

International Journal of Development and Sustainability
ISSN: 2186-8662 – www.isdsnet.com/ijds
Volume 14 Number 5 (2021): Pages 448-470
https://doi.org/10.63212/IJDS25012201

A critical analysis of the interface between inequality and crime in South Africa

Nokukhanya Neptune Mbonambi *

Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

According to the World Bank, South Africa has once again been identified as the most unequal society globally, with a Gini index score of 63%. In addition to these stark levels of inequality, the country grapples with persistently high crime rates. This study critically examines the relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and criminal activities in South Africa. It is anchored in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 10 and the National Development Plan's target of reducing inequality by 2030. A qualitative document analysis approach was employed to conduct this research. The study synthesizes and analyzes empirical research and other academic literature that explores the link between inequality and crime, aiming to propose actionable strategies and solutions to address these challenges. The findings indicate a significant correlation between socioeconomic disparities and the prevalence of criminal activities in South Africa. This highlights the potential for crime reduction through the alleviation of inequalities. The study underscores the imperative for governmental and civil society actors to collaborate to address these systemic disparities to foster a safer and more equitable society.

Keywords: Crime; Inequality; Social Causes of Crime; South Africa

Published by ISDS LLC, Japan | Copyright © 2025 by the Author(s) | This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



Cite this article as: Mbonambi, N.N. (2025), "A critical analysis of the interface between inequality and crime in South Africa", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 14 No. 5, pp. 448-470.

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* Mbonambi.nn@up.ac.za

1. Introduction

The World Bank (2022) identifies South Africa as the most unequal nation globally among 164 countries, with a Gini index score of 63%. According to the World Inequality Database, the top 1% of earners in South Africa capture approximately 20% of the nation's total income, while the top 10% account for 65%. This leaves 90% of earners with only 35% of the total revenue. The *Inequality Trends* report further reveals that these income disparities are deeply entrenched along racial, gender, and spatial lines (Maluleke, 2019). For instance, white individuals have a significantly higher likelihood of securing employment and tend to earn substantially more than individuals from other racial groups. Between 2011 and 2015, the average monthly income for a white individual was R24,646, over three times higher than the R6,899 average monthly income for a black individual. During the same period, women earned approximately 30% less than men, and rural workers earned less than half of what their urban counterparts earned (Webster, 2019). Youth unemployment in South Africa remains particularly acute. As reported in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) for the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate stands at a staggering 63.9% for individuals aged 15–24 and 42.1% for those aged 25–34, compared to the official national unemployment rate of 34.5% (StatsSA, 2022). These figures underscore the structural and systemic challenges that perpetuate inequalities across multiple dimensions in South Africa.

The extreme levels of inequality in South Africa can be attributed to historical systems such as colonialism and apartheid, which systematically marginalized Black South Africans (Aljazeera, 2022). During apartheid, the predominantly white-led government implemented policies that severely restricted the socioeconomic and spatial mobility of Black South Africans. These policies dictated where Black individuals could live and work, resulting in the establishment of townships characterized by substandard housing, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to essential services such as electricity, sanitation, education, and healthcare (Carruthers and Horn, as cited in Shackleton and Gwedla, 2021). As a result, the majority of Black South Africans continue to reside in townships and informal settlements, often working in low-paying jobs and facing restricted access to quality education and healthcare opportunities (Fogel, 2019). This structural inequality is further compounded by significant wealth disparities. Approximately 10% of the population—predominantly white individuals—own more than 90% of the nation's wealth, while roughly 80% of the population, predominantly Black, own no measurable wealth (Orthofer, as cited in Goodman, 2017). These disparities position South Africa as the nation with the highest levels of wealth inequality and income disparity globally (Orthofer, 2016; Sulla and Zikhali, 2018).

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African government has prioritized addressing the social and economic legacies of apartheid and colonialism. Policies aimed at uplifting historically disadvantaged communities have included increased social spending, targeted government transfers, and affirmative action programs designed to reduce inequality and alleviate poverty (International Monetary Fund News, 2020). Despite these initiatives, inequality remains deeply entrenched in South Africa, persisting for over three decades in the post-apartheid era. As a result, it continues to rank among the most critical and persistent socioeconomic challenges confronting the nation (Francis and Webster, 2019).

In addition to severe inequality, South Africa faces critical challenges related to high crime rates, ranking among the countries with the highest crime levels globally. The nation experiences alarmingly high rates of violent crimes, including assault, rape, homicide, and other offenses (World Population Review, 2023).

According to global homicide data, South Africa's murder rate in 2019 was approximately six to seven times higher than the global average (Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, 2019; South African Police Service [SAPS], 2022). The SAPS statistics for the period October to December 2022 reported 7,555 murders, reflecting a quarter-on-quarter increase of 696 cases. Additionally, the same period recorded 15,545 sexual offenses and 85,640 incidents of assault with grievous bodily harm (SAPS, 2022). Beyond violent crime, the country also experiences high levels of household-related crimes. Burglary at residential premises remains the most common crime affecting South African households, with 983,000 incidents reported in 2021/22. Home robberies, the second most prevalent household crime, accounted for 155,000 incidents during the same period. These statistics underscore the pervasive and multifaceted nature of crime in South Africa.

The alarming crime statistics in South Africa cannot be attributed to a single cause but are instead the result of a complex interplay of factors. These include extreme economic inequality, widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, social isolation, substance abuse, and systemic marginalization, all of which characterize South Africa as the most unequal nation globally (Mokgonyana, 2023). This multifaceted reality underscores the urgent need for a critical analysis of the relationship between inequality and criminal activity within the country. Aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 objective of building safer communities and reducing inequality, addressing the root causes of crime and inequality is imperative. Sustainable progress requires targeted interventions that tackle these foundational issues comprehensively. Therefore, the objective of this study aligns with both the Sustainable Development Goals and the NDP 2030 by examining the nexus between socioeconomic inequalities and criminal activities in South Africa. The study aims to propose viable strategies and solutions to mitigate inequality and crime, thereby contributing to the broader goal of fostering an equitable and secure society.

2. Theoretical framework

The unequal distribution of resources within a society is closely linked to the prevalence of crime, as various economic and sociological theories have sought to explain. These theories collectively provide valuable insights into how socioeconomic factors influence societal well-being. One of the most prominent frameworks is the social disorganization theory, which posits that inequality, sluggish economic growth, and poverty weaken social cohesion and organizational structures within communities (Shaw and McKay, 1942). Economic activities play a crucial role in maintaining social organization. Social and economic stability are jeopardized when access to essential goods and services is constrained due to resource shortages, low income, or limited economic activity. This disruption fosters conditions that encourage criminal behavior within society (Garidzirai, 2021). By understanding these dynamics, policymakers can better address the structural causes of crime, emphasizing the importance of equitable resource distribution and sustainable economic development as foundational elements of crime prevention.

