

# Collective (in) efficacy, substance abuse and violence in “Freedom Park,” Cape Town

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**Abstract** Using collective efficacy as a lens, the paper tries to understand high levels of violence and crime within an urban settlement in Cape Town, which has recently undergone an upgrading process from an informal into a formal settlement. Theory and evidence from North America are that collective efficacy (social cohesion and informal control) has a significant bearing on levels of violence and crime and impacts on the ability of a community to regulate antisocial behavior. The paper has three main concerns, namely (a) the impact of the upgrading project on social cohesion within the settlement (b) the impact of an apparent decrease in social cohesion on informal measures of social control and the community’s ability to regulate crime and violence in the settlement and (c) how the presence of a concentration of illegal liquor and drug outlets affects collective efficacy and levels of violence and crime in turn. Research in Freedom Park reveals that the upgrading project did seem to diminish levels of social cohesion, marked by trust and solidarity, within the settlement. Whereas residents had previously depended on one another to maintain order and safety within the settlement, after upgrading, these informal arrangements and support structures have all but disappeared. A proliferation of illegal alcohol and drug outlets has simultaneously contributed to increasing levels of violence and crime and eroded social cohesion among residents. This research shows that while collective efficacy does provide a useful starting point, given the complex nature of violence and crime, it cannot be considered in isolation of broader structural constraints like poverty and unemployment, which feed into a vicious cycle of deprivation violence and crime in disadvantaged neighborhoods in cities of the South.

**Keywords** Housing · Informal control · Social cohesion · Substance abuse · Urban upgrading · Violence

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## 1 Introduction

Urban violence has been identified as a serious development concern, especially in cities in the South where rapid urbanization, coupled with high rates of poverty and inequality, results in very bad living conditions for the majority of urban residents. South Africa is one of the most violent countries in the world according to a research report released in 2009. South Africa is ranked fourth out of 60 countries in terms of reported rates of burglary, murder and robberies (Kessides 2005; p. 3). It has a death rate of 157.8 per 100,000 population, which is considerably higher than the average rate of 139.5 per 100,000 population for the African continent and nearly double the global average of 86.9 per 100,000 population (Seedat et al. 2009; p.1011). Interpersonal violence accounts for close to half of the injuries resulting in death in South Africa, which is four and a half times the global proportion (ibid). Seedat et al. (2009) highlight poverty and inequality as the most prominent factors accounting for South Africa's considerable challenge of violent injury. This paper will show that a complex interplay between structural challenges like poverty and unemployment and neighborhood characteristics like social networks and solidarity (or the lack thereof) accounts for high levels of violence and crime within communities like the one being considered in this paper.

Common explanations for neighborhood violence and criminality point simplistically to poverty and social disorganization as causes. This is the case in South Africa as well as in other urban areas across the globe. More nuanced explanations draw attention to subtle considerations of social (in) cohesion, distrust and weakened informal control in urban communities. Known as "collective efficacy," this set of predisposing factors has been examined mostly in the USA. Research there shows how these social processes and dynamics at community level contribute to risk of violence and crime and the extent to which they can mitigate against vulnerability to interpersonal and community violence.

Authors like Sampson and others have argued that collective efficacy has a significant bearing on levels of violence and crime and impacts on the ability of a community to regulate antisocial behavior. Collective efficacy consists of two components: social cohesion, where social cohesion refers to solidarity and mutual trust among community members, and informal social control. Collective efficacy, it is argued, is not dependent on the presence of dense social networks or ties within a particular community (Mazerolle et al. 2010; Sampson et al. 1997; Sampson 2003, 2009).

The paper draws on "collective efficacy" theory to explain high levels of violence and violent crime within an urban community in Cape Town, South Africa. This community faces challenges of concentrated disadvantage in terms of poverty, high unemployment and a considerable alcohol and drug abuse burden. Freedom Park also went through a formalization process, which spanned approximately 8 years; the residents received formal houses in 2009. The official policy discourse in South Africa around its extensive housing programme is that the provision of a free house to poor households will lift them out of poverty and improve their quality of life. However, little is done by way of monitoring the impact of a formalization process on poor households and communities.

With reference to one deprived neighborhood in Cape Town, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. How has the upgrading intervention impacted on levels of social cohesion in this community?

2. In a context where social cohesion, characterized by solidarity and mutual trust, seems to have been eroded, what is the impact on a community's ability to exercise informal social control and act together to combat violence and crime?
3. How does the presence of a concentration of illegal alcohol and drug outlets impact on collective efficacy and how does this in turn impact on the levels of violence within a community?

## 2 Conceptual framework—collective efficacy, substance abuse and violence

Collective efficacy as a theoretical construct has mostly been used to study violence and crime patterns in neighborhoods in certain American cities. Most studies have been of a quantitative nature.

Sampson, the principal proponent of this theory, and others have argued that collective efficacy is as important as neighborhood characteristics such as concentrated disadvantage and residential stability in terms of explaining differential rates of violence and crime across neighborhoods. The issue of residential mobility in terms of community stability and how it relates to social cohesion is of particular interest to the case being discussed in this paper. The literature seems to suggest that residential stability, a sense of attachment to place and/or a shared history of common struggle contribute to social cohesion and the maintenance of social order within a community (Dempsey et al. 2011; Ross 2005). In cases where the residential composition of a particular neighborhood is changed through residential mixing as a result of urban renewal or upgrading projects for example, it might take a long time for strong social bonds to be established (Kleinmans 2004). Research on residential mixing in new housing developments in post-apartheid South Africa shows that in some instances, integrating different communities in a new settlement can have a negative impact on existing social networks and patterns of interaction and can create social divides and unequal power relations, which might contribute to conflict (Seekings et al. 2010).

