

Exploration of the Urban Residents' Perceptions on Crime Prevention Strategies: A Case Study of Informal Settlement Neighborhoods of Nakuru City, Kenya

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore residents' perceptions of crime and potential prevention strategies in Nakuru City, Kenya. Like numerous other cities, Nakuru has experienced rapid urbanization, leading to the emergence of densely populated informal settlements with limited resources, a common occurrence in many developing countries. Consequently, this has led to an increase in urban violence. While the government has implemented various strategies to address crime, there is limited information available on residents' perceptions of these measures. The study employed a cross-sectional survey and interviews with 399 residents from a population of 570,674, 20 key informants and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study identified inequality (mean score 4.32) as the leading perceived cause of crime, followed by lack of economic opportunities (mean 4.21) and organized crime (mean 4.16). Tribalism was highlighted as a key factor contributing to crime in low-income areas (mean 4.16). Encouragingly, 92.4% of respondents agreed that comprehensive crime prevention strategies can significantly reduce crime. The study recommends collaborative approaches involving law enforcement, communities, civil society, and the private sector, emphasizing holistic strategies beyond solely police interventions. These findings can inform policymakers in informal and urban settings to develop more effective crime prevention measures

Keywords: Kenya, Crime; Violence, Prevention strategies, Nakuru

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Background of the Study

While urbanization has brought advancements in civilization, it has also led to an increase in crime rates in urban areas, impacting residents' lives (Adesegeha&Omotayo, 2023; Bannister & Flint, 2017). The rates of robbery forcible rape, aggravated assault, and homicide have risen (Mitra *et al.*, 2023). However, a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2020) showed a decreasing trend from 2003 to 2018 worldwide, particularly in the category of robbery, serious assault, and city homicide paradox in sexual violence. Strategies have been put in place to combat societal disorders but still seem unable to eradicate such from happening in safe city planning (Sandberg & Ronnblom, 2015). Global crime trends are indeed complex and multifaceted, varying widely depending on factors such as geographical location, socioeconomic conditions, government policies, and technological advancements. Hence, understanding these trends requires acknowledging the multifaceted nature of crime and its varying patterns across regions (Olisahet *al.*, 2024).

From a criminology point of view, crime is a by-product of human civilization, and incivility is a part of the nature of human behavior (Cozens & Love, 2015). Therefore, humans must admit and accept living in co-existence with these disorders or evil acts while deliberately trying to come up with strategies to reduce crime and the fear of crime (Mihinjac& Saville, 2019). Crime is a global phenomenon, but the level of crime varies greatly from region to region. More than a million people die each year from violence and insecurity, making it a major cause of death, particularly for young people aged 15 to 44. It accounts for 14% of deaths among males and 7% of deaths among females. Studies show that urban residents are more likely to experience death, loss of property, injuries, and displacement (UN-Habitat, 2015). This also reveals a disparity between the rich who live in protected areas within the city and the poor who are exposed to all forms of insecurity in slums.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya, experiencing rapid urbanization like other African countries, witnesses similar trends. Cities like Nakuru struggle with growing slum populations and security concerns. The Kenyan government emphasizes the role of county governments in promoting safety through measures like drug control, licensing, and infrastructure development. However, despite some efforts, crime remains a major concern in Kenyan cities. Nakuru, for instance, recorded high crime rates despite police reforms. While traditional law enforcement plays a crucial role, successful prevention requires more inclusive strategies. This study focuses on Nakuru City, aiming to understand the influence of residents' perceptions on police crime prevention strategies. Exploring these perspectives and addressing the need for collaborative, multi-dimensional approaches can contribute to effective solutions.

Literature Review

Globally, American states and the Caribbean countries are among the most insecure and violent places globally with homicide rate is at least thrice the global average (The Economist, 2017; UNDP, 2013; UNODC, 2014). Statistics show that out every four murdered people, one is either a Brazilian, Colombian, Mexican, or Venezuelan (Muggahm, 2017) and over 40 of the most murderous cities are situated in these countries. Over 50 % of the world's population lives in cities, and countries in the global South are home to the most rapid urbanization processes (UN-DESA., 2016). The INTERPOL's (2022) first-ever Global Crime Trend report, saw more than 60 per cent of respondents rank crimes such as money laundering, ransomware, phishing and online scams as high or very high threats.

