

Open Spaces, Nature and Perceptions of Safety in South Africa: A Case Study of Reservoir Hills, Durban

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Introduction

Crime has emerged as one of the most prominent challenges facing South Africa. Crime and safety have been at the centre stage of several debates and discussions. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (2001:1) states that addressing perceptions of crime, particularly anxiety and fear of crime, is as important as reducing crime levels. Additionally, ISS (2001:1) asserts that fear of crime affects quality of life and has negative economic and political consequences. These aspects are particularly acute in countries in transition such as South Africa, as indicated by the collection of articles edited by Dixon and van der Spuy (2004) that indicate the effects of crime in society, the inadequacies of South Africa's justice systems and resource constraints to effectively tackle this national problem.

This article investigates how, within the context of heightened safety and security concerns, residential communities perceive open public spaces by adopting a case study approach. Open spaces in urban areas are critically important in terms of ensuring the continued presence of nature and related natural resources in built environments. However, this article reveals that residents tend to perceive these areas as crime hotspots as well as refuge areas for potential criminals. These perceptions are reflective of increased resistance to open spaces in residential areas. The analysis is undertaken as

part of a broader attempt to examine environmental perceptions of crime and violence, especially in relation to spatial dimensions.

Safety and Security Issues

In the South African context, despite the acknowledgement of crime and violence as a central concern (especially by the Crime Information Analysis Centre 1998), there has been a dearth in studies that focus specifically on people's perceptions about the environments in which they live, especially in relation to violence and crime. Additionally, there remains a weak empirical and conceptual basis to understand the nature and extent of violence and crime against people as well as the context and locality specific experiences. Nelson et al. (2001:249) indicate that research on the micro-spatial geography and temporal characteristics of violence and crime has been neglected in favour of identifying broader patterns and trends. There have been numerous calls to provide more substantive information and rigorous research about the nature, scope and dimensions of the problem at the local level (Nelson et al. 2001:249).

The issue of safety and security in residential areas in South Africa, especially as it is linked to violence and safety, is often highly political and is at the core of much discontent among South African residents. Moser (2004:4) indicates that the uncertainty generated by violence is expressed in fear and insecurity. The Table below illustrates the integrated and holistic crime prevention framework encapsulated in the White Paper on Safety and Security 1999-2004, *In Service of Safety*. The Table clearly indicates that the intention is to focus on policing and the criminal justice system more broadly as well as socio-economic and environmental factors including design issues, education and addressing social-economic problems. Furthermore, the Table indicates that to effectively address crime and violence in South Africa, it is necessary for several stakeholders to work together. The stakeholders include various government departments, the community (citizens and residents) and civil society organisations.

Table 1: Crime prevention framework for the White Paper

Crime prevention through effective criminal justice	Social crime prevention
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Reduces the opportunity for crime by making it more difficult to commit crimes, more risky or less rewarding. Effective law enforcement creates a strong deterrent to crime.	Reduces the socio-economic and environmental factors that influence people to commit crimes and become persistent offenders.
HOW IS IT ACHIEVED? Justice system acts as a deterrent Law enforcement Rehabilitation and reintegration Active visible policing Successful investigations Victim empowerment	HOW IS IT ACHIEVED? Designing out crime (physical design of space) Education Promoting social cohesion Supporting youth and families and groups at risk Breaking cycles of violence Promoting individual responsibility Socio-economic interventions to undercut causes of crime
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE: All levels of Government All Government departments, particularly those engaged in the National Crime Prevention Strategy South African Police Service	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE: All levels of Government Government departments such as Housing, Education, Welfare, Health Municipalities National Crime Prevention Strategy Organisations of civil society Citizens and residents of South Africa.

Source: Department of Safety and Security (1998:22)

Place/ Location and Safety

A specific geographical location includes physical resources as well as social relations which are embedded in a range of power relations. Social relations influence how a specific location is used and perceived. This implies that people assign meanings and values to places. Place, according to Massey (1994:2), is given meaning by people's interactions, perceptions and assumptions about it. Furthermore, livelihood options, mobility and strategies are restricted or enabled by environmental conditions in specific

contexts. The focus on the spatial and locality specific dimensions of violence becomes central to planning and service delivery initiatives.

