

# MEASURING THE PERCEPTIONS OF WHERE AND WHEN MOST RESIDENTIAL BURGLARIES OCCUR IN THE NEWLANDS EAST POLICING PRECINCT, DURBAN

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## Abstract

This study examines the spatial and temporal distribution of residential burglaries in the Newlands East Policing Precinct of Durban, South Africa. Understanding the geographic and temporal patterns of crime is essential for developing effective crime prevention strategies and optimizing resource allocation. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with 37 participants, including members of the South African Police Services (SAPS), Community Policing Forums (CPFs), local ward councillors, and community members. Findings indicate that burglaries are spatially concentrated in the Newlands West area and exhibit seasonal fluctuations throughout the year. Key contributing factors to burglary prevalence include poverty, inequality, and unemployment, underscoring the socio-economic dimensions of crime in the study area. The research highlights the necessity for a multi-stakeholder approach involving law enforcement, government agencies, and community members to effectively address residential burglaries. This study contributes to the limited empirical research on the spatial and temporal aspects of residential burglary in South Africa. It emphasizes the importance of targeted crime prevention measures and strategic policing interventions to mitigate burglary rates. The findings support the need for future research to further explore the socio-economic drivers of crime and the effectiveness of various crime prevention initiatives.

**Keywords:** *crime prevention, residential burglary, spatial analysis, socio-economic factors, temporal patterns.*

## Introduction and Background

Residential burglary, commonly referred to as housebreaking, remains a pervasive issue in South Africa, constituting the most prevalent form of household crime. According to the Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) conducted by Statistics South Africa (2019), residential burglary accounts for approximately 54% of all reported household crimes. Africacheck (2017) defines housebreaking as the unlawful and intentional entry into a building with the intent to commit theft, without direct confrontation between the perpetrator(s) and victim(s). In the 2021/22 period, an estimated 1.4 million incidents of housebreaking were recorded, affecting approximately 5.4% of households across the country. It is important to acknowledge that crime statistics are largely based on reported incidents, and a significant number of burglaries may go unreported. Many lower-income households, in particular, face barriers to reporting crimes due to limited access to police services (Mfazi, 2017). For instance, in the 2017/18 period, an estimated 52.8% of households refrained from reporting burglaries to the South African Police Service (SAPS) due to a perceived lack of police intervention (Africacheck, 2018). Similarly, in 2016/17, only 51% of burglary victims reported incidents to the authorities (VOCS, 2016/17).

However, the reporting rate has shown a gradual increase, rising from 56.1% in 2020/21 to 59.2% in 2021/22 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The demographic distribution of burglary victims reveals disparities among racial and socio-economic groups. Data from Statistics South Africa (2019) and VOCS (2018/19) indicate that Indian/Asian and White households are more frequently targeted, followed by Black African households, whereas Coloured households report relatively lower incidence rates. Additionally, while high-income households are the primary targets for residential burglary, lower-income households are not exempt from victimization. Residential burglary exerts a profound impact on individuals' well-being, primarily by diminishing their sense of security. According to Statistics South Africa (2019), such incidents rank among the most distressing and perilous crimes, as

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they involve the intrusion of private spaces that individuals perceive as sanctuaries, thereby inducing significant psychological trauma. The Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) (Statistics South Africa, 2011) further emphasizes that unlawful entry into a residence, regardless of the occupants' presence, can result in severe emotional distress and elevate the risk of subsequent victimization. Addressing the issue of residential burglary necessitates an in-depth understanding of its spatial and temporal distribution, as well as the factors contributing to its persistence. Yang (2006) argues that the geographical distribution of residential burglary is non-random, with certain locations exhibiting consistently high incidence rates while others remain relatively unaffected. Similarly, the temporal distribution of burglary is also structured rather than arbitrary. For instance, an analysis of burglary patterns in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, revealed that burglary rates peaked in specific temporal cycles, particularly within middle-class neighborhoods (Breetzke, 2016). This suggests that targeted crime prevention efforts focusing on high-risk locations and peak periods could effectively mitigate overall burglary rates. A comprehensive analysis of the spatial and temporal patterns of residential burglaries is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the factors influencing their occurrence. Identifying the specific locations and timeframes in which these crimes are most prevalent is crucial for enhancing law enforcement strategies and optimizing the allocation of resources for crime prevention.

Andresen and Malleson (2013) emphasize the importance of policymakers not only identifying the most effective crime prevention strategies but also determining the appropriate spatial and temporal contexts for their implementation. Although extensive international research has been conducted on the spatial and temporal distribution of residential burglary (Ye, Xu, Lee, Zhu, & Wu, 2015; Malleson, Steenbeek, & Andresen, 2019; Zhang & McCord, 2014), there remains a significant gap in knowledge regarding these patterns within the African context, particularly in South Africa. Breetzke (2015) highlights the paucity of empirical studies examining both spatial and temporal crime variations in South Africa, despite the country's high crime rates. Given this gap in research, the present study seeks to investigate the spatial and temporal distribution of residential burglaries at a localized level, with a specific focus on the Newlands East Policing Precinct in Durban. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the spatial and temporal distribution of burglaries within the Newlands East Policing Precinct. Specifically, this research seeks to address the following key questions:

- i. Which areas or locations within the Newlands East Policing Precinct experience the highest incidence of burglaries?
- ii. Are there specific times or occasions when residential burglaries are more likely to occur?

