

Effects of Insecurity on Community Well-Being: A Case Study of Peri-Urban Communities, Marietta and Marombo, Near St. Paul's University in Kiambu, Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of insecurity on community well-being in the peri-urban areas of Marietta and Marombo near St. Paul's University in Kiambu County, Kenya. It highlights a research gap in the study of peri-urban communities adjacent to universities, contrasting global contexts of insecurity, such as Syria's civil war, with local urban crime in Kenya. The study pursues four key objectives: categorizing types of insecurity, evaluating well-being programs, assessing their impacts, and proposing solutions, framed by Social Disorganization Theory. The literature review examines forms of insecurity, petty crime, youth gangs, and gender-based violence, as well as well-being initiatives such as Nyumba Kumi, a Kenyan community policing program. It underscores their global, regional, and local relevance while identifying the lack of research on Kenya's peri-urban settings. The methodology adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, focus group discussions with 32 participants across four groups, and key informant interviews with 3 participants. Thematic analysis of data from residents, students, and community leaders reveals that socio-economic inequalities alleviate insecurity, leading to psychological distress, reduced social cohesion, and economic challenges. Nyumba Kumi's effectiveness varies due to trust and resource limitations. Proposed solutions include community-based interventions, such as youth programs, and policy measures, such as enhanced street lighting. The study concludes that insecurity severely undermines community well-being and advocates integrated strategies: strengthening community policing, upgrading infrastructure, fostering economic growth, and enhancing social bonds. Recommendations include improving Nyumba Kumi, installing surveillance systems, and promoting vocational training. It suggests future research on long-term impacts, intervention effectiveness, university contributions, and gender perspectives. This dissertation offers actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to build safer, more resilient communities around St. Paul's University, enriching Kenya's urban security discourse.

Keywords: Insecurity, Community Well-being, Peri-Urban, Nyumba Kumi

1.0 Introduction and Background

Insecurity remains one of the most persistent and corrosive challenges facing urban and peri-urban populations globally. It manifests as a complex web of threats, from street-level crime to systemic social instability, that collectively degrade residents' quality of life, undermine economic development, and fray the social fabric binding communities together. This study focuses on the communities surrounding St. Paul's University in Manjiri, Ngecha-Tigoni Ward, Kiambu County, Kenya. This area serves as a compelling microcosm of the broader challenges associated with rapid urbanization in the Global South. By examining diverse facets of insecurity, including crime rates, fear of crime, and social fragmentation, this research provides a granular analysis of their cumulative influence on local community well-being. The ultimate aim is to illuminate how insecurity disrupts daily life and erodes social bonds, thereby offering critical insights to inform the design of more effective, context-specific strategies for fostering safer, more resilient communities.

The concept of insecurity is inherently multifaceted, with roots embedded in socio-economic factors such as persistent poverty, high unemployment, inadequate social services, and the disruptive pressures of rapid, often unplanned, urbanization. Globally, insecurity presents a spectrum of challenges, from petty crime and interpersonal violence to large-scale political instability. These phenomena have a profound, well-documented impact on community well-being, contributing to heightened psychological distress, including anxiety and post-traumatic stress, and a tangible reduction in overall quality of life. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) emphasizes that sustained insecurity leads to social fragmentation, disrupts essential services like healthcare and education, and severely limits economic growth as investment retracts from unstable environments.

Global examples starkly illustrate these devastating effects. The Syrian civil war, beginning in 2011, precipitated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, displacing millions and plunging an estimated 80% of the population into poverty (UNDP, 2020). This extreme insecurity shattered social cohesion, sowed deep-seated distrust, and perpetuated a pervasive state of fear, paralyzing long-term recovery. Similarly, in South Sudan, protracted conflict has left millions internally

displaced and facing acute food insecurity (WFP, 2021). The relentless violence has dismantled traditional social structures, exacerbating public health crises and communal mistrust.

