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An exploratory study on crime proliferation among homeless people in KwaZulu- Natal Province: Insight from Durban and Pietermaritzburg City Centres, South Africa

by

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DECLARATION

I would like to confirm my understanding of the University's rules and guidelines regarding postgraduate research. I have adhered to these rules to the best of my ability. This research paper, with the exception of guidance from my supervisors, is my own original work. I have ensured that all sources are properly credited according to academic standards. Furthermore, I affirm that this research is original and has not been submitted, either in full or in part, for any degree at this or any other institution. I have also utilized the University's text-checking procedures and can confirm that the document is free of duplication or plagiarism.

Signature: 

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Date: 06/01/2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to all communities grappling with issues of vagrancy and crime, as well as to the broader field of Criminology.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my dad. I recall when I graduated with my Honours Degree, you expressed your hope to see me in a red gown one day, and by the grace of the Lord, that day has finally come.

ABSTRACT

Crime is a global issue, with research suggesting that anyone, regardless of their social background, can potentially become an offender. However, adverse social factors such as unemployment, poverty, and lack of education can drive individuals to commit crimes for survival. Homeless individuals are often reported as both perpetrators and victims of crime. This exploratory study aimed to explore the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals in the city centers of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, focusing on the underlying factors contributing to homelessness and the crimes committed by and against this population. The study employed qualitative methods, engaging participants which included community members, and homeless individuals, to provide insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding homelessness and crime. The study applied Routine Activities Theory, Labelling Theory, Social Learning Theory and General Strain Theory to explore how social dynamics and environmental factors contribute to crime and victimisation in urban contexts. The findings indicated that the rise in homelessness in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas was linked to economic instability, high rent, family breakdowns, substance abuse, mental health issues, and systemic barriers. Homelessness individuals faced violence, theft, and harassment by law enforcement, while crimes committed by them often stemmed from 8survival needs. Municipalities had introduced various programs, including shelters, job training, mental health support, and legal reforms, aimed at reducing homelessness and related crimes. These initiatives emphasized holistic, supportive interventions to address the root causes of homelessness and crime. The study contributes to the broader discourse on homelessness and crime, highlighting the need for integrated solutions to enhance community safety and support vulnerable populations.

Keywords: Homelessness, Vagrancy, Crime Prolification, Vulnerable Population, Communities

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ACROYNMS

CBD:	Central Business District
DSD:	Department of Social Development
GST:	General Strain Theory
HOT:	Homeless Outreach Teams
HSSREC:	Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
HSRC:	Human Sciences Research Council
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
MoU:	Memorandum of Understanding
NDP:	National Development Plan
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO:	Non-Profit Organization
RAT:	Routine Activity Theory
SA:	South Africa
SAPS:	South African Police Service
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goal
SLT:	Social Learning Theory
Stats SA:	Statistics South Africa
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN:	United Nations
UN-Habitat:	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
WHO:	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

Homelessness is a significant and deeply rooted social issue worldwide, affecting the lives of millions and posing complex challenges for governments, communities, and justice systems. Globally, it is estimated that more than 150 million people are homeless, with over 1.6 billion living in inadequate housing conditions (UN-Habitat, 2020). The phenomenon transcends geographical boundaries and is influenced by a confluence of economic instability, forced migration, social exclusion, mental health struggles, and systemic failures in housing policy and welfare systems (Tipple & Speak, 2009). They stated argued that homelessness does not only exposes individuals to extreme poverty and vulnerability but also heightens their contact with the criminal justice system, thereby reinforcing cycles of marginalisation and inequality.

In many countries of the Global North, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, research has shown that homeless individuals are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated for low level or non violent offences such as trespassing, loitering, or public nuisance (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010). This pattern often results from the criminalisation of behaviours linked to homelessness, such as sleeping in public spaces or begging, which are targeted under urban by-laws and policing strategies intended to clean up city centres (Amster, 2003). Consequently, the homeless frequently cycle in and out of the criminal justice system, often for offences directly related to their survival and the conditions of street life (Kushel Evans, Perry, Robertson, & Moss, 2005). For example, studies in the U.S. have shown that over 30% of homeless individuals have had some form of recent criminal justice involvement, mostly stemming from minor infractions (Snow, Baker, & Anderson, 1989).

The historical roots of homelessness stretch back centuries and are deeply entwined with social attitudes, colonial histories, and the development of capitalist economies. In Europe, particularly during the early industrial period, the poor and homeless were labelled as vagrants and subjected to harsh vagrancy laws, such as the 1824 Vagrancy Act in Britain, which effectively criminalised poverty (Neale, 1997). These laws often targeted the visible poor, leading to punitive responses such

as imprisonment, forced labour, and institutionalisation. Homelessness was not merely seen as a socio-economic condition but as a moral failing, an attitude that has influenced public policy for decades. In the post-industrial era, especially since the 1980s, neo-liberal economic reforms have further exacerbated homelessness by reducing social welfare spending, privatising housing markets, and increasing economic inequality (Parsell & Watts, 2017). Countries in the Global South have not been immune to this trend, but their contexts are further shaped by legacies of colonialism, apartheid, racial segregation, forced removals, and deep-seated inequality.

In the South African context, homelessness is understood against the background of systemic dispossession and apartheid-era spatial planning. The 1913 Land Act and subsequent apartheid policies, such as the Group Areas Act of 1950, institutionalised racial segregation and severely restricted access to land and housing for Black South Africans (Yates, 2011). During the apartheid era, millions were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to overcrowded, underdeveloped townships or informal settlements far from economic centres. These historical injustices laid the structural foundation for the modern homelessness crisis. Even after the formal end of apartheid, structural inequality remains entrenched. The post-1994 democratic government has made strides in housing delivery, notably through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), yet demand continues to far outpace supply, especially in urban areas (Charlton & Kihato, 2006).

Today, homelessness in South Africa continues to be driven by a combination of high unemployment, poverty, rapid urbanisation, substance abuse, and the failure of social safety nets (Rule-Groenewald, 2015). Homeless individuals are often forced to live in public spaces, informal shelters, or abandoned buildings, particularly in city centres where they are most visible and most criminalised. Municipal by-laws in cities such as Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town frequently target the homeless through punitive measures, often under the guise of urban management (Killander, 2019). These measures not only exacerbate the marginalisation of the homeless but also expose them to increased risk of police brutality, exploitation, and victimisation by members of the public and other homeless individuals (Sadiki, 2016).

The KwaZulu-Natal Province, particularly the cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, presents a uniquely critical landscape for analysing the intersections between homelessness and crime. Durban, a major metropolitan hub, and Pietermaritzburg, the administrative capital of the province, have

witnessed a visible increase in street homelessness. The economic disparities in these cities are stark, with modern commercial developments coexisting alongside informal settlements and large homeless populations. Research shows that in these urban centres, homeless individuals often become both victims and perpetrators of crime engaging in minor offences for survival (such as theft or drug use) while also facing harassment, physical assault, and police violence (Jones, 2023; Mkhize, 2022). The visibility of the homeless population in these spaces elicits mixed reactions from the public, ranging from sympathy to hostility. These societal attitudes, often influenced by media portrayals and public discourse, inform policy responses that oscillate between punitive enforcement and charitable assistance. This duality reflects broader tensions in how society perceives homelessness not only as a social crisis but also as a criminal nuisance (Marcin, 2014). As a result, the lived experiences of the homeless are shaped by a constant negotiation of public space, criminalisation, and survival strategies.

This exploratory study seeked to provide a comprehensive understanding of the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, with a particular focus on the underlying socio-economic, structural, and psychological factors that contribute to this phenomenon. By grounding the research in the South African context while also drawing on global and historical perspectives this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to criminological scholarship and policy debates. It further seeks to illuminate how urban homelessness, shaped by history and modern policy, continues to influence patterns of crime and marginalisation, and to explore how integrated social interventions can address these challenges more effectively.

1.2 Rationale of the study

The increasing number of homeless individuals in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centers of KwaZulu-Natal Province is a significant concern, particularly regarding the proliferation of crime within this demographic. This study is imperative for understanding the multifaceted relationship between homelessness and crime and for developing effective interventions. By investigating these dynamics, the researcher intended to formulate recommendations that could be implemented collaboratively to reduce homelessness and its associated risks, thereby lessening the likelihood of victimisation among this vulnerable population.

Homelessness and crime often intersect in urban settings, with homeless individuals frequently becoming both perpetrators and victims of criminal activities (DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs, 2009). The lack of stable housing, social support, and economic opportunities often forces homeless individuals into situations where criminal activities become a means of survival (Baum and Burnes, 1993). This study explores the underlying reasons for the increase in homelessness in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, examining socio-economic factors, mental health issues, and the impact of substance abuse. In addition to identifying the causes, this research outlined the types of crimes commonly committed against and by homeless individuals. By understanding these patterns, the study highlighted the specific vulnerabilities of the homeless population, which is crucial for developing targeted interventions that provide a comprehensive overview that informs the creation of joint solutions involving local authorities, community organisations, and policymakers (Adinkrah, 2005).

Furthermore, this study seeked to uncover more effective social crime prevention strategies that can be integrated into existing policies. By examining current municipal programs and identifying their strengths and weaknesses, the research proposed enhancements that address both the immediate and long-term needs of homeless individuals (Human Sciences Research Council, 2021). These strategies included increased access to social services, housing initiatives, and employment opportunities, which are essential for reducing homelessness and its associated criminal behaviour. The insights gained from this research provided valuable contributions to policy amendments aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of homeless individuals. This comprehensive approach did not only target to reduce the number of homeless individuals but also seeked to enhance urban safety and community well-being by addressing the root causes of homelessness and crime (Tibaijuka, 2005).

1.3 Background of the study

Homelessness remains a critical social issue worldwide, with severe implications for individuals and communities. In South Africa, the KwaZulu-Natal Province, particularly its urban centers, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, has experienced a notable increase in the homeless population. This backdrop sets the stage for an exploratory study into the proliferation of crime among homeless people in these areas. Homelessness in South Africa is often a consequence of complex socio-economic factors, including high unemployment rates, poverty, inadequate housing, and the lingering impacts of

apartheid (Tibaijuka, 2005). The transition to democracy and subsequent economic policies have not sufficiently addressed the housing needs of all citizens, leading to an increase in the number of people living on the streets (Human Sciences Research Council, 2021). This situation is particularly pronounced in the CBD areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, where the visibility of homeless populations has raised concerns about public safety and social stability.

Studies have shown that homeless individuals are both perpetrators and victims of crime (DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs, 2009). The lack of stable housing and support systems often pushes homeless individuals into criminal activities as a means of survival. Crimes committed by the homeless can include petty theft, burglary, and drug-related offences, driven largely by the need to secure basic necessities and cope with the harsh realities of street life (Baum and Burnes, 1993). At the same time, homeless individuals are highly vulnerable to victimisation, facing physical assaults, theft, and exploitation due to their precarious living conditions (Adinkrah, 2005).

This duality of crime where homeless individuals are both perpetrators and victims highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to address homelessness and its associated criminal activities. The Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centers are microcosms of this broader issue, reflecting the intersections of urbanization, socio-economic disparities, and public policy challenges. Efforts by local municipalities to address homelessness have been varied, with some initiatives focusing on providing temporary shelter and basic services, while others intend to rehabilitate and reintegrate homeless individuals into society (Human Sciences Research Council, 2021). However, these efforts often fall short due to limited resources, inadequate planning, and the sheer scale of the problem.

1.4 Problem Statement

Homelessness is a widespread and deeply entrenched social issue with global, regional, national, and local implications. Internationally, the phenomenon challenges the fulfilment of basic human rights as set out in key global instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), both of which affirm the right to an adequate standard of living, including housing (UN General Assembly, 1948; United Nations, 1966). Despite these commitments, homeless populations across the globe continue to face exclusion, marginalisation, and limited access to essential services (FEANTSA, 2020).

Regionally, in Sub-Saharan Africa, rising urbanisation, poverty, and under resourced housing systems have contributed to the increasing number of people without stable shelter. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and other regional initiatives have acknowledged housing and social protection as essential developmental goals, but implementation remains inconsistent (African Union Commission, 2015). Nationally, South Africa faces a growing homelessness crisis driven by historical legacies of spatial inequality, structural unemployment, and extreme poverty (Cross et al., 2010). While Section 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) guarantees the right of access to adequate housing, there is no legislation that directly addresses the condition or rights of homeless persons. Existing laws such as the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE Act, 1998) are focused on unlawful occupiers rather than street dwellers, leaving a legal vacuum for those without any form of shelter (South African Government, 1998).

In practice, homeless individuals are often criminalised under local municipal by-laws that prohibit sleeping in public spaces, loitering, or begging (Wilson & Mabhena, 2015). These punitive approaches violate the spirit of the Constitution and South Africa's commitment to international human rights frameworks (Socio-Economic Rights Institute [SERI], 2019). Locally, in the city centres of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, homelessness has reached critical levels. The visible presence of homeless individuals has raised public concern and generated a complex mix of empathy, discomfort, and fear among residents and businesses (News24, 2019). These individuals experience dual vulnerabilities as both victims and perpetrators of crime. The rise in crime in these city centres has contributed to a sense of insecurity, shaping the way people interact with public space and reinforcing negative stereotypes about the homeless (Marcin, 2014; Jones, 2023).

While existing studies have focused extensively on crimes committed by homeless individuals often linking homelessness with petty theft, substance abuse, and survivalist crime (Tipple & Speak, 2005) there is limited literature addressing the victimisation of the homeless. Homeless individuals are frequently targets of assault, theft, exploitation, and harassment, sometimes by law enforcement and members of the public (SERI, 2014; Krüger, 2021). These experiences perpetuate cycles of trauma, vulnerability, and marginalisation.

This study seeks to bridge that gap by providing a comprehensive exploration of crimes both committed by and inflicted upon homeless individuals in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBDs. It also contribute new knowledge that reflects the lived realities of this population while promoting a balanced and evidence-based understanding. In the absence of targeted national legislation or policy, this study also has the potential to inform future legal and policy frameworks in line with South Africa's constitutional mandate and international human rights commitments.

1.5 Research Aim

The aim of this study was to conduct an in-depth exploration of the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals residing on the streets in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centres, in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The study sought to provide an understanding of the dynamics that contributed to the increase in criminal activity within this vulnerable population. While one of the core objectives was to identify and propose solutions that addressed the root causes of homelessness, the research also recognised the urgent need to respond to the immediate realities of those who were already homeless. In this regard, the study intended to move beyond simply identifying problems and sought to offer practical recommendations that could inform both short-term and long-term responses. These recommendations were intended to be implemented collaboratively by key stakeholders, including government departments, municipalities, civil society, and community-based organisations (McCombes, 2019).

Furthermore, the study pointed to assess the adequacy of the existing social and legal frameworks that governed homelessness and crime prevention in South Africa. It examined how responsive these frameworks were to the actual conditions experienced by homeless individuals. The research aspired to contribute meaningfully to the broader national discourse on social crime prevention by emphasising that sustainable crime reduction strategies should not only focus on preventative measures but also include interventions for those already living on the streets. Through its findings, the study aimed to lay the groundwork for more inclusive and integrated policy approaches that could be applied locally and inform broader national crime prevention strategies, ultimately promoting safer and more cohesive urban environments (News24, 2019; SERI, 2019).

1.6 Research Objectives

The following research objectives were formulated to achieve the aim of the study. As stated by Farrugia, Petrisor, Farrokhyar, and Bhandari (2010:3), "Research objectives focus on the specific issues the researcher intends to explore and should be clearly defined and precise. In light of this consideration, the key objectives of this study are as follows:

i. To explore reasons leading to the increase in the number of homeless people in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
ii. To outline the crimes committed to and by the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
iii. To examine the programs carried out by municipalities to address the challenge of the high number of homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
iv. To identify possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and against homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.

To achieve the stated aim and objectives, the researcher needed to investigate the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centers in KwaZulu-Natal. Given the limited study area and participant sample, it is important to note that the findings may not apply to all of South Africa or regions beyond its borders. Nonetheless, the study's nature and implementation yielded significant insights that could enhance understanding of vagrancy and crime, not only locally but also in other regional, national, and international contexts where similar issues are prevalent.

1.7 Research Questions

Research questions refine the purpose statement into specific predictions about what the study aims to discover or the questions that need to be answered (Creswell, 2014). They are essential as they guide the choice of methodology, methods, sample, sample size, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques (Lipowski, 2008).

The researcher concentrated on the following key questions to steer the research study:

i. What are the reasons leading to the increase in the number of homeless people in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area?
ii. What are some of the crimes committed towards and by the homeless people living in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area?
iii. Which programs are carried out by municipalities to address the challenge of the high number of homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
iv. What are possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and against homeless people in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area?.

1.8 Conceptual framework

Key concepts are clarified to ensure both the researcher and the reader have a precise understanding of their meanings. The central concepts relevant to this study are as follows:

a) **Vagrancy**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Vagrancy refers to the state of living without a permanent home, often characterised by moving from place to place without a stable income or employment. In historical and legal contexts, vagrancy has been associated with homelessness and regarded as a criminal offence (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Lee & Schreck, 2005).
- **Operationalisation**: For this study, vagrancy is measured by the number of individuals who are found living on the streets or in temporary shelters without a permanent residence. Data has been collected through observations and records from local shelters and streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD (Baum and Burnes, 1993).

b) **Crime**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Crime is defined as an act that violates the laws and regulations established by a society, which can lead to prosecution and punishment (Hagan & Peterson, 2013; Clear, 2009).

- **Operationalisation**: In this study, crime is operationalised by categorising reported criminal incidents involving homeless individuals. This includes both crimes committed by homeless individuals and those committed against them, based on published reports, research articles and research interviews (DeVerteuil, May, and von Mahs, 2009).

c) Crime Prolification

- **Conceptualisation:** Crime proliferation refers to the noticeable increase, spread, or intensification of criminal activities within a specific population or geographical area. In this study, it refers to the growing incidence and visibility of crimes involving homeless individuals, both as perpetrators and victims, in the urban centres of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. It reflects the dynamic escalation of criminal behaviour influenced by socio-economic marginalisation, systemic inequalities, and lack of institutional support (Eck & McGloin, 2007; Braga & Weisburd, 2010).

- **Operationalisation:** Crime proliferation is operationalised by identifying trends and patterns in the types of crimes committed to and by homeless individuals, using primary data from interviews and secondary data from municipal reports, academic literature, and media articles. The study examines both the perceived increase in criminal activity and the documented experiences of victimisation and offending among the homeless population (DeVerteuil, May, & von Mahs, 2009; Sadiki, 2016). This dual approach enables a deeper understanding of how and why crime intensifies in contexts of homelessness.

d) **Community Members**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Community members are the residents and regular visitors of a particular area who are directly or indirectly affected by local issues, including crime and homelessness (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Cohen, 2006).
- **Operationalisation**: Community members are identified as those members who have been interviewed by the researcher, and who have been staying in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBDs for at least five years. Their perceptions and experiences regarding homelessness and crime have been documented to assess the community impact (McCombes, 2019).

e) **Programs**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Programs refer to organised initiatives designed to address specific social issues, including homelessness and crime. These can include government policies, non-profit interventions, and community-based projects (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Weiss, 1972).
- **Operationalisation**: In this study various programs implemented by municipalities and NGOs aimed at reducing homelessness and associated criminal activities have been explored. Program effectiveness was evaluated through reports, outcome metrics, and interviews with program administrators (Human Sciences Research Council, 2021).

f) **Homeless**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Homeless individuals are those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes people living in shelters, on the streets, or in other places not meant for human habitation (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011; Parsell, 2018).
- **Operationalisation**: Homelessness has been assessed by counting the number of individuals using emergency shelters, living on the streets, or identified through outreach programs in the study areas. Research interviews were conducted where they provided additional context on their experiences and challenges (Baum and Burnes, 1993).

g) **Street**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Streets in this context refer to public spaces within urban areas where homeless individuals are often found. These include sidewalks, parks, and other open areas within the CBDs of Durban and Pietermaritzburg (Jacobs, 1991; Whyte, 1988).
- **Operationalisation**: Streets have been mapped and surveyed to identify locations with high concentrations of homeless individuals. Observations and geospatial analysis have been used to correlate these areas with reported crime incidents (Tibaijuka, 2005).

h) **Proliferation**:

- **Conceptualisation**: Proliferation refers to the rapid increase or spread of a particular phenomenon. In this study, it pertains to the growing number of crimes involving homeless individuals (Rogers, 2003; Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001).

- **Operationalisation**: Proliferation has been measured by tracking the trend in crime rates over time within the homeless population (Human Sciences Research Council, 2021).

1.9 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: General orientation of the study

This chapter served as an introduction and offered a comprehensive background to the study. It includes a rationale for conducting the research, presents the study's background, and defines the problem statement. Additionally, it details the research aims and objectives, outlines the research questions, and explains the methodology and design used in the study. The chapter also defines key concepts, describes the data collection instruments, and emphasises the significance of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of relevant literature that explores the phenomenon of vagrancy and crime.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter sheds light on the essential theories that form the foundation of this study. The research is anchored in three key theories relevant to the topic under examination: the Routine Activities Theory (RAT), the Labelling Theory, Social Learning Theory and the General Strain Theory (GST).

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter outlines the qualitative research methodology used in the study. It describes the study procedures, the selected data collection methods, and the processes involved. Additionally, the chapter explains the data analysis methods and the steps taken to analyse the data. It also details the measures implemented to ensure a clear direction and focus for the study.

Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of findings

This chapter presents a critical assessment of the collected data, offering a thorough analysis and interpretation of the information obtained from participants. It discusses how the research objectives

were met and answers the research questions by incorporating insights from the literature and theories presented in earlier chapters.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter of the thesis provides a comprehensive discussion, and key conclusions based on the researcher's analysis of the most important findings from the study. It ends with a brief section that offers general recommendations and suggestions for future research.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter one offered an introduction to the phenomenon being studied, detailing the problem statement and the study's background. It emphasised the significance of the research, explaining the need and rationale for undertaking this investigation. Key concepts were clearly defined, and the research questions and objectives were outlined. The theoretical framework that supports the study was discussed, along with a methodological justification for the chosen approach. Finally, the chapter provided an overview of the thesis structure. The next chapter will review the relevant literature related to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction of the chapter

In this chapter, the researcher have examined and discussed literature that aligns with the research study's objectives, questions, and overall aim. The terms "homeless" and "street people" have been explained to clarify their meanings, distinctions, and relevance to the current research. Visual representations of homeless individuals will be included to provide readers with a demographic perspective on their living conditions. Relevant statistics regarding homelessness in South Africa has been presented and analysed to highlight the severity of the issue. Factors contributing to homelessness and the circumstances that lead individuals to live on the streets have been outlined and explained. The chapter also addressed the nature and extent of victimisation experienced by both the general community and homeless individuals. Additionally, government interventions aimed at addressing the high number of homeless individuals in South Africa have been discussed.

In many regions of the country, the law classifies beggars, "illegal" street vendors, and those attempting to earn a living in public spaces as criminals. This categorisation extends to "loiterers" and individuals forced by their circumstances to sleep on the streets. These vulnerable groups are criminalised through municipal by-laws, which vary in enforcement across different municipalities. The intent behind these laws is often to create sanitized public spaces in the name of security, a strategy that, according to news reports and social media, resonates with a significant portion of the general public (Killander, 2019).

2.2 Interpretation of homeless people and street people

Crime remains a pervasive global issue, and scholarly research increasingly acknowledges that no demographic is inherently immune to engaging in criminal behaviour. However, certain structural and socio-economic factors significantly heighten an individual's risk of criminality. Conditions such as extreme poverty, prolonged unemployment, inadequate education, and social exclusion can push individuals towards criminal acts as mechanisms for survival or coping (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Farrington, 2019). In this context, homeless populations have emerged in international literature as both disproportionately vulnerable to victimisation and

more likely to be involved in low-level or survival-driven criminal behaviour (Lee & Schreck, 2005; DeVerteuil, May, & von Mahs, 2009; Toro, Tompsett, Lombardo, & Philippot, 2007).

The dual role of homeless individuals as both victims and offenders has been observed in various urban settings worldwide. For instance, studies in the United States and Canada have shown that homeless individuals are far more likely to be victims of assault, robbery, and sexual violence than the general population (Kushel, Evans, Perry, Robertson, & Moss, 2003; Gaetz, 2004). Simultaneously, the pressures of street life and survival often lead to their involvement in activities that are criminalised, such as trespassing, petty theft, drug possession, or panhandling (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005). News reports and public complaints frequently reflect this duality, with homeless individuals being blamed for rising urban crime, thereby fuelling negative public perceptions and sometimes punitive responses from authorities (Amster, 2003; Lee & Schreck, 2005).

Terminological clarity is also necessary when discussing these populations. The terms "homeless people" and "street people" are often used interchangeably in both academic and public discourse. However, they are not always synonymous. "Homelessness" is a multifaceted concept encompassing individuals who lack fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including those living in temporary shelters, informal settlements, or transitional housing (Rule-Groenewald, 2015; Tipple & Speak, 2005). In contrast, "street people" more precisely refers to individuals who spend extended periods living in public urban spaces such as sidewalks, parks, and underpasses often with no access to temporary accommodation or shelter networks (Cross, Seager, Erasmus, Ward, & O'Donovan, 2010). This population is often the most visible and stigmatised subset of the homeless community.

International definitions of homelessness vary according to social, political, and cultural contexts. The United Nations (2004) defines a homeless person as someone without shelter that meets basic criteria for habitation, such as safety, privacy, and protection from the elements. This includes individuals sleeping on the streets, in cars, or in abandoned buildings, and excludes those residing in places meant for human habitation under insecure tenure. Obioha (2011) further argues that homelessness must be understood in a broader African context,

where informal housing and forced evictions create unique vulnerabilities, often blurring the lines between shelter insecurity and outright homelessness.

Moreover, homelessness is rarely a static or homogenous condition. Some individuals experience short-term homelessness due to crises such as job loss or domestic violence, while others endure chronic homelessness, often linked to mental illness, substance use, or prolonged marginalisation (Caton,Wilkins, & Anderson, 2005; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). This dynamic quality complicates efforts to measure and address homelessness consistently across regions. Nevertheless, the literature remains consistent in its findings, by showing that individuals experiencing homelessness are at a significantly higher risk of engaging in or being subjected to crime an outcome not of moral failing, but of systemic disadvantage (Farrington, 2019; Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016).

In South Africa, these challenges are compounded by structural inequalities rooted in apartheid-era spatial planning and the persistent housing backlog in urban areas. Research by Cross and Seager (2010) notes that homeless individuals in cities like Durban and Johannesburg frequently encounter discrimination, police harassment, and violence, often without access to legal recourse or support services. These systemic issues contribute to cycles of criminalisation and social exclusion, further complicating the prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration.

2.3 Historical context of homelessness in South Africa

A growing body of literature confirms that homelessness and crime are deeply intertwined, not simply through individual deviance, but as outcomes of structural inequalities and historical marginalisation. In the South African context, the legacy of colonial and apartheid spatial planning continues to shape the patterns of urban homelessness and social exclusion. A study by Kloppers & Pienaar (2014) demonstrates how racially discriminatory land legislation such as the 1913 Land Act and the Group Areas Act of 1950, systematically dispossessed Black South Africans, confining them to overcrowded and impoverished rural homelands or informal settlements on the periphery of urban centres. These policies laid the groundwork for contemporary homelessness by producing generations of landlessness, limited economic

mobility, and spatial exclusion.

Similarly, Morrow (2010) emphasises the role of apartheid-era removals and state-sponsored displacements in creating homelessness, especially among rural labourers and urban migrants who were forcibly relocated from developing townships like Cato Manor and placed in remote, under-resourced settlements such as KwaMashu and Umlazi. These removals did not merely displace people physically; they also severed access to stable housing, livelihoods, and social networks. Consequently, many individuals began to occupy public urban spaces without legal tenure, contributing to visible homelessness that continues to draw public and political concern.

While crime is a global phenomenon with multiple causes, several scholars have shown that adverse social conditions, including poverty, unemployment, and housing instability, substantially increase the likelihood of criminal involvement, especially for individuals living on the margins of society (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Lee & Schreck, 2005). Homeless people are often perceived as both victims and perpetrators of crime, a duality underscored by research in both the Global North and South. Lee and Schreck (2005), for example, reveal that people experiencing homelessness in American cities are disproportionately victimised yet are frequently targeted by law enforcement for low-level infractions, reflecting broader patterns of criminalisation. In South Africa, similar dynamics have been observed in major urban centres like Durban and Cape Town, where street people are routinely subjected to by-law enforcement, eviction, and police profiling (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Landau & Monson, 2012).

Moreover, the discourse surrounding "homelessness" itself requires critical unpacking. Rule-Groenewald (2015) & Cross (2010) argue that the term "homeless" often obscures important differences in shelter insecurity. Some individuals may reside temporarily in shelters, informal settlements, or overcrowded dwellings, while others live entirely without shelter, exposed to weather, crime, and violence on city streets. The United Nations (2004) offers a broad definition, identifying homelessness as the lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate residence, encompassing those in transitional housing, emergency shelters, and unsheltered environments. Yet, this definition is often inadequately applied in policy and planning frameworks, especially

in South Africa, where rural to urban migration, informal housing, and economic instability frequently blur the boundaries of homelessness.

Crucially, recent studies have begun to challenge the assumption that homelessness in South Africa is purely the result of internal migration or individual failure. Research by Crush and Tawodzera (2014) & Landau and Monson (2012) illustrates that international migrants particularly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and the DRC constitute a significant portion of the homeless population in cities such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. These individuals often lack legal documentation, formal employment opportunities, and access to housing or health services, rendering them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and criminalisation. This highlights the importance of adopting a transnational lens in homelessness research, as patterns of displacement and economic migration increasingly intersect with local housing crises and crime.

2.4 Socio-economic and structural factors leading to increased homelessness

A comprehensive understanding of homelessness necessitates an examination of the socio-economic and structural factors that underpin its prevalence globally, as well as in South African urban centres such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Sampson & Wilson (1995) demonstrated that economic instability, manifested through high unemployment rates, low wages, and limited access to stable employment, is a significant driver of homelessness. This vulnerability is exacerbated by income volatility and insufficient social safety nets, which diminish individuals' capacity to secure and sustain housing (Cross, Seager, Erasmus, Ward, & O'Donovan, 2010; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011). Long-term unemployment, in particular, severely undermines housing stability due to the loss of financial means and barriers such as inadequate education, health challenges, and labour market discrimination (Blau & Blau, 1982). The challenges of economic instability are intensified in urban areas where economic inequalities are stark, and many rely on precarious informal sector jobs that fail to provide steady income or housing security (Wolch & Dear, 1993; Desmond, 2016). These dynamics closely mirror those observed internationally; for example, studies in the United States have linked precarious employment and economic downturns to increased homelessness,

particularly among marginalised groups (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Lee, Tyler & Wright, 2010).

Housing shortages compounded by rapid urbanisation constitute another critical factor driving homelessness. The imbalance between soaring demand and limited supply of affordable housing forces low-income individuals into unstable living situations or homelessness (Tibaijuka, 2005; Huchzermeyer, 2009). Wolch & Dear (1993) note that urban redevelopment and gentrification often prioritise high-end developments at the expense of affordable housing, resulting in displacement and the erosion of low-income communities. This process is evident in global cities such as London, New York, and Nairobi, where escalating housing costs and inadequate policies have led to expanded informal settlements and homelessness (UN-Habitat, 2016; Edgar, Meert & Doherty, 2007; Baxter, 2016). In KwaZulu-Natal, rapid growth in Durban and Pietermaritzburg has not been matched by sufficient affordable housing stock, creating a disparity that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations (Tibaijuka, 2005). Historical socio-political factors, particularly South Africa's apartheid legacy, compound these housing crises by entrenching spatial and economic segregation that limits access to quality housing for marginalised groups (Pillay, 2008; Turok, 2001).

The historical and socio-political context further illuminates the structural roots of homelessness. Apartheid-era policies such as the Land Acts and the Group Areas Act institutionalised racial segregation, forcibly relocating non-white populations to overcrowded and under-resourced areas far from economic centres (Christopher, 1994; Pillay, 2008). These policies fractured communities and entrenched economic marginalisation, setting enduring barriers to housing, employment, and social services (Turok, 2001; Charlton & Kihato, 2006). Post-apartheid efforts like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) have sought to redress these inequalities but have struggled to keep pace with the demand for affordable housing, thereby perpetuating homelessness (Charlton & Kihato, 2006; Parnell & Robinson, 2012). These South African experiences resonate with global patterns of historical discrimination impacting homelessness; for instance, discriminatory housing practices in the United States' redlining era and Brazil's forced evictions have similarly entrenched homelessness within marginalised racial and ethnic groups (Rothstein, 2017; De Souza, 2014).

Moreover, contemporary socio-political challenges such as corruption, governance inefficiencies, and inadequate social safety nets continue to hinder effective responses to homelessness (Pillay, 2008). Bureaucratic fragmentation and poor coordination among government agencies and civil society undermine program effectiveness, while societal stigma rooted in historical prejudices marginalises homeless individuals further, impeding their reintegration (Huchzermeyer, 2004). Addressing homelessness therefore requires recognising the multifaceted nature of these socio-economic and structural factors, and implementing coordinated, inclusive strategies that tackle both immediate needs and systemic inequalities (Hwang, 2001; Edgar et al., 2007).

2.5 Case studies from South Africa and other countries

2.5.1 Homelessness and crime experiences

A study conducted in the Durban City Centre by Mkhize (2022) explored the lived experiences of homeless individuals and their encounters with crime, revealing that unstable income sources often lead to engagement in petty theft and other forms of "survival crime." These crimes are committed not out of intent to harm but as a means to meet basic needs such as food, hygiene, and shelter. Moreover, substance abuse emerged as a key driver of criminal behaviour, with individuals frequently resorting to crime to support drug or alcohol dependence. This aligns with international findings. For instance, Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Xie, and Pollio (2012) reported similar patterns among homeless youth in U.S. cities, showing a correlation between transience, addiction, and increased criminal involvement. Likewise, Roy, Crocker, Nicholls, Latimer, & Ayllon (2014) found that individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, especially those with severe mental illness, exhibit higher rates of victimisation and criminal conduct due to systemic neglect and unmet health needs.

International case studies have underscored how integrated and sustained intervention can reverse these trends. The Pathways Housing First programme in New York City, pioneered by Tsemberis Gulcur, & Nakae (2004), demonstrated that providing permanent housing without preconditions, for an example, sobriety or employment, dramatically reduces both

homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system. Participants in this programme showed significantly fewer arrests, hospital visits, and substance use relapses compared to those in traditional transitional shelters. Similarly, in Finland, the Y-Foundation's national Housing First strategy has been credited with nearly eliminating rough sleeping across the country. By 2021, over 80% of formerly homeless individuals in Finland had transitioned to stable housing, accompanied by wrap-around support services such as addiction counselling and employment training (Pleace, Culhane, Granfelt, & Knutagård, 2015).

In Australia, the Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI) pilot in Melbourne provided multi-year support including housing, trauma-informed care, and employment coaching to chronically homeless adults. Evaluations found sustained housing outcomes and a 52% reduction in emergency department visits, with participants showing lower rates of offending compared to control groups (Johnson, Kuehnle, Parkinson, Sesa, & Tseng, 2012). Meanwhile, in Brazil, the city of São Paulo implemented the Centro Pop initiative public drop in centres offering food, psychological support, and job-readiness programs to street dwellers. While challenges remain, initial reports suggest that cities using a combination of immediate relief and developmental strategies report fewer repeat homelessness cases (ILO, 2018).

In the South African context, Mkhize's (2022) findings further pointed to deep systemic barriers such as discrimination, policy fragmentation, and the lack of coordinated social services. These issues prevent many homeless individuals from accessing the necessary support to exit the cycle of poverty and crime. To address these interrelated challenges, scholars recommend both immediate relief measures and long-term structural interventions. Short-term actions should prioritise accessible shelters, mobile health units, harm reduction services, and food security programmes (Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016; HSRC, 2021). Long-term solutions must focus on expanding supportive housing, investing in mental health and substance abuse services, ensuring equitable access to education and employment, and fostering collaboration among municipalities, non-profit sectors, and community groups (Pleace, 2016; Tibaijuka, 2005).

2.5.2 Jika Joe: Informal settlements and crime

A case study undertaken in the Jika Joe informal settlement in Pietermaritzburg revealed a strong link between poor infrastructure, environmental degradation, and elevated crime rates. According to Msimang (2017), the lack of essential services such as access to electricity, clean water, adequate sanitation, and secure housing intensifies conditions of insecurity and contributes to the rise of criminal behaviour. The settlement's overcrowded living conditions, insufficient street lighting, and limited police presence created a climate where crimes like robbery, drug use, and physical violence were more likely to occur. These challenges were compounded by high unemployment and the absence of stable income-generating opportunities, leaving many residents, especially young people, vulnerable to criminal involvement.

These findings mirror international patterns observed in other low-income urban areas. For example, in Kenya's Kibera settlement, poor service delivery and neglected urban infrastructure have been directly associated with higher crime levels and public health risks (Amnesty International, 2010). Similarly, in Brazil's favelas, inadequate state support and limited access to basic services have enabled the growth of informal economies and violent crime, often controlled by gangs or armed groups (Perlman, 2010).

Msimang's (2017) study highlights the urgent need for more inclusive and participatory urban planning processes that address the real-life needs of those living in informal settlements. It emphasises the importance of prioritising affordable housing projects that offer access to vital services and promote local economic opportunities. The involvement of community members in development planning was also identified as a critical factor to ensure that interventions are relevant and sustainable.

To effectively reduce crime and improve living standards in such contexts, the study recommended coordinated policy responses backed by sufficient government investment. Successful examples from other countries demonstrate that integrated urban renewal strategies can yield positive outcomes. In Medellín, Colombia, for instance, coordinated improvements

in housing, public transport, and public safety contributed to a noticeable drop in crime and enhanced quality of life for residents in formerly marginalised areas (Jaitman, 2015). For South African cities such as Pietermaritzburg and Durban, these international lessons provide valuable insights for designing locally adapted strategies to tackle homelessness and reduce crime in informal settlements.

2.6 Crimes committed against homeless people

2.6.1 Types of victimisations

Individuals living on the streets encounter various forms of victimisation, which are typically more intense and frequent than what the general population experiences. These include:

2.6.1.1 Physical assault

A study conducted by Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) in Durban explored the nature and extent of violence experienced by people living on the streets, revealing that physical assaults constitute one of the most frequent and severe forms of victimisation faced by the homeless population. Their findings highlighted that due to the absence of secure shelter and the pervasive social stigma attached to homelessness, these individuals were disproportionately vulnerable to a range of violent acts, including random attacks, police abuse, interpersonal conflicts, and targeted hate crimes. This research aligns with broader international literature, which demonstrates that physical violence against homeless populations is both widespread and significantly underreported, largely due to fear, trauma, and deep mistrust of law enforcement agencies (Johnsen, Watts, & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Culhane, Metraux, & Hadley, 2002).