This paper is structured into several sections. Following the introduction and a review of relevant literature, the second section presents the theoretical framework, highlighting the connection between theoretical perspectives and practical applications. The third section outlines the research background, including the methodology employed in data collection and analysis. Subsequent sections discuss the study's findings, followed by an examination of their implications. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of key insights, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The spatial and temporal patterns of residential burglary can be effectively analyzed within the framework of environmental criminology, particularly through the lenses of the rational choice theory (RCT) and the routine activities theory (RAT). According to Cohen and Felson (1979), routine activities such as shopping, engaging in recreational activities, commuting to and from work, and attending educational institutions occur on a daily basis. These activities take place at different times of the day, influencing the risks and rewards associated with residential burglary. Consequently, the timing and location of burglaries are contingent on offenders' strategic decisions regarding when and where to commit the crime. In alignment with the principles of rational choice theory, potential burglars engage in cost-benefit analyses before selecting specific targets. These decisions shape burglary patterns, as offenders assess various factors such as the time of day, the month of the year, seasonal variations, and the characteristics of targeted dwellings. The commission of burglary, therefore, follows discernible patterns based on these rational choices, underscoring the importance of understanding both spatial and temporal crime dynamics for effective crime prevention strategies.

### ***Routines Activity Theory (RAT)***

The routine activities theory posits that crime occurs when three essential elements converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979:589). The simultaneous presence of these elements facilitates the occurrence of criminal events, whereas the absence of

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any one of them inhibits crime. Consequently, variations in individuals' routine activities within a given area can significantly influence crime rates, as the presence or absence of these elements fluctuates over time (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Felson and Clarke (1998) applied this theoretical framework to explain the rise in residential burglary incidents between the 1960s and 1980s. During this period, an increasing number of women entered the full-time workforce, leaving homes unoccupied for extended hours throughout the day. The lack of capable guardianship during working hours heightened the risk of residential burglaries. Additionally, advancements in the production and availability of valuable, portable consumer goods provided more attractive targets for both opportunistic and habitual offenders. Moreover, the rising market value of goods and the profitability of illicit transactions further increased the likelihood of burglary victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979).

Routine activity theorists were significantly influenced by Amos Hawley's (1950) human ecology theory, which incorporates a temporal dimension in analyzing human behavior. Hawley's theory posits that the timing of various activities—both by the hour of the day and the day of the week—is crucial in understanding patterns of criminal behavior. According to this perspective, the structure of daily routines is a fundamental aspect of human existence, and crime is viewed as an outcome of opportunities that emerge during routine social interactions at specific locations and times. This theoretical framework implies that law enforcement agencies can influence crime rates within their jurisdictions by implementing measures such as increasing capable guardianship, reducing the number of potential offenders, or eliminating suitable targets from areas where offenders are likely to converge. Furthermore, it suggests that the evolution of these three elements over time plays a pivotal role in shaping crime patterns within a given area.

### ***Rational Choice Theory (RCT)***

While the routine activities theory focuses on offender decision-making, it does not account for the cognitive processes underlying these decisions (Felson, 2013). To address this gap, Cornish and Clarke (1986) developed the rational choice theory (RCT), which is rooted in the principles of classical criminology. This theoretical framework posits that individuals act based on free will, making decisions that maximize pleasure while minimizing pain, except in cases involving individuals with mental disorders. The central premise of RCT is that individuals are rational actors whose behaviors are influenced by their desires and the potential consequences of their actions, particularly the fear of punishment. Consequently, increasing the perceived risk of punishment is expected to deter criminal activity (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). Unlike theories that emphasize distinctions between criminals and non-criminals, the rational choice perspective highlights their similarities. Cornish and Clarke (1987) argue that since criminal behavior results from calculated decisions based on anticipated costs and benefits, crime should be analyzed in a context-specific manner. This approach suggests that greater focus should be placed on the immediate situational and historical factors influencing criminal events rather than solely on individual predispositions.

Furthermore, RCT acknowledges that various factors impact criminal decision-making, with situational elements such as poverty, unemployment, economic instability, and social conditions playing critical roles. According to Cozens (2011), opportunistic offenders engage in a rational decision-making process by assessing, interpreting, and reacting to multiple environmental factors. These factors are closely associated with perceived risks and the effort required to execute a crime, shaping the offender's ultimate decision to engage in criminal behavior. When applied to residential burglary, the rational choice theory provides insight into how offenders select their targets. This theoretical framework underscores the significance of environmental factors in evaluating the potential costs and benefits associated with criminal activity, emphasizing the goal-oriented nature of burglars' spatial decision-making (Bernasco, 2008; Brantingham & Brantingham, 1981; Cornish & Clarke, 1987; Taylor & Gottfredson, 1986).