Within Kenya, the nation is navigating intense and rapid urbanization, with the urban population projected to surpass 50% by 2030 (UNDESA, 2020). This demographic shift strains existing infrastructure and public services, fueling the proliferation of informal settlements and a corresponding escalation in crime rates. This environment of heightened criminality instils fear among residents, widens socio-economic disparities, and strains community relations. The inadequate provision of essential services, such as sanitation, reliable street lighting, and effective policing, in these burgeoning peri-urban zones further exacerbates socio-economic divides and threatens community harmony.

The unique location of St. Paul's University, a vibrant hub for a youthful and often transient student population, within this peri-urban setting, presents a specific and critically under-researched context. The interface between a permanent residential community and a temporary student body introduces unique social frictions and security vulnerabilities that demand scholarly attention. The peri-urban areas of Marietta and Marombo, adjacent to the university, experience a convergence of social and economic pressures that have given rise to significant security challenges. While problems like petty crime, youth unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure are common in many developing urban areas, their confluence in a community that hosts a large university creates a unique and complex challenge. These dynamic fosters a specific form of social friction, where a relatively affluent and transient student population coexists with a permanent, and often struggling, local populace. This juxtaposition can create perceptions of inequality that fuel crime, while the transient nature of the student body inhibits the development of strong, cohesive community bonds, which are necessary for effective informal social control. Consequently, residents and students alike face heightened risks, from theft and assault to pervasive fear, which collectively diminish community well-being.

Despite a growing body of literature on urban insecurity in Kenya, there is a distinct lack of research specifically investigating these dynamics within a peri-urban university setting. This study addresses this critical gap, seeking to understand the specific nature of insecurity in this environment and its holistic impact on the lives of those who live and study there.

The overarching purpose of this study is to conduct a thorough examination of insecurity and its impact on community well-being in the neighborhoods surrounding St. Paul's University. The following specific objectives guide this research:

1. To examine and categorize the primary types of insecurity encountered by individuals in areas adjacent to St. Paul's University.
2. To assess existing community well-being programs, particularly the Nyumba Kumi initiative, and evaluate their perceived effectiveness.
3. To analyze the multifaceted impact of insecurity, psychological, social, and economic, on the surrounding neighborhoods.
4. To recommend practical, evidence-based approaches for enhancing community well-being in this specific peri-urban context.

This research holds significant value for multiple stakeholders. For academia, it contributes empirical evidence to urban studies and criminology by applying Social Disorganization Theory to the under-researched context of a peri-urban African university town. For policymakers and government agencies, including the County Government of Kiambu and the National Police Service, the findings offer actionable insights for developing targeted security policies and resource allocation strategies. For community leaders and civil society organizations, this study provides a diagnostic tool for understanding root causes and a basis for designing community-led safety initiatives. Finally, for St. Paul's University administration, this research offers a deeper understanding of the security environment affecting its students and staff, providing a foundation for enhancing campus security and fostering positive university-community relations.

1.2 Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Social Disorganization Theory

This research is fundamentally guided by Social Disorganization Theory, a cornerstone of ecological criminology first articulated by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in their seminal 1942 study of delinquency in Chicago. The theory posits that neighborhood characteristics, rather than individual residents' personal attributes, are the primary determinants of crime rates. Shaw and McKay observed that crime and delinquency remained consistently high in certain neighborhoods

over time, even as different demographic groups moved through them. They concluded that specific structural factors create a state of "social disorganization," defined as a community's inability to realize common values or maintain effective social controls.

The key structural factors identified as contributors to social disorganization are:

1. **Poverty and Socio-Economic Disadvantage:** Communities with high poverty levels often lack the resources, political influence, and institutional capacity to address local problems, including crime. Economic strain can also lead to higher stress and desperation, potentially contributing to criminal activity.
2. **Residential Instability:** High population turnover weakens community bonds. When residents do not expect to live in a neighborhood long-term, they have less incentive to invest in building strong social ties or participating in collective efforts to maintain order, disrupting the development of shared norms.
3. **Ethnic and Racial Heterogeneity:** Shaw and McKay argued that high heterogeneity could impede communication and cooperation among residents due to language barriers and differing cultural norms, making it difficult to form a cohesive social front against crime.

