That Place is "kwaMnyamandawo"

by

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1. Introduction

This study explores the fears and experiences of violence among homeless women living in inner city Johannesburg. It forms part of a larger investigation initiated by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) which explored the relationship between space, time and sexual violence, with a view to identifying ways to reduce the rate of sexual violence, as well as women's fears of rape in the inner city. This component of the larger project focuses on exploring and understanding the perceptions and experiences of safety and danger among certain groups of homeless women for the following reasons: firstly, to explore the impact of social and economic marginalisation on women's sense of safety or danger; and secondly, to explore the relationship between the condition of homelessness and women's vulnerability to violence, abuse and generalised social insecurity.

The report begins by examining popular and evolving conceptions of the home and homelessness as a means of situating the problems of violence and social dislocation experienced by different types of homeless women within the broader socio-economic context in which homeless women attempt to survive. The report then locates the current problem of homelessness across South Africa, and in the City of Johannesburg in particular, in the context of the historical dispossession and dislocation of Africans generally, and African women in particular, by the policies and practices of the colonial and apartheid state. The current housing policies at national, provincial and local levels are examined to identify both the opportunities and obstacles faced by poor people, particularly poor women, in their attempts to gain access to housing and security of tenure, and to illustrate the extreme levels of tenure insecurity faced by certain categories of women who fall outside the ambit of existing provisions and practices. This section of the report concludes with a focused discussion on a number of key gender issues pertaining to the theme of this study – homelessness and violence against women – with special attention given to the key blockages confronted in policy, law and implementation practice.

The research findings which follow extrapolate key themes from interviews with homeless

women living in various types of insecure accommodation, focussing in particular on their perceptions and experiences of violence in different spaces where they live, work and which they traverse in the course of their daily lives. The findings point to some common sources and causes of insecurity among homeless women and highlight the links between socio-economic and physical insecurity among poor black women in the city. Finally, the research findings also report on the views and visions of a safer home, life and world held by the homeless women who participated in the study.

The following study aims to contribute to wider debates about the current housing policy by examining the extent to which the needs of the most marginalized population sector in South Africa's largest city - poor black homeless women - are addressed through current policies and programmes. It also attempts to identify some critical areas where the intervention of government and civil society organisations could prove valuable in addressing some of the most urgent needs of a marginalised sector that often falls outside the reach of social assistance programmes, and who, as a result, are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence and insecurity.

2. Background and Context to Homelessness in Inner City Johannesburg

2.1 Defining homelessness

Most people equate "homelessness" with not having a roof over one's head. Definitions of homelessness have, however, evolved over the years to also include people who live in poor housing conditions, which are considered to constitute "inadequate accommodation". Austeberry and Watson (1986) argue that there are degrees of homelessness, spanning a continuum from lack of permanent shelter to inadequate housing conditions and living arrangements. It may be useful to consider the problem in terms of a continuum between those who sleep without any formal shelter at the one end, and those who have security of tenure in the form of ownership at the other. Between these extremes lies an extensive grey area of people living in hostels, temporary shelters, informal settlements, backyard shacks and other forms of insecure accommodation. In South Africa, tenure insecurity affects many millions of people in urban areas.

In their definition of homelessness, Austeberry and Watson consider the fact that "homeless" is a term generally adopted to describe people without accommodation. They observe that the condition of homelessness goes far beyond the lack of accommodation to include other concepts of the "home" that are strongly linked with notions of family, and the images these notions conjure of warmth, comfort, stability and security. They argue that homelessness is closely associated with affiliation to a family, and that the emphasis placed on this affiliation and the ideological primacy of the family household in relation to the popular conception of "home" further excludes single people who may also be homeless. That the term "homeless" rather than "houseless" is used to describe a certain group of people signifies the breadth of the meaning of home and stipulates that it goes beyond simple provision of shelter. There are other definitions that also focus on disaffiliation and social isolation in addition to the lack of shelter (Glasser 1994).