The central premise of rational choice theory in relation to residential burglary is that offenders engage in a rational cost-benefit analysis before committing the crime and selecting a specific target (Cornish & Clarke, 2008; Nee & Meenaghan, 2006). Burglars assess potential targets based on expected outcomes, ultimately selecting residences that minimize perceived risks and maximize anticipated rewards. The primary benefits of burglary typically include material gains, such as the total value of stolen items and ease of access, whereas the costs involve factors such as travel expenses and the risk of detection and apprehension. While the primary target of burglary is the residence and its valuable contents, the rational choice perspective posits that the decision-making process is influenced not only by the characteristics of the individual property but also by broader neighborhood-level attributes. According to Cornish and Clarke (1987:4), a suitable burglary target is determined by a combination of factors related to both the residence itself and the socio-environmental context in which it is situated. The spatial concentration of burglaries at specific residential locations can be explained through the lens of rational choice theory

(RCT). According to this theory, offenders engage in deliberate decision-making processes, targeting houses that align with their perception of an ideal target—offering maximum reward with minimal risk (Johnson, Bernasco, Bowers, Elffers, Ratcliffe, Rengert, & Townsley, 2007). Initial burglaries often provide offenders with valuable knowledge about a property’s vulnerabilities, increasing the likelihood of repeat offenses at the same house or neighboring properties (Johnson & Bowers, 2004; Johnson et al., 2007). In the context of this study, both the routine activity theory (RAT) and RCT were instrumental in guiding the empirical analysis. These theories collectively underscore the fundamental principle that crime is contingent upon opportunity, even when an offender is motivated. For instance, simple preventive measures such as consistently locking doors and windows, even in hot weather, can disrupt the offender’s rational calculation by removing easy access points to the home. Similarly, RAT highlights that the convergence of three elements—an offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian—is required for a crime to occur. Disrupting any one of these elements can effectively prevent the execution of a planned burglary. Strategies such as concealing visible valuables and ensuring the presence of capable guardians (e.g., alarm systems, security cameras, and guard dogs) can significantly deter offenders and reduce the risk of residential burglaries. This integration of RCT and RAT provides a robust framework for developing evidence-based burglary prevention strategies by focusing on reducing opportunities for crime and increasing perceived risks for offenders.

## **Research and Methodology**

### **Approach and design**

To investigate the spatiotemporal distribution of residential burglaries in the Newlands East policing precinct, a qualitative research design was adopted. Bryman (2004:26) describes qualitative research as a “research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.” This approach was deemed appropriate for the study’s objectives as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuanced social dynamics underlying burglary. Mason (2017:1) highlights that qualitative research enables researchers to examine the interconnected textures and patterns of social life, capturing participants’ lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Such methodologies embrace richness, depth, context, and complexity, facilitating a comprehensive analysis that incorporates multidimensional aspects into the study’s findings.

The selection of this design was intentional and informed by a thorough review of existing literature. Prior studies (Ye, Xu, Lee, Zhu, & Wu, 2015; Malleon, Steenbeek, & Andresen, 2019; Zhang & McCord, 2014) predominantly employed quantitative methods to analyze the spatial and temporal distribution of residential burglaries. These studies relied heavily on crime data provided by law enforcement agencies to test hypotheses and generate statistically valid conclusions. However, such quantitative approaches often overlooked critical perspectives, such as the insights of frontline law enforcement agents and the lived experiences of crime victims. This study sought to address this gap by incorporating the voices and perceptions of individuals with first-hand knowledge of residential burglary in the Newlands East precinct. By recruiting participants who were directly involved or impacted, this research aimed to provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the spatiotemporal patterns of burglary. This approach complemented the existing body of quantitative work, offering a more holistic perspective on the issue and contributing valuable insights to the formulation of effective crime prevention strategies.

### ***The scope of the study***

The South African Police Service (SAPS) in the Newlands East Policing Precinct serves two distinct communities: Newlands West and Newlands East, situated near Durban. These areas differ significantly in their cultural composition and crime rates. Various socio-environmental factors influence these communities, including the prevalence of different housing types (e.g., apartments, standalone houses, single-family homes, and duplexes), widespread substance abuse (particularly drugs and alcohol), diverse population groups, and high levels of unemployment and poverty. Additionally, the precinct spans two administrative wards, each overseen by a different ward councillor, adding a layer of governance complexity.

Historically, during apartheid, Newlands West was designated exclusively for Indian communities. However, the democratic transition brought significant demographic changes to the area. Families from rural regions migrated to Newlands, contributing to challenges in housing availability and infrastructure. Informal settlements emerged around Newlands West as a response to accommodation shortages, leading to overcrowding. In an effort to alleviate these challenges, the sub-economic housing project of Westrich was developed to provide low-cost housing for displaced families (Stan, 2005). These demographic and spatial transformations triggered a wave of socio-economic shifts. Wealthier Indian and African families moved out of the area, seeking better living conditions elsewhere. Conversely, middle-class families, those less affluent, and long-established residents remained in the

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region (Chunderduri, 2013). These dynamics have shaped the social and economic profile of Newlands West, with enduring implications for crime patterns and policing efforts in the precinct. During the apartheid era, Newlands East was designated exclusively for Coloured residents. However, with South Africa's transition to democracy, the area has become more diverse, now accommodating both Coloured and African populations. Despite this demographic shift, socio-economic challenges persist. A significant proportion of residents in Newlands East have not completed high school, and those with educational qualifications often face limited employment prospects. This has created “an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and apathy with respect to finding employment,” with unemployment rates exceeding 40% (Onwards & Upwards Foundation, 2009, cited in Bengtson, 2010:5).