Subsequent scholars, most notably Robert Sampson, have refined the theory. Sampson and Groves (1989) empirically demonstrated that factors like sparse local friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups, and low organizational participation were mediating variables linking structural factors to higher crime rates. A crucial modern extension is the concept of "collective efficacy," which Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) defined as "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good." Collective efficacy is the tangible expression of informal social control. In communities with high collective efficacy, residents know and trust each other and are likely to take action to maintain public order.

Social Disorganization Theory is exceptionally relevant for analyzing insecurity around St. Paul's University. The peri-urban context of Marietta and Marombo exhibits several classic indicators. Economic disparities are palpable between the local community and the university population. Most critically, the university introduces significant residential instability. The student population is inherently transient, with high turnover each semester. This transience hinders the development of deep, lasting social ties between students and permanent residents, thereby weakening the

community's overall collective efficacy. The theory thus provides a powerful framework for understanding how the structural breakdown of social controls in this unique setting directly contributes to security challenges.

Empirical Literature Review

The Nature and Drivers of Insecurity in Urban and Peri-Urban Africa

Insecurity manifests in diverse forms, often exacerbated by underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities. Global studies consistently link chronic poverty and high unemployment to elevated crime rates. In the urban slums of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, a lack of legitimate economic opportunities has been identified as a primary driver of gang membership and violence, severely degrading social infrastructure and community trust (UN-Habitat, 2010). Similarly, political turmoil in Syria has fostered an environment of pervasive fear and mistrust that dismantled community structures (UNHCR, 2021). These global patterns underscore how systemic inequality and governance failures perpetuate cycles of insecurity.

In East Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa broadly, insecurity is often characterized by violent crimes like armed robbery and assault, alongside prevalent theft and gender-based violence (GBV). A study in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, linked rapid, unplanned urbanization and high population density to a surge in violent crime, arguing that such conditions foster anonymity and social breakdown, emboldening criminal elements (Mugisha et al., 2021). In Kenya, the most commonly reported crimes in urban centres are petty theft, violent assaults, and various forms of GBV (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The proliferation of youth gangs in cities like Nairobi and Mombasa has been strongly correlated with high youth unemployment and the accessibility of illicit drugs and small arms (Kihoro, 2020). Concurrently, domestic violence and sexual assault remain severe threats, disproportionately affecting women and girls (Sewanyana, 2019). Locally, in Ngecha-Tigoni Ward, anecdotal reports suggest primary security threats are petty crime (often targeting students), domestic disputes, and loosely organized youth gangs. The university's presence, with its concentration of young people and valuable electronic devices, may act as a magnet for such criminal activity, creating unique security challenges requiring tailored solutions.

The Multifaceted Impact of Insecurity on Community Well-being

Insecurity inflicts damage across psychological, social, and economic domains. The psychological toll is perhaps most pervasive. Constant exposure to crime or its threat induces chronic stress, anxiety, and fear. A study in Nairobi's informal settlements found that fear of crime was a significant predictor of poor mental health outcomes, affecting up to 25% of the population and leading to social isolation as people modify routines to avoid perceived threats (Corburn & Karanja, 2016). This "fear of crime" can be as debilitating as victimization itself, severely restricting personal freedom and quality of life.

Socially, insecurity corrodes community foundations: trust and social cohesion. As fear and suspicion rise, residents become more isolated, retreating into their homes and distrusting their neighbors. This erosion of "social capital", the networks and shared norms facilitating cooperation, cripples a community's ability to engage in collective action (Putnam, 1993). This directly impacts informal social control, as residents become less willing to intervene to stop crime, creating a vacuum often filled by criminal elements.