Collective efficacy has a significant impact in terms of reducing violence and crime within urban neighborhoods (Sampson et al. 1997; Sampson 2003, 2009). Findings from a number of studies demonstrate that “collective efficacy is associated with lower rates of current and future violence and neighborhoods high in collective efficacy manifests significantly lower rates of violence” (Almgren 2005; Duncan et al. 2003; Sampson 2003). This mediating effect of collective efficacy on violence and crime was also observed in studies done in several neighborhoods in Australia (Mazerolle et al. 2010). Collective efficacy comprises two elements: social cohesion characterized by solidarity and mutual trust among residents and informal social control. According to Sampson “social control refers to the capacity of a group to regulate its members according to desired principles to realise collective as opposed to forced goals” (1997; p. 918). Sampson expressed the relationship between collective efficacy and violence and crime as follows:

...The capacity of residents to control group level processes and visible signs of social disorder is a key mechanism influencing opportunities for interpersonal crime in a neighborhood (ibid).

Collective efficacy, i.e., combined measures of social cohesion and informal social control, remains a “robust predictor of lower rates of violence” even in communities

characterized by concentrated disadvantage and residential instability, which according to social disorganization theory<sup>1</sup> contribute to high levels of violence within communities (ibid). The positive impact of collective efficacy has also been demonstrated in other studies. Collective efficacy has been found to have a positive impact in terms of regulating intimate partner violence as in neighborhoods with high levels of collective efficacy, there is a greater likelihood that women in abusive relationships would open up about this to a neighbor. Residents of neighborhoods with high stocks of collective efficacy also report better overall health (Browning and Cagney 2002; Browning 2002; Miller et al. 2011).

Very importantly, however, “the willingness of individuals in the neighborhood to intervene for the common good likely depends on neighborhood social cohesion” (Duncan et al. 2002; p. 246). This implies that social cohesion, i.e., mutual trust and solidarity among community members, is a condition for informal social control. If social cohesion among community members has for some reason broken down or does not exist within a community, it is highly unlikely that members of the community will act collectively in order to impose social control and regulate undesirable behavior, including violence and crime, on the part of its members. There seems to be a two-way relationship between social cohesion and violence or crime, where high rates of violence or crime within a community can have a serious negative impact on mutual trust and solidarity within a community, which in turn will diminish the community’s ability or willingness to work collectively to institute social control measures to inhibit violence and crime within the community. Duncan et al. argue that “in high crime areas, the informal mechanisms necessary for building collective efficacy may be disrupted, diminishing the willingness to intervene for the common good” (Duncan et al. 2003, p. 246). This study supports the assertion that high crime/more violent neighborhoods have lower levels of collective efficacy.

Another significant consideration in the literature on collective efficacy is the role of social capital or dense social networks and whether these are a prerequisite for collective efficacy and its associated impact on levels of violence and crime within neighborhoods. Sampson and others have argued that collective efficacy can exist and function effectively in terms of reducing violence and crime, even in contexts not marked by strong and dense social ties/networks. Dense social ties may be important in terms of creating ideal conditions for collective efficacy to operate, but in and of themselves will not necessarily result in greater social control within a neighborhood (Sampson 2003, 2009). In fact, scholars like Browning (2004) have argued that dense social networks or ties can actually impede social control and facilitate antisocial behavior on the part of certain members of a community. Browning employs the concept of “negotiated co-existence” to explain the persistence of high crime rates in well-organized communities and argues that in as much as dense social ties may promote collective efficacy, they may also provide a stock of social capital for offenders who are embedded in and part of the fabric of these communities (2004; p. 504).

Residents might for example be unwilling or even scared to give up a neighbor’s child who might be involved in delinquent behavior like drug dealing or gangsterism. According to Browning, “whereas networks promote the willingness of neighborhood residents to engage in informal social control, they simultaneously reduce the regulatory effectiveness of those efforts” (2004; p. 505). Patillo (1998) in her ethnographic study of crime in a black middle class neighborhood in Chicago finds similar dynamics at play. This study

<sup>1</sup> Social disorganization theory holds that specific neighborhood characteristics, e.g., concentrated disadvantage, residential mobility and the degree of racial homogeneity, impact on a community’s ability to maintain social order and realize common goals (Almgren 2005; Sampson 2009).

reveals that residential stability fosters strong and dense social networks and ties which have both positive and negative impacts in terms of criminal behavior. On the one hand, it, for examples, facilitates the informal supervision of young people in the community, but at the same time, gang members and other criminal elements who are embedded within the neighborhood through strong kin and other social ties are given a degree of leeway to live and carry out their criminal activities within the neighborhood (Patillo 1998; p. 770). The relationship between collective efficacy and criminality also comes into play in considering the impact of illegal alcohol and drug-related activities on levels of violence and crime within a neighborhood.

The link between alcohol abuse and violence is well established in the literature, although there is still some debate about the extent of the impact that the abuse of alcohol has on aggressive behavior. Corrigan and Matzopoulos<sup>2</sup> (2010) estimate that more than 95 % of studies worldwide report a positive association between alcohol abuse and violence. A few studies have found a positive correlation between alcohol access in terms of the proximity of alcohol outlets and the abuse of alcohol as well as increased violence within communities (Gorman et al. 2001; Gruenewald 1993; Lipton and Gruenewald 2002; Millar and Gruenewald 1997; Toomey et al. 2012; Zhu et al. 2004). These studies have tended to focus on the location of alcohol outlets, rather than on other attributes of the neighborhood environment, as an explanation for the abuse of alcohol and violent behavior. One of the questions that this paper is concerned with is how alcohol and drug abuse and the concentration of illegal alcohol and drug outlets within a neighborhood impact on collective efficacy (social cohesion and social control), and how this in turn affects the community's ability to regulate violence and criminal behavior within the settlement.