The urban environment includes public and private places, people that live and work in an area, the services and facilities available and the way the area is governed and managed. Changes to the urban environment can take the form of social and community developments as well as physical changes. Koonts (2000:4) argues that gender identity versus sexual orientation, pedestrian volume, environmental neglect, and street continuity and integrity influence perceptions of unsafe areas. Community safety is based on four broad principles (Stavrou 1993:3-9):

- Local communities will be safer if crime is prevented or reduced;
- Some environmental factors in public places can make crimes easier to commit and get away with;
- Changing the factors that promote crime and violence can help to deter and reduce the incidence of crime; and
- Strategies to create safer communities work best if they also include community development programmes which address specifically social and economic challenges.

People adopt several coping strategies when responding to real and perceived threats of violence such as the avoidance of places and individuals they perceive as threatening and fighting back. It is important to note that many of the strategies that are used to cope with violence and the fear of violence constrain people's movements and limit their social, political and economic participation and opportunities.

Fear of Crime and Public Spaces

Lawlink (nd:4) states that fear is a complicated emotion that is felt for many different reasons and in many different ways. Furthermore, it is not only an automatic response to danger but it is often the result of complicated interactions between us, our physical and social environment and our cultural background. Bob et al. (2006:2) state that an important aspect of understanding fear of crime is that it is not the same as actual risk of becoming a victim of crime, however, fear is no less real. As Grabosky

(1995:1) underscores, 'Fear of crime has become an important issue of public concern: a problem which detracts from the quality of life, and which adversely affects social and economic well-being'.

Several studies in both developed and developing contexts indicate that fear of crime can impact on people's lives as much as actual crime (Ackah 2000; Adams & Serpe 2000; Grabosky 1995; Moore & Shephard 2006). Fear itself can be extremely incapacitating and restrictive which can limit people's mobility, involvement in activities and access to opportunities. Additionally, social mobility and interaction are impacted as distrust increases. Fear of crime can be a powerful motivator for economic behaviour, for example, choice of residential location and school (Gibbons 2004 cited in Moore & Shephard 2006:293). Moore and Shephard (2006:283) argue:

It (fear of crime) also goes beyond the tangible economic and physical losses imposed by criminals. It extends to an alteration of daily living habits as well as to the negative psychological effects of living in a constant state of anxiety. It has a deleterious effect on the general social order.

Addressing perceptions are critically important. Mistry (2004:19) indicates that despite the decline in crime rates indicated by the victim surveys and the official crime statistics, South African felt less safe in 2003 than they did in 1998. Mistry (2004:24) states that this counter intuitive trend may be explained by a number of factors such as increasing public awareness of other people's victimisation and the high level of violence that typifies some criminality. However, Mistry (2004:24) argues that more research is required in order to understand the complex dynamic between the increasing fear of crime and decreasing crime rates. ISS (2001:2) argue that factors like actual victimization; general impressions of the city environment; the media; interaction with colleagues, friends and family; perceptions about government's ability to provide safety; and the extent to which people feel helpless against crime, influence public perception.

Spatial and Environmental Patterns of Violence

Tabrizi and Madanipour (2006:932) state that environmental criminologists have correlated crime patterns with the environmental and physical layout of places where crimes occur. Incidents of crime tend to concentrate in specific locations at particular time periods. It is also important to note that fear of crime has spatial and temporal dimensions as well. People tend to fear specific locations and times, especially during the night. Dangerous places are linked to perceptions of blocked prospects which reduce visibility and create opportunities for potential criminals to hide. Nelson et al. (2001:253) indicate that potential threat of violence and crime shapes people's perceptions of risk and subsequent behaviour. These perceptions are strongly attached to specific localities.

Smiley and Roux (2005:1) illustrate that while individual people experience stress due to personal events (deaths, marriages, job changes), communities of people also experience daily stress due to features in their neighbourhoods (such as traffic, crime, and abandonment of properties near their homes). They assert that these environmental stressors have the potential to impact entire communities, and yet are difficult to define and measure.

The need to feel safe in our local environment and a right to be comfortable as individuals within society are deemed to be important to physical and psychological well-being. The professions of landscape architecture, urban design, planning and architecture consider the physical environment in an attempt to provide safe spaces for inhabitants of cities, towns, and houses. Koonts (2000:1) asserts that much of the historical reorganisation of spaces within cities was a response to the perceived threat of crime and diminished levels of personal safety. Brantingham and Brantingham (1993 cited in Koonts 2000:1) state that fortified city walls, fences, zoning of land uses and urban renewal or slum clearance were all actions implemented to improve the safety of urban inhabitants, though these measures benefited some residents more than others.