Economically, the costs of insecurity are staggering. Crime is estimated to cost the global economy over \$1 trillion annually in direct losses, security spending, and reduced economic activity (Fajnzylber et al., 2002). In conflict zones like Syria, economic devastation has led to the impoverishment of 80% of the population, with catastrophic long-term consequences (UNDP, 2020). In East Africa, pervasive insecurity is estimated to reduce the region's GDP by 3-5% annually by stifling investment and disrupting supply chains (Mugisha et al., 2021). Within Kenya, insecurity is estimated to cost the national economy up to 7% of its GDP (Karanja Gikonyo, 2021). At the local level, in Ngecha-Tigoni Ward, insecurity directly impacts small businesses, leading them to close early, invest in costly security measures, or face declining customer traffic. A local study indicated businesses could lose up to 20% of customer traffic due to crime-related fears (Omondi Wamuyu, 2022). Furthermore, security concerns, especially GBV threats, disproportionately restrict women's mobility, limiting their access to education, employment, and public life, affecting up to 30% of women in the area (Mwangi & Karanja, 2022).

Community Well-being Programs and Policing Initiatives

In response to rising insecurity, communities and governments worldwide have implemented a range of well-being and security programs. Community policing has emerged as a popular model, predicated on police and citizens working together as co-producers of safety. In Brazil, implementing a comprehensive community policing model in some favelas-built trust between law enforcement and residents, leading to notable reductions in violent crime (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). In the United States, neighborhood watch programs have demonstrated success in fostering collective responsibility and improving safety perceptions, though their direct impact on crime rates is sometimes debated (Bennett et al., 2006).

In Kenya, several national initiatives have been launched to combat insecurity through policing and social development. The *Nyumba Kumi* (Ten Households) initiative, launched in 2013, is a community policing framework that encourages households to organize into clusters of ten, with a designated leader, to enhance neighborhood vigilance and information sharing with police. While the concept is sound, implementation has been mixed. Studies show its effectiveness is often hampered by a lack of public trust in police, inadequate resources for cluster leaders, and a failure to integrate with other local security structures (Kamau & Gikonyo, 2019). On the social front, the government's *Kazi Mtaani* program addressed youth unemployment, a key crime driver, by providing temporary public works employment. While providing short-term relief, the sustainability and long-term impact of such programs remain debated (GoK, 2020). These initiatives, though well-intentioned, often struggle to overcome deep-seated poverty and social disorganization that fuel insecurity at the grassroots level.

Research Gap

The existing literature provides a robust understanding of the general relationship between insecurity, its drivers, and its impacts on community well-being. However, a significant gap remains in applying this knowledge to the unique socio-ecological context of peri-urban communities in Kenya that host major universities. There is a dearth of research specifically examining the interplay between a transient, youthful student population and a more permanent, socio-economically diverse local community. This study is positioned to fill this gap by providing

a rich, qualitative exploration of how these dynamics shape the nature of insecurity and the lived experiences of residents around St. Paul's University, offering novel insights for theory and policy.

2.0 Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative methodology to explain the intricate nature of insecurity and its impact on community well-being. The qualitative approach was well-suited to an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, emotions, and perceptions that a purely quantitative study might overlook. The research design was qualitative and phenomenological, focusing on participants lived experiences to yield rich, descriptive insights for policy-making and community-based initiatives. This approach provided a holistic understanding of how insecurity influences daily life and shapes community dynamics.

The study was conducted in Manjiri, a settlement within Ngecha Ward, Kiambu County, Kenya. This area is characterized by its peri-urban nature, representing a transitional zone with mixed rural and urban characteristics. The specific sites were the neighborhoods immediately surrounding St. Paul's University, primarily Marietta and Marombo. An initial reconnaissance revealed a heterogeneous population comprising long-term residents, newly arrived families, university students in off-campus hostels, and local business owners. The socio-economic landscape is diverse, with varying income levels, educational backgrounds, and access to public services. This blend of demographic and economic diversity, coupled with the presence of a major institution of higher learning, makes it a compelling site for studying the complex interplay between social structure, community dynamics, and security challenges.