A study by Theall et al. (2009) asserts that the presence of a concentration of poorly run alcohol outlets within a neighborhood may result in a reduction of positive social networks, impacting negatively on social cohesion and residents' capacity to act collectively in order to combat social and physical disorder. Duncan et al. in a study on the relationship between neighborhood context and youth alcohol and drug problems found that "higher perceived social cohesion was related to lower perceived problems with youth alcohol and drug use in the neighborhood" (Duncan et al. 2002; p. 131). Galea et al. also point to a relationship between collective efficacy and substance abuse and argue that "urban areas with lower social capital and collective efficacy may be less likely to control deviant behaviors, potentially including the use and misuse of substances" (Galea et al. 2005; p. 130). This seems to indicate that neighborhoods with low levels of collective efficacy and therefore limited social control provide an ideal environment for the sale and abuse of illegal substances like alcohol and drugs, which in turn breed antisocial and violent behavior.

However, whereas collective efficacy provides a good starting point to reflect on high levels of violence and crime, structural conditions like poverty, unemployment and concentrated disadvantage do contribute greatly to the persistence and escalation of crime and violence in deprived neighborhoods. In fact, Sampson et al. (1997) argue that factors like neighborhood disadvantage, racial heterogeneity and residential mobility have a negative impact on collective efficacy. This, according to Duncan et al. is because these factors "prevent the formation of attributes (e.g., resources, trust, kinship) needed for the development of social cohesion, social control and collective efficacy" (Duncan et al. 2003; p. 246). All these elements feed into a vicious cycle where poverty and unemployment,

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<sup>2</sup> Corrigan and Matzopoulos (2010) "BOOZA TV—Bringing the Global Alcohol Strategy to those who need it most".

coupled with other neighborhood dynamics like a modification or change in residential composition and the illegal sale and abuse of substances for example, result in a breakdown of social cohesion and social control within poor urban neighborhoods. This in turn provides fertile conditions for violence, crime and antisocial behavior to spiral out of control. The Freedom Park case, discussed below, is a telling example of this vicious cycle and the complex interaction of multiple factors which create and sustain it.

### 3 The community of Freedom Park—history and context

Freedom Park is located in Mitchell's Plain, the second biggest township in Cape Town. Cape Town is the second largest city in South Africa with a population of just over 3.7 million according to the 2011 census. Cape Town contributes R203, 581 million to the GDP of the Western Cape. It has an unemployment rate of 23.8, and 35.7 % of its population live below the poverty line of less than R3500 per month. Cape Town has a significantly high murder rate of 42 per 100,000 population, compared with 17 in 100,000 for Africa as a whole and a global average of 6.9 per 100,000 as reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2011). According to the 2011 South African Census, Mitchell's Plain is part of one of the poorest districts in Cape Town with an unemployment rate of 33.3 and 39 % of the population living in informal dwellings. Mitchell's Plain also experiences high levels of violent crime and is third highest on the list of police districts with regards to the number of reported cases of rape (Gie 2008).

Freedom Park was established in 1998 when a group of backyard dwellers occupied a parcel of vacant land, which had been zoned for a school that was never built. The residents of Freedom Park lived without basic services like water, electricity and sanitation until 2001 when the municipality provided rudimentary services. At the time, four hundred and forty people, of whom two hundred and fifteen were male and two hundred and twenty-six were female, resided in Freedom Park. A livelihoods analysis conducted there by the Development Action Group in 2005 revealed crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence and community conflict as well as high levels of food insecurity (Development Action Group 2005). During the informal settlement phase, the settlement experienced gang violence. Gang shootouts were a regular occurrence as Freedom Park is located in the middle of the territories of two rival gangs fighting for drug turf (Development Action Group 2005; p. 14). Women also faced a constant threat of rape and molestation related to inadequate public lighting in the settlement.

The livelihoods analysis also revealed that the residents of Freedom Park, many of whom faced considerable social and economic vulnerability, used a combination of different strategies to secure their livelihoods. Those not formally employed, for example, worked as washerwomen or child minders for some of the better-off households in the settlement in exchange for food or money. Others *skarrel* (beg) in more affluent areas, and others ran informal businesses like spaza shops of shebeens<sup>3</sup> (ibid). In particularly desperate times, some households would go without food as a means of reducing their expenditure. Various grants, the national Child Support Grant (CSG) in particular, provide an important source of income for the people of Freedom Park. At the time of the survey, 64 % of households in Freedom Park had at least one person who received some form of a social grant. The settlement also received considerable support from a number of religious

<sup>3</sup> A shebeen is an informal alcohol outlet which might or might not be illegal, depending on whether or not the owner has obtained a liquor license.

and other organizations like Fairest Cape, Bake-for-Profit and Family-in-Focus, who provided food donations as well as skill development and training opportunities to the residents of Freedom Park. Local business in the surrounding areas donated goods like food and clothing (ibid). The construction of formal houses by the City of Cape Town started in 2007 and was completed in 2009.

