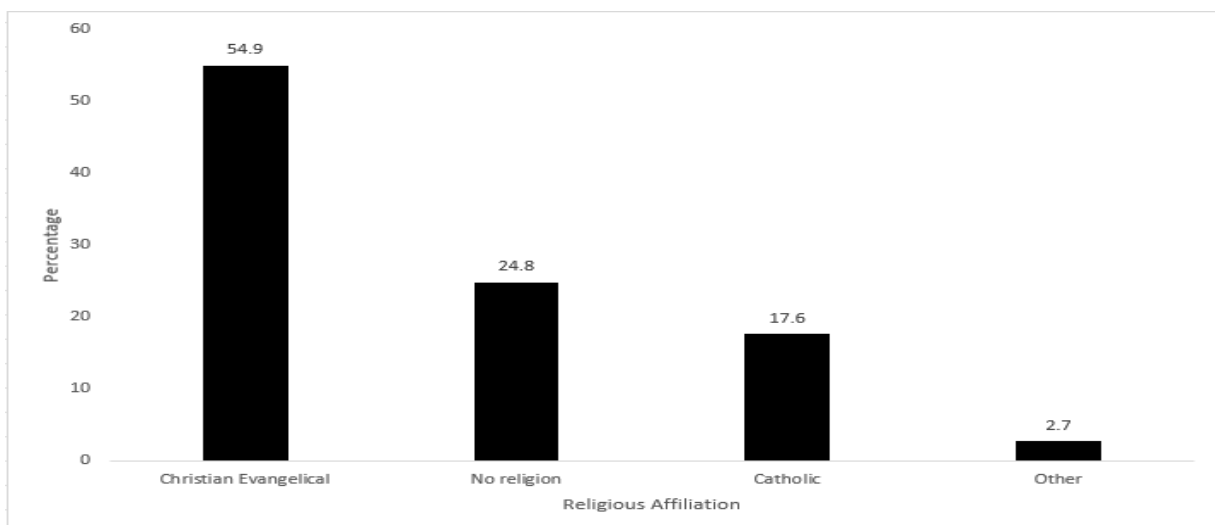
Unfortunately, for the South African people, positions of power were given to incompetent politicians. 'Operation Thunder' formulated by the South African Police Service's anti-gang unit was ineffective and held no traces of religious desisters. Whilst an overwhelming number of studies through the ages have proven the effectiveness of religiosity as a desister for every type of criminal, religion remains a technique which seems to have been dismissed altogether.

2.7 The role of Religion in rehabilitating former gang members

Meditation is known for its pivotal role in every spiritual discipline and has an overwhelming number of cases, which strengthens the effectiveness of this science, as a desister. The Transcendental Meditation technique, formulated by, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi “span the fields of psychology, physiology, and sociology” (Alexander et al., 2003). Jacqueline Lucas (1985) in her thesis ‘Sufism and Curing’, explores the effectiveness of Sufism for the treatment of psychiatric disorders, and demonstrated that it yielded positive outcomes by utilizing this science. Sufism is of course much more than a system of curing illnesses. It is mysticism, and diverse in its manifestations.

Numerous studies reveal that gangs are a form of social organisation that provide marginalised youth with a collective identity and a sense of belonging. Cruz, et al (2017) reveal that youth often lack an identity and the gang can help provide individuals with an identity. Churches also can serve as organizations that give individuals a sense of belonging. Religious organizations, especially evangelical churches, have been filling the void in the disintegrated communities and have provided gang members with alternative venues for dealing with personal crises. The role of Sufism in this regard is viewed so important as most of the aspects of this religion act as a stumbling block for the offenders to continue involving themselves in criminal activities.

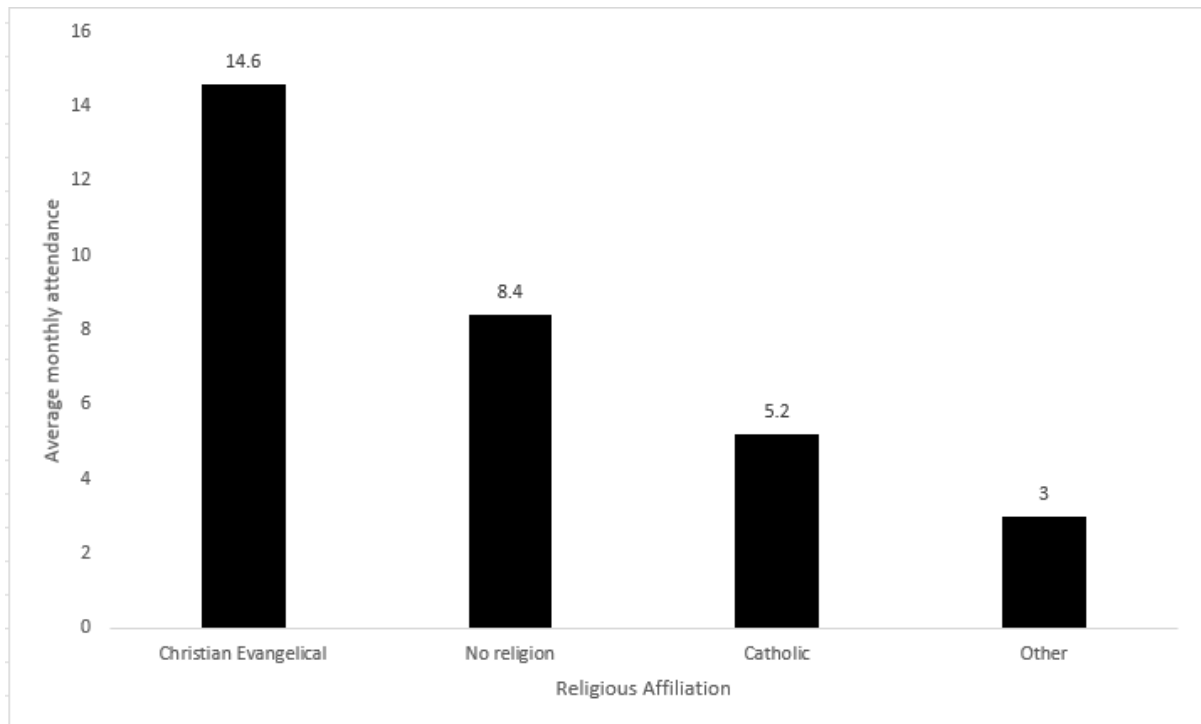
Figure 2.2: Religious Affiliation of gang members



Source: Cruz, Rosen, Amaya and Vorobyeva (2017)

A study conducted by Cruz et al (2017) reveals that about 75, 2% of gang members consider themselves religiously affiliated. Evangelical gang members are considered the largest and leading group with 54.9% identifying as affiliated. Self-identified Catholics, both practising and non-practising, constituted 17.6% of the individuals surveyed; other religious groups, such as Protestants and Mormons, were much less common among gang members' religious affiliations.

Figure 2.3: Church attendance by religious affiliation among gang members



Source: Cruz, Rosen, Amaya and Vorobyeva (2017)

Dudley (2012) quoted in (Cruz et al., 2017), “Churches, especially Catholic and Evangelical Christian organizations, have played an important role in the life of disadvantaged communities laden with gangs and some churches participated in the 2012 truce between the gangs”. In table Two (2) Evangelicals have higher levels of religiosity than members of other religious denominations, attending a religious service 15 times per month on average.

2.8 The nexus between Sufism/Spirituality and other rehabilitation remedies

The Colombo family in the United States is known to be amongst the most powerful and bloodiest of crime families. Hamilton, (2011) writes, “The Colombo crime family — an 83-year-old operation that once ruled New York’s waterfront and has been the

most bloodthirsty of the city's five Mafia families." From this crime family, though, emerges one of the most famous stories of religion as a desister. Mike Franzese who held the rank of a caporegime in the family is a true example of what Desistance Theory calls "redemption self." His appearance at a church is described thus, "On Sunday morning, the former "Prince of the Mafia" delivered a message of redemption and forgiveness at Northside Baptist Church. A born-again Christian, Franzese told the crowd: "Once God's got a hold of your heart, He will never let you go," and then goes on to state, "Franzese is a high-profile, much-interviewed (History Channel and National Geographic TV) ex-member of the New York City mob. He walked away from La Cosa Nostra and is still alive to not only talk about it but to give his Christian testimony" (Cola Daily, 2020).

The understanding and application of religion are immense and touch on every facet of existence. Every major religion has a spiritual dimension as well as practical exercises for an individual to become 'religious' in nature. The following can be well said of religion "Religion is a vast subject. Actually, that's an understatement. Religion touches on everything about the world around us, from the explanations we seek for the creation of the universe and our purpose within to the higher power behind these things to the way we behave, treat one another, and interact with society, to the values, laws, and beliefs that govern us. Whether you are a person of faith, a sceptic, or something in between, the concepts of spirituality, organized religion, and morality affect us all" (The Best Schools, 2018).

Some believe religion and spirituality to be intertwined since the fundamentals complement each other and can be viewed as the same. Nehaesha (2021) states, "Spirituality can be religious or secular". Spirituality and religion are known for being "positive predictors" of an individual's character although the consistency might somewhat differ (Villani et al., 2019). Spirituality as a separate discipline has been explored, operationalised and implemented in various sciences around the world, e.g. nursing. "Nurses consider spirituality as a factor that may influence an individual's health and/or response to illness, death and dying." (Howden, 1992). Spirituality has found its way even into the field of empirical medical applications. This is affirmed in statements such as technology has led to phenomenal advances in medicine and has given us the ability to prolong life. However, in the past few decades' physicians have attempted to balance their care by reclaiming medicine's more spiritual roots,

recognizing that until modern times spirituality was often linked with health care.” (Puchalski, 2001).

Qualitative research done on thirteen prisoners in Texas USA is amongst many that affirm that spirituality is a ‘powerful’ desister. The conviction of the study on religion’s effectiveness for rehabilitation is expressed by Wu (2009) “Wu reported on several significant findings regarding the benefits of practising spirituality or religion while incarcerated. Of note, all thirteen participants perceived that a relationship with "God" served as a protective factor during their time of incarceration. It is worth mentioning that although the term ‘God’ was not used in the interview guide questions, all participants in this study referenced "God" during the interview. Additionally, 100% of participants reported a mystical experience while incarcerated that they attributed to their personal faith”.

In Thailand, Buddhist techniques used at the most famous ministry shed light on the veracity of spirituality in the reformation of criminals of all sorts. Reports indicate that “Drunks from Thailand's underworld, heroin-addicted Vietnam veterans and Laotian refugees from the Golden Triangle trying to get off opium have all journeyed to the monastery set in jagged limestone mountains 140km north of Bangkok to battle their demons” (The Herald, 2006).

Throughout history, in every major religion around the world, the central focus for rehabilitation is anchored in the belief in God. In Judeo-Christian cosmology and eschatology, writes Skotnicki (2019), “- the principal source for the correctional vision to be espoused in this study- the consummation of history will reveal the unity of all life in God.” Most religious people will affirm that the scientific definition of energy is tantamount to a religious person’s definition of the soul “what the theologian calls spirit and the scientist call energy is synonymous” (Skotnicki, 2019).

The secret was revealed in an insightful positive criminology study of a unique Sufi-Islamic way of rehabilitation (Hawa-Kamel, 2018). The spiritual approach to criminology, i.e. examining criminality through the spiritual lens, has found its way and has expanded within this scientific claim. Ronel & Ben Yair, (2018) write, the study of spirituality and its relation to criminology is currently growing. This approach can also fall under the umbrella of positive criminology. The term positive criminology was coined by Ronel and Elisha which is described thus by Kewley et al., (2020), positive

criminology brings together models and theories of criminology in which a positive focus is central to their philosophy.

Sufism and spirituality are indispensable remedies which could be successfully implemented in the rehabilitation of individuals who commit crimes. According to (Muedini, 2015) Sufism provides a positive message in its application. (Malik & Hinnells, 2006) state that “Sufism was characterized by few rules and regulations for the mystic and his followers”, and only later did beliefs begin to become more “standardized”. Some scholars have viewed spirituality as based on finding ways to stabilise the relationship with others, searching for meaning and norms as key elements premised on other discourses. (Dressler & Markus, 2007). A study by Saari et al., 2020, confirms the critical importance of spiritual techniques in the realignment of offenders by utilizing specific methods extracted from the science of Sufism. The study, which involved a sample of 19 male drug addicts whose addiction was remedied in 12 spiritual intervention sessions states, the study shows that religion and spiritual teachings specifically Sufi techniques are important to the rehabilitation of drug addicts.

Another similar study was conducted in Indonesia with a sample of sixteen participants. The study states, “The results of a thematic analysis revealed that the practice of dhikr was the essential therapeutic component for improving the participants’ mental health. “It further elaborated how the psychological elements within the Sufi tradition were “comparable with the process of purification of the soul in Sufism” (Al-Issa, 2000).

Fifty studies on the relationship between religion and crime were conducted, paying special attention to how criminality and particularly religiosity were operationalized in each study. The studies showed the connection between church attendance and crime rates and how lower crime rates were a direct result, frequent church attenders have lower crime rates than infrequent attenders (Ellis, 1985). Lyon (1941) states that if society is to discover the restorative possibilities of its offenders, it is essential that we look beneath the superficial factors of environment and other material elements and seek the inherent spiritual but dormant qualities of character.

The Mufti-Mustafti method for rehabilitation and re-integration of Islamic terrorists further endorses the critical role of religion’s focal beliefs. It further elucidates that

“Religious counselling is one of the most important components of religious rehabilitation programmes as practised across the world today.”

In a study conducted on U.S prisoner’s re-integration titled “Faith-based efforts to improve prisoner re-entry,” both sides of the political divide have demonstrated interest in religious methods for social dilemmas (Mears et al., 2006). It highlighted the role of religious and social programs within the confines of prison and continued post-incarceration; concurring with (Solomon et al., 2004) argues that the reality is that many released prisoners may in fact participate in one or more community-based services.

In a study conducted by Cruz, et al (2017) the authors indicate that religion remains one of the remedies for gangsterism as it provides the gangsters with comfort during the difficult times they have gone through. In this regard, spirituality remains a crucial form of the rehabilitation technique that must not be disregarded when providing former gang members with rehabilitation remedies.

Gang involvement is often rooted in socio-economic hardships, criminal subcultures, and dysfunctional family dynamics. Rehabilitation for former gang members requires multifaceted approaches that address both individual and collective challenges. Religion and spirituality have been recognized as significant components of gang rehabilitation, offering transformative processes that foster personal growth, social reintegration, and moral regeneration. Among the religious traditions explored in the literature, Sufism has emerged as a prominent model, especially in the context of South Africa, for its emphasis on spiritual healing and inner transformation. However, a critical analysis of the literature reveals several limitations in the current focus on Sufism, as well as the need for a broader comparative framework that includes both religious and secular approaches to rehabilitation.

Much of the literature on the role of religion in gang rehabilitation focuses on Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam that emphasizes inner transformation, mercy, and repentance (Hidayah et al., 2016). Sufism encourages practices such as prayer, meditation, and self-reflection, all of which aim to promote personal healing and moral regeneration. In the context of gang rehabilitation, these practices have been credited with facilitating individuals’ disassociation from criminal behaviour by cultivating new values and a sense of divine compassion. This transformative process, often

described as a form of spiritual awakening, is said to help former gang members abandon their violent pasts in favour of peaceful and productive lives (Hidayah et al., 2016).

While Sufism's emphasis on spirituality is valuable, it is important to consider how other religious traditions, such as Christianity or indigenous African spiritual practices, may contribute similarly to gang rehabilitation. Additionally, secular approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), restorative justice, and community-based rehabilitation, have proven effective in promoting behavioural change and reintegration (Mpofu, 2024). These secular models often focus on psychological healing, behavioural modification, and social rehabilitation, which address the underlying psychological and social dynamics that lead individuals to join gangs in the first place (Giordano et al., 2008; Caldwell et al., 2013). Sufism, with its focus on personal transformation, inner peace, and moral regeneration, offers a deeply spiritual pathway to healing that helps individuals disconnect from their past criminal behaviours and embrace new values. Its emphasis on practices like prayer, meditation, repentance, and mercy can lead to profound internal change, offering a sense of spiritual growth and connection to a higher power that facilitates the healing of past traumas (Hidayah et al., 2016).