The social disorganization theory is closely linked to strain theory, which posits that societal pressures compel individuals to strive for materialistic goals as a means of gaining social acceptance. According to Merton's (1949) strain theory, individuals who perceive themselves as disadvantaged compared to others may turn to criminal activities as a way to achieve these goals and mitigate feelings of inequity. Expanding on this, Garidzirai (2021) highlights the connection between strain theory and the lack of economic activity,

emphasizing that diminished economic opportunities contribute to an increase in violent crimes such as robberies, homicides, prostitution, and property theft. A decline in economic activity intensifies these issues, as offenders assess the costs and benefits of their actions, weighing potential gains against the likelihood of apprehension (Becker, 1968). Similarly, Runciman's (1966) theory of relative deprivation underscores the role of perceived inequalities in fostering feelings of dispossession. These feelings, in turn, drive individuals who perceive themselves as economically marginalized to engage in criminal behavior as a response to perceived economic injustice. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of how structural inequalities and economic instability contribute to the prevalence of crime, underscoring the need for interventions that address these root causes.

Although these theoretical frameworks offer varying perspectives, they share a common focus on income maximization as a fundamental driver of individual decision-making, albeit with differences in regulatory and contextual factors (Kelly, as cited in Bhorat, Lilenstein, Monnakgotla, Thornton, and van der Zee, 2020). Becker (1968) argues that individuals engage in a rational cost-benefit analysis, weighing the potential rewards and risks associated with their actions. According to this framework, the decision to engage in criminal activity is driven by a rational pursuit of profit maximization. Becker emphasizes that low-income households are often compelled to commit crimes as a means of improving their financial circumstances, primarily due to poverty, stagnant economic growth, and income inequality. He further highlights the role of cultural and educational backgrounds in shaping criminal behavior. For example, school dropouts forgo opportunities for lawful employment with stable incomes, which increases their likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. A lack of education exacerbates crime rates within a society, leading to heightened levels of unemployment, poverty, and income inequality, thereby perpetuating stagnant economic growth (Becker, 1968).

Rational choice theory posits that individuals act as rational agents who make decisions based on their desires and the potential consequences of their actions, including the fear of punishment. At its core, the theory is grounded in the concept of utility, whereby individuals evaluate pleasure and pain to guide their behavior (Cornish and Clarke, 1989). Cornish and Clarke (1989) extend this framework by asserting that criminal behavior arises from deliberate decision-making processes in which individuals assess the expected costs and benefits of their actions. The rewards of committing a crime may be financial, such as in the case of burglary, or psychological, as seen in cases of assault. Conversely, the potential costs include the likelihood of detection and the severity of punishment (Bhorat et al., 2020).

Bhorat et al. (2020: pp.9) suggest that "the expected benefit of not committing a crime (which is also the opportunity cost of crime) is the probability of employment and the expected wage in employment. There is no cost to abstaining from crime other than the opportunity cost of the crime itself." According to their argument, individuals are more likely to engage in criminal behavior when specific conditions, as outlined in the equation below, are met:

Inequality and Criminality Equation:

$$(1 - p1).\ UC1 + p1.UC2 > (1 - p2).\ UNC1 + p2.\ UNC2$$ (Source: Bhorat et al., 2020)

This equation, proposed by Bhorat et al. (2020), encapsulates the various factors that influence an individual's decision to commit a crime. On the left side, *p1* denotes the probability of apprehension, *UC1*

represents the benefits of committing a crime while avoiding detection, and *UC2* reflects the benefits of committing a crime subject to detection (p1). On the right side, *p2* signifies the probability of finding employment, *UNC1* represents the utility of refraining from crime without securing employment, and *UNC2* represents the utility of refraining from crime while successfully finding employment.

In contexts of high unemployment and inequality, *p2* (the probability of finding employment) and *UNC2* (the utility of refraining from crime and finding a job) are typically low, thereby making criminal activity a more attractive option. High unemployment decreases *p2*, while greater inequality diminishes *UNC2*. As inequality rises, the benefits of legitimate employment decrease, and the relative rewards from criminal activity increase. Consequently, individuals in lower-income brackets may find crime more appealing as the potential gains from illegal activities outweigh the diminishing returns from lawful employment (Bhorat et al., 2020). This theoretical framework highlights how socioeconomic disparities shape the decision-making process, reinforcing the need for policies that address inequality and unemployment to reduce crime rates.

In alignment with these perspectives, Cornish and Clark (1989) argue for a more comprehensive understanding of criminal behavior, emphasizing the importance of considering background factors, historical influences, and situational elements that shape criminal decision-making. They propose that a variety of factors contribute to the decision to commit a crime, with situational aspects such as poverty, unemployment, economic instability, and social conditions playing pivotal roles. According to rational choice theory, opportunistic criminals make calculated decisions by assessing and responding to environmental factors, including the perceived risks and the effort required to carry out a crime. These environmental conditions significantly influence offenders' decision-making processes (Cozens, 2011). Ultimately, these theories are complementary, suggesting that economic factors have a profound impact on a society's overall well-being. When the economy is unstable or weakened, social structures tend to deteriorate, which in turn increases the likelihood of criminal activity (Garidzirai, 2021). This highlights the critical need for addressing economic disparities and promoting stability as essential components in reducing crime and fostering societal well-being.

3. Methodology

To explore the relationship between inequality and crime in South Africa, this study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a document analysis approach. Document analysis is a systematic method for reviewing and evaluating various sources, including printed materials, electronic resources, and internet-based documents (Bowen, 2009: pp.27). This approach proved highly beneficial for the study, as it facilitated a comprehensive assessment of existing knowledge on inequality and crime. It also helped identify gaps in the literature, guiding future research efforts and enabling the synthesis and dissemination of findings within an established body of evidence (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). To ensure transparency and reliability, the analysis followed a structured process involving thematic classification and categorization, as outlined below.

3.1. Procedure for document analysis

The document analysis process followed these systematic steps:

- *Defining the Research Question and Topic:* The study aimed to explore the relationship between inequality and crime in South Africa. The central research question was: *Is there a connection between crime and inequality in South Africa?*
- *Conducting a Comprehensive Literature Search:* A thorough search for relevant studies was conducted using academic databases and search engines, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, Google, SciELO, and EBSCO. The search focused on scholarly publications from 2019 to 2025.
- *Selecting Sources:* To ensure a diverse range of perspectives and empirical findings, the study incorporated secondary data from both published and unpublished research.
- *Identifying Relevant Studies:* Studies that met the inclusion criteria were selected and assessed for thematic alignment, relevance, and reliability.
- *Comparative Analysis and Thematic Coding:* The selected studies were systematically compared to identify recurring themes and relationships.
- *Synthesizing Key Findings:* Significant conclusions from each study were compiled into a coherent analysis.
- *Compiling the Final Report:* The final synthesis was structured to highlight key themes and provide meaningful insights into the intersection of inequality and crime in South Africa.