The community of Freedom Park exhibited considerable courage in initially occupying the vacant land and in their determination not to be moved. They were well organized, had a strong residents committee, and were therefore able to resist several attempts by the city to evict them, at one point even forming a human chain to prevent bulldozers from flattening their settlement (DAG 2009). The process of forming a representative resident committee was not without challenges though and two committees operated at different stages of the development of the settlement. The Tafelsig People's Association (TPA) existed during the first stages of the land occupation and was formed in response to an interdict by the City of Cape Town to have the group evicted. The role of the TPA was to enter into negotiations with the City of Cape Town to avert eviction. They also elected a group of men and women from the community to act as marshals responsible for maintaining law and order on the site and to ensure that food and other donations were distributed in an equitable manner (Smit 2006b). However, party politics reared its head before the 2000 national elections, and allegations of mishandling of savings against the TPA led to the election of a second committee, the Freedom Park Squatters Association (FPSA). With the initiation of the upgrading process, the need for a united community became apparent, and under recommendation from DAG and other support organizations, the two rival committees were dissolved, and a new democratically elected residents committee, the Freedom Park Development Association (FPDA), was established (Smit 2006b; Mah and Rivers 2013).

As to be expected in a context marked by serious deprivation and a struggle for scarce resources, conflict did occur at different stages of the development of the settlement and the eventual upgrading project. However, despite this, the residents of Freedom Park, united by a common struggle for decent housing, showed solidarity by looking out for one another and pooling their resources in order meet their daily needs. That is how they were able to survive under very precarious conditions, for example, living without basic services like water, electricity and sanitation for 3 years.<sup>4</sup> The City of Cape Town was not in favor of an upgrading project in Freedom Park and remained a reluctant partner throughout the process. However, the community's persistence as well as a number of other external events eventually prompted the city to upgrade the settlement.

In order to mitigate their vulnerability to crime and violence, the residents formed a Neighborhood Watch and street committees, which played an active role in maintaining peace and security in the settlement by, for example, patrolling the site at night. The level of organization and solidarity within the community is also evident in their participation in the upgrading process. The community through the resident association was involved in decision-making around different aspects of the project. The strong community leadership negotiated with the city regarding the appointment of consultants to design and manage the housing process. Through a process of social mapping, the community by way of their elected representatives identified the challenges they experienced while living in the informal settlement and also envisioned their future settlement. In so doing, they were able to identify priorities for the upgrading process and how they wanted the settlement to look

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<sup>4</sup> Discussion with a development facilitator employed by the Development Action Group during the upgrading project—March 03, 2014.

and function. These priorities included a safe, well-kept and well-lit settlement with services like a primary and high school, parks for children to play in, a arts and culture center as well as a clinic (Mah and Rivers 2013). The social mapping process allowed the Freedom Park community to participate in the design and layout of the settlement. In fact, the layout plan went through several different drafts before the community was finally pleased that the layout of the settlement would accommodate their needs (Smit 2006b; Mah and Rivers 2013). The residents of Freedom Park were also centrally involved in the conceptualization and choice of house design options. The community identified key priorities for the upgrading with the improvement in safety and security notably first on the list.

This community faced a number of challenges, internal conflict as well as constant negotiation with the city which, as was mentioned previously, was a reluctant partner in the upgrading process. Despite these challenges though, they were well organized, had an efficient residents' committee, and established support structures, which set in place rules and norms for acceptable behavior for members of the community. Those who did not adhere to these rules were banned from the settlement.<sup>5</sup>

## 4 Research methods

Violence is a challenge in Cape Town, which officials, policy-makers, academics and broader civil society are grappling with. Escalating gang-related violence has received much coverage in the media in recent times, but often consists of sensationalist, one-sided accounts of violence and crime in the city. Official crime statistics do not paint an accurate picture of the scale of the challenge due to underreporting and convey very little about the trauma and anguish of the communities who experience crime and violence on a daily basis. This research conducted in-depth interviews with residents of Freedom Park, which afforded them an opportunity to express how their lives are affected by violence and crime and the strategies which they employ to deal with it. These interviews lasted between 45 min and 1 h. As the idea was not to get a representative sample, convenience sampling was used and participants were selected on the basis of their accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. Fieldworkers went from door to door in the community and interviewed those residents who agreed to participate in the study. The use of convenience sampling was also a pragmatic decision as it is becoming increasingly difficult to get communities to participate in academic research processes, because they often do not see how it will contribute meaningfully to their lives. The fact that the researchers were able to get 80 residents to participate in the study can be attributed to a good working relationship with members of the local community-based organization, who are well trusted and respected in this community.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with other external stakeholders in order to garner a diversity of voices and perspectives and to locate this community within a broader context. The use of this method facilitated the development of a complex and rich narrative about the interaction of a multiplicity of factors, operating at individual, household, neighborhood and macroscales and their impact on crime and violence within one community.

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<sup>5</sup> This point was raised on several occasions, in workshops and interviews with members of the team of marshals, responsible for maintaining law and order during the informal settlement phase, and other residents.

The research in Freedom Park used a range of qualitative data collection methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and community mapping. Approximately 100 in-depth interviews were conducted with the following role-players at various times during a 3-year engagement starting in 2011.

- Residents of Freedom Park (80 interviews were conducted, 60 were “original” Freedom Park residents, and 20 were outside beneficiaries)
- South African Police Services (4 interviews)
- Members of the Neighborhood Watch (1 group interview with 7 members of the Neighborhood Watch and 2 individual interviews)
- Social Workers (2 interviews)
- Community Development Workers (4 interviews)
- Health Professionals at Trauma Units (two group interviews)
- Government officials (2 in the Western Cape Provincial Department of Human Settlements, 2 in the Informal Settlement Upgrading department of the City of Cape Town and 1 from the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading Programme, based at the City of Cape Town)
- Support NGOs—(2 interviews were conducted)

Two focus group discussions were conducted with women; one consisted of women between the ages of 18–30 and another with a group of women 30 years and older. Interviewers and facilitators received training to equip them to conduct interviews and focus group discussions. Facilitators and interviewers spoke Afrikaans, the local language spoken in the community, which eased communication and helped to establish rapport.