According to Koonts (2000:1), seminal books that examined the relationships between crime and the physical environment were: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs (1961), *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* by C. Ray Jeffery (1971), and *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Planning* by Oscar Newman (1972). The focus of the books was on making a case for designing

neighbourhoods that empower the residents, giving them the ability to control their environment thereby improving the security of their homes and communities. Local social control was centralised to involve monitoring public space. They also popularised the concept of environmental and behavioural interactions and the impact of this relationship on criminal activities. The field of environmental criminology emerged which looked at the relationship between crime and the physical environment. Numerous studies revealed that the physical features of neighbourhoods as well as perceptions of the physical environment influenced crime rates and the fear of crime in society (Cozens 2004; Koonts 2000; Taylor & Harrell 1996). Crime was viewed to be inextricably linked to the physical environment in which it occurred.

In recent years, growing awareness about how the physical environment affects human behaviour has been integrated into a knowledge-base known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) (Schneider 2001:1). CPTED is defined by Crowe (2000:1) as:

The proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime and the incidence of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life.

Tabrizi and Madanipour (2006:934) indicate that crime prevention through design and management of the environment emphasises that criminal opportunity can be reduced through architectural and planning techniques that make criminal activity more difficult to take place and can reduce the incidence of fear of crime. The core elements of CPTED include the following (Schneider 2001:1-2):

- Natural surveillance: keeping an eye on the whole environment without taking extraordinary measures to do so. Typical obstacles to natural surveillance include solid walls and lack of windows that provide visibility to areas that have experienced a high incidence of problem behaviours.

- Natural access control: determining who can or cannot enter a specific area or facility. Obstacles to access control include unsupervised areas and unlocked entrances to buildings.
- Territoriality: establishing recognised authority and control over the environment, along with cultivating a sense of belonging. Poor border definition can impede territoriality such as open spaces within the city.

The design of space is viewed as being central to giving a message that someone owns, uses and cares for it (Cozens 2004:3). Territoriality (or ownership), control of access, surveillance and the productive use of space, are important to crime prevention and community safety. It is unlikely that a criminal act will be committed in a place that is being viewed as safe and secure. Cozens (2002:1) indicate that a key component of CPTED is the continuous maintenance and management of urban space that is actively being used and discouraging the under-use of such space. The social construction of space into perceived safe and unsafe places is important to understand. Perceptions of safe and unsafe spaces are shaped by information (even if inaccurate) they receive from the media, their family, their peers and other social contacts. Notions of safe and unsafe places are also informed by personal experiences.

The literature identifies several factors in the environment that influence the perception of unsafe or vulnerable public places (Lawlink nd; Loader & Walker 2007; Nelson et al. 2001). The main factors were inadequate policing/security, isolated and poorly lit areas, locations with places to hide in, dilapidated or uncared for areas, and places where there is excessive amounts of alcohol consumption, drug-taking, prostitution and gangsterism. Many of the above are characteristic of open spaces and parks in residential areas as local residents decreasingly make use of these spaces for recreational purposes. Lawlink (nd:9) indicates that when these factors are not removed, improved or addressed, people continue to feel unsafe regardless of how safe an actual crime profile reveals the area to be.

Several studies indicate that there is evidence that green spaces can lower crime and illegal activity when well planned, maintained and monitored (American Planning Association [APA] 2003; Kuo and Sullivan

2001). The latter (maintenance and monitoring) in terms of planning and management of open spaces should be emphasised since open spaces which are unkempt can have the opposite effect. In the United States, for example, these studies illustrate that green spaces have been shown to create neighbourhoods with fewer violence and property crimes and where neighbours tend to support and protect one another. APA (2003:1) in advocating for green spaces, specifically parks in cities highlights the following:

- Time spent in nature immediately adjacent to home helps people to relieve mental fatigue, reducing aggression.
- Green residential spaces are gathering spaces where neighbours form social ties that produce stronger, safer neighbourhoods.
- Barren spaces are more frightening to people and are more crime prone than parks landscaped with greenery and open vistas.
- In order to make the best use of greenery and open space, it must be positively incorporated into a community's design.

APA (2003:2) also notes that these social spaces lead to the conspicuous presence of people outdoors that contribute further to safety and increasing surveillance, which discourages criminals.