The area is also characterized by high levels of violence, further undermining community stability (Bengtson, 2010). The socio-economic conditions in Newlands East have contributed to an environment of insecurity. Many underprivileged residents engage in criminal activities, often as a means of survival or to support drug addictions. Parental involvement in children's lives is minimal or entirely absent, exacerbating vulnerabilities among the youth. This context highlights the significant challenges faced by the community and underpins the researcher's interest in examining the spatial distribution of burglaries within the Newlands East policing precinct. Understanding how this crime is influenced by various community-level factors—such as poverty, unemployment, and substance abuse—can offer insights into the magnitude and nature of crime in both Newlands East and West, thus informing targeted crime prevention strategies.

### Target population

The study population encompassed all South African Police Service (SAPS) officials stationed at the Newlands East Police Station, executive members of the Community Police Forum (CPF) associated with this precinct, all community members residing in the study area, and the Ward councillors overseeing the two wards within the precinct. Given the impracticality of including the entire population in the study, a purposive sampling method was employed to select a representative group of participants. The final study sample comprised 37 participants, including five SAPS officials, ten CPF members, two Ward councillors, and twenty ordinary community members. The sample was diverse, representing Black African, Indian, and Coloured participants who were proficient in either English or IsiZulu, reflecting the linguistic and cultural composition of the study area.

### Data collection

The researcher employed a mixed-method approach to data collection, conducting individual interviews and focus group discussions to gather comprehensive empirical data relevant to the study's objectives. Individual interviews were conducted with five SAPS officials and two Ward councillors to obtain detailed insights from key stakeholders with direct knowledge of crime patterns and prevention efforts in the area. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with Community Police Forum (CPF) members and community residents to capture diverse perspectives and collective experiences. This combination of methods facilitated the collection of nuanced data necessary to address the study's primary research questions effectively.

### Ethical considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee under protocol reference number HSSREC/00001773/2020. Gatekeeper permissions were secured from the South African Police Service (SAPS) National Research Unit and the two Ward councillors included in the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation. Each participant signed a consent form detailing the study's procedures, including the use of audio recording during interviews. For participants who declined to have their responses recorded, the interviewer meticulously documented their responses in written form to ensure accuracy and respect for their preferences.

### Method of data analysis

To analyze the data provided by the research participants, the study employed the thematic analysis method. This approach, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data, enabling the researcher to systematically organize and comprehensively describe a large dataset. The analysis was conducted following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) familiarizing oneself with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) identifying themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the final report.

## **Limitations of the study**

### **Determining the exact time for residential burglaries**

Determining the precise timing of a crime is a common challenge in this area of research, particularly in the context of residential burglaries. This is due to the fact that victims may be absent during the offense or the crime could occur at any point during the night. Such circumstances pose a significant challenge for researchers focused on the temporal aspects of crime. When a burglary is reported to the police, the South African Police Service (SAPS) typically records the time the incident was reported, rather than the actual time the crime occurred. In addressing this issue, the present study incorporated the time of day as a temporal variable, rather than seeking to pinpoint the exact hour of the offense. This approach helped mitigate the limitations associated with determining the exact time of the crime.

### **Limited available research on the topic in the South African context**

The literature on the research topic within the South African context is notably scarce, presenting a challenge in compiling a comprehensive review with sufficient information specific to the South African situation. This lack of relevant literature was viewed by the researcher as a significant limitation, as each country has its own unique circumstances. The absence of comparative data from South African studies could have enriched both the findings and conclusions of the study. Additionally, this gap in the literature provided limited guidance for the researcher in contextualizing the study within the South African setting.

### **Unwillingness by security companies to participate in the study**

The perspectives of security companies operating within the Newlands East policing precinct, as key stakeholders in addressing residential burglaries, would have greatly enhanced the study's findings. To engage these companies, multiple emails and phone calls were directed to various security firms supporting the Newlands community, inviting them to participate in the research. However, despite these efforts, no responses were received, and the invitations to participate were unsuccessful.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **The spatial distribution of burglary at residential premises**

To investigate the spatial distribution of residential burglaries within the Newlands East Policing Precinct, the following research question was posed:

- *Which areas or locations within the Newlands East Policing Precinct experience the highest incidence of burglaries?*

Data analysis revealed that burglaries occur more frequently in the Newlands West area compared to the Newlands East area. The reasons for this disparity are explored in the subsequent discussion.

### **Theme One: Burglary ‘hotspots’**

While much research has focused on police efforts to prevent and reduce crime in specific locations, it is equally critical to achieve this by understanding where, when, and why crime clusters occur within a particular area (Allvin, 2019). Previous studies have established that residential burglaries tend to be geographically concentrated, with these concentrations ranging from a single street address to an entire neighborhood (Braga, Turchan, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2019). When participants were asked about the area and location of burglaries in the study area, some expressed uncertainty. However, the findings indicated that burglaries were more prevalent in the Newlands West area, with specific hotspots identified in Westrich, Castlehill, and Earlsfield. Participants provided the following observations:

*“Newlands West, Westrich”* (FGD-A: 03:10).