The target population consisted of adult residents (aged 18 and older) living in Marietta and Marombo. This demographic was selected for their direct, firsthand experiences and nuanced perspectives on community security challenges.

A purposive sampling method was utilized to select participants. This non-probability technique involves intentionally selecting individuals with specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research topic. The goal was to ensure a diverse, information-rich sample providing a wide range of perspectives. Selection criteria included length of residency (long-term and newer residents), status (student, permanent resident, business owner), and community role (community elder,

security official). This method allowed for varied voices, enriching the depth and breadth of collected data. The total sample size of 47 participants (12 for semi-structured interviews, 32 for FGDs, 3 for KIGs) was deemed sufficient for data saturation in a qualitative study of this scope.

Data was gathered using a triangulation of three primary qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Twelve one-on-one interviews were conducted with residents and students. An interview guide with open-ended questions provided structure, but the format allowed for deeper probing into personal experiences, sensitive topics, and emergent themes related to safety perceptions, personal encounters with crime, and psychological impacts.
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Four FGDs, each with 8 participants (total 32), were conducted. Groups were composed to be relatively homogeneous to foster a comfortable discussion environment (e.g., female students, male youths, female residents/business owners, male residents/elders). FGDs provided a dynamic platform for participants to share collective experiences, discuss community-level perceptions, and debate the effectiveness of security initiatives. Group interaction often elicited richer data as participants built upon each other's comments.
3. **Key Informant Guides (KIGs):** In-depth interviews were conducted with three key informants: a local security official from the National Police Service, the sub-chief of Manjiri area, and a senior St. Paul's University administrator responsible for student welfare and security. These interviews provided valuable macro-level insights into institutional responses, policy frameworks, historical context, and broader security management challenges.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, a method widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved several steps: familiarization with data through multiple readings of transcripts and field notes; generating initial codes to categorize specific data segments; searching for themes by grouping related codes; reviewing and refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data; defining and naming themes; and finally, producing a coherent analytical narrative. This systematic approach ensured findings were well-supported by data, providing a reliable foundation for conclusions and recommendations.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Theme 1: The Nature and Prevalence of Insecurity

The first major finding was the pervasive, multifaceted nature of insecurity in communities surrounding St. Paul's University. Participants described an environment where property crime and the fear of crime were constant realities. The most frequently cited forms were petty crimes, which participants felt had become normalized.

Prevalence of Petty Crime: Almost all participants reported being a victim of, or knowing someone who was, a victim of theft. Mugging, phone snatching, and break-ins into students' and residential homes were commonplace. Students were perceived as particularly vulnerable targets because they possessed valuable items such as laptops and smartphones.

"Here, losing a phone is normal. You can be walking in broad daylight, and two guys on a motorbike just snatch it and they are gone. It happens so fast. You don't even have time to scream." — **Female Student, FGD**

"My house has been broken into twice this year. They took my laptop the first time, and my roommate's things the second time. Now we are afraid to leave the room empty, even for an hour." — **Male Student, Semi-structured Interview**

Emergence of Youth Gangs: Many residents expressed deep concern over loosely organized youth gangs. These groups were not seen as sophisticated syndicates but as bands of unemployed local youths engaging in opportunistic crime to fund livelihoods and, in some cases, drug habits.

"It's the idle boys. They sit by the roadside the whole day. When evening comes, they look for who to rob. They are not strangers; we know them. They are our neighbor's sons." — **Male Resident, FGD**

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Female participants highlighted the prevalence of verbal harassment and palpable fear of sexual assault, especially after dark. This fear significantly restricted their freedom of movement and access to public spaces.

