

# Assessing the Challenges Inhibiting Youth Participation in Crime Prevention Activities in a South African Community



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## ABSTRACT

Various developmental obstacles confronting Africa are closely tied to high crime rates, including issues such as income disparity, rapid urbanization, and a predominantly youthful population. Despite the existence of innovative and impactful programs, significant challenges continue to hinder meaningful youth participation in crime prevention efforts. This study aims to examine the challenges influencing youth participation in crime prevention activities. A qualitative research design used focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to establish a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and existing strategies for youth participation in crime prevention activities. The widespread findings of the case study in Mmabatho Extension 39 revealed that alcohol and drug abuse within the community continues to present a significant obstacle in the fight against crime and violence among youth. The findings also revealed that the absence of cohesion among community members poses a significant limitation to youth engagement in prevention initiatives. In the absence of a shared purpose and a cohesive environment, young people are discouraged from participating in crime prevention endeavours. To address these issues, the study recommends community-driven partnerships that provide mentorship, early-life interventions, skills development, and recreational activities. Such measures would empower youth to actively contribute to community safety and social cohesion. This study enriches sociological scholarship on youth and crime prevention by offering context-specific insights and actionable recommendations to enhance youth engagement in crime prevention strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Global Organized Crime Index 2023 indicates a persistent increase in organized crime on a global scale, with 83% of the global population living in environments characterized by high levels of criminal activity.<sup>1</sup> South Africa accounts for the highest levels of violent crime globally.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, South Africa

<sup>1</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "Global Organized Crime Index 2021," *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Business Tech, "South Africa Ranks among the Most Dangerous Countries in the World – and It's Costing Us." *September 21*, vol. 8, 2017.

recorded 21,022 murders, an increase of 3.4% from the previous year.<sup>3</sup> From April 2018 to March 2019, an estimated two million crimes were recorded in South Africa. The following year, from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, the murder rate increased by 1.4% to 21,325 equating to approximately 58 individuals killed daily.<sup>4</sup>

Various developmental obstacles confronting Africa are closely tied to high crime rates, including issues such as income disparity, rapid urbanization, and a predominantly youthful population. The South African government has recognized the importance of community participation, particularly among young people, in the fight against crime. National efforts like the Crime Prevention Strategy of 1996, the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security, the National Crime Combating Strategy, the National Gang Strategy, and the National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 aims to enhance safety, security, and crime prevention. However, a lack of effective leadership has impeded the realization of these policies and strategies.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing the pivotal role of communities, particularly the contribution of young people, the South African government actively promotes their inclusion in crime prevention programs. This orientation establishes a robust partnership between the police and communities. In alignment with government efforts, anti-crime organizations have embraced community participation as a novel approach to crime management.<sup>6</sup> Empirical evidence underscores the effectiveness of community involvement in facilitating good governance.<sup>7</sup> However, a notable lack of youth participation in crime prevention activities poses a challenge to the effectiveness of these strategies.

The African Youth Charter (2006) and other national frameworks, such as the National Youth Commission Act (1996) and the National Youth Policy (2009, 2015, and 2030), define youth within an age range, from 14 to 35 years to account for the enduring socio-economic and historical inequalities in South Africa since 1994. While the "transition-focused" definition emphasized the shift from childhood dependency to adult independence, the age-based categories have been critiqued for prolonging youth dependency and masking social and economic inequalities.<sup>8</sup> In this study, *youth* refers to individuals from the ages of 18 to 35 years. The defined age range reflects the socio-political realities that necessitate extended youth support, aligning with the focus on young people's role in community development and crime prevention. This perspective is pertinent in understanding youth urgency in crime prevention and ascertaining where the social structures limit or enable their participation.

This study defines *crime prevention* as encompassing state and non-state initiatives, excluding direct law enforcement, aimed at reducing criminal opportunities and addressing underlying societal factors.<sup>9</sup> The approach prioritizes proactive programs that alter potential offenders' motivations.<sup>10</sup> A key tension in crime prevention debates is overreliance on punitive measures versus community-driven interventions. Youth involvement is particularly significant, as their engagement in prevention efforts not only reduces personal criminal activity but also contributes to broader community safety. Participation spans various levels, from passive engagement to active collaboration, culminating in community-driven solutions.<sup>11</sup> When citizens are consulted but not empowered, then community participation is merely tokenistic. Instead of genuine citizen participation power is often held by local elites and external agencies. This study aims to examine the challenges inhibiting youth participation in crime prevention efforts.

<sup>3</sup> Africa Check, "FACTSHEET: South Africa's crime statistics for 2017/18," 2018, <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-south-africas-crime-statistics-for-2017-18/>.

<sup>4</sup> SAPS, "2018 Annual Crime Statistics 2017/2018," 2018, <https://www.saps.gov.za/services/crimestats.php>.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara M. Holtmann, "Safe Communities of Opportunity: A Strategy for a Safe South Africa," 2009.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Manaliyo, "Community Policing and the Challenges of Trust in South Africa," *Crime Prevention Review* 12, no. 4 (2016): 345–67.

<sup>7</sup> Kimutai Kiplimo and Aluvi Patrick Amisi, "Good Governance and Service Delivery: A Study of Citizen Participation in Kisumu County," 2018.

<sup>8</sup> R Mkandawire, "Alienated, Criminalised and Stigmatised Youth Subcultures of South Africa," in *Kopano–Southern Africa Regional Exchange Conference, Dikhololo, North West Province*, 2000, 20–25.

<sup>9</sup> Dan A. Lewis and Greta Salem, "Community Crime Prevention: An Analysis of a Developing Strategy," *The Fear of Crime*, 2017, 507–23.