*“Newlands West, the most targeted houses in Newlands West are Castlehill, Westrich, and Hillgrove”* (KII-A: 01:05).

*“Burglaries are more predominant in the Newlands West area. Specifically, in Westrich and places near Westrich, including Earlsfield, Riverdene, and Castlehill”* (KII-A: 01:01).

*“Westrich, Castlehill, Hillgrove, and Parlock”* (FGD-A: 03:11).

These findings highlight the spatial concentration of residential burglaries in specific areas within Newlands West, emphasizing the need for targeted crime prevention strategies in these locations.

### **Theme Two: Repeat Victimisation**

In the Newlands East Policing Precinct, a significant proportion of residential burglary cases involve repeat burglaries at the same premises. Offenders often target the same houses and neighborhoods due to their familiarity with the conditions and routine activities of previously targeted residents. This familiarity enables burglars to rationalize the likelihood of subsequent successful attempts, often with substantial rewards. The neighborhoods most frequently targeted for repeat burglaries include Westrich, Castlehill, and Earlsfield in Newlands West.

Participant accounts highlighted these patterns:

*“Burglary is common in the Newlands West area; it is one crime that you would hear one in ten people saying that they have been a victim of. Though, not all of them report it to the police. I, for one, have been a victim of it more than once and only reported it in the second incident” (FGD-A: 01:03).*

*“Yoh, burglary is a stubborn crime and very prevalent here (Newlands West). I’ve already experienced it three times. The first time they broke into my house, they also tried to break into my neighbor’s house, but that attempt was not successful since the house was more guarded” (FGD-A: 03:01).*

These findings underscore the prevalence of repeat burglaries in specific areas and highlight the potential influence of offender familiarity and routine activity patterns in shaping criminal behavior. They also suggest that underreporting of incidents may obscure the true extent of the problem in these neighborhoods.

### **Theme Three: Environmental design**

The physical environment and design of certain areas, particularly in Newlands West, present significant challenges to effective policing. The infrastructure in these areas is not conducive to adequate law enforcement due to several factors, including insufficient street lighting, overgrown vegetation that provides concealment for burglars, and narrow access routes that are inaccessible to police vehicles. These limitations hinder the ability of the South African Police Service to respond efficiently and deter criminal activities. Participants provided the following insights:

*In Westrich, which falls under Newlands West, police vehicles cannot drive into some of the roads due to the design of the place, and houses are not properly numbered” (KII-A: 03:07).*

*We have a huge problem with burglaries, especially in Westrich (Newlands West). The reason is the environmental design of the properties there is not conducive for proper policing because the police must park a vehicle away from the houses and look for some houses on foot because the vehicle cannot go in. Also, there are no actual addresses on the post boxes. Some have boxes, but the numbers vary. They are not in numerical order as they have block numbers and numbers ranging downwards, and that is one of the problems. House numbers are not clearly visible from the street, so you cannot find addresses. The streetlights, especially at night when burglaries also take place, are not bright enough for the community. At times, there are no streetlights, and the community takes its time to report such issues to us or the municipality. Obviously, criminals will target those places more (KII-A: 01:03).*

These findings emphasize the role of environmental design in facilitating or hindering crime prevention. Poorly planned infrastructure, such as inadequate lighting, unclear house numbering, and inaccessible roads, creates opportunities for burglars while simultaneously limiting police effectiveness. Addressing these issues could significantly improve crime prevention efforts in the affected areas.

### **Theme Four: Spatial distribution of burglary in deprived neighbourhoods and surroundings**

Both deprived and middle-class neighborhoods experience higher rates of residential burglary compared to affluent areas. Several factors contribute to this disparity. In deprived neighborhoods, residents are often less active in crime prevention initiatives, creating an environment more susceptible to criminal activity. Additionally, many burglars reside in these disadvantaged areas and operate within their familiar "awareness spaces." Middle-class neighborhoods, such as Castlehill and Earlsfield, are particularly vulnerable due to their proximity to deprived areas like Westrich. This geographical closeness enables individuals from poorer neighborhoods to target wealthier-looking homes in search of financial gain. Consequently, the socio-economic dynamics and spatial relationships between these areas play a significant role in shaping burglary patterns.

*“Burglaries occur more on the Newlands West side, specifically in the middle- and lower-class neighborhoods. These include Westrich, Earlsfield, Castlehill, etc. Well, the affluent areas are also targeted like Parlock and Hillgrove, but you get random housebreakings there and during those housebreakings most*

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*of the suspects come with vehicles. Also, most of the time in those cases we get video footages since those areas have cameras as well as proper patrols” (KII-A: 01:03).*

*“In Westrich, there are no neighborhood watches, so this area is targeted more because of this. However, when we go to other places in Newlands West like Parlock, it is rare because there are community patrollers there. In Hillgrove as well, it is not so prevalent because there are neighborhood watches there” (KII-A: 01:02).*

These findings indicate that the presence of community-based crime prevention initiatives, such as neighborhood watches and patrolling, plays a crucial role in deterring burglaries. The lack of such measures in areas like Westrich leaves these neighborhoods more vulnerable, while affluent areas benefit from better security infrastructure and organized community efforts.