A 3-day community mapping exercise was conducted with members of the Freedom Park community in October 2013. The mapping exercise was done after the interviews and focus group discussions. It therefore provided a way to triangulate some of the interview and focus group data. The mapping was done over 3 days, and a combination of older and younger men and women participated in the process. For this process, it was important to have participants who lived in the settlement before and after it was upgraded. The first day of the workshop was used to prepare participants for the mapping exercise. They were given an overview of different types of mapping techniques, the aim of mapping and what to expect during a mapping exercise. On this day, participants expressed concern for their safety and possible victimization. A decision was therefore taken that participants would not walk through the settlement and point out violence and crime hotspots, but that this would be replaced with a form of desktop mapping. Two enlarged satellite images of the settlement, one from when the settlement was still informal and a second of the upgraded settlement, were provided to the participants, and they were asked to indicate the places, times and frequency of incidences of violence and crime. Color-coded stickers were used to indicate the types of crime or violent incidences and how often they occurred. On day two of the mapping workshop, participants worked with a satellite image of the informal settlement, and on the third day, they worked with one of the current settlement, after the upgrading intervention.

Primary data sources were supplemented with secondary sources like the archives of the Development Action Group (DAG), a local housing and urban development nonprofit organization. Documents sourced from the archives include a livelihood analysis of the settlement, project reports and assessments, maps and photos of the original site as well as statistics about the demographics of Freedom Park.

## 5 Research findings—collective (in) efficacy, substance abuse and violence in Freedom Park

### 5.1 Impact of upgrading on social cohesion in Freedom Park

The first question that this paper tries to address is how the upgrading of the informal settlement has impacted on social cohesion among residents. There are clear indications, based on interviews with residents and external service providers, that the upgrading project has changed the dynamic within the settlement among a previously strong and well-mobilized community. This quality enabled them to initially occupy a vacant plot of land, resist several attempts at eviction, and negotiate with the city to improve their site through the provision of basic services and other infrastructure. Through community solidarity and the sharing of resources, they were able to survive under very precarious conditions. Moreover, they were successful in forming linkages with external groupings, NGOs, private companies and other organizations and in so doing attracted resources to their community. Not only did they possess significant stocks of bonding capital, but bridging and linking social capital were also high, thereby enabling them to form networks and connections beyond their settlement.<sup>6</sup> Even though conflict overrepresentation and resources did flare up at different periods within the settlement, the community, with the help of their support organization, was able to resolve this conflict to ensure that the project progressed.

However, indications are that this sense of community spirit and collective struggle dissipated after the upgrading intervention. To get a sense of this, residents were asked the following questions:

- (a) How do residents relate to one another after the upgrading project, i.e., are they closer now than before the settlement was upgraded?
- (b) Have relationships between neighbors and members of the community improved?

There is an overwhelming sense that residents are not as close to one another as they were before, when they were living in the informal settlement and that relationships between neighbors and members of the community have deteriorated. There is a sense of a loss of solidarity and mutual care. The feelings of growing alienation were for example expressed as follows:

No caring for neighbors, everybody is doing their own thing  
 We were closer in the shacks,<sup>7</sup> we shared everything  
 People are not close anymore, everyone is just for themselves

Some of this loss of closeness is attributed to one particular aspect of the upgrading project: inclusion of beneficiaries who were not part of the original group of land occupiers in the upgrading project. A group of 204 households from the city's housing waiting list were allocated houses as part of the Freedom Park upgrading project even though they had not been resident there. This not only impacted on neighborliness and community bonds, but affected levels of trust among community members. The inclusion of outside

<sup>6</sup> In the social capital literature, a distinction is made between *bonding* social capital, which refers to networks and ties between family, friends and people within a particular community and *bridging* social capital referring to horizontal connections between different communities or groups with similar socio-economic status. Middleton et al. (2005) further distinguish *linking* social capital, which refers to vertical connections between poor communities and groups or social actors in positions of power.

<sup>7</sup> Informal structures, sometimes made of wood, plastic and zinc.

beneficiaries undermined unity within the settlements and created a real sense of “us-versus-them”:

They did not sacrifice with us, we had to go through tough times, and they just stride in  
In the shacks we were like a family, we are not as close anymore; we have different  
neighbors, outside beneficiaries

Even though people struggled for a long time to get a house, some feel that the acquisition of this house has come at the cost of their solidarity as a community. One interviewee remarked poignantly that:

We are all separated, each one for themselves, relations have changed because  
people have their own houses

This view was also expressed by a community development worker who has had a long history with the community and has known them since before the upgrading project.

During the time of the informal settlement, Freedom Park was a closely knit community where people looked after each other. Residents were united by the common purpose of getting houses. Now that there is no longer such a common purpose, substance abuse has become worse,<sup>8</sup> including the problem of overcrowded houses.

The receipt of the houses has also contributed to growing individualism among residents as they do not engage with one another as regularly as they did before. This is echoed in Ross’ work, which laments similar loss of community cohesion in another settlement in Cape Town:

We were very close, but now everyone seems to be doing their own thing. We greet each other, but that bond we used to share is no longer there...I think these vrot (rotten) houses may also have something to do with it (Ross 2010; p. 47).

In another study of upgrading projects in Cape Town, Massey (2013) found a similar loss of social cohesion resulting from a disruption of social networks brought about by the upgrading intervention.