Other definitions of homelessness include related conditions of physical and material vulnerability. "People are considered homeless if they lack adequate shelter in which they are entitled to live safely. At the extreme they are sleeping rough, while others live under a

roof but their accommodation is lacking in safety, security or basic amenities" (Daly 1996 cited in de Bruyn 2000). In this definition, safety and security, as well as access to basic services, are all prerequisites for the existence of a home. The scope of this study is limited to those who are categorised as "homeless" within the narrow definition, with our study areas restricted to people lacking any secure long-term shelter, such as those illegally occupying abandoned buildings, temporarily living with others or living in formal transitional housing, as well as those living in accommodation provided by their informal employers. Additional categories of homeless people not included in our study are those sleeping on the streets, renting backyard shacks on other people's property, living in hostels or living in accommodation provided by more formal employers.

All these communities and individuals require secure tenure in the city but also have different needs, which warrant further investigation before any programme seeking to address these can be developed. The reasons why some homeless people manage to access transitional housing while others live on the streets or, at best, illegally occupy buildings or land, also require further investigation.

2.2 Historical factors contributing to homelessness in South Africa

Glasser (1994) argues that in developed countries homelessness is defined by the lack of affordable housing where government discontinues its involvement in the building or subsidisation of low-cost housing. In the developing world, issues of rural to urban migration, unemployment and underemployment are more central causes of homelessness. In South Africa a chronic housing shortage coupled with structural unemployment also contributes significantly to homelessness.

Olufemi (1997) argues that there is no single cause that renders individuals homeless, but that homelessness is rather a final stage in a series of lifelong crises and mixed opportunities. The reasons for the homelessness of the women participants in this study were indeed complex and are outlined in Section 5.1 of this report. In this section we primarily focus on historical factors contributing to homelessness in South Africa.

Black women have borne the heaviest burden of the state's use of space to control the black population in South Africa. From the development of the 'reserve' system following the Land Act of 1913 through to the rational development planning of the new millennium, black women have been forced to occupy marginal spaces on the peripheries of the formal economy.

The 1913 Land Act created the basis for the migrant system, where African men entered the growing urban areas as 'temporary sojourners' to minister to the needs of the capitalist economy for the benefit of the white population. African women were forced to remain behind in the reserves, to look after children and the elderly, and to 'subsidise' men's wages. On the basis of women's unpaid reproductive labour in the reserves, men were paid wages below the cost of the reproduction of their families (Yawitch 1981).

In 1921, less than seven percent of African women lived in urban areas, making them the least urbanised of any sex-race category. The greatest disparity between African men and women was found on the lucrative Rand, with almost nine times more African men than women living in the urban areas of the Rand (Walker 1991). The migrant labour system led

to widespread fragmentation characterising African family life throughout the twentieth century.

In the urban areas, African women were clustered in the least skilled, lowest paid jobs. Employment in domestic service accounted for most urban African women, with a small percentage in manufacturing (Walker 1991). Most African women were thus dependent for accommodation on individual employers. The relationship was not regulated and employers of domestic workers held almost total power. Loss of employment meant loss of accommodation.

Up to this time, the provision of housing to the poor was the voluntary responsibility of local authorities. In 1920, the Housing Act made local authorities responsible for initiating, constructing and managing housing schemes. Specific racial groups received differing portions of the housing budget, thus creating an early residential segregation (Hendler, Mabin & Parnell 1986). A decline in funding in the 1930s resulted in the dropping of sub-economic schemes and the introduction of selective individual home ownership. A decline in construction, combined with lower vacancy rates in public housing schemes, led to a deepening housing crisis (Hendler, Mabin & Parnell 1986).

Before 1930, patriarchal control ensured that few women migrated to town on their own, and the state did not find it necessary to place legal restrictions on the migration of African women. However, as economic circumstances compelled more African women to leave the impoverished reserves, the state began placing restrictions on the migration of women to the towns. In 1930, municipalities were empowered to prohibit African women from entering their areas without permission, although women with relatives who had sufficient accommodation were exempted (Walker 1991). This immediately made African women dependent on men for the right to live in urban areas. In 1937, African women were no longer permitted to leave their home districts without permission from the authorities both at home and in the urban area to which they wanted to move. In addition to these controls, the law only recognised African women as minors and leases were made out to men only. This created enormous accommodation problems for single, divorced, widowed or deserted women (Walker 1991). It also forced women into illicit and insecure employment that often put them at physical risk.

In 1948, the National Party-led government renewed its efforts to control the movement of the African population, despite the collapse of the reserve economies. The amendment of the Urban Areas Act in 1952 tightened influx control measures and extended the law to African women. The accompanying Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act of the same year extended the carrying of passes to African women for the first time (Walker 1991). Mass resistance to the new laws, in particular by women against the extension of the laws to them, forced the government to introduce the provisions of these Acts slowly.