<sup>10</sup> Jan van Dijk, Paul Nieuwebeerta, and Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, "Global Crime Patterns: An Analysis of Survey Data from 166 Countries Around the World, 2006–2019," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 38, no. 4 (December 20, 2022): 793–827, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-021-09501-0>.

<sup>11</sup> Debra Hauser, "Community Participation Partnering with Youth: A Rights, Respect, Responsibility® Paradigm," *Advocates for Youth: A Rights, Respect, Responsibility* 3, no. 15 (2002): 1–19.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth participation in crime prevention initiatives is often hindered by individual and personal challenges that impact their ability and motivation to engage in activities. The review of the literature identifies factors, such as limited decision-making power and low self-efficacy, which deter youth involvement by creating barriers that must be addressed to unlock their full potential.

### *Limited decision-making power*

Limited decision-making power among youth represents a substantial barrier to their effective participation in community initiatives.<sup>12</sup> This issue often arises from systemic marginalization, where young people are excluded from decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. Exclusion fosters a sense of disconnection and inadequacy, leading to disengagement from community affairs.<sup>13</sup> When youth perceive themselves as outsiders in shaping their environments, their motivation to contribute diminishes, resulting in a cycle of exclusion that undermines their engagement and the overall effectiveness of community initiatives. The perception of irrelevance is a key factor affecting youth involvement.<sup>14</sup> When young people believe their opinions are undervalued or ignored by adults and decision-makers, they become less inclined to engage in community programs. This lack of representation in leadership roles and failure to incorporate youth perspectives leads to low participation rates in initiatives targeting youth-specific issues, reinforcing feelings of disempowerment and disengagement.

The marginalization of youth perspectives also deprives communities of innovative ideas and solutions. Young people bring fresh insights into social challenges, offering creative strategies for fostering engagement and implementing effective interventions.<sup>15</sup> For instance, their contributions to environmental or safety-focused initiatives can result in sustainable and inclusive solutions. To address these issues, policymakers and advocates must prioritize inclusive decision-making processes that genuinely value youth perspectives, thereby enhancing their engagement and empowerment within communities.<sup>16</sup>

### *Low Self-Efficacy*

Low self-efficacy is another significant challenge that limits youth engagement in crime prevention activities.<sup>17</sup> Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to achieve specific goals, noting that it is critical for motivation and active participation. When young people lack confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully, they often feel powerless, resulting in disengagement from community initiatives.

Fear of failure compounds this issue. Many young people worry that their efforts will not produce meaningful results, which discourages them from taking initiative. Individuals with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid challenging tasks due to anxiety about potential failure. In community contexts, where the stakes of crime prevention efforts feel significant, this fear can further deter youth participation.

The consequences of low self-efficacy extend beyond individual disengagement to collective community efforts. Communities benefit from the diverse perspectives and energy that youth bring, but these contributions remain untapped when self-efficacy is low.<sup>18</sup> To address this, programs must focus on building youth confidence through mentorship, skill development, and environments that normalize failure as a learning process. Positive reinforcement and incremental opportunities for success can empower young people to actively participate in community crime prevention initiatives.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marni LoIacono Merves et al., "Engaging and Sustaining Adolescents in Community-Based Participatory Research," *Family & Community Health* 38, no. 1 (January 2015): 22–32, <https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.0000000000000057>.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon Thabo Mampane, "Youth Development Through Participation in Decision Making," 2019, 35–53, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9388-1.ch003>.

<sup>14</sup> LoIacono Merves et al., "Engaging and Sustaining Adolescents in Community-Based Participatory Research."

<sup>15</sup> Mampane, "Youth Development Through Participation in Decision Making."

<sup>16</sup> LoIacono Merves et al., "Engaging and Sustaining Adolescents in Community-Based Participatory Research."

<sup>17</sup> Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (Macmillan, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*.

<sup>19</sup> Mampane, "Youth Development Through Participation in Decision Making."

By addressing challenges related to limited decision-making power and low self-efficacy, crime prevention programs can better engage youth and foster their active participation. Incorporating inclusive decision-making processes and targeted confidence-building interventions ensures that young people feel valued, empowered, and capable of contributing to the safety and development of their communities.

### ***Social and economic barriers***

There are various social and economic barriers that significantly affect youth participation in crime prevention initiatives. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, exclusion of marginalized groups, and a lack of resources and support create structural and systemic challenges that hinder meaningful engagement. These barriers not only limit opportunities for young people but also perpetuate cycles of disengagement, undermining efforts to harness their potential as key contributors to safer communities.

### ***Poverty and Unemployment***

Poverty and unemployment are major twin social barriers that influence youth involvement in crime prevention initiatives. Young people in economically disadvantaged communities often face limited access to education, training, and employment opportunities, which diminishes their ability to participate in or benefit from crime prevention programs. Unemployment further exacerbates this issue by fostering feelings of frustration and hopelessness. Prolonged unemployment among young people not only contributes to social exclusion but also diminishes their motivation to engage in community efforts.<sup>20</sup> When basic needs remain unmet, crime prevention initiatives often take a backseat to immediate survival concerns. Addressing poverty and unemployment is thus essential for creating an environment where young people can actively participate in crime prevention and community development.

### ***Lack of Resources and Support***

The absence of adequate resources and support significantly hampers youth engagement in crime prevention efforts. Young people often lack access to training programs, mentorship opportunities, and material resources necessary for meaningful participation. The National Academies of Sciences emphasized that robust training opportunities are essential for equipping youth with the skills and confidence required to contribute effectively to community initiatives.<sup>21</sup> Without such support, many young people feel unprepared and disengaged, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation and missed opportunities for community improvement.