There are no spaces for us to meet. We struggle to even meet for our burial society. It is worse now that it is formal (Massey 2013; p. 5)

This loss of social cohesion following a public housing intervention has also been observed in Chile where the Chilean government, similar to South Africa, has invested substantially in a low-cost, subsidized housing programme (Smit 2006a; Posner 2012).

## **5.2 The erosion of social cohesion and the impact on informal social control and violence in Freedom Park**

This apparent erosion of social cohesion among residents of Freedom Park, marked by decreasing levels of solidarity and mutual trust, has affected the community’s ability to collectively exercise control over antisocial elements in order to address violence and crime within the settlement. Before the settlement was upgraded, the community employed a variety of informal methods to combat violence and crime. These included the marshal system, street committees and a neighborhood watch. The physical layout of the informal

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<sup>8</sup> One interviewee claimed that although there was abuse of alcohol and drugs in the informal settlement, it was not at the scale it is at now.

site made it difficult for the police to enter the settlement to patrol or pursue criminals, which meant that the community was largely responsible for keeping their settlement safe.

During interviews with the residents of Freedom Park and external service providers, concern was expressed about a perceived increase in levels of violence and crime within the community following the improvement in the settlement. Although the nature and types of violence experiences before upgrading have not necessarily changed, levels of gang violence, domestic violence, child abuse and housebreaking have increased significantly. While Freedom Park did experience violence and crime previously, as indicated by the livelihood analysis conducted by DAG, interviewees expressed concern over a continuing loss of control and an inability of the community to regulate what happens in the settlement as they did previously.

Residents were asked the following questions to get a sense of community efforts to address current levels of violence and crime within Freedom Park:

- (a) What is the community doing to make the settlement safer?
- (b) What would the community like to do to make the settlement safer?

The overwhelming response to the first question was that the community is doing nothing to improve safety. This sense of apathy relates in part to the receipt of the “house” and the loss of a sense of a common struggle which accompanied it. In the words of one person,

... when we were living in the “hokkies” (shacks or informal dwellings) we would participate in the street committees at night to keep an eye on the community and follow leads ..., and we didn’t have a problem and we used to catch these crooks—you see when you’ve got street committees, you’ve got ears everywhere.

When asked why people do not participate in street committees anymore, the response was:

Why must I be on the streets when I can be in my house?! We sat outside for many years!

The house also seems to provide a shelter from gang violence and the very real threat of getting caught in the cross fire.

This place is very dangerous; you must be in your house always

Everyone looks after their own house, security all the time, you keep inside, because you are scared you could get shot

The responses indicate a cycle of interaction between social cohesion and violence. High levels of community violence impact on social cohesion in that it limits opportunities for social interaction and engagement between residents. This in turn inhibits collective action and social control, contributing further to violent and criminal activities within the settlement. Another contributing factor is existing social networks and kinship ties between community members. The literature states that social networks and kinship ties can operate in both positive and negative ways in terms of regulating violent and criminal activities. Although, according to Samson and others, they are not a prerequisite for collective efficacy, they can contribute toward better collaboration between community members in order to informally police violent and criminal activities. The street committees and neighborhood watches, which operated when the Freedom Park community lived informally, bear testimony to this. On the other hand, there could also be a darker, more cynical dimension to dense social networks and kinship ties where they can facilitate violent and criminal activity by shielding the perpetrators of these activities. Community members

talked with great sadness about how young boys who were toddlers when they occupied the site in 1998 are now gangsters and drug dealers. Some felt that this frustrated efforts to combat gangsterism and the associated drug trade as the drug dealers and gangsters are part of the community; the drug dealer or gangster is often the son of a neighbor.

We need to come together again, need to unite again, though some don't want to get involved as their kids are gangsters

Parents don't want to put their children in jail and this causes friction in the community

There is no unity, they don't support one another because their children are gangsters; we need to break the silence, but we can't or we will become targets

In response to the second question about what should be done to improve safety, most respondents were in favor of more community-based responses like standing together, reviving the marshal system, forming a neighborhood watch and drawing up a petition. They were, however, not opposed to working together with the police, and many expressed the need for a mobile police station to be erected outside the settlement.