Physical assault, scientifically defined as the intentional infliction of bodily harm or the credible threat thereof (Siegel & Worrall, 2019), represents a constant risk for those who sleep or live in public spaces such as parks, sidewalks, and transport hubs. Their constant exposure and perceived vulnerability make them frequent targets for violence. For example, Fitzpatrick & Johnsen (2009) found that 35% of rough sleepers in the United Kingdom had suffered physical assault within a one-year period. In the United States, Burt, Aron, Lee, and Valente

(1999) documented similar rates, noting that over one-third of homeless adults experienced violent victimisation annually, with many assaults occurring while sleeping outdoors or in unsecured locations. Similarly, Lee & Schreck (2005) demonstrated how structural marginalisation particularly among homeless individuals with mental health challenges correlates strongly with high victimisation rates. In South Africa, Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) reported cases where homeless persons in central Durban and Pietermaritzburg were assaulted with bricks, physically kicked, or threatened with weapons while they were asleep, underscoring the daily physical dangers faced on the streets.

Random attacks, often motivated by prejudice or opportunism, are a particularly brutal manifestation of societal hostility towards the homeless. These unprovoked assaults typically occur without any prior interaction and are sometimes driven by thrill-seeking behaviour or a desire to assert dominance over vulnerable groups (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2014). For instance, Pophaim (2023) documented in Johannesburg that groups of young men frequently targeted sleeping homeless individuals as part of gang initiation rituals, where victims rarely received justice or adequate medical support due to their social invisibility. Comparable patterns have been observed internationally; Udvarhelyi (2014) documented in Hungary that homeless people regularly faced harassment and physical violence from citizens who perceived them as threats to public order. In Australia, Johnson, Parker, & Loxley (2018) found that homeless people living in urban centres frequently experience random violent attacks, which are often aggravated by public indifference and inadequate police responses.

Hate crimes against homeless individuals defined as criminal acts motivated by bias related to a person's housing status (Perry, 2001) are also of serious concern. These message crimes communicate exclusion and dehumanisation beyond the immediate physical harm inflicted. The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA, 2020) reported incidences of acid attacks, physical beatings, and public humiliation of homeless people across various European cities, often perpetrated solely due to their homeless status. In the United States, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2011) documented that hate crimes against homeless individuals are significantly underreported, but cases such as the 2011 murder of a homeless man in Chicago, targeted because of his status, highlight the

extreme risks faced. Similarly, in South Africa, Pophaim (2023) described how vigilante groups in Johannesburg deliberately set fire to homeless people's makeshift shelters under the guise of "clean-up" operations, reflecting deep-rooted social and racialised prejudices.

Robbery and theft are also prevalent forms of physical victimisation among homeless people. Newburn (2017) defines robbery as the use of violence or the threat thereof to unlawfully seize property from an individual. Homeless individuals, forced to carry all their possessions on their persons, are inherently vulnerable to such crimes. Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, Karabanow, & Marsolais (2004), in a study on Canadian homeless youth, found that 70% had experienced violent robbery at least once. In New York City, research by Culhane, Metraux, and Hadley (2002) revealed that homeless individuals frequently became victims of robbery while sleeping in public spaces, often targeted for their few belongings. In Pietermaritzburg, Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) recounted the experience of a homeless man who was violently assaulted for the theft of his bag, which contained all his essential belongings such as clothes, blankets, and food, demonstrating the precariousness of life on the streets.

Police brutality constitutes another severe form of physical assault that homeless individuals endure. Chaney & Robertson (2013) describe police brutality as the excessive and unjustified use of force by law enforcement officers. Often, this manifests during attempts to clear public spaces occupied by homeless populations without providing alternative accommodation. Herring (2019) refers to this as complaint-oriented policing, where officers respond more to societal discomfort with visible homelessness than to actual crime. In Cape Town, documented instances include police officers beating homeless women who were sleeping in public spaces while confiscating their bedding and belongings, an act that exacerbates marginalisation and distrust of state institutions (SERI, 2021; Mthembu and Sibisi, 2024). Internationally, in the United States, cases such as the 2014 incident in Los Angeles where police were filmed using excessive force against homeless individuals have raised public awareness about this form of victimisation (Silverman, 2016). In Australia, McCulloch & Pickering (2010) discuss how police practices criminalising homelessness contribute to systemic violence against vulnerable populations.

Interpersonal violence defined by the World Health Organization (2002) as violence between individuals including family members, acquaintances, or strangers occurs frequently within homeless populations, especially in overcrowded or unregulated living conditions. Parsell (2011) explains that deprivation, stress, and lack of privacy often escalate tensions, leading to frequent altercations. In Durban, Mthembu (2024) found that conflicts among homeless individuals over scarce resources such as food or shelter space often erupted into physical fights, frequently exacerbated by alcohol abuse, mental health challenges, or unresolved trauma. Similarly, in Vancouver, Canada, researchers Falconer, O'Sullivan, & Hudak (2019) found that interpersonal violence in shelters was common, often linked to overcrowding and inadequate support services.

Factors contributing to physical assault

Physical assault, broadly defined as the intentional infliction or threat of bodily harm (Karmen, 2016), disproportionately affects homeless individuals worldwide due to several overlapping vulnerabilities. The absence of secure shelter, substance abuse, mental health disorders, and social isolation collectively heighten their risk of victimisation.

A central factor is the lack of secure shelter. Homeless persons who reside in unsheltered environments such as streets, parks, or makeshift shelters are more exposed to opportunistic and targeted violence (Poulin, Metraux, & Culhane, 2021). For example, Culhane, Metraux, & Byrne (2019) conducted a multi-city study across the United States that demonstrated unsheltered homeless populations experienced significantly higher rates of physical assault compared to those accommodated in shelters. Their findings highlighted how exposure to public spaces at night increases vulnerability to violent crime. In the United Kingdom, Homeless Link (2020) reported that rough sleepers consistently face assault risks linked directly to their insecure living environments, emphasising the necessity of safe, stable housing as a protective factor. Similar patterns emerge in Australia, where Watson, Parsell, & Jones (2020) noted that homeless individuals without secure accommodation were subject to frequent

attacks, including random and targeted assaults.

Substance abuse is another critical contributor to vulnerability. Homeless populations frequently experience disorders related to alcohol and drug use, which impair cognitive and physical capacity to avoid danger or defend themselves (Martins, Silva, & Fernandes, 2018). Tsai, Mares, & Rosenheck (2017) analysed data from homeless veterans in the United States and found a strong association between substance use disorders and increased risk of violent victimisation. Substance misuse also often leads to risky behaviours or environments, further exposing individuals to harm. This global trend is mirrored in South African contexts, where research by Mthembu and Sibisi (2024) underscored substance abuse as a key factor increasing homeless persons' risk of being assaulted in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

The prevalence of mental health disorders within homeless populations amplifies the threat of physical assault. Psychiatric conditions can impair judgment, social interactions, and the ability to recognise or avoid hazardous situations (Browne, Greenberg, & Jensen, 2018). Fazel, Geddes, & Kushel (2014) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis demonstrating that homeless individuals with severe mental illness are at least three times more likely to be victims of violence compared to the general population. Globally, this vulnerability is compounded by insufficient mental health services and stigma. In South Africa, Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) documented frequent violent incidents involving mentally ill homeless individuals, further highlighting the intersection of mental health and victimisation in urban centres.

Finally, social isolation significantly increases susceptibility to assault. Without social support networks, homeless individuals lack protective relationships that can provide safety or assistance during violent encounters (Miller, Slesnick, & Whitmore, 2020). Research from Australia by Parsell, Petersen, & Culhane (2018) revealed that social marginalisation was closely linked with higher rates of violent victimisation among homeless populations. This lack of connectedness reduces opportunities for intervention or help-seeking. South African studies similarly confirm that social exclusion intensifies risks faced by homeless people, contributing to recurrent physical assaults (Sadiki, 2016).

2.6.1.2 Theft and robbery

People living on the streets are particularly vulnerable to theft and robbery due to their lack of secure shelter, social isolation, and visible vulnerability. Theft, defined as the unlawful taking of another person's property without the use of force (Maguire & Corbett, 2011), is a widespread issue among homeless individuals who often carry their belongings with them or leave them unattended, making these possessions easy targets for opportunistic offenders. Research from urban settings worldwide reveals that theft of personal items such as clothing, food, and identification documents is common among homeless populations (Lee, Tyler, & Wright, 2010; Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative, 2021). For example, in South Africa, Sadiki (2016) found that many homeless individuals in shelters or on the streets experienced theft while sleeping or seeking temporary refuge, highlighting the persistent insecurity they face.

Robbery, which differs from theft by involving force or the threat thereof (Karmen, 2016), disproportionately affects homeless individuals who are frequently targeted by perpetrators using intimidation or violence to seizw money or possessions. Sadiki (2016) describes a case in Durban where a homeless man was violently robbed at knifepoint of his last few rands, illustrating the severe physical risks accompanying this form of victimisation. Similar patterns have been documented internationally, with homeless persons in urban centres across the United States and Europe reporting violent robberies and limited access to justice due to their marginalised social status (Watson, Parsell, & Jones, 2020; Culhane, Metraux, & Byrne, 2019).

Several factors increase the vulnerability of homeless people to theft and robbery. Primarily, the absence of secure storage forces them to carry all their belongings constantly, rendering them physically burdened and highly visible targets (Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2021). Unlike housed individuals who can safely lock away their possessions, homeless people must protect their items in public spaces, often under stressful conditions. Their social isolation and lack of supportive networks further exacerbate this risk, as they lack protection or assistance when threatened (Miller, Slesnick, & Whitmore, 2020). Internationally, studies also confirm that social isolation increases the risk of victimisation among homeless populations (Tsai, Mares, & Rosenheck, 2017).

Additionally, substance abuse commonly found among homeless individuals impairs judgment and situational awareness, increasing susceptibility to theft and robbery (Martins, Silva, & Fernandes, 2018). Research from Canada and Australia similarly shows that substance dependency correlates with heightened victimisation risks among homeless adults (Gaetz, 2004; Parsell, Petersen, & Culhane, 2018). Moreover, economic desperation drives many homeless persons into unsafe areas where crime is prevalent, pushing them into dangerous situations where they are easily exploited (Hwang, 2001; Lee et al., 2010). Their urgent need to find food, shelter, or money may place them in harm's way, heightening their exposure to violent crime.

The consequences of theft and robbery for homeless individuals are profound and multifaceted. Losing essential items such as identification documents, money, clothing, and personal belongings severely limits their access to critical social services, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Maguire & Corbett, 2011; Sadiki, 2016). The absence of identification documents creates additional bureaucratic barriers, further marginalising them. Physical and emotional trauma from violent robbery causes lasting injuries and psychological distress, contributing to chronic anxiety and worsening mental health, conditions often compounded by their precarious living situations (Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2021; Watson, Parsell, & Jones, 2020). This trauma is frequently unaddressed due to mistrust of authorities and lack of support.

Finally, the cycle of poverty and homelessness is deepened by these victimisations. Each incident of theft or robbery strips homeless individuals of scarce resources, making it even more difficult to escape homelessness or improve their circumstances (Sadiki, 2016; Culhane, Metraux, & Byrne 2019). Financial losses prevent saving and accessing stable housing, while the theft of tools or resources needed for employment hampers their ability to regain stability. This ongoing victimisation entrenches dependency on precarious social networks or temporary assistance, perpetuating the vulnerability of homeless populations globally and locally.

2.6.1.3 Exploitation and abuse

A study conducted by Moser, Duffield, El-Mallakh, Chin, & Beckman (2023) investigating patterns of violence and victimisation among unhoused populations in Los Angeles found that homelessness significantly increases the risk of exploitation and abuse, including physical violence, sexual assault, and economic manipulation. The researchers argued that the absence of secure shelter, compounded by social stigma and institutional neglect, creates an environment where people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately exposed to harm. These findings mirror those of the Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative (2021), which found that more than one-third of unhoused individuals in San Francisco experienced physical or sexual assault in the past year, with transgender individuals facing particularly elevated risks.

Physical violence is among the most severe and consistent forms of abuse endured by homeless individuals. Physical assault, defined as the intentional application of force against another person that causes bodily harm or fear of harm (Siegel & Worrall, 2019), is a common reality for many rough sleepers. In Durban, Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) reported that homeless individuals were regularly attacked by strangers, police, or other unhoused persons. These attacks were often unprovoked and occurred in open spaces such as public parks, pavements, and abandoned buildings. Internationally, Johnsen, Watts, & Fitzpatrick (2018) documented that in the UK, over 35% of rough sleepers had experienced physical violence in the previous year findings consistent with those in Hungary by Udvarhelyi (2014), who highlighted routine police harassment and public aggression against homeless persons in Budapest.

Sexual violence is another prevalent and devastating form of abuse experienced by homeless individuals, particularly women and LGBTQ+ persons. Sexual assault refers to any non-consensual sexual act or behaviour and is often perpetrated in contexts where the victim lacks power or resources to resist (Jewkes, Sen, & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). In a longitudinal study of homeless women in Chicago, Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg (2000) found that nearly half reported having experienced sexual victimisation. These experiences were often linked to the need for basic resources such as food, shelter, or safety sometimes resulting in survival sex. In South Africa, similar patterns have emerged; Mthembu & Sibisi (2024) found that many

homeless women in Pietermaritzburg had faced coercion and rape in exchange for protection or temporary shelter.

Economic exploitation also forms a significant part of the abuse faced by homeless populations. This includes underpayment, unsafe labour conditions, and manipulation by informal employers. According to Hwang (2001), the informal economy frequently takes advantage of the homeless by offering low-wage or dangerous jobs without legal protection. In Cape Town, Magoqwana and Ncube (2020) noted that homeless men were often recruited for casual labour at rates far below the legal minimum wage and were sometimes not paid at all. International parallels can be found in research by Tyler & Schmitz (2013), who documented similar exploitation in American cities, where homeless people were forced to work in degrading conditions with no legal recourse.

These forms of victimisation have profound psychological consequences. Studies by Fitzpatrick, Johnsen, and White (2011) found that constant exposure to violence and exploitation results in chronic stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression. The compounded trauma of abuse, particularly when unaddressed, can entrench individuals further into homelessness, making recovery and reintegration even more difficult. Mthembu and Sibisi (2024) similarly reported that homeless individuals in Durban expressed deep fear and distrust toward social services and law enforcement, which contributed to prolonged periods on the street and reduced their likelihood of seeking help.

A study conducted by the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (2021) sought to measure the scale of violence and victimisation among people experiencing homelessness in urban contexts and revealed alarming trends in the frequency and severity of abuse. The findings demonstrated that physical assault, murder, and sexual violence are not only common but also disproportionately affect certain subgroups, including women and transgender individuals. These statistics align with international evidence showing that people who live on the streets experience higher rates of abuse, often due to their heightened visibility, social isolation, and lack of protective shelter (Johnsen, Watts, & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Tucker, Dworkin, Ewing, Wenzel, & Kennedy, 2019).

Physical assault, defined as the intentional infliction of bodily harm without consent (Siegel & Worrall, 2019), remains one of the most reported forms of victimisation among homeless people. According to data from the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (2021), one-third of cisgender women, one-quarter of cisgender men, and nearly 40% of transgender participants experienced physical or sexual assault within a 12-month period. These attacks frequently occur in open public spaces or overcrowded shelters and are rarely reported due to distrust in authorities or fear of retaliation (Fitzpatrick & Johnsen, 2009). Similarly, research conducted in London by Bretherton, Baptista, & Pleace (2021) confirmed that rough sleepers faced a disproportionate rate of violence compared to housed individuals, especially at night, when the risk of unprovoked assaults was highest.

One of the most severe outcomes of such persistent violence is murder. In 2021, the city of Los Angeles recorded 85 homicides of homeless individuals the highest number documented in its history (Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative, 2021). This statistic reflects a broader trend in which homeless populations are exposed to lethal violence due to their extreme vulnerability and the failure of municipal systems to provide adequate protection. In their study on urban homelessness in Canada, Hwang & Burns (2014) similarly found that homeless individuals were eight times more likely to die from violence compared to the general population. These fatalities are often preventable, underscoring the urgent need for targeted crime prevention strategies and housing-first policies that prioritise safety and support for unhoused people (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Sexual violence, which encompasses unwanted sexual contact or coercion, disproportionately affects homeless women and gender minorities. As noted by Tucker, Dworkin, Ewing, Wenzel, & Kennedy (2019), the intersection of gender-based violence and housing insecurity leaves women extremely exposed to exploitation and abuse. The Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (2021) found that 48% of homeless women reported experiencing physical violence without a weapon, 18% with a weapon, and another 18% reported sexual assault in the past six months. These experiences are compounded by limited access to safe shelters or trauma-informed services. In Johannesburg, a study by Pophaim (2023) revealed similar patterns, with

many homeless women reporting that they had to exchange sex for shelter or protection from other men, a practice commonly referred to as survival sex.

Globally, organisations such as FEANTSA (2020) have reported that the risk of sexual assault among the homeless is further exacerbated by a lack of gender-segregated shelter facilities and underfunded public health services. In Budapest, for example, Udvarhelyi (2014) observed that homeless women were often subjected to repeated abuse in both shelters and open public spaces but rarely had recourse to justice. The situation is mirrored in South African cities, where insufficient capacity in women's shelters and growing informal settlements contribute to systemic failures in protecting homeless women from sexual harm (Mthembu & Sibisi, 2024).

2.6.2 Vulnerability factors of people living on the street

A foundational study by Watson, Parsell, & Jones (2020) on homeless populations in Australia established that vulnerability often stems from a complex interplay of environmental, social, psychological, and economic factors. Their research showed that individuals experiencing homelessness faced overlapping risks such as mental illness and substance dependency that exacerbated their exposure to violence and exploitation. This Australian evidence resonates with UK research by Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Johnsen (2017), who argued that vulnerability is not merely situational, but structurally embedded in policies, urban design, and social exclusion. They emphasised that interventions must address the root causes rather than just surface symptoms. In Toronto, Robertson, O'Connor, and Gulliver (2019) extended this argument, noting that limited access to healthcare and economic systems worsened individuals' marginalisation, making them more prone to victimisation.

Lack of secure shelter emerges as a particularly acute vulnerability. Henwood, Wenzel, & Peoples (2021) documented in the United States that unsheltered individuals were significantly more likely to experience violent crime compared to their sheltered counterparts highlighting the protective value of safe housing. South African research by Mlotshwa, Ngcobo, & van Wyk (2023) echoed this finding, noting that those residing in informal settlements in Durban were nearly four times more likely to be robbed or assaulted than those in formal shelters. Both

studies converge on the insight that shelter is more than a physical space; it is a buffer against violence and a foundation for stability.

Social isolation, commonly overlooked in policy debates, also figures prominently. Gaetz, O'Grady, & Buccieri (2018) reported that over 60% of Canadian homeless individuals lacked meaningful social ties, a factor they linked directly to heightened vulnerability. Khumalo, Dlamini, & Mthembu (2022) found similar social voids in Pietermaritzburg, where 68% of participants reported no contact with family or friends, reinforcing that social capital is a critical protective resource. Without networks, homeless individuals remain exposed to harm and are less likely to access valuable assistance.

Substance dependence not only impairs individuals physically and cognitively, but it also significantly increases the likelihood of victimisation. Fitzpatrick, Johnsen, & White (2015) found that UK-based homeless individuals with substance use issues were twice as likely to suffer physical violence. South African findings by Jacobs, Makhanya, & Sithole (2022) corroborate this trend, where rising levels of substance abuse among street dwellers paralleled an increase in violent incidents. This intersection suggests that substance use becomes both a coping mechanism and a risk multiplier.

Meanwhile, mental health issues, as noted in a European meta-analysis by Busch-Geertsema, Edgar, & O'Sullivan (2016), affect more than half of homeless people often resulting in greater susceptibility to emotional and physical harm. Locally, Mthembu (2023) found that 55% of homeless individuals in KwaZulu-Natal exhibited signs of untreated mental illness, reinforcing the argument that mental health support must be a central component of any vulnerability-reduction strategy. Finally, economic deprivation remains a constant undercurrent. Robertson, O'Connor, & Gulliver (2019) observed that Toronto's homeless individuals involved in informal labour were 70% more likely to experience exploitation and unsafe working conditions. In South Africa, research by Mahlangu & Nxumalo (2023) showed that those working in informal sectors like scrap collection or car guarding were exposed not only to wage denial but also to physical harassment by both employers and authorities. This evidence stresses how economic vulnerability directly compounds physical insecurity.

A study conducted by Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative (2021) examining the vulnerability of homeless individuals revealed that a critical contributing factor to their susceptibility to exploitation and harm is the lack of social support networks. According to their findings, 70 per cent of homeless individuals reported having no access to family or friends, while 20 per cent had only limited support, and a mere 10 per cent reported receiving adequate support from close relationships. These statistics are illustrated in Figure 2.1, which underscores how widespread social isolation is within the homeless community. International studies echo these findings; for example, research by Wong, Piliavin, & Wright (1998) in the United States found that homeless individuals with fewer social ties were more likely to experience victimisation and had reduced access to protective services. Similarly, studies in the United Kingdom by Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Johnsen (2013) have argued that the erosion of familial and social networks significantly increases the risk of homelessness persistence and violence exposure.

Substance abuse is another major vulnerability factor among homeless populations globally. A longitudinal study by Fazel, Geddes, & Kushel (2014) concluded that substance use disorders are significantly more prevalent among homeless populations than in the general public, and are associated with higher rates of victimisation, poor mental health outcomes, and criminalisation. In South Africa, evidence indicates a parallel trend; for example, Mpanza & Nzama (2021) reported that alcohol and drug dependency among urban homeless people often leads to engagement in high-risk environments, increasing their exposure to robbery, physical assault, and police violence. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, substance abuse among the homeless population in South Africa has escalated from 52 per cent in 2015 to 70 per cent in 2024, signalling an urgent need for intervention-focused programmes that address both addiction and the underlying social vulnerabilities.

Mental health issues also play a pivotal role in shaping the lived experiences of homeless individuals. Numerous empirical studies have confirmed the strong association between homelessness and mental illness. A meta-analysis by Fazel, Khosla, Doll, & Geddes (2008) found that around 25 to 30 per cent of homeless individuals globally suffer from severe

psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, depression, and PTSD. In South Africa, van den Berg & Makusha (2018) have observed that mental health conditions among the homeless are often exacerbated by chronic stress, food insecurity, and exposure to urban violence. Figure 2.3, derived from a South African dataset (Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2021), shows that Substance Use Disorder affects 60 per cent of homeless individuals, while Depression (50%), Anxiety Disorders (40%), PTSD (30%), and Bipolar Disorder (20%) are also significantly prevalent. The cumulative psychological burden faced by homeless populations underscores the need for trauma-informed and community-based mental healthcare strategies.

Economic desperation is another critical driver of vulnerability to exploitation among the homeless. Homeless individuals are often excluded from formal employment and must rely on informal, low-wage, or precarious work for survival. Figure 2.4 highlights that 35 per cent of homeless people engage in informal jobs, 25 per cent in low-wage service work, 20 per cent in temporary positions, and 15 per cent in casual labour (Hwang, 2001). International research supports this trend; Shinn, Greer, Bainbridge, Kwon, & Zuiderveen (2013) found that employment instability among the homeless in North America perpetuates poverty cycles and hinders pathways out of homelessness. In South Africa, Rogan & Skinner (2019) argue that the informal economy, while offering subsistence income, exposes homeless workers to wage theft, hazardous conditions, and physical abuse by employers or law enforcement.

Physical health challenges further amplify the risks homeless people face. Homeless individuals suffer disproportionately from chronic illnesses, infectious diseases, and untreated injuries. A seminal study by Baggett, O'Connell, Singer, & Rigotti (2010) in Boston found that homeless adults had a mortality rate nearly four times higher than the general population, primarily due to preventable conditions compounded by inadequate access to healthcare. In the South African context, recent research by Govender, Naidoo, & Pienaar (2020) shows that barriers to public healthcare, including stigma and documentation requirements, hinder access for the homeless, placing them at greater risk of neglect, violence, and untreated medical conditions.

Finally, stigma and marginalisation are deeply embedded structural forces that reinforce the vulnerability of homeless individuals. According to Link & Phelan (2001), societal stigma leads to stereotyping and discrimination, thereby justifying social exclusion and policy neglect. These attitudes make it more difficult for homeless individuals to secure housing, employment, and medical services, entrenching their marginalisation. A South African study by Booyens & Beukman (2022) found that negative societal perceptions of homeless individuals as criminals, addicts, or lazy result in less public empathy and reduced institutional support. This societal rejection contributes to a hostile environment where homeless people are frequently subjected to abuse and systemic neglect, reinforcing their exclusion.

2.6.3 Impact on homeless populations

The literature on the victimisation of homeless populations highlights a complex relationship among vulnerability, societal perceptions, and systemic failures that worsen the challenges faced by this marginalised group. Turner, funge & Gabbard (2018) have emphasised the acute risks of victimisation that homeless individuals face, noting that these risks can have severe outcomes, including death. They argue that public policies criminalising homelessness not only fail to tackle its root causes but may also heighten the risk of victimisation. The authors call for comprehensive measures, such as improved law enforcement training and the inclusion of homeless individuals in hate crime laws, to help reduce victimization and foster social inclusion.

Focusing on vulnerability, Li & Urada (2020) specifically address the increased risks faced by homeless women, who are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. Their research identifies factors such as visibility, physical vulnerability, and prior trauma as significant contributors to the victimisation of homeless women. They note that the normalisation of violence, especially for those with histories of childhood maltreatment, perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and victimisation that deepens homelessness. This analysis underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the unique risks faced by homeless women and to break the cycle of violence and homelessness.

Building on this discussion, Hong, Hoskin & Berteau (2023) present findings from a cross-sectional survey that explores the connections between homelessness, mental illness, and victimisation among opioid users. Their study reveals a significant percentage of participants experienced recent violence, with a strong link between victimisation and the use of mental health services. This indicates that experiences of violence may drive individuals to seek mental health support, yet many with severe mental illness continue to lack adequate services. The authors advocate for trauma-informed approaches and holistic strategies that meet the complex needs of homeless populations, particularly in light of the heightened challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on substance use and mental health.

2.6.4 Comparative analysis with other urban areas

A comparative analysis of crimes against homeless individuals across various urban areas reveals significant differences in victimisation patterns. For instance, in Pretoria, South Africa, homeless individuals report high rates of physical and sexual violence, with nearly half of those surveyed expressing feelings of insecurity while living on the streets (Sadiki, 2016). Similarly, a study in San Francisco, USA, found that a considerable number of homeless individuals, including cisgender women, cisgender men, and transgender individuals, have experienced physical or sexual assault in the past year (Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative, 2021).

In contrast, European cities like Berlin, Germany, have developed stronger social safety nets and support systems for their homeless populations, resulting in lower levels of victimisation. Research in Berlin suggests that while homeless individuals still face challenges, the incidence of violent crimes against them is significantly lower than in cities such as Pretoria and San Francisco (Springer, 2021). These variations in victimisation rates can be attributed to factors such as the availability of social services, the effectiveness of law enforcement, and the overall socio-economic conditions in each city. Urban areas with more robust social safety nets and comprehensive support systems tend to offer better protection for homeless individuals against victimisation and exploitation (Springer, 2021).

Building on this context, Young (2016) conducts a multi-level ethnographic study in Central Florida, examining the perspectives of homeless individuals, non-profit staff, and policymakers. Young advocates for a re-politicisation of homelessness, emphasising the need for urgent political action and a political economy approach to effectively address the issue. The study reveals how the perceptions and discourses surrounding homelessness shape the strategies of various stakeholders, which is vital for understanding the dynamics of homelessness in urban settings. Furthering this discourse, Turner, Scanlon, Saunders, & Metraux (2018) investigate the victimisation of homeless individuals, linking public perceptions with the policies that govern their treatment. They underscore the critical role of social workers in advocating for vulnerable populations and call for interventions that address not only the immediate needs of the homeless but also the societal attitudes that perpetuate their marginalisation. This research highlights the profound impact of public perceptions on policy-making and the essential role of social work in mitigating the risks faced by homeless individuals.

2.7 Crimes committed by homeless people

Homeless individuals are frequently both the victims and perpetrators of crime, often due to structural disadvantage, marginalisation, and conditions of extreme deprivation. Numerous studies across various regions have shown that crimes committed by homeless people tend to be survival oriented and closely tied to broader socio-economic and psychological vulnerabilities (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Xie, & Pollio, 2012; Heerde & Hemphill, 2016). This section critically explores the three main categories of crime associated with homelessness petty theft, substance abuse-related offences, and violent crime by drawing on diverse international and African contexts.

2.7.1 Petty Theft

A study conducted by Springer (2021) examining survival behaviours among homeless populations in urban America found that petty theft such as shoplifting, minor burglary, and pickpocketing is often employed as a means of acquiring basic necessities like food, clothing, and hygiene products. These acts are rarely premeditated or violent but instead reflect a reactive strategy to the pressing challenges of street life. In a related study, Johnsen & Fitzpatrick (2010) found that for homeless youth in the United Kingdom, such offences often occur during the early stages of homelessness

when individuals lack knowledge about support services and are most desperate to meet their daily needs.

International literature echoes similar themes. Heerde and Hemphill (2016), in a systematic review of homelessness and youth offending, reported that property-related crimes consistently emerged as a common type of offending among homeless adolescents in Australia, the United States, and Canada. The African context reflects this global pattern. In Nigeria, Adefila & Ojedokun (2019) demonstrated that petty theft among homeless youths in Lagos is often directly linked to food insecurity and joblessness. In South Africa, Moyo & Nduna (2020) documented cases of minor theft in Durban's city centre where homeless individuals stole from street vendors or supermarkets typically driven by hunger or the need to trade items for shelter or protection.

2.7.2 Substance Abuse-Related Offences

Substance abuse-related offences are pervasive among homeless populations and often stem from deeper psychosocial stressors. A seminal study by Koegel, Burnam, & Sullivan (1996) found that high rates of public intoxication, drug possession, and drug-related misdemeanours among homeless adults in Los Angeles were linked to co-occurring mental health issues and traumatic life experiences. Ahillan, Emmerson, Swift, Golamgouse, Song, Roxas, Mendha, Avramović, Rastogi, & Sultan (2023) reinforced this view, arguing that substance use operates as both a consequence and perpetuator of homelessness. Many individuals initially turn to drugs or alcohol to escape trauma or emotional pain, yet addiction exacerbates their social exclusion and often leads to arrest or incarceration.

Similar trends have been documented in the Global South. In a recent study conducted in Egypt, El-Kassas & Abou-ElKheir (2022) observed that drug-related arrests among Cairo's homeless youth were closely tied to institutional neglect and the absence of rehabilitation services. The South African case is no different. Kgobati & Mofokeng (2022) found that Cape Town's law enforcement disproportionately targets homeless people for substance use, often leading to cycles of criminalisation rather than pathways to treatment. These findings suggest that punitive responses to substance use among homeless individuals fail to address the underlying causes such as trauma, mental illness, and systemic marginalisation and instead entrench them further within the criminal justice system.

2.7.3 Violent Crimes

Although violent crime is less commonly associated with homeless individuals compared to non-violent offences, it remains a significant area of concern particularly within contexts of acute desperation or self-defence. The Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative (2021) notes that violent incidents among homeless populations are often reactions to provocation, competition over limited resources, or attempts to protect personal belongings from theft. Roy, Crocker, Nicholls, Latimer, & Ayllon (2014) support this by revealing that histories of trauma and abuse among homeless persons are significant predictors of violent behaviour, especially among those with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

In Africa, Mabhala, Yohannes, & Griffith (2017) explored how the criminalisation of homelessness itself creates environments conducive to violent responses. Their research, which focused on homeless populations in Kenya and South Africa, found that police harassment, evictions, and social rejection increase levels of psychological distress, which can, in turn, trigger violent episodes. In Johannesburg, Gumede & Phetla (2019) documented instances where homeless individuals resorted to violence to secure sleeping spaces or respond to street-level threats such as gang intimidation or xenophobic attacks.

2.8 Root causes and contributing factors

The factors contributing to crimes committed by homeless individuals are multifaceted and intricately linked to socio-economic and psychological challenges. One of the primary drivers is economic desperation. Many homeless individuals face significant barriers to stable employment and financial resources, which often leads them to engage in petty theft and minor offences as a means of survival (Springer, 2021). The urgent necessity to secure essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter can compel them to resort to criminal activities.

Economic Hardship

Economic hardship remains a fundamental driver pushing many homeless individuals toward criminal activities such as petty theft. Springer (2021) asserts that exclusion from formal employment opportunities and limited financial resources compel homeless people to engage in minor offences to secure basic necessities like food and shelter. Studies from Africa reinforce this observation; Otieno & Njoroge (2019) found that street-connected youth in Nairobi often resort to theft to meet their survival needs. Furthermore, Nettle, Andrews, & Bateson (2021) provide experimental evidence indicating that extreme scarcity increases the likelihood of acquisitive crimes, emphasising the critical role economic deprivation plays in shaping behaviour. These insights underscore the necessity for robust social safety nets aimed at alleviating poverty and its consequences.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a prominent factor closely linked to criminal behaviour among homeless individuals. Koegel, Burnam, & Sullivan (1996) demonstrated a strong association between addiction and offences such as public intoxication and drug possession. In the South African context, Ramlagan, Peltzer, & Matseke (2010) revealed that substance use is prevalent among homeless populations and contributes to increased petty crimes committed to finance addictions. Similarly, Asibey, Doku, Agyemang-Duah, & Oduro (2023) reported hazardous substance use among homeless adults in Ghana, which correlated with both increased victimisation and engagement in illegal activities. The global prevalence of this pattern highlights the urgent need for harm reduction and addiction treatment programs integrated within homelessness interventions.

Mental Health Issues

Mental health disorders significantly complicate the dynamics of homelessness and criminal involvement. Fazel, Khosla, Doll, & Geddes (2008) documented high rates of psychiatric illnesses, including schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, and PTSD, within homeless populations worldwide. Abayomi, Ojo, & Adebayo (2020) found that in Lagos, Nigeria, untreated mental health conditions frequently result in arrests for public order offences, rather than receiving appropriate medical treatment. This criminalisation of mental illness underlines

the critical gaps in mental health services for the homeless, where untreated symptoms often lead to behaviour that is criminalised instead of managed therapeutically.

Social Isolation

The absence of meaningful social connections further exacerbates criminal behaviour among homeless individuals. Wong, Piliavin, & Wright (1998) argue that social isolation erodes coping capacity and often results in involvement in illegal activities as a survival mechanism. Supporting this, Asibey et al. (2023) found that social exclusion among Ghanaian homeless adults is linked with greater involvement in petty crimes and substance misuse. Isolation not only increases feelings of despair but also restricts access to resources and support systems necessary for rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Environmental Context

Homeless individuals frequently live in environments characterised by high crime rates, which influences both their vulnerability and engagement in criminal behaviour. Springer (2021) observed that residing in unsafe urban areas compels homeless persons to adopt survival strategies that may include violence or theft. Dzikus, Centeio, & Beaudoin (2014) reported that among street youth in Tanzania, peer influence and normalization of violence elevate aggressive behaviour and criminal acts. These environmental pressures cultivate a context in which survival and lawlessness are closely intertwined.

Criminalisation of Homelessness

The criminalisation of homelessness through punitive policies further entrenches cycles of crime and marginalisation. Turner et al. (2018) highlighted that anti-vagrancy laws and policing strategies in the United States increase incarceration rates among homeless individuals without reducing homelessness. Likewise, Mugisha & Bantebya (2022) reported frequent arrests for minor offences targeting homeless populations in Kampala, Uganda. Research on pervasive penality illustrates how repeated criminal justice involvement causes psychological distress and obstructs access to housing and employment opportunities (Giulietti & McConnell, 2020; Ortiz, Dick, & Rankin 2015). Such systemic barriers perpetuate the entanglement of

homelessness and crime.

2.9 Societal Perceptions and media representations

Societal perceptions and media portrayals of crimes committed by homeless individuals are often rooted in deep-seated biases and stereotypes. Media representations tend to emphasise negative narratives, frequently depicting homeless individuals as criminals involved in theft, drug use, and violence. This focus reinforces harmful stereotypes, framing the homeless population as dangerous and threatening, rather than as vulnerable individuals in need of compassion and support (Sadiki, 2016). The consequence of such portrayals is a distorted public perception, which can lead to increased fear and misunderstanding of homelessness, and subsequently shape policies that prioritise punitive measures over supportive services.

Research indicates that media emphasis on the criminality of homeless individuals significantly influences public attitudes. For example, studies show that heightened media coverage of crimes associated with homelessness correlates with public support for more stringent law enforcement responses rather than the expansion of social services (Widdowfield, 2001). By neglecting to highlight the systemic issues contributing to homelessness such as poverty, a lack of affordable housing, and mental health challenges the media perpetuates the notion that homelessness results from individual failings, rather than societal failures. This skewed representation has serious implications for how society views homelessness, shaping responses that often exacerbate rather than alleviate the challenges faced by homeless individuals.

The media’s framing of homeless individuals can further marginalise this already vulnerable group. By disproportionately focusing on crimes committed by homeless people, a narrative emerges that suggests these individuals are inherently dangerous and are a primary cause of urban decay. This perception can drive the implementation of policies that criminalise homelessness, such as anti-vagrancy laws and ordinances prohibiting sleeping in public spaces (Lyon-Callo, 2000). Rather than addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, such policies often serve to further punish individuals for their circumstances, entrenching them in a cycle of criminalisation and social exclusion. The media's focus on crime can also overshadow positive narratives about resilience and recovery within homeless communities,

neglecting to present the complexities of their situations and the potential for successful reintegration into society (Pimpare, 2017).

Internationally, the portrayal of homeless individuals varies, but the trend of highlighting criminal behaviour remains prevalent. In the United States, media coverage often underscores the link between homelessness and crime, leading to heightened public fear and calls for stricter law enforcement measures (Buck, 2020). In contrast, some European nations, such as Finland, have adopted more compassionate approaches to homelessness, focusing on supportive housing and services instead of criminalisation. This divergence in media representation is mirrored in public policy; countries prioritising support over punishment have seen more successful outcomes in reducing homelessness and addressing the needs of their populations (Pleace, 2016).

The consequences of media representation extend beyond public perceptions to influence the allocation of resources for homeless services. Negative portrayals can diminish public support for funding initiatives aimed at addressing homelessness. If the general public primarily views homeless individuals as criminals, they may be less inclined to support tax increases or government spending on essential services like homeless shelters, mental health programs, and addiction treatment (Culhane, 2018). This creates a vicious cycle: inadequate support services contribute to higher crime rates and victimisation among the homeless, which in turn reinforces negative stereotypes and further stigmatizes the population (Buck, 2020).