The lack of positive role models in many communities further compounds this issue. Mentorship is a critical component of youth development, as role models provide guidance and inspiration for active engagement.<sup>22</sup> In communities where adults fail to model participation or encourage youth involvement, young people may internalize the belief that their contributions are neither valuable nor necessary. This diminished sense of self-efficacy and motivation undermines efforts to involve youth in crime prevention programs, making it even more difficult to break cycles of disengagement. The social and economic barriers reviewed pose significant challenges to youth participation in crime prevention initiatives. As with all other challenges, addressing these barriers requires targeted strategies that prioritize inclusivity, provide necessary resources, and foster supportive environments.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena such as the challenges faced by youth in their participation in crime prevention.<sup>23</sup> A phenomenological design was employed since it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of

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<sup>20</sup> Tim Corney et al., "Approaches to Youth Participation in Youth and Community Work Practice: A Critical Dialogue," 2020.

<sup>21</sup> National Academies of Sciences, *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, and Amy K. Syvertsen, "The Contribution of the Developmental Assets Framework to Positive Youth Development Theory and Practice," 2011, 197–230, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-386492-5.00008-7>.

<sup>23</sup> W. Neuman Lawrence, "Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches" (Pearson, 2014).

the challenges young people face in crime prevention initiatives.<sup>24</sup> The population for this study comprised 16 youth aged from 18 to 35 years residing in Mmabatho Extension 39, a peri-urban residential area in the Mahikeng Local Municipality, North-West Province, South Africa. Additionally, key informants, including a ward councilor, members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), and a representative from the Community Police Forum (CPF), were included as participants. These individuals were selected based on their significant role in crime prevention and community safety efforts. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants and youth participants who were directly involved in or affected by crime prevention activities, ensuring that the sample was relevant to the study's focus.<sup>25</sup> Snowball sampling was then used to further identify additional participants through referrals from initial respondents. Focus group discussions were arranged with youth participants in Extension 39 because they allow for dynamic interactions between participants, providing a rich source of data about shared experiences and collective perceptions.<sup>26</sup> In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including a ward councilor, members of SAPS, and a representative from the CPF for nuanced and expert opinions on the challenges and opportunities related to youth crime prevention in Extension 39.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within the data.<sup>27</sup> The thematic analysis was guided by a framework, which includes familiarization with data, coding, theme development, and interpretation.<sup>28</sup> This process allowed for the identification of key themes. The findings from the focus group discussions and individual interviews were analyzed to draw comprehensive conclusions about the study's central research questions.

The study adhered to the North-West University (NWU) guidelines for research ethics and integrity to ensure the integrity of the research process, as well as the protection of participants. Ethical clearance NWU-02103-20-A7 was obtained from the Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of NWU. Following this approval, the researcher sought permission from the ward councilor, the leader of the (Community Policing Forum) CPF and the South African Police Service (SAPS) members who participated in the study. Participants were asked for consent to record both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities. Meticulous record-keeping was undertaken to provide an audit trail that enhances transparency and accountability. Peer debriefing was conducted, where fellow researchers critically examined the data and interpretations to ensure that biases were minimized, and the findings remained grounded in the data. Finally, validation of data with respondents was integral to the study, as participants were invited to review the findings to confirm their accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. This member-checking process not only bolstered credibility but also affirmed the authenticity and relevance of the study's conclusions, ensuring that the voices of participants were faithfully represented. To maintain reflexivity, the researcher adhered to the Setswana cultural values when talking to older key informants from SAPS and CPF.

<sup>24</sup> Sadruddin Qutoshi, "Phenomenology: A Philosophy and Method of Inquiry," *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 5 (May 30, 2018): 215, <https://doi.org/10.22555/joed.v5i1.2154>.

<sup>25</sup> Martyn Denscombe, "Critical Incidents and Learning about Risks: The Case of Young People and Their Health," in *Researching School Experience* (Routledge, 1999), 187–202.

<sup>26</sup> Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey., *Qualitative Research Methods*. (Thousand Oaks: : SAGE Publications Limited, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Susan Luckman, "Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners" (SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Luckman, "Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners."

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS /FINDINGS

### Challenges faced by young people in participating in crime prevention activities

This section presents findings on the challenges faced by young people in participating in crime prevention activities in Extension 39. Drawing from participants' accounts and theoretical insights, themes were identified and discussed. These include alcohol and drug abuse, lack of resources, truancy, fear of being attacked/victimized, lack of trust and support, and lack of information as presented in Figure 1.