"As a woman, you cannot walk alone past 7 PM. The catcalls, the inappropriate comments... you just feel unsafe. You always have to plan your day to be home before it gets dark, which limits what you can do." — **Female Resident, Semi-structured Interview**

Discussion: These findings paint a vivid picture of a community struggling with high levels of incivility and crime, classic indicators of social disorganization. The prevalence of petty crime and visible idle youth gangs suggests a breakdown in informal social controls. As Social Disorganization Theory predicts, when a community cannot maintain public order, crime flourishes. The specific targeting of students aligns with Routine Activities Theory, which posits that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target (students with valuables), and the absence of a capable guardian (weak community surveillance) converge. The gendered dimension of insecurity, restricting women's mobility, is consistent with research by Mwangi & Karanja (2022), underscoring how insecurity disproportionately curtails women's socio-economic opportunities.

Theme 2: Socio-Economic Drivers of Insecurity

The second theme emerging with overwhelming consensus was that socio-economic deprivation, particularly high youth unemployment, is the primary engine driving insecurity. Participants did not view crime as inherent malice but as a symptom of deeper systemic failures.

Youth Unemployment and Idleness: This was the most frequently cited cause of crime. Participants lamented the lack of formal employment opportunities for educated young people, leaving them frustrated, idle, and vulnerable to crime.

"When young people have nothing to do, idle hands are the devil's workshop. They see others with things and want the same, so they steal. If they had jobs, good jobs, this problem would reduce by half." — **Male Resident, Semi-structured Interview**

"The government has forgotten us. Only few flower farms around here, no jobs. The only thing available is boda [motorcycle taxi] work, and not everyone can do that. Crime becomes a way to survive." — **Young Male Resident, FGD**

Perceived Inequality and Social Friction: The University's presence created a stark visual contrast between the perceived affluence of students and the economic struggles of local residents. This generated resentment and a sense of relative deprivation, which some believed justified crimes against students.

"The students, they have everything. Laptops, expensive phones, nice clothes. Our boys have nothing. So, there is a tension. The local boys feel like the students are in a different world, and they want a piece of it." — **Officer Commanding Manjiri Police Post (O.C.P.P), KIG**

Drug and Substance Abuse: Several participants linked rising petty crime to increased drug and substance abuse among youth, arguing that many engage in theft to finance addiction to cheap alcohol, bhang (marijuana), and other narcotics.

"Many of them are not just stealing for food. They are stealing to get money for drugs. That is a big problem that is destroying our young generation." — **Female Resident, FGD**

Discussion: These findings strongly support Social Disorganization Theory, which identifies poverty and economic disadvantage as key structural factors leading to crime. The narrative of desperation driven by unemployment aligns with vast criminological research, including Kihoro's (2020) work on Nairobi's informal settlements. The palpable relative deprivation caused by the university's presence creates social friction that exacerbates the problem. This dynamic exemplifies how structural inequality weakens social cohesion. When a community segment feels systematically excluded from legitimate economic opportunities, commitment to conventional social norms can weaken, making illicit activities seem a more viable alternative.

Theme 3: The Holistic Impact of Insecurity on Well-being

The third major theme revealed that insecurity's impact extends far beyond financial loss, permeating every aspect of community life, inflicting deep psychological, social, and economic damage.

Psychological Distress: A Climate of Fear: The most profound impact was the pervasive sense of fear and anxiety dictating daily lives. This "fear of crime" was a constant stress source, tangibly affecting mental well-being.

"You can't walk alone after dark. Even in the daytime, you're always looking over your shoulder. You live in a constant state of alert. It's exhausting. You are never truly relaxed." — **Female Resident, FGD**

"My children are afraid to play outside after school. I am afraid for them. This fear is like a poison; it slowly kills the spirit of the community." — **Female Resident, Semi-structured Interview**

Erosion of Social Cohesion and Trust: The climate of insecurity led to a breakdown of trust among neighbors and withdrawal from communal life. People became more isolated and less likely to engage with their community, further weakening the social fabric.

