

Urban renewal helps prevent violence in South Africa

Urban upgrading in a Cape Town township appears to have reduced violence, but alcohol use threatens gains and could fuel increased crime and injuries.

The issue: How urban upgrading can curb violence

In 2013, South Africa's murder rate of 32 per 100,000 people was more than five times the global average. The situation is worse in Cape Town: in 2015, it registered 2,451 homicides, a rate of 65.53 per 100,000 people.

In 2006, Cape Town's government launched the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) program, a five-year, \$11 million effort to transform the city's roughest sections. Khayelitsha township, one of Cape Town's most violent, was a starting point.

Developed as a response to the community's desire for safer streets and routes, the VPUU program included well-lit pedestrian walkways, community centres, playgrounds and parks. Social interventions, such as alcohol control, were also launched.

Early indications were that murder rates had dropped in project areas and perceptions of safety had improved, but independent evaluations are needed to confirm these findings.

Findings: Alcohol use promotes widespread violence

University of Cape Town researchers undertook research to determine if and how the VPUU program was helping to prevent violence.

Their assessments confirmed the situation in Khayelitsha: almost half its population lives in shacks; unemployment is rampant; services are poor and public transport is limited.

Recommendations

The research feeds into the Western Cape's violence prevention framework, which emphasizes strategies to reduce access to and the harms associated with alcohol. Findings will also help guide the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for violence prevention.

Researchers have shared their results with policymakers. For example, findings from the community survey and the health facility data collection have helped the province rethink how it will address alcohol-related harm.

Their recommendations include:

- Build on successes of urban upgrading efforts, such as VPUU in ways that take local contexts into account.
- Limit the influence of the alcohol industry in policy-making and focus on violence prevention rather than on growing the alcohol economy.
- Develop provincial initiatives to address alcohol-related harm, such as implementing a new provincial alcohol policy.
- Develop a Violence and Injury Trauma Observatory to systematically collect, validate, and analyze data on indicators of violence and injury and evaluate the impact of interventions.

Urban upgrading leads to:

- Less interpersonal violence
- Fewer robberies
- Better mental health
- Greater satisfaction with services

A high rate of interpersonal violence exists in the township. Other crimes, alcohol misuse, material and social deprivation, and depression are also widespread. And, contrary to popular perceptions, violence occurs as often in formal as in informal settlements.

Interpersonal violence accounted for more than

one-third of all violence, closely followed by crime-related violence. Violence by gangs was a distant third. More than 20% of injuries presenting to emergency centres were the result of violence, particularly sharp force injuries such as stabbing. Alcohol was implicated in more than a third of injuries, particularly for violent and transport-related injuries.

Young men were the most frequent victims and perpetrators of violence: youth 15 to 24 years of age were six to 10 times more likely to suffer violent injuries than those under 15.

Researchers' preliminary analysis determined that residents living within two kilometres of a VPUU intervention experienced less violence than residents of other areas. This was consistent for men and women, and across formal and informal settlements. Similarly, residents living close to the VPUU site were less likely to be depressed and were more satisfied with the services and infrastructure available in their neighbourhoods.

As researchers pursue their analysis, they will benefit from better methodologies developed during the research, including:

- the use of cellphones to survey communities, which makes data collection more efficient and yields higher quality data;
- novel GIS methods to quantify access to alcohol and exposure to the alcohol environment;
- new ways to merge data at different spatial levels, allowing a greater range of factors to be analyzed in the same models; and,
- refined urban upgrading indicators to measure the impact of complex programs at the small-area level.

While providing evidence of the impact of the VPUU program, further analysis will help determine if differences over time in violence, safety, and other outcomes between areas are due to the interventions themselves or to other factors, such as better overall economic conditions.

The research

A multidisciplinary team of researchers led by the University of Cape Town gathered data about injuries over 2.5 years from health facilities, households, and stakeholders, including police and liquor vendors. Some 1,500 randomly selected households were twice surveyed. Rapid assessments at health facilities in two high-risk areas were carried out five times. Communities were involved in all stages of the research.

This primary data was combined and analyzed with secondary data gathered from monitoring and evaluation surveys, budgetary and census records, and information from the South African Index of Multiple Deprivation, and from 10 years of police records of robberies. Interventions in urban upgrading; safety and security; economic and human development; alcohol and other drug use were analyzed.

Resources

Cassidy, T et al. 2015. "Evaluation of a Cape Town Safety Intervention as a Model for Good Practice: A Partnership between Researchers, Community and Implementing Agency." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4(1): 27, pp. 1-12. Ubiquity Press, London.

IDRC. Assessing the success of a violence-reduction policy in South Africa. Ottawa. <https://www.idrc.ca/en/article/assessing-success-violence-reduction-policy-south-africa>

Safe and Inclusive Cities is a global research effort jointly funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Launched in 2012, it supports 15 multidisciplinary teams working in 40 cities across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America to build evidence on the connections between urban violence, poverty, and inequalities.



Safe and Inclusive Cities

International Development Research Centre
PO Box 8500, Ottawa, ON
Canada K1G 3H9
Phone: +1 613-236-6163
Fax: +1 613-238-7230
Email: cities@idrc.ca | www.idrc.ca/cities

idrc.ca