In Africa, traditional crimes such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and organized crime persist as significant challenges. Additionally, emerging crimes such as online banking fraud, credit card fraud, and cryptocurrency scams are increasingly becoming major concerns, according to a report by INTERPOL (2022). Sub-Saharan African countries at the moment are experiencing high rates of urbanization as many people move from rural to urban areas. For example, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Kinshasa (DRC), and Luanda (Angola) are all predicted to grow by approximately 50 million inhabitants from 2016 to 2023, and Lagos (Nigeria) by more than 10 million (from 13.7 million in 2016 to 24.2 by 2030). In a region that is affected by political instability and challenges related to climate change and food insecurity, analysts and policymakers have increasingly sought to understand how these factors relate to an elevated risk of violence in these fast-growing cities. Reports indicate a worrying link between poor urban planning and high crime rates, exemplified by studies in South Africa and Kenya. This connection is especially concerning given the rapid urbanization happening in many countries, potentially creating fertile ground for new security challenges. The evolving nature of crime further complicates matters, demanding continuous adaptation from law enforcement (NCRC, 2013; SRIC, 2014; South Africa Crime and Safety, 2017).

Kenyans rely heavily on their police to combat rising and evolving criminal threats like terrorism and cybercrime, but the sheer complexity and adaptation required to address these challenges often leaves law enforcement struggling to keep pace (Martin,2022; NCRC, 2013). This necessitates proactive strategies beyond traditional solutions to tackle the increasingly sophisticated landscape of crime. The fast pace of technology and reporting demands faster responses to evolving crime threats, but rapid communication also facilitates global collaboration in tackling them. Effective crime prevention requires addressing desire, ability, and opportunity, with offender justifications and victim experiences impacting responses alongside legal, individual, and social factors. Kenya's constitution tasks county governments with security and safety, including controlling drug abuse, issuing licenses, regulating housing, managing traffic, and ensuring proper lighting and healthcare access, all interconnected with public safety (Fisher & Lab, 2010; Gitonga, 2015; Wortley & Mazerolle, 2013).

Methodology

Study Area

Nakuru City, the fourth largest in Kenya, boasts 570,674 inhabitants, with the largest concentration in its urban center (Nakuru City). This study was carried out at four key locations of the city: Kaptebwa, London, Bondeni, and Free Area. Kaptebwa. These four locations are slum areas that are found on the outskirts of the city, faces significant daily challenges, including overcrowding, poor sanitation, limited access to clean water, and inadequate healthcare.

Research Design, Target Population and Unit of Analysis

This study employed a descriptive research design with qualitative and quantitative approach. This allowed focused collection of information from a representative sample through interviews. The flexibility of interviews helped explore attitudes, motives, and experiences related to insecurity, both from victim and perpetrator perspectives. Additionally, interview schedules gathered demographic data to contextualize findings within participants' social and economic realities (Creswell, 2014). The target population was the residents who were above 18 years of age in Nakuru County, Kenya where the combined population of Nakuru is 570,674 (KNBS 2019). The unit of analysis was the resident individuals aged 18 years of age in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

This study employed purposive and proportionate sampling techniques based on Kothari & Gaurav (2014), selecting a representative sample of 399 from Nakuru City's population of 570,674 using Yamen's (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: n = is the sample size, N = the target population (570,674) and e = precision level (0.05)

Data Collection, Instrumentation, Validity and Reliability

Primary data was obtained through questionnaires administered to respondents, interviews with key informants and focus groups discussions triangulating quantitative and qualitative methods. Secondary data came from reviewing documents, books, and reports. Semi-structured questionnaires collected quantitative data on demographics and study aspects. Key informant (KI) interviews, guided by predetermined questions, provided deeper insights. Focus groups (6-12 participants per group with gender balance) explored issues and concerns collaboratively. To ensure the instrument's content validity, two experts from Egerton University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences evaluated it as per Bowling & Ebrahim (2005), confirming that the items align with the defined concept and adequately represent the intended subject area. Reliability, as Kasomo (2006) explains, reflects the instrument's ability to consistently measure the same phenomenon repeatedly. This study utilized Cronbach's alpha, aiming for a minimum score of 0.7 to ensure internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The study utilized SPSS 21.0 for quantitative data analysis and discourse analysis for KI interviews and FGDs. Data was presented in tables for thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics (mode, frequency, mean, percent) explained findings, while Pearson's correlation assessed relationships between continuous variables.