3.2. Selection criteria for documents

To ensure the quality and relevance of the study, documents were selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- *Recency:* Documents published after 2019, reflecting current socioeconomic conditions.
- *Credibility:* Peer-reviewed academic articles, official reports, policy papers, and publications from reputable organizations focusing on crime and inequality.
- *Regional Focus:* Research conducted in South Africa, emphasizing local socioeconomic and criminological factors.
- *Empirical Basis:* Studies providing data-driven insights into the relationship between crime and inequality.

3.3. Exclusion criteria and search strategy

To refine the selection process, exclusion criteria were applied. Documents were excluded if they:

- Lacked a clear connection between crime and inequality.
- Focused solely on inequality without addressing crime.
- Examined crime-related issues outside of South Africa.
- Were conceptual discussions without empirical evidence or substantive investigation.

A comprehensive search was conducted using the following keywords to identify relevant documents: *"Inequality and crime in South Africa"*, *"Socioeconomic factors and crime in South Africa",* and *"The link between inequality and crime in South Africa."*

3.4. Thematic organization and data analysis

A thematic coding approach was employed to systematically identify and categorize key patterns in the data. The analysis followed these steps:

- *Initial Review and Familiarization:* Each selected document was thoroughly examined to gain a deep understanding of its content, with a focus on themes related to crime rates and socioeconomic inequality.
- *Coding Process:* An inductive coding approach was applied, identifying emerging themes such as educational inequality, housing inequality, unemployment, and income disparity as contributing factors to crime.
- *Thematic Categorization:* The identified codes were grouped into broader thematic categories aligned with the study's objectives, including:
    - *Education Inequality and Crime*
    - *Unemployment and Crime*
    - *Income Inequality and Crime*
    - *Housing Inequality and Crime*
- *Interpretation and Synthesis:* Identified themes were analyzed to extract meaningful insights.
- *Triangulation and Validation:* To ensure a comprehensive understanding, findings were cross-referenced across multiple sources to assess consistency and coherence. This process strengthened the credibility and reliability of the study's conclusions.

4. Findings and discussion

The document analysis revealed that socio-economic inequalities, including unequal access to education, high unemployment rates, income disparity, and disparities in housing, collectively contribute to the prevalence of criminal activities in South Africa. These factors exacerbate social exclusion and hinder individuals' ability to access legitimate opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood of criminal behavior as individuals seek alternative means of survival or social mobility.

4.1. Income inequality and crime in South Africa

The findings on income inequality and crime in South Africa reveal a strong correlation between economic disparity and criminal activity, particularly violent crimes. Studies indicate that rising income inequality exacerbates social strain, weakens community cohesion, and increases the likelihood of crime, as outlined in strain theory and social disorganization theory. While violent crimes escalate with inequality, the relationship with property crime is more complex, influenced by law enforcement and private security measures. Empirical

evidence highlights income inequality as a primary predictor of crime, emphasizing the need for policy interventions that address economic disparities to mitigate criminal behavior.

Table 1. Key themes, sources, and findings on the relationship between income inequality and crime

Theme	Key Sources	Findings
Income Inequality and Violent Crime	Adam and Grobbelaara (2022); Büttner (2025); Zungu and Mtshengu (2023); Ngozi and Abdul (2020)	Income inequality is a strong predictor of violent crime, particularly robbery and assault.
Income Inequality and Property Crime	Büttner (2025); Bhorat et al. (2020); Greater Good SA (2022)	The relationship between inequality and property crime is complex, with some studies finding an inverted U-shaped correlation.
Economic Disparities and Crime	Zungu and Mtshengu (2023); Greater Good SA (2022); Garidzirai (2021)	Low-income individuals target wealthier areas, motivated by financial desperation and perceived economic injustice.

4.1.1. Reevaluating the link between income inequality and violent crime

Adam and Grobbelaara (2022) firmly position income inequality as a key determinant of violent crime, particularly robbery, through the lens of strain theory. This argument is reinforced by Ngozi and Abdul (2020), as well as Büttner (2025), who identify a positive linear correlation between income inequality and violent crime across different precincts. The emphasis on strain theory (Merton, 1949) highlights how individuals facing economic hardship resort to crime when legitimate means of economic advancement are obstructed. However, while these studies establish a correlation, they often neglect to dissect the specific mechanisms by which income inequality fosters criminal behavior. The omission of spatial and psychological dimensions in many studies is a significant limitation. Social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942), which suggests that economic disparity weakens community cohesion and informal social controls, provides a crucial supplement to strain theory. In highly unequal urban environments, informal social control mechanisms deteriorate, leaving room for criminal networks to flourish. This challenges the oversimplified view that financial frustration alone drives violent crime; rather, it is the intersection of inequality and social fragmentation that generates criminogenic conditions.

4.1.2. Income inequality and property crime: A more complex relationship

Unlike the strong correlation with violent crime, the literature suggests that the impact of income inequality on property crimes is less straightforward. Büttner (2025) identifies an inverted U-shaped relationship, implying that while moderate levels of inequality may initially increase property crime, extreme inequality can have a neutral or even negative effect. Similarly, Bhorat et.al. (2020) provide a counterintuitive perspective by

arguing that in low-income contexts, the relationship between property crime and inequality is often neutral or negative. This paradox can be understood through rational choice theory (Cornish and Clarke, 1987), which posits that crime is a calculated decision based on perceived risks and rewards. In areas where both inequality and overall income levels are low, potential offenders may lack the necessary resources or opportunities to commit property crimes effectively. Moreover, as inequality escalates in affluent areas, wealthier residents are more likely to invest in advanced security systems and private security services, thereby reducing the feasibility of property crime. This nuanced dynamic suggests that while economic deprivation is a necessary condition for property crime, the effectiveness of law enforcement, surveillance, and private deterrents significantly mediate its occurrence.

4.1.3. Relative deprivation and spatial opportunity structures

Zungu and Mtshengu (2023) provide a critical insight by emphasizing the role of relative deprivation in crime perpetuation. Their assertion that income inequality accounts for approximately 64% of crime occurrences highlights the importance of perception in shaping criminal behavior. This aligns with relative deprivation theory (Runciman, 1966), which posits that crime is driven by perceived economic disadvantage rather than absolute poverty. This perspective is particularly salient in South Africa, where high levels of spatial inequality create stark economic contrasts. The proximity of low-income communities to affluent areas fosters both motivation and opportunity for crime, as economically disadvantaged individuals recognize lucrative targets nearby. This spatial element is frequently overlooked in economic analyses of crime, yet it plays a crucial role in explaining patterns of both violent and property crimes. The Greater Good SA (2022) article illustrates this phenomenon, highlighting that crime emerges not merely from economic hardship but from the visibility of wealth disparities within close physical proximity.