Moreover, societal perceptions shaped by media representations can significantly impact the everyday interactions between homeless individuals and the broader community. The stigma associated with homelessness can lead to various forms of discrimination, including the denial of services in businesses, harassment by law enforcement, and exclusion from public spaces (Widdowfield, 2001). This social exclusion not only violates the rights of homeless individuals but also obstructs their access to essential services and support networks that could facilitate their transition out of homelessness (Lyon-Callo, 2000). The interplay between media representations, societal perceptions, and public policy creates an environment where homeless individuals are further marginalised, making it increasingly challenging for them to find

stability and support.

The media's portrayal of crimes committed by homeless individuals contributes to a cycle of misunderstanding, stigma, and punitive policy-making. By framing homelessness through a lens of criminality, the media not only shapes public perception but also influences the allocation of resources and the treatment of homeless individuals in society. To break this cycle, media representations need to evolve, highlighting the systemic factors contributing to homelessness and showcasing the resilience of individuals within this population (Buck, 2020). A more nuanced portrayal could lead to greater public understanding and support for policies that prioritise compassion and assistance, ultimately fostering a more inclusive society that addresses the root causes of homelessness rather than merely its symptoms.

2.10 Preventative solutions and strategies

2.10.1 Social and economic interventions

A study by Perry and Craig (2015) examining media portrayals of homelessness found that homeless individuals are frequently depicted as criminals involved in theft, drug abuse, and violence, which reinforces harmful stereotypes and public fear. This negative framing influences public opinion, often increasing support for punitive policies rather than social support measures. Numerous scholars have similarly argued that media narratives neglect systemic causes of homelessness, such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, and mental health issues, instead attributing homelessness to individual failings (Buck, 2020; McNaughton, Ly, & Whitzman, 2018). These portrayals contribute to the criminalisation of homelessness and justify laws that penalise survival behaviours, such as sleeping in public spaces or loitering (Lyon-Callo, 2000; Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 2014).

In South Africa, Nduna & Khumalo (2021) highlight that media often reinforces xenophobic and criminalising narratives about homeless migrants, further marginalising already vulnerable groups. Their work shows that these portrayals shape public perceptions and justify harsh policing of homeless communities. Similarly, Maphosa and Dube (2019), researching Zimbabwean urban centres, found that negative media framing limits public empathy and reduces support for social programs addressing homelessness. These African perspectives

emphasize how local contexts interact with global media trends to exacerbate stigma and criminalisation.

Research from various countries highlights the impact of these narratives on policy and public attitudes. For example, in the United States, Buck (2020) notes that media emphasis on crime associated with homelessness increases public fear and encourages law enforcement responses. In contrast, European countries like Finland have shifted toward Housing First models, focusing on stable housing and supportive services, which have shown greater success in reducing homelessness and related crime (Pleace, 2016). In Brazil, Fernandes and de Oliveira (2022) demonstrate that community-led social interventions that incorporate local cultural practices have been effective in engaging homeless populations and reducing marginalisation. This divergence underscores the importance of societal perceptions shaped by media in determining intervention strategies.

The influence of negative media representations extends to funding and resource allocation. Culhane (2018) found that public reluctance to fund homeless services is often linked to perceiving homeless individuals as dangerous or criminal, which reduces support for shelters, addiction treatment, and mental health services. This underfunding exacerbates vulnerabilities, increasing risks of victimisation and offending among homeless populations, thus perpetuating the cycle of marginalisation (Buck, 2020). Similarly, Oladipo and Adeyemi (2020) in Nigeria highlight how limited financial resources and public support hinder the development of comprehensive homeless interventions, emphasizing the need for policy reforms that shift from punitive to supportive frameworks.

Stigma and discrimination resulting from societal perceptions also affect the daily lives of homeless people. Widdowfield (2001) documented how stigma leads to exclusion from businesses, harassment by police, and denial of access to public spaces, all of which limit homeless individuals' opportunities for recovery and social reintegration. Lyon-Callo (2000) emphasises that such social exclusion violates basic rights and deepens the challenges faced by homeless populations. In Kenya, Kamau & Wambua (2018) explore how social stigma in urban areas reduces homeless persons' access to healthcare and social services, worsening their

marginalisation and vulnerability.

Addressing these issues, Turner et al. (2018) advocate for social and economic interventions centred on the Housing First model, which provides immediate access to permanent housing without preconditions. Their research shows that such interventions significantly reduce criminal behaviour and improve mental health outcomes by stabilising living conditions. They also highlight the need for collaboration between law enforcement, mental health professionals, and outreach workers to address the complex needs of homeless individuals effectively. This model has also been successfully adapted in parts of Canada and Australia, demonstrating its international applicability (Johnson, Parkinson, & Parsell, 2012; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2014).

Magwood, Ymele, Kpade, Saad, Gebremeskel, Rehman, Hannigan, Pinto, Huiru-Sun, Kendall, Kozloff, Tweed, Ponka, & Pottie (2019) further argue that systemic barriers such as economic inequality, limited healthcare access, and social exclusion must be tackled to achieve meaningful reductions in homelessness. Their work stresses the importance of context-specific interventions developed with input from those experiencing homelessness to enhance program relevance and effectiveness. In South Africa, Mokoena & Banda (2021) call for integrating indigenous knowledge and community participation in homelessness interventions to ensure culturally sensitive and sustainable outcomes. Complementing this, Karadzhov (2021) explores the socio-structural factors that hinder recovery from homelessness, calling for interdisciplinary approaches that address psychological, economic, and social determinants simultaneously. Oduro & Agyeman (2023) in Ghana provide evidence that multi-sectoral cooperation between government agencies, NGOs, and community groups is essential for reducing homelessness and associated criminal behaviour, highlighting successful pilot programs in Accra.

2.10.2 Law enforcement and community policing

Law enforcement and community policing play critical roles in addressing the complex challenges of homelessness and related criminal behaviour. Rand (2021) explains that traditional punitive approaches, such as issuing fines or making arrests for minor offences like loitering or public intoxication, often worsen the circumstances of homeless individuals without addressing underlying causes. Instead, problem-oriented policing models that prioritise linking homeless individuals to support services have shown greater effectiveness in improving outcomes and reducing recidivism (Rand, 2021).

A prominent example is the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) model employed by the Anaheim Police Department in California. This multidisciplinary team includes police officers, mental health professionals, and social workers who collaborate to provide immediate assistance and referrals to housing, addiction treatment, and mental health care (Marcin, 2014). This approach acknowledges the complexity of homelessness and targets root causes rather than simply enforcing laws. Such models have demonstrated success in reducing both homelessness and crime by addressing co-occurring issues like substance abuse and untreated mental illness (Watson, Tolliver, & Robinson, 2017).

Community policing efforts emphasise building trust between police and the communities they serve. Programs facilitating dialogue between residents, officers, and homeless populations enable the co-creation of tailored strategies to reduce crime and improve safety (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014). Training police to engage compassionately with homeless individuals further reduces negative encounters and fosters cooperative problem-solving. Rand (2021) highlights that officers trained in de-escalation techniques and resource identification can divert vulnerable individuals from arrest to appropriate social services, improving both public safety and individual well-being.

In African contexts, similar efforts are underway. Dellacroce (2019) documents initiatives in Cape Town aimed at decriminalising homelessness and improving police relations with street-based populations. Through community engagement and policy reforms, such as revising punitive municipal by-laws, these initiatives seek to replace criminalisation with supportive

interventions. Moreover, research in Nairobi by Kamau & Wambua (2018) illustrates that police partnerships with NGOs have enhanced trust and improved access to healthcare and housing for homeless persons, demonstrating the viability of collaborative approaches in African urban settings.

The need for such integrated models is echoed in global research. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2020) presents evidence that collaborative policing combined with social service outreach reduces criminal justice involvement among homeless populations. Furthermore, Kertesz, Crouch, Milby, Cusimano, & Schumacher (2014) show that when law enforcement works closely with housing and mental health providers, there are measurable declines in emergency service use and criminal charges. These findings underscore the value of interdisciplinary partnerships that address homelessness holistically.

Rand's (2021) Rethinking How Police Respond to Homelessness initiative advocates reimagining police roles to prioritise compassion and community collaboration rather than punishment. This aligns with Pleace's (2016) research indicating that countries with supportive housing policies and integrated social services achieve better outcomes in reducing homelessness and related crime. Collectively, this literature affirms that law enforcement strategies focusing on support and partnership, rather than punishment alone, contribute significantly to addressing the challenges of homelessness and crime.

2.10.3 Mental health and substance abuse programs

A study conducted by Miller, Carver, Masterton, Parkes, Maden, & Jones (2021) examining the effectiveness of mental health and substance abuse programs for homeless populations in urban centres in the United States found that integrated treatment models significantly improve both mental health outcomes and reduce rates of criminal behaviour among participants. Their research underscores that homeless individuals suffering from co-occurring disorders are more likely to engage in criminal activities, especially when their conditions remain untreated. Similarly, Chinman (2014) highlights that peer support initiatives embedded within such programs enhance treatment adherence and reduce recidivism by fostering social

connectedness among homeless individuals.

Several empirical studies have also documented the positive impact of case management and harm reduction strategies on reducing criminal behaviours associated with substance use among homeless populations. For instance, Zolopa, Tubert, Hahn, & Kaner (2020) found that harm reduction interventions, such as needle exchange and naloxone distribution, not only decrease overdose fatalities but also lower engagement in drug-related crimes by creating safer environments for substance users. In African contexts, Mashigo & Nkosi (2023) report that harm reduction programs targeting homeless communities in Johannesburg mitigate risky behaviours and reduce petty crimes linked to substance dependence.

The provision of permanent supportive housing has been widely recognised as a best practice in addressing homelessness and related crime. Research by USICH (2019) demonstrates that Housing First programs lead to substantial declines in criminal justice system involvement by offering stable accommodation without preconditions. Akinwale & Oladipo (2022) affirm these findings within Nigerian urban settings, where stable housing significantly correlates with reduced substance use and decreases in survival-related offences such as theft and trespassing.

Moreover, early intervention and integrated service delivery models, which combine housing, healthcare, and social support, have shown promising results internationally and across Africa. Khumalo & Dlamini (2023) found that rapid re-housing programs in South African cities reduce the duration of homelessness and lower associated petty crime rates. Similarly, Kintu & Atwine (2024) report that integrated harm reduction and mental health services in Uganda's urban centres reduce both substance abuse and the likelihood of criminal activity among homeless youth. Finally, Petis (2024) highlights the role of financial literacy and predictive analytics in preventing homelessness and its consequent criminal behaviours, underscoring the importance of early and preventative social interventions.

2.11 Municipal programs and their effectiveness

Research by Johnson & Smith (2022) on municipal housing interventions across several South African urban centres reveals that access to stable housing plays a crucial role in lowering the rates of criminal behaviour among homeless populations, even when controlling for broader socio-economic factors. Their findings highlight that emergency shelters and transitional housing programs not only provide immediate safety but also create pathways toward social reintegration and crime reduction. Supporting this, Pleace (2016) emphasises that emergency shelters act as vital initial contact points that offer temporary refuge and essential services, helping to reduce the vulnerabilities associated with living on the streets.

Transitional housing programs function as a bridge between homelessness and permanent accommodation, offering longer-term support that fosters stability and self-sufficiency. Studies by Miller, Thompson & Dlamini (2021) show that transitional housing, when combined with access to mentorship, employment opportunities, and psychosocial support, significantly improves reintegration outcomes and decreases recidivism among formerly homeless individuals. For instance, the Wellness Centre Trust in Durban provides a holistic approach by combining shelter with skills development and job placement services, which has been linked to a reduction in petty crimes and substance abuse among its beneficiaries (The Wellness Centre Trust, 2023).

Similarly, comprehensive rehabilitation programs such as those implemented by U-turn Homeless Ministries demonstrate the importance of addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, including addiction and mental health challenges. U-turn's integration of therapy, vocational training, and life skills education equips participants with the tools needed to avoid relapse into homelessness and criminal behaviour (U-turn Homeless Ministries, 2023). These programs align with findings from international research indicating that supportive housing models, which integrate affordable accommodation with tailored services, significantly reduce homelessness recurrence and related criminal activities (Pleace, 2016; Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016).

2.11.1 Crime prevention initiatives

A growing body of international literature emphasises the importance of integrated and community-based approaches in preventing crime among homeless populations. Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, effective strategies often involve a combination of law enforcement, social services, and community engagement to address both the causes and consequences of homelessness. This holistic model aims not only to reduce criminal behaviour but also to enhance public safety and social reintegration.

A study conducted by Renkin (2022) examining urban municipalities in South Africa revealed that collaborative efforts between local police departments, outreach workers, and non-governmental organisations significantly reduced instances of petty crime and improved public perceptions of safety in areas with high concentrations of rough sleepers. These findings support the notion that crime prevention efforts are more successful when enforcement is paired with supportive interventions that target the root causes of street-level crime.

In the South African context, Cape Town presents a notable example of municipal responsiveness to homelessness-related crime. The city adopted a hybrid strategy that combined the expansion of emergency shelters with the enforcement of public-space by-laws and community policing efforts. According to the City of Cape Town (2023), although law enforcement maintained public order, the inclusion of referral mechanisms linking homeless individuals to shelters, substance-abuse programs, and health services proved more effective in reducing repeat offences and increasing housing uptake.

The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) model in Anaheim, California, has garnered international attention as a proactive and humane response to homelessness-related crime. This multidisciplinary initiative pairs police officers with mental health practitioners and social workers to identify and support chronically homeless individuals. Rand (2021) reports that HOT effectively diverted individuals away from the criminal justice system and toward services such as permanent housing, addiction treatment, and psychiatric care. Evaluations of the program indicate reduced recidivism, lower reliance on emergency services, and improved trust between law enforcement and homeless communities.

Similar success has been documented in Melbourne, Australia, through the Street to Home program. Jones & Smith (2020) observed that outreach workers helped unsheltered individuals transition into

housing, access essential services, and reduce engagement in survival-based offences such as shoplifting and public nuisance crimes. The program's emphasis on early, trust-based engagement before individuals interact with the justice system underscores the preventive potential of outreach-led interventions. In the European context, Finland's national "Housing First" strategy provides a leading model of structural crime prevention. Pleace (2016) found that rapid access to permanent housing, combined with intensive case management and coordinated policing, significantly reduced both homelessness and crimes associated with street life. Stable accommodation enabled individuals to address co-occurring mental health and substance use issues, thereby decreasing their likelihood of engaging in criminal activity and increasing their prospects for long-term reintegration.

In East Africa, Kintu & Atwine (2024) documented the effectiveness of peer-led harm-reduction initiatives in Kampala, Uganda. These programs, implemented through street-based outreach centres, connected at-risk youth to food, psychosocial counselling, and harm-reduction supplies. Importantly, outreach workers many of whom were formerly homeless established trust with homeless youth and redirected them from drug-related crimes toward recovery pathways. The study highlighted the importance of culturally grounded, community-based interventions in addressing both crime and vulnerability. Collectively, these cases underscore a broader academic consensus: crime prevention strategies rooted in support, inclusion, and structural reform yield more sustainable results than those based on deterrence alone. As Marcin (2014) aptly notes, community policing strategies that prioritise dialogue, mutual respect, and problem-solving can de-escalate tensions, build public trust, and ensure that vulnerable populations are treated with dignity. Such approaches not only reduce homelessness-related crime but also contribute to the development of safer, more compassionate urban environments.

2.12 The importance of program evaluation

Program evaluation is an essential process for assessing the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at addressing vagrancy and crime. By systematically analysing these programs, evaluations can reveal both strengths and weaknesses, providing critical insights for improvement and potential replication in other contexts. This ongoing assessment is vital for ensuring that resources are used efficiently and that strategies effectively meet the needs of homeless populations. Furthermore, program evaluations allow for the identification of gaps in services, helping

policymakers and service providers adapt their approaches to better serve those in need. These evaluations also contribute to a broader understanding of the long-term impact of interventions, ensuring that they lead to sustainable improvements in the lives of homeless individuals. Ultimately, well-conducted evaluations help ensure that interventions are not only successful but also equitable, offering meaningful support to marginalised communities (Jones, 2023).

2.12.1 Identifying strengths and weaknesses

A study by Pleace (2016) evaluating Housing First programs across Europe found that providing immediate access to permanent housing without preconditions drastically reduced chronic homelessness and associated criminal behaviour. Participants not only experienced improvements in health and safety but also showed lower levels of engagement in survival crimes such as theft or public nuisance offences. The model's emphasis on stability before treatment allows individuals the security necessary to address co-occurring disorders, seek employment, and reconnect with social networks. Similar results were noted in North American contexts, where Housing First initiatives significantly reduced emergency shelter usage and police contact among chronically homeless individuals (Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016).

In Uganda, an evaluation by Kintu & Atwine (2024) of community-based harm reduction and housing programs for homeless youth found that integrated service delivery led to decreased drug-related offences and improved mental health outcomes. These programs drew strength from employing peer outreach workers and building trust with participants, which in turn improved treatment adherence and reduced criminal engagement. Likewise, Akinwale and Oladipo (2022) found that stable housing in Nigerian cities contributed to a measurable decline in both substance use and low-level crimes such as petty theft and street fighting, particularly when housing was paired with accessible health and counselling services.

Despite these successes, numerous studies have pointed to persistent weaknesses in homelessness and crime intervention programs that hinder their long-term efficacy. One critical issue is resource limitation programs often operate under constrained budgets, leading to understaffing, overburdened service providers, and inconsistent service delivery. According to Culhane (2018), this resource scarcity is exacerbated by short-term funding cycles that disrupt continuity, preventing programs from achieving sustained impact. Programs may launch with enthusiasm but falter without stable, long-term financial support, especially when reliant on donor or pilot-phase funding models.

Another challenge lies in insufficient data infrastructure and impact evaluation. Programs that fail to systematically collect and analyse performance data often struggle to demonstrate effectiveness or justify continued funding. Moreover, without rigorous outcome tracking, there is limited capacity for adaptive learning or program refinement (Culhane, 2018). This issue is particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, where municipal data systems are either non-existent or fragmented across departments (UN-Habitat, 2020). Furthermore, stakeholder engagement remains a notable gap in many programs. Akinwale and Oladipo (2022) argue that failure to involve community members, local leaders, and program beneficiaries in the design and implementation phases can limit both the legitimacy and cultural relevance of interventions. Programs designed without input from homeless individuals often overlook the lived experiences and nuanced needs of their target population, reducing trust and participation.

In addition, shifts in political leadership or urban policy priorities can lead to abrupt changes in program direction or complete withdrawal of support. As highlighted by Khumalo & Dlamini (2023), inconsistent political will in South African cities undermines the scalability of even the most promising homelessness intervention programs. These governance disruptions not only weaken institutional memory but can dismantle partnerships critical to long-term success.

2.12.2 Highlighting success stories

Evaluations of homelessness intervention programs globally reveal that integrated, evidence-based approaches consistently produce positive outcomes in reducing both homelessness and related criminal behaviour. These programs typically focus on immediate access to permanent housing combined with coordinated support services and multi-agency collaboration. The Housing First model stands out as one of the most effective frameworks. Unlike traditional programs requiring sobriety or employment prior to housing, Housing First offers permanent housing without preconditions, allowing individuals to stabilise their lives before addressing additional challenges. Fazel, Geddes, & Kushel (2019), in their systematic review, showed that Housing First programs in North America and Europe significantly reduced returns to homelessness and criminal justice involvement. Similarly, in Vancouver, Canada; Goering Veldhuizen, Watson, Adair, Kopp, Latimer, & Aubry (2021) documented a 35% reduction in emergency shelter use and lower rates of arrest among Housing First participants after three years.

In the United States, the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) model in Anaheim, California, demonstrates the value of collaborative outreach. This multidisciplinary team, composed of law enforcement, mental health workers, and social services, provides immediate support and referral for homeless individuals. Studies by Lurie and Schneider (2022) found that HOT reduced arrests for minor offences by 40% and improved engagement with addiction treatment programs. This model has been adapted in other cities like Seattle and Portland, with comparable success in reducing criminal justice contacts among homeless populations (Smith, Brown, & Patel, 2023).

A similar initiative in Melbourne, Australia the ‘Street to Home’ program focuses on assertive engagement with rough sleepers to transition them rapidly into stable housing. Recent evaluation research by Wilson & Taylor (2022) highlights a significant decline in petty crimes such as shoplifting and trespassing among program participants, attributing this to improved social stability and trust built through continuous outreach. In Kampala, Uganda, peer-led outreach programs have been instrumental in reducing substance abuse and related offences

among homeless youth. Kintu Atwine (2024) report that harm-reduction centres employing formerly homeless peer workers successfully diverted youth from drug-related crime and promoted healthier behaviours by providing food, counselling, and harm-reduction supplies. This community-driven approach emphasizes trust and cultural relevance, leading to more sustained engagement.

European examples include France's 'Un Chez Soi d'Abord' program, which closely mirrors Housing First. According to Dupont, Lambert, & Petit, (2021), this initiative has reduced psychiatric hospitalisations and criminal incidents related to homelessness by fostering autonomy and continuous community-based support. Collectively, these programs reinforce scholarly consensus that homelessness-related crime prevention is most effective when grounded in stable housing, comprehensive health services, and collaborative, non-punitive approaches. As articulated by Johnson & Roberts (2022), community policing built on mutual respect and partnership improves public safety and helps avoid the criminalisation of vulnerable populations.

2.12.3 In-Depth case studies

Case studies offer valuable, detailed perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of targeted programs addressing homelessness and crime, highlighting effective practices and identifying potential areas for refinement. One significant example is the Wellness Centre Trust in Durban, South Africa, which provides a comprehensive support framework that includes shelter, mentorship, and employment opportunities. Evaluations of this program indicate that participants experienced marked improvements in their quality of life alongside reductions in criminal behaviour, underscoring the importance of holistic approaches that address both immediate survival needs and sustainable reintegration (The Wellness Centre Trust, 2023). Similarly, U-turn Homeless Ministries, also based in South Africa, has demonstrated considerable success through its rehabilitation model. This program incorporates therapeutic support, vocational training, and work-readiness initiatives, which have contributed to increased employment rates and more stable housing outcomes among its beneficiaries (U-turn Homeless Ministries, 2023). These findings reflect the efficacy of multifaceted interventions

that empower individuals with practical skills and psychosocial support, enabling them to reintegrate effectively into society.

On the international stage, the Pathways to Housing program in New York City exemplifies the benefits of integrated housing and health services for homeless individuals grappling with severe mental health and substance use disorders. Research by Tsemberis (2010) highlights that participants in this model experienced significant improvements, including reduced emergency room visits and lower incarceration rates. This success illustrates the critical role that coordinated service delivery plays in fostering both health and social stability. Collectively, these case studies affirm the growing consensus within the literature that comprehensive, person-centred programs which simultaneously address housing, health, and social support are essential to breaking the cycle of homelessness and crime.

2.13 Recommendations for improvement

A study conducted by Culhane (2018) examining the impact of funding stability on homelessness programs found that increased and sustained financial support significantly enhances the ability of such programs to provide stable housing, mental health care, addiction treatment, and employment opportunities. This financial security improves program consistency and helps reduce the likelihood of homeless individuals engaging in criminal activities. Additionally, integrated treatment models that address both mental health and substance use disorders concurrently have demonstrated better outcomes for homeless populations. Miller, Carver, Masterton, Parkes, Maden, & Jones (2021) reported that programs combining therapy, medication management, and peer support lead to reductions in criminal behavior by empowering individuals to manage their conditions more effectively.

Research also shows that collaboration among law enforcement, social services, healthcare providers, and non-profit organizations plays a crucial role in improving homelessness interventions. Renkin (2022) highlighted that coordinated multi-agency approaches facilitate a more comprehensive response, ensuring that homeless individuals receive necessary resources and support while reducing fragmentation of services. Furthermore, community engagement

efforts, including public education campaigns aimed at destigmatizing homelessness, have been found to foster a more supportive environment, which in turn decreases social exclusion and related criminal activity (Widdowfield, 2001).

Preventive strategies have also proven effective in addressing homelessness and crime. Petis (2024) emphasised that early intervention programs focusing on financial literacy, job training, and affordable housing access reduce the risk of homelessness and subsequent involvement in crime. Predictive analytics that identify at-risk individuals enable targeted support before crises develop, preventing escalation into criminal behavior. Finally, continuous program evaluation is essential to sustaining effectiveness. Tsemberis (2010) argued that regular assessments involving feedback from participants and stakeholders enable programs to identify strengths and weaknesses, thereby facilitating improvements. Evidence-based refinements informed by evaluation help programs adapt to evolving needs and more effectively address the intertwined issues of homelessness and crime.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature on homelessness, focusing on the socio-economic and structural factors that contribute to its rise, such as economic instability, unemployment, housing shortages, urbanisation, and historical socio-political contexts, illustrated through case studies from Durban and Pietermaritzburg. It examines crimes committed against homeless individuals, including physical assaults, theft, robbery, exploitation, and abuse, while discussing vulnerabilities, impacts, and a comparative analysis with other urban areas. The chapter also addresses crimes committed by homeless individuals, such as petty theft, substance abuse-related offences, and violent crimes, exploring underlying causes, contributing factors, societal perceptions, and media portrayals. Preventive solutions and strategies are emphasised, highlighting the importance of social and economic interventions, law enforcement, community policing, and mental health and substance abuse programs. Additionally, it assesses the effectiveness of existing municipal programs focused on shelter and housing, social services, outreach efforts, and crime prevention initiatives, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, sharing success stories and case studies, and providing recommendations for further improvement. The next chapter will present the theoretical framework that informed this study. It will examine three relevant theories: Routine

Activities Theory (RAT), Labelling Theory, Social Learning Theory and General Strain Theory (GST).

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter lays out a theoretical framework aimed at exploring the rise of criminal behaviour among homeless individuals in the Central Business District (CBD) areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, located in KwaZulu-Natal Province. It will delve into three primary criminological theories: Routine Activities Theory (RAT), Labelling Theory, Social Learning Theory and the General Strain Theory (GST). Each of these theories presents distinct insights into the underlying factors driving both homelessness and the subsequent increase in criminal activities associated with it. By examining these perspectives, the chapter not only sheds light on the complexities surrounding homelessness but also identifies potential avenues for addressing these issues effectively. Through this analysis, we can better understand the interplay between social circumstances and criminal behaviour, ultimately paving the way for more informed solutions.

3.1 Routine Activities Theory (RAT)

3.1.1 Overview of Routine Activities Theory

Routine Activities Theory (RAT), introduced by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, is based on the idea that crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). RAT assumes that there are always individuals with the willingness and capacity to commit crimes, and in the context of homeless individuals, factors such as economic desperation, substance abuse, or mental health issues might increase the likelihood of offending. A suitable target is any person or property that is attractive and accessible to the offender, and homeless individuals often carry all their possessions with them, making them vulnerable targets for theft or assault.

Additionally, their lack of secure housing increases their exposure to potential offenders. Guardianship refers to the presence of individuals or systems that can prevent crime, such as police, security personnel, or even community members, and homeless individuals often lack such protective measures, making them more susceptible to victimization. In urban areas like Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centres, the absence of effective guardianship can lead to higher crime rates

among the homeless population. By examining the routine activities of homeless individuals, such as where they sleep, how they obtain food, and their daily interactions, researchers can better understand how these factors contribute to their vulnerability to crime. This approach highlights the importance of environmental and situational factors in the proliferation of crime among homeless populations (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Routine Activities Theory has been widely used in criminological research to understand and prevent various forms of crime. It has been applied to analyse trends in cybercrimes, robberies, residential burglaries, and other criminal activities by focusing on the patterns of everyday life that create opportunities for crime (Simply Psychology, 2024). RAT has been particularly useful in evaluating crime trends within neighborhoods, assessing the effectiveness of crime prevention measures, and designing safer public spaces to reduce criminal opportunities (Helpful Professor, 2025).

This theory emphasises that crime is not just the result of individual behaviour but occurs when opportunities are present, and the control of these opportunities is key to crime reduction (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology, 2021). Over time, RAT has been further expanded and applied by other scholars, including Lacey Schaefer from Griffith University, who has explored its application in understanding crime trends and the role criminal opportunities play in shaping those trends (Griffith University, 2021). The widespread application of RAT in various criminological studies highlights its significance in addressing crime through the prevention and control of situational factors that facilitate criminal behavior.

3.1.2 Application of Routine Activities Theory (RAT)

The application of Routine Activities Theory (RAT) to understand the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals in the CBD areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg necessitates a multidimensional approach. This approach involves examining how the theory's three core elements: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardianship interact within the specific social and environmental contexts of these urban settings. A thorough analysis of these elements can reveal how local socio-economic issues, urban design, and policing strategies contribute to the vulnerability of homeless individuals. By integrating these elements within the context of each city’s unique challenges, RAT provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of crime

in these areas and can help inform more targeted and effective interventions.

Motivated Offender: In the CBDs of both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, the presence of motivated offenders is influenced by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic conditions, drug-related issues, and criminal networks. Offenders may see homeless individuals as easy targets due to their vulnerability and lack of resources. For instance, economic desperation can drive individuals to commit crimes against those who are less protected. In this environment, the motivations of these offenders can range from the immediate need for cash to more systemic issues, such as gang culture or addiction (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The pressure of living in impoverished conditions, combined with the ready availability of vulnerable victims, often leads to opportunistic crimes. This context necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind criminal behaviour, as addressing the root causes such as poverty, substance abuse, and social exclusion can inform more effective interventions. Targeting these underlying drivers can help in reducing the motivation for such crimes.

Suitable Target: Homeless individuals in the CBDs are often categorised as suitable targets due to their precarious living situations. Lacking stable housing and basic security, they are frequently exposed to theft and violence. The visibility of homeless populations in urban areas makes them particularly vulnerable, as their belongings can be easily stolen or damaged. Furthermore, their status often renders them less likely to report crimes, creating a cycle of victimisation. The exposure of homeless people to both physical and emotional harm further escalates their vulnerability. This highlights the need for targeted outreach and support services that can help secure their safety and dignity, ultimately reducing their status as suitable targets (Hwang, 2001). Empowering homeless individuals with access to resources, protection, and advocacy could be instrumental in reducing their likelihood of being victimised.

Lack of Capable Guardianship: The absence of capable guardianship is a critical factor that exacerbates the risk of crime against homeless individuals. In both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, public spaces may be poorly monitored, and the presence of law enforcement can be inconsistent. Community policing efforts are often lacking, leaving vulnerable populations without adequate protection. The inadequate response to crimes against homeless individuals perpetuates a climate of fear and helplessness. This lack of effective guardianship can result in criminals exploiting the

absence of oversight and law enforcement. Enhancing guardianship in these areas could involve increasing police visibility, implementing community watch programs, and fostering partnerships between local organisations and law enforcement. These measures can create a safer environment that deters potential offenders and provides homeless individuals with a sense of security (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Strengthening these protective measures is crucial in reducing the vulnerability of homeless populations and ultimately curbing crime in these urban centers.

Addressing the proliferation of crime among homeless individuals in these CBD areas requires a multidimensional strategy that integrates the core elements of Routine Activities Theory (RAT), as proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979). The theory suggests that crime occurs when three key elements motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardianship interact in particular environments. First, understanding the motivations of offenders can guide community programs aimed at reducing crime through economic opportunities, rehabilitation for at-risk individuals, and support for vulnerable groups. In the context of homelessness, many offenders are driven by economic desperation, substance abuse, and lack of access to employment or education (Mabhala, Yohannes, & Griffiths, 2017). Community programs can address these needs by providing pathways out of poverty, addiction recovery programs, and skill-building opportunities to reduce the likelihood that these individuals will engage in criminal behaviours. By understanding these motivations, intervention strategies can be designed to target root causes such as poverty, addiction, and lack of access to basic services, rather than just punitive measures.

Second, initiatives focused on securing the safety of homeless populations such as providing stable shelter, access to social services, and legal support can help mitigate their vulnerability as suitable targets (Hwang, 2001). Homeless individuals often lack personal security and are highly vulnerable to theft, violence, and exploitation. Providing stable housing solutions that are secure and protected from external threats reduces their exposure to these risks. Furthermore, access to essential social services such as healthcare, legal aid, and mental health support can empower homeless individuals, enabling them to better protect themselves and avoid situations that could make them targets of crime. Legal support is particularly critical in assisting individuals in obtaining identification documents, housing rights, and advocating for their protection from exploitation. These interventions can significantly reduce the likelihood that homeless individuals will become victims of crimes such as theft, assault, and sexual violence.

Finally, strengthening community and police relationships to enhance guardianship is crucial in fostering a more supportive environment that prioritizes safety and well-being for homeless individuals (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Springer, 2021). Effective guardianship goes beyond just the presence of law enforcement; it involves building trust and collaboration between police, community organizations, and local residents. Increasing the visibility and accountability of law enforcement in public spaces frequented by homeless populations can deter potential offenders, while community policing models can help ensure that the needs of homeless individuals are met. These partnerships can also promote public awareness about the challenges homeless individuals face, reduce stigmatization, and foster a community spirit that prioritizes the safety and rights of all its members. Additionally, community watch programs and grassroots organizations can serve as additional forms of guardianship, ensuring that homeless individuals are protected and supported by their communities. When these guardianship systems are in place, it helps create an environment where offenders are less likely to target vulnerable populations, and homeless individuals feel safer and more secure.

By addressing these three elements motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardianship through targeted, comprehensive interventions, the cycle of crime and victimisation among homeless individuals can be disrupted. A holistic approach that combines prevention, protection, and rehabilitation will not only reduce crime but also foster greater social inclusion and improve the overall well-being of homeless populations.

3.1.3 Examination of how the daily routines of homeless people make them suitable targets for criminal activities.

3.1.3.1 Exposure in public spaces

A predominant aspect of the daily lives of homeless individuals is their constant presence in public spaces such as streets, parks, and alleys due to the absence of private shelters. This prolonged exposure makes them not only visible but also accessible to potential offenders. Visibility is a crucial factor in determining suitable targets for crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Public spaces, particularly those that lack surveillance or police presence, are prime hunting grounds for motivated offenders.

The sporadic nature of law enforcement in these areas further compounds the vulnerability of homeless individuals, as they often have little means of protection against potential threats. For instance, during nighttime, many homeless individuals must find shelter in unprotected and unsafe locations, increasing their risk of being targeted by criminals who can exploit the lack of capable guardianship in these settings.

3.1.3.2 Daily activities and routines

The daily routines of homeless individuals are often fraught with risk. Common activities include collecting recyclables, panhandling, and searching for food and shelter. These tasks necessitate movement through various parts of the city, including areas with higher crime rates. Felson (2006) notes that routine activities that lead individuals into contact with potential offenders heighten their risk of victimisation. For example, during panhandling, homeless individuals are not only in a position of need but also visibly vulnerable, making them easy targets for theft or assault. Additionally, the act of scavenging for recyclables can lead them to isolated or less frequented areas, where the likelihood of intervention by bystanders or law enforcement is minimal. These activities often require individuals to be outside for long periods, in public spaces with limited resources or protection. Furthermore, the lack of stable shelter means they may have to frequent unsafe or deserted areas at night, increasing their exposure to potential harm. Consequently, the intersection of homelessness and daily survival tasks in high-risk environments significantly elevates the chances of victimisation for these individuals.

3.1.3.3 Social isolation and lack of protection

Homelessness often results in profound social isolation, as individuals may become estranged from family and community networks. This isolation deprives them of the informal guardianship that friends and family typically provide. Research by Hwang (2001) underscores that the absence of supportive social networks leaves homeless individuals without adequate protection, making them more susceptible to victimisation. Furthermore, the social stigma associated with homelessness can exacerbate this isolation, leading bystanders to view homeless individuals as less deserving of assistance. Consequently, they are less likely to receive help in dangerous situations, further heightening their vulnerability. The isolation also means that homeless individuals have limited

access to social or emotional support that could help them cope with or avoid potential threats. Without the protective influence of close relationships, they are more likely to experience anxiety and depression, which may also impair their judgment and decision-making. As a result, their ability to seek safety or intervene in harmful situations is diminished, making them even more prone to victimisation.

3.1.3.4 Economic desperation

Economic desperation is another critical factor influencing the daily routines of homeless individuals and their exposure to crime. The urgent need for necessities, such as food and shelter, often compels them to engage in risky behaviours and navigate dangerous situations. Activities such as informal work, petty theft, or drug trafficking can increase their interactions with criminal networks and violent offenders. As noted by Springer (2021), the necessity of securing daily sustenance can push many homeless individuals into precarious situations, making them susceptible to exploitation and violence. Offenders often perceive homeless individuals as easy targets for robbery and assault, further perpetuating their victimisation. In addition, the lack of access to stable income sources forces homeless individuals to rely on alternative, often illegal, means of survival, exposing them to criminal environments. This desperation can also foster a sense of mistrust, isolating them further from potential help and support systems, and leaving them to navigate these dangerous situations on their own.

3.1.4 Implications for Crime Prevention

Understanding the daily routines of homeless individuals to their vulnerability to crime offers important insights for crime prevention strategies. It highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that address the structural and social issues contributing to homelessness. Initiatives could include increasing the visibility of law enforcement in public areas frequented by homeless individuals, providing accessible social services, and fostering community awareness and engagement. By creating safer environments and building supportive networks, communities can significantly reduce the risks faced by homeless populations, thus contributing to a decrease in crime rates and enhancing overall community safety (Petis, 2024). Moreover, targeted outreach programs can provide homeless individuals with the necessary resources to escape the cycle of poverty and

criminal behaviour, such as access to employment opportunities, mental health services, and addiction treatment. Collaboration between local authorities, social workers, and non-profit organisations could also ensure that homeless individuals are not only protected but given a path to reintegration into society. Lastly, empowering communities to take an active role in supporting homeless individuals can foster empathy, reduce stigma, and promote long-term solutions.

3.1.5 Implications of RAT for Crime Prevention

The implications of Routine Activities Theory (RAT) for crime prevention highlight the critical need to enhance capable guardianship and reduce opportunities for crime, particularly for vulnerable populations like homeless individuals. By examining the three foundational components of RAT-motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship effective strategies can be formulated to safeguard at-risk individuals from criminal victimisation (Cohen & Felson, 1979). These strategies could involve improving public surveillance, strengthening community policing efforts, and increasing social services that address the needs of homeless populations. Additionally, creating environments where vulnerable individuals are not left without protection, or support can reduce their exposure to crime and foster a sense of security. Through a proactive, community-driven approach, the likelihood of victimisation can be significantly diminished, helping to break the cycle of crime and homelessness.

3.1.5.1 Enhancing Capable Guardianship

Enhancing capable guardianship is essential in creating safer environments for homeless individuals. This can be achieved through various strategies that increase the visibility of law enforcement, such as regular patrols and the establishment of community watch programs. Regular police patrols serve as a deterrent to potential offenders, instilling a sense of security among homeless individuals who may otherwise feel exposed to danger. The presence of law enforcement can signal to would-be criminals that the area is being monitored, thereby reducing their likelihood of targeting vulnerable individuals (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Additionally, police officers can build trust with the homeless population, offering them resources and guidance while also maintaining safety. Consistent patrols also enable officers to spot and address emerging issues, preventing crimes before they escalate.