### Theme Five: Newlands West comprises a larger geographic area than Newlands East

Newlands West is significantly larger in both geographic size and population compared to Newlands East. The area has experienced an unplanned influx of people from rural regions, leading to ongoing developments to accommodate the growing population. Construction projects, including the building of new houses, malls, and smaller business centers, are continuously underway in Newlands West. Participants highlighted these dynamics:

- *“The western side of Newlands is bigger compared to the eastern side in terms of size and the number of individuals it accommodates. Newlands West is constantly being developed as compared to Newlands East, with malls, houses, and other construction projects. As we speak, there are some informal settlements and temporary shelters there in Westrich (Newlands West), which causes problems as they bring people from different areas. Many of these individuals are unemployed and waiting for government housing. Not working, they would do anything to survive” (KII-A: 01:05).*

This unregulated growth and the presence of informal settlements contribute to socio-economic challenges in Newlands West, including unemployment and increased vulnerability to crime. These factors underscore the need for sustainable urban planning and targeted interventions to address the area's unique challenges.

### Theme Six: Environmental features such as planning and design.

The Newlands West area is more frequently targeted for burglaries due to the environmental design and location of residences in this region. Housebreakers tend to prefer standalone houses, which are more common in Newlands West, over apartment complexes, which are the predominant residential design in Newlands East. Apartment complexes generally present a higher risk of detection, as they have a greater likelihood of someone being present and vigilant.

Standalone houses are particularly appealing to burglars for several reasons:

1. **Reduced Surveillance:** Apartment blocks typically have a higher concentration of residents, increasing the likelihood of surveillance and detection.
2. **Privacy for Offenders:** Single-family homes often feature high garden walls, fences, or shrubbery, which provide burglars with privacy once they have accessed the property, making it less likely they will be observed.
3. **Perceived Rewards:** Detached houses are generally larger and appear more luxurious compared to apartments, leading to the perception that they offer greater rewards for burglary.

Participants provided the following insights:

*“Burglaries occur more in the Newlands West area. The reason being the majority of the homes in the Newlands West area are standalone houses, as compared to the Newlands East neighborhood, where it is mostly apartments where people frequently loiter. For example, if we live in a block of flats like in the Newlands East neighborhood, there's a good possibility that one of the four families may be at home. In contrast, with standalone homes, once the burglars do a survey and discover that nobody is at home, they will conclude that once they gain access, there will be no interruptions” (KII-A: 02:01).*

These findings highlight how differences in residential design and environmental factors influence burglary patterns, with standalone homes in Newlands West presenting greater opportunities for undetected access and higher perceived rewards.

### Factors that contribute to the spatial distribution of burglaries

Several factors contribute to the spatial distribution of residential burglary in the Newlands East Policing Precinct, with key influences including unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, and poverty. Participants



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emphasized that many burglars in the area commit these crimes not only to survive but also to fund their drug addictions. Additional contributing factors include the socio-economic diversity in Newlands West, which consists of both affluent and deprived neighborhoods. The disparity between these areas leads burglars to target wealthier homes, motivated by the potential financial rewards. Furthermore, a lack of guardianship—such as neighborhood watches, security alarms, and proper security measures like fences and burglar bars—makes certain properties particularly attractive to motivated offenders. Participants highlighted the following contributing factors:

*“There are just so many things contributing to burglaries in the area. Criminals check places without security guards, places with no streetlights, or areas where the streetlight is not working, and they target those areas with long grass. Therefore, it is imperative to get all stakeholders on board. The municipality should fix streetlights and cut overgrown bushes and grass. Lastly, since criminals target those places with no community patrols and no neighborhood watches, the CPF and SAPS should work hard in establishing these structures in those areas”* (KII-A: 01:05).

*“The main contributing factors are unemployment, drugs, and alcohol in the area. It is really a problem. So, in order to curb residential burglaries in Newlands, all stakeholders must assist in the fight. Local government should come up with strategies to break unemployment by assisting with small businesses in the area. Rehabilitation centers should address the drug issue, and parents should take their children to rehabilitation centers. Also, the police must arrest drug dealers and close down illegal taverns”* (FGD-A: 03:04).

*“The Newlands West area has a diverse population, including both middle and lower classes. Thus, this is what attracts housebreakers to this area, especially those from poverty-stricken backgrounds”* (KII-A: 01:03).

*“Socio-economic reasons. Some of the properties in Newlands West are lavish and could give the impression that the residents are affluent, whereas others are not. Lack of guardianship. I believe that once motivated perpetrators are aware that a specific residential area lacks active security, such as alarm systems or patrolling security, they will take advantage of this opportunity and perform house burglaries”* (FGD-A: 03:01).

The primary motive for residential burglary is financial gain, particularly through stealing money (Montoya et al., 2016). Therefore, any visible display of wealth increases the likelihood that a home will be targeted for burglary. This aligns with the routine activities’ theory, which suggests that crime is more likely to occur when individuals with criminal intent encounter suitable targets, with no capable guardians or security measures in place to prevent the crime.

### Exploring the temporal distribution of burglary at residential premises

To investigate the temporal patterns of residential burglaries in the Newlands East Policing Precinct, the following research question was formulated:

- *Are there specific times or occasions when residential burglaries are more likely to occur?*

In addressing this question, the researchers further inquired whether burglaries were more prevalent during particular times of the day, months of the year, or other temporal intervals. Responses were subsequently categorized based on factors such as special events, months of the year, seasons, days of the week, and times of the day.