Attempts to prevent crime, however, can have unintended consequences. For example, Ayres and Thomas (1998:139) conducted a social environmental audit of urban renewal schemes based on an investigation of environmental hazard risk perceptions of people in their homes, workplaces and other places of urban activity, in the vicinity of five major renewal sites in Sandwell, West Midlands, U.K. The report indicated that urban renewal in the United Kingdom had brought about an increase in certain perceived environmental risks and not necessarily a more desirable perceived environmental state than the alternative of dereliction. Town and O'Toole (2005:2) state:

Architects and urban planners who call themselves New Urbanists say their proposals, including developments that mix residential and commercial uses, have homes with tiny private yards and large common areas, and feature pedestrian paths, will solve all sorts of

social problems, including crime. Yet the housing and neighbourhood designs they want to substitute for the modern suburb almost invariably increase crime.

Several studies indicate that physical environment features can influence the chances of a crime occurring (Taylor & Harrell 1996:1). Offenders may decide whether or not to commit a crime in a location after they determine the following (Taylor & Harrell 1996:1-2):

- How easy will it be to enter the area?
- How visible, attractive, or vulnerable do targets appear?
- What are the chances of being seen?
- If seen, will the people in the area do something about it?
- Is there a quick, direct route for leaving the location after the crime is committed?

These questions indicate that potential offenders critically assess the environment as a potential crime site. Even opportunity crimes entail a rapid assessment of the environment.

Understanding spatial patterns and perceptions of crime are central to developing effective prevention strategies and planning safe neighbourhoods. As Craglia (2000:712) states:

An increasingly important aspect of this local-level use of crime mapping is the extent to which it may enable greater involvement of local communities in crime prevention, particularly if the communities themselves develop the expertise to map their own neighbourhoods.

Communities (at all levels) are deemed to be constantly adapting to environmental problems or threats. Young (2006:353) highlights the importance of the physical environment:

This emphasis on the physical, social and biological environment as a source of threats for the community diverges from the current view among environmentalists that communities are threats to nature.

Actually, both interpretations are valid: an unmanaged (environmental) problem often returns as a threat to the community.

Taylor *et al.* (1994:1) show that residents living in close proximity to non-residential land use (including open spaces such as parks and vacant plots) are more concerned for their personal safety and less likely to intervene if they see something suspicious; they experience higher victimisation rates and call the police more often. In neighbourhoods where physical deterioration is more widespread (including the lack of maintained designated residential parks), residents have been more fearful when the future of that neighbourhood has appeared uncertain (Taylor *et al.* 1994:3).

Primary Research

Case Study and Methodology

The focus of the study in terms of primary data collection is a residential suburb (Reservoir Hills) in Durban, South Africa. Reservoir Hills is a historically Indian, middle income area. However, in recent years there has been a mushrooming of several informal settlements in the area. It is believed that the case study sufficiently reflects a cross-section of experiences contrasting socio-economic and spatial contexts and experiences. Both quantitative (questionnaire surveys) and qualitative (focus group discussions and ranking exercises) methods were employed. In terms of the questionnaire survey, 100 households were interviewed utilising the purposive sampling approach. Households located in close proximity to open spaces and parks were targeted. For the focus group discussion, 10 residents who participated in the household interviews participated.

Results

The table below illustrates respondents' perceptions of violence and danger.

Table 2: Perceptions pertaining to where violent acts are most likely to occur: multiple responses

Location/ place	Percent (n=100)
In the home	33
Close to the home	16

Public spaces	51
School	6
The workplace	1
Unknown/ unfamiliar environment (new area)	36
Parks/ grounds	13
Open spaces	8
Traffic lights	3
Nightclubs	10
Bars/ shebeens	3
Poorly lit areas	6
Shopping centres	18
Everywhere	3

Interviewees identified a range of areas/ places where they felt that violent acts are most likely to occur in their area (Table 2). The main locations identified were:

- public spaces (51%)
- in the home (33%)
- unknown/ unfamiliar environments (36%)
- close to the home (16%)

In Reservoir Hills, shopping centres (18%), parks/ grounds (13%), nightclubs (10%) and open spaces (8%) were also deemed to be unsafe by some of the respondents. It is also important to note that during focus group discussions the main public spaces and unknown/ unfamiliar environments that were deemed to be unsafe were parks and vacant plots.

The responses are similar to studies cited in the literature review that show that the majority of respondents perceive that violence is most likely to occur in public spaces as well as unknown and unfamiliar environments (Cozens 2004; Moser 2004; Smiley & Roux 2005; Tabrizi & Madanipour 2006). However, it is important to note that the home was also perceived by a significant proportion of the respondents as a place where violence was most likely to occur.