"People keep to themselves now. You don't know who you can trust. The person you say hello to in the morning might be the one planning to rob you at night. So, we lock our gates and stay inside." — **Male Resident, Semi-structured Interview**

Economic Stagnation and Lost Opportunities: Insecurity acts as a major brake on the local economy. Businesses suffer from reduced operating hours and customer traffic, while the overall environment deters new investment.

"Customers are afraid to come here in the evening. We have to close by 9 PM, and that hurts our business. Who wants to invest in a place where your shop can be broken into anytime?" — **Local Shop Owner, Semi-structured Interview**

Discussion: This theme powerfully illustrates the cascading negative effects of social disorganization. The psychological distress described is consistent with global research on mental health impacts in high-crime areas (WHO, 2018). The erosion of social cohesion and trust defines a community with low collective efficacy. As Sampson et al. (1997) described, when trust evaporates, residents' willingness to intervene for the common good disappears. This creates a vicious cycle: crime erodes trust, and a lack of trust makes it harder for the community to organize against crime. The economic impacts confirm findings from Karanja Gikonyo (2021) and Omondi Wamuyu (2022), demonstrating that insecurity is a profound barrier to economic development.

Theme 4: Ineffectiveness of Formal and Informal Control Mechanisms

The final theme centered on community perception of initiatives designed to provide security. Findings reveal a deep-seated lack of confidence in both formal policing and the primary community policing initiative, Nyumba Kumi.

Lack of Trust in the Police: A significant number of participants expressed disillusionment with the formal police service, citing slow response times, perceived corruption, and a general disconnect from community needs.

"The police? They only come after the crime has happened, to write a report. Sometimes they don't come at all. We have lost faith in them." — **Male Resident, FGD**

Variable Effectiveness of Nyumba Kumi: The Nyumba Kumi initiative was seen as a good idea in principle but largely ineffective in practice. Its success depended on individual cluster leaders' proactivity and trust among neighbors. In many areas, it was dormant.

"Nyumba Kumi exists on paper. We know who our cluster leader is, but we never meet. We don't share information. People are afraid to be seen as informers." — **Female Resident, Semi-structured Interview**

"We report crimes [to the cluster leader], but nothing happens. There is no follow-up. It feels like a waste of time. So, people have stopped bothering." — **Male Student, FGD**

Discussion: The failure of both formal and informal social controls is the ultimate manifestation of social disorganization. The lack of trust in police creates a significant barrier to co-producing security, a core tenet of community policing. Nyumba Kumi's struggles highlight a critical point: such programs cannot be implemented as top-down mandates. Their success is contingent upon pre-existing social capital and trust, the very things insecurity has eroded. As argued by Kamau & Gikonyo (2019), without genuine community buy-in and institutional support, initiatives like Nyumba Kumi fail to realize their potential, leaving the community vulnerable and lacking effective mechanisms to enforce collective norms and ensure safety.

5.0 Conclusion

This study provides compelling, context-rich evidence that insecurity, fundamentally driven by deep-seated socio-economic inequalities, severely undermines community well-being in the peri-urban areas of Marietta and Marombo. The findings demonstrate that insecurity is a complex web of interconnected challenges manifesting through psychological distress, erosion of social cohesion, and significant economic burdens on residents and local businesses. The lived experiences reveal a climate of fear constraining daily life, a breakdown of interpersonal trust dissolving the social fabric, and a stagnant local economy perpetuating the very conditions of poverty and unemployment that fuel crime.