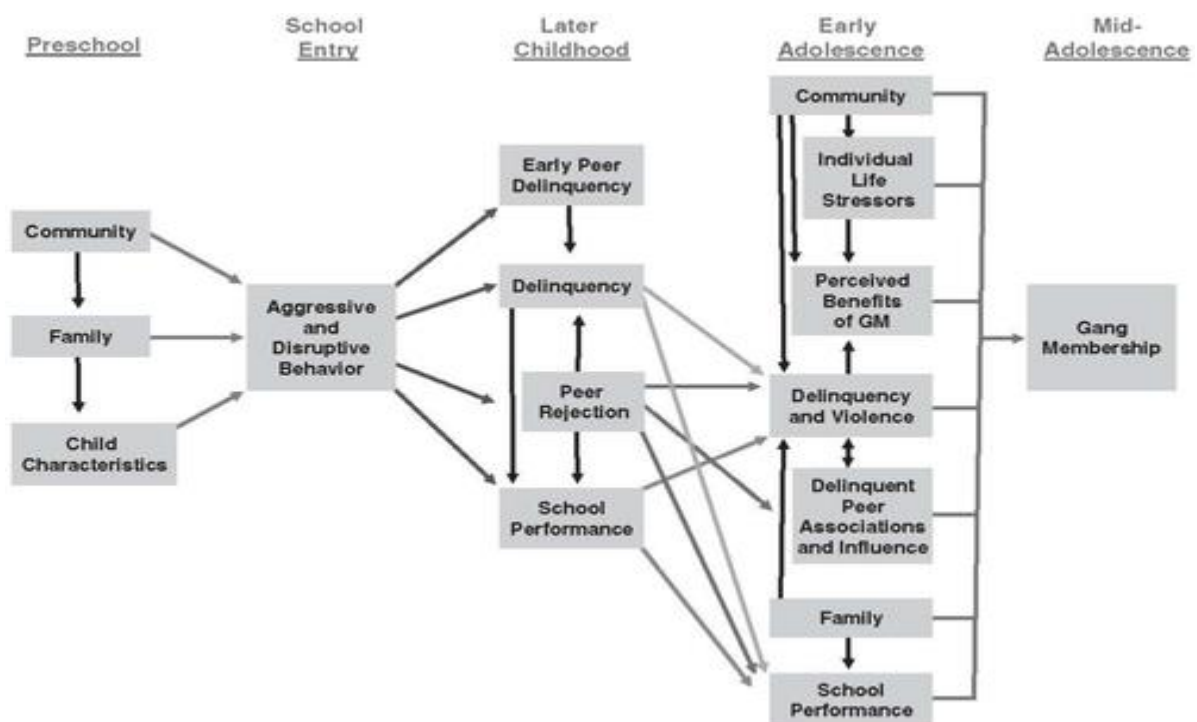
Gang involvement is frequently tied to social dynamics, such as peer pressure, family dysfunction, and community alienation (Schutte & Reddy, 2012). While Sufism addresses the individual's spiritual transformation, it may overlook the social and familial factors that perpetuate gang membership. Social reintegration, including rebuilding relationships with family members and re-entering the workforce, is essential for long-term rehabilitation and desistance from crime. Programs that emphasize community engagement, family therapy, and practical skill-building may be needed in conjunction with spiritual interventions to address these systemic issues (Voll, 1997).

The reliance on Sufism as a predominantly individualistic spiritual model also raises questions about its applicability in secular or multi-faith environments. The specific religious teachings of Sufism may not resonate with all individuals, especially those who do not identify with Islam or adhere to religious traditions. The emphasis on Sufism's cultural and religious specificity may limit its broader applicability in diverse

contexts, particularly in secular rehabilitation programs where spirituality might not play a central role. Therefore, while Sufism’s transformative potential is evident, it should be considered in conjunction with other rehabilitation models that may be more inclusive and adaptable to various populations (Koenig, 2009).

Similarly, restorative justice programs aim to repair the harm caused by crime through dialogue and reconciliation between offenders, victims, and the community (Mpfu et al., 2024). These programs are designed to address the relational and communal aspects of rehabilitation, which are critical for successful reintegration into society. While spiritual models like Sufism emphasize personal transformation, secular approaches often provide practical tools for behavioural change and community reintegration. A holistic approach to gang rehabilitation may involve a combination of both models, addressing the spiritual, psychological, and social needs of former gang members.

Figure 2.4: The Life-Cycle Approach to Gang Prevention



Source: By Well & Egley, 2005

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.4073/csr.2015.18>

2.9 Principal theories

This is an attempt to provide a suitable theoretical framework for understanding the abstinence of 'offensive' behaviour of former gang members in the Durban Metropolitan; while being guided by the Desistance Theory to comprehensively identify the probable reasons as to why people cease and sustain the cessation from offending. The main purpose of adopting this theoretical framework is to develop an understanding of the switching from criminal behaviour to abstaining from being involved in criminal activities of gangsterism by closely looking at the following elements:

What could be the driving factors for the abstinence of committing gang-related crimes in the Durban Metropolitan?

Exploring this behaviour (of abstinence), by assessing the associated daily activities done in the rehabilitation process of offenders, and further gain a better understanding of the challenges faced in the rehabilitation process of former gang members.

Weaver (2019) asserts that Desistance Theory focuses on people discontinuing offending and sustaining it rather than focusing on why people offend and their desires for offending. The theory strives to explain the process by which offenders change their criminal behaviour and come to live life free from criminality. Criminological interest in desistance developed in the 1970s and 1980s, (e.g., Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Meisenhelder, 1977, Rand, 1987; Shover, 1983). Since this time, a range of empirical studies and principles associated with Desistance Theory seeks to account for and explain desistance have been advanced. Various research studies have explored processes of desistance from crime and provided explanations accounting for structural and individual levels factors (Fernando, 2021). In the sections below the four (4) important elements that try to explain Desistance Theory are discussed (Weaver, 2019).

Individual and agentic: This principle is based on the established links between age and certain criminal behaviours. Most importantly, it focuses on explaining desistance within age and maturation. This element suggests that offenders essentially grow out of criminality. In continuation, the agentic explanation of desistance is perpetuated by rational choice principles.

Social and Structural: This principle mainly includes social bonds and social control. It generally advances an association between desistance and external circumstances to the individual (including the individual's reaction to and interaction with those external circumstances). The significance of ties to family, employment or educational programmes which are considered to create a stake in conformity is taken into consideration.

Interactionist: Interactionist theories broadly emphasise the significance of subjective changes in the person's sense of self and identity, and as part of that, their aspirations, in response to their (changing) social contexts.

Situational: This principle illustrates how various aspects of individuals' social environments and situated routine activities also influence behaviour. The situational factor states that an individual's criminal behaviour can change when one or more features of their surrounding environment is altered (Bottoms, 2014). For example, changes in places of residence, the avoidance of criminogenic spaces and disassociation or separation from peers who offend can lead to desistance.

For this study, Desistance Theory will be applied to demonstrate how religion and spirituality (Sufism) may be instrumental in influencing the desistance of former and 'current' gang members. It is argued by Weaver (2019) that Desistance Theory and its interpretation in both policy and practice, remains very individualistic in focus, and all too often disconnected from specific analyses of the cultural and structural contexts in which both offending, and desistance take place.

Desistance Theory has made significant contributions to understanding how individuals cease criminal behaviour, focusing on the role of personal identity and agency in the decision to desist from crime. However, the theory's individualistic emphasis on personal transformation and internal motivation tends to overshadow the structural and systemic factors that play a critical role in shaping an individual's ability to cease and sustain desistance from criminal activities. These external factors such as poverty, inequality, and systemic discrimination are deeply embedded in the socio-economic context within which former gang members operate, influencing not only their initial involvement in gangs but also their potential for successful rehabilitation (Giordano et al., 2008; Schutte & Reddy, 2012).

For instance, poverty and lack of economic opportunity can limit access to essential resources, such as employment and education, which are key to breaking free from a criminal past (Farrall, 2002). Inequality and systemic discrimination further exacerbate these challenges, often leaving marginalized individuals without viable alternatives to criminal behaviour. Gang membership, for many, offers a sense of belonging and a source of income in a system where structural barriers hinder upward mobility (Vold et al., 2002). By focusing solely on identity change and individual agency, Desistance Theory may overlook the significant external pressures and challenges these individuals face in their efforts to desist from crime. Acknowledging that individuals are not only shaped by their internal desires and motivations but also by the socio-economic conditions they live in allows for a more comprehensive approach to gang rehabilitation. Structural interventions such as access to education, job training, social services, and addressing systemic inequalities would complement the individual-focused aspects of desistance, leading to more sustainable rehabilitation efforts (Schutte & Reddy, 2012).

2.10 Applicability of Sufism as a desister

The religion-crime relationship has been empirically established since the 1970's with evidence indicating that religion can potentially contribute to non-recidivism or desistance (Jang & Johnson, 2017). Other studies suggest that religious involvement tends to decrease crime partly because it is likely to increase the fear of punishment because of the moral compass of knowing what is right and wrong (Smith, 2003). Scholars argue that Muslim beliefs and behaviours reduce crime (Qasim, 2018). There is an increasing interest in applying religion to better understand and explain desistance and this can be particularly beneficial for the city of Durban where there is a large number of people who identify with a particular religion.

Contrary to evidence demonstrating that spiritual codes and practices are effective for achieving criminal desistance and crime prevention, contemporary criminology is mostly a secular field which does not view spirituality as having a substantial impact on crime desistance (Ronel & Ben Yair, 2017). The current study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the influence of Sufism on desistance. Sufism is defined as a mystical Islamic movement that aims to reach unification with God through diverse spiritual techniques (Sviri, 1994). Sufism and Islam cannot be separated, with some scholars

arguing that Sufism is the heart of Islam (Haeri, 1990). The Sufi orders are widespread through Asia and Africa. Sufism entails a personal spiritual journey that requires the believers to liberate themselves from their drives, which prevent them from perceiving the greatness of God that surrounds the material world (Nicholson, 2007).

Islamic law and ethics strongly oppose criminal acts, such as theft and street fighting, and advocates for believers to break from such sins (Khosrokhavar, 2016). Because of such laws, the Islamic religion can be understood as a source of desistance, one in which people come to cease offending behaviour (Weaver, 2016). Research has identified different narratives by which religion aids the process of desistance. One of this is the narrative of redemption which allows criminals to deal with strain by reconciling their deviant pasts with the ethics of Islam (Khosrokhavar, 2016). Narratives of reconciliation enables converts or reconverts to ascribe meaning to past wrongdoings, come to terms with their deviant lifestyle and reconcile these to fill it with new purpose (Truong, 2018). The narrative also involves a form of purification, where criminals highlight their past sins, break radically from their criminal lifestyles and asking God for forgiveness. This process is commonly referred to as conversion or being born again (Benslama, 2016).

The specific intervention methods used to counter gangsterism and gang violence seem to lack substance and practicality. South Africa has failed to see the value and extent of religiosity and spirituality in the rehabilitation of offenders. Most street gang members in Durban identify with some form of religion, and this major desister (religion) has been proven to incite contrasting and powerful new identities (Cruz, Rosen, Amaya & Vorobyeva (2017). Studies done by occupational therapists on the rehabilitation of gang members (their method mirrors Desistance Theory) within South Africa showed that exercises which have a spiritual foundation are at the core of total reformation.

In a qualitative study in South Africa conducted by an occupational therapist, ten young men who were previously involved in gangs and subsequently became part of a group called the "Peace Team" participated in four focus groups. The study concluded that understanding gang-related occupations assist occupational therapists in planning relevant programmes to support young men's disengagement from gangs and reintegration into the community in pro-social ways. Hardy writes of intervention

strategies based on Christian religious fundamentals implemented by a metropolitan court judge who offered minor offenders the option of church attendance as a way of facilitating desistance. The criminal justice system in South Africa is yet to produce intervention strategies which showcase radical change.

2.11 Summary

In summation, the literature critically evaluated gangsterism on a global scale to draw a comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of this culture. The continual rise of gangsterism globally is congruent with the rise within South Africa and more particularly within the city of Durban. Moreover, it showcases how existing literature is more focused on gangs of the Western Cape and the minuscule amount of research done on gangsterism in Durban. The principal theory of 'Desistance' which is centred around discontinuation of offending is explained as well as its applicability to the research being conducted. The crucial role of religion/Sufism as one of the strongest desisters is explained by drawing on findings from other disciplines which proved (religions') holistic and powerful effect in rehabilitation. The challenges encountered in the rehabilitation process, as well as the reasons for gang involvement are addressed; according to the research these themes are universal. Finally, the role of policymakers i.e the government and their lack of utilizing religion in the rehabilitation of criminals is clarified.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The “chapter consists of a detailed outline of the method and collection procedure employed in the current study. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p.6), methodology defines how researchers might go about practically researching anything they believe can be discovered. The methods and techniques used in the study are described succinctly to provide a clear picture of how data is collected, and the researcher employed what scholars refer to as the "journey motif" to precisely, rationally, and tersely describe the research setting as well as provide a rationale and justification for the research design considered ideal for this study.

The descriptions of the various steps taken, as well as the justifications provided for each step and decision, are in tandem with Mouton and Muller's (1998) definition of methodology as "a systematic approach to research that involves a clear preference for certain methods and techniques within the framework of specific epistemological and ontological assumptions" (p.2). This term tries to underline that social investigation should not be performed haphazardly.

3.2 Study context

Gangsterism has its hotspots in South Africa where gang violence statistics are the highest. The government's National Anti-Gang Strategy, which was developed in 2016, revealed that gangsterism is common in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng. The study was conducted in Durban which is located in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, formerly known as the Natal Colony. Durban was a perfect setting for this ethnographic study as the researcher had access to information on multiple forms of criminality, most of which comprise gang members involved in different aspects of crime like the gang wars in the Sydenham area that is directly connected to the drug wars in Cape-town. Examples of the forms of criminality the researcher was exposed to are taxi gangs, drug gangs, gang wars and hit-men working in areas like Kwa-Mashu and" Umlazi.

Figure 3.1: Map of Durban



3.3 Research design and approach

The “study used a qualitative research design. According to Neuman (2014), a research design is a road map that illustrates the path that connects the research questions to the study's practical implementation. Scholars like Durrheim refer to this as a "architectural blueprint" (2006). Apt to note is that a rigorous and well-thought-out approach is required to create a dynamic research design. In qualitative research, a non-linear approach and inductive reasoning are largely assumed (Neuman, 2014). As a result, realistic considerations were taken in light of the circumstances. The type of questions the study should address led to the use of a qualitative research approach.

According to Carter and Little (2007), research aims, questions, and study design shape and are shaped by methodology. Furthermore, they believe that the researcher's epistemological and ontological assumptions play a significant effect in the research design selection. Apt to note is that qualitative studies provide a detailed description and analyses of the quality or substance of human experience (Marvasti, 2004). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) found that qualitative research emphasizes processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined and measured in terms” of

quantity, “intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers are rather interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. One disadvantage of qualitative research is that it can be very time consuming and thus often also costly (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). The researcher aimed to provide an accurate representation of the role played by spirituality/ sufism in the rehabilitation of gang members in Durban without generalizing their stories to other cases but instead relating them to existing theories.

In support of a qualitative approach, Poovey (1995) noted, there are limits to what the rationalizing knowledge epitomized by statistics can do. No matter how precise, quantification cannot inspire action, especially in a society whose bonds are forged by sympathy, not mere calculation. Poovey (1995) can be interpreted as simply emphasizing that some research questions can be best explored and understood using a qualitative approach since it seeks meaning and not generalisation. Generalisation is normative in, and synonymous with quantitative inquiry (Neuman, 2014). In this instance, the researcher wanted the opportunity to pose questions that would elicit responses in participants own words relating to their lived experiences and this was important to fostering deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

This qualitative approach offers an in-depth exploration of personal transformations and the factors influencing desistance from crime, which cannot be easily quantified. Unlike more structured methodologies, the life story method provides a deeper look at emotional, psychological, and socio-economic aspects of desistance, addressing gaps in existing research that tend to generalize findings. It enables a personalized understanding of individual pathways to rehabilitation, shedding light on personal relationships, identity changes, and the role of external factors such as family and socio-economic conditions. By focusing on personal narratives, the life-story method also contributes new insights to research, particularly in under-explored regions like Durban, South Africa (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The nature of the study also called for a qualitative enquiry. Gangsterism is a global phenomenon and a discourse that seeks to be addressed in international forums and as such an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences attracted such an inquiry seeking to understand how religion, spirituality or Sufism played a role in the rehabilitation of gang members in desisting from crime. A qualitative design, therefore,

offers participants the opportunity to bring forth diverse, relevant dimensions and in-depth thick descriptions of a lived experience the researcher might have not envisaged, something which is not possible in a quantitative study. To this end, in-depth interviews were used. The nature of in-depth interviews employs a semi-structured form thus, it triggers a naturally occurring conversation (Spicer, 2012:482).