Table 3: Perceptions pertaining to places that are viewed as being unsafe: multiple responses

Places	Percent (n=100)
Central town/ city	30
African townships	21
Public places	18
Nightclubs	11
Beachfront	10
Informal settlements	36
Home	1
Shopping areas	18
Tuckshops	2
Quiet roads	2
Dark roads and alleys	11
Deserted areas	3
The grounds/ parks	34
Parking lots	8
Outside school	10
In school	5
Public toilets	3
Motor vehicles	4
Unfamiliar environment	2
Taxi ranks/ bus stops	2
Robots/ traffic lights	1
Bars/ shebeens	2
Parks (hide, consume alcohol)	13
Bushes (hide)	15
Workplace	1

The findings in the Table above are similar to those in Table 2 relating to where respondents felt that violent acts are most likely to occur. In general, Table 3 shows that the main areas considered unsafe by the respondents were:

- Informal settlements (36%)
- The grounds/ parks (34%)
- Central town/ city (30%)
- African townships (21%)
- Public spaces (18%)
- Shopping areas (18%)
- Bushes (hide) (15%)
- Parks (hide, consume alcohol) (13%)

The reasons forwarded for particular areas being unsafe include:

- Public spaces: areas are frequented by strangers and criminals tend to target these areas.
- Central town/city: many people visit the area that is deemed to be a high crime zone. Because the area is busy, perpetrators of violence prey on victims in these areas.
- Informal settlements: crime was deemed to be high in these areas. The perception that poverty and crime are linked is discernible. Some of the reasons forwarded included desperation as a result of dire poverty and the fact that informal settlements tend to be overcrowded. Some respondents also felt that people who live in informal settlements are generally uneducated.
- African Townships: the respondents who identified these areas associated them with high levels of crime. Perceptions of these areas (as well as informal settlements) in South Africa remain criminalised (especially by those living in middle and upper income areas or areas historically designated for non-African groups). This reinforces notions of the 'other' and unfamiliar areas as being deemed to be unsafe. Shopping areas and tuckshops: the respondents felt that shopping areas, especially in residential locations, are frequented by boys who like hanging around the shops and look for trouble.
- The grounds/parks and bushes: these areas were seen as locations where unsavoury elements in the community, particularly youngsters who take alcohol and drugs, congregate. They thus felt that

increasingly these places are associated with drugs and alcohol as well as other types of unruly behaviour. Respondents also felt that criminals tend to hide in these areas.

The results also reveal that the majority of the respondents perceived African males as perpetrators of criminal acts. Blau and Blau (1982 cited in Stolzenberg *et al.* 2006) in their seminal research establishing the relative deprivation thesis argued that economic inequality (embedded in racial hierarchy) engenders resentment, hostility, frustration, and was perceived to be a precipitating factor in the impetus of criminal behaviour. Furthermore, Nofziger and Williams (2005) state that one of the most consistent findings in several research efforts is that race is a stronger predictor of attitudes towards violence and crime than most other demographic characteristics such as sex, age or socio-economic status. This was found to be the case in this study.

In general, public spaces were viewed as being unsafe. Many of the respondents stated that they knew these areas were unsafe because they had a reputation for being so. This confirms the findings in the literature review that peoples' perceptions of safe and unsafe areas are informed by information that they gather from various sources rather than real personal experiences of violence. It is important to note that most respondents identified areas in their residential areas as being unsafe. This alludes to the high levels of fear of crime prevalent in the community.

It is important to note that unlike the studies of APA (2003), Kuo and Sullivan (2001) and Taylor *et al.* (1994) who indicate that green spaces can lower crime and illegal activities, this research reveals that several respondents saw green spaces and parks as places that are unsafe and where unsavoury elements congregate. During the focus group discussions this attitude was further reinforced with participants indicating that very few residents use parks because of fear of being harassed, assaulted or robbed. They stated that these were unsafe places for their children to go to. In Reservoir Hills the rape and murder of a 10-year old girl in 2000 in a community park is still remembered by many of the participants. This incident can also be considered as a 'signal crime' that Innes (2004:17) identifies as an incident that functions as a warning signal to people about the distribution of risk throughout social space. More specifically, Innes

(2004:15) states:

The fundamental tenet of the signal crime concept is that people interpret and define particular criminal incidents as indicators about the range of dangers that exist in contemporary social life and that might potentially assail them.

Unsafe places identified by the respondents are also reflective of poor infrastructure, unsavoury elements (especially unruly youth, drunkenness, etc.), isolated and poorly lit areas, locations with places to hide in, overcrowding and dilapidated or uncared for areas. During the fieldwork, the authors observed that all parks in Reservoir Hills were unkempt. This further fuels perceptions that these locations are unsafe.