The rise of squatter movements, at the same time as the anti-pass campaigns, pushed the government into a renewed provision of state housing. In the late 1940s, site and service schemes were introduced and there was a boom in public construction (Hendler, Mabin & Parnell 1986). But the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the associated forced removals and resettlements brought a halt to this growth. Alongside the destruction of houses in the urban 'black spots', the state borrowed from the private sector to build houses in the segregated

townships and in the bantustans.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, state policy resulted in a severe curtailment of the building of African houses. In an attempt not only to contain, but also to reverse, black urbanisation the state imposed a freeze on land development and building of family houses in African townships and began the removal of freehold rights (Boraine 1989). After 1967, laws were passed stipulating that women's names could no longer be put on the waiting list for housing. Women who did not live with husbands or fathers, and were therefore denied access to official housing, were expected to live in hostels, or to become registered lodgers or other tenants (Parnell 1990). Women who were evicted from their homes were 'endorsed out' to rural areas. Urban residence rights and access to housing in the racially segregated townships remained key points of vulnerability for women. Housing shortages and the subsequent rise in rentals also posed a challenge for women living in the towns.

Although funding for African township development began to increase after the advent of the Administration Boards in 1977, the allocation of funds to urban African housing remained low. Between 1973 and 1978, while 44% of the urban population was classified as African, only 6% of the Housing Fund's resources were put towards the development of African residential areas (Parnell 1990). By the 1980s, the state had shifted its responsibility for the provision of housing to the private sector, based on individual home ownership and bond repayments. This excluded millions of the poorest from the housing market.

The rapid expansion of informal settlements in and around the city attested to the failure of the state and the private sector alike to provide adequate shelter for the African population. The state made a distinction between squatters and residents of informal settlements on the basis of the illegality of the former. The recognition of selected informal settlements and the provision of rudimentary services to these chosen settlements became part of the late-apartheid strategy to ease the mushrooming housing crisis (SA Institute of Race Relations 1992).

Even after the formal abolition of influx controls in 1986, the problem of housing for African women was not over. By this time, very few women actually had ownership or secure tenure in their own names. At the end of apartheid, male tenants dominated public housing, with the right to purchase this housing at preferential rates. Women who mostly sub-let from tenants throughout apartheid had to buy their own houses at full cost on the private housing market (Parnell 1990). As rentals increased women were increasingly pushed out of the formal areas, including from backyard shacks, into the informal settlements. The alternative was a precarious foothold in the city, moving from one abandoned building to another as the authorities constantly caught up with and hounded occupiers out of these buildings. For the most marginalised minority, these constraints on access to formal shelter translated into literal homelessness. Little has changed for many African women since the demise of apartheid and the promises of democracy.

2.3 Post-apartheid housing policies and the homeless

Post-apartheid housing policy is one of the starkest indicators of the continuity of economic and social policy between the late apartheid and the post-apartheid periods. The apartheid state took a general turn towards privatisation especially from the early 1980s as the state

ran into financial difficulties, came under intensifying political pressure from grassroots resistance and as its policies were increasingly at odds with continued capital accumulation across the board. Together with big capital organised through the Urban Foundation, and with assistance from the World Bank, the state developed a policy of individualised home ownership and a market-led housing policy (Bond 2000).

Post-apartheid housing policy, negotiated through the institutional structure of the National Housing Forum, is market-centred, offering "little more than a developer-led, site-and-service policy" (Bond 2000:136). The Housing White Paper in 1994 and subsequent amendments based housing policy on "the fundamental pre-condition for attracting investment, which is that housing must be provided within a normalised market" and in 1996 the Ministerial Task Team confirmed that the state's gradual withdrawal from housing provision was a fundamental principle (Bond 2000:145).

The Constitution grants concurrent jurisdiction over housing to the national and provincial governments. The national Department of Housing (NDoH) is responsible for designing the policy, legislative and funding frameworks and overall targets, with detailed policy, planning and implementation carried out by the provincial and local (municipal) governments. Within the context of a state-assisted market-driven approach to housing delivery, the 1994 White Paper on Housing makes no specific mention of temporary or transitional housing. At the national level, the broad policy objective is to eliminate the housing backlog and ensure that everyone has a formal house.