4.1.4. Municipal-level findings: the institutional dimension

Garidzirai's (2021) municipal-level analysis further strengthens the argument that income inequality plays a decisive role in crime rates. The study's finding that a 1% increase in income inequality corresponds to a 0.87% rise in crime rates provides strong empirical backing for the broader theoretical claims. However, such findings also necessitate a deeper inquiry into institutional responses to inequality-driven crime. While most studies focus on the economic precursors of crime, fewer examine the role of governance, policing, and policy interventions in mediating these effects. The South African context is characterized by uneven law enforcement capabilities, where some high-crime areas suffer from limited police presence, exacerbating the crime-inequality relationship. Addressing income inequality alone, therefore, may be insufficient to curb crime unless complemented by institutional reforms that enhance law enforcement efficiency and community policing initiatives.

The literature decisively establishes that income inequality is a fundamental driver of crime in South Africa, particularly violent crime. However, a critical analysis reveals that the crime-inequality nexus is shaped by multiple interacting factors, including spatial dynamics, relative deprivation, law enforcement capacity, and security measures. While violent crime exhibits a direct linear correlation with inequality, property crime demonstrates a more complex, context-dependent relationship. Moving forward, policy responses must recognize that crime prevention extends beyond economic redistribution. Addressing income inequality as

part of a broader structural transformation—encompassing urban planning, law enforcement reform, and social cohesion initiatives—will be crucial in mitigating the deep-seated relationship between inequality and crime in South Africa. A singular focus on wealth redistribution without structural adjustments risks leaving the root causes of crime unaddressed, perpetuating cycles of violence and economic marginalization.

4.1.5. Policy implications

Given the strong empirical link between income disparity and criminal activity, policymakers should prioritize strategies that reduce economic inequalities as part of broader crime prevention efforts. Key policy recommendations include:

- *Progressive Taxation and Social Welfare:* Implementing redistributive policies to narrow economic gaps can help address the root causes of crime.
- *Job Creation Programs:* Expanding employment opportunities, particularly in disadvantaged communities, can alleviate financial strain and reduce incentives for criminal behavior.
- *Community-Based Interventions:* Strengthening local governance structures and promoting economic participation can enhance social cohesion and contribute to lower crime rates.
- *Enhanced Education and Vocational Training:* Equipping individuals with marketable skills can decrease dependence on illicit activities as a means of financial survival.

4.2. Housing inequality and crime in South Africa

Among the reviewed literature, nine studies examined the relationship between housing inequality and crime in South Africa. Collectively, these studies establish a positive correlation between housing inequality and crime; however, their findings vary concerning the specific types of crimes most strongly associated with housing disparities.

Table 2. Key themes, sources, and findings on the relationship between housing inequality and crime

Theme	Key Source(s)	Findings
Housing Inequality and Crime Correlation	Manea, Piraino, and Viarengo (2023)	Identified a strong correlation between housing inequality and various crimes, including assaults, robberies, and rape, but not with murders and residential burglaries.
Housing Development as a Crime Mitigation Strategy	Manea et al. (2023)	Found that increasing subsidized housing reduces housing inequality and decreases violent crime rates by 5-6%.

Theme	Key Source(s)	Findings
Housing Inequality and Property Crime	Büttner (2025); Mbonambi (2022)	Property crimes such as residential burglary, vehicle theft, and aggravated robbery have a stronger association with housing inequality than violent crimes. The proximity between wealthier and disadvantaged neighborhoods exacerbates burglary rates.
Informal Settlements and Crime	Khumalo and Alhassan (2021); Williams and Zacheous (2022); Marutlulle (2021)	Informal housing correlates with a 10% increase in crime rates due to relative deprivation, lack of policing, overcrowding, and weak social structures.
Homelessness and Crime Victimization	Sadiki and Steyn (2021)	Homeless individuals face higher victimization risks; 55.8% feel unsafe, and 57.1% have previously been crime victims.

4.2.1. Reassessing the crime-housing inequality nexus

While Manea, Piraino, and Viarengo (2023) provide an innovative empirical foundation linking housing inequality to various crime types, their findings challenge conventional assumptions. Specifically, their research indicates that while housing inequality is strongly correlated with violent crimes such as assault and robbery, its statistical insignificance in murder and residential burglary requires further interrogation. This suggests that while socioeconomic disparities create an environment conducive to crime, certain forms of crime may be influenced by additional, non-economic factors such as gang dynamics, social disorganization, and law enforcement efficacy. The presence of spillover effects further underscores the regional diffusion of crime, emphasizing that crime in high-inequality areas does not remain localized but extends into adjacent districts (Manea et.al. 2023).

Similarly, Büttner's (2025) differentiation between property and violent crimes offers critical insight into crime dynamics. Unlike Manea et al. (2023), Büttner (2025) posits that property crimes, such as burglary and vehicle theft, are more directly tied to housing disparities. This challenges simplistic notions of crime as a homogeneous phenomenon by arguing that visible disparities in wealth and infrastructure create specific incentives for property crimes. This distinction aligns with Becker's (1968) economic theory of crime, wherein crime emerges as a rational response to economic deprivation. However, Büttner's findings also implicitly critique traditional economic models by acknowledging the role of social frustration and relative deprivation, as articulated in strain theory.

4.2.2. The role of informal settlements and structural vulnerabilities

The spatial configuration of informal settlements further complicates the housing-crime relationship. Khumalo and Alhassan's (2021) quantitative assessment of informal housing as a crime determinant reinforces the argument that these settlements are not merely sites of economic disadvantage but active enablers of criminal behavior. Their findings, demonstrating a 10% increase in crime associated with informal housing expansion, reveal the compounded effect of economic marginalization and weak institutional oversight. However, while their analysis establishes a correlative link, it does not adequately engage with causal mechanisms, leaving room for further research into how urban planning interventions could mitigate crime.

Williams and Zacheous (2022) advance this discussion by integrating qualitative insights into how inadequate policing exacerbates crime vulnerabilities in informal settlements. Their research highlights an often-overlooked dimension of housing inequality: the role of state neglect in crime perpetuation. The absence of law enforcement infrastructure transforms informal settlements into quasi-lawless spaces, where gang activity, opportunistic crimes, and sexual offenses thrive. This perspective aligns with social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942), which posits that areas characterized by weak social cohesion and institutional failure experience higher crime rates. The study further implicates urban planning deficiencies, illustrating how housing inequality is not merely an economic issue but a governance failure that fosters criminogenic environments.