Table 4: Perceptions pertaining to places that are regarded as being safe: multiple responses

Places	Percent (n=100)
Shopping mall	22
School (security guard)	38
Religious places	13
Friend's home	25
Home	80
Gymnasium	1
Workplace	8
None	3

Compared to unsafe places identified in Table 3, respondents identified significantly fewer places that they deem to be safe (Table 4). This illustrates the pervasiveness of fear and insecurity that respondents feel. The vast majority of respondents (80%) felt that they regarded their homes as being safe. This can be largely attributed to the higher levels of security mechanisms that respondents have in the homes (such as alarms, burglar guards, fences, dogs, etc.). This was also the case in relation to friends' home (25%). Other main areas cited by the respondents as being safe were the school (38%) where security guards were present, shopping mall (22%),

religious places (13%) and the workplace (8%). One respondent stated the gymnasium and 3% indicated none. Schools, shopping malls and the workplace were regarded as being safe because of the presence of security and that many people are around. One respondent stated that she considered the school safe because it was an area where entrance into the premises was deemed to be controlled. Religious places were deemed to be safe because of the presence of people and because, as one respondent stated, 'even most criminals respect God'. The statement indicates that respondents felt that religious places were sacred and therefore safe. This is in keeping with Trawick and Howsen's (2006:344) findings that religion serves as a deterrent to crime.

In general, the areas that respondents regard as being safe were generally private, familiar areas. These areas are also generally enclosed. A sense of security was a primary factor in determining whether a place was safe or unsafe. In this regard, the presence of visible security such as alarms, vicious dogs, fencing, police and security guards made the respondents feel particularly safe. As indicated earlier, the main reasons forwarded for the home being regarded as safe were that family members could be trusted and will offer protection, if necessary, as well as the presence of security measures such as alarms, fences and dogs. The respondents stated that they felt safe in these areas because people they knew and trusted were always around. Open spaces on the other hand were public and often frequented by strangers.

Table 5: Perceptions regarding what would make respondents feel safer in areas that they have identified as being unsafe: multiple responses

	Percent (n=100)
More police/ security presence	88
Building homes in vacant plots and parks	34
Only certain people allowed in area/ restricted access	17
Improving the infrastructure in the area	11
Cleaning up area	7
Proper fencing of area	3
Proper lighting in the area	7

The majority of the respondents (88%) felt that police/security presence will make them feel safer in areas that they deemed to be unsafe (Table 5). A significant proportion of the respondents (34%) indicated homes should be built in vacant plots and parks. This indicates support for getting rid of open spaces. What is particularly disconcerting is support for getting rid of parks in the area. These are the few public recreational natural spaces in existence in the community. The environmental implications are serious and it is clear that many residents see these places as threats to their safety and security. In addition to the parks being unkempt, it was also observed during field visits that very few people actually used the park. Seventeen percent of the respondents stated that only certain people should be allowed in the area/ restricted access. During the focus group discussions this was supported by several participants who supported gated communities or boom gates that restricted access to the roads where they lived. Additionally, 11% indicated that improving the infrastructure in the area would make them feel safer. Related to improvements in infrastructure, some respondents stated that the areas should have proper lighting (7%) and be properly fenced (3%). Some respondents (7%) felt that the area should be cleaned up.

It is important to note that the above responses suggest that in terms of ensuring a safe environment that promotes feelings of security the most important aspects identified by the respondents related to controlling who had access, having visible police/ security presence and changing how space is used. Also, ensuring that the infrastructure (in terms of lighting and fencing) was up to standard was deemed important by the respondents. Thus, most respondents supported a proactive stance when dealing with making unsafe areas safe. This is in keeping with the CPTED approach presented earlier.

Table 6: Nature/ type of violence and/ or crime respondent had personally experienced

	Percent (n=100)
Not applicable	68
Theft of vehicle/ car hijacking	7
Robbery/ mugging/ theft	9
Vandalism	1
Burglary in the home	9

Harassment	2
Homicide/ murder	1
Physical abuse/ assault	3

The main types of violence that respondents personally experienced were (Table 6):

- Robbery/ mugging/ theft (9%)
- Burglary at home (9%)
- Theft and hijacking (7%)

Other types of violence experienced by some of the respondents were physical abuse/ assault (3%), harassment (2%), vandalism (1%) and homicide/ murder (1%). It is important to note that most of the respondents (68%) did not personally experience any form of violence.

Table 7: Where incident personally experienced took place?