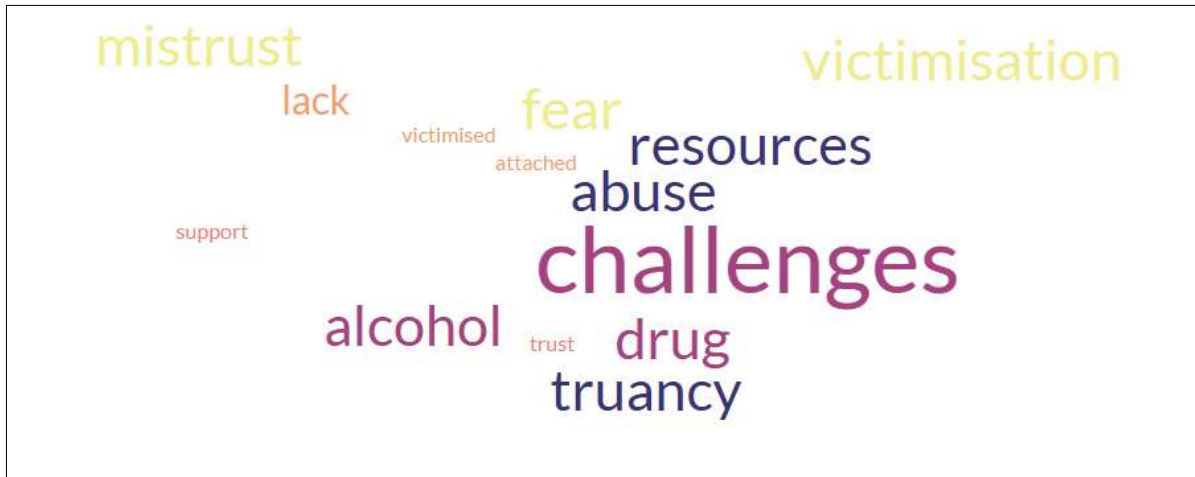


Figure 1: Challenges faced by young people in participating in crime prevention activities  
Source: Bosiling (2024)

### Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Participants highlighted alcohol and substance abuse as significant challenges affecting youth participation in crime prevention activities in Extension 39. Substance abuse was identified as a central issue not only for its role in perpetuating criminal activities but also for its impact on youth disengagement from community initiatives. Participant CP1 observed that,

*“.....substance abuse diminishes young people’s capacity for constructive engagement, asserting that it breeds a drunk society, undermining the potential of youth as future leaders.”*  
(Interview with CP1: June 2023).

Similarly, WC1 noted that,

*“Alcohol and drug use perpetuate a cycle of dependency and criminal behavior, creating barriers to participation in activities aimed at improving community safety”* (Interview with WC1: June 2023).

The participants' accounts reflect a troubling pattern of youth dependency on substances. CM2 described the prevalence of taverns in the area, their unregulated operation, and the visible effects of alcohol and drugs on young individuals:

*“Alcohol and drugs are the daily food for the young people in Extension 39. It is sad to see a young man in the morning drinking alcohol.”* (Interview with CM2: June 2023).

This sentiment was echoed by SAP3, who noted,

*“Substance abuse is popular among young men. They avoid counselling and instead turn to alcohol or drugs as coping mechanisms because of the wide range problems they face.”*  
(Interview with SAP3: July 2023).

The normalization of substance use within the community was emphasized in participants' reflections on the accessibility and lack of regulation of alcohol sales. This absence of regulation

facilitates youth engagement in substance use, further isolating them from positive societal interactions and crime prevention activities.

Participants noted that substance use contributes to truancy, risky sexual behavior, and disengagement from educational and community opportunities. Participant WC1 remarked,

*“Our children don’t have time to spare for community involvement. They would rather have time for alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drugs are the end of our children”* (Interview with WC1: June 2023).

Establishing safe spaces for counselling, mentorship, and peer support can enable young people to overcome substance-related challenges and re-engage with their communities. Additionally, strict enforcement of liquor licensing rules and targeted educational campaigns can reduce accessibility to substances and promote healthier coping mechanisms. The findings in Extension 39 illustrate the profound impact of substance abuse on youth participation in crime prevention activities. By addressing the root causes of substance dependency through supportive, community-driven interventions, it is possible to create environments that encourage positive youth engagement and build more cohesive and safer communities. This approach aligns with the community development theory, which emphasizes collective action and the mobilization of community resources to address shared challenges. Through such efforts, Extension 39 can begin to reverse the cycle of substance abuse and youth disengagement, fostering an environment where young people can contribute meaningfully to crime prevention initiatives.

### ***Lack of Resources***

Participants identified insufficient resources as a primary challenge to youth participation in crime prevention initiatives in Extension 39. The lack of financial, material, and human resources severely limits the ability of community policing forums (CPF) and individuals to engage effectively in crime prevention. This was revealed in the following excerpts:

*For example, community members were asked to contribute money to purchase whistles for night patrollers, but many were unable to participate due to financial constraints* (Interview with CM5: June 2023).

*“My father’s car is used as a police vehicle or ambulance. Calling the police and ambulances takes forever, so people rely on their own cars, and those who don’t have cars ask their neighbors. The other time someone was stabbed, and the ambulance came very late, and the person had passed away.”* (Interview with CM8: June 2023).

Participant CM5 noted that CPF efforts often rely on community donations, which are challenging to collect given the high unemployment rates. This highlights the economic hardships that impede meaningful community participation in crime prevention activities. Participant CM8 elaborated on the dire resource gaps, revealing that private vehicles often substitute for police or ambulance services,

This account underscores the community's reliance on personal resources to fill systemic gaps, further burdening already strained households.

Participant CM7 added that,

*“Even basic communication for crime reporting, such as using personal airtime to call the police, is an out-of-pocket expense for community members. I remember using my cell phone to call the police, and in that case, where do you claim your airtime back?”* (Interview with CM7: June 2023).

Such financial pressures deter sustained engagement in crime prevention, as residents are forced to bear the costs of addressing communal safety concerns. The findings align with those of studies, which argued that resource scarcity significantly hampers CPF effectiveness.<sup>29</sup> The absence of essential tools,

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<sup>29</sup> Modjatji M Malatji, Khethiwe Madima, and Kholofelo A Rakubu, “The Effectiveness of Community Policing Forum in Crime Prevention,” *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 12, no. 6 (2023): 202–11.

such as transportation for patrols or funds for communication, undermines both the community's and law enforcement's ability to fulfil their responsibilities. This lack of resources jeopardizes the cooperative relationship between the CPF and the broader community, weakening collective crime prevention efforts.