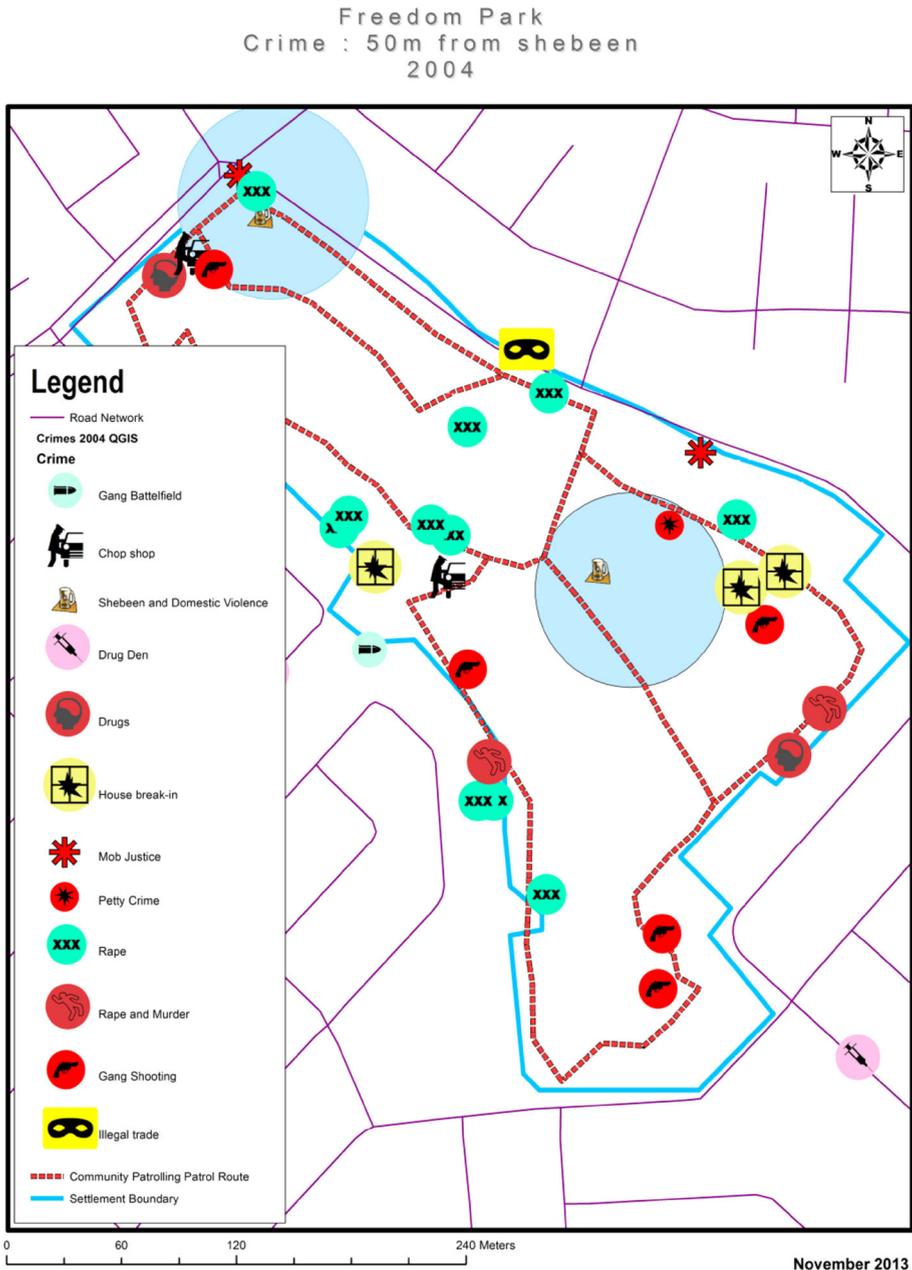
### 5.3 Illegal sale of substances, collective efficacy and violence in Freedom Park

This community is facing a considerable substance abuse (alcohol and drugs) burden, and there is a common perception among research participants that the scale of the problem is increasing. There has been a proliferation in the number of illegal alcohol and drug outlets in the settlement since it has been upgraded into formal housing (Figs. 1, 2). Participants reported that there were two shebeens and one drug den in the informal settlement (see Fig. 1) compared with 14 shebeens and 8 drug dens in the upgraded settlement (see Fig. 2). This growth in the number of shebeens and drug dens has been accompanied by a perceived increase in the number of crimes and violent incidence, particularly fighting and domestic violence, committed within a 50-m radius of these outlets.

The Freedom Park interviewees consistently pointed to three contributing factors to perceived escalation of violence and crime after formalization, namely poverty, unemployment and a lack of community control. The sale of illegal substances provides an income to poor households and enables them to cover the additional expenses of paying for water, rates and electricity, which come with owning a house. High unemployment means that young men are recruited into gangs and the associated drug trade, as there are few alternative sources of employment. The Freedom Park case indicates a complex interaction between structural factors like poverty and unemployment, the livelihood and coping strategies which they result in and the interaction with collective efficacy as expressed in the community's ability to control and regulate antisocial behavior. Whereas before the upgrading intervention, this community was poor and a high unemployment rate did exist and there were certainly attempts to establish illegal alcohol outlets, high levels of informal social control and solidarity on the part of the community meant that attempts to establish illegal alcohol and drug outlets were quickly halted.