#### Theme One: Time of the day

The incidence of residential burglary exhibits a significant increase during daytime hours compared to the early evening and nighttime. In the study area of Newlands, residential burglaries typically begin around 07:00 and peak at approximately 17:00. This pattern is primarily attributed to the absence of residents, who are engaged in work and school activities during these hours. The following statements from key informants and focus group discussions illustrate this trend:

*“It happens mostly from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the day when people are not home”* (KII-A: 01:05).

*“It is more during the day; it is very rare for it to happen at night”* (KII-A: 01:01).

*“During the day, I believe criminals capitalize on the time when residents are away for work or school”* (FGD-A: 03:01).

These findings align with the broader understanding that residential burglaries typically occur in the absence of direct confrontation between perpetrators and victims. The observed pattern is supported by both Rational Choice Theory and Routine Activity Theory. From a rational choice perspective, burglars may deliberately target homes during daytime hours, anticipating that they will be unoccupied. Routine Activity Theory further reinforces this explanation,

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suggesting that the daily routines of residents—such as leaving for work or school—create opportunities for criminal activity in their absence.

The study revealed a notable distinction in burglary patterns between the two residential areas within the study site. Specifically, the frequency of burglaries varied between Newlands West and Newlands East based on the time of day. This variation may be attributed to differences in employment levels, with higher unemployment rates in Newlands East resulting in more residents being at home during the day compared to their counterparts in Newlands West. Consequently, the greater presence of individuals in Newlands East may act as a deterrent to daytime burglaries. Prior observations suggest that a higher number of people "hanging around" in this area serves as informal guardianship, thereby reducing the likelihood of burglaries occurring during daylight hours. The following statements from key informants support this argument:

*"In Newlands West, it is more during the day; in the case of Newlands East, it is both night and day" (KII-A: 01:01).*

*"It happens mostly from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the day when people are not home; if it happens during the night, it occurs between 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. when people are sleeping" (KII-A: 01:05).*

A comprehensive analysis of these findings indicates that, overall, residential properties in the study area are more susceptible to burglary during the daytime than in the evening or nighttime. However, while daytime burglaries are more prevalent, incidents occurring at night remain a significant concern.

### Theme Two: Day of the week

The occurrence of residential burglary is significantly higher on weekdays, particularly from Monday to Friday. This pattern can be attributed to increased opportunities for offenders, as many residents are away at work or school during these days, leaving homes unoccupied and vulnerable to burglary. The absence of guardianship during these periods creates favorable conditions for property-related crimes. The following statements from respondents illustrate this trend:

*"Generally, it occurs more during weekdays. However, if it is holiday season, I would say both weekdays and weekends since residential burglaries occur more often whilst residents are at work, school, or on holiday" (FGD-A: 03:10).*

*"Weekday burglaries are more prevalent than weekend burglaries" (KII-A: 06:06).*

These findings highlight the influence of routine activities on burglary patterns. While weekdays present the highest risk due to the predictable absence of occupants, holiday seasons may also see increased incidents as homes remain unoccupied for extended periods.

### Theme Three: Month of the year

The highest incidence of residential burglary in the study area occurs during the summer month of December. Several factors contribute to this trend, with the most prominent being that many South Africans take holidays or extended breaks from work during this period. Consequently, a significant number of households in Newlands are left unoccupied as residents travel for vacations, visit rural family members, or engage in social activities away from home. The following statements from participants illustrate this pattern:

*"It occurs more during the December summer holidays, as during this time people are mostly active outside, and therefore this will increase burglary. So, during the summer holidays we have a lot of housebreakings because people are away from their homes" (KII-A: 02:01).*

*"Burglary is high during the month of December during these holidays" (FGD-A: 03:06).*

*"Housebreakings are mostly common in the month of December due to the number of festive activities which occur particularly away from individuals' houses. During these periods, residents also leave their homes empty and visit their relatives and other places" (KII-A: 01:05).*

These responses indicate that routine domestic activities vary across different months and holiday seasons, directly influencing burglary rates. Prior research suggests that property crimes often stem from a perceived immediate need for cash, with offenders targeting homes that are likely to contain money and valuable items (Cohn & Rotton, 2003). This pattern is particularly evident in South Africa during December, when individuals receive year-end bonuses and purchase high-value assets such as jewelry, televisions, smartphones, and computers. The combination of increased wealth and reduced residential occupancy creates an environment conducive to burglary.