3.4 Research paradigm

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) articulate that a research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that defines the nature of enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Kuhn defines a paradigm as: an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables” and problems “attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools. The term paradigm refers to a research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research (Kuhn, 1977). A paradigm thus, implies “a pattern, structure and framework or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions” (Olsen, Lodwick& Dunlop, 1992:16).

The interpretivist paradigm's key tenets are relevant to the current research. The adopted research paradigm aligns with the study's topic and research objectives because interpretivism takes an emic or insider approach to research, which means approaching social reality from the standpoint of the participants or individuals involved. Interpretivism's philosophical roots are thus employed as a lens through which to examine reality as it is experienced, formed, and understood by the participants. Participants are the ones who experience the world and come up with subjective meanings. The perspectives and opinions of the participants are crucial in answering the study questions. O'Connor (2015) asserts that, any researchable problem is better understood as a constitutive element of the social world largely explained from the vantage point of participants as social actors.

Interpretive researchers argue that reality is made up of people's subjective perceptions of the outside world; as a result, they may subscribe to an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological idea that reality is socially produced. Interpretivists, according to Willis (1995), are anti-foundationalists who believe there is no single

proper path or approach to knowledge. Walsham (1993) claims that there are no 'right' or 'incorrect' hypotheses in the interpretive tradition. Instead, they should be rated on how 'interesting' they are to the researcher and others working in similar fields. They try to draw their constructs from the field by studying the topic of interest in depth.

Qualitative interpretations are constructed. The researcher first creates a field text consisting of field notes and documents from the field, what Roger Sanjek (1990:386) calls "indexing" and David Plath (1990:374) calls filework. The writer-as interpreter moves from this text to a research text: notes and interpretations based on the field text. This text is then re-created as a working interpretive document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense of what he or she has learned. Finally, the" writer produces "the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale from the field may assume several forms: confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, analytic, grounded theory, and so on (Van Maanen, 1988). It is thus apt to note that there are multiple criteria for evaluating qualitative research, and those that are emphasized stress the situated, relational, and textual structures of the ethnographic experience. There is no single interpretive truth; there are numerous interpretive communities as indicated above, each with its own criteria for evaluating interpretations.

3.5 Selection of participants

To collect qualitative data, the researcher ought to engage with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). Those interviewed in the research were chosen using purposive sampling or what other scholars refer to as non-probability sampling. Here samples are chosen that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data (Yin 2011), and from whom the research will obtain the broadest range of information and perspectives on the subject of study (Kuzel, 1992). Purposive sampling refers to a procedure in which one cannot specify the probability that any member of the population will be included in the sample (Cozby, 2007). Neuman (2003) stated that in purposive sampling, the researcher uses his/her own judgment to select the research participants in order for them to be able to correspond with the research aims.

Although participants were spread over a large geographical area, the accessibility of current gang members in the community where the researcher resided made it

possible for the researcher to locate and interview former gang members. Some potential participants were, however, not interviewed due to time and resource constraints. The impact of this on the credibility of the study was compensated by reaching saturation on the data obtained from available participants. All the participants were identified using the snowball, or chain referral technique which is used to locate participants by asking others to identify persons or groups with special understanding of a given topic (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill, 2002). Prior to that, a priori sampling had been used to identify participants. This technique entails the definition of characteristics, and structure of selection criteria in advance (Ulin et al., 2005).

More “so, a large pool of possible participants was established prior to the interviews to increase opportunity for selecting few information-rich cases, since in qualitative research, detail and depth take precedence over numerical accuracy (Durrheim, 1999). Unlike in quantitative research, participants for a qualitative study are not selected based on being statistically representative, but because they can provide information that is ‘rich’ and ‘thick’ and that fulfils an investigative purpose (Polkinghorne, 2005). Information-rich participants are, those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Polkinghorne, 2005). Therefore, the list of participants was thus left open in order to enhance the dependability of findings by way of sampling to redundancy (Durrheim, 1999). This technique is important in that it is exhaustive, since interviewing continues until views are repeated. While the findings of this study cannot be generalised, this technique allows for making inferences about religion and its rehabilitative potential to crime and gang affiliations.

More so, research participants were included according to characteristics such as specific knowledge or experience relating to the goals of the study. An advantage of this sampling method is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to select research participants that have direct knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, so that they can provide directly relevant perceptions and opinions relating to the study (Henning, van Renburg, & Smit, 2004). Cozby (2007) stated that this sampling technique affords the researcher the opportunity to deal with participants who have actively been involved with or affected by the phenomenon being studied and as such can provide specific and relevant information. Neuman (2003) also stated that an

advantage of purposive sampling is that the researcher becomes able to select unique cases that are particularly informative and relevant.

A further benefit of this sampling method is that it is inexpensive and convenient to make contact with prospective participants whilst an obvious disadvantage of purposive sampling is that it can increase the risk of selection bias, which may result in difficulties related to the generalization of results to the population (Cozby, 1997; Neuman, 2003); while another disadvantage is that it does not allow representation of the entire population to be a part of the study as they may not have any experience with the phenomenon being assessed. Thus, non-probability sampling does not lend itself well to generalising the results to the population as a whole as it does not generate “a group of participants that can be said to be representative of the population (Cozby, 2007). As previously mentioned, it should be noted that the researcher did not attempt to make any form of generalization from the specific cases to the population but only aimed to relate the research participants’ lived experiences to existing theories.

For the selection of research participants, the following inclusion criteria were employed to select suitable participants:

- (i) the participants were male aged between 30 and 65 years’ old.
- (ii) the participants lived in Durban.
- (iii) the participants had a good command of English language as means of communication.
- (iv) the participants were a part of a gang at some point in their life.
- (v) participants had used religion, spirituality and Sufism as a rehabilitative method to desist from crime and gangsterism.

The researcher, therefore selected (n=10) male ex-gang members and (n=2) key informants who met the above criteria

3.6 Data collection method and procedure

Data was gathered from the selected sample using semi-structured interviews. This type of interview, according to Yin, has three advantageous characteristics:

(1) there is no tightly scripted questionnaire: The researcher will have a mental framework of study questions, but the specifically verbalized questions are posed to any given participant will differ according to the context and setting of the interview;

(2) avoiding any 'uniform behaviour' for all interviews by relying upon a 'conversational mode', the interview will lead to a social relationship of sorts, with the quality of the relationship individualized to every participant; and

(3) the interviewer uses open rather than closed-ended questions to elicit in-depth answers (Yin," 2011).

As "Meyer importantly points out, within this framework research participant are seen as active meaning makers rather than passive information providers, and interviews offer a unique opportunity to study these processes of meaning production directly (2008). The interviews were aimed at eliciting information on religion and or spirituality as a rehabilitative method to gangsterism and crime.

Data for the study was obtained by having the participants complete a biographical questionnaire. The biographical questionnaire included demographic data on the participants' age, race and profession. Participants were aged between 30-65 years and hailed from Durban in South Africa. This information served to confirm that the research participants were suitable for inclusion in the study. Subsequent to this, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted individually with each of the participants; these interviews were basically 30-45 minutes long. All interviews were audio-recorded in accordance with the permission granted by the research participants when they signed the informed consent form. There was no specific venue for the interviews; this was done to create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were beneficial both for the researcher and the research participants as they were flexible. This flexibility provided the researcher with the opportunity to follow up particularly interesting aspects that came up during the interviews. For the participants, this form of interview allowed the participants to provide a more comprehensive description of the phenomenon being studied by allowing additional information to be gathered during the interview process (de Vos et al., 2005). It is apt to note that with this form of data collection the participants are

given some control in terms of the direction that the interview takes and have the opportunity to introduce a topic that the researcher had not considered (de Vos et al., 2005). Semi-structured interviews make use of a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule and are guided, rather than dictated, by the schedule.

The interview schedule used open-ended questions which allowed the participants to provide as much or as little information as they chose (Breakwell, Fife-Schaw, Smith & Hammond, 2006). The semi-structured format meant that questions are set out before the interviews and the interviewer asks the participants these questions and then follows up, explores and probes the answers given by the participants as required. The participants were debriefed verbally by the researcher after the interviews in order to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable and to answer any questions they may have had regarding the interviews. According to Struwig and Stead (2001) debriefing with the interviewees after the interviews is of vital importance.

3.7 Research instruments

This section focuses on the study's research instruments, namely the researcher(s) and the interview guide. Questions on the interview guide were generated after a thorough review of relevant literature and scrutiny of the research problem, research questions and study objectives.

3.7.1 Researcher as the key instrument

Interviewing is dependable with an interpretive approach which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). The researcher used an interview schedule as a data collection tool in this study. It was used to gather data that was relevant to answering the key research questions. The structure and order of the questions contained in the interview guide was not concrete but rather fluid as they could always be adjusted depending on how the conversation would unfold. The key areas of exploration included: rehabilitative measures or methods used, societal acceptance, recidivism among other pertinent issues discussed. Krueger (1998) identifies a typology of opening, introductory, key, and ending questions. Similar issues were explored in these interviews.

3.7.2 Interview guide/ schedule

Interviewing is dependable with an interpretive approach which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche Durrheim, 2006). The researcher used an interview schedule as a data collection tool in this study. It was used to gather data that was relevant to answering the key research questions. The structure and order of the questions contained in the interview guide was not concrete but rather fluid as they could always be adjusted depending on how the conversation would unfold. The key areas of exploration included: rehabilitative measures or methods used, societal acceptance, recidivism among other pertinent issues discussed. Krueger (1998) identifies a typology of opening, "introductory, key, and ending questions. Similar issues were explored in these interviews.

3.8 Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model was adopted to further analyse the data to give a rich and detailed, yet complex, description of data. The six steps are as follows:

- **Familiarising yourself with your data**

This step requires the researcher to be fully immersed and engaged in the data by transcribing the interactions, reading (and re-reading) the transcripts, and listening to the recordings. Initial ideas were noted down. In doing so the researcher had a comprehensive understanding of the content of the interaction and familiarised themselves with all aspects of the data. This step provided the foundation for the subsequent analysis. For the researcher to gain a better understanding of gang culture, full immersion in the participants, lives and significant experiences were observed and accurately recorded.

- **Generating initial codes**

Once familiar with the data, the researcher identified preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear exciting and meaningful. These codes were numerous and specific than themes but indicated the context of the conversation. In this study the researcher was familiar with the gang culture, which enabled him to identify those

significant codes that are meaningful and to be taken under consideration. The codes generated provided further meaningful data and assisted in answering the study's objectives.

To minimise bias during the coding process, the researcher employed several strategies to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data analysis. First, the researcher followed a systematic and transparent coding procedure by ensuring that the process was well-documented and consistent across all interviews. By using clear, predefined categories based on the research questions and theoretical framework, the researcher minimized the risk of interpreting data in a way that would reflect personal biases or preconceived notions (Creswell, 2013).

Additionally, the researcher employed peer debriefing, which involved sharing the coding process with the supervisor to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the coding. This external feedback allowed for an independent review of the codes and themes, providing a check on any potential bias that could have influenced the interpretation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Peer debriefing also enhanced the credibility of the analysis by ensuring that multiple perspectives were considered during the coding process. The researcher also used constant comparison, a method where new data was continuously compared with previously coded data. This iterative process allowed the researcher to refine categories and themes as the analysis progressed, ensuring that the coding remained grounded in the data and not influenced by any assumptions or biases (Plummer, 2001).

• **Searching for themes**

The third step in the process is the start of the interpretive analysis of the collated codes. Relevant data extracts were sorted (combined or split) according to overarching themes. The researcher's thought process was alluded to the relationship between principles, sub-themes, and articles. The data was codified according to the segments the researcher had initially laid out (viz early life, teenage phase, old age). "The principles and sensitive themes of this study were a reflection of the researcher's focus on the role of Sufism/religiosity in the rehabilitation of gang members.

• **Reviewing themes**

A deeper review of identified themes followed the researcher's need to question whether to combine, refine, separate, or discard initial themes. Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while clear and identifiable distinctions between themes should exist. This is usually done over two phases, where the themes need to be checked (in) about the coded extracts (phase 1) and then for the overall data set (phase 2). A thematic 'map' was generated from this step. The researcher at this stage was flexible and prepared to reassess the themes and make the necessary changes in accordance with the data collected.

• **Defining and naming themes**

This step involves 'refining and defining' the themes and potential sub-themes within the data. Ongoing analysis is required to enhance the identified themes further. The researcher provided theme names and clear working definitions that capture the essence of each theme in a concise manner. At this point, a unified data story emerged from the themes. The researcher made a clear distinction between themes based on religiosity in the lives of former gang members whilst avoiding themes that merely give historical narratives of the participants. The researcher had to separate information on current gang members from former gang members as well.

• **Producing the report**

Finally, the researcher had to transform the analysis into an interpretable piece of writing by using vivid and compelling extract examples that relate to the themes, research question, and literature. The report relayed the results of the analysis in a way that seeks to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. The report goes beyond merely describing the themes and portray a study supported by empirical evidence that addresses the research question. The researcher used all information gathered through participant interviews and data generated by the immersion in gang culture to thoroughly explain the objectives of the study and created a coherent piece of writing. Compelling extracts such as how great a desister religion "has in their lives and extracts on gang affiliation have to create a meaningful piece of literature giving validity to the study.

Self-Reflexivity

The researcher's background and perspective, particularly their academic training in criminology and social sciences, influenced how they approached the research topic. With expertise in criminology, the researcher brought a strong understanding of criminal behaviour, rehabilitation theories, and the socio-political dynamics surrounding marginalised groups, which shaped the research framework, choice of questions, and analysis. Additionally, the researcher's personal experiences and values, especially in relation to issues such as inequality and social justice, informed the interpretation of participants' experiences, as well as the selection of themes during data analysis.

To manage these potential biases, the researcher engaged in self-reflexivity, a process of critically reflecting on their own role in the research. By being aware of their personal and academic background, the researcher took conscious steps to recognize how these aspects might influence their interactions with participants and the interpretation of the data. This self-reflexivity allowed the researcher to maintain an objective stance, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the participants' voices rather than the researcher's own assumptions or experiences (Creswell, 2013). By reflecting on how their identity and perspective might shape the study, the researcher ensured a more balanced and open-minded approach, acknowledging that personal biases could affect the research but were actively managed throughout.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

This study adhered to the principles of new ethnography, paying attention to Paula Saukko's concept of dialogic validity, which assesses research in terms of how well it manages to capture the lived realities of others (2003). Developing study and writing methodologies that allow the scholar to be more accurate to the lived experiences of others is the aim of contemporary ethnographic research.

Consequently, a number of tactics, like cooperation, that seek to give participants more control over how the study is carried out and how their lives are documented, are what define new ethnographic practice. Self-reflexivity is another hallmark of

modern ethnography; it attempts to raise the scholar's consciousness of the social and cultural devices that mediate her/his perception of worlds that may differ significantly from her/his own. Polyvocality also highlights the reality that lived realities are diverse and that listening to a variety of voices and views may be necessary to fully comprehend them (Saukko 2003).

Furthermore, it is appropriate to mention that the interviewees had the opportunity to peruse the narratives that informed the dissertation before review and publishing; the investigator emphasized his own theoretical and political viewpoints, and a variety of perspectives on the main concerns were sought. The qualitative approach was used for the current study, which focused on the experiences of gang members, because it emphasised the unique traits and experiences of people. The researcher's goal was to accurately depict the lived experiences of the research participants in this study, tying their experiences to established theories rather than extrapolating their experiences to other situations.

Credibility

This was established through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review the findings and verify that their perspectives were accurately represented. This helped ensure that the interpretations made by the researcher aligned with the participants' experiences and minimized the risk of misinterpretation (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, triangulation was employed, utilizing data from interviews, secondary sources, and participant observation. This cross-checking method helped to validate the findings and reinforced the credibility of the results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Transferability,

The researcher provided detailed descriptions of the study's context, including the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Durban community and the specific dynamics of gang rehabilitation. This allowed readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other similar settings and populations (Plummer, 2001).