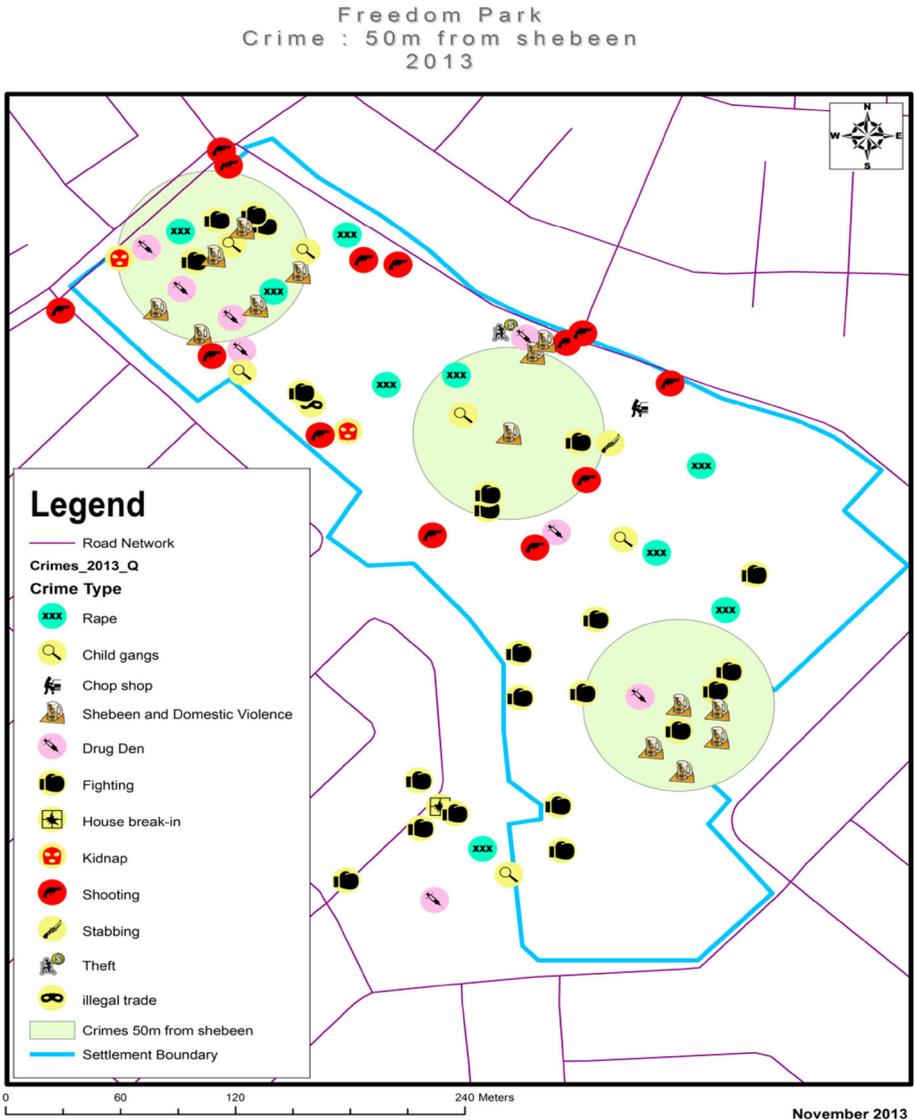
## 6 Conclusion

The Freedom Park case lends support to many of the central arguments of collective efficacy theory. Firstly, it shows that collective efficacy, denoted by social cohesion and social control, is important for regulating levels of violence and crime in a poor settlement



**Fig. 1** Distribution of crimes around shebeens and drug dens when the settlement was informal

in a city in the global South. In the case of Freedom Park, as has been observed in other contexts, the provision of formal housing has had a negative impact on social cohesion as it has disrupted the resident composition, existing social relations and regulatory institutions



**Fig. 2** Distribution of crimes around shebeens and drug dens in 2013

within the community. During the informal settlement phase, mutual trust and functioning support structures facilitated greater levels of informal social control, which enabled the community to regulate violence, crime and antisocial activities like the illegal sale of alcohol and drugs in the settlement.

The assertion by Samson and others that social cohesion is a necessary condition for a community to be able to exercise informal social control and in this way regulate violence and crime seems to hold true in this instance. In Freedom Park, there has been a breakdown in solidarity and mutual support structures after the construction of formal houses, which

has impacted on the willingness of residents to collectively regulate unacceptable behavior and criminal tendencies within the settlement. The Freedom Park case study therefore gives credence to the importance of social cohesion as a prerequisite for social control and points to a dual relationship between social cohesion and violence, where social cohesion is needed for combating high levels of violence and crime. However, high levels of violence and crime at the same time deplete stocks of social cohesion within a community.

In addition, there has been an explosion in the number of illegal alcohol and drug outlets after upgrading. This is a clear indication of the breakdown of the regulatory capacity of the community as previously during the informal settlement phase, the establishment of these types of businesses was carefully controlled by the community. What contributes to the lack of regulatory control is the way in which many of the drug dealers and gangsters are deeply rooted in the community through family and friendship ties, as observed elsewhere by Browning (2004), Sampson (2003) and Patillo (1998).

The increase in the illegal sale of alcohol and drugs is contributing to rising levels of violence and crime within the settlement as depicted in the mapping of the types and levels of crime reported within a 50-m radius of these outlets. This is consistent with the positive correlation between the proximity of alcohol outlets and increased violence reported by Gruenewald (1993) and others. The increase in the number of illegal alcohol and drug outlets is strongly linked to a perceived worsening of people's livelihoods after upgrading. Many of the respondents felt that they are actually poorer since they have received their homes as these come with new financial obligations like paying for services. The impacts of poverty and unemployment were mitigated by high levels solidarity and informal measures of social control, which existed before the upgrading project. Neighbors generally looked out for one another's well-being, and informal structures like the marshals regulated the illegal sale of drugs and alcohol and the antisocial behavior associated with that. In addition, daily support from external organizations in the form of donations and food provided a safety net and lessened the community's vulnerability while they were living informally.

This brings us to the third point; this case supports the notion that collective efficacy does not function in isolation of broader structural conditions like poverty, unemployment and inequality, but is in fact strongly tied to it. Solidarity and informal measures of control can cushion the effects of poverty and unemployment in poor communities. This study suggests that the concept of collective efficacy, which has mostly been applied in quantitative studies of crime levels in American cities, does offer interesting possibilities as a conceptual tool to be used in more qualitative, ethnographic research on violence and crime in urban settlements in other parts of the world. However, whereas it provides a good starting point, it might be too limited to untangle the web of structural factors which cause and interact with complex neighborhood dynamics to sustain high levels of violence and crime in cities of the South. The research also has important policy implications, particularly with regards to the way in which upgrading projects are implemented. The research suggests a need for a strong analysis of livelihoods strategies and a mapping of existing networks and social relations within a community before the commencement of any upgrading project. Upgrading programmes should take due cognisance of social networks and community structures which contribute toward social cohesion and informal social control within settlements and should find ways to support and enhance these, rather than disrupt them. This would ensure that residents are still able to draw on these support structures after a formalization process.

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