4.2.3. Reconceptualizing crime victimization among marginalized groups

Beyond perpetration, housing inequality also exacerbates victimization risks, particularly among marginalized populations. Marutlulle (2021) and Sadiki and Steyn (2021) provide crucial insights into the reciprocal nature of crime and housing inequality, illustrating how impoverished communities experience heightened exposure to crime. The victimization of homeless individuals, as reported by Sadiki and Steyn (2021), further problematizes the crime-housing inequality discourse by shifting attention from offenders to vulnerable populations. Their findings, showing that 55.8% of homeless respondents feel unsafe and 57.1% have experienced prior victimization, reveal how economic disenfranchisement extends beyond material deprivation to existential insecurity. This perspective necessitates a re-evaluation of crime as a purely individualistic act. Instead, crime must be understood as an emergent property of structural inequalities, where both offenders and victims are shaped by systemic deprivation. This shift in analytical framing calls for policy interventions beyond punitive measures, advocating instead for holistic social policies that address economic exclusion and spatial segregation.

The literature unequivocally establishes that housing inequality plays a significant role in shaping crime patterns in South Africa. However, this relationship is neither uniform nor unidirectional. Violent crime and property crime respond differently to housing disparities, influenced by spatial arrangements, economic incentives, and law enforcement presence. Informal settlements and marginalized communities experience crime both as perpetrators and victims, highlighting the dual burden of socioeconomic deprivation. Moving forward, policymakers must recognize that crime reduction requires more than just punitive approaches—it necessitates systemic interventions that target inequality at its root. Housing policy, when integrated with broader socioeconomic development initiatives, has the potential to disrupt the structural conditions that sustain crime, paving the way for a more equitable and secure society.

4.2.4. Policy implications

Given the strong correlation between housing inequality and crime, policy interventions should focus on the following key areas:

- *Expansion of Subsidized Housing Initiatives:* Increasing access to formal housing can improve living conditions and reduce socioeconomic disparities. Research indicates that constructing subsidized housing units can lower crime rates by 5% to 6%.
- *Enhanced Security Infrastructure and Urban Planning:* Targeted security measures should be implemented in areas where affluent suburbs border informal settlements to mitigate the risk of property crime. Strategic urban planning can help reduce crime by addressing spatial inequalities.
- *Strengthened Law Enforcement and Community Policing:* Law enforcement presence in informal settlements should be reinforced, with an emphasis on community policing to foster trust between residents and authorities. Improved police response times and engagement can enhance crime prevention efforts.
- *Social and Economic Interventions:* Programs aimed at addressing economic deprivation, such as job creation, vocational training, and economic inclusion initiatives, can reduce the incentives for criminal activity. Providing viable economic alternatives is crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty-driven crime.
- *Protection for Vulnerable Populations:* Safeguards for marginalized groups, including the homeless, should be strengthened through the provision of safe shelters, rehabilitation programs, and targeted victim support services. Addressing the needs of these groups can help reduce their exposure to victimization and criminal involvement.

4.3. Education and crime in South Africa

A significant finding emerging from the literature review is the inverse relationship between educational attainment and criminal behavior. The collective evidence from the reviewed studies consistently suggests that an increase in years of education corresponds with a decreased likelihood of engaging in criminal activities. This phenomenon aligns with broader criminological and economic theories that emphasize education as a fundamental determinant of crime rates.

Table 3. Key themes, sources, and findings on the link between education and crime

Theme	Key Sources	Findings
Educational Attainment and Crime Reduction	Adam and Grobbelaara (2022); Bhorat et al. (as cited in Lomahoza, 2019) Jonck et al. (2015)	Increased education reduces income inequality and robbery incidents; individuals with incomplete secondary education are overrepresented in offender populations; the majority of offenders had only completed primary education.

Theme	Key Sources	Findings
Educational Inequality and Crime	Büttner (2025) Amnesty International (2020); Sulla and Zikhali (2024)	Higher educational disparities correlate with increased rates of both property and violent crimes. South Africa's unequal school system perpetuates poverty and inequality; local socio-economic inequalities are linked to higher crime rates.
Post-Secondary Education and Crime Reduction	Garidzirai and Zhanje (2019); Khumalo and Alhassan (2021)	Higher levels of education are associated with lower crime rates, particularly in Gauteng municipalities.
Economic Stability through Education	Garidzirai (2021); Singh (2024)	Education increases opportunity costs of crime by enhancing economic stability and disciplined behaviors; violence and trauma impact learning, affecting economic stability.
Theoretical Frameworks on Education and Crime	Becker (1968); Cornish and Clarke (1987); Shaw and McKay (1942); Merton (1949)	Theories highlight rational decision-making, social cohesion, and economic strain as mechanisms linking education to crime prevention.

4.3.1. The interconnection between education and crime

Adam and Grobbelaara (2022) highlight the strong relationship between income inequality, robbery, and educational disparities in South Africa through a system dynamics simulation model. Their study demonstrates that a 50% reduction in the secondary school dropout rate results in a significant decline in income inequality, which subsequently reduces robbery incidents. This finding supports prior research that identifies education as a crucial determinant of crime rates. Notably, Bhorat et al. (as cited in Lomahoza, 2019) indicate that individuals with incomplete secondary education represent a disproportionately large segment of the offender population. Additionally, Jonck et al. (2015) found that most criminals in South Africa had only completed basic schooling, reinforcing the idea that secondary education plays a critical role in crime prevention.

4.3.2. Empirical evidence on educational disparities and crime

Büttner (2025) further supports the argument that educational inequality is strongly correlated with violent crime. Their study found statistically significant relationships between disparities in education and various crime categories, including residential burglary, vehicle theft, aggravated robbery, aggravated assault, sexual offenses, and murder. The effect was notably stronger for violent crimes, where a 0.1 increase in educational

inequality corresponded with a 42% to 45% increase in violent crime rates, whereas property crime rates increased by 23% to 25%. Amnesty International (2020) reported that South Africa possesses one of the most unequal education systems globally, where students from the top 200 schools outperform those from the next 6,600 schools combined in mathematics distinctions. These findings suggest that educational disparities reinforce cycles of poverty and inequality, which in turn contribute to higher crime rates.

4.3.3. Education as a crime-reduction mechanism

Garidzirai and Zhanje (2019) provide empirical evidence that higher education levels are associated with lower crime rates in Gauteng municipalities. Their study indicates that a 1% increase in post-secondary education correlates with a 0.52% decrease in crime rates. Additionally, Khumalo and Alhassan (2021) emphasize that education significantly reduces the likelihood of engaging in blue-collar crimes. Garidzirai (2021) expands on this perspective by arguing that education increases the opportunity cost of crime—higher education levels enhance household earnings and economic stability, making criminal activities less attractive. Additionally, education fosters disciplined household behaviors, reinforcing its role in crime reduction. These studies collectively underscore the long-term benefits of educational investment in fostering economic stability and reducing criminal activity.