Results

Socio-demographic distribution

Age and gender distribution of the respondents are shown in Figure 1. It was noted that 12.7% of the respondents were aged 18-24 years, 26.1% were aged 25 - 30 years, 30.5% were aged 31 - 35 years, 27.2% were aged 36- 40 years and 8.5% were >41 years. The number of female respondents was 255 which forms 72% of the total number of respondents whilst that of male respondents was 107 which forms 28.3% of the total number of respondents.

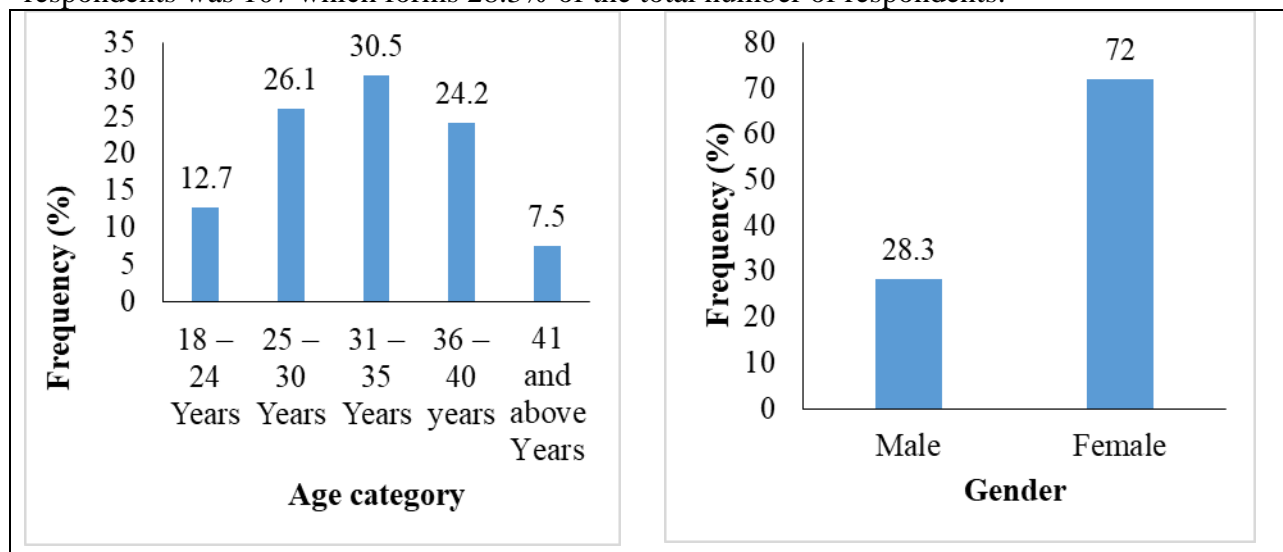


Figure 1: Age and gender distribution of the respondents

Distribution of respondents by educational background of the respondents is shown in Table 1. 61.2% of the respondents had a college education, 29.8% had secondary school, 4.7% had primary education and 4.3% never went to school.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by educational background

Education level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	24	4.3
Primary level	55	4.7
Secondary level	106	29.8
Tertiary level	171	61.2
Total	356	100

Source: Field Data 2023

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Police officers' distribution by rank and work experience is shown in Table 2. Among the police, 64.3% of the police officers were in the rank of police constables, 4% were in the rank of gazetted officers, 25% and 16% were in the corporal-senior/sergeants and inspectors-chief inspectors' categories respectively. 29% had a work experience in service of 11-20 years, 38% had 21-30 years, 24% had above 30 years and 15% <10 years.