Dependability,

The researcher maintained an audit trail, meticulously documenting the steps taken throughout the research process. This included detailed records of data collection,

analysis, and decision-making processes, which allowed for transparency and ensured that the study could be replicated by others (McAdams, 2008).

Confirmability

This was ensured through reflexivity. The researcher reflected on their own potential biases and how these might influence the research process. By being transparent about their own assumptions and reactions, the researcher was able to reduce the impact of personal bias on the interpretation of the data, ensuring that the findings were rooted in the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's perspective (Creswell, 2013).

3.10 Ethical considerations

According to Vorster (2002), ethical guidelines provide a foundation for the researcher to evaluate her own conduct. In the present study, the researcher consistently strived towards maintaining proper ethical practice and a level of professionalism and accountability that one would expect from a study at a tertiary institution involving human beings and potentially sensitive issues such as gang affiliation for crime. Thus, "the approval of the Faculty's Research Committee as well as the Ethics Committee of the university was sought and achieved before commencing the study.

It was foremost in the mind of the researcher that a variety of factors must be considered when dealing with people from different cultural contexts. First and foremost was the issue of confidentiality to keep all details of the research participants' private and to not disclose any details to third parties, hence pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. The respondents were informed that their data would remain confidential and that their data would not be used for any other purpose than that described in the study, and this was in accordance with what transpired during the research. The data recorded from the participants were coded so as to ensure the anonymity of the participants, and the data has remained confidential.

The strict measures that were taken to ensure confidentiality included storing the audio-recordings safely during the study and after the research has been completed the audio-recording would eventually be destroyed and all identifying information relating to the research participants will be deleted or disguised in the findings of the

research. Voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all participants in writing before they participated in the research. This was done to protect both the participants, researcher, and the research itself (de Vos et al., 2005). It should also be mentioned that the participation in the present study was on a voluntary basis with no remuneration or incentives offered to the participants.

The researcher managed potential biases during the interviews by employing several key strategies that ensured transparency and integrity in the research process, given the sensitive nature of the topic. First, the researcher practiced reflexivity throughout the study by acknowledging their own potential biases and considering how their background and perspectives might influence the way questions were framed or how responses were interpreted. This self-awareness helped minimize the impact of personal biases on the data collection and analysis processes (Creswell, 2013).

In addition, the researcher adopted a nonjudgmental and empathetic approach during the interviews. Recognizing the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher worked to create a comfortable and respectful environment where participants felt safe to share their experiences without fear of judgment. The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity further helped to build trust and reduce any social desirability bias, ensuring that participants could be open and honest about their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

To further mitigate bias, the researcher employed triangulation, using multiple data sources to cross-check the information gathered during the interviews. This included gathering secondary data and incorporating observations, which helped validate the interview responses and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the gang rehabilitation process (Plummer, 2001). Lastly, the researcher ensured a diverse sample, including participants from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This approach helped to capture a broad range of views and reduce the risk of any one-sidedness in the findings, ensuring that the results reflected the complexities of the gang rehabilitation process (McAdams, 2008).

Permission to conduct the study was gained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal after the research protocol was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee **Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006413/2023** Thereafter the research participants were selected through referrals from fellow gang members. A letter of recruitment (see

Appendix 3) was given to the research participants and informed consent was obtained from them in writing (see Appendix 2).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology and procedures employed in participant selection, data collection and processing, and analysis. The chapter came to a close with a discussion of how the study's credibility was ensured. The findings of this study are presented in the following chapter.”

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this study the researcher presents findings on how Sufism or religiosity plays a role in the rehabilitation of former gang-members and then discusses the findings. Several themes (n=6) were derived from the data generated from in-depth interviews. The findings are presented below in a tabular manner. The researcher made effort to capture nuances of the narratives of gang affiliates in Durban and how Sufism or religion plays a significant role in the rehabilitation of former gang members. The themes are adequately nuanced using relevant direct quotes from the study participants.

4.2 Emergent Themes

The themes (n=6) offered below are accessible in the chapter and are presented in the order they adopt in this preliminary chapter.

Table 4.1: A map of the findings in their sequence

Themes	Sub-themes
Power struggles among gang affiliates	
The impact of social environment on behaviour	
Police involvement in gang crimes	
Reasons for joining a gang	(i) Gangs provide members with a sense of friendship, camaraderie, and family that they are not receiving at home or school

	(ii) They experience a measure of success in gangs, in comparison to experiences of failure at school and in the home
	(iii) They have not developed the skills to constructively express feelings of anger and rage
	(iv) There is nothing else to do; they have no hope and see no alternative but to join a gang
	(v) They feel their survival may depend on joining a neighbourhood gang
	(vi) It is an avenue to gain respect and money
Gang affiliation: A choice made	
Rehabilitating Frameworks for gang members	(i) The role played by religion and spirituality in gang affiliation desistance
	(ii) The role played by the church in gang affiliation and desistance
	(iii) Parental role in gang-membership and desistance

4.3 Socio-demographic data for the study sample

The study participants were within the range of ages 40 to 65 years. Notable is that participants were drawn from Sydenham a small town in the central of Durban. The total number of participants was (n=10) and (n=2) key informants. A summary of the participants' socio-demographic characteristics is tabulated below (*Table 4.2*).

Table 4.2 Participants socio-demographic characteristics

Participant	Age	Race	Occupation
G1	Mid sixties	Coloured	Clothing Factory Owner

G2	Mid forties	Coloured	Restaurant Owner
G3	Mid sixties	Indian	Pensioner
G4	Mid forties	Indian	Sponsored Athlete
G5	Mid sixties	Indian	Owner of Superette
G6	Mid forties	Indian	Coffee Shop Owner
G7	Mid sixties	Black	Taxi Owner
G8	Mid sixties	Coloured	Construction Worker
G9	Mid sixties	Indian	Drug rehab Owner
G10	Mid sixties	Coloured	Mosque Trustee
KI 1	Early sixties	Indian	Lecturer
KI 2	Late thirties	Coloured	Hitman

Above is the table that represents the participant's demographic data. To protect the identities of the participants the researcher assigned the letter 'G' together with numbers one to ten to represent the ten participants. The use of this method also boosted their trust in the researcher thus allowing for more co-operation and creating a sense of ease for the participants. The researcher firstly accumulated data which gave a historical back drop which initiated "openings" for the questions on the interview schedules. The participants' responses to the questions were meticulously recorded with their consent.

4.3 Power struggles among gang affiliates

From the findings it was deduced that gang members had a leader who gave orders to the crimes to be committed, although a gang has a set of specialisation gang members in the study indicated that drugs was not part of their trade. Participants indicated that G10 was their leader and each member of the gang knew their place in the rank and as such operated under strict orders. One participant said:

We operated like the Italian Mafia, each member knew his rank. As much as people think we never sold drugs, some of us used it, but we never sold. Our gang was more into racketeering and protection. G6

Findings indicated that gang members engaged in research before executing a given task. Participants indicated that when given orders by the gang leader they would not

engage in the assignment without doing proper research on how the task would be executed. One participant said:

When G10 made a decision that someone had to be taken out it was done professionally. We had the cops 'checked' from the constables to the colonels and brigadiers. We were operating on another level. G4

Findings showed that the survival of gangs was deeply entrenched in respect for hierarchies that existed in the gang. Participants indicated that in their gang they had an organogram that they respected and knew who was next in power in the event of the gang leader being ousted. One participant said:

G10 was taken to be the leader. G1 was next in command, whilst G6 who is approximately ten years their junior was to take over the reigns in the event of G1 and G10 being 'taken down. G2

Like any other group or gang finding found that power struggles exist even among criminals. Participants averred that some gang members became power hungry and this led to the splitting of gang. One participant said:

The gang split, as a result of a struggle for hierarchy by participants G1 and G10, namely, differences in the gang's focus and direction. G7

While some participants indicated that the splitting of the gang was due to power structures and power hungry gang members. Some participants indicated that some group members wanted to incorporate a different crime trade in crystal meth. They attribute the splitting of their gang to the diversion of their crime specialisation suggested by their gang leader. One participant said:

G10 only wanted to be involved in racketeering, protection and planned assassinations whilst G10 was more ambitious and wanted to bring the crystal meth trade from Cape Town to Durban. His cousin is the leader of the gang called the "Americans" from Cape Town. They are one of the biggest crystal meth manufacturers in South Africa. G5

Findings also indicated that the power struggles that existed among gangs and gang members were entrenched in drug trade. Some participants averred that the death of

G10 (gang leader) was eminent because he was adamant to divert their interest as a gang to drug dealing and several attempts to kill him were made prior. One said:

The attempt on his life was done by G2 because Ravi Chetty attempted to assassinate G10 a few years prior because he refused that we get engaged in drugs. G7

Findings suggest that drug dealing claimed innocent lives and therefore a dangerous trade to engage in than racketeering and protection. Participants indicated that drug dealing was a dangerous trade which in some cases claimed the lives of innocent people who lived in areas where gangs traded. One participant said:

This on-going cycle of gang wars for drug territory also claimed the lives of people who just resided in the area and were not known for any gang affiliation. This was a dangerous one compared to the other. G2

It is to note that the researcher witnessed the assassination of a gang-member who on arrival at his home was shot at close range at the back of the head. One of the participants told the researcher that:

He wasn't really part of the gang. He just cooled off with the gang members. They live in the same block of flats. He didn't traffic drugs for them or hurt anyone for them. It was just for any form of revenge from the gangs living in the other flats. G5

The findings indicated that the gun battles in Sydenham started because of drug trade. Participants indicated that the territorial wars existed because illicit drugs were in demand in the market and as such not in all areas did they make money so gangs fought because of territories that give them more clients. One participant said:

Everyone wants to trade in illicit drugs. Gangsters who deal with drugs are always greedy for money, because the whole of South Africa is fucked on it. I can take you to the crystal-meth factory in Cape Town. It looks like a five-star hotel on the floor level. From the second floor up is only crystal meth labs. G9

While some indicated that territorial wars for drug trade caused the gun battles others indicated that suspicious behaviour around gang members could warrant a gun fight. Because gang members were always on the lookout for sell-outs and undercover

police, they did not trust anyone especially if they looked suspicious, more so letting go of suspicious behaviour was translated to the gang being weak. One participant said:

Now and then there is a cease–fire, and for stupid things like looking at someone in a funny way starts another war. Gang members are always on the lookout for these things (sell-outs, police, enemies) I mean you cannot trust anyone and if you let them go it makes your gang look weak so they have to deal with them. G3

While identifying with a gang came with the perks of living a luxurious lifestyle findings indicate that most gang members especially gang leaders lived in fear of their lives and that of their families, even after breaking away from a gang. Some participants said:

Me I have no friends and I want to keep no friends because I don't know who to trust. My best friend for decades tried to kill me over money. G10

You saw how G10 moves. Armour plated cars, security with high calibre assault rifles. And you will never see them with their families. But sooner or later they have to leave their cars and homes. When they least expect it and they drop their guard for a second is when they get plugged. G6

4.4 The impact of social environment on behaviour

From the study it is important to note that gang membership is a culture in areas where crime is rife. Participants indicated that children learn or mimic adults who identify with gang memberships and as they grow older they become part of gangs. Some participants said:

The children from school check how it's going down with the older people and get dragged into that life style! They had to sell their souls for this life. G5

More so, the researcher was also with G5 when he witnessed three pubescent children who were planning on beating another child over a game. G5 told them:

*F*** off from here! G5*

G5 then looked at the researcher and said:

You see how young they start with gang behaviour. That one kid, I know his family he is only seven years old. G5

This episode explicitly indicated to the researcher the severity of the onset of gang mentality, that children coming from areas with low-income families, coupled with high gang activity, drug usage and drug dealing are susceptible to gang membership at a very tender age, some as young as seven. It also portrayed one of the priority elements that explain Desistance theory, vis-a-vis the situational factors. This principle demonstrates how several aspects of individuals' social environments and situational routine activities influence behaviour.

Findings suggest that the environment in which one is nurtured plays a significant role in their behaviour. Participants indicated that the areas in which they grew up in were known for crime and as such being part of one was seen as an achievement.

Being part of a gang was the in thing where I grew up. One was likely to join because most guys joined the gang and you wouldn't want to be left out...you had to belong to a group. G6

Participants in the study indicated that gang membership was not an easy subscription for many people who wished to subscribe or identify with a gang. They indicated that those who wished to identify with a gang were supposed to be willing to give up even their life for them to belong. One participant said:

Of every hundred that wish to live a gangster lifestyle only ten make it out. Out of the ten only three will become big bosses. Out of the three that become bosses, only one wouldn't be killed and they have to give up everything just to get there. G3

Findings indicate that a lack of positive role models in society brews deviant and antisocial behaviour in children as they grow up. Participants indicated that the role models they were exposed to in their neighbourhood(s) were gangsters who seemed to live a luxurious lifestyle than that of their parents and wished to become like them when they grew up.

All I could see was the fancy cars and lifestyles of thugs in my area and I envied that so I wished I could be like them when I grew up. G2

4.5 Police involvement in gang crimes

Findings suggest that the police are involved in covering up crimes committed by gangs in Durban later on take a back seat when gang members turn on each other. Participants indicated that the unresponsiveness of police when a gang member is shot translates to their involvement. One participant said:

Do you see any police vehicles here? It's been an hour. The police station is up the road and not one police van has shown up. The police don't care. They want them to kill themselves. How many killings you already saw? Only a few will reach the newspapers." This indicates the low level of report rate for gang-related behaviour. The Sydenham police station is about a two-minute drive from the researcher's place of study, yet their response to gang related violence around the corner from the station is ludicrous. G8

Participants indicated that most of the police officers in Durban are on the payroll of drug-dealers and gang-members within the districts they patrol. While collecting data the researcher witnessed police officers jovially liaising with gangsters in their jurisdiction and collecting envelopes of money. According to some study participants these payments ensure that the gang-members clients are not troubled by officers on patrol and also provides them with information for any potential drugs busts.

The brown envelope is a bribe to the police and these police act as whistle blowers to gang members on any attacks on them. G7

Another incident witnessed by the researcher while collecting data that displayed corruption in the South African Police Service (SAPS) was when a fleet of armoured vehicles were sent by SAPS to raid a block of flats from which a well known drug 'cartel' was being run. Surprisingly no illicit drug was found. One participant told the researcher that:

Imagine, one of the biggest places for drugs and nothing was found! What does that tell you? That someone from SAPS tipped them off about the raid. G5

G5s response to the raid revealed the shocking truth that the police and other law enforcement agencies were doing little to bring the issue of drug dealing under control.

4.6 Reasons for joining a gang

To better understand reasons for gang affiliation the severity and root causes need to be identified as well as their methods of operations. Gangsterism is not a new phenomenon, but it is still a problem that needs to be urgently addressed. Criminal street gangs are responsible for most of the crimes in recent years (PMG, n.d).

4.6.1 Gangs provide members with a sense of friendship, camaraderie, and family that they are not receiving at home or school

The researcher found this to concur with his findings. As evidenced in the case of the researcher taking one of G10's ex hitmen to the rehabilitation centre run by G9, after being kicked out of his home and ostracized by his extended family. The hitman also came from a functional family, originally residing in the Durban CBD. He became captivated by the lifestyle which surrounded him. The hitman stated,

I joined the gang because town was rough, and I also liked the lifestyle. I saw the bigger gangsters leading. Everyone showed them respect and no one wanted to mess with them. I should have listened to my parents. When I joined the gang, they became my new family. If I got into a fight I knew all I had to do was make a phone call and all the members will rock up and stand for me. My family kicked me out because I was part of G10's crew and because I killed people. The more they pushed me away the further I went into this life. Because of the drugs even the crew, and even G10 kicked me out. Now I lost my wife and kids. My parents have a protection order against me and I don't know how to get out. G9

Unfortunately, G10's hitman abandoned the rehabilitation centre on his own volition and is begging on the streets for money to pay for a shelter and for his drugs. For the researcher this paints a clear picture of the trajectory that most gang-members end up on, homeless drug addicts on the streets, in prison or being killed.