4.3.4. Theoretical perspectives on education and crime

Criminological theories further explain the mechanisms through which education influences crime rates. Rational choice theory (Cornish and Clarke, 1987) suggests that individuals assess the benefits and risks before engaging in criminal activities. In contexts where educational attainment is low, legitimate employment opportunities are scarce, reducing the opportunity cost of crime and making criminal behavior more attractive. Becker's (1968) economic theory of crime aligns with this perspective, asserting that individuals conduct a cost-benefit analysis before committing crimes. When access to education is limited, potential legal earnings decrease, making crime a more rational choice for economic survival. Social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942) posits that communities with low educational attainment suffer from weak social cohesion, which reduces informal social controls that deter criminal behavior. Similarly, strain theory (Merton, 1949) explains how individuals facing economic hardships due to educational disadvantages may resort to crime as an alternative means of achieving financial stability. These theoretical perspectives collectively emphasize the necessity of investing in education as a foundational crime prevention strategy.

4.3.5. Policy implications

The systematic evidence suggests that investment in education can serve as a crime prevention strategy. Policies aimed at increasing access to quality education, particularly in marginalized communities, can significantly reduce both property and violent crime rates. Given the South African context, interventions focusing on reducing secondary school dropout rates and enhancing post-secondary education accessibility should be prioritized. This aligns with international best practices, as seen in Nordic countries (Bjerk, 2012), where educational equity has contributed to low crime rates.

4.4. Unemployment and crime in South Africa

The relationship between unemployment and crime in South Africa has been extensively studied, revealing a significant correlation between rising unemployment rates and increases in both property and violent crimes. This analysis categorizes key themes emerging from the literature and integrates relevant studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue.

Table 4. Key themes, sources, and findings on unemployment and crime

Theme	Key Sources	Findings
Youth Unemployment and Violent Crime	Mazorodze (2020); Zungu and Mtshengu (2023); Mpako and Moosa (2023)	High youth unemployment rates are positively correlated with increased violent crimes, including homicides.
Unemployment and Property Crime	Zungu and Mtshengu (2023); Fumba and Magadze (2022); Mbonambi (2022); Statistics South Africa (2023)	Economic hardship due to unemployment leads individuals to engage in property crimes such as burglary and housebreaking.
Employment as a Deterrent to Crime	Garidzirai (2021); Lomahoza (2019); Harambee (2024)	Employment provides a legitimate means of livelihood, reducing the incentive to engage in criminal activities.
Socio-Economic Inequality and Crime	Büttner (2025); Khan (2022); World Bank (2023)	Structural inequalities and economic disparities contribute to higher crime rates.
Theoretical Frameworks on Unemployment and Crime	Merton (1949); Shaw and McKay (1942); Cornish and Clarke (1987); Becker (1968)	Criminological theories explain how economic strain, social disorganization, and rational choice contribute to criminal behavior in the context of unemployment.

4.4.1. The impact of youth unemployment on violent crime

The reviewed literature underscores the complex relationship between unemployment and violent crime in South Africa, particularly emphasizing youth unemployment as a key driver. Empirical evidence, including Mazorodze (2020), highlights a statistically significant correlation between youth unemployment and homicide rates in the KwaZulu-Natal province, reinforcing broader research that links economic deprivation to increased crime levels. Mpako and Moosa (2023) and the World Bank (2023) further illustrate the growing unemployment crisis, reporting staggering rates of 46.5% and 60.8% among young people, respectively. These figures suggest that persistent joblessness exacerbates social instability and fuels violent criminal activities.

4.4.2. Theoretical explanations for the unemployment-crime nexus

Strain theory (Merton, 1949) provides a crucial framework for understanding the relationship between unemployment and crime, arguing that individuals facing financial hardship may resort to crime as an alternative means of achieving economic success. This perspective is reinforced by Zungu and Mtshengu (2023), who find that a one percent increase in youth unemployment corresponds to a ten percent rise in crime, supporting the frustration-aggression hypothesis. Similarly, social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay, 1942) suggests that economic instability weakens social structures and informal social controls, fostering conditions that make criminal activity more likely.

4.4.3. Employment as a deterrent to crime

The relationship between employment and crime extends beyond violent offenses. Studies such as Garidzirai (2021) and Harambee (2024) suggest that employment opportunities play a crucial role in crime reduction, with evidence indicating that a one percent increase in employment results in a 0.93 percent decline in crime rates. Rational choice theory (Cornish and Clarke, 1987) further complements this analysis, positing that individuals weigh the costs and benefits of crime. When legitimate economic opportunities are scarce, the perceived rewards of crime outweigh the risks, making criminal activity a rational choice for economic survival.

4.4.4. The link between unemployment and property crime

Beyond violent crime, property crime is intricately linked to unemployment. Research by Fumba and Magadze (2022) and Mbonambi (2022) highlights that individuals from impoverished backgrounds often resort to burglary, housebreaking, and other property crimes out of necessity. These findings align with Becker's (1968) economic theory of crime, which suggests that when lawful employment opportunities diminish, the economic incentives for criminal activity increase. The persistence of socio-economic disparities exacerbates this trend, as wealthier areas become prime targets for property crimes.

4.4.5. The historical and socioeconomic context of crime in South Africa

Beyond academia, media perspectives such as Khan (2022) contextualize crime trends within South Africa's broader socio-economic and historical landscape. Discussions from the *"Crime in South Africa—Who is to Blame?"* webinar reinforce the argument that unemployment, poverty, and inequality, rooted in the country's colonial and apartheid past, continue to shape contemporary crime patterns. This historical lens underscores the urgency of policy interventions aimed at addressing economic exclusion as a means of curbing crime.

4.4.6. Policy implications

A comprehensive policy approach focused on social stability, education, and economic empowerment is essential for addressing the link between unemployment and crime. First, expanding access to skills development and vocational training programs, particularly in marginalized communities, can equip individuals with employable skills and reduce reliance on illegal activities. Second, strengthening government-private sector partnerships is crucial for creating sustainable job opportunities, especially for young people. Third, targeted economic interventions, such as startup incentives and microfinance programs, can provide viable alternatives to illicit income sources. Fourth, expanding community-based crime prevention initiatives

can facilitate the reintegration of ex-offenders into legitimate career pathways. Finally, strengthening social welfare programs can help alleviate financial hardships that often lead individuals to crime. Collectively, these measures form a holistic strategy to break the cycle of crime driven by unemployment, fostering a safer and more stable society.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this research provide substantial evidence supporting the correlation between socio-economic inequalities and criminal activities in South Africa. The prevalence of extreme inequality, compounded by widespread unemployment and poverty, creates an environment that fosters criminal behavior. Addressing these socioeconomic disparities is crucial for reducing crime rates and enhancing societal stability. To this end, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.1. Recommendation one: implementing holistic social crime prevention initiatives