The findings also highlight the emotional toll of resource scarcity on community members. Participant CM3 expressed frustration with the perceived inequity of voluntary efforts:

*"I have stopped patrolling because I feel used to it when some of the community members are sleeping, and some of us have to brave the hot/cold nights to protect them"* (Interview with CM3: June 2023).

This sentiment reflects the exhaustion and demoralization that can arise when resource gaps force individuals to take on disproportionate burdens, further discouraging participation in crime prevention activities.

The lack of resources significantly undermines youth engagement in crime prevention activities in Extension 39. Resource constraints weaken social capital, disrupt community resilience, and place disproportionate burdens on individuals, thereby impeding collective crime prevention efforts. Addressing these challenges through targeted investments and partnerships is essential for building a cohesive and effective community response to crime. By strengthening the social fabric and providing necessary resources, Extension 39 can create an environment where youth and other community members can actively contribute to safety and development.

### **Truancy**

Participants highlighted truancy as a critical challenge undermining youth participation in crime prevention in Extension 39. Participant WC1 expressed concern about youth pretending to attend school while engaging in deceptive behaviors that alienate them from education and hinder their ability to integrate into society:

*"The youth in our community do not attend school; instead, they wander the streets and town aimlessly. It is disheartening to see them leave their homes in the morning dressed in school attire, only to engage in deceptive behavior. As a result, they are deprived of essential education and are unable to fully integrate into society due to their lack of academic knowledge"* (Interview with WC1: June 2023).

This lack of school attendance not only diminishes the prospects of young individuals but also weakens the community's capacity to engage them in crime-prevention activities. Participant CP1 similarly remarked on the link between truancy and substance abuse, highlighting that youth who skip school are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors that reduce their ability to contribute positively to their community,

*"Youth abstain from attending school, opting instead to engage in substance abuse activities such as smoking drugs and consuming alcohol. This raises concerns about their ability to actively engage in community initiatives."* (Interview with WC1: June 2023).

Such behaviors perpetuate a cycle of disengagement and delinquency, further marginalizing these individuals and their communities. Truancy poses a significant barrier to youth participation in crime prevention as it disrupts their engagement with educational, social, and community resources. Schools often serve as central hubs for mentorship, socialization, and exposure to positive extracurricular activities, which can instill civic responsibility and community awareness. When students skip school, they forfeit these opportunities and are more likely to associate with negative influences. Additionally, schools frequently host crime prevention initiatives, such as workshops on conflict resolution and partnerships with local law enforcement, which truants miss. This absence weakens the community's collective action against crime and limits young individuals' understanding of their role in fostering safer environments. By integrating these approaches, communities like Extension 39 can break cycles of disengagement and create safer, more cohesive environments.

### ***Fear of being attacked/victimized***

The other factor contributing to the lack of youth participation in preventing crime was the fear of being victimized. Participants expressed apprehension about becoming targets for retaliation when engaging in crime prevention efforts. Participant CM4 highlighted that this fear stems from the potential for attackers to target both the individuals involved and their families. This sense of vulnerability deters residents from attending meetings or reporting crimes to law enforcement:

*“I don’t want to be involved in community initiatives. I fear for myself and my family because we can be attacked because people have seen us attending meetings. Believe me, there is a list that these criminals carry. If one of them is arrested, they come and threaten us if we leak the info to the police”* (Interview with CM4: June 2023).

Participant CM7 echoed similar concerns, stating that their efforts to contribute to crime prevention have often been met with perceptions of betrayal or being labelled as "sellouts," which increases the risk of victimization:

*“I really want to be involved in crime prevention activities in my community, but my biggest fear is being victimized.”* (Interview with CM7: June 2023).

Additionally, Participant CM9 shared their personal experience of being attacked for participating in a community meeting, illustrating how fear of retaliation discourages others from following suit,

*“I was once attacked for being part of the community meeting.”* (Interview with CM9: June 2023).

This fear of victimization not only discourages active participation in crime prevention but also contributes to a culture of silence. Many residents opt not to disclose information about crimes they witness, exacerbating the challenge of combating criminal activities. Fear of crime can significantly diminish civic engagement, particularly in activities geared towards collective well-being, such as neighborhood committees or crime-prevention forums.<sup>30</sup>

Media portrayals of crime can also amplify fear. Sensationalized crime reports can distort public perceptions, creating an inflated sense of danger that discourages participation in community activities.<sup>31</sup> While this dynamic is widely observed in urban settings, the specific socio-economic challenges and demographic composition of Extension 39 present unique barriers. Fear of crime intersects with existing inequalities, limiting the potential for residents, particularly young people, to contribute actively to crime prevention.

The fear of being attacked or victimized significantly hinders youth engagement in crime prevention initiatives in Extension 39. This fear not only weakens community cohesion but also limits the effectiveness of collective efforts to combat crime. Understanding these dynamics is critical for fostering a culture of safety and active community participation in Extension 39.

### ***Lack of trust and support***

The lack of trust and support between the youth, adults, and law enforcement emerged as a significant barrier to crime prevention initiatives in Extension 39. Participants noted a pronounced imbalance in decision-making processes, where young people are often sidelined or viewed as problematic. Participant CM2 observed that adults in the community often distrust the youth, perceiving them as troublemakers, which undermines collaboration and inhibits youth engagement in crime prevention efforts. Participant CM5 emphasized the need for trust between adults and young people, suggesting that adults adopt a supportive role while allowing the youth to take ownership of community initiatives:

*“Old people in the community see us as problematic, so we don’t get involved because they don’t share information with us. In community meetings, we are not given a chance to voice our problems”* (Interview with CM7: June 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Piscitelli and Andrea M.L. Perrella, “Fear of Crime and Participation in Associational Life,” *The Social Science Journal* 54, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 179–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2017.01.001>.