Table 2: Police officers' distribution by rank and work experience

Demographic Characteristics		Count	Percentage (%)
Rank	Gazetted officers (ASP-SSP)	5.0	25.0
	Member of inspectorate (Inspectors-chief inspectors)	3.0	16.0
	NCO's (Corporal-Senior/Sergeants)	5.0	25.0
	Police constables	10.0	64.3
Work Experience in NPS	0-10years	3.0	15.0
	11-20years	11.0	29.0
	21-30years	15.0	38.0
	Above30 years	7.0	24.0

Source: Field Data 2023

3.2 Perception of occupation on Crime Related activities

Perception of occupation on crime related activities in Nakuru City, Kenya is shown in Table 3. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents opined that employment development influences crime prevention strategies in Nakuru City. Using. The major contributing factor to crime active crime-relativities is the gap between the rich and the poor with a mean of 4.32 whereas alcohol and drug abuse among youth contributes the least, a mean of 3.48.

Table 3: Perception of occupation on Crime Related activities in Nakuru City, Kenya

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
Lack of entrepreneurial activities	4.21	0.624
Inequality among the urban residents	4.32	0.811
Alcohol and Drug abuse leads to criminal activities among youths	3.48	0.504
Business rivalry among the urban residents	4.21	0.624
Organized a crime	4.16	0.848

Scale: 1-5 where 1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree

Source: Field Data 2023

Urban residents' perception on causes of increase crime rate in low-income areas in Nakuru City is shown in Table 4. When the respondents were asked on the causes of increase in crime in low-

income areas in, poor society cohesion emerged to be major cause with a highest mean of 4.16 while lack of sufficient security increases crime had a least cause mean of 3.93.

Table 4: Causes of increase crime rate in low-income areas in Nakuru City

Statements	Mean	Std.Dev
Tribalism/Poor Society Cohesion	4.16	0.848
Inequality among the people	4.05	0.749
An increase in unemployment has an impact on the rate of crime	4.04	0.687
Lack of sufficient security measures	3.93	0.657

Scale: 1-5 where 1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agreed

Source: Field Data 2023

Urban residents’ perception of Crime reporting in Nakuru City

The level of crime reporting on crime prevention strategies in Nakuru City was determined in this study where the respondents were asked to indicate whether crime reporting contributes to crime prevention strategies and the findings are illustrated in Figure 2. Majority (92.4 %) of the respondents agreed that crime reporting influences crime prevention strategies in whereas, 7.6 % disagreed.