4.6.2 They experience a measure of success in gangs, in comparison to experiences of failure at school and in the home

The above reason was with the case of G2. In the researcher's first interview with G2, with a smile and relish in his voice he informed the researcher,

All the other people are playing gangster. When the war between G10 and G1 was happening we came to know who were the die-hards for our crew. I took being a gangster to the next level. I killed people, I went to prison, I joined the 26 gang and then became a general. G2

G2's statement, "I took being a gangster to the next level," together with his smile and voice tone displayed that he viewed his gang accolades as a tremendous success in his life.

4.6.3 They have not developed the skills to constructively express feelings of anger and rage

G10 is a good example of this 'personality deficiency'. In the researcher's interview with G10's cousin regarding G10, he told the researcher that:

G10 got his entire right arm sliced off by a meat grinder when he was about eleven at his parents' butcher shop. When he was thirteen or fourteen he got stabbed in the right eye during a gang fight. Brett and Judge who had their gang in Phoenix used to tease him and mess with his brains, acting like untouchables in the under-world. When they wanted to take over the CBD they had to first kill G10. So they invited him to a party and lied that they wanted to sort out the problems that they had. G10 got wind of the attempt on his life by a lady friend. G10 loaded his gun, drove straight to the party walked up to Brett and Judge and shot both in the head in full view of everyone at the party. He also took out his knife and stabbed each body about thirty times, then partied the night away like nothing happened. These were the killings that got him his jail sentence. The judge understood the reasoning behind him wanting to kill Brett and Judge before they got to him first but didn't understand why he mutilated their bodies after killing them. KI

The researcher feels that because G10 was handicapped at a young age and lost two major appendages, this fuelled his feelings of anger and his gang-members were the only people he could speak to concerning these feelings.

4.6.4 There is nothing else to do; they have no hope and see no alternative but to join a gang

The research site is surrounded by low-income housing and shacks riddled with gang activity. G5's testimony has bearings. He told the researcher that:

It's sad to see so many young people die because they grew up without parents in this district. Alot they don't have any supervision and drop out of school by fourteen. As they get older they get dragged into this life and they feel the only thing they can do is be a gangster and they lose hope for doing anything better. Most of them die young.

4.6.5 They feel their survival may depend on joining a neighbourhood gang

They fear for their safety and believe that being in a gang gives them protection. Since the greater number of people residing in the CBD did not get involved in gang-life, the researcher does not believe their reasons for joining was for survival. When all the participants were asked what made them join gang-life they emphasized that it was a choice. They could not blame their family support system. In an interview with G1, when he was asked what pushed him to join a gang? He said:

It was all around us, the moments we walked out of our doors. Back in those days' gangs formed for things like soccer games. G1

The only participant who said they joined a gang for survival was G3. He told the researcher that:

We joined for things like soccer games but also for protection. We didn't want to walk around a street corner and get hashed by the gangsters from that street. So, joining G10 and his crew gave me protection. G3

4.6.6 It is an avenue to gain respect and money

Gangs can provide lucrative economic opportunities, status, and prestige especially for youth who do not believe they have employment opportunities, or who have no job skills. With the exception of G1, most of the participants were not into the drug trade but focussed more on racketeering, body guarding, and extortion. Participant G2 reinforced this point when he told the researcher in the second interview that:

We bluffed ourselves we were a gang until things had gotten serious as we grew up. We realized that fighting costs money. But I won't lie, we did it for the girls as well and the status of being a known gangster and belong to a crew. Made us feel like 'dons.' (Italian mafia boss). G2

To the researcher these masculine tendencies or methods of acquiring respect displayed by G2 came across as strong factors for gang recidivism.

In another sitting with G5 he told the researcher about the fun they had living that life-style. He said:

When it was new years' time for us, ay we could party. Six buses from Cape Town will come down packed with girls. That lifestyle I still think about sometimes. We used to feel like we own the world. My father used to beg me to leave this lifestyle. He told me, 'Stay at home, if you must, I'll give you money until you find a good job'. I was the only child and growing up in Overport during my childhood days which was hard. I wasn't religious at all. My friend's father gave me my first job after school to run the Butterworth Hotel and club. That's how I got introduced to the gangsters and this lifestyle. Almost every second night we were busting peoples' heads open. I used to take two pool balls, put them in a bank sack and hit the people badly with it. No one could touch us. My friend's father one day as people were coming in to party called me aside and said, 'G5 can you see all these people coming down into the club, they coming in happy. You and your gangster friends are responsible for their happiness and safety and every night you'll end up hitting them very badly. You have to be a better person than that. One day you might need one of them for something. G5

4.6.7 Some youth grow up in families where parents and relatives are gang members and joining a gang is part of family tradition

None of the participants blamed their parents as a motive for their gang affiliation. All participants came from functional family set-ups. In an interview with G10's cousin, he stated that:

G10 and his brother both grew up with religious and law-abiding family. He and his brother will come out of the house, one brother will go to the Mosque for prayer, the other brother went to join the gangs.

However, the researcher argues that the same cannot be said about gang-members located within the place of research in the suburb of Sydenham. There are multiple instances where families from this locality have two children who have joined a gang. Some participants told the researcher that the severity is out of hand. One participant said:

I'm here over twenty- five years and left that life but I know of a lot of children I came across, one day you will hear one brother got shot and the same week the other brother gets shot. Why? Because they wanted to join a gang. So many who are killed grew up in front of me. To see them die so young is a tragedy.
G10

4.7 Gang affiliation: a choice made

However, during the process of enquiry in this study the researcher found that 'rational choice' was the primary reason for gang affiliation within the Durban CBD and surrounding areas. Every participant reiterated that their decision to be gang-members was a 'rational choice'. When asked what pushed them to be part of a gang some participants said:

It was all around us in town. The moment we came out of our homes. It was on our doorstep. But back then when it started it was over things like soccer games and being macho. G1

Each road had its own gang. The gangs that operated were the 'Skeletons', 'TDks', 'Queen's Brigade', 'Generations'. But we needed the protection if we were playing them in any games. G10

G10's brother is totally different to him. His brother focussed on his studies and was religious and will pray all the salaahs. G10 wanted to bunk school and join the street gangs. Both from the same family. Both had the same parents who were very religious. G10 will go to the gang and his brother will go to pray. K11

This lifestyle was just so much more fun. And I was making more money this way. I knew what I was doing. I knew it was wrong deep down. I made a choice.

G5

From the findings it is also important to note that a lack of parental guidance on the child may lead to aberrant behaviour in their youth. When asked what the causes were for gang mentality amongst teenagers in Sydenham some participants quickly noted a lack of supervision from parents, the urge to make money at young age, familial affiliation among others. The following was said:

They make a choice and also, they lack supervision. Most of them come from good homes with hard working parents. When they come home from school their parents are still at work. So they start having sex with girls and using drugs with the older ones from the ages of twelve. G5

They see how easy it is to make money dealing in drugs and this drives them even more to live this lifestyle. Some of them join because their relatives are part of a gang and they automatically see themselves following down the same path. G3

The responses showcased the integral part that parental supervision plays in moulding the minds of youth who come from areas rife with gang-life. It also confirms that rational choice plays a pivotal role in motivating the youth to be part of a gang.

4.8 Rehabilitating frameworks for gang members

4.8.1 The role played by religion and spirituality in gang affiliation desistance

The study shows that religion and spiritual teachings, specifically Sufi techniques are important in rehabilitating gangsters. Some participants indicated that they were tired of leading a dirty life and as they grew older they decided to change their lives. One participant said:

Ask G5 how bad I was. I was on every drug you can think of. Always having a party. As I got older I got depressed living this life. It was taking me nowhere. That's when I met my Sufi mentor. Because of the spiritual exercises he gave me to do daily, I left that life and Alhamdulillah (praise be to god) you can see my success. G9

From the study it is evident that some participants had completely desisted from their past gang life and were now involved in other trades that were beneficial to the community. Participants indicated that some were now running businesses. One participant said:

I have a non-profit Sufi centre that focusses on the rehabilitation of drug-addicts through spiritual exercises. G5

A lot of former gang-members and current gang members aiming for desistance join this centre. On one occasion the researcher met one of G10's hit-men who wished to join the rehabilitation centre at G5's shop. Consumed by the gangster lifestyle and drug addiction he was in jeopardy of losing his wife and children along with his parents. He said:

If I do not change I will lose everything that is important to me I wish to change and I believe rehab is the best for me...I am not ready to lose my family. KI 2

His addiction for cocaine and his gang-life had his brother following down the same road. Unfortunately, he broke the rules of the rehabilitation centre and was kicked out. However, the religious environment that he was in, kept him clean of drug addiction for eight months. The researcher met him eight months later at G5's work place. He came in wanting to borrow money for a shelter as his parents refused to take him in again. G5 told him that:

I can't give you the money for the second time again. I don't know if you are going to use it for a shelter or you going to buy cocaine. We gave you two chances at the rehab and you broke the rules. I will look bad if I assist you now and it might compromise my friendship with G9. G5

Another prime example that portrayed religiosity as a strong factor for gang desistance was found in a second interview the researcher had with G2. The researcher found a stark contrast in G2's persona in the face-to-face interviews he conducted with him. The first was before G2 went on pilgrimage to Mecca. He was imprisoned for his assassination attempt on "Ravi Chetty. He proudly said:

I took gangsterism to the next level. I killed people when the order was given without hesitation. When I went in the tronks (jail) I also became a general of the 26 gang. I could go anywhere in the prison and had keys for any room. Only

two other bosses had that privilege, G10 and G1. I could have anything I wanted to eat, any fast food. No one hassled me or the people around me! G2

In addition, after his pilgrimage the researcher had a second interview with him and immediately noticed a radical change in his demeanour. The researcher asked him whether religion was a strong motivational factor in his desistance. He replied:

The first place I went to after coming out of jail was the Grey Street Mosque! I went there and prayed to Allah to change me. I had such a warm welcome from the mussalies(worshippers) and I realized what a big part of my life I missed out on. I started praying every day. Regardless of all the privileges I had in jail, jail is still jail. I missed my family alot as well. After coming back from Umrah(pilgrimage) I repented for everything I did to Allah. I started reading all my salaah and kept away anything that will drag me back to my old lifestyle. You knew me before! I was a loose cannon. Now I avoid trouble at all costs. I know God is watching my every action and one day I will have to stand before him. Like last week I was on Florida Road with my children and wife. One youngster in his twenties was in a BMW M3 and was blasting his music. Two people asked him to turn his music down and he swore them. I walked up to him nicely and told him if he could please turn down the music. He told me, 'Fuck off!' Normally I will have bust his head open but I restrained myself. I pulled his keys from the ignition and threw it in bush. He started telling me that G6 is his cousin and he is going to call him up for me. When he went to meet G6 on that same day he was surprised to see me and G6 together laughing and having coffee. He apologized very fast for his behaviour. G2

The researcher then asked about how he felt about being a general in number 26 gang in prison. He replied:

All that is just a lie! All nonsense. Being a general didn't help me out in life. It also slowly takes your faith in God away. I rather be known for praying salaah five times a day than being a general in the 26 gang. Now that I came back from Umrah I don't want to be labelled as gangster anymore. I made peace with all the gangsters I had problems with and I can drive safely with my family. You saw how G10 moves? You will never see him with his family driving around or going out. Although he changed now he still has to watch his back. Also I don't

ever want to go to jail again. I read all my salaah in jail. I won't lie, that kept my sanity as well. Without my salaah I would have lost my mind. G2

The researcher went a few times to the Grey Street 'JumahMusjid' mosque, which is in the heart of Durban's CBD frequented by G10 for a face to face interview and found out that he arrived early before each salaah (prayer), that is practiced five times a day, just to engage in more prayers and worship. He held the muslim prayer beads which is used by muslims to invoke God in his hands. The researcher was told by G10's cousin that:

He is there early before each prayer, sitting in the corner with his prayer beads and he told me cuz, 'All I pray for during that time is for forgiveness from Allah, for the people I killed and hurt. I think about all the wrong that I did back in the day and it frightens me. I hope God will forgive me.' G10's cousin KI1

His cousin also stated that,

G10 made an earnest attempt to change his life after going for hajj (pilgrimage). When he came back he grew his beard and always attends salaah at most in congregation. G10's cousin

The change seen in G10 after his pilgrimage really portrayed the effectiveness of religiosity to change the most hardened of criminals. The second place that the researcher met G10 was at the Muslim graveyard in the CBD that has the shrine of the most revered 'sufi 'saint in South Africa. Notable is that G10 was there every Saturday and Sunday immediately after the second obligatory prayer. G10 would stand with the holy Quran open, at his mother's grave and pray for her. After this he will go to the shrine to pay homage to the saint buried there and also to engage in worship with his prayer beads for about fifteen minutes before leaving.

In another long interview with G10 outside the Grey Street mosque he told the researcher that:

This street (meaning Grey Street) is my fucking street! All the shops and people staying here are under my protection. You won't find any break-ins here. I will own this street till I die! G10

He went on to tell the researcher about the gang-wars he had with the gangs from Cape Town who wanted to traffic crystal meth about a decade ago. He told the researcher that:

*G1 sent twenty kaapi (colloquial term for people from Cape Town) gangsters with their tattoos to take over my street. I didn't want these gangsters running in my district selling their drugs. All my friends abandoned me when this war started. I organized the guns and brought my crew together and told them this is also your town; you'll need to stand for it now. We killed all of them and sent their bodies back to Cape Town.*G10

An important point to highlight is that G1 and G10 were once the best of friends and ruled Durban's under-world. They both served long prison sentences for murder. Both, also climbed the ranks of the prison number gangs and are known even to this day as generals of the 26 gang, the highest rank achievable in the South African prisons. G1 was the main proponent for bringing the meth industry to Durban, and it was G10 who was against it. This was one of the factors that led to their breakup and rivalry. In one of the face-to-face interviews he got annoyed with the researcher's persistence for information. The researcher approached him at the entrance to the mosque. Although, engaging in complete desistance the researcher noticed how the town thugs immediately rush to greet him, displaying their reverence for his status in the underworld. He was also surrounded by Muslim men, garbed in traditional Muslim attire, and armed with guns. He told the researcher,

Leave me alone! You know people have been killed for asking questions like you. We are outside the mosque, show respect and leave me alone. G10

This was in response to the researcher asking him if he assists the younger generation of gang-members to leave the gang life. His last comments to the researcher before he walked away was:

I don't want the world to know the good things I do. I do assist them but I don't vy (go) around talking about it. G10

Reflecting on that moment, the researcher came to realise how much G10 revered the precincts of the mosque.

Amongst the causes of gangsterism mentioned is, family affiliation with gangsterism which then pens out to be a tradition for the young to identify with a gang. The researcher endeavoured to enquire if the participants' parents were religious and if they had anything to do with them being part of a gang. Apt to note is that none of the participants came from families of gang-members. All stated that their parents were law abiding citizens who only wanted what was best for them. Some participants told the researcher that:

Both my ma (mother) and ballee (father) were super religious. I was rebellious. I only joined a gang in high school. Do you know I have a smaller brother? You will never say we brothers. He is always in a kurta, has a beard and always at the mosque. G2

I can never blame my parents for what I did. Every day my mother will cry and pray to God for me to leave that lifestyle. I listened eventually. If it wasn't for her prayers, I don't know where I will be. She finishes three Qurans every month for me. I made my own choice. G4

4.8.2 The role played by the church in gang affiliation and desistance

Findings indicated that religion played a major role in gang affiliation desistance. Participants indicated that the church or rather religious organisations were ready to accept gang members back into the society and reintegrate with community members without judgement of crimes previously committed. One participant said:

The church has been my salvage and the loss of my brother opened my eyes and that pain I can't get over it till today but I pray to God always for contentment and to get me through life... So the church has been so good to me with no one to remind me of my past they see me as I am today. G8

From the study it is evident that religion and spirituality are transformative tools that seek to change one from realising the good from the bad, helping criminals shun away from crime. Participants indicated that the church prompted gang members to feel remorse and seek redemption. One participant said:

I cannot begin to explain how the temple visits have changed my life. My family is very spiritual and that has helped me change my ways for the better I am a better person now...no one is perfect. G9

Findings indicate that complete desistance and the journey to re-create themselves came with its own set of challenges. Participants understood that what they were previously engaged in was antisocial and they sought redemption and reintegration into society through the church.