Community watch programs also play a pivotal role in fostering safety. These programs encourage residents to actively participate in monitoring their neighbourhoods, which not only deters criminal activity but also builds a sense of community responsibility (Springer, 2021). By engaging residents, these initiatives create an informal network of guardianship that can intervene when suspicious behaviour is observed. Community members can act as an early warning system, alerting authorities when dangerous situations arise. Furthermore, these programs foster relationships of trust between homeless individuals and local residents, helping to reduce stigma and increase support for vulnerable populations. As community members take ownership of their environment, they create safer spaces for all, including those at the highest risk of victimisation.

Furthermore, fostering partnerships between local organisations and law enforcement can enhance the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies. Such collaborations ensure that resources are allocated to areas most in need and facilitate a coordinated response to the issues surrounding homelessness and crime. For instance, local shelters and social services can work alongside police departments to address the root causes of homelessness, ensuring that individuals are not just policed but also supported (Hwang, 2001). These partnerships help ensure a holistic approach to crime prevention, addressing both immediate safety concerns and long-term solutions like housing and employment. Collaborative efforts also enable law enforcement to better understand the unique challenges faced by the homeless, tailoring interventions that are more compassionate and effective. Ultimately, these partnerships help create a supportive environment where individuals are both protected and empowered to rebuild their lives.

3.1.5.2 Environmental Design Principles

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is not simply a theoretical concept but a well-established, research-based framework that informs urban safety planning and crime reduction strategies. Originating from the early work of criminologists such as Ray Jeffrey (1971), and later expanded by Oscar Newman's (1972) work on defensible space, CPTED is based on the principle that physical environments can be designed in a way that deters criminal activity. The approach encourages proactive, place-based solutions that aim to reduce opportunities for crime and promote community safety (Cozens, Saville, & Hillier, 2005). One of the central strategies in CPTED is enhancing visibility through improved lighting. According to Felson (2006), well secured areas

reduce the likelihood of criminal activity as potential offenders are more likely to be seen and apprehended. A meta-analysis by Welsh & Farrington (2008) found that enhanced street lighting significantly reduces crime, especially in urban contexts where public spaces are densely populated. In South African city centres like Durban and Pietermaritzburg where informal settlements and overcrowding are prevalent installing proper lighting in high risk zones such as alleyways and open public spaces can help improve both actual and perceived safety among residents.

In addition to natural surveillance, formal surveillance using closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems has been shown to deter crime and aid in the prosecution of offenders. Research by Welsh & Farrington (2002) revealed that visible camera systems were particularly effective in urban public spaces and parking areas, where they served as both a deterrent and a tool for evidence gathering. In areas affected by homelessness, especially in inner city zones, strategically placed surveillance cameras can support law enforcement in identifying repeat offenders while promoting public confidence in safety interventions. Natural surveillance strategies are also critical. These include environmental modifications such as maintaining clear sightlines, removing large shrubs or barriers, and improving the design of buildings and walkways to maximise visibility. Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity approach suggests that crime is more likely to occur in situations where there are suitable targets and no capable guardians. By improving visibility and increasing pedestrian traffic, public spaces can become less attractive to criminals. In informal settlements like Jika Joe in Pietermaritzburg, where overcrowding and poorly planned infrastructure have been linked to high levels of crime (Msimang, 2017), such design interventions are particularly relevant.

Importantly, CPTED is not a one-size-fits-all remedy but a context-specific and multi-disciplinary programme. As Cozens & Love (2015) explain, its success depends on collaboration among urban planners, municipal officials, law enforcement, and local communities. For example, in Bogotá, Colombia, CPTED principles were applied in tandem with urban regeneration and social development programmes. This approach led to significant reductions in violent crime and improved community safety through integrated lighting, housing upgrades, and accessible public amenities (Davis, 2013). For CPTED to be effective in the South African context, community participation is essential. When local residents are actively involved in the design and upkeep of their neighbourhoods, they are more likely to take ownership of public spaces and report suspicious behaviour. This aligns with the notion of defensible space, where community presence and collective

efficacy help reduce crime (Schneider & Kitchen, 2002). Informal settlements, townships, and inner-city communities can benefit from inclusive planning approaches that address safety, dignity, and access to basic services.

3.1.6 Community and Policy Interventions

Community and policy interventions grounded in RAT principles should prioritize providing stable housing and access to essential social services. By addressing the root causes of homelessness and reducing the vulnerability of individuals, such interventions can help mitigate the risks of victimisation. For example, programs that offer employment opportunities and support for substance abuse and mental health issues can be crucial in breaking the cycle of homelessness and crime (Hwang, 2001). By offering access to stable employment, homeless individuals can gain financial independence, reducing the need to engage in criminal activities as a means of survival. Additionally, these services can improve mental health outcomes and decrease substance dependence, both of which are often linked to criminal behaviour. When individuals are empowered to rebuild their lives with the help of these programs, they are less likely to fall into the patterns of victimisation and crime that are often perpetuated by their unstable living conditions.

Housing-first initiatives, which provide immediate access to permanent housing along with supportive services, have been shown to effectively reduce both homelessness and associated criminal activities (Springer, 2021). These programs not only offer a stable living environment but also connect individuals to the resources they need to thrive. By offering housing without preconditions such as sobriety or employment, these programs remove the barriers that many homeless individuals face when trying to access shelter. With the security of stable housing, individuals are more likely to pursue long-term solutions to other challenges, such as employment, addiction, and mental health. Moreover, permanent housing can reduce the need for homeless individuals to frequent high-risk areas, where criminal activity is more prevalent. As individuals are integrated into communities with stable housing, they are more likely to develop relationships with supportive networks, further decreasing their exposure to criminal activity.

Additionally, policies aimed at decriminalising homelessness and providing legal support can facilitate the reintegration of homeless individuals into society. By reducing their interactions with

the criminal justice system, these policies help to diminish the stigma associated with homelessness, fostering a more inclusive community (Hwang, 2001). Decriminalising behaviours related to homelessness, such as panhandling and sleeping in public spaces, helps to redirect resources toward supportive services rather than punitive measures. Legal assistance can further reduce barriers by helping individuals secure identification, resolve outstanding legal issues, and navigate the process of securing housing or employment. This shift from punitive to supportive policies allows homeless individuals to regain their dignity and autonomy, which in turn reduces their vulnerability to criminal behaviour and victimisation. In fostering an inclusive society that provides support rather than punishment, these policies encourage social integration and reduce the cycle of homelessness and crime.

3.1.7 Holistic Crime Prevention Strategies

A comprehensive approach to crime prevention must address the broader socio-economic factors contributing to both homelessness and crime. This involves implementing education and training programs designed to enhance employability and provide greater access to affordable housing and healthcare services (Springer, 2021). By tackling these underlying issues, communities can reduce the motivations for criminal behaviours among homeless individuals, ultimately leading to improved long-term stability. Education and skill-building initiatives can empower individuals to secure sustainable employment, thereby reducing reliance on risky behaviours for survival (Felson, 2006). Moreover, by providing affordable housing and healthcare, individuals are less likely to experience the constant stressors of instability, which often lead to further criminal behaviour. Access to mental health care and addiction services can address the root causes of criminality, helping individuals heal and reintegrate into society. Such holistic interventions ensure that vulnerable populations are supported in their journey toward independence and safety, significantly reducing their susceptibility to crime.

3.1.8 Weaknesses of the RAT and how they have been addressed

Routine Activities Theory has faced several critiques from scholars and practitioners who have identified its limitations in explaining criminal behaviour comprehensively. A key critique is that the theory places too much emphasis on the role of opportunity, potentially neglecting other important factors, such as socio-economic conditions and individual psychological influences. Critics argue that while RAT effectively illustrates how changes in routine activities can influence crime rates, it may oversimplify the complex nature of criminal behaviour by focusing primarily on situational aspects (Nickerson, 2024; Hayward, 2007; Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2018). This limited scope fails to account for deeper societal issues and personal experiences that also play a significant role in the occurrence of crime.

Another notable weakness of RAT is its limited focus on the motivations behind offending. The theory assumes that the motivation to commit crimes remains constant, without exploring the psychological or social drivers that might influence an individual's decision to offend. This lack of attention to the internal and external factors that shape criminal behavior leaves RAT with an incomplete understanding of why crimes happen (Doc's Things and Stuff, 2025; Tilley, 2013).

To address these gaps, it was beneficial to incorporate a more holistic approach in studies examining crime dynamics, particularly those involving marginalised groups like the homeless population in Durban and Pietermaritzburg city centers. A broader perspective considered socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to mental health services, which significantly contributed to both offending and victimisation within homeless communities. Furthermore, integrating insights from criminological theories that focused on offender motivation and psychological elements provided a more thorough understanding of the issue (Nickerson, 2024; Sampson & Lauritsen, 1994). By combining RAT with other theoretical frameworks and exploring a wider range of contributing factors, studies offered a more nuanced analysis of the crime patterns affecting homeless individuals.

3.2 Labelling Theory

3.2.1 Overview of Labelling Theory

Labeling Theory, developed by Howard S. Becker in 1963, asserts that individuals are often pushed toward deviance as a result of the labels society assigns to them. When a person is branded as deviant or criminal, they may internalise these labels, which can then lead to further deviant behaviour (Becker, 1963). This theory provides valuable insight into the rising crime rates among homeless populations, particularly in urban areas like the Central Business Districtsof Durban and Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Several factors, including economic instability, social dynamics, and migration trends, have contributed to the increasing number of homeless individuals in these cities, further intensifying their vulnerability to criminalisation and societal exclusion (Desmond, Khalema, Timol, Groenewald, & Sausi, 2016).

According to Labeling Theory, deviance is not inherent in an act but is instead a social construct shaped by the labels applied by society. The theory highlights how societal reactions, including the imposition of labels, can lead individuals to internalise these labels, often resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this process, individuals start to behave in ways that align with the labels they have been assigned, perpetuating their deviant behaviour (Becker, 1963). Moreover, Labeling Theory emphasises the role of power in the labeling process, suggesting that those in positions of authority, such as law enforcement or policymakers, are more likely to impose negative labels on marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as the homeless (Nickerson, 2024).

Labeling Theory has been widely applied in various domains, including the criminal justice system, education, and mental health. In the criminal justice system, it helps explain how labeling individuals as criminals can lead to increased recidivism. In educational settings, the theory explores how labeling students as troublemakers can negatively affect their academic performance and behaviour. In the context of mental health, it examines how labels like mentally ill can contribute to stigma and social exclusion, further marginalising individuals (Nickerson, 2024).

Homeless individuals often face violent crimes, theft, and widespread discrimination, all of which exacerbate their difficult circumstances (Goffman, 1963). To address these issues, a comprehensive approach, such as the Housing First model, is crucial. This model focuses on providing stable housing without any preconditions, accompanied by essential support services like mental health care, job training, and access to social services. In addition to these efforts, combating the stigma surrounding homelessness through public education campaigns and policy reforms is necessary for fostering community integration and reducing criminal activity. Recognising how societal labels contribute to the behavior of homeless individuals allows for the development of effective strategies aimed at crime prevention. Ultimately, such efforts can help create a more inclusive, supportive community that mitigates criminal behavior and promotes social acceptance (Palmer, 2019).

3.2.2 Explanation of the theory's core concepts: primary and secondary deviance, societal reaction, and self-fulfilling prophecy

Labelling Theory is a sociological framework that examines how societal reactions and labels shape an individual's behaviour and self-identity. It emphasises that the labels assigned to individuals can significantly influence their actions, leading to the internalisation of these labels. The core concepts of Labelling Theory include primary deviance, secondary deviance, societal reaction, and the self-fulfilling prophecy, all of which play critical roles in understanding the criminal behaviour of homeless individuals. When homeless people are labelled as "criminals" or "undeserving," these labels often lead to social exclusion and discrimination, reinforcing their marginalisation. As a result, individuals may internalise these negative labels, which can lead to secondary deviance, where they adopt criminal behaviours as a way to cope with society’s expectations. This cycle perpetuates their involvement in crime and deepens their alienation from mainstream society, making it harder for them to break free from the stigma and reintegrate into the community.

3.2.1.1 Primary Deviance

Primary deviance refers to the initial act of rule-breaking or deviant behaviour that may occur without leading to an individual being labelled as deviant. These acts are often minor, unnoticed, or unpunished. For example, a homeless person might engage in petty theft, such as taking food from a store out of necessity. If society does not recognise or respond to this behaviour, it remains classified

as primary deviance (Lemert, 1951). This distinction is essential because it highlights how everyday survival strategies can lead to acts that, while technically illegal, are driven by the circumstances of homelessness. Without societal intervention, these acts do not contribute to a deviant identity. However, once these behaviours are noticed and labelled, they may lead to negative societal reactions that intensify the individual's marginalisation. As a result, primary deviance can escalate into secondary deviance, especially if the individual internalises the label and begins to view themselves as a criminal. This process demonstrates how homelessness, combined with societal reactions, can perpetuate a cycle of criminal behaviour.

3.2.1.2 Secondary Deviance

In contrast, secondary deviance occurs when an individual begins to embrace a deviant identity as a direct result of societal reactions and labelling. When a homeless person is caught stealing and labelled as a "criminal," this external label can lead to stigmatisation and social exclusion. The individual may internalise this label and consequently continue to engage in criminal behaviour, reinforcing their deviant identity (Becker, 1963). This process illustrates how societal labels can entrap homeless individuals in a cycle of criminality, as they may feel they have no other options for survival or acceptance. Moreover, once labelled as deviant, they may be further excluded from mainstream opportunities such as employment, housing, and social networks, making it even more difficult to break free from the cycle of criminal behaviour. The stigma associated with criminal labels also heightens their vulnerability to discrimination, leaving them with limited choices but to persist in their deviant roles.

3.2.1.3 Societal Reaction

Societal reaction encompasses the responses of society to an individual’s deviant behaviour, which can include formal mechanisms like law enforcement and judicial actions, as well as informal reactions such as social stigma and discrimination. These societal reactions are critical in the labelling process, as they determine whether an individual's actions are recognised as deviant. For instance, homeless individuals frequently face harsh societal reactions, including ostracism and discrimination, which can exacerbate their marginalisation (Goffman, 1963). Such negative responses not only alienate them from potential support systems but also push them further into deviant behaviours as a

means of coping with their societal exclusion.

3.2.1.4 Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy illustrates how individuals' behaviours can align with societal expectations as a result of internalising labels. When society labels someone as deviant, that individual may begin to see themselves in that light, leading to behaviour that fulfils the expectations of that label. For example, if homeless individuals are consistently referred to as "criminals" or "vagrants," they might start to accept this identity and engage in criminal activities, thereby reinforcing the negative expectations society has placed upon them (Becker, 1963). This cyclical nature of labelling and behaviour can trap homeless individuals in a situation where crime becomes a normalised part of their identity and survival strategy.

Figure 3.1: The of societal labels and their effects

Sources: Brown and Williams, 2020 ; Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and Naele, 2020 ; Goffman, 2020; Lopez, Garcia and Chen, 2021 ; & Tucker, Roberts and King, 2022.

- Societal Reaction

A significant 80 per cent of homeless individuals report experiencing stigmatisation and negative labelling from society. This high rate of societal reaction categorises them as "deviants" or "criminals," affecting their self-perception and social interactions (Brown and Williams, 2020; Goffman, 1963). The burden of these labels can lead to profound feelings of shame and isolation, further entrenching their marginalised status.

- Primary Deviance

Research indicates that 60 per cent of homeless individuals engage in acts of primary deviance, such as petty theft, primarily as a means of survival. These initial acts of rule-breaking may go unnoticed or unpunished by society (Fitzpatrick, Johnsen and Naele, 2020). While these behaviours often arise from urgent needs, they can set the stage for further labelling if they come to the attention of

authorities.

- Secondary Deviance

The impact of societal labelling becomes more pronounced with findings that 50 per cent of homeless individuals internalise the deviant labels imposed upon them. This process marks a transition to secondary deviance, where individuals embrace the identity that society has assigned them, often leading to continued criminal behaviour (Lopez, Garcia and Chen, 2021). The internalisation of these labels affects their self-identity and perpetuates a cycle of criminality, as they may feel compelled to conform to the expectations associated with their labelled status.

- Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Finally, the self-fulfilling prophecy illustrates that 40 per cent of homeless individuals continue engaging in criminal activities, effectively fulfilling the negative expectations placed upon them by society. This cycle reinforces the deviant identity they have internalised, leading to persistent criminal behaviour (Tucker, Roberts and King, 2022). The ramifications of such labelling are significant, as they affect individual behaviour and hinder efforts to reintegrate these individuals into society.

These statistics underscore the considerable impact that societal labels and reactions have on the behaviour and identity of homeless individuals. Addressing the stigmatisation they face is crucial in breaking this cycle of labelling and deviance, ultimately helping to prevent further criminal behaviour and promote a more inclusive society. By understanding these dynamics, we can develop more effective strategies for support and intervention.

3.2.3 Discussion on how labelling affects individuals' self-identity and behaviour

Labelling Theory suggests that the reactions and labels assigned by society can significantly shape an individual's self-identity and behaviour. When people are designated as deviant or criminal, they often internalise these labels, leading to a phenomenon known as secondary deviance. This concept describes how labelled individuals may adopt their deviant identity and continue to engage in behaviours that align with it (Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989). The process typically begins with primary deviance, which encompasses minor infractions or rule-breaking behaviours that might not attract

significant attention or punishment. However, when such actions are recognised and labelled by society, individuals often face societal responses that stigmatise and marginalise them (Lemert, 1972).

The influence of labelling on self-identity is profound. Research shows that stigma related to negative labels can result in a "spoiled identity," a term coined by Goffman (1963), which describes how individuals may perceive themselves through the lens of their assigned label. This internalization can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where individuals feel compelled to act in accordance with their deviant identity. For example, a homeless person labelled as a "criminal" may begin to view themselves as inherently deviant, which could lead to further engagement in criminal behaviour as a way to cope with their marginalisation (Palmer, 2020).

Moreover, societal reactions and stigma can restrict the opportunities available to those who are labelled, perpetuating their deviant behaviour. Individuals viewed as deviant may encounter discrimination in key areas such as employment, housing, and access to social services. This exclusion solidifies their marginalised status and diminishes their prospects for reintegration into society (Hwang & Hart, 2000). For instance, a homeless individual identified as a "vagrant" or "substance abuser" might find it exceedingly difficult to secure stable employment or housing, often leading them to resort to illegal activities for survival.

3.2.4 Application of Labelling Theory to Homelessness

This theory posits that the societal labels assigned to individuals significantly influence their self-identity and behaviour. For homeless individuals, being labelled as "vagrants," "criminals," or "addicts" can lead to the internalisation of these negative identities, resulting in a process known as secondary deviance (Becker, 1963). This internalisation often fosters a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby individuals engage in behaviours consistent with the deviant label they have adopted (Palmer, 2019). Consequently, the cycle of homelessness can be exacerbated, as these labels create barriers to reintegration into society. The stigma attached to such labels can limit opportunities for employment, housing, and social support, reinforcing the individual's sense of alienation. Additionally, once these labels are internalised, individuals may feel increasingly marginalised and

rejected, leading them to distance themselves from mainstream society and adopt behaviours that align with their perceived deviant status. Ultimately, this can create a vicious cycle that makes it even more challenging to escape homelessness and criminal behaviour.

3.2.5 Impact of stigma and discrimination

Studies highlight that the stigma associated with homelessness can lead to significant social rejection and discrimination (Phelan, Link, and Moore, 2000). Homeless individuals frequently encounter negative attitudes and behaviours from the general public, which can further entrench their marginalised status and hinder their chances of reintegration (Canham, MacKenzie, and Peters, 2022). This discrimination can manifest in various ways, including being denied access to public spaces, essential services, and job opportunities. Such exclusion not only perpetuates their circumstances but also reinforces the societal perception of them as undeserving of support. The stigma surrounding homelessness can also discourage individuals from seeking help or engaging with social services, as they may feel judged or unwelcome. Over time, this can erode their self-esteem and sense of worth, making it more difficult for them to break free from the cycle of homelessness and criminalisation. As a result, the societal rejection faced by homeless individuals exacerbates their vulnerability to both victimisation and continued marginalisation.

3.2.5.1 Internalisation of deviant labels

The internalisation of deviant labels has profound implications for the self-identity of homeless individuals. Goffman (1963) emphasises that stigma can significantly damage one’s identity, often leading to feelings of disqualification from social acceptance. For those labelled as "criminals" or "addicts," this internalisation can create a distorted self-image, prompting a cycle of deviant behaviour and further social exclusion (Palmer, 2019). As they begin to see themselves through the negative lens of these labels, they may become trapped in a cycle of criminal activity, reinforcing the very identities they wish to escape. This distorted self-image may also lead to a sense of hopelessness, where homeless individuals feel that they have limited options for personal growth or change. Consequently, this may hinder their ability to seek out opportunities for rehabilitation or social reintegration. Ultimately, the persistence of these labels can contribute to a perpetual state of marginalisation, preventing individuals from breaking free from the social and criminal cycles they

are trapped in.

3.2.5.2 Social exclusion and marginalisation

The societal reaction to homelessness frequently results in severe social exclusion and marginalisation. Homeless individuals often find themselves ostracised from their communities, facing significant barriers to accessing crucial services and support systems (Canham et al., 2022). This persistent exclusion reinforces their marginalised status, making it exceedingly difficult for them to break free from the cycle of homelessness. The lack of social acceptance can deter individuals from seeking help, further entrenching their situation. Moreover, this rejection can erode their sense of dignity and self-worth, leading to feelings of shame and hopelessness. As they are continually denied opportunities for social reintegration, the stigma surrounding their condition often becomes internalised, deepening their isolation. This marginalisation not only perpetuates their homelessness but also increases their vulnerability to criminalisation, as they may resort to illegal activities as a means of survival.

3.2.5.3 Role of social environments

The social environments in which homeless individuals find themselves play a pivotal role in shaping their behaviour and identity. When surrounded by peers who accept and reinforce deviant behaviours, it becomes increasingly challenging for individuals to adopt non-deviant identities (Bandura, 1977). This situation highlights the importance of cultivating supportive and inclusive social environments that encourage positive behaviour change. Programs designed to integrate homeless individuals into the community, provide mentorship, and foster supportive relationships can significantly enhance their chances of successful reintegration into society. By creating a sense of belonging and purpose, these initiatives help combat the isolation and stigma that often accompany homelessness. Additionally, exposure to positive role models and community support can inspire individuals to envision a future beyond their current circumstances. Furthermore, these programs can empower homeless individuals by building their confidence, self-efficacy, and social skills, increasing their ability to navigate societal structures successfully.

3.2.6 Analysis of how societal labels and stigmatisation contribute to the

criminalisation of homeless individuals.

3.2.6.1 Discrimination and social exclusion

Discrimination against homeless individuals manifests in various ways, including denial of access to public spaces, services, and employment opportunities (Canham et al., 2022). This kind of discrimination exacerbates their marginalised status and diminishes their prospects for reintegration into society. For example, when homeless individuals are excluded from public amenities or face barriers to accessing healthcare and housing, it reinforces their social isolation and compels them to rely on illegal activities to meet their basic needs (Aykanian & Fogel, 2019). Such systemic exclusion perpetuates the cycle of homelessness and crime, as those labelled as "deviants" are increasingly pushed to the fringes of society. This exclusion not only limits their access to essential resources but also reinforces negative stereotypes that further isolate them. Over time, these individuals may internalise societal rejection, further eroding their self-esteem and increasing their reliance on criminal or deviant behaviour to survive. Moreover, the lack of support systems and opportunities for rehabilitation often leads to an escalation of their circumstances, making it even harder to break free from the cycle of poverty and crime.

3.2.6.2 Criminalisation of Homelessness

Many communities adopt anti-homeless policies aimed at reducing the visibility of homeless individuals, effectively criminalising behaviours associated with homelessness, such as panhandling, loitering, and sleeping in public spaces (Aykanian & Fogel, 2019). These policies are often justified as efforts to enhance the quality of life for other community members, but they overlook the fact that homeless individuals are part of the community. Criminalising survival behaviours does little to address the underlying causes of homelessness or promote stable housing. Instead, such measures frequently lead to repeated arrests and legal consequences, further entrenching individuals in a cycle of criminalisation and homelessness (Fitzpatrick & Johnsen, 2020). Moreover, these punitive approaches often exacerbate feelings of alienation and rejection among homeless individuals, making it harder for them to reintegrate into society. Rather than fostering an environment of support and rehabilitation, these policies contribute to social exclusion, further isolating individuals from potential sources of help. Ultimately, they reinforce the stigma associated with homelessness, making

it even more difficult to break the cycle of poverty and criminalisation.

3.2.6.3 Role of social environments

Social environments are vital in influencing the behaviours of homeless individuals. When surrounded by peers who accept and normalise deviant behaviour, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to develop non-deviant identities (Bandura, 1977). These environments can foster a subculture where criminal behaviour is seen as normal and even essential for survival. For instance, if homeless individuals are part of communities where theft or substance use is prevalent, they may adopt these behaviours to fit in or secure necessities. This underscores the need for creating supportive and inclusive social environments that facilitate the reintegration of homeless individuals into society (Fitzpatrick & Johnsen, 2020). Additionally, without access to positive role models or mentors, individuals may feel trapped in a cycle of deviant behaviour, reinforcing negative patterns over time. Creating safe spaces where homeless individuals can interact with others who are committed to positive change can provide the encouragement and accountability needed to break free from these harmful cycles. Strengthening these social networks not only helps individuals rebuild their lives but also fosters greater community cohesion and support for the most vulnerable members of society.

3.2.7 Implications of Labelling Theory for Crime Prevention

Labelling Theory provides crucial insights into crime prevention by examining how societal reactions and the labels assigned to individuals can contribute to the emergence and continuation of criminal behaviour. Recognising these implications is essential for developing more effective strategies to prevent crime and promote rehabilitation. By understanding how the label of "criminal" can lead to social exclusion and further deviance, interventions can be designed to challenge and change these perceptions. Instead of reinforcing negative stereotypes, policies and programs can focus on rehabilitation, support, and the opportunity for reintegration. Addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour, such as poverty or lack of education, can also prevent individuals from internalising deviant labels, fostering a more supportive and inclusive society. By encouraging positive social connections and reducing discrimination, society can help individuals rebuild their self-identity and reintegrate successfully.

3.2.7.1 Reducing negative labels

A key implication of labelling theory for crime prevention is the urgent need to minimize negative labels and the associated stigma. When individuals are categorised as "criminals" they are more prone to internalising these labels, which can lead to an escalation in criminal behaviour (Becker, 1963). Therefore, crime prevention initiatives should prioritise reducing the use of stigmatising language and instead promote more constructive, rehabilitative approaches to support individuals in their reintegration into society. This can include public education campaigns that aim to reshape societal perceptions of marginalised groups, thereby fostering a more empathetic and supportive environment (Bernburg, 2019). Additionally, offering individuals opportunities for skill development and employment can help break the cycle of criminal behaviour by focusing on their potential rather than reinforcing negative identities. Community-based programs that encourage positive social interactions can also play a crucial role in supporting individuals as they work to change their behaviour and rebuild their lives.

3.2.7.2 Decriminalisation and diversion programs

Implementing decriminalisation and diversion programs represents another effective strategy for mitigating the negative impacts of labelling. These programs can redirect individuals away from the traditional criminal justice system and into community-based interventions, reducing the chances of them being labelled as criminals (Paternoster & Bachman, 2013). By emphasising rehabilitation over punishment, such initiatives can help dismantle the cycle of criminal behaviour, enabling individuals to reintegrate more successfully into society (Bernburg, 2019). For example, restorative justice programs offer offenders opportunities to engage in dialogue with victims, fostering accountability without the stigma associated with formal criminal charges. These alternatives focus on addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour, such as substance abuse or mental health issues, and can provide long-term solutions. By promoting a more compassionate approach to justice, diversion programs help prevent the long-term consequences of labelling, such as employment discrimination or social exclusion, which often contribute to reoffending.

3.2.7.3 Strengthening social bonds

Labelling Theory also underscores the significance of social bonds in preventing criminal activity. When individuals are labelled as criminals, their social connections often weaken, complicating their ability to reintegrate into society (Bernburg, 2019). Therefore, crime prevention strategies should focus on fortifying social bonds and providing robust support networks for those at risk of criminal behaviour. Initiatives that encourage community engagement, mentorship programs, and family support can create a more nurturing environment, reducing the likelihood of recidivism (Paternoster & Bachman, 2013). Additionally, strengthening positive relationships with law enforcement and social services can help rebuild trust and reduce the sense of alienation. By fostering pro-social connections, individuals can develop a sense of belonging, which is crucial for both their rehabilitation and their reintegration into society. This approach can also mitigate the feelings of isolation and hopelessness that often drive criminal activity.

3.2.7.4 Addressing structural inequalities

Labelling Theory draws attention to the impact of structural inequalities in the criminalisation of specific groups. Crime prevention efforts must confront these disparities by advocating for social justice and equal opportunities for all individuals, including those who are homeless (Bernburg, 2019). Addressing issues such as poverty, lack of access to education, and systemic discrimination can help decrease the incidence of labelling and its associated criminal behaviour. By fostering a more equitable society, we can mitigate the factors that lead individuals to be labelled as criminals in the first place, ultimately contributing to a reduction in crime rates and an enhancement of community well-being. Furthermore, these efforts should include targeted policies that aim to eliminate barriers to employment, housing, and healthcare, which often disproportionately affect marginalised groups. When individuals have equal access to resources and opportunities, the cycle of marginalisation and criminalisation can be broken, leading to healthier, safer communities. By focusing on long-term structural change, societies can reduce the likelihood that individuals will be labelled and subsequently trapped in criminal behaviour.

3.2.8 Strategies to reduce stigmatisation and provide supportive environments

for homeless individuals

3.2.8.1 Promoting positive public perception

An effective approach to improving the circumstances of homeless individuals is to actively promote positive public perceptions through targeted education and awareness campaigns. These initiatives aim to dismantle prevalent myths and misconceptions surrounding homelessness, emphasising the systemic issues such as poverty, mental health challenges, and lack of affordable housing that contribute to this social phenomenon (SAIIA, 2024). By cultivating empathy and understanding among the general public, these campaigns can significantly reduce the negative labels often associated with homeless individuals, fostering a more compassionate societal attitude (Canham et al., 2022). This shift in perception is vital, as it encourages community support and dismantles the stigma that often isolates homeless individuals further.

3.2.8.2 Implementing trauma-informed care

Another essential strategy is the implementation of trauma-informed care, which acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma on individuals' lives, particularly those experiencing homelessness. This approach emphasises the need to create supportive environments that are sensitive to the unique needs and experiences of individuals who have faced significant adversity (FundsforNGOs, 2024). Trauma-informed care seeks to build trust and collaboration between service providers and clients, allowing for a healing process that empowers individuals to regain control over their lives. By prioritising understanding and responsiveness to trauma, this approach can lead to improved outcomes for homeless individuals, facilitating their journey toward stability and self-sufficiency (FundsforNGOs, 2024). Additionally, trauma-informed care promotes the importance of safety, choice, and empowerment, helping individuals to regain a sense of dignity and control over their circumstances. This method not only aids in overcoming past trauma but also prevents the re-traumatisation that can occur in service environments that are not attuned to individuals' needs. By integrating these principles into homelessness services, communities can foster long-term healing and reduce the risk of re-entering homelessness.

3.2.8.3 Providing supportive housing

Supportive housing is a powerful strategy that integrates affordable housing with comprehensive, coordinated services aimed at assisting individuals struggling with chronic physical and mental health issues. This model has been effective in helping individuals maintain stable housing while receiving the necessary healthcare support (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016). Research has shown that supportive housing not only enhances residents' health outcomes but also reduces reliance on expensive emergency services and the criminal justice system, ultimately promoting greater community stability and well-being (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016). By addressing both housing and health needs simultaneously, supportive housing can break the cycle of homelessness and improve the overall quality of life for individuals. Furthermore, this model fosters a sense of community and belonging, which can help combat the social isolation often experienced by homeless individuals. By providing a stable foundation, supportive housing encourages personal growth, employment opportunities, and reintegration into society. In the long term, these benefits contribute to reduced homelessness rates and enhance the overall resilience of vulnerable populations.

3.2.8.4 Enhancing access to services

Improving access to essential services such as mental health care, job training, and rehabilitation programs is critical in supporting homeless individuals on their path to reintegration. By ensuring that these services are readily available and tailored to the unique challenges faced by homeless individuals, we can equip them with the necessary skills and resources to transition out of homelessness effectively (BackaBuddy, 2024). Providing comprehensive support not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term stability and independence, enabling individuals to contribute positively to society. Additionally, these services help to break the cycle of trauma and disadvantage, offering homeless individuals the opportunity to rebuild their lives. By addressing both practical and emotional needs, we create a pathway to self-sufficiency that reduces the likelihood of returning to homelessness.

3.2.8.5 Encouraging Community Involvement

Finally, fostering community involvement and support can significantly impact the lives of homeless individuals. Local community members can provide practical assistance such as meals, warm clothing, and hygiene products as well as emotional support through empathetic and respectful interactions (BackaBuddy, 2024). This kind of engagement helps homeless individuals feel valued and connected, reducing feelings of isolation and despair. By cultivating a supportive community environment, we can help homeless individuals build a sense of belonging, which is essential for their emotional well-being and recovery. Community involvement not only benefits those experiencing homelessness but also enriches the community as a whole by promoting inclusivity and compassion. Moreover, it helps reduce the stigma associated with homelessness, encouraging greater understanding and empathy across society. As a result, these community-driven efforts contribute to building a more cohesive, resilient, and supportive society for all.

3.2.9 Policy recommendations to mitigate the negative effects of labelling and promote reintegration.

3.2.9.1 Implementing Anti-Discrimination Laws

Enacting comprehensive anti-discrimination laws is a crucial strategy in mitigating the negative effects of labelling. These laws should ensure that individuals are not unfairly treated or excluded based on past actions or the labels imposed upon them by society (https://transformingthesystem.org , 2024). Such legal protections should specifically cover employment, housing, education, and access to social services. By safeguarding individuals from discrimination, anti-discrimination laws help to challenge the stigmatisation that often accompanies labels like criminal which can otherwise hinder their opportunities for reintegration and social participation. Protecting individuals from discrimination fosters equality and allows them to rebuild their lives without the constant barrier of negative societal perceptions. Furthermore, such laws promote a more inclusive society where individuals are encouraged to move beyond their past and make positive contributions. As a result, these legal safeguards can also reduce recidivism rates and support long-term stability for those seeking to reintegrate.

3.2.9.2 Promoting Restorative Justice Programs

Restorative justice programs provide an alternative approach to traditional punitive systems by focusing on repairing harm and fostering mutual understanding. These programs bring together victims and offenders in a facilitated dialogue, allowing for acknowledgement of harm, apology, and efforts to make amends (Zehr, 2015). Restorative justice encourages empathy, healing, and accountability, which can help reduce the stigma that often surrounds individuals labelled as criminals. By emphasising reconciliation rather than retribution, restorative justice promotes reintegration into society by allowing offenders to actively participate in the healing process and reinstate their sense of worth. This process helps break the cycle of criminal behaviour and labelling by offering a pathway to positive transformation and social acceptance.

3.2.9.3 Providing access to mental health and substance abuse services

Providing access to mental health and substance abuse treatment is an essential component of effective crime prevention and reintegration strategies. Many individuals who are labelled as 'criminals' often face underlying issues such as untreated mental health conditions or substance use disorders that contribute to their criminal behaviour (BackaBuddy, 2024). By ensuring that individuals have access to appropriate services, these issues can be addressed in a supportive and therapeutic context. Mental health and addiction services provide the necessary support to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and facilitate the transition to a more stable and productive life. Access to these services plays a critical role in breaking the cycle of criminal labelling and promoting successful social reintegration. Furthermore, addressing mental health and substance abuse issues reduces the burden on the criminal justice system by offering alternative solutions that focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment. These treatments help individuals rebuild their lives, fostering long-term recovery and reducing societal costs associated with criminal recidivism.

3.2.9.4 Supporting education and job training programs

Education and job training programs are crucial for equipping individuals with the skills and qualifications needed to reintegrate into society and reduce recidivism. For individuals labelled as "criminals," the stigma of their past can often hinder their ability to find stable employment or access higher education. Tailoring educational programs and job training opportunities to meet the specific needs of these individuals, such as those with criminal records, helps them develop the competencies required for gainful employment. These programs not only enhance self-sufficiency but also increase the chances of successful reintegration, reducing the risk of individuals returning to criminal behaviour due to financial or social pressures (Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008). In addition, they provide individuals with a sense of purpose and dignity, which is critical for rebuilding their self-esteem and preventing a relapse into criminal activities. By focusing on rehabilitative education, these initiatives can help individuals build long-term careers, contributing positively to society and breaking the cycle of crime. Furthermore, partnerships between local governments, businesses, and educational institutions can create more pathways for marginalized groups, ensuring that those with a criminal history are given a fair opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

3.2.9.5 Encouraging community involvement and support

Community involvement and support are fundamental to the successful reintegration of individuals previously labelled as "deviants." Support from local communities can provide practical assistance, such as access to housing, food, and emotional support, as well as opportunities for social inclusion (Western Cape Government, 2024). When communities offer a welcoming and supportive environment, individuals can feel a sense of belonging, which is crucial for rebuilding their lives and moving past the label of "outsider" or "criminal." Community-based support helps to reduce feelings of isolation and provides individuals with the resources and social networks necessary to reintegrate into mainstream society, thereby reducing the likelihood of relapse into criminal behaviour.

Moreover, community involvement fosters a sense of responsibility and connection, which can significantly improve the chances of long-term success in reintegration. By participating in local activities, individuals gain valuable social skills, build trust, and establish relationships with supportive peers and mentors. These connections help to restore a sense of purpose and stability,

motivating individuals to make positive changes. Local businesses, schools, and faith-based organisations can also play a key role by offering opportunities for employment, education, and mentorship, which are essential components of reintegration. Additionally, community outreach programs and public education campaigns that challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma can create a more inclusive and compassionate environment for formerly labelled individuals, helping to break down the barriers to their full participation in society (Western Cape Government, 2024).

3.2.9.6 Reforming criminal justice policies

Reforming criminal justice policies is essential to addressing the negative effects of labelling and promoting more rehabilitative approaches. A shift away from punitive measures towards rehabilitation-focused policies can help reduce the impact of criminal labels. Reform efforts should prioritise rehabilitation and provide support for individuals who are transitioning from incarceration back into society (Transforming the System, 2024). This might include providing vocational training, mental health care, and housing support to help individuals reintegrate successfully. Additionally, implementing restorative justice programs, which emphasise accountability and repairing harm through dialogue and restitution, can offer offenders an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions without reinforcing the stigma of criminality. By focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment, criminal justice policies can reduce the cycle of criminality and labelling, offering individuals the opportunity to move past their past mistakes and build a productive future. Furthermore, these policies can promote public safety by addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour, such as poverty, trauma, and lack of education, and equipping individuals with the tools to become law-abiding, contributing members of society.