The White Paper on Housing establishes a subsidy system targeting the poorest households. The policy provides for a once-off state subsidy to assist low-income families to acquire housing. In 2001, the NDoH introduced a requirement for own contribution, to be paid in cash or through 'sweat equity' – providing labour to build the house (Charlton 2004). The policy recognised that the subsidies would be insufficient and made arrangement with banks to provide loans to supplement the subsidies. But only formally employed people with incomes in excess of R1 500 could access the loans. In this way many families who have informal ways of earning their income or whose employment pays less than the stipulated amounts were excluded (Federal Update, 1999). The subsidy system is geared towards freehold tenure for nuclear family based households, and the 20 - 45% of female-headed households in informal settlements are unlikely to have access to end-user finance or savings required to utilise the subsidy (Fish 2003).

The policy recognises the potential benefits of collectively owned housing through a social housing policy. To this end, a social housing subsidy was made available to institutions to provide affordable social housing to the lower end of the market (Department of Housing 1994). The subsidies would be used for capital costs for new or existing social housing units and would therefore be fixed in the housing stock, rather than moving with the individuals who occupy the stock. Despite this recognition, only a handful of social housing initiatives have emerged in South Africa. In 1999, institutional subsidies represented less than one percent of total allocated subsidies (Fish 2003). In 2000, Rust identified just 20 "serious, formal initiatives" out of about 50 in total (cited in Fish 2003: 405). Social housing initiatives "emerged as a result of fragmented organisational will, rather than a result of a supportive policy environment" (Department of Housing 2003: 3).

In 2003 the NDoH released a draft social housing policy. The main government

intervention is the provision of an institutional subsidy for each residential unit to be developed and occupied by qualifying residents earning less than R3 500 per month (Fish 2003). But despite targeting the lower end of the market, social housing is not an option for the very poor, in the context of the need to maintain buildings and pay rentals (Department of Housing 2003). The White Paper also recognised the need for a policy for what was termed 'special needs housing' including homeless shelters, old age homes and frail care facilities (Department of Housing 1994). But there is nothing more on this subject in the White Paper.

In essence the poor remain locked out of the formal housing market, and housing delivery has lagged behind demand. Despite the construction of well over 1 million houses since 1994, delivery has not kept pace with demand nor has it wiped out the backlog of an estimated 3 million housing units inherited from apartheid planning. Between 1994 and 1999, formal housing stock only grew by 12%, compared to the 97% increase in informal dwellings (rising to 142% in urban areas). Informal dwellings increased from 667 000 to 1,3 million during this period (Radebe 2001).

The post-apartheid approach to shelter provision and human settlement development, despite stated policy commitments to integration, appears to be reinforcing historical patterns of spatial marginalisation and socio-economic exclusion of the poor. The reasons for this are complex and include *inter alia* inadequate attention devoted to land redistribution as part of a broader urban land reform approach, high land costs, existing bulk infrastructure inherited from the fragmented apartheid city, and the influences of corporate and other vested interests (such as organised residents' associations) which perpetuate patterns of spatial development that relegate the poor to the peripheries of the urban landscape and shape government's responses to informal settlements.

In September 2004 the NDoH launched its Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Integrated Sustainable Human Settlements. This Plan, to be implemented over the next five years, addresses a number of wide-ranging issues within the existent market-led housing policy framework and includes the revision of subsidies, the extension of rental housing, deepening partnerships between government and the financial and construction sectors, and the 'eradication of informal settlements' (BuaNews 2004).

The Plan addresses, on paper at least, many of the problems that have confronted post-apartheid housing policies and programmes – *inter alia* the creation of dormitory low-income settlements on the urban periphery that lack access to basic social services and amenities and are distant from jobs; the barriers to very poor households gaining access to state-subsidised housing because of own contribution requirements; and the expansion of and support to the rental housing market, an important source of accommodation for lower income city residents. It remains to be seen whether the substantive questions of political will to address distorted spatial patterns of development that relegate the poor to the peripheries of the city, the building of an integrated strategy that involves the range of government departments required to support the delivery of integrated settlements that are capable of sustaining the survival strategies of the very poor, and the major barriers of end-user responsibility for maintenance and payment for basic services (an aspect that does not come within the purview of the NDoH Comprehensive Plan) will be addressed.