Comprehensive social crime prevention initiatives must be implemented immediately, particularly in areas with high unemployment, poverty, and educational inequality. Rather than focusing solely on short-term interventions, these initiatives should prioritize long-term structural solutions that address the root causes of crime. Key components should include:

- *Life Skills Development and Youth Mentorship:* Grounded in the frustration-aggression hypothesis, programs that equip young people with conflict resolution, problem-solving, and emotional regulation skills can reduce crime driven by frustration and social strain (Zungu and Mtshengu, 2023). Providing mentorship and positive role models can further reinforce prosocial behaviors, steering youth away from criminal activity.
- *Targeted Vocational Training and Career Counseling:* Vocational training programs should align with labor market demands and provide certification pathways that enhance employability, particularly for individuals in marginalized, high-risk areas (Garidzirai, 2021). By expanding economic opportunities, these programs reduce the perceived benefits of criminal activity, aligning with the rational choice theory, which suggests that individuals weigh the risks and rewards of unlawful behavior before engaging in crime.
- *Community-Based Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation:* Drawing from social disorganization theory, effective crime prevention requires strengthening informal social control mechanisms such as mentorship programs, neighborhood watch groups, and local development initiatives (Shaw and McKay, 1942). Strengthening community cohesion through these interventions can disrupt crime cycles and foster safer environments.

5.2. Recommendation two: reducing educational inequality and expanding access to quality education

Education remains one of the strongest predictors of crime reduction (Adam and Grobbelaara, 2022). To dismantle the structural inequalities that perpetuate both socioeconomic and criminal disparities, the South African government must prioritize comprehensive public education reform. This includes:

- *Enhancing Teacher Training and Public-School Infrastructure:* The stark contrast between well-resourced private schools and underfunded public schools reinforces cycles of inequality (Amnesty International, 2020). Addressing this disparity requires targeted investments in curriculum development, teacher training, and digital learning resources to improve the quality of education in disadvantaged communities.
- *Reducing the Secondary School Dropout Rate:* Adam and Grobbelaara (2022) found that halving the secondary school dropout rate significantly reduces violent crime and income inequality. To prevent at-risk youth from disengaging, targeted interventions such as financial aid, school nutrition programs, and academic support systems should be prioritized.
- *Bridging the Gap Between Education and Employment:* Expanding technical and vocational education (TVET) institutions and aligning high school curricula with industry-driven apprenticeships can improve employment outcomes and reduce reliance on illicit economic activities (Bhorat et al., 2019).

According to strain theory (Merton, 1949), educational disadvantages contribute to economic frustration, which in turn fosters criminal behavior. Thus, improving education is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic crime prevention measure.

5.1. Recommendation three: prioritizing job creation and economic inclusion

Structural unemployment, particularly among young people, has been identified as a key driver of crime (Mazorodze, 2020; World Bank, 2024). Addressing this issue requires:

- *Expanding Public-Private Job Creation Partnerships:* Governments should collaborate with the private sector, labor unions, and development organizations to create targeted employment initiatives for unemployed youth. Expanding incentives such as entrepreneurship grants, public infrastructure projects, and tax breaks for youth employment are essential to fostering sustainable economic inclusion.
- *Supporting Small and Informal Businesses:* Given that a significant portion of South Africa's workforce operates in the informal sector, investing in township economies, cooperatives, and microenterprises is crucial. These initiatives help diversify income sources and provide viable alternatives to criminal activities (Zungu and Mtshengu, 2023).
- *Reskilling and Upskilling Initiatives:* A lack of marketable skills keeps many young individuals locked out of formal employment for extended periods. Reskilling programs in high-demand industries—such as trade skills, digital technology, and renewable energy—can enhance economic participation and reduce criminal incentives (Garidzirai and Zhanje, 2019).

The persistent link between economic disadvantage and crime (Becker, 1968; Lomahoza, 2019) underscores the need for a holistic approach to unemployment. By integrating industry-driven skills development, entrepreneurship support, and job creation efforts, policymakers can significantly curb crime rates.

5.2. Concluding remark: a coordinated multi-sectoral strategy for crime reduction

In conclusion, tackling the socioeconomic drivers of crime requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach. It is crucial to prioritize proactive social and economic measures alongside law enforcement efforts to effectively

prevent crime. Successful implementation of evidence-based solutions depends on collaboration among the public and private sectors, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. By investing in education, creating employment opportunities, and supporting community-led crime prevention initiatives, South Africa can disrupt the cycles of crime fueled by inequality, paving the way for lasting social and economic stability.

Acknowledgements

Professor Adewale A. Olutola for the support and mentorship offered in preparing this article.

References

Adam, F. and Grobbelaar, S. (2022), "Education- and income inequality as drivers of violent property crime in South Africa: A system dynamics model", *Sustainability*, Vol. 14 No. 21, p. 13943. https://doi.org/10.3390/su142113943

Aljazeera (2022), "South Africa the most unequal society in the world: Report", 10 March, available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/10/south-africa-most-unequal-country-in-the-world-report (accessed 25 April 2023).

Amnesty International (2020), "South Africa: Broken and unequal education perpetuating poverty and inequality", available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/south-africa-broken-and-unequal-education-perpetuating-poverty-and-inequality (accessed 10 August 2024).

Arksey, H. and O'Malley, L. (2005), "Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 19-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616

Becker, G.S. (1968), "Crime and punishment: An economic approach", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 76 No. 2, pp. 169-217. https://doi.org/10.1086/259394

Bhorat, H., Lilenstein, A., Monnakgotla, J., Thornton, A. and van der Zee, K. (2020), "Crime and inequality in South Africa: Non-linear outcomes under extreme inequality", Working Paper, Development Policy Research Unit, University of Cape Town.

Bjerk, D. (2012), "Re-examining the impact of dropping out on criminal and labor outcomes in early adulthood", *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 110-122. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2011.09.003

Bowen, G.A. (2009), "Document analysis as a qualitative research method", *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 27-40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Büttner, N. (2025), "Local inequality and crime: New evidence from South Africa", *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, pp. 1-49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-024-09662-5

Cornish, D.B. and Clarke, R.V. (1989), "Crime specialisation, crime displacement and rational choice theory", in: *Criminal Behavior and the Justice System: Psychological Perspectives*, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 103-117. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-86017-1_7

Cozens, P.M. (2011), "Urban planning and environmental criminology: Towards a new perspective for safer cities", *Planning Practice and Research*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 481-508. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2011.582357

Fogel, R. (2019), "Informal housing, poverty, and legacies of apartheid in South Africa", available at: https://urban.uw.edu/news/informal-housing-poverty-and-legacies-of-apartheid-in-south-africa/ (accessed 25 July 2023).

Francis, D. and Webster, E. (2019), "Inequality in South Africa", *Development Southern Africa*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 733–734. https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2019.1699397

Fumba, B. and Magadze, T.O. (2022), "Factors influencing housebreaking: Narratives from ex-offenders and community leaders at Ntabankulu Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape (South Africa)", *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 50-69.