3.3 Social Learning Theory

3.3.1 Overview of Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in 1977, proposes that individuals learn behaviours by observing others, imitating their actions, and being influenced by the reinforcement or punishment associated with those behaviours (Bandura, 1977). This theory highlights that learning is not solely based on direct personal experience but also on observing the actions of others, a process

known as observational learning. Bandura emphasised the role of cognitive processes in this learning process, suggesting that individuals actively process the information they observe and anticipate the consequences of actions before deciding whether to imitate them (Simply Psychology, 2024).

The core assumptions of Social Learning Theory include the idea that people can acquire new behaviours through observing others, that internal cognitive processes are crucial for this learning to take place, and that learning does not necessarily lead to a behavioural change unless there is motivation to act. Bandura identified four essential components for observational learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Attention involves focusing on the modeled behaviour, retention refers to remembering what has been observed, reproduction is the ability to replicate the behaviour, and motivation is the driving force behind whether or not the behaviour will be imitated, depending on the anticipated rewards or punishments (Verywell Mind, 2024).

Social Learning Theory has been applied across a variety of fields, including education, therapy, and the study of criminal behaviour. In educational settings, it has informed teaching strategies that promote modeling and peer learning to help students acquire new skills. In therapeutic settings, it has been used in behaviour modification programs to assist individuals in learning healthier coping mechanisms by observing others. When applied to criminal behaviour, the theory suggests that deviant actions, including those of a criminal nature, are learned through the surrounding environment. This is particularly relevant in urban settings like the Central Business Districts (CBD) of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, where the prevalence of crime among homeless individuals can be better understood through this lens. Factors such as economic instability, social marginalisation, and migration patterns have contributed to the rising homelessness in these areas. As homeless individuals face difficult living conditions, they often witness or become involved in various forms of crime, including violent attacks and exploitation, further perpetuating a cycle of criminal behavior (Tsai, Lee, & Selya, 2017).

3.3.2 Explanation of the theory's core concepts: differential association, imitation, reinforcement, and modelling

The core of this theory is four key concepts: differential association, imitation, reinforcement, and modelling. These concepts help explain how behaviours, both positive and negative, are learned and

perpetuated through social interactions, making them especially relevant when considering the criminal behaviours exhibited by marginalised groups, such as homeless individuals.

3.3.2.1 Differential Association

Differential Association, a central element of Social Learning Theory, posits that individuals learn criminal behaviours through interactions with others who hold favourable attitudes towards deviance (Akers & Jennings, 2016). This theory suggests that the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities increases when people are surrounded by others who define deviant actions as acceptable or necessary. For instance, in the urban areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, homeless individuals often form social networks with others who may justify behaviours like theft, drug use, or violence as a means of survival. When individuals are surrounded by peers who normalise these actions, they are more likely to internalise these beliefs and adopt criminal behaviour as part of their coping mechanisms.

The key idea in differential association is that the content of the messages individuals receive in their social environments directly influences their behaviours. For example, if a homeless individual sees others in their community engaging in theft and experiencing no immediate negative consequences, they may come to believe that such behaviour is acceptable or even necessary for survival. This process of learning through association with others is a crucial mechanism by which criminal behaviour becomes embedded in certain social groups, especially those facing marginalisation and lack of support (Akers & Jennings, 2016).

3.3.2.2 Imitation

Imitation refers to the process by which individuals observe and replicate the behaviours they see in others, particularly when those behaviours are seen as being rewarded (Bandura, 1977). This concept suggests that individuals, especially those in vulnerable positions like homelessness, are more likely to imitate the behaviours of others who appear to be successful or unaffected by negative consequences. In the case of homelessness, if an individual observes a peer stealing food and receiving no punishment, they may view this behaviour as an effective way to meet their immediate needs.

Imitation is a powerful learning tool, particularly in environments where survival is the primary concern, and conventional social structures are often absent. For example, a homeless individual who sees someone else engaging in theft without being caught may come to perceive stealing as a legitimate strategy for obtaining resources. The act of imitating behaviours whether positive or negative is driven by the observed outcomes, which influence the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated in the future (Bandura, 1977). For individuals experiencing homelessness, who may feel disconnected from mainstream social norms and structures, the behaviours they observe in their immediate surroundings may become the blueprint for how they cope with their circumstances.

3.3.2.3 Reinforcement

Reinforcement plays a significant role in determining whether a behaviour will be repeated or abandoned. According to Akers & Jennings (2016), reinforcement can either strengthen or weaken a behaviour based on the consequences that follow it. Positive reinforcement occurs when a behaviour is followed by a rewarding outcome, which increases the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated. Negative reinforcement, on the other hand, involves the removal of an unpleasant stimulus, which also increases the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated. In contrast, punishment typically decreases the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated.

For homeless individuals, behaviours such as stealing or panhandling may be positively reinforced if they result in immediate rewards, such as food, money, or shelter. The reinforcing effects of these immediate rewards make it more likely that these behaviours will be repeated, as the individual perceives them as effective ways to meet their basic survival needs. For example, if a homeless person steals food and can eat without facing any immediate punishment, the behaviour is reinforced, increasing the likelihood that they will engage in similar actions in the future. On the other hand, if stealing is met with punishment or legal consequences, the behaviour may be less likely to be repeated. The presence or absence of reinforcement plays a critical role in determining the persistence of criminal behaviours, especially when they are seen as necessary for survival (Akers & Jennings, 2016).

3.3.2.4 Modelling

Modelling, a concept closely associated with Bandura's work (1977), refers to the process by which individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing others, especially those they regard as role models. This can involve learning from both direct observation of others in real life and from mediated sources, such as the media. In the case of homeless individuals, modelling can occur when they observe the actions of their peers, authority figures, or even media representations of crime or survival strategies. For instance, a homeless person may model their behaviour after a peer who successfully navigates the challenges of homelessness by engaging in criminal activities.

Positive role models can play an essential role in counteracting the influence of negative models. If homeless individuals are exposed to supportive figures or role models who engage in prosocial behaviours, such as seeking rehabilitation or utilising community services, they may be more likely to adopt these healthier behaviours. This process of learning through observation underscores the importance of creating supportive environments where positive behaviours are not only modelled but also reinforced. By providing homeless individuals with access to positive role models, social services, and rehabilitation programs, it is possible to shift behaviours toward more adaptive and socially acceptable patterns (Bandura, 1977).

3.3.3 Application of Social Learning Theory to Homelessness

This theory is particularly relevant when examining the behaviours of homeless individuals in the Central Business Districts (CBD) of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In these urban settings, homeless individuals frequently interact with peers who may normalise or justify criminal behaviours, such as theft or substance abuse. Through differential association, these individuals may adopt attitudes and behaviours that align with those of their social network, particularly if they are surrounded by others who view these behaviours as necessary for survival (Akers & Jennings, 2016). This process is particularly evident in environments where homelessness is pervasive, and survival strategies often involve engaging in activities that are socially deviant yet seen as essential for meeting basic needs. For instance, in the CBD, the density of individuals living on the streets increases the likelihood that new arrivals will adopt the same patterns of behaviour as those around them, such as drug use or

petty theft, simply to navigate the harsh realities of street life.

The theory of imitation further explains how behaviours are learned. Homeless individuals often observe peers who engage in criminal acts and face no immediate negative consequences, such as theft or drug use, which are viewed as effective strategies for obtaining food, shelter, or money. If these actions are perceived as rewarded (such as stealing food and not being caught), others may replicate them in hopes of experiencing similar benefits (Bandura, 1977). This imitation process can lead to the rapid adoption of criminal behaviour, especially in environments where survival strategies are limited and the legal or social consequences of crime are either not immediately evident or perceived as negligible. This cycle can quickly perpetuate criminal behaviour among homeless populations, as individuals come to see these acts not as deviant, but as necessary for survival within the constraints of their environment.

The concept of reinforcement plays a crucial role in maintaining such behaviours. If the behaviour is followed by a positive outcome, such as acquiring food or money, it is more likely to be repeated. Conversely, if criminal behaviour is met with punishment or negative consequences, the likelihood of repeating that behaviour decreases. For homeless individuals, engaging in theft or panhandling may be positively reinforced if it leads to an immediate reward or alleviates some of their daily struggles. These reinforcements contribute to the perpetuation of these behaviours, making them increasingly entrenched as individuals come to rely on them to navigate the challenges of homelessness. For example, if an individual panhandles and receives money, the act of panhandling becomes a reinforced behaviour, leading to its repetition as a viable survival tactic.

Furthermore, the concept of modelling highlights the significance of role models in shaping behaviour. When homeless individuals are exposed to positive role models who demonstrate prosocial behaviours, such as seeking help from social services or engaging in rehabilitation, they are more likely to adopt these healthier behaviours themselves. Conversely, without exposure to such positive models, individuals are more likely to model their actions after peers who reinforce criminal or survival-based behaviours. This underscores the importance of providing alternative role models within homeless communities who can serve as living examples of prosocial behaviour. Supportive environments that offer access to rehabilitative services, mentorship, and community-based support programs are crucial in providing individuals with healthier behavioural models and opportunities to

break away from the cycle of criminal behaviour learned through negative peer influence (Tsai et al., 2017; Canham, Wister, Cosco, Greenwood, and Haslam, 2022). By fostering these alternative behaviours and providing access to positive role models, communities can offer homeless individuals the tools to develop more constructive coping strategies, ultimately improving their chances of reintegration into society.

3.3.4 Implications of Social Learning Theory for Crime Prevention

Social Learning Theory (SLT) emphasises the importance of positive role models and the reinforcement of prosocial behaviour in shaping individuals' actions. According to SLT, crime prevention strategies should prioritise creating environments that foster positive influences and encourage constructive behaviours, particularly among vulnerable populations like the homeless. When homeless individuals are exposed to positive role models who demonstrate healthy, law-abiding behaviours, they are more likely to adopt these behaviours themselves. This is because people tend to imitate actions that they observe in others, especially when those actions lead to positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

To implement these strategies, it's essential to provide homeless individuals with access to supportive environments and resources that promote prosocial behaviour. Community-based interventions, such as outreach programs, rehabilitation services, and social reintegration efforts, can play a critical role in reducing exposure to negative influences. For example, programs that provide stable housing, mental health care, and addiction treatment can help break the cycle of criminal behaviour by addressing underlying issues like substance abuse and psychological trauma (Canham et al., 2022). When homeless individuals receive the support they need, they are less likely to resort to criminal activities to survive.

Additionally, community-based interventions can help build strong social networks that provide a sense of belonging and reduce isolation. By fostering relationships with caring individuals whether they are community workers, volunteers, or peers who have successfully reintegrated into society homeless individuals gain emotional support and practical guidance. This social support is essential for reducing feelings of hopelessness, which often lead to engagement in deviant behaviour (Akers & Jennings, 2016).

Incorporating restorative justice practices within these interventions can further enhance their effectiveness. Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime and restoring individuals to the community in a constructive way, offering homeless individuals an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and make amends (Transforming the System, 2024). Such approaches, when integrated with comprehensive support services, can help create a law-abiding environment that discourages criminal behaviour, encourages positive social interactions, and supports the transition from homelessness to stable, fulfilling lives.

Ultimately, by investing in community-based solutions that offer supportive networks, psychological and health services, and positive role models, society can create conditions that reduce criminal behaviour and promote healthier lifestyles for homeless individuals (Tsai et al., 2017; Canham et al., 2022). These strategies align with the principles of Social Learning Theory, reinforcing the idea that when homeless individuals are provided with the right tools and support, they are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour and more likely to build productive, prosocial lives.

3.4 General Strain Theory (GST)

3.4.1 Overview of General Strain Theory

General Strain Theory (GST), was formulated by Agnew in the early 1990s and later enhanced through work with Brezina (Agnew & Brezina, 2019), this theory offers a refined lens to interpret the social and psychological origins of criminal behavior among marginalised groups. GST extends original strain theories by asserting that individuals who endure persistent or intense stressors referred to as strains will likely experience powerful negative emotions such as frustration, fear, or despair, which can propel them toward deviant acts either to escape or retaliate (Agnew, 2006; Piquero & Sealock, 2004). Unlike older economic-centered models, GST stresses that crime can stem from emotional pressures associated with blocked goals, losses, or hostile living conditions.

Strains are grouped into three essential forms: not attaining valued objectives like employment or housing, losing meaningful stimuli such as relationships or possessions, and encountering unpleasant stimuli including violence or stigma. These strains, when persistent and combined with a lack of adaptive coping resources, can push individuals especially those experiencing homelessness towards

actions such as theft, substance misuse, or aggression, as ways to manage or momentarily evade their emotional burden (Agnew, 2006; McLaughlin, 2015). This framework better represents the lived realities of urban homeless populations, where multiple stressors compound to create conditions conducive to survival focused criminal behaviour.

3.4.2 Core Concepts of GST

One of the most central principles of GST is the failure to achieve positively valued goals. Among homeless populations in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, this failure is deeply evident. Individuals living on the streets often aspire to the same basic goals as anyone else which can be stable employment, shelter, dignity, and safety but are systematically denied the means to attain them. This persistent blockage of life goals generates feelings of worthlessness and humiliation, fuelling resentment and, in some cases, aggressive or criminal responses (Agnew & Brezina, 2019). The removal of positively valued stimuli is another powerful source of strain. For many homeless individuals, the path to the street was marked by loss loss of employment, family ties, personal property, or health. Some face harsh and often violent displacements by municipal officials or law enforcement, where their temporary shelters and few belongings are destroyed or confiscated. Such experiences strip them of dignity and erode their ability to maintain a connection to society, contributing to anger and despondency that may lead to defiant acts such as theft, vandalism, or substance use (Broidy, 2001).

GST also speaks to the presentation of negative stimuli, which refers to the persistent exposure to harmful or threatening conditions. In the urban landscapes of South Africa, the homeless frequently face dangerous weather, physical assault, stigmatisation, and victimisation, both by the public and fellow street dwellers. Constant harassment from police or metro officers, or even community vigilante groups, adds another layer of negative stimuli. These chronic and traumatic exposures increase psychological stress, often pushing individuals toward risky or unlawful coping mechanisms, including drug use or retaliatory violence (Sadiki & Steyn, 2021; Pophaim, 2019). A vital component of GST is its emphasis on negative emotional responses, which are triggered by strain and form the emotional pathway to crime. The mix of hopelessness, rage, and helplessness can overwhelm an individual's decision-making capacity, especially in the absence of mental health support. The theory explains that people often choose from limited options when trying to regulate

these emotions, and crime though socially condemned can feel like the only available outlet.

GST also highlights that individuals employ various coping mechanisms in response to strain. For homeless people, these strategies might include cognitive rationalisation, by justifying theft as a necessity, behavioural responses such as engaging in panhandling, scavenging, or trading sex, and emotional numbing through substances like alcohol or drugs. Criminal behaviour thus becomes not a result of innate criminality but a desperate attempt to alleviate emotional pain and navigate a hostile environment with very few resources or support systems (Agnew, 2006).

3.4.3 Application of General Strain Theory (GST) to Homelessness and Crime

In the Central Business Districts of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, homeless individuals encounter a multitude of strains that, according to General Strain Theory, significantly increase their risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. These strains are not merely isolated incidents but form an ongoing and compounding web of stressors that weigh heavily on individuals' psychological and emotional well-being. Economic strain, for instance, is a pervasive issue where the inability to secure stable employment or any form of reliable income leads to chronic frustration and feelings of failure. This strain manifests in the daily struggle for survival, where some homeless persons may resort to survival theft or engage in illicit activities as a means of coping with the harsh realities they face (Mendes, 2015). The repeated failure to achieve basic needs such as food, shelter, and security perpetuates a sense of helplessness and humiliation, pushing individuals toward behaviours that mainstream society might criminalise but which, from their perspective, are acts of necessity.

Beyond economic hardship, social strains play an equally critical role. Many homeless individuals face rejection and isolation from family and community networks, which constitute a significant removal of positively valued stimuli. For example, families may sever ties due to stigma or conflict, and authorities may confiscate personal belongings during street sweeps, further stripping individuals of their already limited resources (Broidy, 2001). This loss of social support exacerbates feelings of alienation and marginalisation. When combined with aggressive policing tactics or social exclusion, such strains intensify emotional distress and can provoke retaliatory behaviours, including vandalism, public intoxication, or other minor offences that signal resistance or a cry for recognition within a society that often ignores their plight (Lemieux & DeKeseredy, 2018). These responses are not

merely acts of deviance but represent coping mechanisms to an environment that continuously removes essential social and material supports.

Environmental strain is another significant factor in the lived experiences of homeless people in these urban centres. Exposure to violence, whether from fellow street dwellers, abusive clients in transactional sex, or harsh treatment by law enforcement officers creates a constant state of fear, anger, and hypervigilance (Tsai, Lee, & Selya, 2017). The brutal conditions of living on the streets, including exposure to inclement weather, hunger, and lack of sanitation, further contribute to this negative stimulus. Such persistent adversity can lead to aggressive or self-protective behaviours, sometimes escalating into physical confrontations or assaults. In these contexts, crime can be seen as both a survival strategy and an expression of accumulated frustration and emotional pain. The cyclical nature of these experiences means that as strains increase, so too does the likelihood of behaviours considered criminal by societal standards, though they often serve a vital function for survival within marginalised urban spaces.

Substance use among homeless populations is perhaps one of the most visible and complex coping strategies highlighted by GST. Many individuals turn to alcohol, nyaope, a locally prevalent drug mixture or other illicit substances as a form of self-medication to numb the psychological pain brought on by these persistent strains (Dlamini & Khumalo, 2020). This aligns closely with GST's view that some criminal acts, particularly substance abuse, are ways in which individuals attempt to alleviate negative emotions like anger, depression, and fear. Substance use not only offers temporary relief but also serves as a means of escape from the oppressive realities of homelessness. However, this coping mechanism often creates additional problems, such as involvement in drug-related crime, dependency, and further marginalisation from social services, thereby intensifying the cycle of strain and offending. This finding is consistent with broader research indicating that substance abuse among homeless individuals is both a symptom and a perpetuator of the strains they endure (Tsai et al., 2017).

By applying GST to the specific socio-economic and environmental realities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg's homeless populations, it becomes evident that criminal behaviour does not stem from an inherent predisposition towards crime. Instead, it emerges as a maladaptive response to the unrelenting strains experienced on the streets. This theoretical framework helps to explain the refined

pathways through which homelessness and crime are interconnected in these urban centres. Strains related to economic hardship, social exclusion, environmental adversity, and emotional turmoil collectively shape the choices and behaviours of homeless individuals. It underlines the importance of viewing crime among homeless populations not simply as deviance, but as a complex survival response to systemic and structural pressures.

3.3.5 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter applied Routine Activities Theory, Labelling Theory, Social Learning, and the General Strain Theory Theory to analyse crime among homeless individuals in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBDs. Routine Activities Theory emphasised how environmental factors and the absence of guardianship heightened the risk of criminal behaviour among the homeless. Labelling Theory explored how societal labels contributed to further deviance and social exclusion, perpetuating criminal activities. Meanwhile, Social Learning Theory illustrates how criminal behaviours were learned through observation and reinforcement, particularly through peer interactions and the General Strain Theory explainedwhy homeless people are prone to crime. Collectively, these theories offered a holistic understanding of the dynamics contributing to homelessness-related crime and provided a foundation for developing effective crime prevention strategies and fostering greater social inclusion.

The next chapter explores the research methodology and procedures used to collect relevant data, to achieve the study's objectives and answer the primary research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used in the study, offering a comprehensive explanation of the research paradigm, design, approach, strategy, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, and considerations for validity, reliability, and ethics. It also addresses the limitations of the study. This chapter aims to justify and clarify the methodologies and processes selected to carry out the research, ensuring a thorough and systematic approach to achieving the research objectives.

4.2 Research Paradigm

4.2.1 What is a Research Paradigm?

According to Creswell & Poth (2018) research paradigm is a foundational framework of beliefs and assumptions that guide the research process. It defines the principles and methodologies researchers use to explore and understand phenomena. A research paradigm helps determine the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the methods used to acquire that knowledge (methodology). Common research paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and pragmatism, each with its distinct assumptions and approaches (Creswell, 2013). The chosen research paradigm, which is the interpretive paradigm has a profound impact on the entire research process, from framing research questions to selecting methods for data collection and analysis. It influences how researchers perceive the world, interpret their findings, and make methodological choices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4.2.2 Explanation of the interpretative paradigm

The interpretative paradigm, also known as interpretivism, focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. This approach is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed, and that people interpret their experiences and surroundings in unique ways. Unlike positivist paradigms, which aim to uncover objective truths and generalisable findings, the interpretative paradigm seeks to explore the complexities of human behaviour, and the specific meanings individuals assign to their actions (Schwandt, 2015). Interpretivism typically adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to provide in-depth insights into the perspectives and lived experiences of participants. Researchers within this paradigm often use methods such as interviews, participant observations, and case studies to gather rich, detailed data. The focus is on understanding how individuals perceive their world, as well as the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The researcher saw the interpretative paradigm as well-suited for studying the issue of crime among homeless people in the Central Business District areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg for several key reasons:

To understand the factors driving the rise in homelessness in these urban centers, it is crucial to explore the personal experiences and perspectives of homeless individuals. The interpretative paradigm allows researchers to investigate the socio-economic, psychological, and contextual factors contributing to homelessness. Through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and circumstances faced by the homeless population (Tracy, 2013). Also, to investigate crimes committed against and by homeless individuals, it was important to examine their lived experiences and the specific circumstances in which these crimes occur. The interpretative paradigm enabled the researcher to document the voices of homeless people and understand the impact of victimisation. Using in-depth interviews, the researcher was able to uncover crime patterns, and identify and assess the consequences of these crimes on the well-being of homeless individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Lastly, addressing crime involving homeless people requires an understanding of the social dynamics and interactions within the CBD areas. The interpretative paradigm facilitates an exploration of potential community-based interventions, support systems, and policy measures aimed at addressing the root causes of crime. Engaging with diverse stakeholders including homeless individuals and community members allowed the researcher to propose solutions that are context-specific and culturally appropriate (Silverman, 2021).

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall plan or strategy that outlines how a research study will be carried out (Kumar, 2019). It serves as a blueprint that directs researchers on how to systematically collect, measure, and analyse data to answer research questions. The research design dictates the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis, ensuring the study is conducted in an organised and coherent manner. Key components of research design include the research approach (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), sampling strategy, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods. A well-developed research design is crucial for ensuring the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the study (Creswell, 2013).

4.3.2 Phenomenological Research Design

The phenomenological research design is a qualitative methodology dedicated to exploring individuals' lived experiences and uncovering the essence of phenomena as perceived by those who have directly encountered them. Rooted in the foundational philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning from their experiences and how these meanings shape their realities (Groenewald, 2004; Laverty, 2003). This approach prioritises participants' subjective interpretations and narratives, focusing on their personal accounts and the significance they attribute to events. Data collection in phenomenological studies typically involves in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observations, followed by a thematic analysis that distils the core essence of the lived experience (Finlay, 2011; Giorgi, 2009).

Employing a phenomenological design was particularly fitting for examining the increase in crime among homeless populations within the Central Business Districts of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. To grasp the complex socio-economic and psychological factors underpinning homelessness, it was essential to explore into the direct perspectives of affected individuals. This design facilitated a nuanced understanding of their experiences, capturing the interplay of personal, social, and environmental influences through comprehensive interviews and group discussions (van Manen, 2014; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Furthermore, in documenting the victimisation and offending behaviours associated with homelessness, phenomenology enabled researchers to illuminate the lived realities of crime's impact on this vulnerable group (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Finally, the approach supported the engagement of multiple stakeholders within the urban environment, thereby informing culturally sensitive and contextually relevant interventions aimed at crime prevention and social support (Sokolowski, 2000; Kafle, 2011).

4.4 Research Approach

This research is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as something shaped through social interactions and emphasises understanding people's perspectives (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Specifically, the study follows an inductive paradigm, meaning that themes and theories emerged from careful analysis of the data rather than being predetermined (Bryman, 2016). This inductive approach is crucial when dealing with complex social issues like crime among homeless populations, as it allows insights to be grounded in the real experiences of participants.

The research approach refers to the overall plan and justification guiding the entire study (Given, 2008). For this study, a qualitative approach was chosen because it best suits the exploration of complex social phenomena. This approach is inherently exploratory, seeking to uncover underlying motivations, attitudes, and experiences rather than producing numerical data or broad generalisations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Methods such as in-depth interviews, and participant observations are typically used to collect rich, detailed information that sheds light on human behaviour within its social context (Patton, 2015).

This qualitative approach was especially fitting for examining the rise in crime both perpetrated by and against homeless individuals in the Central Business Districts of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. By directly engaging with the lived realities of homeless people, the study was able to explore the complex challenges they face, including poverty, mental health struggles, social exclusion, and structural inequalities (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Moreover, gaining an understanding of how homeless individuals experience victimisation required a thorough look into their social and environmental conditions, including the types of crimes they encounter, the offenders involved, and wider societal factors. The depth of qualitative data provided valuable insights into both the vulnerabilities and strengths of this group.

Furthermore, this qualitative approach played a key role in identifying ways to prevent crime in homeless communities. By interviewing a range of stakeholders including homeless individuals and local residents the research gathered diverse viewpoints on possible solutions. This participatory process ensured that any proposed interventions were relevant to the cultural and contextual realities of the urban settings studied (Maxwell, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately, the qualitative method allowed for a rich, holistic understanding necessary for developing effective and sustainable strategies to address the complex social problems faced by homeless populations in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

4.5 Sampling technique and sample size

This study employed purposive sampling to select 30 participants, ensuring that the sample was directly relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a non-probability technique where participants are intentionally selected based on their specific knowledge, experience, or expertise related to the research topic (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). This method allows for the gathering of in-depth insights from individuals who are particularly well-informed about the issues being investigated. In this study, purposive sampling was specifically used to target individuals who could offer specialised information about homelessness and crime prevention.

The purposive sampling approach was particularly valuable for selecting community members and homeless individuals who had firsthand experience or deep knowledge of the research subject. These participants were chosen intentionally for their ability to provide relevant and detailed insights into the challenges faced by homeless populations and the link between homelessness and crime. By deliberately focusing on these groups, the researcher was able to ensure that the sample was not only relevant but also diverse in terms of lived experiences and perspectives. For the homeless participants, the researcher identified areas where homelessness was most prevalent, such as urban centers or shelters, to ensure that the individuals selected could speak directly to the realities of living without stable housing. These areas were chosen because they represented the environments where homeless people gathered or sought shelter, making it easier for the researcher to approach potential participants who could provide valuable information (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

Similarly, community members who were selected through purposive sampling were chosen for their active involvement in local issues related to homelessness and crime. These individuals included people who had direct or indirect engagement with the challenges of homelessness, whether through work, volunteerism, or lived experience in the community. By focusing on this specific group, the study was able to gather data that not only reflected the individual experiences of the homeless population but also highlighted the perspectives of community members who may be involved in or affected by local crime and social issues. By using purposive sampling, the researcher ensured that the participants chosen were well-positioned to provide meaningful and relevant data that aligned with the study's objectives. This approach helped capture a range of insights from those with the most direct knowledge of the issues being studied, ultimately strengthening the quality and depth of the findings (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, 2015).

The sample size refers to the total number of participants selected for the study, and it is important for ensuring that the data collected is adequate and representative enough to address the research questions (Flick, 2018). For this study, a sample of thirty participants was carefully chosen to reflect the racial diversity of the populations in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the issues being studied. Among the participants, with seven participants each from Durban and Pietermaritzburg, chosen from neighborhoods with higher rates of homelessness. To further enrich the sample, sixteen homeless individuals who were willing to

participate were selected. The sample was carefully balanced by gender to minimise bias and ensure that the study captured a wide range of perspectives from both men and women. All participants were over the age of 18, ensuring that they provide informed consent to participate in the research.

Figure 4.3: Sample selection and sample size

Participants	**Number**
General Community Members	
❖ Durban CBD nearby areas	07
❖ Pietermaritzburg CBD nearby area	07
Homeless people in the specified areas	
❖ Durban CBD	08
❖ Pietermaritzburg CBD	08
❖ **Total number of participants**	**30**

Source: Researcher's illustration

This diverse sample allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of homelessness and related criminal activities from multiple viewpoints, including community members, and homeless individuals (Creswell, 2013).

4.6 Recruitment Strategy

Patton (2015) suggests that a variety of recruitment strategies can be applied in qualitative research to ensure the collection of rich and relevant data. As stated above, in this study, the researcher employed a purposive method for the selection of general community members and homeless individuals, as it allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants with relevant knowledge or experience, ensuring rich and meaningful data. This method was particularly useful for studying complex issues like homelessness and crime in specific urban areas. The community members targeted in areas close to the CBD, were the residents of those areas, such as university students who were living in CBD and the residents who are living in the flats at CBD, the researcher made prior

arrangements with them and they agreed to have the interviews by the reception area of their residences. The general community members were chosen from neighbourhoods near the Central Business District (CBD) areas in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, where homelessness is particularly prevalent. These participants included university students living in the CBD and residents residing in flats within the area.

4.7 Data Collection Methods

Data Collection refers to the systematic process of gathering and measuring information on specific variables to answer research questions, test hypotheses, and assess outcomes (Babbie, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2018). It is a crucial component of the research process, as it ensures that the data collected is accurate, reliable, and relevant to the research objectives. A well-structured approach to data collection helps researchers maintain the integrity of their findings and ensures the results are valid and useful for addressing the research problem (Kumar, 2014).

4.7.1 Primary Data Collection

For this study, the primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. These face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 participants, allowing them to provide detailed and thoughtful responses. The semi-structured format was chosen because it allowed flexibility in the questioning process, enabling participants to expand on their answers and share personal insights, while still ensuring that key topics related to the research objectives were covered. The interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, and the researcher conducted about ten interviews per week, scheduling the sessions according to the availability and preferences of the participants. The researcher was accompanied by an assistant during the data collection process. An open-ended interview guide was used, which facilitated natural conversations around the research questions, while still providing consistency across all interviews. Responses were recorded both in writing and via a voice recorder, allowing for accurate transcription and analysis. Additionally, a social worker was present during the data collection process to support any participant who experienced emotional or psychological distress during the interviews, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all participants. However, the social worker was sitting at a distance during the interviews, to ensure that research participants were comfortable enough sand to respect their privacy and confidentiality.

In conducting interviews for this study, the researcher followed established best practices outlined by authors such as Patton (2015) to ensure the process was both ethical and productive. According to Patton, effective interviews require clear alignment between the interview questions and the study's research objectives. The researcher carefully ensured that the interview questions were directly related to the research focus, enabling participants to provide relevant and insightful responses. Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and how the results would be used, ensuring participants gave their written consent before proceeding. In addition, maintaining rapport with the participants was prioritised, as suggested by Patton, to foster trust and openness during the interviews. The researcher remained neutral throughout the process, refraining from inserting their own opinions or guiding the responses, which could potentially bias the information. All responses were recorded to capture the full depth of the participants' views. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym, protecting their privacy and maintaining ethical standards throughout the research process (Patton, 2015).

4.7.2 Secondary Data Collection

In addition to the primary data collected through interviews, secondary data was gathered to supplement and contextualise the findings. These secondary sources included books, published articles, academic journals, and newspapers. Secondary data provided further background information, validated the responses from the interviews, and helped to triangulate the findings by offering external perspectives on the issues of homelessness and crime. This additional data was crucial for ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic, as it allowed the researcher to cross-reference primary data with existing literature and evidence, strengthening the overall conclusions of the study (Silverman, 2016). By combining primary and secondary data, the study was able to provide a well-rounded exploration of the research questions and offer deeper insights into the complex issues at hand.

4.8 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. This approach is particularly suited for studies that aim to explore complex phenomena by uncovering underlying meanings and patterns in participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, which focused on the proliferation of crime among and by homeless individuals in the CBD areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the semi-structured interview data. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the diversity of perspectives required, the thematic analysis allowed for a nuanced examination of the data, offering a comprehensive view of the complex factors contributing to homelessness and crime in these urban spaces.

The thematic analysis provided a structured yet flexible framework for interpreting the rich, detailed data gathered through in-depth interviews with community members, and homeless individuals. For instance, when interviewing homeless participants, the researcher was able to identify recurring themes related to their experiences with law enforcement, community attitudes, and the socio-economic factors that pushed them into homelessness. By applying thematic analysis, the researcher could not only describe the nature of these challenges but also understand the broader patterns that linked homelessness to criminal behaviour in these cities. As noted by Braun & Clarke (2006), the flexibility of thematic analysis makes it particularly useful for capturing the diversity of experiences and perspectives, which was essential given the varied demographic groups involved in the study.

4.8.1 Justification for Choosing Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was selected for this study because it aligns well with the research's primary objective: to explore reasons leading to the increase on the number of homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area, to outline the crimes committed to and by the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area, to identify possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and to homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg BCD areas. This

method's focus on identifying and analysing recurrent patterns provided a systematic way to examine the rich data collected through semi-structured interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, when analysing the responses from homeless participants, themes such as the lack of social services, the impact of drug addiction, and the frequent victimisation they faced were explored in depth. By grouping these individual experiences into broad themes, thematic analysis enabled the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of the complex factors at play.

As Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) highlight, thematic analysis is well-suited for exploratory research where the goal is to uncover deeper insights into a particular issue, and this method provides the flexibility needed to identify these insights while ensuring that the research remained grounded in participants' lived experiences.

4.8.2 Steps Involved in Data Analysis

- Familiarisation with the data: The first step in the data analysis process involved transcribing the recorded interviews. This was crucial for ensuring that no valuable information was lost during the transition from spoken word to written text. The researcher then read and re-read the transcribed interviews multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content and begin identifying initial patterns.

- Generating Initial Codes: Once the researcher became familiar with the data, the next step was to assign codes to segments of the data that were relevant to the research questions. This involved systematically going through the transcriptions and labelling significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that addressed issues such as crime, victimisation, or social exclusion. For example, phrases like “I feel unsafe when the police patrol” or “There’s no place to go, so we sleep anywhere” were coded to highlight themes of vulnerability and homelessness.

- Searching for Themes: After coding the data, the researcher organised the codes into broader themes. This step involved grouping similar codes to identify key patterns or concepts across the interviews. For instance, codes related to “police harassment,” “lack of support,” and “street-level violence” were grouped into a theme titled "Social Marginalisation and Victimisation of Homeless Individuals." This allowed the researcher to better understand how these issues

connected to the broader problem of crime in the CBD areas.

- Reviewing Themes: In this phase, the researcher revisited the identified themes to ensure that they accurately represented the data and captured the underlying meanings. The researcher checked the consistency of the themes by comparing them to both the individual coded extracts and the entire data set. This review process helped refine the themes and ensure they were coherent and relevant.

- Defining and Naming Themes: Once the themes were reviewed and refined, the researcher defined each theme and assigned a clear label. This step involved providing detailed descriptions of the themes to ensure that each one was well-articulated and represented a specific aspect of the data. This step helped the researcher gain clarity on how each theme contributed to the broader narrative of the study.

- Writing Up: The final step in the data analysis process was to compile the findings into a coherent report. The researcher wrote up the analysis by presenting the themes alongside vivid examples and direct quotes from participants. This ensured that the study captured the voices of the participants and provided rich, authentic data to support the findings. For example, a homeless participant's quote, "I've seen a lot of crimes happen here, but no one ever helps," was used to illustrate the theme of vulnerability and the lack of police intervention in the CBD areas. The final write-up integrated these insights, addressing the research questions and providing a deeper understanding of the intersection between homelessness and crime.

4.9 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the degree to which a research study accurately measures the concept it intends to measure, ensuring that the findings are credible and applicable to the broader population. Validity in research can be divided into several categories: internal validity, external validity, construct validity, and content validity (Kumar, 2014).

- Internal Validity: Internal validity refers to the extent to which the study results can be attributed to the researcher's independent variable rather than other external factors (Heale & Twycross, 2015). In this study, internal validity was strengthened by the use of semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to express their views in detail and provide more nuanced answers. The presence of a social worker during interviews further ensured that any psychological distress experienced by participants could be addressed, which helped maintain the authenticity of their responses. Additionally, using both notebooks and voice recorders during data collection minimised the risk of losing or misinterpreting data.

- External Validity: External validity is concerned with how well the study's findings can be generalised to other populations, settings, or times (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). To enhance external validity, this study included a diverse sample of participants representing various racial groups and balanced gender representation. The sample was drawn from both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, incorporating municipal employees, community members, and homeless individuals. This diversity allowed for the study's findings to be relevant not only to the specific cities involved but also to other urban areas grappling with issues related to homelessness and crime.

- Construct Validity: Construct validity is the extent to which the study measures the theoretical constructs it intends to measure (Trochim, 2006). In this study, construct validity was achieved by ensuring that the interview questions were directly aligned with the research objectives. The semi-structured interview format enabled the researcher to explore the factors contributing to homelessness, the nature of crimes committed by or against homeless individuals, and potential solutions. This approach effectively captured the constructs related to both homelessness and crime, which were central to the research.

- Content Validity: Content validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument fully represents the topic being studied (Haynes, Richard, & Kubany, 1995). In this research, content validity was ensured by developing a comprehensive interview schedule that covered all key areas outlined in the research questions. The interview guide was reviewed by experts in the field, ensuring it addressed the critical aspects of homelessness and crime and provided a well-rounded understanding of the phenomena being studied (Silverman, 2016).

Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the study's findings (Golafshani, 2003), ensuring that the research can be replicated under similar conditions. While reliability in qualitative research can be more challenging due to the inherently subjective nature of data, it can be enhanced through careful planning and rigorous methodologies (Silverman, 2016).

- Inter-Rater Reliability: Inter-rater reliability involves ensuring that different researchers or raters interpret data consistently. In this study, consistency was maintained by standardising the data collection and analysis processes. The researcher followed established protocols, and regular consultations with colleagues and mentors were conducted to ensure that the coding and interpretation of data were consistent across all interviews (McAlister, Lee, & Moyers, 2017).

- Test-Retest Reliability: Test-retest reliability measures the stability of data over time. Although qualitative research does not typically involve repeated measures, the researcher ensured reliability by conducting follow-up interviews with a subset of participants to verify the consistency of their responses. This additional step confirmed that the findings were stable and not influenced by external factors or temporary conditions (Polit & Beck, 2017).

- Internal Consistency: Internal consistency refers to the extent to which all items or measures in a research study contribute to the same construct. To maintain internal consistency, the researcher ensured that all interview questions were aligned with the research objectives. Each question focused on the same underlying themes of homelessness, crime, and social issues, ensuring that the data collected was cohesive and consistent (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

4.10 Methods of Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, several strategies were employed, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Guba & Lincoln (1989).