<sup>31</sup> Chris Hale, “Fear of Crime: A Review of the Literature,” *International Review of Victimology* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 79–150, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026975809600400201>.

This sentiment highlights the alienation young people feel when their perspectives are dismissed, consistent with findings that noted that youth often feel their voices are disregarded by adults.<sup>32</sup> This disconnect fosters a negative atmosphere, discouraging youth from actively participating in crime prevention initiatives.

A recurrent theme among participants was mistrust in law enforcement. Participant CM6 asserted that police collusion with known criminals, particularly drug dealers, undermines efforts to build trust within the community,

*“Some of the police officers are on the payroll of these drug dealers. We are fighting a losing battle as a community. Drug dealers are well-known in our community, but community members are afraid to point them out because of the relationships they have with some of the police officers.”* (Interview with CM6: June 2023).

This perception is echoed by participant CM1, who expressed frustration over reporting crimes only to see suspects walking free shortly thereafter,

*“Most of the young people in the community do not trust the police because you report a crime, and later you see the person walking the streets.”* (Interview with CM1: June 2023).

These accounts demonstrate the erosion of trust between law enforcement and the community, particularly among the youth. The absence of strong relationships between the police and the youth diminishes the community’s willingness to report crimes, further exacerbating the problem.<sup>33</sup> When individuals believe that law enforcement is complicit or ineffective, they are less likely to engage in initiatives that depend on collaboration with the police.

The lack of support from the community also presents a challenge. Participants noted that community members often fail to attend meetings or volunteer for crime prevention initiatives. Participant CP3 criticized this apathy, questioning why residents shoulder responsibilities that ostensibly fall within the purview of law enforcement,

*“Why do I have to do the police work when they are paid every month to do their job? Even when we give them information on the criminals, they do nothing to arrest them.”* (Interview with CP3: June 2023).

This disconnect between community members and law enforcement mirrors findings from a study that identified a lack of community appreciation for CPF efforts, leading to frustration among both police and CPF members.<sup>34</sup> The police must integrate meaningfully into the communities they serve to foster trust and collaboration.<sup>35</sup>

The fear of retaliation compounds these issues. Participant CM2 described the risks involved in reporting crimes,

*Even though I can see a crime happening, I am so reluctant to report it. You just put yourself in danger because the next day the suspect will know all the information about you. These criminals work with the police* (Interview with CM2: June 2023).

Such fears deter not only crime reporting but also broader community involvement, leaving crime prevention efforts severely weakened. Studies demonstrate that fear of crime undermines social cohesion and trust in community structures, creating an environment conducive to criminal activity.<sup>36</sup>

Encouraging inclusive participation and fostering mutual trust between the youth, adults, and law enforcement can significantly improve crime prevention efforts. Community participation is key to

<sup>32</sup> Anne Crowley and Dan Moxon, *New and Innovative Forms of Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes* (Council of Europe Strasbourg, France, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Joseph O’Leary and Joël Reland, “What’s Happening to Knife Crime?” <https://fullfact.org/crime/knife-crime/> 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Malatji, Madima, and Rakubu, “The Effectiveness of Community Policing Forum in Crime Prevention.”

<sup>35</sup> Petrus Machethe and Emeka Obioha, “Challenges Facing the South African Police Service and Community-Based Organisations in the War against Drugs in a South African Township,” *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 31, no. 2 (2018): 66–78.

<sup>36</sup> Robert J Sampson and W Byron Groves, “Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social-Disorganization Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 4 (1989): 774–802.

preventing crime and fostering social cohesion.<sup>37</sup> By addressing the mistrust and lack of support in Extension 39, the community can create an environment that promotes collective responsibility and collaborative efforts to improve safety and quality of life for all residents.

### ***Lack of Information***

The study highlighted the critical role of effective information sharing in fostering community development and engagement. Participants emphasized that the lack of information within Extension 39 is a significant barrier to youth participation in crime prevention efforts. Participant CM2 noted that limited information sharing between the police and the community hinders opportunities for meaningful engagement in community safety initiatives. This sentiment was echoed by CM8, who observed that individuals holding specific positions in the CPF are privileged with access to information, leaving others, particularly the youth, uninformed. CM9 further reinforced this by stating that the absence of information is a key reason young people refrain from participating in crime prevention activities.

*“It is important to share information with other people so that they know exactly what they sign up for.”* (Interview CM2: June 2023).

Participant CM8 expressed frustration about being recruited into the CPF without clarity on their roles and responsibilities. The lack of role definition creates uncertainty and deters meaningful participation:

*“I have been recruited to join the CPF as a young person. I don’t know if they want numbers or people who will make meaningful contributions. There is a lot more that is expected from me, but my role is not clarified from the beginning.”* (Interview CM8: June 2023).

This limited access to information perpetuates unequal participation, with those attending community meetings or holding formal positions being better informed. Participant CM9 succinctly captured the issue:

*“Lack of information is hindering participation by young people in crime prevention efforts. Sometimes we don’t get involved because we don’t have information, period.”* (Interview CM9: June 2023).