...the church helped in reflecting on their past and seek redemption in a bid to reintegrate back into society. G1

Religion is an infinite subject which touches on everything about the world around us, from the explanations we seek for the creation of the universe and our purpose within to the higher power behind these things to the way we behave, treat one another, and interact with society, to the values, laws, and beliefs that govern us (Mark Stibich, 2022). Whether you are a person of faith or a sceptic person sketching in between, the concepts of spirituality, organized religion, and morality affect us all (The Best Schools, 2018).

Most participants seemed to have powerful moments whilst engaged in criminal activity that initiated desistance. Some believe religion and spirituality to be intertwined since the fundamentals complement each other and can be viewed as the same. One participant said:

Once I could have gone and joined the gang and got involved with what they were doing or I could have went fishing with another group of friends. I chose to go fishing, it was after long time i went out with them and joining them took away some of the depression i started suffering with. When we reached the pier the weather was bad. There were very strong winds and there was a slight drizzle. My friends said that it was no use fishing and we should go back home. I was enjoying myself with them and it was one of the few times I came out. I prayed to god and asked him to please change the weather so I could stay longer. I swear not even a minute passed by and the weather changed from dull and rainy to hot and sunny. I felt shivers down my spine when this happened and all i could do was marvel at god. G3

The researcher deduced that participants all had significant turning points in their lives that pushed them to adopt a more religious lifestyle. When asked if they believed in God some participants replied that:

You and me need to sit and have a cup of coffee and speak about this. We don't have enough time now. But look at my eyes, can you see that they crooked? I wasn't born like this. I was in a car with my best friend. He shot me through the head at close range. Can you see the scars?" He turned his head to show the researcher two bulging scars on either side of his head where the bullet entered and exited. G3

He went on to say that:

I woke up three days later in the morgue. I just kicked the casket and I fell to the floor. I was declared dead. The morticians looked at me and told me to remain calm. I said I can't remain calm, I'm naked and I have blood on me. They told me again to be calm and I said before I calm down give me clothes to wear. That is the power of God. What happened is a miracle. The doctors couldn't explain how I survived a head-shot at close range. Remember I told you I don't keep friends? That's why! Now I go to visit family only, go to church and pray every day to God for saving me. Without my religion I don't know how to carry on with life. G3

His response reinforced the researcher's tentative conclusion that religiosity, knowingly or unknowingly, was a powerful desister and that by praying every day or engaging in some form of spiritual exercises allowed participants to reflect on their past lives remorsefully. Religion and spiritual exercises replaced gang-life and mentality in the participants.

From the findings it is evident that participants preferred to be part of a religious association than pursue a life which only resulted in pain. G1 told the researcher that:

I was a general in the 26 gang. I didn't worry about religion. When I was in jail one of the inmates came to me and said the guards hit him and weren't allowing him to pray. I told him, fuck the guards. Next time you pray; me I'm coming to pray with you. That's how I became Muslim. Next prayer time came. Me I went with him and we prayed and the guards just looked. After we prayed I went to

the guard and 'told' them that if they stop us from praying, all the guards are going to be killed. Even the warden is going to be killed. G1

The researcher came to the conclusion that religion was integral to the participants' major decisions and altered their ways of thinking. Although G10 views himself as someone who has left gang-life after his pilgrimage to Mecca, he still commands the same amount of respect as when he was active. The researcher went to the Grey Street mosque in an attempt to gain more information from him. It just so happened that it coincided with a '*janazasalaah*', a prayer done for every Muslim who passes away. In this case it was an innocent boy who was shot dead in a cross-fire, a result of gang wars between tow truck owners. A well-known street thug was smoking a cigarette inside the mosque. This act will be deemed totally disrespectful by any Muslim. Upon seeing this total disregard for the precincts of the mosque, G10 approached him and said:

You got no respect that this is a masjid? Put the cigarette off now. G10

Unfortunately, the street thug didn't realize that it was G10 and responded:

Fuck off. Don't tell me what to do. G10

Immediately G10 slapped him across the face and said:

You have a big mouth! This is how you children die! You lucky it's a janazasalaah! When you find out who I am you going to shit yourself." He then left the street thug and walked to the ablution room. G10

As this event unfolded the researcher observed several men come and stand next to G10, waiting for an order to 'dispose' off the street thug. The researcher feels that had this event transpired before G10 went on pilgrimage, the street thug might have been beaten to death. It also displayed the change in G10's way of thinking in that he could have had the street thug severely beaten but out of respect for the mosque and the special prayer for the deceased he let him be.

4.8.3 Parental role in gang-membership and desistance

As stated above, one of the motivating factors for joining a gang are youth who model their behaviour around family members who are part of a gang. All the participants in this research stated that their parents were not only honest hard workers but that they

had strong bonds with the religions they followed. All participants stated that their parents were not responsible for their gang-membership. This prompted the researcher to unravel the role the parents had on the participant's gang desistance. G10's cousin told the researcher that:

G10's parents were angels. He got away with over sixty murders and he told me it was only because of his mother's prayers. His mother will cry on the musallah (prayer mat) almost every day for him to leave that life- style behind. His father as well will urge him to come to the mosque during prayer times continuously. His father used to hit him telling him that he is going to end up dead or in jail if he continued. Finally, he ended up in jail and told me, I lost fifteen years of my life being in jail. I wish my parents were alive to ask them for forgiveness.

This prompted the researcher to conclude that although both nature and nurture are factors that drive a person to join gangs, nature seemed to be a stronger contributor for gang affiliation amongst the participants whilst nurture seemed to be a stronger contributor for gang desistance.

One participant told the researcher that:

I used to take G10's mother to see him when they moved him from prison to prison around the country. All the while she will be praying and telling me to leave the gang life. When she will meet G10 in jail during visiting hours, she will only cry and tell him that she wants him out of gang-life before she passes away. If it wasn't for his mother's continuous prayers and pleading, G10 might have never left and would have died in that lifestyle. G3

Moreover, G5 reinforced the researcher's view of the role of parents when he stated that

After I started going to the mosque and slowly changing my life style and helping others, my father didn't know I was doing acts of charity. His words always sat at the back of my mind. I started seeing the pain my lifestyle brought to my parents. My mother used to tell me that every day she cries and prays to God that I change. It was the people I helped that came to him and told him that without your son's help we would be living on the streets or dead. When my

parents found out how I was helping people they cried and said I knew our prayers will be answered someday. Looking at them in that state made me realize the pain I brought to them and I became so remorseful that I closed down the club and opened up this legitimate business. G5

In the brief interview with one participant before their assassination the researcher asked if the participant blamed his parents for gang involvement. The participant replied:

Do you know what's Ubuntu for the Africans? G7

The researcher responded:

Yes, it is to show humanity to others regardless of what race they are from.

The participant then went on to say:

Yaa, to be human and to help others. My parents were traditional and strongly believed in Ubuntu. They were very religious and always told me that God doesn't like what I'm doing. They tried a lot to keep me away from this life. But I didn't listen. When my mother died my eyes opened. I wish I never broke her heart with the way I acted. After her death, every day I thought of her and slowly started to leave the gang. But even now I still have to be careful. People still want to kill me. G7

These comments elucidated for the researcher that even after desistance, former gang-members are still afraid of long lasting vendettas they had with rival gangs, and that revenge amongst current gang-members was an on-going cycle. Every participant had religious parents who wished for them to leave the life of gangsterism, and all of them were highly religious. A common theme is that the participants always refer primarily to the prayers of their religious parents which assisted them on their journey to gang desistance.

Every participant spoke about the pain it brought to them, and that they will always cry during their prayers for their children to walk away from that life. G6 was known to be the third in command from G10s gang. He now runs a legitimate business and abstains

from any form of gang activity. The researcher asked G6, how he managed to survive unharmed since he was known to take the place of G10 when he dies? He replied:

My mother's duas (prayers) All my mother does is pray. She told me, she used to finish three Qurans (muslim's holy book) a month and cry to Allah, for me to stop because she used to tell me that she knew if I continued I will end up dead or in jail or a full blown drug addict. Every time I visited her she will ask me when am I changing my life? As she got older I couldn't bear to see the pain my lifestyle brought to her. So I slowly started to save up, stop the gang grafts (jobs) and told G10 that I was leaving and going legitimate. Ma's (mother's) duas(prayers) is the reason I changed my life. She used to also sit on my head to read my five salaahs. Now I don't miss a single one. Before all the money I earned seemed to be cursed. Now everything feels halaal (pure). I was the one who brought an end to the gang wars in Durban back in the day. I held a meeting with the heads of the gangs and convinced them that we should work together instead of trying to kill each other. This was how I got my respect from G10.G6

In the interview with G2 the researcher asked him if religion is a greater desistor than family? He stated that:

Fifty-fifty. While I was in jail I missed my family every day. I will think about them and the pain I brought to them and sometimes I cried. I never wanted to be in a position where I hardly ever got to see them. If one of my parents died I wouldn't even be able to go for the funeral. But it was my salaah(prayers) in prison that helped me go on with life. I can't deny that I owe a lot to my religion for helping me cope. Now that I went for Umrah (pilgrimage) and I read all my salaahs, it's given me a new start to life and hope for forgiveness from God. It keeps me in line. And my children check me going to the mosque to pray and want to come with. The joy this brings I can't explain. My children learn by watching me. G2

The researcher is of the opinion that G2's strict adherence to his religion is a clear example of modelling in that his children are adopting his religiosity. Had he been still 'embedded' within gang culture their approach to life and views of their father will be

different. G4's response was in concordance with that of G2s. He informed the researcher that:

If it wasn't for my mother's prayers, I wouldn't be as successful as I am now. My son is also into bodybuilding and his studies. My mother is proud of my achievements now. And also wouldn't want me to ever join a gang again and break her heart. Also I never want to lose my children to this life. I wouldn't want them imitating me I wouldn't want them knowing of my past ever! G4

The researcher believes that had G2 and G4 continued with gangsterism in the latter part of their lives it could have been like that of G3, who lost everything and only has spiritual and religious practices to get him through life. G2s and G4s sentiments correlates with a study that states that effective parenting and strong family functioning that include warm affective bonds, high monitoring and consistent discipline are protective against a variety of antisocial and problem behaviours, including involvement with delinquent peers and subsequent likelihood of gang membership and violence.

The researcher concludes that religious, law abiding parents serve as strong desisters for current gang-members' abilities to withdraw themselves from their gangs. They also serve as support structures and motivators for gang desistance. They could also prevent the on-set of gang mentality amongst youth who will model their behaviour on their religious practicing parents. As is the case with G4, where his son is walking in his father's footsteps, is consistent in his school work and has his father's love to keep him grounded.

4.9 Discussion

The study showed that the survival of gangs was deeply entrenched in respect for hierarchies that existed among gang members. In a study by Narag and Lee (2018) gang fights transcribe to territories of contested ownership symbolic of physical prowess over negotiation. Honneth (1997) articulates that gang fights can be identified as relational practices of recognition where young men mutually recognise one another as warriors, foot soldiers engaged in battles for territory and honour. According to Narag and Lee (2018) gang life is not only a powerful emotional experience involving risk, danger and pleasure, but operates on a symbolic and fantasy level so that heroic tales and myths of warfare are recreated. The researcher argues that it is these heroic

tales that gang members want their name as a leader to be associated with hence the existence of power struggles. Evidently from the study some gang members commanded the same respect they had before turning away from gansterism, this is argued to be a result of the power they exerted in their gang and community and most gangsters want that power.

Findings indicate that that the environment in which one is nurtured plays a significant role in the quest for one to join a gang or identify with one. Kynoch (1999) argues that the paucity of legitimate economic opportunities in the townships and the absence of effective policing, gang membership become the best method of survival for some residents in townships or locations. He further argues that gangsterism offers a sanctuary for marginalised males (and some females), weere often gangs are admired by the people they lived among (Kynoch, 1999). Because children mimic behaviour or rather learn behaviour from adults this was evidenced in this study where most participants indicated that they admired the luxury that came with being part of a gang. The researcher therefore argues that a lack of good role models in townships or locations breeds deviant behaviour (gangsters) because it is what defines a community with a lack of good role models.

One of the four essential elements that attempts to explain desistance was showcased by the responses given by participants namely the “situational principle”. This illustrates how various aspects of individuals’ social environments and situational routine activities influence behaviour(Weaver, 2019). When asked what the causes were for gang mentality amongst teenagers in Sydenham some participants quickly noted a lack of supervision from parents, the urge to make money at young age, familial affiliation among others. Some studies indicate that family criminality have been identified as significant factors contributing to gangs in several research findings (Heidt & Wheeldon, 2015; Brownfield, 2003; Kakar, 2005). The researcher argues this to be a legacy that youth or children wish to take over because it is what they have been exposed to in their life.

From the findings several reasons for one joining a gang were explicated. Recognising and acknowledging the causes for gang involvement should lead to establishing ways to combat them (Diamanduros, Downs & Jenkins, 2008). These combative ways fall under the category of prevention. Apt to note is that inequalities that exist in

communities' prompt children to join gangs at a very tender age and this then becomes a culture either in a family or community. The researcher argues that there are several ways or rehabilitative methods that a community can adopt in a bid to combat deviant behaviour leading to gang affiliation. From the study Sufism, spirituality and religion are seen as rehabilitative methods that can be adopted in communities, and these can be categorised as one of the prevention mechanisms used to combat deviant behaviour leading to gang affiliation.

Similar to the findings of this research, in a study undertaken in the Western Cape, which focused on young people and the reasons for gang affiliation found that participants' involvement in gangs meant social support, material resources including drugs and money (Van der Westhuizen & Gawulayo, 2021). The methods suggested to rehabilitate gangsters in this study which closely resembles Desistance Theory which showed that exercises which have a spiritual foundation are at the core of total reformation (Mthembu et al., 2015). They concluded that understanding motives for gang affiliation is instrumental for the creation of appropriate programmes for gang desistance amongst the youth.

Johnson and Densley (2018) articulate that the role of religion and spirituality has been the focal point with regards to gang affiliation desistance. They further make a correlation between spiritual philosophies which guide their offending actions and principles. In tandem with the study findings, it is apt to note that former gang members view religious and spiritual organisations as non-judgmental platforms which relates to their innate human needs such as a sense of belonging and provides for passive re-integration into society. From the findings it is evident that spirituality and religion offers a space for redemptive reflection. In a study conducted by Deuchar (2019) which focused on religion and spirituality he maintained that, spirituality plays a role in transitioning in and out of crime, gangs and from antisocial to pro-social roles. These roles are complicated, rarely linear and nuanced at every step of the way.

Participants' comments about salaah (prayer) keeping their sanity is congruent to a study conducted in Texas, where many affirmed that spirituality is a 'powerful' desister (Decker & Pyrooz, 2020). The outcomes of the study on religion's effectiveness for rehabilitation is expressed by Wu (2009). Wu reported on several significant findings regarding the benefits of practising spirituality or religion while incarcerated. Of note,

in his study, participants perceived that a relationship with "God" served as a protective factor during their time of incarceration (Wu, 2009). It is essential to note that although the expression "God" was not utilized in the interview schedule, all participants in this study mentioned "God" during the dialogue. Furthermore, participants described a mystical experience they accredited to their own faith while imprisoned.

From the findings it is important to note that the specific intervention methods used to counter gangsterism and gang violence seem to lack substance and practicality in South Africa because the number of gang related crimes are not reported on daily and most participants in this study cited spirituality and religion to have been their solution to gang affiliation desistance. According to the researcher, in South Africa the value and extent of religiosity and spirituality in the rehabilitation of offenders is not significant (Cruz et al., 2017). Most street gang members in Durban identify with some form of religion. This major desister (religion) has been proven to incite contrasting and powerful new identities (Cruz, et al., 2017). In a study conducted by occupational therapists on the rehabilitation of gang members (their method mirrors Desistance Theory) within South Africa and showed that exercises with a spiritual foundation are at the core of total reformation (Mthembu, et al., 2015).

Institutions that have faith at its core administer many of the prison-based programs intended at reducing retrogression. Many of these institutions also manage healing strategies for substance abusers, at-risk juveniles, and ex-offenders. Much of research undertaken indicates that religiosity and delinquency are conversely related. consequently, it could be deemed plausible that faith-based programs, which are grounded in religious institutions, may be effectual methods for reducing criminality (Dodson et al., 2011). The criminal justice system in South Africa is yet to produce intervention strategies which showcase radical change. In a study conducted by Anderson (2009) on what shields certain youth in Wentworth from the alluring life of gangsterism and masculinity, she draws attention to Dane one of her participants who was given a book, *'The Cross and the Switchblade'* by Wilkerson, et al. (1963). The book outlines the violent wars between two rival gangs in the USA and is focused around a preacher who tries to assist in a battle to stop gangsterism. Dane stated that after reading the book that:

The book that I read is 'The Cross and the Switchblade'. I can see myself in this book. It's about gangs and how a preacher tries to stop the gangs and gang fights. The book helps me to see myself. He also places religion as the main desister in his own life.