	Percent (n=100)
Not applicable	68
Inside the home	12
Outside the home on respondent's premises	3
In close proximity of respondent's home	6
Public spaces in the community	7
At work	1
Social places (night clubs, restaurant, etc.)	1
Unknown area (new environment)	2

The main places where violence was experienced by the respondents are illustrated in Table 7:

- Inside the home (12%)
- Public spaces in the community (7%)
- In close proximity of the respondent's home (6%)
- Outside the home on respondents' premises (3%)

Other places identified by a few of the respondents were unknown areas/new environments (2%), social places (1%) and at work (1%).

These findings reinforce other studies (Cozens 2004; Moser 2004; Tabrizi and Madanipour 2006) that show that although most people perceive unknown and unfamiliar places as being dangerous, most incidents of crime and violence take place at or near homes (places frequented and known by the victim). This research, therefore, supports the findings in the literature review that in reality most violations occur at home, close to the home or in familiar places. Additionally, the perpetrators are usually known rather than strangers. In this article specifically, unlike earlier perceptions mentioned by the respondents that violence is most likely to occur in public spaces as well as unfamiliar and unknown places, the responses here reveal that most respondents' experiences of violence took place in areas they were familiar with. Thus, the fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown as well as places in which one is most likely to be surrounded by strangers (public spaces) persists despite very different personal experiences. However, it is important to reiterate that addressing perceptions is critically important when dealing with the fear of crime which influences people's behaviours.

Table 8: Ranking matrix illustrating unsafe places identified by respondents in Reservoir Hills

	IS	S	P	BS	SC	VIP	D	CB	CBD	R
IS	X	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS	IS
S	X	X	P	BS	SC	VIP	S	CB	CBD	R
P	X	X	X	P	P	VIP	P	P	P	P
BS	X	X	X	X	BS	VIP	BS	BS	BS	BS
SC	X	X	X	X	X	VIP	D	CB	CBD	R
VIP	X	X	X	X	X	X	VIP	VIP	VIP	VIP
D	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	D	CBD	R
CB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CBD	R
CBD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CB D
R	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

	Scoring	Ranking
Informal settlements (IS)	9	1
Schools (S)	1	9
Parks (P)	7	3
Bus stops/taxi ranks (BS)	6	4
Shopping centres (SC)	1	9
Vacant/ incomplete properties (VIP)	8	2
Driveways (D)	2	7
Central beachfront (CB)	2	7
Central Business District (CBD)	5	5
Roads (R)	4	6

The ranking of the unsafe areas identified by the participants during the focus group discussion in Reservoir Hills show that informal settlements was ranked number 1 (Table 8). Vacant/ incomplete properties were ranked number 2 and parks were ranked number 3. This was followed by bus stops/ taxi ranks (4), Central Business District (5) and roads (6). Both driveways and central beachfront were ranked 7 while schools and shopping centres were ranked 9. During the discussions it became evident that the fear of car hijackings was an important consideration among participants (roads and driveways were deemed to be unsafe primarily for this reason). This discussion also entailed a lengthy recollection of the rape and murder of a 10 year old girl in 2000 in a community park. Resident questionnaire survey respondents also discussed this as an important incident. Thus, this is certainly a major signal crime in the community.

Unlike the survey responses, none of participants during the ranking exercises identified their homes as one of the ten main unsafe areas. This indicates that compared to other unsafe areas (specifically in relation to public spaces), the home is viewed as a safe haven. The areas that were deemed to be unsafe were viewed as places that criminals target and unsavoury inhabitants are found in these areas. The participants stated that the areas (especially vacant land, parks and specific roads) were notorious in the area for drug dealing and drunken behaviour. Participants also provided specific incidents of crime that occurred in these areas. This illustrates that perceptions of unsafe places are informed by knowledge of criminal activities that are likely to take place there. However, it is important to note

that many of the participants did not experience or see these events first hand but heard about them, generally from local newspapers and friends and family. This research indicates similar findings to the Institute for Security Studies (2001) study which found that the fear of crime in the city is linked to higher crime levels as well as general governance issues such as congestion, overcrowding, uncontrolled street-hawking and litter.

It is also important to highlight that a significant proportion of the areas that were perceived as being unsafe were in the local neighbourhoods. With the exception of the city centre and beachfront, the rest were places found near the participants' homes and places they frequent. Again, the sense of insecurity and vulnerability that emerged during the interviews is reinforced by the ranking exercises and focus group discussions more generally.