Garidzirai, R. (2021), "An analysis of economic determinants and crime in selected Gauteng local municipalities", in: Yonk, R.M. (Ed.), *Improving Quality of Life: Exploring Standard of Living, Wellbeing, and Community Development*, IntechOpen, United Kingdom, pp. 151-162. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.96339

Garidzirai, R. and Zhanje, S. (2019), "An analysis of crime and economic development in the Gauteng province: A time series analysis", paper presented at the 10th International Conference on Social Sciences (ICSS), 3-5 September 2019, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa.

Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network (2019), "Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 Results", available at: https://ghdx.healthdata.org/gbd-2019 (accessed 29 April 2023).

Goodman, P.S. (2017), "End of apartheid in South Africa? Not in economic terms", *International New York Times*, pp. NA–NA.

Greater Food SA (2022), "How poverty can promote crime in South Africa?", available at: https://www.myggsa.co.za/how-poverty-can-promote-crime-in-south-africa/ (accessed 2 July 2023).

Harambee (2024), "Firing on all cylinders: A joint approach to tackling youth unemployment", available at: https://www.harambee.co.za/firing-on-all-cylinders-a-joint-approach-to-tackling-youth-unemployment/ (accessed 3 January 2025).

International Monetary Fund News (2020), "Six charts explain South Africa's inequality", *International Monetary Fund News*, 30 January, available at: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/01/29/na012820six-charts-on-south-africas-persistent-and-multi-faceted-inequality (accessed 29 April 2023).

Jonck, P., Goujon, A., Testa, M.R. and Kandala, J. (2015), "Education and crime engagement in South Africa: A national and provincial perspective", *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 45, pp. 141–151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.10.002

Khan, N. (2022), "Inequality, poverty behind crime", available at: https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/post-south-africa/20220601/281565179392402 (accessed 2 July 2023).

Khumalo, Z. and Alhassan, A.L. (2021), "Read, write, develop: The socio-economic impact of literacy in South Africa", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 48 No. 8, pp. 1105–1120. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-07-2020-0448

Lomahoza, K. (2019), "The state of crime and safety in the City of Joburg: Issue 19 – June 2019", available at: https://www.joburg.org.za/documents_/Documents/Statistical%20Briefs/Crime%20and%20safety%20city%20of%20Joburg.pdf (accessed 16 July 2023).

Maluleke, R. (2019), "Inequality trends in South Africa: A multidimensional diagnostic of inequality", available at: https://cisp.cachefly.net/assets/articles/attachments/80641_report-03-10-192017.pdf (accessed 14 October 2023).

Manea, R.E., Piraino, P. and Viarengo, M. (2023), "Crime, inequality and subsidized housing: Evidence from South Africa", *World Development*, Vol. 168, p. 106243. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106243

Marutlulle, N.K. (2021), "A critical analysis of housing inadequacy in South Africa and its ramifications", *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, Vol. 9 No. 1, p. 372. https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v9i1.372

Mazorodze, B.T. (2020), "Youth unemployment and murder crimes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa", *Cogent Economics & Finance*, Vol. 8 No. 1, p. 1799480. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2020.1799480

Mbonambi, N.N. (2022), "A spatiotemporal assessment of burglary at residential premises in the Newlands East Policing Precinct", Doctoral dissertation, [University of Kwa-Zulu Natal].

Merton, R.K. (1949), "Social structure and anomie", in: Wilson, L. and Kolb, W.L. (Eds.), *Sociological Analysis: An Introductory Text and Case Book*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, pp. 771–780.

Mpako, A. and Moosa, M. (2023), "South African youth say government is failing to address their top priority: jobs", available at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/AD681-South-African-youth-say-jobs-are-top-priority-Afrobarometer-7aug23.pdf (accessed 1 June 2023).

Mokgonyana, K. (2023), "South Africa needs an effective prison rehabilitation programme", available at: https://mg.co.za/thoughtleader/opinion/2023-04-18-south-africa-needs-an-effective-prison-rehabilitation-programme/ (accessed 21 November 2023).

Ngozi, A. and Abdul, J. (2020), "Dynamic analysis of violent crime and income inequality in Africa", *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, Vol. 8, p. 2.

Orthofer, A. (2016), "Wealth inequality in South Africa: Evidence from survey and tax data", Research Project on Employment, Income Distribution & Inclusive Growth, Working Paper No. 15, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Runciman, W.G. (1966), *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England*, Penguin, London.

Sadiki, L. and Steyn, F. (2021), "Destitute and vulnerable – Fear of crime and victimisation among the homeless in urban and rural settings in South Africa", *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 57-77. https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v43i1.367

Shackleton, C.M. and Gwedla, N. (2021), "The legacy effects of colonial and apartheid imprints on urban greening in South Africa: Spaces, species, and suitability", *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, Vol. 8, p. 579813. https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2020.579813

Shaw, C.R. and McKay, H.D. (1942), *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago. https://doi.org/10.2307/1334446

South African Police Service (2022), "Annual Crime Statistics 2020/2021", available at: www.saps.gov.za/services/crimestats.php (accessed 22 May 2023).

Statistics South Africa (2022), "Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q1:2022", available at: https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q1%202022.pdf (accessed 26 April 2023).

Statistics South Africa (2023), "Crime in South Africa up in 2022/23", available at: https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=16562 (accessed 26 April 2023).

Sulla, V. and Zikhali, P. (2020), "Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities", World Bank Group, available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530481521735906534 (accessed 26 April 2023).

Webster, D. (2019), "Why South Africa is the world's most unequal society", available at: https://mg.co.za/article/2019-11-19-why-sa-is-the-worlds-most-unequal-society/ (accessed 30 April 2023).

Williams, J.J. and Zacheous, A.A. (2022), "An evaluation of urbanisation challenges experienced in the Low-Income Areas of Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa", *preprint, Research Square*, available at: https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-1407838/v1 (accessed 16 May 2025). https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1407838/v1

World Bank (2022), "The World Bank Report Assesses Sources of Inequality in Five Countries in Southern Africa", available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/09/new-world-bank-report-assesses-sources-of-inequality-in-five-countries-in-southern-africa (accessed 25 April 2023).

World Bank (2023), "Safety First: The Economic Cost of Crime in South Africa", available at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099111723083017868/pdf/P180139079ce0406a09305024e058b594e2.pdf (accessed 10 February 2024).

World Population Review (2023), "Crime Rate by Country", available at: https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/crime-rate-by-country (accessed 23 May 2023).

Zungu, L.T. and Mtshengu, T.R. (2023), "The twin impacts of income inequality and unemployment on murder crime in African emerging economies: A mixed model approach", *Economies*, Vol. 11 No. 2, p. 58. https://doi.org/10.3390/economies11020058