It is therefore evident from study findings that religion and spirituality can be used as rehabilitative mechanisms for crime recidivism.

The findings of the study highlighted the transformative role of Sufism in the rehabilitation of former gang members in the Durban Metropolitan, shedding light on how spiritual practices foster personal change. Desistance Theory emphasises the significance of identity transformation and agency in the cessation of criminal activities (Maruna, 2001). The participants' shift in values and behaviours through Sufism can be seen as a manifestation of this transformation of identity, allowing individuals to redefine themselves away from their past roles in criminality. For example, participants' experiences of personal change, such as the adoption of new values and the rejection of gang-related behaviours, could be directly connected to Desistance Theory's idea that desistance is a process of identity change. The ability to detach from gang affiliations and engage in spiritual healing reflects a profound shift in how individuals perceive themselves and their place in society.

While Desistance Theory is often focused on individual agency and identity transformation, it does not adequately account for the external factors that influence the desistance process. In the case of gang rehabilitation in Durban, socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and systemic discrimination play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' pathways away from crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993). These structural factors may either hinder or facilitate the rehabilitation process. For instance, participants who struggled with poverty or lacked job opportunities might have found it more challenging to reintegrate into society, even after experiencing spiritual transformation through Sufism. Desistance is a non-linear process, and individuals may experience setbacks or differing degrees of transformation. While the study highlighted the positive impact of spiritual practices, some participants' experiences contradicted the general findings or revealed complexities not captured by the theory. For example, some participants found that their rehabilitation was

influenced by factors beyond religion, such as family support, economic opportunities, or community-based programs.

The study's findings suggest that while Sufism's emphasis on spiritual healing and identity transformation plays a crucial role in desistance from gang involvement, these spiritual practices alone may not be sufficient to ensure long-term rehabilitation. Sufism, with its focus on self-reflection, repentance, and the cultivation of mercy, provides a powerful framework for personal transformation. This transformation is particularly important in the context of desistance, as individuals often need to redefine their sense of self and their relationships with society. Through spiritual practices, participants may experience a shift in values, distancing themselves from their previous gang affiliations and behaviours. However, the study also highlighted the complexity of the desistance process, emphasizing that desistance is not solely driven by spiritual or religious factors but is deeply influenced by structural and socio-economic conditions.

This observation contrasts with perspectives in the literature that view rehabilitation primarily through the lens of structural and socio-economic factors, such as access to employment, education, stable housing, and community support systems (Schutte & Reddy, 2012). Research suggests that while religious interventions can be transformative, they are often insufficient without addressing the underlying socio-economic challenges that many gang members face. For example, poverty, unemployment, and a lack of educational opportunities are significant drivers of gang involvement, and without addressing these systemic issues, individuals may struggle to maintain their desistance from criminal activities. Gang membership often serves as a means of survival in socio-economic contexts where other opportunities are limited, and without meaningful interventions in these areas, individuals may return to criminal behaviour as a way to cope with ongoing financial or social hardships.

The findings of the study therefore present an opportunity to challenge the overemphasis on spiritual or individualistic explanations for desistance. While Sufism and other religious practices can provide a transformative spiritual experience, they must be seen as part of a broader, more holistic approach to gang rehabilitation. The study advocates for integrating socio-economic interventions alongside spiritual healing to support the long-term desistance process. This includes focusing on

providing former gang members with tangible opportunities for reintegration into society, such as job training, education, and community-based support. By addressing both internal changes in identity and external socio-economic factors, rehabilitation efforts can be more comprehensive and sustainable. Without considering the socio-economic factors that contribute to gang involvement, rehabilitation programs risk being ineffective in the long term, as individuals may relapse due to the persistent structural barriers they face.

Moreover, incorporating a holistic approach that integrates spiritual, social, and economic support would align with current criminological thinking, which recognizes the importance of both individual transformation and structural change in the desistance process. This dual approach acknowledges that while personal change is essential for desistance, lasting rehabilitation also requires addressing the conditions that may perpetuate criminal behaviour. Thus, the study's findings suggested a need for a shift in how gang rehabilitation programs are designed, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that combines spiritual transformation with practical socio-economic interventions.

4.10 Summary

The findings indicated that socio economic factors together with a degree of rational choice by individuals could lead to gang affiliation. It also displayed that both nature and nurture played a major role in gang membership. It further outlined the violent mentality of former gang members during the height of their 'careers' and its favourable shift (that of desistance) in their current lives.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes and makes recommendations for further research based on the findings of this study. The pitfalls the researcher had to encounter in order to gather information are also discussed in this chapter. Important to note is that the role religiosity and spirituality play in rehabilitating gangsters was the core of this study and findings are summarised below.

5.2 Summary of findings

Findings of the study suggested that gang association can be stopped through spiritual regenerative exercises. Chapter 4 showcased the themes that emerged from the data that were collected. Apt to note is that there are psycho-social factors that pushed the participants towards gangsterism. However, the study also explored how they used spirituality and religion to navigate out of gangsterism and maintain desistance through spiritual re-generative exercises.

The researcher notes that rational choice was the driving factor for gang lifestyle and life changing experiences that moved them towards gang dis-engagement. It also presents the crucial role that their parents have in their lives post gang-membership. From the findings it was evident that despite having disengaged from gangsterism participants still feared for their lives and that of their loved ones. The findings also showed that whilst participants had disengaged from gangsterism some participants still maintained close bonds with their former gangs. The study also showed the grim lives that some led after gang-disengagement such as being disregarded by their families and losing the wealth accumulated during their times within a gang. Moreover, it shows the challenges some faced on their path to gang-desistance and the regrets they have for past actions done for their gang.

5.2.1 Role played by religion in gang desistance

Religion/spirituality as a desister was conceptualized as serving as a buffer for gang dis-engagement as well as an avenue for former gang-members to recreate themselves into socially acceptable ways and become law abiding citizens. The

findings revealed that each participant had a different religious strategy that allowed for desistance and the ability to maintain gang disassociation. Every participant attributed a great part of their desistance resulting from change inspired by religion.

From the findings it can be concluded that religion is a significant mechanism to crime recidivism and desistance. Participants took to their religious roots to better re-create themselves; they displayed a deep recognition of a higher power (God) which they traced back to their religious backgrounds claiming that it rendered a helping hand in dealing with their past and current positions in life. Religion also assisted gangsters to come to terms with heinous crimes, such as murder that they had committed for their gangs. It also created a platform for reintegration into society. For some, it numbed the pain of the losses of their loved ones who completely reject them, because of gang affiliation. Some sought to go on pilgrimages and 'holy' sanctuaries to tear themselves away from their gangs whilst others chose to engage in spiritual re-generative exercises in their communities. Participants in this study attached themselves to some religious organization such as churches and mosques to substitute for the gangs they had joined. The study also showed that adopting a more religious approach in their lives radically changed their way of thinking, the choices they make now and their plans for their future.

The research shows that the most hardened gangsters who had violent pasts can change for the betterment of others. The reason for this is that youth who revere them and their past are redirected by them towards a law-abiding lifestyle. The study shows the events that may be deemed mystical or a miracle which inspired change within them. Some have had near death experiences, a result of gang wars, which they attribute to their prayers to God, this in turn inspired change and the realization that they were not immortal. Adopting religion in their lives together with the inevitable approach of death is something they reflect on daily. Participants felt that one day they will be held accountable by God for their actions on earth. The mere thought of standing before a deity one day is what inspires continuous repentance and avoidance of any action that might hinder their religious progress.

The participants also stressed the importance of being good religious' role models for their children and none wish to see their children choosing the same life that they did. Religion has provided them with adequate tools to continuously seek betterment of

their characters. Those participants that were incarcerated for long periods turned to their religion to assist them in getting through their prison sentences and created awareness of their social image once discharged. It also gave them ways to cope in prison with prayers which provided patience and perseverance.

Adopting a more religious life also came with the realization of the integral role their parents had, since all participants came from strong religious families. It also allowed them to view themselves responsible for their choices for gang affiliation and not place blame on any external factors. All participants in retrospect wished that they adhered to the teachings of their parents which emphasized adopting religion instead of gang-membership. The fear embedded in them in breaking their current religious bonds has only produced positive results in their lives and has also assisted them in reaching tertiary desistance.

The religious approach that the participants chose also changed their demeanour in the way they speak by eliminating vulgar and helped in adopting dress codes that displayed their religious identity; Muslim participants for example grew their beards and started wearing the Muslim traditional attire. This outward manifestation is congruent with their reformed inner religious characters. Religion created a fear of God within them as well as enabled them in finding joy in everyday occurrences; further solidifying desistance on a tertiary level.

More so, being recognized now by society as people who have changed their entire lives for the better provides a need for on-going desistance and strong reliance on their religious and spiritual practices that impedes recidivism. By adopting spiritual practices such as meditation also served as a cure for mental problems such as debilitating depression or suicidal tendencies. Religion has proven to be the most effective desister in this regard. It also equipped them with methods to abstain from other detrimental behavior such as illicit drug usage which was and still is prevalent among gang-members. It has kept them away from lucrative illegal activities such as planned assassinations. The awe and ostentation that is attached to life as a gangster now, is viewed by the participants as terrible ways of living their lives. These findings suggest that achieving the level of tertiary desistance from gangs occurred in six stages:

(i) Gang association →(ii) Life changing events→(iii) Choice to disassociate from gang-life→(iv) Utilizing religion as a desister→(v) Tertiary gang desistance→(vi) Creation of pro-social identities

5.2.2 Participants relationship with God

The research has proven through the participants that former gang-members have deep rooted beliefs in a higher power. A power which they feel that they will one day stand before and be held accountable for their lives on earth. This major recognition of God came through the experiences they had living their lives as gangsters. All the participants emphasized, that under the influence of family or other factors that contributed to their gang disengagement, the primary factor that ultimately led them away from their previous lifestyle was their belief in an all-powerful being who helped them in life threatening situations and assisted them in mending the broken bonds with their families. This allowed for the continuation of tertiary desistance and a guiding force in their present positions. All participants displayed fear, as well as recognition of God in the interviews. Since every religion is based on some deity, their continuous efforts to maintain relations with pro-social members of society is deeply rooted within their religious practices making them wary of an eternal being who hearkens to the prayers they made for reformation.

Religious re-generative practices are ultimately exercises that helped them to reconnect with God. Some participants referred to gang encounters where they were nearly killed, as miracles given to them by God, for second chances in life. Other participants who have been shot multiple times and could have resulted in their deaths see their survival as 'god sent' as well. Participants who had achieved tertiary desistance and are now leading law-abiding lives disciplined themselves through their remembrance in an almighty being. When the researcher pried them about one-day standing before a deity for the sins they had committed, all participants stated that they seek forgiveness through prayers every day for their past and hope that when they do stand before God, they will be forgiven through his mercy. This God-conscious backdrop that they have created for themselves also allows them to deter youth who wish to become gang-members from doing so. It has also created humility and

patience which has replaced aggressive and violent attitudes in their psyche, attitudes inculcated in them by the gangs they had joined.

The researcher is of therefore of the notion that that gangsters turn to God to assist them change and be accepted back in society. The realization of an almighty deity waiting to hold them into account the day they die has:

- Instilled fear for breaking God's laws out of fear for retribution.
- Instilled hope that they will be pardoned by God the day they meet him.
- Instilled in them values that are socially acceptable.
- Assists them in their decisions.
- Brought about peace which numbs the pain from their past.
- Instilled in them the need to adopt more religious values that will grant them redemption.

5.2.3 Family structure and gang desistence

The fear of losing their families because of their gang affiliation as well as the fear of imprisonment were also identified as effective desisters. Even though some of the participants when incarcerated enjoyed certain perks like contact with loved ones, having access to fast foods, appropriate bedding, bigger cells and access to any block within the system, most of them didn't enjoy such privileges. This realization reinforced the fear of being imprisoned and having minimal contact with loved ones. The realization that they will miss out on milestones in their families' lives as well as the pain of only seeing their families at certain times impacted on their views of remaining within a gang. The participants placed the lack of seeing their families when incarcerated as a desister just below, or at par with religion. All participants had children, some participants from legitimate relationships whilst some had children 'out of wedlock'.

The research shows that they will never wish for their children to join gangs or have anything to do with that lifestyle. The lifestyle that their parents wished for them is what they now as parents wish for their own children. All participants stated that their parents could not be blamed for their decision for gang association. They also stressed

how the continuous prayers of their parents were motivational factors that helped them when they were incarcerated, serving as the beginning of their desistance and saving them from being killed. Their gang affiliation was always a topic of discussion when they were with their parents, who were strictly against that lifestyle. All participants wish for their children to grow up well educated and live law-abiding lives.

Unfortunately, some participants have had their marital lives torn apart because of gang involvement. Some of them whose children are married with children of their own wish to have nothing to do with them because they hold them accountable for being raised in unstable families. Those who were incarcerated always emphasized how they missed out on large parts of their children's upbringing and never wanted to subject them to that again. Some of the older participants unfortunately don't have the luxury of enjoying normal outings with their families, for they are constantly in fear of attempts on their lives for past actions; and for their innocent loved ones paying the price, being either killed or maimed. They have to invest in armoured vehicles, state of the art security systems in their homes and have armed guards with them all the time. Unfortunately, even with such systems in place some are still vulnerable as is the case of one of the senior participants who was still assassinated.

All the participants deeply regret not pursuing their parents' advice in their earlier years, especially with those participants whose parents passed away whilst they were in jail or were still active in gang activities. Those whose existing family members, especially their children who have altogether 'erased' them from their lives only have a few structures in place to get them through their lives, with religion being the foremost. Those that have effectively disengaged from gang affiliation are living productive lives and setting good examples for their children and the mere fact that their parents are proud of how they now conduct themselves is another 'pillar' that supports their tertiary desistance.

Every participant reminisced remorsefully when it came to questions regarding their parents. Recalling the tears their parents shed on their behalf as a result of their gang involvement their regret and sadness could clearly be seen in their body language when speaking of them. Their parents' religiosity entwined with their existing religious practices fortified their reasons for disengaging in gang activity. At the researcher's place of study, the common cause for youth gang affiliation is the lack of parenting.

Although most of the youth are members of law-abiding families, most come from households where both parents are working to make ends meet. Long hours at their jobs keep them away from their children, who then model their behavior around the gang members in their locality and are further enticed to the life of fast and easy money, availability of women and drugs. This early involvement is the primary reason for the high rate of killings and deaths amongst young gang members who do not have access to the security their superiors possess and are extremely vulnerable.

5.2.4 Overview of participants in this study

In this study the former gang-members in the sample were above 40 years of age with only one of them over 65 years of age. The age gap between the younger and older participants and location (Durban CBD) is of critical importance because the time frame of the older participants places them before South Africa's first democratic elections. The older participants (those closer to 60 years) pursuit of life in gang membership, have somewhat similar reasons for gang affiliation to their younger successors.

However, old, and retired gang members don't really regard the younger generation as 'gangsters' per se. To the researcher the reasons seems to stem from paradigm shifts in time which altered their own individual code of what constitutes a real gangster. The older participants who joined gangs during apartheid, in a more underdeveloped CBD, stated their reasons for gang involvement was the thriving 'availability' of opportunities just outside their homes. Also, that it was activities like soccer and cricket games which tended to turn into all out street brawls that facilitated growth of notoriety of their gangs which set the playing field for their lives in organized crime.

Younger participants' reasons for joining are rooted mainly in rebelling against care givers and authorities and their interactions with the older generation. They were exposed to the alluring lifestyles, the power, masculinity and easy money of their predecessors together with their own predisposing factors (desire to rebel against authorities e.g. school teachers and parents). However, the masculinity, prestige and power associated with gang membership cannot be ignored as one of the foremost reasons for gang affiliation and recidivism.