The absence of clear communication channels and transparent information sharing reduces the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives and weakens community engagement. Access to relevant information is essential for the success of crime prevention efforts, enabling individuals to understand the measures needed to enhance community safety.<sup>38</sup> Disseminating information fosters collective and individual participation, ensuring that community members comprehend their roles and responsibilities.<sup>39</sup> Transparency in sharing information empowers individuals, allowing them to stay informed and contribute effectively to community initiatives.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of information in Extension 39 highlights the broader challenge of inequitable access to resources and opportunities for community engagement. When young people are uninformed about crime prevention programs, they are less likely to participate, further exacerbating their marginalization. Positive youth and community development theory emphasizes the importance of empowering young individuals by providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to contribute actively to their communities. Transparent and inclusive information-sharing processes are vital in ensuring that young people feel valued and equipped to make meaningful contributions.

<sup>37</sup> Ogadimma Arisukwu et al., “Community Participation in Crime Prevention and Control in Rural Nigeria,” *Heliyon* 6, no. 9 (September 2020): e05015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05015>.

<sup>38</sup> Jonatan Abraham and Vania Ceccato, “Crime and Safety in Rural Areas: A Systematic Review of the English-Language Literature 1980–2020,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 94 (2022): 250–73.

<sup>39</sup> Teodor Mircea Alexiu, Theofild-Andrei Lazăr, and Elena-Loreni Baciu, “Community Participation and Involvement in Social Actions,” *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 7, no. 33 (2011): 5–22.

<sup>40</sup> Kelvin M. Njunwa, “Community Participation as a Tool for Development: Local Community’s Participation in Primary Education Development in Morogoro, Tanzania: A Case of Kilakala and Mindu Primary Schools” (University of Agder, 2010).

Moreover, the absence of information-sharing structures undermines trust and collaboration between community members and law enforcement. Participant CM2's observation about the potential benefits of improved communication between the police and the community highlights the need for transparent, consistent dialogue. Such efforts are crucial for building trust, enhancing accountability, and creating an environment where all members, particularly the youth, feel included and motivated to participate.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study on the relationship between substance abuse and youth disengagement resonate with the results reported in the broader review of the literature. Substance abuse diminishes inhibitions and increases susceptibility to risky behaviors, particularly among adolescents navigating developmental challenges. Similarly, some studies highlight how socio-economic instability exacerbates substance use, with young people often turning to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms in underprivileged communities.<sup>41</sup> This cycle of substance use and social isolation not only perpetuates criminal activity but also impedes meaningful youth engagement in crime prevention efforts. Literature found a significant overlap between substance use and violent criminal behavior, with 26% of respondents in the study reporting concurrent alcohol or drug use and criminal activity.<sup>42</sup> This correlation is also evident in Extension 39. The relevance of the findings in the context of existing literature or contemporary practice should receive urgent attention.

Young individuals entrenched in substance use often isolate themselves from family and peers, weakening the networks of support necessary for healthy development. This detachment fosters a cycle where substance use reinforces social isolation, further disengaging youth from community initiatives and perpetuating negative behaviors.

The lack of resources in Extension 39 can be analyzed through the lenses of social capital and community development theories. Social capital theory posits that networks and relationships within a community yield collective benefits, fostering trust and collaboration.<sup>43</sup> However, resource constraints erode these networks by limiting opportunities for engagement. For instance, without funding for community centers or events, residents have fewer chances to build connections and foster the trust necessary for collaborative crime prevention. Findings relating to relying on personal vehicles for emergencies exemplify how resource scarcity disrupts social networks and shifts the burden onto individuals, weakening the community's collective efficacy.

Community resilience concept in the Community Development theory refers to the ability to adapt to challenges as in this case crime, which further underscores the implications of these findings. Resilient communities can adapt to challenges and mobilize resources effectively to address shared threats.<sup>44</sup> However, resource limitations in Extension 39 hinder the establishment of robust social networks, compromising the community's ability to respond to crime. Communities with strong social ties can mobilize quickly in the face of threats, enhancing their overall safety and cohesion. In contrast, the fragmented social bonds resulting from resource constraints in Extension 39 leave residents vulnerable and unable to respond effectively to criminal activity. The implications extend beyond immediate crime prevention efforts to the long-term stability of the community. Resource scarcity diminishes social capital, which is critical for fostering collective action. Strong social capital enhances collective efficacy, a crucial element for effective crime prevention.<sup>45</sup> Without adequate resources, the community cannot sustain programs that strengthen social ties or foster engagement, leading to a weakened social fabric and reduced capacity for collaborative problem-solving.

<sup>41</sup> Kebogile E. Mokwena and Nomkanka J. Setshego, "Substance Abuse among High School Learners in a Rural Education District in the Free State Province, South Africa," *South African Family Practice* 63, no. 1 (August 23, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/safp.v63i1.5302>.

<sup>42</sup> Lorraine T. Midanik, Tammy W. Tam, and Constance Weisner, "Concurrent and Simultaneous Drug and Alcohol Use: Results of the 2000 National Alcohol Survey," *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 90, no. 1 (September 2007): 72–80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.02.024>.

<sup>43</sup> Marian van Bakel and Sven Horak, "Social Capital Theory," in *A Guide to Key Theories for Human Resource Management Research* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 261–67, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035308767.ch33>.

<sup>44</sup> Francis H Norris, Kathleen Sherrieb, and Betty Pfefferbaum, "Community Resilience: Concepts, Assessment, and Implications for Intervention," *Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges across the Lifespan*, 2011, 162–75.

<sup>45</sup> John H Laub and Robert J Sampson, "Understanding Desistance from Crime," *Crime and Justice* 28 (2001): 1–69.