2.4 The City of Johannesburg's housing strategy

Although housing is a national and provincial competency, the Housing Act (107 of 1997) gives municipalities the mandate to implement housing programmes and projects in their jurisdictions. However, municipal delivery plans are dependent for funding on the release of subsidy payments from national and provincial government (City of Johannesburg 2001). National or provincial budget cuts can thus have serious implications for the ability of the City to deliver housing. Some of the richer municipalities like Johannesburg can, and do, offer an additional subsidy on top of the national grant. Municipalities must come up with their own detailed delivery plans within the frameworks and budgets set at national and provincial levels. The City of Johannesburg Housing Department has shifted from the management of council-owned housing stock to the proactive delivery of housing. Housing delivery plans are devolved to the regions, within a city-level strategic framework and overall targets. The city's strategic framework includes some reference to social housing, transitional housing, inner city upgrading and a policy with regard to illegal land and building occupations.

The city has taken a "zero tolerance" approach to land occupations. A rapid response unit has been set up to remove illegal occupiers as soon as possible after they occupy. The city's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) seeks an end to illegal occupations, the registration of all occupants of informal settlements and a phased approach of either upgrading informal settlements or of removing residents to areas deemed more appropriate. Ten informal settlements are targeted for relocation in 2004/05 and 17 further settlements in 2005/06 (City of Johannesburg 2004). Once registration of existing residents is completed, any new occupiers will be considered illegal and will be removed.

Transitional shelter functions as immediate shelter for some of the estimated 4 500 people living on the streets without any form of shelter at all. It serves an additional function of temporary shelter for those who are evicted in the process of inner city upgrading and regeneration. The Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, responding to a proposal by the Gauteng National Housing Board to accommodate homeless people in transitional shelters, adopted an Inner City Transitional Housing Policy in 1996. The overall aim of this policy was to ensure that transitional housing residents would eventually be capacitated to acquire access to permanent accommodation. The proposal was aimed at removing destitute homeless people from parks and the streets by providing them with temporary accommodation for a period of six months, after which they could be moved into more permanent housing, such as social housing. This temporary shelter was to be provided to people with a monthly income below R1 250 for persons without dependants and R2 500 for those with dependants.

The local government's role would then be to provide subsidies for the development of buildings for this purpose. The subsidies would be released to any municipality or properly incorporated charitable organisation, which would then develop the building to provide the necessary facilities for residents. Initially, eight projects were set up as pilots that could be replicated in other areas of the city if they proved successful.

Although the proposal does not state this, residents of transitional housing are expected to pay rental for the upkeep of their accommodation. In two of these places, Cornelius House and Phuthaditjhaba the residents had to pay amounts of R300 and R100, respectively. The

Johannesburg Trust for the Homeless (JTH) manages Cornelius House as a model transitional housing initiative. The JTH is a partnership between the private sector City of Johannesburg Partnership and a couple of churches (Fraser 2004). According to JTH central executive officer Chris Lund, the leap from homelessness to social housing is too great. With self-contained housing units in a social housing project costing upwards of R800 per month, cheaper communal or transitional housing options need to be created. In this option, the occupant would pay around R125 - R170 per month for a bed and shared kitchen and ablution facilities (Garson 2004). The Johannesburg Housing Company offers temporary or emergency shelter to people evicted from other inner city buildings it is renovating on this basis, but the temporary residents are also expected to pay rent (Garson 2004).

Over the last four years, it has become clear that residents living in transitional houses have been unable to move to more permanent housing like social housing because the financial gap between the two types of housing is too big a leap. As a result some residents have been living in these houses for longer than four years. The metro Department of Housing is currently exploring the possibility of providing accommodation that will not be as costly as social housing to those people who are currently living in transitional housing. In its 2001 strategy, the council established a policy of transferring transitional housing to an NGO or to a rental housing association. The city states its willingness to provide a budget to sustain transitional housing projects if required (City of Johannesburg 2001). The city's 2004 IDP indicates that the city plans to deliver 100 transitional housing units in 2004/05 and 300 units in 2005/06 (City of Johannesburg 2004).