To recapitulate: Reasons for joining a gang; objectives of the gang; life within a gang; advantages and disadvantages of gang-membership; reasons for walking away; the 'awakening' of religion within their lives and ultimately their everyday reflections on God are dissimilar yet alike. For instance, whilst older participants speak of 'gang behaviour' being prevalent just outside their door and around every corner, younger participants based their judgments on the alluring and attractive lives of their seniors. The older participants needed the protection of their gangs for soccer and other games that could quickly get violent, whilst younger participants looked to re- create themselves in that image.

Universally known desisters for walking away puts family and religion as the primary desister followed by desisters such as prison time, close encounters with death and fear for their lives. However, both categories of participants agree that 'rational choice' is the main reason as they could have easily walked away and pursued a life away from any form of criminality.

Thus, many youths see themselves as making a rational choice in deciding to join a gang: They see personal advantages to gang membership (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991).

All had brushes with law enforcement with some doing hard time and some climbing the ranks of the 'number gang' prevalent in all South African prisons. All participants had received formal education at schools whilst those who wished to not comment in totality on their academic history led the researcher to assume that at some point they abandoned high school to pursue a life within gangsterism; their body language and vague replies conveyed embarrassment to the researcher. Questions regarding children out of wedlock or from failed marriages; on the consequences of the life they chose; the serious hardships and trauma associated with the life- style were amongst the questions that 'overwhelmed' them.

Also, questions concerning serious crimes committed were also amongst the questions the participants were not comfortable in answering. The older participants unequivocally told the researcher that those questions were "dangerous to ask", whilst the younger participants were less wary of them. The reason is because of the researcher's own history with the younger participants, some of whom the researcher had got into altercations within earlier years. They were more comfortable interacting

with the researcher. Another well-established fact is the temporary visage of masculinity associated with gang membership and wars of territory which is persistent. McLean and Holligan, 2018 in their study on gang's state that, "Many contemporary studies of youth gangs connect.

5.3 Factors contributing to gang-membership

5.3.1 Being raised in an environment controlled by gangs

One of the main contributing factors to gang affiliation is the 'availability' of gang life in certain areas, such as the Durban CBD as well as the researcher's place of study. All participants stated that gang life was just outside their doors on every street corner. Every street had its own group of pocket gangs with some expanding in membership over the years. Gangs created safety for the participants, especially for those above sixty years of age, when they were younger. Those who were around the age of 40 years stated that the 'availability' as well as the alluring lifestyle portrayed by their superiors was motivation to join a gang. However, every participant stated that they made a rational choice to join a gang.

5.3.2 Alluring lifestyle

The difference between gang affiliation amongst the participants interviewed contrasts with those who are currently seeking that lifestyle. The lifestyle of partying, making fast money through gang dealings as well as the respect based on the notoriety of being a gang member was the primary reasons. Being in a gang was much more 'fun' than studying and finding a job. The research findings show that most gang members are involved in the illicit drug trade. This trade brings in a lot of money on a daily basis, something which the youth are drawn to.

In the researcher's place of study, the factors are based on nature and nurture. The Sydenham area is well known for its illicit drug trade. Youth who have no direction in life witness the dealings of gang members in their locality and succumb to this lifestyle as a result. Some have no family and so see themselves as having no other option but to become part of a gang. Others come from stable households with law abiding parents who don't have adequate time in the day to monitor their children. As a result, their free time is spent with senior members of gangs, and they find themselves treading down the same path.

Many of the gang members are poor, young males who are recruited from the Cape Flats as 'guns for higher'. They are provided with illegal guns, illicit drugs to trade with and given housing by their recruiters. This is the reason for the high death rate amongst gang members as young as eighteen years of age. Some join gangs because their family members are part of this lifestyle. Some join seeking revenge for close members of their families and close friends who were killed in gang wars. The strongest factor seems to be the easy money made through racketeering and dealing with drugs.

However, such was not the case with the gangs of the past which formed for protection for things like soccer and cricket games that ended in violence. It was only after a few years that they realized they were in deep in the gang lifestyle they enjoyed. Dysfunctional family systems as a motive for gang membership did not show up amongst the participants who revered their parents and labeled them as religious and law-abiding citizens. The researcher was informed though that 'guns for hire' recruited from the gangs of the Cape Flats came from severely dysfunctional families where their primary caregivers were part of a gang, resulting in these 'caregivers' later passing the mantle down to them.

5.3.3 Lack of job opportunities

The increasing lack of job opportunities in South Africa together with gang culture predominant in many of the Durban suburbs creates a fertile ground for youth who can't find any other line of work save that of joining a gang. In the place of study, the researcher was informed that gang mentality amongst the youth start as young as seven years of age. Adolescent children are exposed to the mentality of the gang members in their surroundings. They witness the illegal movement of drugs, assassinations, gun wars, illegal gun trade, prostitution and quick money at such tender and crucial years of their lives that they model their behaviour around those in their environment. Many of the youth either drop out of school to find place in a gang or slowly affiliate themselves whilst still in school. Those who do not meet the requirements to go to a tertiary institute or suffer from lack of funds quickly find their way into the gang culture.

5.3.4 Fame and notoriety

The fear of being arrested and incarcerated is dulled by the notoriety and fame that comes with time served in a prison. Many want to be known for assassinations and killings and this fame comes with incarceration. When imprisoned they readily join the prison number gang and love the idea that people know this when their time is served. Also, another driving force is the lack of police activity in their areas or dirty cops who are on the payroll of gang leaders. The research shows that reasons for gang affiliation has had a major paradigm shift over the years. In the past in Durban, gang member's families were never targeted as a means of seeking revenge. However, in the present time gang members will randomly kill innocent people having no dealings with rival gangs except that they resided in the same area or in the same block of flats.

5.4 Limitations of the study

This section delves into the challenges that the researcher encountered during data collection.

5.4.1 Procuring of participants

All participants in this study conversed with the researcher in English. Unfortunately, former gang-members have suspicious mindsets which is understandable. The researcher had a few formal interviews with former members at a place of their choice. The collection of data from them was done on a writing pad written with a pen. Unfortunately, none of the participants had given permission to be recorded which hampered parts of the research that needed confirmation on salient points. The researcher had to then find and make use of gang affiliates to fill in the missing blanks. Some participants expressed anger towards the questions on the interview schedule and even warned the researcher that people were killed for asking such questions. These questions related to 'stories' on criminal acts committed by certain participants, including acts of murder still lingering in the folk-lore within Durban's history. Other participants altogether dismissed the researcher and wished to have no part in the study. With certain participants the researcher had to find an appropriate time and place, and travel daily to the spots frequented by participants with the off chance of meeting them and making progress. At other interviews the researcher had to meet a participant at a certain place, getting picked up, and taken for a drive to answer the

questions on the interview schedule. This was owing to the fear of being overheard divulging information regarding certain gang-members who are still operational, something which could easily result in being later targeted. To procure second or third interviews for follow-ups with some participants was difficult, the researcher opined it was because they felt they had provided enough information.

5.4.2 The researcher's place of study

As an Ethnographic researcher attempting to obtain information regarding gang lore through 'Field Research' was integral, tedious and dangerous. The place of research has had a history of decades of on-going gang wars. Many a time shootings and planned assassinations occurred whilst the researcher was present and more than once a few minutes before his arrival. The researcher witnessed the killings of innocent by-standers, and of some middle aged people who didn't have anything to do with gang activity only because they lived in flats that had rival gang members. More than once the researcher had to take refuge in the place of study for shootings that were occurring a few meters away. This 'deadly edge' which surrounded the place of study kept the researcher on high alert for any stray bullets and gang fights that could occur as the researcher approached the place of research.

5.4.3 The Corona virus outbreak

For a while South Africa was in total shutdown during the corona virus outbreak, bringing the research study to a complete 'standstill'. Even though later when restrictions were marginally lifted, the corona virus pandemic and the on-going gang violence in the place of research still hindered the researcher's ability to obtain samples and data. Additionally, the inconsistent; opening and closing; of the place of study further hampered drastically with data collection. However, gang activity continued as normal. Even during these trying times and against the odds, the researcher continued to strive to collate data, hoping that the place of study will be accessible. Unfortunately, three of the researcher's participants succumbed to the Corona virus, whilst some were now afraid of contracting the virus and were no longer available. Fortunately, some of the participants were accommodating and promised to avail themselves as soon as regulations allowed for it. In spite of the corona virus gang activity continued and the researcher witnessed the 'rise and fall' of one particular 'power drunk', financially secure criminal with a false sense of security

because of his successful security business. This gang affiliate had to flee from Durban, relocate going into hiding.

5.4.4 Organized Looting

The organized looting that had Durban, under the spotlight of the world was another factor that hampered the collection of data and the acquiring of participants. However, the gangs in the Sydenham area were unfazed by the looting. The researcher went to the place of study a day after the organized looting and saw numerous cars from security vehicles to cars belonging to people from as far as Ballito (area outside Durban) come to collect ammunition in the event of the looting and bloodshed continuing. Many of the customers were stunned by the on-going rapid fire from the buildings a few meters away and were in total shock when they were informed that it was owing to gang-wars occurring in the flats a few metres away. However, this further hampered the researcher's ability to procure participants who were actively involved in assisting their neighbourhood from potential looters. The researcher was told their priority now was ensuring their neighbourhood's safety and to check with them when the situation normalized. Time elapsed before the researcher could resume the study, valuable time that the researcher could have spent interviewing them and obtaining data.

5.4.5 Participants' demographics

Because of the internal conflict which led to major drug wars and the disassembling of the gang under study, some members retired in the Overport suburb whilst others relocated to other surrounding suburbs such as Phoenix, with one participant relocating to Cape Town. The researcher had to interview participants outside a shebeen known for violence, at night whilst it was raining, further making it daunting to jot down data on a paper pad. With regard to the participant who moved to Cape Town the researcher had to travel to a clothing factory close to the Durban CBD, serving as a safe house for this participant. The researcher had to go through three levels of security before obtaining an in-depth one- on- one interview with the participant. Most participants were suspicious in providing their places of residence, fortunately this information was not pivotal for the topic of the research.

5.4.6 Sample presentation

The researcher initially wanted to obtain fifteen participants for this research study. Unfortunately, what was not taken into account was the volatile mindsets that gangsters had. Whilst three died as a result of the corona virus, two of the intended participants proved to be impossible to get a hold of. They were reclusive, avoiding contact with people who were not close friends. They were also afraid of divulging information that might get them incarcerated or killed by active gang-members. The only African male gang member who the researcher managed to procure an in-depth interview with for this study and was hoping to set up a subsequent meeting with, was killed in early 2022, outside his home. Gaining information from secondary sources such as family members was tedious as they too were afraid of incarceration or assassinations because of disclosing information which might find their peers behind bars. The corona virus outbreak and the organized looting, were major obstacles in gathering a larger sample size.

5.5 Recommendations

While this study was not exhaustive with respect to studies that have examined the relationship between religion and crime, there are some themes that warrant further exploration:

- First, does the age at which one is exposed to religious doctrine make a difference in engaging in criminal activity? Some studies have examined the influence of religion on youth. While the results were mixed, there is some evidence that religion (measured in a number of different ways) does have some influence on reducing the propensity to engage in criminal and or delinquent behaviour. However, the studies presented did not discuss how long the youth had been exposed to religious doctrine and activities. This raises a question about length of experience with a religious doctrine and practices. Does religion have a stronger influence on youth who have a longer experience with religion compared to those who may have a shorter experience?
- Second, the reason or motivation behind attending church was not addressed in this study. One might expect to see different outcomes for youth who willingly attended because they like to do so versus youth who were forced to attend.

- Third, it will be important to examine the dimensions of religion to understand their relative significance. Does the amount of religious knowledge matter more than the amount of religious participation? Testing different measures of “religiosity” will help to develop a better theoretical understanding of the religion-crime nexus. Specifically, it makes a difference, for instance, if the amount of religious attendance and participation suppresses crime more than the degree of knowledge or belief (Clear and Sumter 2002).

The researcher therefore recommends that subsequent empirical investigations or research be conducted to bring to the fore the role played by the nexus between religion and crime in self-control and social control as well as accentuate the mechanisms by which religion, as an agent of social control, suppresses criminal/deviant behaviour.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



28 November 2023

Zaheer Ahmed Soofie (214585689)
School of Applied Human Sc
Howard College Campus

Dear ZA Soofie,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006413/2023

Project title: The role played by religion and spirituality in the rehabilitation of former gang members in the Durban Metropolitan

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 07 November 2023 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.

This approval is valid until 28 November 2024.

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 sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ICF)

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL for research with human participants

Information sheet and consent to participate in research

Date:

Greetings: **Greetings Sir!**

My name is Zaheer Ahmed Soofie. I am from the School of Applied Human Sciences, Discipline of Criminology and Forensic Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am a Masters candidate whose study focuses on the role played by religion and spirituality in rehabilitating former gang members in Durban. My contact numbers are [REDACTED] (home) [REDACTED] (cell number). My email address is 214585689@stu.ukzn.ac.za OR [REDACTED]

I am asking for permission from you to participate in a study which I am undertaking that involves research which deals with: "The role that religion and spirituality play in the rehabilitation of former gang members in the Durban metropolitan." The aim and purpose of this research is to effectively understand the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of former gang members and how it assists them in their current position in life. This study is expected to enroll fifteen participants and interviews carried out in a setting which they are comfortable with. It will entail the following procedure: answering questions that are based on the topic, which helps achieve the aims and objectives of this study. Your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be approximately 30-45 minutes in duration.

The study may involve the following risks and / or discomforts:

As a participant you may have to revisit some traumatic experiences that you may have encountered when you were a member of a gang. In the event of any mental conditions that may arise due to the nature of the research, the researcher will provide psycho-social interventions from a psycho therapist (Dr Naseema Dawood HPSCA No: PS0077844) who will be readily available to assist. (*See attached letter*).

Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point when you no longer feel comfortable. In the event that trauma is experienced you are entitled to withdraw from the study. Data will be collected through audio recorded interviews and in analyzing the data the researcher will use pseudonyms for confidentiality reasons and the audio recorded interviews and

transcribed data will later be discarded. To ensure the safety of the data, the researcher and the supervisor will be the only people having access to it. The data will be stored in a folder with an encryption key and all transcripts will be shredded after the study has been completed. No transport costs will be incurred by the participants as the researcher will be travelling to the chosen venues. There are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in this study.

We hope that the study will create the following benefits: being able to narrate your experience which may shape the lives of other gang members who are still into crime and motivate them to desist from crime.

(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

(i) Researcher: Mr Z A Soofie on the following: Home number: [REDACTED] OR Cell number: [REDACTED] OR Email address: 214585689@stu.ukzn.ac.za OR [REDACTED]

(ii) Supervisor: Prof ND Gopal Cell Number: 0837922957 OR Email address: Gopal@ukzn.ac.za

(iii) 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

Tell: 27 312604557- Fax: 27 31 2604557- Fax: +27 31 2604609

EMAIL: HSSREC@UKZN.ac.za

Consent

I have been informed about the study entitled **The role played by religion and spirituality in the reformation of former gang members in the Durban metropolitan**

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. 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. I have been informed that I am not liable for any compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study related procedures.

If I have any further questions/ concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at: [REDACTED] (home number) cell number: [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED]

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 researcher 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

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions

1. Could you explain your family system growing up?
2. What are the reasons that drove you into joining a gang?
3. Can you explain your experiences as a gang member?
4. What motivated you to quit gang life?
5. How would you describe your religiosity and spirituality as an individual?
6. Describe how influential religion and spirituality were in helping you to cope with life after gangsterism?
7. Explain the challenges you faced in using religion and spirituality to overcome your gang affiliation?
8. Were there any specific strategies/programmes/teachings in your religious affiliation that helped you remain committed to rehabilitating yourself? Please explain these if any.
9. What other methods or strategies of religiosity and spirituality could be used to influence current gang members to desist from crime?
10. In what ways has religion and spirituality affected/ shaped the choices you make in life now or post gang affiliation?

APPENDIX 4: TURNITIN REPORT

ZAHEER TURNITIN COPY.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

3% SIMILARITY INDEX	3% INTERNET SOURCES	2% PUBLICATIONS	2% STUDENT PAPERS
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APPENDIX 5: EDITORS LETTER



Mufasa Research Consultancy

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

05 March 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Editor's Letter

THE ROLE PLAYED BY RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE REHABILITATION OF FORMER GANG MEMBERS IN THE DURBAN METROPOLITAN

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,



Venencia Nyambuya (PhD)

PhD in Media & Cultural Studies: UKZN (RSA)
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