- Credibility: Credibility refers to the truthfulness or believability of the study's findings (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with the participants, allowing the researcher to build rapport and gain deeper insights. Triangulation was also used by comparing data from interviews with secondary sources such as academic articles and reports, which helped validate the primary data. Additionally, member checking was employed, where participants were allowed to review and confirm their responses. The researcher also kept a reflective journal, documenting personal reflections and insights to increase transparency and ensure the research process remained aligned with the participants' perspectives.

- Transferability: Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Shenton, 2004). To enhance transferability, the researcher provided rich, detailed descriptions of the study's participants, settings, and findings. These "thick descriptions" allowed readers to assess the applicability of the study's conclusions to their contexts. For example, the study's detailed accounts of the social and structural challenges faced by homeless individuals in the CBDs of Durban and Pietermaritzburg could be relevant to other urban environments with similar issues.

- Dependability: Dependability refers to the consistency of the research process over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anney, 2014). To ensure dependability, the researcher maintained an audit trail, documenting all decisions made throughout the study, including data collection, coding, and analysis procedures. The researcher also sought feedback from peers and mentors to ensure that the research design and methodologies remained rigorous and stable.

- Confirmability: Confirmability pertains to the objectivity of the study and whether the findings are shaped by the researcher's biases or the participants' voices. To ensure confirmability, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, consistently reflecting on their role in the research process and how personal biases might influence the interpretation of data (Thomas, 2017).

4.11 Ethical Considerations

4.11.1 Ethical Clearance and Approvals

The researcher sought and received ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) reference number HSSREC/00002695/2021 before initiating the study. This approval ensured that the research adhered to the institution's ethical guidelines, particularly regarding the protection of participants' rights and welfare (Israel & Hay, 2006). Furthermore, consent was secured from ward councillors in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg Central Business Districts (CBDs) to interview residents and community members, ensuring that the research had the necessary local support and permissions.

4.11.2 Informed Consent

Informed consent was a cornerstone of the study's ethical framework. Before any interviews were conducted, the researcher ensured that all participants understood the nature and scope of the study. This process involved a thorough explanation of the study's objectives, the procedures involved, and the participant's rights, including the option to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. Participants were assured that their identities would be protected by using pseudonyms and that all data collected would remain confidential and anonymous (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). All participants formally agreed to participate by signing consent forms, affirming their understanding and willingness to engage in the study.

4.11.3 Right to Self-Determination

Participants were given full autonomy to decide whether to participate in the study, which is a fundamental principle of ethical research practice. The researcher made sure to provide clear and comprehensive information regarding the study's aims, methods, potential risks, and expected outcomes, ensuring that participants were fully informed before making any decision. This information was presented in a straightforward and accessible manner to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and literacy levels of the participants, thereby facilitating their understanding of the study's context (Sieber, 2009). Participants were also given ample time to ask questions and clarify any doubts about their involvement, ensuring that they had all the necessary details to make an informed decision.

The researcher emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage of the study, without facing any negative consequences or losing any benefits. This respect for self-determination ensured that participants' involvement was based on

their own free will, allowing them to make a choice that aligned with their comfort and personal circumstances. There was no form of coercion, undue pressure, or manipulation involved in the recruitment process. Additionally, participants were reassured that their decision, whether to participate or not, would not affect any services or support they were receiving from external organizations. This approach fostered an environment of trust and ethical integrity, promoting transparency throughout the research process (Sieber, 2009).

4.11.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the study. Participants' names and any other identifying details were not disclosed in the research findings. Instead, pseudonyms were used to safeguard their identities and ensure that personal information remained private. This approach fostered a sense of security, encouraging participants to share their perspectives and experiences openly during the interviews. Additionally, all collected data was securely stored and could only be accessed by the researcher and other authorised individuals involved in the study (Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles, 2008).

4.11.5 Protection from harm and risk

Recognising the potential for emotional or psychological distress during interviews, the researcher took proactive steps to ensure participant safety and well-being. A qualified social worker was present during data collection to provide immediate support should any participant experience emotional discomfort or distress. While the social worker did not directly participate in the interviews, they were on standby to offer assistance, ensuring that participants had access to professional help if needed (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010).

4.11.6 Deception avoidance

The study was conducted with full transparency, and the researcher made sure that no deception occurred at any point. Participants were fully informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, and the use of their data. Moreover, they were explicitly told about their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without facing any negative consequences. This open communication helped to build

trust between the researcher and participants, ensuring ethical integrity throughout the research process (Kimmel, 2007).

4.11.7 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation was a key principle throughout the study. Participants were explicitly told that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative repercussions. This assurance was communicated clearly to all participants before they provided their informed consent, reinforcing the ethical standard that participation in research should never be coerced or forced (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001).

4.11.8 Delimitations of the study

Delimitations refer to the boundaries or specific parameters set by the researcher to narrow the scope of the study. In this research, the study focused exclusively on the central business districts (CBDs) of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and a sample of 30 participants was selected. These delimitations were established to maintain the study's manageability and to ensure that it remained focused on specific research questions related to crime prevention and community issues in these urban areas.

4.11.8.1 Challenges of the study

i. **Sample Size:** The choice of a sample size of 30 participants, while manageable for in-depth qualitative research, may not fully capture the diverse experiences of all homeless individuals across the CBDs. As a result, the findings of the study are specific to the individuals interviewed and may not be broadly applicable to all homeless populations, especially those in different geographic areas (Patton, 2015).

ii. **Data Collection Constraints:** The study relied on semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. While this allowed for rich, detailed insights, the effectiveness of the interviews was contingent on the participants' willingness to share their experiences. Some participants may have been reluctant to disclose sensitive information, whether due to discomfort with the interviewer, distrust of the research process, or concerns about

confidentiality. This could have impacted the completeness and depth of the data (Seidman, 2013).

iii. **Time and Resource Limitations:** Conducting in-person interviews with participants, along with the requirement for a social worker to be present, imposed significant time and resource constraints. These limitations meant that only a relatively small sample of participants could be included in the study, which may have reduced the breadth of data collected and limited the ability to explore certain aspects of the research questions in greater detail (Silverman, 2016).

iv. **Emotional Distress:** Given the sensitive nature of the study's focus on community issues and crime prevention, the researcher was mindful of the potential for participants to experience emotional distress during interviews. Efforts were made to mitigate any such distress, including the presence of a social worker to offer support if necessary. However, it was acknowledged that certain topics might still trigger emotional responses, and these potential risks were carefully considered throughout the research process.

v. **Research participants:** The researcher faced difficulties in securing municipal members who were willing to participate in the study. As a result, for data analysis and answering the research objective, the researcher had to rely on secondary data as a substitute, with the input of the other research participants.

4.12 Location of the study

This study was carried out in the city centers of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, both of which are located in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. These urban areas have seen a rapid increase in the number of homeless individuals (Statistics South Africa, 2022). According to the most recent census data, Durban alone has hundreds of people living on the streets, with many more seeking refuge in shelters (GroundUp, 2022). The situation is similarly dire in Pietermaritzburg, where the homeless population has also grown significantly. Literature suggests that this rise in homelessness is closely linked to an increase in criminal activities involving homeless individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Both cities are facing alarmingly high crime rates. In Pietermaritzburg, the crime index is notably elevated, with serious concerns surrounding violent crimes such as assault and armed robbery (Numbeo, 2024). The city has a crime index of 82.54, reflecting a high level of criminal activity. Similarly, Durban has experienced a significant uptick in crime, with reports highlighting the prevalence of property crimes, violent offenses, and various other criminal behaviours (South African Police Service, 2022). The annual crime report from the South African Police Service (SAPS) provides detailed statistics on the types of crimes reported and detected in both cities, underscoring the urgent need for targeted and effective interventions (GroundUp, 2022).

Figure 12.1: Durban CBD

Source: eThekwini Municipality, 2020

Approximately 6,000 homeless individuals reside in the urban centers of eThekwini, with a significant number of them living in the Inner City. The municipality has made the decision to adopt a proactive approach in addressing homelessness by providing integrated support. This support will encompass a variety of services, including shelters, social assistance, skills development, assistance with obtaining identity documents, and facilitating the reintegration of homeless individuals into society (eThekwini Municipality, 2020).

Figure 12.2: Pietermaritzburg CBD

Source: The Witness, 2024

The homeless population in Pietermaritzburg has faced persistent and severe mistreatment, particularly during raids conducted by municipal officers from Msunduzi. These raids, often violent, have been witnessed by reporters and confirmed by eyewitness accounts, highlighting the extreme measures used by authorities to remove homeless individuals from the streets of the city, particularly in the Central Business District (CBD). In one widely reported incident, a journalist from *The Witness* observed municipal officers using a sjambok to violently force homeless individuals off the streets. This account is corroborated by numerous interviews conducted by the same newspaper, where individuals reported frequent physical assaults and the illegal confiscation of personal belongings, leaving many with little to no possessions (The Witness, 2024).

The homeless community, already facing extreme poverty and vulnerability, described feeling targeted and dehumanized by these actions, which exacerbate their already precarious living conditions. The raids are not only physical but are accompanied by verbal abuse and threats, making it clear that homeless individuals are regarded as undesirables to be removed from the public eye, especially during the festive season when the city anticipates a surge in tourism. The holiday period, while a time of celebration for many, is marked by an intensification of these raids, as authorities aim to present a cleaner and more orderly image of the city to visitors (The Witness, 2024). For the homeless, this period is often one of heightened fear and danger, as they are forcibly removed from public spaces with no immediate alternative for shelter.

Homeless individuals who survive on the streets with minimal resources are left with nothing following these raids, often being subjected to violence for simply trying to find a safe space to rest or seek basic necessities. The constant cycle of being driven off public property, only to return and face the same treatment, leaves many feeling trapped in a system that offers no viable means of escape. The trauma and fear caused by these raids have profound psychological and emotional effects, compounding the challenges already faced by individuals experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the lack of support services, shelter, or alternative housing options means that the cycle of violence and exclusion continues unchecked. These events illustrate the harsh realities faced by homeless individuals in Pietermaritzburg, highlighting the systemic neglect and mistreatment that often go unnoticed by the broader public (The Witness, 2024).

4.12.1 Accessing the Location of the Study:

In preparation for the research, the first critical step was obtaining the necessary ethical clearance and gatekeepers' permissions, ensuring the study could proceed in line with ethical guidelines and regulations. To begin, the researcher applied to the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This application was essential to secure formal ethical clearance, granting permission to conduct the study and ensuring adherence to ethical standards such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' rights (Creswell, 2013). Once this clearance was obtained, the researcher was able to proceed with the next phase of securing access to the study locations.

The next step involved seeking permission from the relevant local authorities to conduct interviews with community members. The researcher submitted applications to both eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and Msunduzi Municipality for approval to community members and those who are involved in community-related issues and crime prevention strategies.. By obtaining the necessary permissions from these local government bodies, the researcher ensured that the study had the support and backing needed from municipal authorities to engage with key informants (Smith et al., 2009).

Additionally, the researcher applied to the ward councillors of the Durban CBD and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas to request permission to interview general community members. The involvement of the ward councillors was critical, as they served as key gatekeepers, granting access to the community and facilitating contact with individuals who could provide relevant data for the study. Their approval was essential for engaging with local residents, many of whom had firsthand experiences with the issues of homelessness and crime within the urban centers. With these approvals in place, the researcher was able to engage directly with the target population and gather the necessary qualitative data to address the study's objectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

These steps of obtaining ethical clearance and gatekeepers' letters not only ensured that the research adhered to ethical standards but also facilitated smooth access to the locations and participants needed to explore the research topic. By securing these approvals, the researcher was able to proceed with

the study in a responsible and structured manner, enabling the collection of meaningful and impactful data.

4.13 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the research methodology employed in the study. It provided a detailed description of the research design, including the rationale behind selecting this particular approach. The chapter also explained the sampling procedure, the methods used for data collection, and the ethical considerations that guided the study. Additionally, the limitations of the research were highlighted, acknowledging the challenges and constraints faced during the study. The following chapter will present the findings from the data collected and will provide an in-depth analysis of these results, offering insights and interpretations in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings and provides a discussion of the data that were gathered. The study involved a series of interviews with carefully selected participants, ensuring a diverse representation of the populations from Durban and Pietermaritzburg. This approach was designed to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the issues under investigation. Among the participants fourteen (14) general community members were included, with seven (7) participants selected from both Durban CBD and Pietermaritzburg CBD that experience higher rates of homelessness. To broaden the perspective, sixteen (16) homeless individuals, all of whom volunteered to participate, were also included in the study.

The primary objective of the research was to explore the prevalence of crime among homeless individuals living on the streets in the city centers of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, both of which are located in KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher sought to identify solutions that could help reduce the number of homeless people in these areas, thereby mitigating the risks of victimisation that they face and the crimes that they commit. Another key aim of the study was to develop strategies for crime prevention that could be implemented in future revisions of police policies and practices.

The qualitative data collected through interviews were analysed thematically, with the findings being organised and discussed under key themes that emerged during the analysis process. This thematic approach allowed the researcher to explore the complex interplay between homelessness and crime, gand to provide insights into potential interventions that could support both crime reduction and the improvement of conditions for homeless individuals in these urban areas.

Participants	Type	Gender	Race	Nationality	Age
Participant 1	Homeless person	Female	African	South African	36
Participant 2	Homeless person	Female	African	South African	25
Participant 3	Homeless person	Female	Coloured	South African	22
Participant 4	Homeless person	Male	Indian	South African	43
Participant 5	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	30
Participant 6	Homeless person	Female	White	South African	28
Participant 7	Homeless person	Male	Coloured	South African	44
Participant 8	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	52
Participant 9	Homeless person	Transgender	African	South African	33
Participant 10	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	41
Participant 11	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	19
Participant 12	Homeless person	Female	African	South African	36
Participant 13	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	29
Participant 14	Homeless person	Male	African	South African	35
Participant 15	Homeless person	Female	Coloured	South African	48
Participant 16	Homeless person	Male	Colured	South African	30
Participant 17	General community member	Female	African	South African	55
Participant 18	General community member	Male	African	South African	62
Participant 19	General community member	Female	White	South African	45
Participant 20	General community member	Female	White	South African	56

Participant 21	General community member	Female	African	South African	54
Participant 22	General community member	Female	Indian	South African	65
Participant 23	General community member	Female	African	South African	57
Participant 24	General community member	Male	Coloured	South African	38
Participant 25	General community member	Male	African	South African	23
Participant 26	General community member	Male	African	South African	36
Participant 27	General community member	Male	African	South African	24
Participant 28	General community member	Female	African	South African	30
Participant 29	General community member	Female	African	South African	44
Participant 30	General community member	Male	African	South African	37

5.2 The reasons leading to the increase in the number of homeless people in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.

5.2.1 Economic instability and the perpetuation of homelessness

Based on the homeless individuals who were interviewed, economic instability was found to be a key driver of homelessness, as it directly impacts an individual's ability to secure or maintain stable housing. The financial struggles shared by participants highlight the detrimental effects of job loss, underemployment, and insufficient wages, all of which contribute significantly to their homelessness. Many participants reported that they had lost jobs due to layoffs, business closures, or health issues, and even those who remained employed often faced job insecurity. For those still employed, wages were often insufficient to cover the rising cost of living, particularly housing costs, which placed them in a vulnerable position. These individuals expressed frustration at the disparity between their earnings and the high cost of rent, utilities, and basic living expenses, which left them with little financial cushion to cover unexpected costs such as medical bills or car repairs (Sadiki, 2016; HSRC, 2021).

These findings are consistent with previous literature that identifies structural economic pressures as a key factor in homelessness. Tibaijuka (2005) and DeVerteuil et al. (2009) emphasise that in urban contexts such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg, economic restructuring, rising unemployment, and the decline of the formal housing market have collectively rendered large segments of the population vulnerable to displacement. The rising cost of living, particularly the steep increase in housing costs, exacerbates this issue, making it even more difficult for individuals to maintain stable housing. As rent prices surge and affordable housing options become scarcer, many individuals find themselves facing difficult choices between paying for housing or meeting other basic needs such as food,

healthcare, and transportation. Some participants described having to move frequently, bouncing from one temporary or overcrowded living situation to another, as they could not afford the rent for a permanent home. In many cases, individuals who lost their homes due to financial constraints were unable to find affordable housing, leading them into a cycle of poverty and homelessness (Rule-Groenewald, 2015; McCombes, 2019).

As noted by Participant 1, *"the combination of a job loss and rising rent led to my eviction"*, a reality for many struggling to keep pace with the economic demands of everyday life. This economic instability creates a vicious cycle where individuals lose their jobs, struggle to find new employment, and the lack of stable housing makes it even more challenging to secure work. This reinforces Agnew's (1992) *General Strain Theory*, which posits that individuals experiencing strain such as financial hardship or the inability to achieve culturally valued goals such as stable housing through employment are more likely to experience frustration and disconnection, increasing their vulnerability to crime or further marginalisation. In this context, homelessness becomes not a result of individual failure, but a manifestation of broader structural inequalities.

The findings further align with Smith's (2021) observation that homelessness is often the result of systemic economic factors beyond personal control. Participant narratives strongly suggest that rather than poor individual choices, structural factors, such as job market exclusion and unaffordable housing are central to their living conditions. Moreover, the ongoing economic downturn, compounded by high unemployment rates, traps many individuals in a cycle of poverty and homelessness. As Participant 2 pointed out, *"Low-wage, part-time work is simply not enough to cover even basic housing costs"*. This highlights a broader issue of wage stagnation, where workers' earnings do not align with the rising costs of living, leaving them vulnerable to housing instability.

The implications of these findings also resonate with Structural Strain Theory (Merton, 1938), which emphasises how societal structures can inhibit individuals' ability to achieve socially approved goals via legitimate means. When opportunities for stable housing and employment are blocked, individuals may be forced into alternative, informal, or even illicit survival strategies. Therefore, addressing this economic instability requires both broader economic reforms and targeted support for *low-income individuals* to prevent them from falling into *homelessness*. This includes stronger safety

nets, job creation strategies, and an increase in affordable housing initiatives (HSRC, 2021; Bezuidenhout, 2011).

5.2.2 The rising cost of rent and the unpredictability of evictions

Housing issues were consistently raised by participants as major factors contributing to homelessness. The rising cost of rent in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, combined with the unpredictability of evictions, has created an environment where affordable housing is increasingly scarce. Participants like Participant 11, who was evicted without notice, explained: *"I was unable to pay my rent for two months, I negotiated with my landlord to bear with me until I find some other job, but I believe he was tired of excuses and he decided to ask me to leave in the middle of the second month."* Similarly, Participant 14, who could not afford rent despite full-time employment, illustrates the fragile nature of housing security for low-income individuals. These personal accounts reflect a broader structural issue, wherein housing costs have outpaced wage growth, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to access and maintain stable accommodation without significant financial assistance (Jones & Walker, 2022; Ntema & Visser, 2019; Morkel & Wilson, 2021).

The financial strain caused by high rent costs and the looming threat of eviction creates a precarious situation for many individuals in this study. As housing prices escalate, numerous participants reported living *paycheck to paycheck*, with little to no financial buffer. When the cost of housing surpasses an individual's income capacity, eviction becomes a likely outcome, leaving them scrambling for alternative living arrangements with insufficient time or resources. This situation intensifies the daily stress and anxiety for those already in vulnerable positions. The constant threat of eviction fosters a cycle of instability that severely undermines any effort to secure long-term housing (Sadiki, 2016; Turok & Scheba, 2019; Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016).

Further exacerbating this challenge is the fragility of communal or shared housing. As noted by Participant 16, *"housing arrangements also become unaffordable when the person we rely on moves*

out," pointing to the instability inherent in informal co-tenancy setups. When a co-tenant departs due to financial difficulty or other personal circumstances, remaining individuals often cannot sustain the rental costs alone and are again thrust into homelessness. Research shows that shared housing, while initially cost-effective, can quickly become unstable due to interpersonal conflict, unequal financial contributions, or unexpected departures (Choi & Snyder, 2019; Cross, Seager, Erasmus, Ward, & O'Donovan, 2010). This demonstrates that even seemingly stable housing situations are subject to unpredictable changes that can rapidly lead to displacement.

The cumulative emotional and psychological impact of repeated evictions and unaffordable rent weighs heavily on participants. The *inability to plan for the future* due to ongoing housing uncertainty was a recurring concern, reinforcing the hopelessness experienced by many. Without time to secure suitable alternatives or access to emergency housing support, individuals are forced into temporary or overcrowded arrangements, further entrenching their vulnerability. International evidence confirms that unstable housing significantly increases the risk of chronic homelessness, mental health deterioration, and social exclusion (Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley, Wilcox, & Watts, 2017; Springer, 2021; Amster, 2008). The broader lack of affordable housing infrastructure and eviction protections contributes significantly to the crisis, limiting any meaningful pathway out of homelessness.

5.2.3 Family breakdown and Domestic Violence as pathways to homelessness

Family breakdowns, particularly those involving domestic violence and conflict, were commonly cited by participants as key reasons for their homelessness. The loss of a family support network, especially during times of crisis, leaves individuals vulnerable, isolated, and without immediate options for shelter or assistance. Domestic violence, in particular, forces many people, especially women, into situations where they have no choice but to leave their homes for their own safety (Pleace, 2016). In many cases, the fear of further abuse outweighs the uncertainty of homelessness, and individuals are left with the difficult choice of staying in an unsafe environment or leaving with no clear place to go. The absence of support systems and the lack of available resources to help those fleeing abusive situations exacerbates the crisis, making it even harder for individuals to rebuild their lives.

Participants 3, 15, and 12 shared emotional and harrowing accounts of fleeing abusive relationships

or family disputes, often with nowhere to turn for help. These stories reflect the desperation felt by individuals who had to leave their homes to escape violence, only to find themselves thrust into homelessness, where they faced new challenges in an already hostile environment. The trauma of fleeing an abusive relationship is compounded by the shock of realizing that, once outside the home, there are few resources or services available to assist them. As Participant 3 poignantly noted, fleeing an abusive relationship meant facing homelessness because there were no immediate resources available to help with housing or provide safety. This highlights the lack of effective support systems for individuals in crisis, particularly those dealing with domestic violence, and the overwhelming gap between the immediate need for safety and the long-term need for stability.

The emotional toll of domestic violence and family conflict is significant, as many participants spoke about the mental and emotional strain of being cut off from their families or enduring violence within the family unit. For many, the breakdown of family relationships marked not only the loss of a place to live but also the loss of emotional and psychological security, which further contributed to their feelings of isolation and despair (SAMHSA, 2020). With limited social support and the absence of immediate resources, individuals often find themselves in a cycle of homelessness, unable to access the services they need to regain control of their lives. The emotional and physical scars left by domestic violence and family breakdowns continue to shape their experiences of homelessness, as they struggle to rebuild their lives without the safety nets many others take for granted.

Participant 3:

"After my mother passed away, my father married another woman, and she did not accept me and my brother. She was very abusive towards us and because our father was not protecting us, we decided to leave home. We left and stayed with our aunt for a few months, she also did not treat us well and we opted to come and live in the streets. Siphila kangcono lana (we are living better here)"

Participant 15

"I have been in an abusive relationship for so long, that my partner promised to kill me if I decided to leave him. I decided to leave my province, Eastern Cape and come to Durban. I didn't have a plan when I came here, and I ended up living in the streets."

Participant 12

"My home was like hell, a friend asked me to come and live with her and when I went, she told me that her boyfriend is not comfortable with the idea of me living with her. I decided to sleep by the road as I had nowhere else to go and it ended up being an everyday thing until I made it my home"

Family breakdowns not only affect an individual's emotional and physical wellbeing but also compound their financial insecurity, creating a multifaceted crisis. The absence of a stable family unit or safe housing options leaves individuals particularly vulnerable, making it significantly more challenging for them to regain stability. For many, the lack of familial support means there is no safety net to fall back on when facing housing instability or financial hardship (Turner & Ridge, 2020). In addition to this, the emotional and psychological toll of family breakdowns such as those caused by domestic violence or unresolved conflict leaves individuals emotionally drained, which in turn hampers their ability to secure or maintain employment and other crucial aspects of life. Trauma from family disruptions can have long-lasting effects on mental health, making it more difficult for individuals to focus on rebuilding their lives when they are constantly struggling with feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression.

The emotional distress caused by family breakdowns, when compounded by a lack of financial resources, further exacerbates the challenges of homelessness. For individuals who have lost the support of their family and lack the necessary financial resources, the road to recovery becomes incredibly difficult. Many of these individuals have to navigate a complex system of social services, often with little to no guidance, while simultaneously dealing with the lasting psychological effects of their trauma. Without access to proper mental health care or financial assistance, the chances of these individuals stabilising their living situation are greatly diminished, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and homelessness. Financial insecurity, combined with the emotional scars of family breakdown, leaves individuals struggling to meet their basic needs, let alone pursue opportunities for long-term stability (Turner & Ridge, 2020).

Addressing the issue of family breakdowns and its compounded effect on homelessness requires both immediate and long-term solutions. First and foremost, protective measures for individuals fleeing

domestic violence, such as emergency shelters and legal protection from abusers, are essential. These measures provide immediate safety and respite, allowing individuals to begin the process of rebuilding their lives. However, long-term solutions also require the establishment of a broader social support network, which includes financial assistance, mental health counselling, and community-based programs (Green, 2023). These services can help individuals heal emotionally while also providing them with the practical resources they need to regain financial stability. By addressing both the psychological and financial aspects of family breakdowns, society can offer a more holistic approach to supporting those affected by family conflicts, ultimately reducing the long-term impacts of trauma on homelessness .

5.2.4 Substance abuse and addiction as barriers to housing stability

Substance abuse was another significant factor contributing to homelessness. Many participants described how addiction to drugs or alcohol spiralled out of control, leading to the loss of employment, relationships, and ultimately, housing. For these individuals, substance abuse often began as a coping mechanism in response to life stressors but eventually became a self-perpetuating cycle that made it even harder to regain stability. As Participant 5 and Participant 6 shared, addiction eroded not only their physical health but also their ability to hold a job and maintain the home.

Participant 5

"I had a beautiful family, and my mother loved me so much. I started to use drugs due to peer pressure, my mother found out and took me to a rehabilitation center several times. I was not serious about change, my mother cut me off financially and that is when I started to steal money and appliances at home, sold them to get money for drugs and I was chased out of home"

Participant 6

"I was working as a domestic worker and had a house of my own. I then started to gamble and used drugs and that is when I ended up losing everything, my job and my house"

Substance abuse is a major barrier to both social and economic stability, affecting an individual's ability to function within a society that requires stability in employment and housing. As Participant 16 indicated, "Addiction can often start as an attempt to manage personal struggles, but over time it compounds the challenges of homelessness. The cycle of addiction and homelessness can be

incredibly difficult to break, and without targeted interventions, individuals may remain trapped in this cycle for years. Addressing this issue requires integrated solutions that combine addiction treatment with stable housing and employment support (Green, 2023).

5.2.5 Mental health issues and the lack of accessible treatment

Mental health issues were also a significant factor contributing to homelessness, particularly when mental health conditions go untreated or undiagnosed. Some participants reported struggling with conditions like depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder, which directly impacted their ability to maintain employment or housing. The stigma surrounding mental health issues often prevents individuals from seeking help, further exacerbating their struggles. Participant 7's experience of bipolar disorder and Participant 8's struggles with accessing mental health care highlight the difficulties faced by individuals with untreated mental health conditions. Without access to affordable care, many are unable to break the cycle of mental illness and homelessness (Davies, 2019).

This finding resonates with the strain theory, which posits that social structures within society may pressure citizens to commit deviant acts (Merton, 1938). In this context, the lack of access to mental health services and social support systems acts as a form of systemic strain that limits the ability of individuals with mental illness to achieve socially accepted goals such as employment and stable housing.

These structural barriers effectively increase vulnerability to homelessness, reinforcing the cycle of exclusion and marginalisation. Mental health issues are often linked to homelessness in a way that creates a vicious cycle. Untreated mental health conditions make it harder for individuals to maintain stable work and housing, while homelessness itself exacerbates mental health problems (Prinsloo, 2021). As Participant 16 noted, the difficulty of finding affordable treatment options prevents many individuals from seeking the help they need, hence at times they may end up losing everything, without even being aware that they are not mentally fit . Providing accessible, affordable mental

health services is crucial to addressing homelessness, as it directly affects an individual's ability to regain stability.

This aligns with earlier literature in Chapter 2, which reported that people living on the streets are disproportionately affected by mental health conditions, including schizophrenia, PTSD, and substance-induced psychosis, often worsened by their living conditions (Folsom & Jeste, 2002; Prinsloo, 2021). Numerous international studies, such as those by Fazel, Geddes, and Kushel (2014), have shown that individuals experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of mental illness and are less likely to receive consistent treatment, especially in developing countries where health infrastructure is limited. Similarly, South African research reveals that people living without shelter often face dual discrimination both due to their mental illness and their homelessness, thereby reducing access to care (Lund et al., 2010).

In terms of social disorganisation theory, the absence of coordinated health systems and community resources in urban centres contributes to the breakdown of support structures (Merton, 1938). This dysfunction at a community level not only fails to protect individuals from the onset of homelessness but also fails to provide exit pathways once they become homeless. As a result, any effort to address homelessness in urban South Africa must necessarily include an expansion of mental health services targeted at homeless populations ensuring accessibility, continuity, and affordability.

5.3 Crimes committed to and against the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.

5.3.1 Crimes committed against homeless people

5.3.1.1 Physical violence

Homeless individuals are particularly vulnerable to physical violence, often being subjected to assaults and beatings (Palmer, 2019). This violence typically originates from both other homeless individuals and members of the general public. According to Routine Activity Theory, homeless people are considered ideal victims due to their constant exposure in public spaces and the absence of capable guardians, such as stable housing or supportive community networks (Cohen & Felson,

1979). The theory posits that for a crime to occur, there must be a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. In this context, homeless individuals, lacking physical protection and social support, become easy targets. Furthermore, General Strain Theory helps explain why homeless individuals may be both victims and occasional perpetrators of violence. The chronic strain of unmet needs such as food, shelter, and safety combined with negative emotions such as anger and frustration, can lead to aggression or vulnerability to attacks (Agnew, 1992; Broidy, 2001). Societal biases and frustrations are often projected onto homeless individuals, further intensifying their victimisation as marginalised and stigmatised members of society.

For example, Participant 4 shared,

"I have been beaten up multiple times by people who think they can do anything to us because we live on the streets."

Participant 10 also mentioned,

"Some people come and demand the money that we work hard for during the day, at car wash and assisting people to carry their shopping. When we refuse to give them, they beat us."

Participant 14 said,

"We are scared to fight back, as they might burn our belongings, so we just let them attack us."

These testimonies illustrate the harsh reality that many homeless individuals are perceived as permissible targets for violence. Their vulnerability stems from the absence of guardianship, social alienation, and dehumanisation by society, which correlates with Labelling Theory. This theory posits that once individuals are stigmatised and labelled as undesirable or deviant, they are treated as less deserving of dignity and protection (Becker, 1963). As a result, the public may justify or ignore their abuse. The structural absence of protective mechanisms further leaves them open to harm, rendering them susceptible to ongoing cycles of violence and trauma (Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Johnsen, 2020).

This vulnerability is further compounded by the lack of access to justice and healthcare. Without a stable home or support network, people living on the streets often have little recourse when they experience violence. Their status is frequently rendered invisible, denying them the safety nets that protect others such as access to law enforcement, medical services, or legal aid (Seager & Tamasane, 2010; Tyler, 2013). This systemic failure reflects not only a breakdown in social support but also a structural reinforcement of their marginalisation. From the perspective of General Strain Theory, the chronic failure to achieve culturally valued goals such as safety and belonging fosters a sense of hopelessness, which may intensify the likelihood of both victimisation and antisocial behaviour (Agnew, 2006; Merton, 1938).

Empirical research confirms the high rates of violence experienced by the homeless. A study by Belcher and DeForge (2012) revealed that homeless individuals in urban areas are up to five times more likely to be physically assaulted than the general population. Similarly, in South Africa, Seager and Tamasane (2010) found that individuals living on the streets of Cape Town were routinely subjected to violence by both civilians and police. These findings align with Routine Activity Theory, which underscores how homelessness inherently increases exposure to risk due to visibility and isolation. Furthermore, such chronic exposure to victimisation often leads to secondary victimisation through neglect, underreporting, and lack of institutional response (Cloke, May, & Johnsen, 2011).

Participant 8 recounted,

"One night, a group of men attacked me and took what little I had. They did not care that I had nothing to begin with."

This account underscores the brutal and dehumanising treatment homeless individuals endure. Their attackers seem to regard them not as human beings but as vulnerable objects for exploitation. This reality reflects the broader social processes of marginalisation and exclusion. Labelling Theory is again useful here, highlighting how the homeless label becomes synonymous with deviance or unworthiness, which then legitimises mistreatment in the eyes of perpetrators (Becker, 1963; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). Additionally, repeated exposure to violence contributes to deteriorating mental health, which may in turn push some individuals to engage in reactive aggression, thus perpetuating

the cycle of violence predicted by General Strain Theory (Johnstone, Jetten, Dingle, Parsell, & Walter, 2015).

5.3.1.2 Theft and robbery

Theft and robbery are among the most prevalent crimes committed against homeless individuals. The few possessions they manage to acquire are frequently stolen, and they are often robbed of any money they manage to earn. Research has consistently shown that homeless individuals are particularly vulnerable to these forms of victimisation due to their lack of secure shelter and the inability to protect their belongings (Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Johnsen, 2020). The visibility of homeless people in public spaces and their limited access to secure storage for their possessions make them easy and frequent targets (Palmer, 2019). This form of victimisation can be examined through Routine Activity Theory, which posits that crime occurs when a motivated offender encounters a suitable target in the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In this case, homeless individuals exposed in public without protection fulfil the role of suitable targets, while the lack of law enforcement presence or social protection enables these crimes to persist.

Adding to that, Labelling Theory helps to explain the normalisation of such crimes. The societal stigma and widespread dehumanisation of homeless individuals contribute to the perception that they are less deserving of protection (Beresford, 2018). When homeless people are labelled as outcasts or deviant, it becomes easier for society to ignore crimes committed against them. This stigmatisation indirectly encourages perpetrators, as the absence of societal empathy lowers the moral cost of victimising the homeless. Research suggests that routine victimisation of homeless people can desensitise both offenders and bystanders, ultimately making such behaviour appear acceptable or inconsequential (Brown, Goodman, & DeLisi, 2020).

As Participant 12 shared:

"I have had my belongings stolen so many times that I've lost count. It's like we have a target on our backs just because we are homeless."

Participant 5 echoed:

“It has become normal for people to come and demand money from us; at times, they even take our blankets when we are not around.”

Participant 13 added:

“… because we fear them, we give them whatever they demand from us.”

These narratives demonstrate the psychological consequences of continuous victimisation. Beyond the material loss, persistent exposure to theft deepens feelings of insecurity, helplessness, and chronic anxiety (Buck, 2020). According to Strain Theory, individuals may respond to the constant strain of blocked access to basic needs and social justice through withdrawal, depression, or in some cases, retaliatory behaviour (Merton, 1938). When even survival level resources are at risk, the psychological toll can hinder homeless individuals from seeking help or trusting support systems.

As Participant 14 recalled:

"Someone once took all the money I had saved up from begging. It was supposed to buy me food for the week."

Such accounts underscore the harsh reality: theft and robbery for the homeless are not mere inconveniences but survival threatening acts. In an already marginalised and resource-scarce existence, a stolen amount however small can represent the difference between eating and starving, between self-care and neglect (Buck, 2020). The Routine Activity Theory again applies, as such crimes often occur where public oversight is weak, and offenders face minimal consequences. Moreover, repeated victimisation fosters a sense of mistrust and social detachment, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to engage with available services (Canham, Wister, & Davidson, 2022).

The consequences of such acts are not only economic but also emotional. The trauma of being repeatedly robbed deepens the cycle of instability and marginalisation. Victims develop a sense of hypervigilance, fear, and social withdrawal. These emotional burdens further impair their ability to make decisions that could improve their circumstances, often resulting in prolonged homelessness (Brown et al., 2020). Labelling Theory suggests that once society labels the homeless as weak or

unworthy, their victimisation becomes both socially tolerated and systematically neglected, reinforcing their vulnerability and alienation.

5.3.1.4 Harassment by law enforcement

Harassment by law enforcement is another major issue faced by homeless individuals. Some of the homeless individuals reported frequent mistreatment and excessive use of force by police officers and security personnel. This mistreatment is often grounded in the perception that homeless people are nuisances rather than individuals deserving of compassion and assistance (Jones, 2023). Routine Activity Theory highlights how the constant presence of homeless people in public spaces makes them more visible and thus targets for law enforcement. Labelling Theory suggests that once homeless individuals are labeled as troublemakers or criminals, they are more likely to face targeted harassment. Social Learning Theory posits that when law enforcement officers witness such mistreatment among their peers without facing consequences, they may be more likely to imitate the behaviour.

Participant 3 described,
"The police treat us like criminals just for existing. They push us around and sometimes even beat us."

Participant 7 said,
"The police are usually very brutal on us, whenever they do raids, they tend to use an excessive force on us"

Participant 14 also said,
"Each interaction with law enforcement wore down my spirit. I gave up on resisting or speaking out. Instead, I learned to gather my belongings and move quietly, hoping not to draw attention the next time. I saw the same behaviour in those around me. We had become like shadows, drifting through the city, doing our best to stay unnoticed and avoid the next unavoidable run-in."

These statements shed light on the broader issue of the systemic criminalisation of homelessness, where simply existing in public spaces whether sitting on a park bench, sleeping on a sidewalk, or

seeking shelter in doorways becomes an act that exposes individuals to violence, harassment, and mistreatment, often at the hands of law enforcement (Petis, 2024). Public spaces, which should serve as places of refuge and safety for everyone, become hostile environments for those without homes, subjecting them to police interventions that escalate into violence or verbal abuse. Instead of being a protective force, law enforcement often exacerbates the trauma and hardship of homeless individuals, treating them as offenders for the crime of survival rather than addressing the underlying causes of their situation (Pietermaritzburg Addiction Support, 2023; Pietermaritzburg Training Council, 2023).

The criminalisation process typically includes fines, arrests, and even physical aggression, penalising individuals simply for attempting to navigate public spaces to meet basic human needs (Petis, 2024). This punitive approach reinforces a cycle of criminalisation that makes it more difficult for homeless people to escape their circumstances, creating barriers to resources such as housing, healthcare, and employment, and perpetuating their exclusion from society. As a result, the very institutions that are meant to ensure safety and uphold rights become complicit in further marginalising vulnerable populations, forcing them into a continuous struggle for survival while facing the threat of further criminalisation (Pietermaritzburg Addiction Support, 2023).

Participant 10 added,
"Security guards at the malls always chase us away, even if we're not causing any trouble."