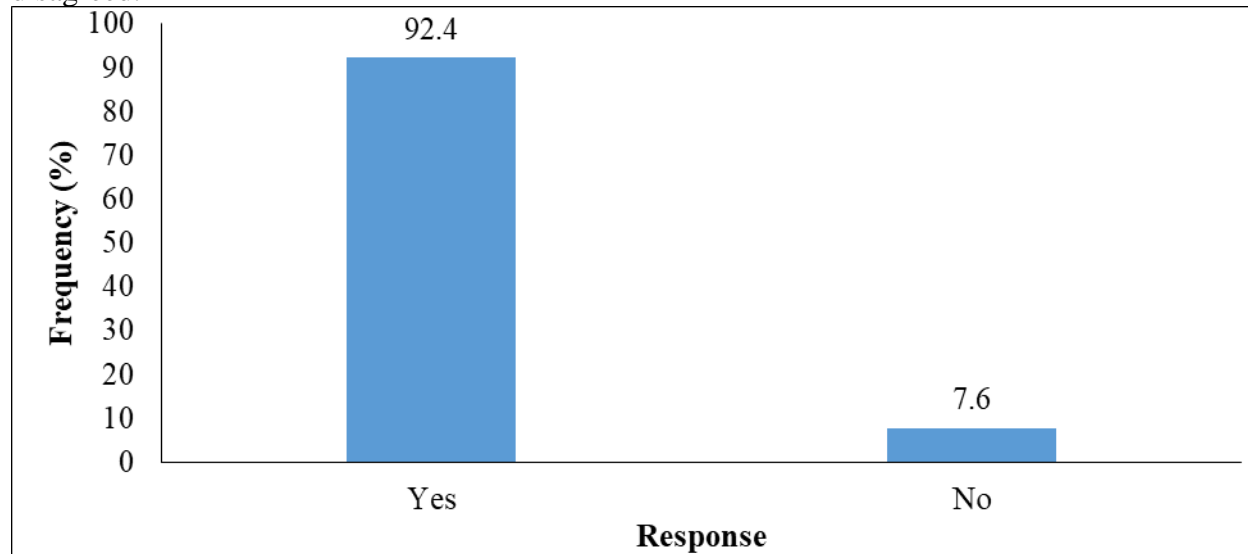


Figure 2: Perception of crime reporting in crime prevention in Nakuru City, Kenya

Source: Field Data 2023

Here are some of their responses:

“...Some police officers are unapproachable whenever there is a need for their services”

Respondent No. 12

“Yes, police officers fail to respond in good time...” Respondent no.5

“...I am satisfied with the measures taken by police to manage crime in our place. Police officers are reliable in providing safety and security” Respondent no.19

“Police officers maintain the confidentiality of information given to them” Respondent no. 10

“Police officers harass members of the public in the course of their duties...” Respondent no.12

These respondents were further requested to indicate their level of agreement with various statements on perception of crime reporting on crime prevention strategies in Nakuru County and the findings are as illustrated in Table 5. From the findings, the respondents agreed that crime reporting helps in law enforcement as shown by a mean of 4.337, and that sharing intelligence has increased the number of arrests as shown by a mean of 3.921. The respondents were however neutral that information sharing leads to inter-agency collaboration as shown by a mean of 3.090 and that crime reporting helps in thwarting a crime before it happens as shown by a mean of 2.539.

Table 5: Agreement with various statements on perception of crime reporting in Nakuru City, Kenya

Statement	Mean	Std.Dev.
Sharing intelligence have increased number of arrests	3.921	0.661
Crime reporting help in thwarting a crime before it happens	2.539	1.235
Crime reporting help in law enforcement	4.337	0.673
Information Sharing Leads to Inter-agency Collaboration	3.090	0.807

Scale: 1-5 where 1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agreed

Source: Field Data 2023

Further probe using key informant interview, one of the respondents asserted that;

“... most of the residents shy away from interacting with the police officers even when they are supposed to report criminal activities or volunteer information about a crime incident a security loophole is created by the residents' reluctance to cooperate with the police officers in ensuring security...”

One of the key informants interviewed in the Bondeni area posited that:

“The police are usually slow to react or there is little prospect of recovering lost or stolen items, therefore most significant criminal incidents remain unreported. Since some police personnel collaborate with criminals and frequently reveal the name of the informants, endangering their lives, major crimes like armed robberies are rarely reported. The only crimes that are reported are small ones, such break-ins, assaults, altercations, and misplaced children”.

The secretary of the business community (Wakulima traders) noted that there had been improved crime prevention strategies in urban low-income areas and its surroundings. One of the Miraa and Mogokaseller also noted that they had been relevant decrease in fear of crime at night and traders were expressing confidence in conducting their businesses.

The findings from the Key informant interview (Kaptembo and Free Area Chief) noted that:

“Through community policing, members of the public can report freely matters of

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criminal nature to the police and through that we have been able to detect and reduce crime rate slum areas...”

Trends for various aspects of crime prevention strategies

The respondents were asked to indicate the trend of the various aspects of crime based on the number of arrests, crime analysis, and criminal prosecutions and the findings are as illustrated in Table 6. According to responses, the number of arrests has increased as shown by a mean of 3.989, the criminal prosecutions have been constant as shown by a mean of 3.371 while crime analysis has reduced as shown by a mean of 2.258.

Table 6: Trends for various aspects of crime prevention in Nakuru City, Kenya

Aspects of crime prevention	Mean	Std.Dev.
Number of arrests	3.989	0.593
Crime analysis	2.258	0.886
Criminal prosecutions	3.371	0.831

Scale: 1-5 where 1=strongly disagree and 5= strongly agreed

Source: Field Data 2023

One of the DCI police officers who had worked for three years in the CBD gave the following information:

“Community policing is the best way to deal with criminals because as a police officer, I have received many reports from the members of the public about people they are suspect to be robbing from Nairobi residents, and upon acting on the information, we have arrested most of the suspects and members of the public have helped in being witnesses in court hence we have succeeded in prosecuting most of them...”