### Theme Four: Weather Variations

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In line with Routine Activity Theory, the activities of residents in the Newlands study area are influenced by weather conditions, which in turn affect their routine behaviors and the presence of capable guardianship that deters burglars. The key finding suggests that homeowners and guardians are more likely to be present and actively monitoring their properties during inclement weather, thereby reducing the likelihood of burglary. Conversely, during hot weather conditions, residents tend to be less cautious, often leaving windows open at night, which creates opportunities for burglars. Offenders exploit this negligence, operating under the rational assumption that they can enter undetected while occupants are asleep. The following statements from participants illustrate this phenomenon:

*"To think of it, I became a victim of burglary because I had left my windows open on this one night. I left them open because it was hot, and I needed some air to sleep. Luckily, the housebreaker took my laptop only and some handheld stuff and ran away when I woke up" (FGD-A: 03:01).*

*"Given that varying weather patterns primarily influence what individuals do, I would definitely agree there is a connection. For example, individuals like spending time at home when it's cold or raining, which means that they're more likely to witness a burglary take place; this then discourages burglars from committing this crime" (KII-A: 01:02).*

These responses suggest a strong link between weather patterns and the frequency of residential burglaries. This finding has implications for law enforcement strategies, particularly for the South African Police Service (SAPS), which may need to anticipate and prepare for fluctuations in burglary incidents based on seasonal and weather-related factors. Additionally, public awareness initiatives should educate residents on the importance of heightened vigilance during warm weather conditions to mitigate burglary risks.

### Theme Five: Summer holiday season

The findings related to seasonal patterns of burglary align with the month-of-the-year variable, demonstrating a strong association between residential burglary and the summer holiday period in the Newlands East policing precinct. This trend is largely attributable to the widespread absence of residents during the hot summer months. In South Africa, the December school holiday is a time when many families gather to celebrate the festive season, often traveling for vacations, engaging in day trips, or planning recreational activities for their children. Additionally, this period includes no fewer than four public holidays, culminating in New Year's Day. The prolonged absence of residents during this time results in numerous unoccupied and unguarded homes, thereby increasing the opportunity for burglars to operate with reduced risk of detection. A key informant described this pattern as follows:

*"During summer holidays, there are many opportunities during this time, and burglars are always looking out for these opportunities. During these times, most people are away from home, and so burglars go around looking for houses to hit. They go to the extent of putting something in the yard—a water bottle, for example—and come back the next day to check if it has been removed. If not, they will break into the house, as this will confirm their suspicion that nobody is at home. Another thing they check is post boxes to see if people have collected [the post]. People must know that criminals are aware of residents' movements and understand what is happening in the community; therefore, they know when a particular house is unoccupied during this time" (KII-A: 01:05).*

This perspective is supported by Rational Choice Theory (RCT), which posits that criminals are rational actors who assess risks and opportunities before committing a crime. Burglars carefully observe patterns of occupancy and identify homes that can be targeted with minimal risk of detection. Routine Activity Theory (RAT) further reinforces this view, suggesting that offenders exploit predictable patterns in residents' daily and seasonal routines to determine the most opportune times for burglary. Consequently, the increased absence of homeowners during the festive season creates an ideal environment for property-related crime.

### Conclusion

This study has examined both the temporal and spatial dimensions of residential burglary within the Newlands East policing precinct in Durban. Temporally, the findings indicate that the frequency of residential burglaries fluctuates throughout the year, varying by hour, day, week, month, and season. The application of Routine Activity Theory has proven valuable in explaining these patterns, highlighting the role of daily routines and seasonal behaviors in shaping burglary risks. Spatially, the results reveal that residential burglaries are highly concentrated in the Newlands West area. A key factor contributing to this trend is the recurrence of burglaries at specific locations, suggesting that targeted crime prevention measures in this area could significantly reduce the overall incidence of burglary. Overall, this research provides critical insights that can inform the development of effective crime

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prevention initiatives. By demonstrating that burglary patterns are influenced by the routine activities of community members and that spatial concentrations of crime exist within specific neighborhoods, the study underscores the importance of strategic, data-driven interventions. These findings can assist policymakers and law enforcement agencies in determining the most effective times and locations for crime prevention efforts. If appropriately implemented and disseminated, the insights gained from this study have the potential to contribute to a substantial reduction in residential burglary, both within the study area and in similar urban settings.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### Community Awareness and Vigilance

Residents should be educated on the specific times and locations where residential burglaries are most prevalent in their community. Increased awareness can enhance vigilance and encourage precautionary measures, particularly during high-risk periods. Additionally, homeowners should ensure that their properties remain secured at all times and notify relevant authorities when leaving their homes unoccupied for extended periods.

#### Multi-Stakeholder Crime Prevention Initiatives

Crime prevention requires a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders. The local municipality should take proactive measures to enhance community safety by improving street lighting and clearing overgrown vegetation, which may serve as concealment for criminals. Furthermore, the government should assume greater accountability in crime prevention by implementing socio-economic development programs that promote small business growth, reduce poverty, and create employment opportunities—factors that may indirectly reduce crime.

#### Integration of Crime Prevention in Urban Planning

The South African Police Service (SAPS) should work closely with private construction firms and the Department of Human Settlements when planning and executing housing projects. Incorporating crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles can help ensure that new residential developments are constructed with security and policing considerations in mind.

#### Strengthening Community-Police Partnerships

Effective crime prevention in the study area necessitates strengthened collaboration between community members and law enforcement agencies. Establishing trust and cooperation between residents and the SAPS can facilitate more efficient crime reporting, information sharing, and the implementation of proactive security measures.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Given the limited research on the spatiotemporal patterns of residential burglary in South Africa, further studies should explore this phenomenon using diverse research methodologies. A mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques would provide a more comprehensive understanding of burglary trends and inform more effective crime prevention strategies.

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