Communal or social housing has the potential to provide cheap long-term accommodation for low-income residents. In Johannesburg, the Johannesburg Housing Company (JHC) has refurbished inner city buildings using the institutional subsidy provided for social housing projects, and leases them to residents at subsidised rentals. The projects include Jeppe Oval, Carr Gardens in Newtown, Douglas Village and Parkzicht in Troyeville and the Landdrost Hotel in Joubert Park. JHC retains ownership of the buildings and cross-subsidises by allowing a mix of incomes amongst tenants and charging high rents to those not eligible for the subsidy (Fish 2003).

However, in the context of the need for residents to pay rents and maintenance costs themselves, social housing is not ideally suited for the poorest residents. Inner city upgrading is certainly not focussed on housing the destitute and homeless. Geoff Mendelowitz of JHC gives a clear picture of the philosophy underlying the company's renovating activities: "We need owners to be able to fix up, maintain buildings and make a profit on them otherwise there's no incentive for them to get involved. We don't want to be hardheaded but we want to create a world-class city. We need to attract the right people to live here, people who can pay rent" (quoted in Garson 2004). The council has a similar point of view. Residents who have occupied inner city buildings without permission will be forced to leave to allow for upgrading. They will then go through a process of being shifted into 'transitional housing' where discipline can be imposed on them. In the words of Sizakele Nkosi, in charge of housing in Johannesburg, "These people are not used to paying for services and we must first teach them to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility" (Thale 2002).

The council owns 27 hostels containing 47 000 beds. These hostels are for the public and council staff. While they were built as single sex hostels, many have been upgraded to

family units (City of Johannesburg 2001). Single women will find it difficult to get accommodation in the hostels, dominated as they are by single men or men with their families. The quality of the hostels is poor, and the council is planning to privatise them, and to implement a cost recovery policy where they are unable to privatise (City of Johannesburg 2001). This will have a direct negative impact on the poorest residents who will be unable to pay the costs of staying in the hostels.

The discussion above shows how government's policies focus on those who can afford to supplement the subsidies. None of the policy documents refer to the homeless groups who squat on unused land and live in abandoned buildings. The assumption seems to have been that all homeless people would be able to move to transitional housing but the fact is that most of the people who squat on land and occupy abandoned buildings cannot afford the monthly rents since they do not have regular income. The city Department of Housing strategy seems to have completely omitted to look at the needs of the squatting homeless who also need housing but do not have money to pay for it. Some of the women in our sample were living in an old abandoned church and did not have money to move into transitional housing. These women have been unable to access the subsidies available to people living in squatter settlements because they lack the R1000 savings required for subsidy beneficiaries to bridge the subsidy.

2.5 Gender dimensions of homelessness and access to housing

The review thus far has pointed to the many difficulties poor people confront gaining access to affordable, well-located government-subsidised housing. Poor women face peculiar constraints and difficulties, by virtue of their extremely marginalized economic and social position, aspects of which are not adequately addressed in government housing policy and programmes. The problem of violence again women, widely prevalent in public housing and low-income housing developments, is discussed and its implications for government policy and approaches to low-income housing delivery are explored.

2.5.1 Gender bias in housing policy and programmes

The National DoH has a focus on promoting and supporting women in the housing sector, with a special focus on women in the construction industry, and on women-headed households as beneficiaries of housing policy. A particular emphasis in the Department's gender strategy is to promote the access of women-headed households to housing subsidies. While the National Department notes its success in reaching female-headed households, with a total of 50.5% of approved subsidies going to women-headed households, research undertaken by the Public Services Commission (PSC) has argued that the Department is experiencing some difficulty promoting women's equal access to housing (Charlton 2004).

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was appointed by the NDoH to research and develop a framework in terms of which a gender perspective could be brought to bear on housing and human settlement policy and implementation. The CSIR report raises critical considerations regarding approach, and finds that the existent policy is gender-neutral in its emphasis on equality of access to housing by men and women. This approach fails to recognise the realities of gender inequality and that these give rise to different needs of housing and differential constraints to access (and retention of access) for men and women. A key commentator on the housing policies and programmes identifies a

major conceptual problem in the orientation of housing policy, which is built around the biased assumption of stable nuclear families "gradually accumulating wealth on the urban periphery" and therefore largely inappropriate to the needs of (poor) women (Huchzermeyer 2003:128 cited in Charlton 2004).

Further, certain key interventions in terms of settlement and housing design to promote women's safety have not been adequately considered. Questions of post-delivery support, particularly in relation to the maintenance of infrastructure, the further development and management of the settlement, and crime and safety prevention have not been adequately attended to through policy (CSIR report cited in Charlton 2004).