Crime and informal settlement

The Pearson correlation of crime prevention strategies with criminal activities in low-income areas of Nakuru City was conducted as shown in Table 7. The correlation analysis revealed that there was a significant negative but weak relationship between crime prevention strategies with criminal activities in low-income areas of Nakuru City ($r=-0.302$, $p<0.001$).

Table 7: The correlation of crime prevention strategies with criminal activities in low-income areas of Nakuru City

Area of Residence	Community Policing	Criminal Activities	Pearson Correlation Coefficient Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Low Income Areas of Nakuru City			-0.302*	0.000

* - Means significant at 5% level

Source: Field Data 2023

The regression analysis of demographic factors of slum residents against crime mitigating strategies as shown in Table 7 which shows a positive and significant relationship between resident perceptions on crime prevention in Nakuru slum areas. However, each location has different levels of crime incidents depending on whether they are directly linked to the criminal disposition of an individual.

Table 7: Relationship between Crime and Informal Settlements in Nakuru City

	Coefficients	Std error	T	Sig.
Constant	1.4255	1.4928	1.5414	0.08321
Demographic factors	0.46263	0.31422	3.3624	0.00473
Public perception	0.20069	0.2644	3.2678	0.05202
Crime Prevention strategies	0.70788	0.22082	2.4099	0.00184

Source: Field Data 2023

Discussions of the Results

Based on the gender, level of education and level of education of the respondents in this study, as indicated in Figure 1 and Table 1, it can be deduced that the respondents were well represented by gender able to read and write, and they were knowledgeable to fill the data collection tool and majority of the population living in selected areas were youth. These finding mirrors a current report that indicates that the number of ladies were more than men in Kenya (KNBS, 2019). On the other hand, majority of police service officers were of the rank of constables and had experience in the service of over 10 years. This implies that these officers have necessary experience of enforcing law and order as well as have knowledge of the same.

Several factors contribute to crime in urban areas, including a lack of entrepreneurial opportunities, economic inequality, youth substance abuse, fierce business competition, and organized crime. This analysis is supported by a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Kaptembwo, where unemployment and poverty were identified as primary drivers of crime, pushing many youth to engage in criminal activities for survival. These findings suggest that empowering young people economically could be a key strategy for preventing crime in slums. Additionally, research suggests that the physical layout of slums can influence crime rates (Groff, 2011; Jegede *et al.*, 2021). Studies have shown that features like pubs (Roncek & Bell, 1981), restaurants (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1982), bus stops (Gerell, 2018), dense vegetation obstructing sightlines (Donovan & Prestemon, 2018), and heavily forested areas (Lee *et al.*, 2023; Schroeder & Anderson, 1984) can be associated with higher crime rates in their immediate vicinity.

Despite efforts by both County and National governments to address insecurity in Central Business Districts (CBDs), aUN-Habitat (2015) report highlights persistent root causes that fuel crime. These include unemployment, inequitable resource distribution, social and political exclusion, easy access to small arms, poor urban planning, youth idleness, poverty, drug abuse, insufficient police presence, inadequate CCTV surveillance, and poor street lighting. The report implies that while funds are allocated to deter street crime (Okere, 2012), addressing these deeper socioeconomic and infrastructural issues remains crucial for sustainable solutions.

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Multiple factors contribute to rising crime rates in Nakuru County. Several studies highlight the significant roles of unemployment, economic hardship, and substance abuse. Lack of economic opportunities as some studies indicate high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, as a key driver (Tilly, 2005; Midrift, 2018). Insufficient security measures further exacerbate the issue. Studies point to the impact of poverty and inequality (Midrift, 2018), suggesting economic disparity and lack of resources fuel crime, particularly within slum communities. Studies reveal a strong link between alcohol and drug use and criminal activity (Midrift, 2018). This aligns with global observations by the World Health Organization, identifying unemployment, especially among youth, as a major factor contributing to crime (WHO, 2004). A similar study on the influence of employment on crime rate in informal settlements by Omboi (2020), findings a very strong relationship between the two.