The analysis, framed through Social Disorganization Theory, concludes that the community's structural characteristics, economic disadvantage and residential instability exacerbated by a transient university population, have critically weakened its collective efficacy. Existing community well-being programs, particularly Nyumba Kumi, are largely perceived as ineffective, and critically hampered by a widespread lack of trust in formal institutions and a scarcity of the social capital needed for such initiatives to thrive. This research underscores that addressing insecurity is not merely a law enforcement matter but a holistic developmental challenge. It requires integrated, community-led strategies that move beyond reactive policing to address root causes. A secure, thriving community can only be built on a foundation of economic opportunity, social trust, and a shared sense of collective responsibility.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following specific, actionable recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders:

For the County Government of Kiambu and National Government Agencies:

1. **Invest in Youth Economic Empowerment:** Partner with local technical colleges and St. Paul's University to establish vocational training and entrepreneurship programs tailored to the local economy. This should include providing access to micro-financing and mentorship for young people wishing to start small businesses, creating sustainable alternatives to crime.

2. **Upgrade Critical Public Infrastructure:** Prioritize upgrading essential infrastructure to create a safer physical environment. This includes a comprehensive program to install and maintain high-mast street lighting along major roads and footpaths, and strategic installation of publicly monitored CCTV surveillance systems in known crime hotspots and commercial centres.

For the National Police Service:

3. **Strengthen Community Policing through Trust-Building:** Revitalize Nyumba Kumi by transforming it from a passive information-gathering network into an active problem-solving partnership. This requires assigning dedicated community policing officers, establishing regular, transparent community forums for residents to voice concerns without fear, and creating a clear feedback mechanism to ensure reported incidents are demonstrably acted upon.

For the Administration of St. Paul's University:

4. **Foster University-Community Integration:** Proactively bridge the social divide between students and the local community. This can be achieved by developing joint community projects (e.g., clean-up days, sports tournaments), creating a student volunteer program focused on mentoring local youth, introducing certificate and diploma courses that will engage the community and establishing a formal university-community security liaison committee to address shared safety concerns collaboratively.

5. **Enhance off-Campus Security Support:** Develop a program to inspect and accredit off-campus student hostels based on minimum security standards (e.g., secure perimeter, night guards, adequate lighting). Share this accredited list with students and parents to guide housing choices and incentivize landlords to improve security.

For Community Leaders and Residents:

6. **Promote Local Social Cohesion:** Organize community-led events and projects that encourage positive interaction and collective problem-solving, such as neighborhood watch patrols, cultural festivals, and community improvement projects. These activities can help rebuild trust and foster

the shared identity and collective efficacy needed to address security challenges from the ground up.

7.0 Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing deep insights, has several limitations. As a qualitative study focused on a specific case, the findings are not statistically generalizable to all peri-urban communities in Kenya. The reliance on purposive sampling may have introduced selection bias, despite efforts to ensure participant diversity. Furthermore, the self-reported nature of the data means that crime perceptions may not perfectly align with official crime statistics, which were not the focus of this phenomenological inquiry. These limitations, however, do not detract from the validity of the findings within their specific context.

8.0 Suggestions for Further Research

This study opens several important avenues for future research:

1. **A Longitudinal Study:** Investigating the long-term psychological and physiological impacts of residing in a high-insecurity environment, tracking a cohort of residents over years to measure the cumulative toll of chronic stress and fear on health outcomes.
2. **A Quantitative Impact Evaluation:** A rigorous quantitative study assessing the effectiveness of specific community-based interventions, using a quasi-experimental design to compare crime rates and safety perceptions in areas with interventions (e.g., upgraded lighting, youth programs) versus control areas.
3. **An Institutional Analysis of the University's Role:** A focused exploration of St. Paul's University's specific economic and social contributions to the local community, quantifying its economic footprint and identifying opportunities for more strategic corporate social responsibility and community engagement.
4. **A Comparative Gender Analysis:** A comparative study on gendered experiences of insecurity in different peri-urban settings in Kenya, providing a nuanced understanding of how insecurity differentially impacts the lives, livelihoods, and mobility of men, women, and gender minorities, informing more targeted and equitable security policies.

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