The findings align with those of another research study, which indicates that truancy can lead to broader social challenges, including substance abuse, gang involvement, and behavioral disorders.<sup>46</sup> The absence of structured educational experiences leaves young individuals vulnerable to these risks, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and disengagement. Furthermore, the intersection of offender and victim activity—often dictated by time and location—shows a discernible pattern, as outlined by crime pattern theory. This framework highlights how unsupervised time among truant youth increases their susceptibility to criminal behavior. Truancy undermines youth engagement in crime prevention by isolating young individuals from educational and social resources essential for their development.

Studies reveal a complex interplay between perceived safety and community engagement.<sup>47</sup> Heightened fear of crime often leads to social withdrawal, with residents becoming isolated and reluctant to participate in local activities. This aligns with the findings of another study that argued that fear undermines social cohesion and trust in community structures, making collaborative crime prevention efforts more challenging.<sup>48</sup> In Extension 39, socio-economic disparities, inadequate policing, and a history of community neglect exacerbate these dynamics. Participant narratives indicate that insufficient resources and perceptions of law enforcement ineffectiveness further deepen the community's reluctance to engage in crime prevention.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of community partnerships is important in the fight against crime and encourages youth participation. The advantages of establishing a partnership, which became evident in the initial stages of this study, indicate that collective efforts produce more favorable results than individual efforts. Empirical evidence has shown that the government should harness its capabilities alongside those of its citizens and diverse non-governmental stakeholders to tackle societal issues effectively.

Establishing a collaborative relationship within the community with the youth as the main actors is a crucial element in fostering secure, thriving, and united communities. This partnership can be used to achieve consensus, develop a mutual understanding, explore collaborative funding and resource allocation and develop and implement a crime prevention strategy. Additionally, the community and the young people will contribute to a culture of prevention and offer the opportunity to integrate mainstream safety within policies and institutional frameworks. The recognition of the extensive range of elements contributing to crime, violence, and insecurity is evident in this approach to developing the local community partnership, as it aims to unite all entities that have the potential to influence the underlying causes of criminal behavior. This acknowledgement emphasizes the understanding that no individual organizations possess the ability to offer a sustainable solution to insecurity. Instead, achieving community safety necessitates a collective endeavor involving various stakeholders. Therefore, the formation of a sustainable, multi-disciplinary partnership centered on a shared vision serves as a fundamental requirement for the successful prevention of crime.

Addressing truancy requires targeted interventions that enhance educational engagement and promote constructive community participation. After-school programs provide structured environments that reduce absenteeism and support academic achievement, offering students homework assistance and enrichment activities that occupy their time positively.<sup>49</sup> These programs also create opportunities for students to build connections with their peers and mentors, fostering a sense of belonging and community engagement.

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen Filkin, Dara Mojtahedi, and Dominic Willmott, "Motivations for Adolescent Offending and Truancy from School: Retrospective Interviews with Adults Recently Released from a Custodial Prison Sentence in England," *Heliyon* 8, no. 6 (June 2022): e09762, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09762>.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Morrel-Samuels et al., "Community Engagement in Youth Violence Prevention: Crafting Methods to Context," *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 37, no. 2 (April 11, 2016): 189–207, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-016-0428-5>.

<sup>48</sup> Robert J Sampson, Stephen W Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science* 277, no. 5328 (1997): 918–24.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph A. Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (January 3, 2011): 405–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>.

Mentoring programs are another effective intervention. By connecting at-risk youth with positive role models, these initiatives help reduce delinquency and improve social skills.<sup>50</sup> Such relationships provide essential guidance, support, and encouragement, helping young individuals resist negative influences and adopt healthier behaviors. Life skills training and conflict resolution workshops can further empower youth, equipping them with tools to navigate challenges and make constructive choices.<sup>51</sup>

Addressing resource scarcity is critical for fostering meaningful youth participation in crime prevention. Interventions should prioritize investments in infrastructure, such as establishing resource hubs equipped with telephones, computers, and transportation to support CPF activities. Such investments would reduce reliance on personal resources and enhance the community's capacity for collective action. Moreover, fostering partnerships with local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies can provide additional funding and logistical support to address these gaps.

The findings reveal that addressing the information gap is crucial to enhancing youth engagement in crime prevention activities. By implementing transparent communication channels and ensuring equitable access to information, Extension 39 can empower its youth to take an active role in fostering community safety.

Rebuilding trust in law enforcement and community leadership is critical. The importance of consistent, transparent communication between law enforcement and community members to mitigate fear and foster collaboration.<sup>52</sup> By addressing residents' safety concerns and demonstrating a commitment to accountability, local authorities can help break the cycle of distrust that currently hampers participation.

## CONCLUSION

Crime remains a widespread and complex problem that impacts communities worldwide, particularly the younger generation, with extensive implications for individuals, families, and society at large. The findings of the South African case study revealed that the challenges faced by young people in Mmabatho Extension 39 include various factors such as alcohol and drug abuse, limited resources, truancy, fear of victimization, lack of trust and support, and lack of information. Of particular concern is the prevalence of alcohol and substance misuse among the younger population in this area. The participants highlighted that this issue poses a significant barrier for young people to actively participate in crime prevention efforts. There is also a shortage of both human and financial resources. The respondents highlighted the need to have a dedicated office space equipped with resources to carry out effective crime prevention initiatives. It is imperative to implement community-based initiatives, such as youth programs and community police, in conjunction with addressing the underlying causes of crime, which encompass poverty, unemployment, and lack of education and skills. Furthermore, it is crucial to rebuild trust between law enforcement agencies and the community, which can be achieved through transparency, accountability, and commitment to community-centered policing. This will ensure the safety and well-being of community members in Extension 39, which should be of utmost priority, and concerted efforts should be made to break the cycle of violence and fear, thereby creating safe and secure environments for everyone.

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