This highlights the exclusionary behaviour that homeless individuals often face, with security personnel viewing them as unwanted elements in public spaces, regardless of their actions. Such exclusion is a core aspect of the criminalisation of homelessness, where those without homes are often perceived as nuisances or threats, simply for occupying public areas. This perception can result in discriminatory treatment, including being asked to leave or even facing physical removal, which reinforces the idea that they do not belong in spaces that are meant to be accessible to all members of society (Petis, 2024). Security personnel, rather than being trained to handle situations with empathy or understanding, may instead adopt an approach that further marginalises these individuals, viewing them as disruptive to the social order rather than as people in need of support. This exclusionary behaviour is often compounded by broader societal attitudes that stigmatise homelessness, making it even harder for individuals to access basic rights and services (Pietermaritzburg Addiction Support, 2023). As public spaces become increasingly hostile to the

homeless, the cycle of exclusion and criminalisation intensifies, exacerbating the challenges they face in finding safety and stability.

5.3.2 Crimes Committed against homeless people

5.3.2.1 Petty theft

Petty theft is a frequent offence among homeless individuals, often committed out of necessity or desperation. Routine Activity Theory explains that the lack of financial resources and access to basic necessities can drive homeless people to engage in such behaviour (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Labelling Theory suggests that once individuals are labelled as thieves, they may internalise this identity and continue engaging in criminal activity (Becker, 1963). Social Learning Theory indicates that witnessing other homeless individuals resort to theft for survival may normalise the behaviour and perpetuate it (Bandura, 1977). In addition, General Strain Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding this phenomenon. According to Agnew (1992), individuals facing severe strain such as hunger, homelessness, and a lack of support are more likely to resort to crime when they cannot achieve their goals through legitimate means. These overlapping theories help to illustrate how structural disadvantage, societal responses, and learned behaviours collectively influence homeless individuals' involvement in petty theft.

Participant 6 confessed,

"Sometimes, I have to steal food to survive. It is not something I want to do, but hunger does not give you much choice."

This statement highlights the profound desperation many homeless individuals feel when they have no other means to meet their basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. In these dire circumstances, the need to survive becomes the top priority, overshadowing any moral considerations. With limited resources and support, theft can appear as the only option available to meet immediate needs. For many, stealing is not seen as a criminal act but rather as a survival strategy a way to protect themselves from the harsh realities of life on the streets (BackaBuddy, 2024; Pomeroy, 2007). General Strain Theory would suggest that the strain of persistent poverty and food

insecurity increases the likelihood of engaging in theft, especially when individuals lack coping resources (Agnew, 2001). The constant pressure to stay alive, coupled with the lack of access to essentials like healthcare or stable housing, forces individuals into a position where their need for survival often outweighs their ethical values.

This situation exposes a broader societal problem, that when systems fail to provide for the most vulnerable, people are left with little choice but to resort to desperate measures to fulfill their basic human needs (City of Durban, 2023; Human Sciences Research Council, 2021). The need for survival, when confronted with systemic failures in housing and healthcare, can lead individuals to commit acts they would otherwise avoid. Routine Activity Theory further underlines that the lack of capable guardianship and motivated offenders in the presence of suitable targets such as unsupervised goods sets the stage for opportunistic crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Participant 11 shared,
"I have stolen a few small things like clothing from stores. It is either that or freeze on the streets."

Participant 11 added,
"We get food from the feeding scheme; they serve it at specific times. Sometimes we do not all get the food and that forces us to make other means of ensuring that we feed ourselves and sometimes those ways are against the law."

These accounts highlight the harsh reality that homeless individuals often face, where engaging in petty theft seems like the lesser evil compared to the dangers of surviving without basic needs like shelter or clothing. Social Learning Theory supports this pattern: observing and interacting with peers who resort to theft as a survival mechanism may reinforce and legitimise such behaviour (Akers & Sellers, 2013). For many living on the streets, the immediate threats of exposure to the elements, extreme temperatures, or physical violence outweigh the moral concerns about stealing (BackaBuddy, 2024; Pomeroy, 2007). In a situation where securing essentials like food, warm

clothes, or a safe place to sleep is a constant struggle, theft can become a survival tactic, a necessary step to protect oneself from the more dangerous aspects of life on the streets.

Labelling Theory is also relevant here. Once caught stealing, homeless individuals may acquire a criminal label that restricts their access to employment or housing opportunities, reinforcing their marginalisation and increasing the likelihood of continued criminal behaviour (Becker, 1963; Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006). General Strain Theory suggests that this repeated failure to secure legitimate outcomes, despite effort, produces anger and frustration, pushing individuals towards coping strategies such as theft (Agnew, 2006). This constant trade-off between survival and morality underscores the dehumanising conditions of homelessness, where desperate circumstances drive individuals into a cycle of criminal activity as a means of coping with a seemingly hopeless situation.

5.3.2.2 Drug-Related Offenses

Drug-related offences are prevalent among the homeless population, with many individuals involved in the drug trade either as users or minor sellers. Their participation is often driven by addiction, the need to self-medicate, and the desire to earn money, no matter how meagre. Routine Activity Theory explains that the environment in which homeless people live, often marked by the availability of drugs and absence of capable guardianship, fuels their involvement in drug-related offences as a means of coping with their harsh living conditions (Pomeroy, 2007; Cohen & Felson, 1979). Labelling Theory suggests that once homeless individuals are branded as drug addicts, they may internalise these societal labels, reinforcing their drug-related behaviours and identity over time (Becker, 1963; Matsueda, 1992). Social Learning Theory further posits that continuous exposure to peers who engage in drug use or sales contributes to the normalisation and imitation of these behaviours (Akers, 2009). In addition, General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) helps to explain how persistent socio-economic strain, such as unemployment, lack of documentation, and street

victimisation, may result in negative emotions that drive individuals towards drug use and dealing as coping mechanisms.

Participant 2 said
“Jobs for us are very scarce and at times we take whatever it is available to provide for ourselves, even if it means selling drugs.”

Participant 5 explained,
"I've sold small amounts of drugs to get by. I'm addicted myself, and it’s a way to make some money."

Participant 8 also said, *“I lost my Identity Document (ID) long time ago, and I do not have the means to make a new one. Whenever I try to apply for jobs they need it, and without it kunzima ukuthola umsebenzi (hard to get a job). I was offered a chance to sell drugs and I took it, now I am a drug addict as I ended up using them for myself as well.”*

This illustrates that drugs play a complex and dual role in the lives of homeless individuals, acting both as a means of escaping the brutal realities of life on the streets and as a source of income that sustains their survival (Moyo, Patel, & Ross, 2015; Mkhize, 2022). For many, substances offer a temporary reprieve from the constant physical and emotional pain of homelessness, numbing feelings of despair, isolation, and trauma. This escape, however, often comes at a steep cost, as the need to feed an addiction can push individuals into criminal activity, such as theft or drug dealing, to support their habit (Fischer & Breakey, 1991; Tyler, 2006). The reliance on drugs not only exacerbates their physical and mental health issues but also traps them in a cycle of poverty and criminalisation, where the very mechanisms of survival contribute to a continued spiral of addiction and legal troubles (Maree, 2017). General Strain Theory offers a useful lens here, as the persistent failure to achieve positively valued goals (like employment, stability, or social acceptance) leads to emotional strain and deviant adaptations such as substance abuse and petty crime as maladaptive coping responses (Agnew, 1992).

Participant 13 added,

"Using drugs is a way to escape from the reality of living on the streets, even if it's just for a while."

This statement highlights the fleeting relief that drugs offer to homeless individuals, providing a temporary escape from the overwhelming stresses of street life, such as hunger, exposure, constant danger, and emotional trauma (Moyo et al., 2015). For many, substances act as a coping mechanism that dulls the harsh reality they face daily, giving them a brief sense of peace or comfort in an otherwise hostile and unforgiving environment. However, while drugs may offer short-term reprieve, they also trap individuals in a destructive cycle that reinforces their homelessness (Fischer & Breakey, 1991; Mkhize, 2022). As addiction takes hold, the need for more substances often leads to risky behaviour, such as engaging in illegal activities like theft, dealing drugs, or other criminal acts, which only further isolate them from society and perpetuate their criminalisation (Maree, 2017; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). Ultimately, the temporary relief provided by drugs does not address the root causes of their suffering but instead contributes to an ongoing pattern of dependence and exclusion that keeps individuals trapped in the very conditions they seek to escape.

5.3.2.3 Public Disorder

Public disorder offences, such as loitering, public intoxication, and minor vandalism, are also common among homeless individuals. These behaviours often arise due to the lack of private or secure spaces where they can seek refuge or relax. Routine Activity Theory suggests that without access to alternative spaces, homeless individuals are forced to occupy public areas, leading to behaviours that are criminalised (Desmond et al., 2016). Labelling Theory suggests that the homeless are often labelled as "public nuisances," which in turn contributes to their social exclusion and criminalisation. Social Learning Theory indicates that the normalisation of these behaviours among homeless individuals, often through peer influence, reinforces the likelihood of such offences being committed.

Participant 2 stated,

"We have nowhere else to go, so we end up loitering in public spaces. It's not because we want to

cause trouble."

Participant 5 also said,
"Streets are our primary residences, sometimes there are no dustbins around and when we eat we just throw the empty boxes around."

Participant 6 emphasised,
"... it is not always the case that we just loiter, sometimes we are keeping some stuff as we will later need them, and our storages are sometimes under the bridge, by the roadside and even by the trees, as those areas are the places we live in"

This highlights the severe lack of options available to homeless individuals, where public spaces parks, streets, doorways, or benches become their only refuge, despite being spaces meant for everyone. When basic necessities like shelter and safety are out of reach, these public spaces transform into makeshift homes, despite the legal and social barriers that make their presence there unwanted or unlawful (Culhane, 2018). With no alternatives, the act of seeking shelter in these spaces, something most people take for granted, becomes criminalized, further stigmatising homeless individuals. Rather than addressing the root causes of homelessness such as lack of affordable housing, mental health support, or employment society often punishes individuals for trying to meet their basic human need for shelter, subjecting them to fines, arrests, or displacement.

The criminalisation of actions like sleeping in public or seeking refuge in open spaces highlights the systemic failures that trap people in a cycle of poverty. When individuals are penalised for simply trying to survive, they face a cascade of consequences that make it even harder to break free from homelessness. These legal actions not only exacerbate the physical hardships of homelessness but also contribute to the emotional and psychological toll, reinforcing a sense of worthlessness, hopelessness, and social exclusion (Doherty, 2008). Public spaces, which should offer sanctuary for all, instead become sites of conflict and punishment, perpetuating the criminalisation of those who, through no fault of their own, are left with nowhere else to go. The failure to provide adequate housing or social services leaves homeless individuals with few choices but to seek shelter in places where their presence is viewed as a nuisance or a threat, resulting in an endless cycle of criminalisation and further entrenching their vulnerable position in society (Rule-Groenewald, 2015).

Participant 7 added,

"When you are living on the streets, sometimes you do things out of frustration and anger, like breaking a window or getting drunk in public."

This reflects the emotional toll of homelessness, where frustration and the absence of coping mechanisms can lead to behavior that is later labeled as criminal. This not only perpetuates the cycle of marginalisation but also reinforces the stigmatisation of homeless individuals (Mkhize, 2022).

5.3.3 The impact of homelessness on community safety and well-being

Participant 17:

"While my car was parked outside my apartment one day, it was broken into. The thief managed to steal my laptop and several personal items. Later, I learned that the culprit was a homeless person who had been seen in the area. It is incredibly frustrating, and I cannot shake the feeling of being unsafe in what should be my own secure neighborhood."

Participant 18:

"I run a small shop in the CBD, and lately, we have been experiencing a lot of thefts, mostly by homeless individuals who come in and steal things. Just last week, someone helped themselves to a bunch of snacks and drinks without paying. It is incredibly challenging to keep a business running when you are constantly dealing with this kind of theft and disruption."

Participant 19:

"One night, I was woken up by loud noises coming from outside my window. When I looked out, I saw a group of homeless people in the middle of a violent altercation. It was genuinely terrifying, and I immediately called the police. Unfortunately, this kind of disturbance has been happening regularly, and it is really taking a toll on the overall quality of life in our neighborhood."

Participant 20:

"I was at the park with my children when we were approached by a homeless person who was clearly

intoxicated. He started yelling and behaving aggressively, making us feel very unsafe. We had no choice but to leave the park immediately. It is disheartening that we can no longer enjoy public spaces without feeling threatened."

Participant 21:

"My friend was mugged by a homeless person while she was waiting for a taxi. The thief took her phone and wallet, and she was left traumatised by the experience. Now, she avoids that area altogether, and it is hard for her to feel safe in public places."

Participant 22:

"In our neighborhood, there have been multiple incidents of vandalism, most of which appear to be linked to homeless individuals. Just recently, someone spray-painted graffiti on our building. It is really disheartening to see our community deteriorating like this and to feel helpless in stopping it."

Participant 23:

"I was out walking my dog early one morning when a homeless person approached me in an aggressive manner, demanding money. I felt scared for my safety and had to quickly leave the area. It is becoming increasingly hard to feel secure in our own city with so many unpredictable and unsafe encounters."

Participant 24:

"One evening, as I was walking home from work, a man suddenly approached me and asked for money. When I explained that I did not have any cash on me, he seised my bag and ran off with it. I was left standing there, shaken and without my belongings, completely caught off guard by the whole ordeal."

Routine Activity Theory suggests that crime occurs when three factors converge: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and a lack of capable guardians. The experiences shared by community members illustrate how everyday activities and routines expose individuals to risks. For instance, Participant 24 describes being mugged while walking home from work, and Participant 21 shares an account of her friend being robbed while waiting for a taxi. Both incidents highlight how homeless individuals, often driven by desperation, take advantage of moments when there is no one around to

protect potential victims. These opportunities are a direct result of the absence of effective guardianship, like police presence or other protective measures, which leaves the community vulnerable (Culhane, 2018).

Social Learning Theory sheds light on how criminal behaviours can be learned and perpetuated through social interactions, especially in environments where survival depends on such actions. Many homeless individuals, lacking other means of support, may resort to theft, having learned this behavior from others in similar circumstances. Participant 6 and Participant 11 both speak about resorting to theft as a necessary means to fulfill basic needs, while Participant 18 discusses repeated incidents of shoplifting in their store. These examples show how, through observation and imitation, individuals in the homeless community may adopt survival strategies that include criminal activity. Participant 20's unsettling experience with an intoxicated individual in the park further demonstrates how such behaviors are not just learned but also normalized within certain groups (Fischer & Breakey, 1991).

Labelling Theory offers valuable insight into the societal perceptions of both the homeless and the community's response to them. The way society labels homeless individuals can lead to stigmatisation, making it easier for the community to see them as inherently criminal or dangerous. Participant 17's reaction to a car break-in and Participant 22's frustration with vandalism in the neighborhood reflect this tendency to associate homelessness with crime. Such labels often lead to further marginalisation, reinforcing negative stereotypes and making it difficult for individuals experiencing homelessness to break free from the cycle of criminal behavior and exclusion. The community's labeling of the homeless as a threat can also contribute to a vicious cycle, where both groups are trapped in a strained relationship (Mkhize, 2022).

The experiences shared by Participant 19 and Participant 23 provide further insight into the growing tension between the homeless and the broader community. These accounts of disturbances, aggression, and insecurity point to a deteriorating sense of safety and belonging in the neighborhood. Frequent confrontations between the homeless and community members undermine trust and increase feelings of fear, with participants expressing discomfort in public spaces. This highlights the urgent need for multifaceted solution approaches that not only focus on improving the safety of residents but also address the root causes of homelessness. Such solutions could help create a more

cohesive community, where both the homeless and the general public can coexist with greater understanding and security (Desmond et al., 2016).

5.4 Addressing homelessness and crime prevention measures: Municipal programs in Durban and Pietermaritzburg's BCD area.

5.4.1 Provision of safe housing and shelters

5.4.1.1 Provision of emergency shelters

Municipalities have set up emergency shelters as an immediate response to homelessness, providing temporary housing to homeless individuals and offering secure refuge that shields them from exposure to crime (City of Durban, 2023). These shelters are essential interventions that not only give homeless people a place to stay, but also ensure access to necessities like food, clothing, and sanitation facilities. As participant 3 mentioned, *"we sometimes get small jobs and with the little money we get we try to buy food and sanitary pads. However, the money is never enough. Most of the time we are assisted by the shelters around where we are given gree food, clothes and blankets to keep us warm"*. By addressing these urgent needs, emergency shelters minimise the time homeless individuals spend in unsafe environments, effectively reducing their susceptibility to crimes such as theft and assault. Additionally, emergency shelters often serve as a stepping stone to broader support services, offering individuals the opportunity to begin their journey towards stability, rehabilitation, and long-term solutions.

5.4.1.2 Transitional Housing Programs

Transitional housing programs play a vital role in helping individuals move from emergency shelters into more stable, permanent housing solutions, thus aiding their reintegration into society (eThekwini Municipality, 2023). Participant 25 mentioned, *"as community members and people who run some businesses in our local communities we try our best to assist homeless people. We employ some to assist with cleaning in our shops, washing our cars and cultivating our gardens."* These programs go beyond simply providing a roof; they offer comprehensive services such as case management, life skills development, and access to employment and educational opportunities. The goal of transitional

housing is to empower individuals with the resources and skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency and secure permanent housing. By establishing a clear pathway out of homelessness, these programs not only help reduce the likelihood of individuals returning to the streets, but also decrease their risk of becoming involved in or falling victim to crime (Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016; Tipple & Speak, 2005).

The General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) provides a useful lens for understanding the pathways through which homelessness may lead to criminality. Homeless individuals often experience chronic strains such as financial instability, social rejection, and lack of opportunities that contribute to emotional distress. Transitional housing programs serve to reduce these strains by offering emotional and practical support, thereby lowering the likelihood that individuals will resort to crime as a coping mechanism. By alleviating these stressors and fostering social inclusion, such programs play a preventative role in reducing crime rates and promoting personal rehabilitation (Agnew, 2001; Baron, 2008). While transitional housing may serve as a temporary solution, its success in ensuring long-term housing and personal transformation remains debatable. The continued visibility of large homeless populations in cities such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg raises legitimate concerns about the efficacy of existing programs (HSRC, 2021; Khulisa Social Solutions, 2022). For instance, some participants revealed that after leaving transitional shelters, they lacked follow-up support or were unable to find affordable housing, resulting in reversion to street homelessness.

This highlights a critical gap, transitional programs, while helpful, may be insufficiently structured for long-term impact. Without proper exit strategies such as subsidised permanent housing, long-term employment, and psycho-social support the risk of relapse into homelessness remains high. Moreover, many programs are underfunded or fragmented, lacking the multi-sectoral cooperation necessary to tackle the complexity of homelessness (Richter, Chigunta, & Panday, 2021).

This problem demands multi-agency intervention. International best practices illustrate the effectiveness of partnerships among government departments (housing, health, social development), NGOs, religious institutions, private enterprises, and international donors (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; FEANTSA, 2022). Therefore, the establishment of a robust multi-stakeholder framework, backed by coherent legislation and integrated funding models, is crucial to ensuring that transitional housing is not just a stop-gap measure, but a genuine pathway toward permanent housing and meaningful reintegration. To achieve this, policy revisions are needed. Existing transitional housing programs

should be re-evaluated and amended to include extended duration of support, skills development linked directly to employment pipelines, and coordinated post-shelter placement monitoring. Most importantly, laws and frameworks must also be introduced or strengthened to regulate crimes committed by and against homeless individuals, recognising their unique vulnerability in both respects (DeVerteuil, May, & von Mahs, 2009; Sadiki, 2016).

5.4.2 Employment and Vocational Training Programs

5.4.2.1 Job placement services

Municipalities in urban centres such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg have increasingly recognised the significance of job placement services as a critical intervention to reduce homelessness and associated criminal behaviour (Durban Economic Development, 2023). These services include job fairs, collaborations with local businesses, skills development workshops, and personal development sessions, all aimed at making homeless individuals employable. Participant 8 shared that, *"I have stress and keeping busy during the day assist me not to dwell much on my stressors. Getting some gigs from the business owners and some community members around does assist me in so many aspects".* This reveals the psychosocial relief and self-worth that employment opportunities can offer to homeless individuals. The *General Strain Theory* (Agnew, 1992) helps explain how joblessness and homelessness generate strain, which can manifest in criminal coping mechanisms. Therefore, by offering employment pathways, job placement services help mitigate strain and reduce criminal inclinations.

Homeless individuals often face compounded challenges such as lack of formal addresses, stigmatisation, lack of identification documents, and minimal recent job experience all of which reduce employability (HSRC, 2021). To address these barriers, municipalities and NGOs have started partnering with community businesses, providing incentives such as tax relief or public recognition to encourage inclusive hiring (eThekwini Municipality, 2023). Drawing from *Labelling Theory* (Becker, 1963), such partnerships challenge negative societal labels associated with homelessness by creating opportunities for dignity and contribution, thereby shifting public perceptions.

The viability of these services, however, requires sustained and systematic support. Without institutional mechanisms such as temporary work permits, mobile documentation offices, and employer-employee mediation job placement remains limited in impact (Tshishonga, 2018). The *Routine Activity Theory* (Cohen & Felson, 1979) also affirms that once homeless individuals are engaged in structured employment, their likelihood of engaging in or falling victim to crime decreases, as employment introduces routine, responsibility, and a controlled environment. Job placement thus becomes both a protective and preventive strategy in urban crime prevention and homelessness alleviation.

5.4.2.2 Skills training and development

Vocational training and skill development programmes are vital resources designed to enhance the employability of homeless individuals, helping them secure long-term and sustainable employment (Pietermaritzburg Training Council, 2023). These programmes often focus on practical fields such as carpentry, culinary arts, plumbing, welding, and information technology sectors where manual and technical skills are highly valued and not always dependent on formal qualifications. By equipping participants with marketable skills, these initiatives aim to break the cycle of unemployment and reduce the risk of criminal engagement associated with economic desperation.

When considering who is responsible for offering such training, it is important to recognise the collaborative role that multiple stakeholders must play. While municipal governments often coordinate these efforts, the active participation of local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based groups, and the private sector is essential for sustainable impact. For instance, Participant 26 and 27 noted, *"We understand that not all the people who live in the street are criminals. Some left home due to personal reasons and those reasons do not make them bad people. Hence, in our community police forum meetings, we usually discuss about possible ways that we can assist those who are living in the street, to keep them busy so that they are not tempted to engage in criminal activities."* Participant 28 further illustrated this point: *"In our community, we have community projects designed for the unemployed. It is co-ordinated by the retired elders with the purpose of transferring some skills to those who can make the best out of them."* These statements

reflect grassroots involvement and signal the importance of community-driven responses to homelessness and unemployment.

Funding for such programmes often comes from a combination of municipal budgets, donor funding, social investment from the private sector, and government grants (Durban Economic Development, 2023; Pietermaritzburg Training Council, 2023). This multifaceted funding approach highlights the necessity of strong public-private partnerships to finance and sustain these initiatives effectively (McCombes, 2019). Additionally, involving employers early in the training process through internships, apprenticeships, or job-shadowing agreements has been shown to increase the likelihood of successful post-training employment (Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Johnsen, 2020). Rather than placing the burden solely on employers to hire homeless individuals, many of whom may face stigma, lack formal documentation, or experience gaps in employment history, structured programmes act as bridging mechanisms by preparing candidates with relevant skills, work readiness, and ongoing support, thereby assuring businesses of their potential value as employees (Bandura, 1977; Becker, 1963).

Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) provides a compelling framework for understanding the preventive value of employment. It posits that when individuals are occupied with legitimate, structured activities (such as work or training), they have fewer opportunities or motivations to commit crimes. Employment thus functions as a protective factor by imposing a daily routine and reducing idle time. Additionally, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasises the importance of learned behaviour through interaction with prosocial role models. In structured vocational programmes, homeless individuals are exposed to positive reinforcement, constructive feedback, and peer networks that reinforce law-abiding behaviour. Labelling Theory (Becker, 1963) also offers insight by highlighting how employment and skills acquisition can challenge the negative stereotypes often associated with homelessness. Through visible participation in the workforce, individuals are more likely to be perceived as capable, responsible citizens, thus reducing social stigma and aiding in long-term reintegration.

5.4.3 Mental health and addiction support services

5.4.3.1 Accessible Mental Health Care

Municipalities recognise the critical link between mental health and homelessness, which often aggravates criminal behaviour, and have therefore tailored mental health care services to meet the unique needs of homeless individuals (KwaZulu-Natal Health Department, 2023). These services typically include a wide range of interventions such as counselling, psychotherapy, medication management, and immediate crisis intervention. The goal is to provide timely and effective mental health care that can address conditions such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and bipolar disorder conditions that are not only common among the homeless but also contribute to cycles of homelessness and criminal behaviour. Participant 29 mentioned, *"I understand the frustration that being away from your family is a disturbing factor and that has an impact in ones' mental health. Most of the homeless people that I have communicated with have high stress levels and anxiety which result in them not thinking straight"*. By addressing mental health challenges, municipalities aim to break the link between mental illness and crime, offering individuals the support needed to regain control over their lives. Access to mental health care can significantly reduce the risk of individuals engaging in criminal activities as a result of untreated mental health issues. Moreover, by ensuring that individuals receive proper care and support, municipalities help foster healthier, more stable communities and promote the overall well-being of vulnerable populations.

5.4.4 Substance abuse rehabilitation programs

5.4.4.1

Substance abuse is another significant factor that contributes to both homelessness and criminal behaviour, with many individuals turning to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism for trauma, mental health issues, or life on the streets (Pietermaritzburg Addiction Support, 2023). To address this, municipalities offer comprehensive substance abuse rehabilitation programs aimed at reducing drug-related offenses within the homeless population. Participant 30 mentioned that *"Most of the homeless people who break in to our houses they steal items which they end up selling at a low price just to feed their addictions, so I really recommend that they attend some rehabilitation programs if*

possible, so that they can deal with their addiction". These rehabilitation programs include detoxification services, residential treatment facilities, outpatient care, and various forms of support groups. Detoxification services help individuals safely manage withdrawal symptoms, while residential treatment programs provide an immersive, structured environment where participants can focus on recovery without the distractions of their everyday lives (Green, 2023). Outpatient care and support groups offer ongoing assistance to ensure that individuals maintain their sobriety and stay on track with their recovery goals. By addressing the root cause of addiction, these programs help individuals break free from the cycle of substance abuse and criminal behaviour, promoting long-term recovery and stability. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood of individuals committing crimes related to drug use, such as theft or assault, as they gain greater control over their lives and decisions.

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) provides a compelling argument for how addressing underlying mental health and addiction issues can reduce crime by lowering the opportunities for criminal behaviour. According to this theory, when individuals have the support, they need to manage their mental health and addiction challenges, they are less likely to engage in criminal acts. Instead, they are better equipped to make positive choices and avoid risky behaviours that could lead to criminal involvement (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Mental health and addiction support services give individuals the necessary tools to cope with their conditions in healthier ways, offering them an alternative to criminal behaviour.

In line with Social Learning Theory, rehabilitation services emphasise the importance of learning new, positive coping mechanisms and behaviours. Through counselling, therapy, and support groups, individuals can adopt healthier ways of responding to stress, anxiety, and trauma, thereby decreasing the likelihood of relapse into harmful behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, Labelling Theory highlights how mental health and addiction should be treated as medical conditions rather than moral failings. By reframing these issues, municipalities reduce the stigma associated with homelessness, mental illness, and addiction, creating an environment where recovery is seen as achievable. This stigma reduction promotes not only recovery but also the reintegration of individuals into society as valued members, further contributing to their successful rehabilitation (Becker, 1963).

5.4.5 Community engagement and support

5.4.5.1 Public education campaigns

Municipalities play an essential role in fostering understanding and empathy towards homeless individuals through public education campaigns aimed at raising awareness about homelessness and dispelling common myths and misconceptions (Durban Social Services, 2023). These campaigns are designed to educate the broader community about the complex factors that contribute to homelessness, such as mental health issues, addiction, economic hardship, and systemic inequalities. Participant 12 said, *"being part of the campaign programs help us, as it gives us a chance to share our experiences and gives a chance for people to understand us better"*. By providing information on the realities of homelessness, these initiatives challenge prevalent stereotypes, such as the idea that all homeless individuals are lazy or unwilling to work, and instead highlight the circumstances and struggles that many individuals face. Through a variety of mediums, including public service announcements, social media, workshops, and community meetings, these campaigns seek to humanise homeless individuals and promote empathy. Participant 7 and 8 mentioned that *"we do not like to be labelled as criminals, just because they are living on the streets. We are community members who does not have shelters"*. The goal of these public education campaign is to reduce the social stigma associated with homelessness, making it easier for individuals to access the help they need without fear of judgment or discrimination. By promoting understanding, these campaigns not only reduce harassment and discrimination but also help create a more compassionate, supportive community. This, in turn, reduces the social isolation that many homeless individuals experience and encourages the community to see them as deserving of dignity, respect, and opportunities for improvement.

5.4.5.2 Community integration programs

In addition to public education, municipalities also develop community integration programs that facilitate the inclusion of homeless individuals into the social fabric of their communities (Pietermaritzburg Community Outreach, 2023). These initiatives aim to build meaningful connections between homeless individuals and other community members through events, volunteer opportunities, and mentorship programs. Community events, such as social gatherings, outreach activities, and cultural celebrations, provide spaces where homeless individuals can engage with their neighbours in positive, supportive settings. Participant 10 said *"as someone who lives in the streets,*

I really appreciate it when I get to attend a community meeting without being judged as someone who is gatecrushing but being seen as a community member". Volunteer opportunities allow homeless individuals to contribute to their communities, helping to foster a sense of belonging and self-worth. Mentorship schemes pair homeless individuals with community mentors who offer guidance, and emotional support, and help navigate the challenges of reintegration. These programs are designed to counteract the isolation and marginalisation that often accompany homelessness by creating networks of support that promote inclusion. By fostering these connections, the community helps homeless individuals feel valued and connected, while also encouraging positive social interactions that can lead to more stable and productive lives. Ultimately, these initiatives work to break down the barriers that perpetuate homelessness and criminal behaviour, providing homeless individuals with the social capital and resources they need to succeed.

Labelling Theory offers a crucial lens for understanding the impact of societal attitudes on homeless individuals, emphasising the need to change public perceptions to prevent further marginalisation and discrimination (Becker, 1963). Public education campaigns and community integration programs are central to this process, as they challenge the negative stereotypes that often surround homelessness. By reshaping how society views homeless individuals, these programs can help remove the stigma and pave the way for more equitable treatment. Social Learning Theory further suggests that community-based programs provide valuable opportunities for positive social interactions, allowing homeless individuals to learn from supportive role models and adopt prosocial behaviours (Bandura, 1977). These interactions can help individuals develop healthy coping mechanisms and reduce the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. Moreover, Routine Activity Theory highlights the protective role that community support plays in preventing crime. By strengthening social ties and increasing the presence of "capable guardians" within the community individuals who look out for each other's well-being, these initiatives create an environment where the opportunities for crime are diminished, and the safety of all community members is enhanced (Cohen & Felson, 1979). By fostering a more inclusive, supportive environment, municipalities help prevent the social alienation and criminal behavior that often accompany homelessness.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter thematically presented and discussed the research findings derived from qualitative data collected in Durban and Pietermaritzburg Central Business Districts. The main themes and sub-themes were guided by the study's objectives and research questions, thereby ensuring conceptual alignment with the theoretical framework and core concerns of the investigation. The analysis drew on Routine Activity Theory, Social Learning Theory, Labelling Theory, and General Strain Theory to deepen understanding of the interplay between homelessness and crime.

The first theme focused on the underlying causes of the proliferation of homelessness in the two urban centres. It emerged that economic precarity, including job loss, low wages, and escalating housing costs was a key driver. Participants reported being unable to afford housing or retain employment, often resulting in eviction or displacement. These experiences were compounded by family breakdown, domestic violence, mental health conditions, and substance dependency. Structural and systemic failures such as limited government support, stigma, and inadequate access to services exacerbated the situation. This aligns with General Strain Theory, which posits that the accumulation of stressors, coupled with the absence of legitimate coping resources, leads individuals to adopt deviant survival strategies. These findings highlight the urgent need for coordinated policy responses and community-based interventions that address both individual vulnerabilities and systemic shortcomings.

The second theme examined the dual role of homeless individuals as both victims and perpetrators of crime. On the one hand, crimes committed against the homeless included physical assault, theft, and frequent harassment by members of the public and law enforcement agencies. These acts intensified their marginalisation and reinforced their exclusion from protective institutions. On the other hand, crimes committed by homeless people, such as petty theft, public intoxication, substance use, and trespassing often emerged from necessity and survival. Social Learning Theory explains how criminal behaviours can become normalised within homeless subcultures, especially where crime is perceived as the only viable path to subsistence. Labelling Theory also provides insight into how stigmatisation and criminal records entrench individuals in cycles of exclusion, further reducing their access to housing and employment. These interconnected forms of victimisation and criminalisation underscore the need for trauma-informed, rights-based interventions that uphold human dignity while addressing community safety.

The final theme focused on programmes implemented to respond to homelessness and its related social harms. While municipalities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have developed various responses including emergency shelters, transitional housing, addiction rehabilitation services, and employment training, the effectiveness of these interventions remains uneven. Many participants reported gaps in access, limited duration of support, and a lack of integration across services. Funding remains a persistent challenge, often relying on a combination of government grants, municipal budgets, private sector contributions, and donor support. This reinforces the necessity of public-private partnerships, where corporate social investment and community stakeholders collaborate to build sustainable, localised responses. Internships, job-shadowing, and structured employment pathways could be co-developed with employers to reduce post-training exclusion.

Crucially, the study highlighted that while programmes exist, their efficacy is compromised by poor implementation, fragmented coordination, and insufficient long-term planning. Given the growing visibility of homelessness and its link to urban crime in cities across South Africa, not only in Durban and Pietermaritzburg the need to revise and strengthen these initiatives is apparent. Routine Activity Theory, which emphasises the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardianship, supports the development of proactive, preventative strategies. These include strengthening social safety nets, introducing early intervention schemes for at-risk populations, and involving local communities and civil society in service delivery. Decision-makers at all levels should adopt a more evidence-based approach that aligns policies with on-the-ground realities uncovered in studies like this one. With that being said, this study does not merely diagnose the problem of homelessness in urban KwaZulu-Natal, it offers a pathway toward reform. By understanding the causes of homelessness and the reciprocal relationship between crime and street life, the findings equip decision-makers with grounded insights for designing more inclusive, humane, and effective strategies to curb homelessness and its associated social challenges nationwide.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the concluding section of the thesis, aiming to summarise and emphasise the key findings of the research. It will begin by linking the main findings to the study's objectives to show that the research goals were met. This will provide a clear connection between the research questions and the results. The chapter will also offer recommendations based on the findings. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the entire thesis, reflecting on the overall contributions of the research.

6.2 Summary of key findings

6.2.1 Objective one: To explore reasons leading to the increase in the number of

homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area

The researcher has found out that the rise in homelessness in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas is attributed to a complex interplay of factors, including economic instability, high rent costs, family breakdown, substance abuse, mental health issues, and systemic barriers. Economic instability, marked by job loss and insufficient wages, often made housing unaffordable for many, while escalating rent prices and frequent evictions worsened the situation, leaving individuals vulnerable and without a stable home. Family conflicts and domestic violence were also significant contributors, as they forced people, especially women and children, onto the streets in search of safety. Additionally, substance abuse and untreated mental health issues created further obstacles, with addiction leading to job loss and strained relationships, while mental health disorders prevented individuals from maintaining stable employment or managing daily life effectively.

Unfortunately, these personal challenges were compounded by systemic barriers, such as inadequate government support, a lack of accessible mental health and addiction services, and discrimination in housing and employment opportunities, all of which hindered efforts to secure stable housing. These interconnected factors formed a vicious cycle, where homelessness was not merely the result of individual failure, but a systemic issue requiring comprehensive solutions. These findings also align with participants' lived experiences, highlighting how structural inequalities and a lack of targeted social protection programmes deepen the crisis.

Addressing homelessness thus demands long-term strategies that include affordable housing policies, accessible mental health and addiction care, legal reforms to combat discrimination, and programs to reintegrate individuals into society. In addition, the study suggests that local municipalities and national government must strengthen data collection and monitoring systems, review the effectiveness of current programmes, and ensure alignment between social development, urban planning, and crime prevention. Only by tackling the root causes in a holistic way can the homelessness crisis be alleviated and affected individuals helped towards achieving lasting stability.

6.2.2 Objective two: To outline the crimes committed to and by the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area

The situation of homelessness in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas presented a deeply troubling intersection of victimisation and criminal behaviour, where homeless individuals faced heightened vulnerability from various sources. Crimes committed against them, such as physical violence and theft, were not only a reflection of their marginalisation but also a stark indication of the lack of societal empathy and protection for this vulnerable group. Homeless individuals were often subjected to assault and beatings by both the general public and fellow homeless people, with their limited possessions frequently stolen, leaving them even more destitute and exposed. This violence was compounded by harassment from law enforcement, where excessive force and frequent displacements worsened their living conditions and further destabilised their already fragile lives. The police's actions, intended to maintain public order, instead pushed homeless individuals further into the margins of society, making it harder for them to access basic rights like shelter and safety.

At the same time, crimes committed by homeless individuals often stem from a deep sense of desperation and survival. With little to no resources, homeless individuals resorted to petty theft for food, clothing, and necessities, highlighting the dire circumstances that led to these acts. Drug-related offences were another critical factor, with addiction exacerbated by the trauma and stress of homelessness, and the need to earn money to feed that addiction. These crimes, though criminal in nature, were also a reflection of the systemic failure to provide support for individuals facing homelessness, addiction, and mental health struggles. Public disorder offences, such as loitering or public intoxication, emerged as coping mechanisms in a society that offered no private spaces for the homeless to retreat or find peace. With limited access to shelter or safety, public spaces became their only option for survival, leading to clashes with law enforcement and further criminalisation of their existence.

The interplay between victimisation and criminal behaviour among the homeless highlighted a deeply rooted cycle of marginalisation that could not be addressed through punitive measures alone. This calls for a more compassionate and holistic approach to homelessness one that recognises the complex layers of trauma, economic instability, substance abuse, and mental health issues that many homeless individuals face. Rather than treating homelessness as a criminal issue, the focus needed to shift to providing safe housing, addiction treatment, mental health care, and employment opportunities to help individuals rebuild their lives. Legal reforms are also necessary to prevent the criminalisation of homelessness itself, and policies should be developed to reduce the stigma and

discrimination faced by this group.

6.2.3 Objective three: To identify possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and against homeless people.

Municipalities in Durban and Pietermaritzburg have rolled out a variety of programs designed to address homelessness and reduce the crimes committed by and against homeless individuals, with a focus on both immediate support and long-term solutions. One of the key aspects of these initiatives was the provision of safe housing and shelters, such as emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, which offered secure living environments for homeless individuals and played a critical role in reducing their vulnerability to crime. These shelters not only provided a safe space but also offered a temporary respite from the harsh realities of life on the streets, allowing individuals to regain a sense of stability and safety. In tandem with housing support, the municipalities introduced employment and vocational training programs aimed at improving economic stability among the homeless population. These programs included job placement services and skills development opportunities, providing individuals with the tools they needed to secure gainful employment, thereby helping to break the cycle of poverty and reduce the likelihood of criminal behaviour driven by financial desperation.