Most of the researches on violence has demonstrated that the relationship between poverty and inequalities with crime or violence in urban areas is complex (Fajnzylber *et al.*, 2002; Green *et al.*, 2024). For example, Stewart argued that violence, poverty, and inequality are connected in a vicious cycle, whereby the inequality spawns violence, which in turn worsens poverty and increases inequality even more (Stewart, 2008). Inequality takes both economic (poverty) and socio-political aspects where the socio-political being a question of social and political exclusion which in most cases but not always based on identity (Green *et al.*, 2024; Muggah, 2012). According to the report by Midrift (2018), victims of crime are thought to be majorly comprised of youth and women though there exists a perception that girls are disproportionately targeted, while men are more victimized in Nakuru Municipality's Kaptembwo neighborhood; and this could be due to the high number of gangs perpetrating violence in this area as revealed through interviews and focus group discussions. *Gaza*, which engages in violent crime, robbery, extortion, and political violence is the major gang that operates in Kaptembwo. There are also turf wars between *Gaza* and other gangs including Confirm, which operates in Bondeni.

Several crime prevention strategies exist in Kenya, including community policing, patrols, education, and infrastructure improvements. However, residents in Nakuru express dissatisfaction with police response times, creating a potential reason for high crime rates. Conversely, effective crime reporting, emphasized by studies (National Crime Research Centre, 2017; Ngcamu & Wallis, 2011; Sauerweinet *et al.*, 2017), facilitates law enforcement and inter-agency collaboration, ultimately helping prevent crime. From these mixed responses, it indicates that residents are affected by the criminal activities some with the awareness of the police officers since sometimes they do not respond immediately when a distress call is made. As a result of that, the perceived laxity by some urban residents among the police officers has negatively been perceived to be cause of rising cases of crime informal settlements in Nakuru County. Therefore, public perception of the residents about the police officers can be associated with the insecurity and crime occurrence within the settlement. For example, perpetrators of criminal activities are likely to be encouraged to be involved in more crime activities when they believe that the police officers will not respond immediately even when they are called by the residents (Chesterton & Schaffer, 2016; Freilich *et al.*, 2024).

Aligning with Andrew & Orodho (2014) and Moser & McIlwane (2014), this study emphasizes the need for collaborative crime prevention. Despite existing policies, high crime rates in slum areas necessitate more comprehensive and collaborative strategies. The Average

Correlation of Crime Prevention Strategies with Criminal Activities in Low-Income Areas of Nakuru County was studied and the results. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) of the two variables i.e. crime prevention strategies (CP) and criminal activities (CA) is -0.302 and a P-value of 0.0001 which is less than 0.05 . This shows there is a statistical significance that influences crime prevention strategies on criminal activities in low-income areas of Nakuru County. The coefficient (r) is a strong negative correlation which means that as crime prevention strategies were being practiced; criminal activities also reduced or became ameliorated significantly. Members of the community have cooperated and coordinated with the authorities i.e. the chiefs and the police. The community members through their representatives such as chiefs and community elders have acted as liaisons with the police. The community members have also greatly obeyed the instructions from their respective chiefs.

Conclusions

Nakuru City residents encounter notable challenges related to crime and safety, particularly within informal settlements where robbery, mugging, and illicit activities are prevalent. Effective crime prevention strategies require collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including the police, NGOs, and community members. Priority should be given to increased resource allocation and the adoption of technology to enhance existing measures like community policing. The hindrance posed by poor settlement planning underscores the necessity for improved infrastructure to support law enforcement efforts. Despite acknowledging limited government intervention, residents actively engage in community initiatives aimed at addressing crime and insecurity, demonstrating their commitment to fostering a safer environment in Nakuru.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed: First, the County and national governments should prioritize public awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance of enhancing police-community interaction as an effective strategy to reduce crime rates within the community, utilizing community policing approaches. Second, both the National and County governments should implement measures to provide remuneration for representatives who actively and directly participate in community policing initiatives. This incentivization can encourage greater involvement and commitment from community members in crime prevention efforts.

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