The fear of parks, grounds, bushes and vacant plots was evident during the interviews and ranking exercises. As indicated earlier, the researchers observed that the parks/ grounds were generally unkempt and unattractive. One respondent stated:

I have lived in the area for the past forty years next to the park. There were never any problems. In the past five years there has been one murder (of a teenage girl) and three rapes in the park. It is not safe anymore. The youth congregate in the park where they consume alcohol and take drugs. It has become a hang-out for kids who truant school. I just can't understand why the police cannot do anything since I see them everyday and they are in plain view.

Most participants felt strongly that parks and grounds should not exist and homes should be built. Open spaces (especially parks and conservancies) are viewed as being critically important to protect the natural environment in urban areas. They are also important for recreational purposes. However, the inability to ensure that these places are safe has resulted in antagonism among residents to these places.

From these results (ranking exercises and surveys) the landscape (especially communities where people live) can be seen as influencing levels of fear and safety. It is also important to note that the locality specific analysis shows that in relatively small communities both safe and unsafe

areas are discernible. This perception, as indicated in earlier discussions, is strongly influenced by who frequents and what types of activities characterise a particular location. The findings show that areas considered to be safe were areas where there was a level of controlled access. The respondents deemed open areas or public spaces as being unsafe.

During the discussions it was clear that, when possible, respondents tended to avoid areas they considered to be unsafe, including parks and open spaces generally. Many respondents indicated that while they recall playing in the parks during their childhood they do not permit their children to go to the parks in the area. The avoidance zones were constructed around particular types of activities and around particular groups of people. The respondents highlighted public spaces as being dangerous and areas Africans frequented were usually described as being unsafe. Additionally, it is clear that the presence of males (especially in groups at the shopping centres as well as in recreational areas such as the parks and on streets) was also associated with danger. The avoidance of certain places illustrates poignantly the way in which the fear of crime and violence restricts the movement of residents.

Conclusion

Understanding locally-based dynamics and strategies that are employed to deal with violence and crime provide a firm basis upon which to develop context specific and appropriate interventions and support structures to address issues pertaining to violence and crime in ways that consider local strategies, priorities and needs. Furthermore, responding effectively to experiences and fear of violence, crime and insecurity is an important aspect of improving the quality of life of households and communities in South Africa.

Place (especially peoples' understanding of and attitudes towards specific locations) and subjectivity (personal experiences and perceptions) play central roles in people's understanding of, and attitudes towards, crime and violence in society (Massey 1994; Moser 2004; Tabrizi & Madanipour 2006). The above also influence spatial patterns of crime. The responses from primary research and findings from the literature indicate that the fear

of violence and crime in residential areas is largely located in public and open spaces, including parks and vacant plots.

During the focus group discussions and interviews it was clear that parks in the neighbourhood and open spaces generally were a source of fear in relation to potential criminal and violent activities. This was the case whether the open spaces were well maintained or not. The results are different from the findings of APA (2003), Kuo and Sullivan (2001) and Taylor *et al.* (1994) who indicate that green spaces can lower crime and illegal activities. This research reveals that several respondents saw green spaces and parks as places that are unsafe and where unsavoury elements congregate. In South Africa, it is therefore necessary to rethink open space planning, particularly the maintenance of these spaces and addressing resident perceptions of these places. As the APA (2003:3) states, where parks already exist, their maintenance is critical:

A well-maintained park or open space sends a message that someone cares about it. In turn, the message that someone cares about the park helps create a perception of safety. The greater the perception of safety, the more likely the park will be used. In addition, maintenance programmes that include participation by the users help to establish a sense of ownership and promote stewardship of the space.

This article indicates that several factors have been associated with fear of crime and natural, open spaces. These can contribute to feeling unsafe in public places. These factors include:

- Past experience of physical violence, especially signal crimes: if a particular group of people experience high levels of crime, then they are more likely to feel vulnerable to violence, and are likely to experience higher levels of fear.
- Perceptions of violence and crime: individuals and communities who hold strong perceptions about the prevalence of violence in open areas are likely to have higher levels of fear even if they have not personally experienced any violence.

- Lack of understanding about specific types of violence and where they occur: often because victims are found in bushes, people associate the crime with where the victim was found. Often, the violent act itself may not have occurred where the victim was found.
- Opportunities for crime: places of high risk make people feel extremely unsafe.
- Unkempt and unpoliced areas: the way a place looks contributes to how people perceive a place even if there are actual incidents of criminal acts. Additionally, poor policing of these areas creates higher levels of fear and vulnerability.

It is imperative that the issues highlighted above are addressed to change residents' perceptions of open spaces.

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