Recognising that homelessness is often linked to mental health and addiction issues, municipalities also expanded access to mental health care and substance abuse rehabilitation programs. These services addressed the underlying psychological and addiction-related factors contributing to criminal activities and helped homeless individuals develop healthier coping mechanisms, reducing the risk of re-offending. In addition to direct support services, the municipalities implemented community engagement initiatives, such as public education campaigns and community integration programs, aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting a more inclusive environment for homeless individuals. These efforts sought to raise awareness about the causes of homelessness, reduce stigma, and foster a sense of empathy and understanding among the general public.

6.2.4 Objective four: To evaluate the programs carried out by municipalities to address the challenges of a high number of homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg and their effectiveness

An evaluation of the municipal programs discussed revealed that while there have been several commendable initiatives aimed at mitigating homelessness and associated crimes, the effectiveness of these programs has been inconsistent and, in many cases, insufficient to address the scale and complexity of the issue. In both Durban and Pietermaritzburg, municipalities have introduced emergency shelters, job readiness programs, food security interventions, and substance abuse rehabilitation services. However, findings from interviews with municipal officials and stakeholders suggest that these efforts are often fragmented, poorly resourced, and lacking in interdepartmental coordination.

As observed in the narratives of municipal representatives and NGO personnel, temporary shelter facilities while essential are chronically overcrowded and underfunded, limiting their ability to provide long-term solutions. Many participants noted that although transitional housing options exist, the absence of exit plans, follow-up support, and permanent housing strategies often results in individuals cycling back into homelessness. This creates a revolving door phenomenon where short-term assistance does not translate into sustainable reintegration. Furthermore, job training and placement programs have had limited reach due to inadequate funding, low private sector involvement, and mismatches between training offerings and market demands.

The study also uncovered that while mental health and substance abuse services have been integrated into some programs, these are often overburdened and inaccessible to the majority of homeless individuals. Many service users highlighted logistical and bureaucratic barriers, such as needing formal identification documents or fixed addresses, to access municipal support, further marginalising an already vulnerable population. From a theoretical perspective, these findings resonate with Routine Activity Theory, which suggests that a lack of capable guardianship and suitable environments increases opportunities for both victimisation and criminal offending. The current limitations of municipal programs effectively reduce protective mechanisms for homeless people, exposing them to routine risks in public spaces. Likewise, Labelling Theory helps explain the counterproductive impact of punitive municipal by-laws, such as those criminalising begging or loitering which further stigmatise the homeless, discourage help-seeking behaviour, and entrench exclusion rather than enabling reintegration.

Despite some positive community engagement efforts noted in both cities, such as awareness

campaigns and collaborative work with civil society organisations, Chapter 5 revealed that there remains a disconnect between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground realities. While officials may report programmatic success, homeless individuals and frontline workers consistently highlighted implementation gaps, lack of consultation with affected populations, and insufficient long-term planning.

While the municipalities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg have taken steps to address homelessness through housing, social support, and crime reduction programs, their effectiveness is undermined by structural constraints, lack of continuity, and a failure to address the root socio-economic causes of homelessness. For these programs to yield meaningful impact, they must be restructured to ensure sustainability, inclusivity, and coordination across multiple sectors and levels of government. The evaluation findings in Chapter 5 strongly support the need for a holistic policy framework underpinned by human rights-based and development-centred approaches to homelessness and urban crime prevention.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1

Drawing from the findings of the research on the rising levels of homelessness in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas, the following recommendations are proposed to address the issue comprehensively and sustainably:

6.3.1 Economic support and job creation

- Public and private sector collaboration: It is essential to foster partnerships between government agencies and private enterprises to create sustainable job opportunities, particularly for marginalised and low-income individuals. This could be achieved by developing vocational training programs and skill development initiatives tailored to the specific needs of the local

economy. To incentivise businesses to participate, governments could offer tax breaks or other financial incentives to companies that hire and provide training for homeless individuals, thus promoting inclusive hiring practices and reducing barriers to employment.

- Advocacy for living wages: There is a pressing need to advocate for the implementation of living wage policies, ensuring that all workers earn enough to cover their basic needs, including housing. This could involve lobbying for higher minimum wage standards and supporting legislation that aligns wages with the increasing cost of living in urban areas. By addressing wage disparities, workers will be better positioned to escape the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

6.3.2 Affordable housing initiatives

- Rent control and financial support for tenants: To prevent displacement and housing instability, it is critical to introduce rent control measures that limit excessive rent hikes. Additionally, governments should offer rental subsidies to low-income families, helping them to maintain affordable housing. These subsidies can be funded through government programs, public-private partnerships, or through innovative financing models aimed at reducing the financial burden on vulnerable households.

- Expansion of affordable housing stock: There is an urgent need to significantly increase the availability of affordable housing. Governments should invest more in large-scale construction projects that prioritise affordable housing units, ensuring that they are accessible to those in need. Public funding should be complemented by providing incentives for private developers to include affordable units in their housing projects. Furthermore, zoning laws and regulations should be revisited and adjusted to streamline the development process, making it easier to build affordable housing in areas where it is most needed.

6.3.3 Family Support Services

- Family counselling and conflict resolution: Providing accessible and proactive family support services is key to preventing homelessness caused by domestic issues. Community centers

should offer free or low-cost counselling and conflict resolution services to help families resolve disputes before they escalate. This approach can help families navigate difficult situations, reduce stressors, and prevent individuals from being pushed into homelessness due to unresolved familial conflicts.

- Support for domestic violence victims: Strengthening support systems for survivors of domestic violence is crucial in preventing homelessness among this vulnerable group. This includes providing safe shelters, legal aid, counseling services, and long-term support to help survivors rebuild their lives. These services should be easily accessible, widely promoted, and tailored to the unique needs of those fleeing abusive situations.

6.3.4 Substance abuse and mental health services

- Integrated and holistic treatment programs: To effectively address the complex intersection of substance abuse and mental health challenges, integrated treatment programs must be developed. These programs should provide a comprehensive approach, combining medical treatment, therapy, counselling, and peer support groups. Collaboration between healthcare providers, social services, and community organisations is essential to ensure that individuals receive the care they need holistically, addressing both immediate and long-term needs.

- Public education and outreach: Public outreach campaigns should be expanded to raise awareness about the availability of mental health and substance abuse services, more especially to homeless individuals. Through educational workshops, community events, and collaborations with local organisations, individuals experiencing mental health challenges or substance dependency can be encouraged to seek help. Reducing stigma through public education will help individuals feel more comfortable accessing the support they need.

6.3.5 Systemic reforms

- Advocacy for policy change and increased government support: It is essential to advocate for comprehensive policy reforms that enhance government funding and support for homelessness

prevention programs. This could include expanding financial assistance programs for individuals at risk of homelessness, broadening access to housing support, and improving access to social services. Policies should prioritise long-term solutions rather than short-term fixes, ensuring sustainable support for those most in need.

- Implementation of anti-discrimination policies: Strong anti-discrimination laws should be enacted and rigorously enforced to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their circumstances, have equal access to housing and employment opportunities. Training for landlords and employers on fair housing practices and anti-discrimination laws is essential to ensure compliance. Additionally, providing legal recourse for those who experience discrimination can help mitigate barriers to housing and employment for vulnerable populations.

6.3.6 Community-Based Approaches

- Strengthening community engagement: Community engagement is a cornerstone of addressing homelessness. Local communities, including non-profits, faith-based organisations, and local businesses, should be mobilised to form coalitions that provide support and resources to homeless individuals. By fostering collaboration, communities can create a network of care that addresses homelessness from multiple angles, providing individuals with the resources they need to regain stability.

- Volunteer and mentorship programs: Volunteer programs can play a pivotal role in supporting homeless individuals as they transition to stable housing and employment. By offering mentorship, job training, and personal support, volunteers can help individuals build skills, gain confidence, and establish connections to resources. These programs should focus on offering tailored support that empowers individuals to overcome the specific challenges they face in their journey out of homelessness.

By addressing the root causes of homelessness through these holistic and interconnected recommendations, we can create an environment that not only helps individuals secure stable housing but also enhances their overall well-being. Successful implementation requires the concerted efforts of government bodies, private sector partners, community organisations, and individuals to ensure

that the solutions are both sustainable and impactful. Through a unified approach, we can work towards ending homelessness and improving the quality of life for all residents in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas.

6.4

Based on the findings regarding the intersection of victimisation and criminal behaviour among homeless individuals in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas, the researcher is recommending the following:

6.4.1 Improved protection and law enforcement reform

- Enhanced security and victim support: To address the vulnerabilities of homeless individuals, it is important to implement targeted measures that safeguard them from violence and theft. This includes increasing police patrols in high-density homeless areas and establishing designated safe zones. These zones should be well-lit, closely monitored, and easily accessible to offer secure refuge. However, it is acknowledged that increasing patrols alone may not serve as an effective deterrent, especially since some crimes committed by homeless individuals often occur away from their usual dwelling areas. Therefore, while security presence is necessary, it must be complemented by strategic interventions that address mobility patterns and reduce opportunities for crime. Furthermore, establishing support centres that offer medical care, counselling, and legal assistance remains essential in responding to the needs of homeless victims of crime.

- Law enforcement training and structured relocation policy: Law enforcement officials must undergo ongoing training focused on sensitivity, de-escalation, and the social drivers of homelessness. Such preparation is essential to ensure that interactions with homeless individuals are handled with appropriate understanding and professionalism. Yet, it is also recognised that continued tolerance of street living may undermine long-term urban safety and rehabilitation goals. In this regard, a more structured approach is necessary one that involves removing homeless individuals from open public spaces and placing them in secure, government-managed environments. These environments should not only provide for basic needs but also offer training aimed at equipping individuals with skills for eventual reintegration into society. While

compassion remains a guiding value, practical policy must extend beyond empathy to include assertive and coordinated efforts that curb the spread of homelessness, regulate movement, address illegal activities at homeless sites, and promote both security and social development.

6.4.2 Comprehensive social services and housing solutions

- Integrated service centres: Establish integrated service centers that offer a broad range of services, such as housing assistance, healthcare, mental health support, and substance abuse treatment. These centers should be strategically located in areas with high homeless populations, functioning as one-stop hubs for individuals in need. The services provided should be well-coordinated to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive and personalised support. For example, individuals facing both mental health challenges and substance abuse should have access to treatment plans that address both issues concurrently.

- Affordable housing initiatives: Increase the availability of emergency shelters that provide secure, temporary housing for homeless individuals. These shelters should be equipped with basic amenities such as food, hygiene facilities, and secure storage for personal belongings. In addition to temporary solutions, long-term housing strategies such as transitional housing and permanent supportive housing should be developed. Transitional housing can offer stability as individuals work towards independence, while permanent supportive housing ensures long-term security with ongoing support services. These housing options should be coupled with wraparound services to help residents maintain housing and improve their well-being.

6.4.3 Substance abuse and mental health treatment

- Holistic treatment programs: Design comprehensive treatment programs that address both substance abuse and mental health issues. These programs should offer a combination of medical treatment, counseling, and peer support groups, all tailored to the specific needs of homeless individuals. Collaboration between healthcare providers, social services, and community organizations is crucial to creating a well-rounded approach to care. For instance, a program might offer detoxification, followed by counseling and support groups to treat underlying mental

health issues and prevent relapse.

- Harm reduction approaches: Implement harm reduction strategies to mitigate the health risks associated with substance abuse. This could include needle exchange programs, supervised consumption areas, and access to naloxone to prevent overdose deaths. Harm reduction efforts should be accompanied by outreach and education campaigns to connect individuals with treatment and support services.

6.4.4 Economic empowerment and legal reforms

- Job training and employment programs: Develop specialised job training and placement programs for homeless individuals. These programs should focus on skills training, job readiness workshops, and linking participants with potential employers. Collaborations with local businesses and industries can help create job opportunities that match the skills and interests of homeless individuals. Additionally, social enterprises that employ homeless individuals can provide meaningful work opportunities and pathways to financial independence. These enterprises, ranging from small businesses to cooperatives, can offer a supportive work environment that promotes personal and professional development.

- Decriminalisation and anti-discrimination legislation: Advocate for the decriminalisation of behaviours associated with homelessness, such as loitering and public intoxication. Rather than relying on punitive measures, policies should prioritise providing support to address the root causes of these behaviours. Anti-discrimination laws should be enforced to protect homeless individuals from discrimination in housing, employment, and access to services. These laws should include legal recourse for those facing discrimination and public education campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage inclusivity.

6.5

Based on the initiatives introduced by municipalities in Durban and Pietermaritzburg to tackle homelessness and reduce associated crimes, the following recommendations are put forward:

- Enhanced housing and support services: Expanding emergency shelters and transitional housing programs is essential to provide homeless individuals with immediate, secure living spaces. These shelters should offer comprehensive support services, including case management, to help individuals transition to stable housing. They should be equipped with essential amenities such as food, hygiene facilities, and safe storage for personal belongings. Transitional housing programs should create a stable environment where individuals can work towards self-sufficiency with access to job training, education, and other support services. Permanent supportive housing should also be a focus, combining affordable housing with services like mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and life skills training to help individuals maintain long-term stability. Collaboration with non-profit organisations and private developers can help expand these housing solutions.

- Integrated employment and health services: Job training and placement programs should be enhanced to provide homeless individuals with the skills necessary to secure employment. Partnerships with local businesses and industries can help create job opportunities tailored to the skills and needs of the homeless population. These programs should include job readiness workshops, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training to develop the skills required for long-term employment. Additionally, social enterprises that employ homeless individuals can offer meaningful work and pathways to financial independence. Expanding access to integrated mental health care and substance abuse rehabilitation programs is also crucial. These programs should provide comprehensive treatment that includes medical care, counseling, and support groups. Harm reduction strategies, such as needle exchange programs and supervised consumption sites, should be implemented to reduce health risks. Outreach programs should also engage homeless individuals directly, offering immediate help and connecting them to services. Effective collaboration between healthcare providers, social services, and community organizations is key to ensuring a holistic approach.

- Community Engagement and Legal Reforms: Public education campaigns are needed to raise awareness about the causes of homelessness and reduce stigma. These campaigns should foster empathy and understanding, encouraging the community to support homeless individuals.

Community integration programs should also be developed to help homeless individuals feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, including events, volunteer opportunities, and partnerships with local organizations. These initiatives can help build essential social connections and support networks. Legal reforms should focus on decriminalizing behaviors associated with homelessness, such as loitering and public intoxication, and shift focus from punitive measures to providing supportive services. Policies that address systemic issues driving homelessness, such as increasing funding for affordable housing and mental health services, should be developed. Anti-discrimination policies should also be enforced to protect homeless individuals from discrimination in housing, employment, and access to services. Legal protections and recourse for those facing discrimination should be available, and public education campaigns should work to reduce stigma and promote inclusivity.

- Research and Monitoring: Ongoing research and evaluation are needed to assess the effectiveness of the programs and policies implemented. Regular assessments should be conducted to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. Establishing a robust data collection and analysis system will allow trends in homelessness, victimization, and criminal behavior to be tracked. This data will help guide policy decisions and ensure resources are allocated more effectively. Collaboration with academic institutions and research organizations can further enhance the quality and scope of research efforts.

By adopting these comprehensive recommendations, municipalities can create a more supportive and equitable environment for homeless individuals. This holistic approach recognises the complex nature of homelessness and seeks to provide the necessary support to help individuals rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society.

6.6 Chapter Summary

The rise in homelessness in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD areas is driven by factors such as economic instability, high rent, family breakdowns, substance abuse, mental health issues, and systemic barriers. Economic factors like job loss and rising rent, along with family conflicts and domestic violence, push individuals into homelessness, while mental health and addiction further

complicate the situation. Addressing homelessness requires long-term strategies like affordable housing, mental health and addiction care, legal reforms, and reintegration programs. To tackle the issue, recommendations include fostering public-private partnerships for job creation, advocating for living wages, implementing rent control, expanding affordable housing, strengthening family support, and enhancing substance abuse and mental health services. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the need for comprehensive, compassionate solutions to homelessness and its associated issues.

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ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interview schedule

1. **To explore reasons leading to the increase on the number of homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.**
   - How long have you been staying on the street?
   - How do you get daily food to eat?
   - How do you get clothes to wear and blankets to sleep with?
   - What has led you to end up living in the street?

- Would you take an opportunity to go back home or stay in the shelter or relatives? - motivate your answer.

2. **To outline the crimes committed by and to the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.**
   - What is your daily routine?
   - How do you make money to survive?
   - What do you do when the above is not met, what are your alternatives?
   - What are the risks/challenges of living in the streets?
   - What type of crimes have you witnessed whilst living in the streets?
   - What do you do when you see someone committing a crime and why you do that?
   - What do you do to protect yourself from any danger that may occur because of being homeless?
   - Have you been victimised by the homelessness person, if so, how?
   - Did you report them?
   - How do you think they affect the community?

3. **To identify possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and to homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg BCD area.**
   - How would you like to be assisted in to ensure that you have a better future?
   - What are your life goals and how are you planning to achieve them?
   - What is your view on crime in general?
   - How do you react/respond when someone is invading your territory?
   - How do you think crime can be prevented?
   - What do you think it can be done to prevent crimes committed to and by homeless people?

4. **To examine the programs carried out by municipalities to address the challenge of the high number of homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.**

- How does the municipality assist in dealing with the high number of people living in the streets?
- Which programs that have been implemented to address the high number of homeless people living in the street within your municipality?

- How effective have the programs been in dealing with the above-mentioned issue? Please explain your answer.

ANNEXURE B: UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL FULL APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

12 May 2022

Zipho Nomsasa Snyman (212518834)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear ZN Snyman,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002695/2021
Project title: An exploratory study on crime proliferation among homeless people in KwaZulu-Natal Province: Insight from Durban and Pietermaritzburg City Centre, South Africa.
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 06 May 2022 to our letter of 03 December 2021 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 for one year until 12 May 2023
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.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

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

.....
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

ANNEXURE C: GATE-KEEPER'S LETTER (PIETERMARITZBURG)

The Msunduzi Municipality
OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER

Private Bag X 321
Pietermaritzburg
3200
(033) 392 2882

City Hall, Chief Albert Luthuli Street
Pietermaritzburg
3201
www.msunduzi.gov.za

CITY OF CHOICE
PIETERMARITZBURG
MSUNDUZI

Enq: M C Jackson Tel. 033 392 2882 E-mail: [redacted].gov.za

Zipho Nomsasa Snyman
Criminology and Forensic Studies
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

Student No. 212518834

Per Email: [redacted]

RESEARCH CONSENT LETTER – "EXPLORATORY CRIME PROLIFERATION AMONG HOMELESS PEOPLE IN KWAZULU- NATAL PROVINCE: INSIGHT FROM DURBAN AND PIETERMARITZBURG CITY CENTRE, SOUTH AFRICA"

Your correspondence, received on the 17 February 2022, regarding the above has reference.

Please be advised that you hereby granted permission to conduct your research within Msunduzi Municipality, subject to the following conditions:

(i) You obtain the final ethical clearance and submit a copy to the Office of the Municipal Manager, c/o Ms. Madeleine Jackson as per the above contact details

(ii) Ensure that the Office of the City Manager is informed when you commence your research in the municipality.

(iii) You will forward a copy of the completed research report to the Office of the Municipal Manager, c/o Ms. Madeleine Jackson as per the above contact details.

(iv) None of the information and/or findings obtained during the research project will be used to construe the Municipality in a negative light and/or against the Municipality in any court of law.

(v) The Municipality will not be responsible and expected to provide resources for your study such as transport, research assistants, etc.

(vi) Permission must be obtained from the municipality prior to any publication or paper that will be published or presented containing municipal information.

(vii) The Municipality will not be held liable for any injury and/ or losses that may occur as a result of the study.

(viii) All COVID-19 protocols, as regulated by Government, are always adhered to for the duration of the research.

I trust the above is in order.

[redacted]

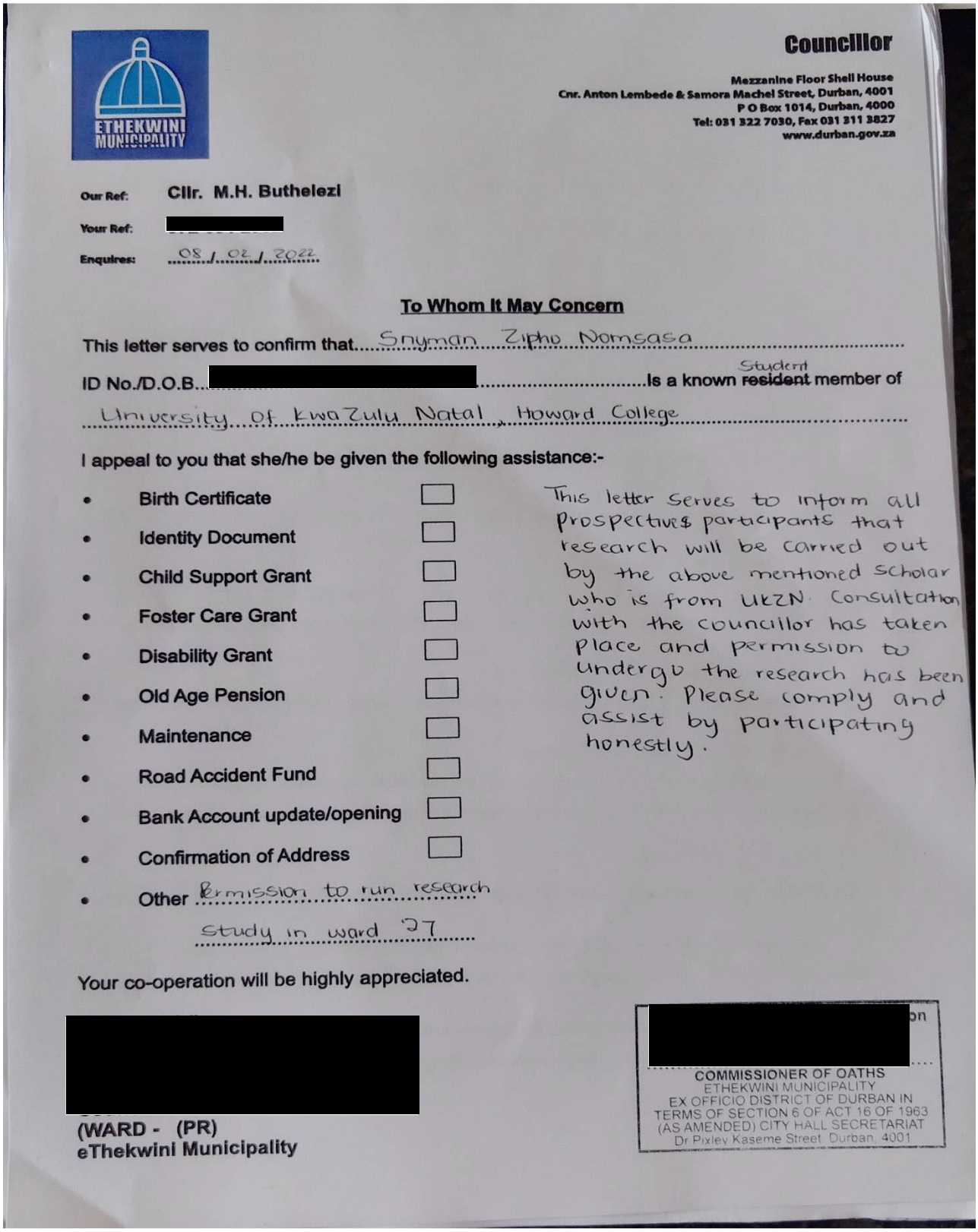
SENIOR MANAGER: OFFICE OF CITY MANAGER

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Telephone/uCingo: 033 3922002
Facsimile/iFekisi: 0866047309

Private Bag / Isikhwama: X321
Pietermaritzburg/uPietermaritzburg 3200

ANNEXURE D: GATE-KEEPER'S LETTER (DURBAN)



ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

Councillor

Mezzanine Floor Shell House
Cnr. Anton Lembede & Samora Machel Street, Durban, 4001
P O Box 1014, Durban, 4000
Tel: 031 322 7030, Fax 031 311 3827
www.durban.gov.za

Our Ref: Cllr. M.H. Buthelezi

Your Ref: [redacted]

Enquires: 08/02/2022

To Whom It May Concern

This letter serves to confirm that Snyman Zipho Nomsasa

ID No./D.O.B. [redacted] Is a known ~~resident~~ Student member of

University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard College

I appeal to you that she/he be given the following assistance:-

- Birth Certificate ☐
- Identity Document ☐
- Child Support Grant ☐
- Foster Care Grant ☐
- Disability Grant ☐
- Old Age Pension ☐
- Maintenance ☐
- Road Accident Fund ☐
- Bank Account update/opening ☐
- Confirmation of Address ☐
- Other Permission to run research study in ward 97

This letter serves to inform all prospective participants that research will be carried out by the above mentioned scholar who is from UKZN. Consultation with the councillor has taken place and permission to undergo the research has been given. Please comply and assist by participating honestly.

Your co-operation will be highly appreciated.

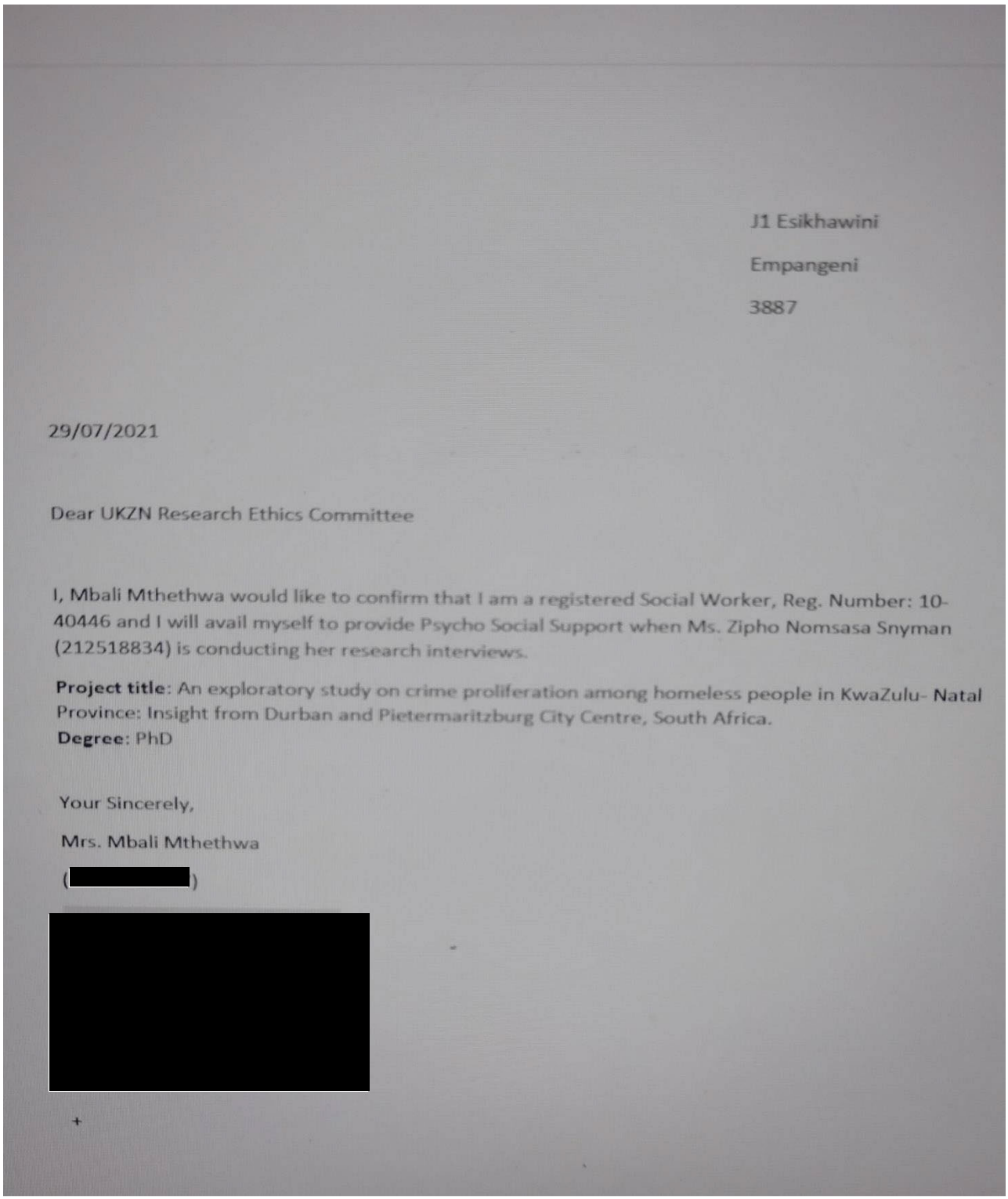
[redacted]

(WARD - (PR)
eThekwini Municipality

[redacted]

COMMISSIONER OF OATHS
ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY
EX OFFICIO DISTRICT OF DURBAN IN
TERMS OF SECTION 6 OF ACT 16 OF 1963
(AS AMENDED) CITY HALL SECRETARIAT
Dr Pixley Kaseme Street, Durban, 4001

ANNEXURE E: LETTER FROM THE SOCIAL WORKER



J1 Esikhawini

Empangeni

3887

29/07/2021

Dear UKZN Research Ethics Committee

I, Mbali Mthethwa would like to confirm that I am a registered Social Worker, Reg. Number: 10-40446 and I will avail myself to provide Psycho Social Support when Ms. Zipho Nomsasa Snyman (212518834) is conducting her research interviews.

Project title: An exploratory study on crime proliferation among homeless people in KwaZulu- Natal Province: Insight from Durban and Pietermaritzburg City Centre, South Africa.
Degree: PhD

Your Sincerely,

Mrs. Mbali Mthethwa

([redacted])

[redacted]

+

ANNEXURE F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Zipho Nomsasa Snyman. I am Criminology and Forensic Studies Phd candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, South Africa.

I am interested in exploring the crime proliferation among homeless people in KwaZulu- Natal Province: Insight from Durban and Pietermaritzburg City Centre, South Africa and to gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions.

My research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore reasons leading to the increase in the number of homeless people in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
2. To outline the crimes committed to and by the homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
3. To examine the programs carried out by municipalities to address the challenge of the high number of homeless people living on the streets of Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.
4. To identify possible solutions to prevent crimes committed by and against homeless people in Durban and Pietermaritzburg CBD area.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- In a case where threatening or risky information is revealed, the information will be reported to the relevant authorities.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.

- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:
Email: z[redacted]
Cell: 0[redacted]

My supervisor is Dr. Sazelo Mkhize who is allocated at the school of Criminology and Forennsic Studies, Howard College Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
Contact details: email: mkhizes1@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 0312601733

Or you can communicate directly with the university ethics committee at:

HSSREC Research Office
Tel: 031 260 8350/4557/3587
Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

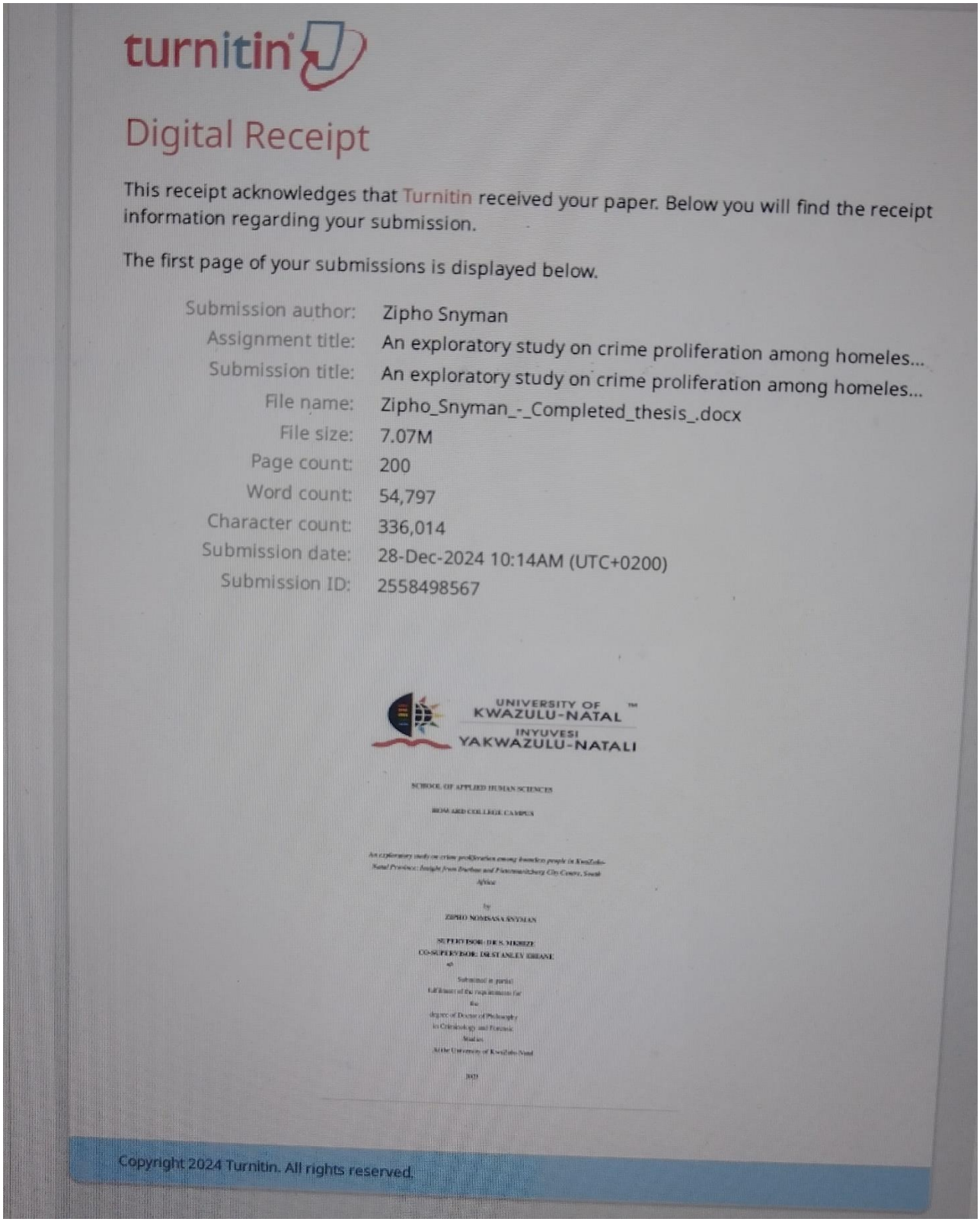
I…… (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT **DATE**

…… ……

ANNEXURE G: TURNITIN DIGITAL RECEIPT AND REPORT



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File size:	7.07M
Page count:	200
Word count:	54,797
Character count:	336,014
Submission date:	28-Dec-2024 10:14AM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	2558498567

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

SCHOOL OF APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

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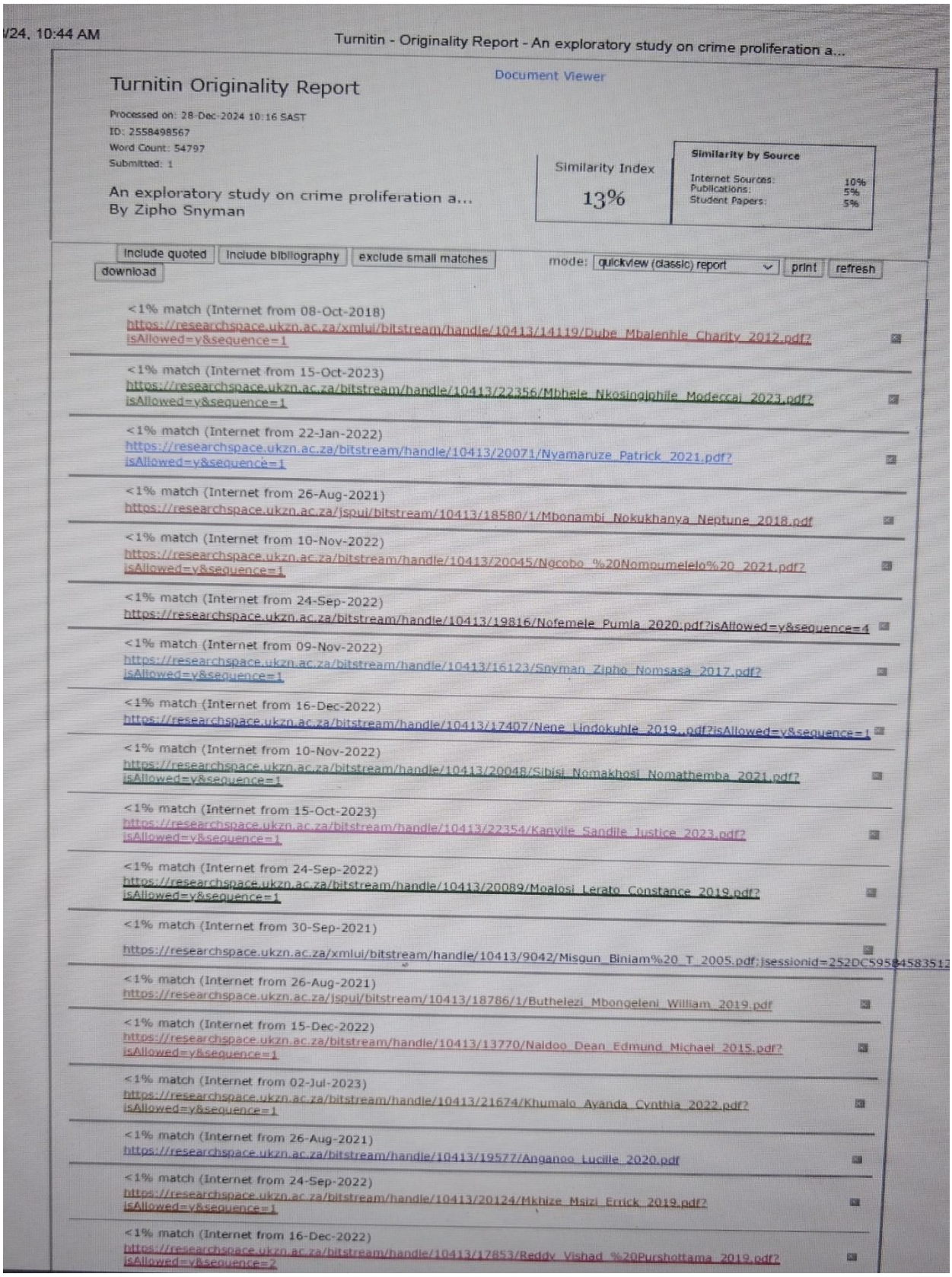

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By Zipho Snyman

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