Research commissioned in 2000 by the Gauteng DoH from the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), and undertaken in a sample of four low-income housing developments, confirms the importance of even limited improvements, such as tenure security and basic services, in enhancing the quality of women's lives. The most frequently mentioned reason for women choosing to live in the new housing development was that they wanted a permanent place, free from overcrowding and/or a home they could call their own, echoing many of the aspirations of women reached through this study. The CASE/GDoH research also finds that for the majority of the respondents in the least developed housing sites, tenure security and access to basic services (including schools) are important needs for poor women, which should be prioritised in low-income housing developments.

In relation to services, the study identifies poverty levels as a critical factor that should be taken into consideration by the Department. Development often brings with it costs that poor communities cannot carry, such as service payments. The study warns that in the absence of consideration of questions of affordability, the poorest members of communities may be forced to leave a developing site because of their inability to pay for services and other housing delivery and maintenance costs (CASE/GDoH 2000).

Even once women have gained access to government-subsidised housing, their conditions of access are often precarious. The Women's Legal Centre in Cape Town has been dealing with the problem of women's names appearing as co-applicants on the national subsidy database, but not on the title deed (Charlton 2004). On the dissolution of a marriage, women may find themselves in a vulnerable position with no legal rights to the house, and no recourse to a further housing subsidy. (CASE/GDoH 2000; Charlton 2004). Further, there is mounting evidence that some beneficiaries are selling government subsidised homes at times of crisis - despite restrictions on the sale of these houses for a period of eight years (currently being revised down to five years) and it is likely that power inequalities at the household level mitigate against women having influence over these types of decisions.

The CASE/GDoH study found that in all of the research sites, between 55% and 68% of respondents had applied for a subsidy themselves, with more than half of the total respondents having applied with a dependent instead of a partner. The report advises the Department to build on this evidence of fairly high tenure security for women in these sites by encouraging women to apply for subsidies with dependents, rather than a partner, thereby reducing women's vulnerability to homelessness should a relationship end.

Further points of vulnerability for poor women's access to housing include weak access to legal support and the courts, which leave many women vulnerable in divorce proceedings. And women married under customary law generally also do not enjoy inheritance rights and, therefore, may lose access to housing on the death of the recognised rights-holder.

The important question of gender equity in housing, therefore, cannot be reduced to numbers of subsidy allocations, but must address a whole complex of factors such as location, reliable and affordable access to basic services, tenure security, employment (and not be limited to short-term employment created through housing delivery programmes), access to the legal system and importantly, safety from violence and threat both in the community and the home.

2.5.2 Gender-based violence and housing

There is clear evidence from developed countries that domestic violence is a significant cause of homelessness among women. A study conducted by New York-based Homes for the Homeless (1997) found that 70 percent of homeless mothers were physically, sexually or emotionally abused as children and of those abused as children, 75% experienced similar abuse as adults. No similar data exists for South Africa. One of a handful of South African studies has pointed to the role of domestic violence in homelessness, or insecurity of tenure. In this study undertaken in *Die Bos*, an informal settlement in the Western Cape, domestic violence accounted for 20 per cent of moves recorded (Ross 1996).

However, the role of the NDoH with regard to abused women, a category of women defined as particularly vulnerable, is less clear. Currently, the needs of vulnerable groups, including abused women, is defined as the responsibility of the Department of Social Development (DSD) - although there is a debate within the NDoH regarding its contributions to meeting the needs of this group in conjunction with other government departments and initiatives. In terms of NDoH policy, the institutional housing subsidy – the same mechanism applied for support to transitional and social housing initiatives – can make a capital contribution to the cost of building shelters for abused women and their dependents. The Department, however, prefers seeking a longer-term solution to addressing the problems of abused women, and that is ensuring women become socially and economically dependent through access to their own house (Charlton 2004).

Shelters for abused women in South Africa have traditionally been set up and managed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with government playing a more supportive role from 2002 onwards. Nationwide there was a total of 41 shelters accommodating abused women and their children from 1 week to six months in 2002. Twenty-one of these shelters were currently subsidised by the DSD (*Ibid*). The Sanctuary, one such shelter, reports that shelters offer only a short-term remedy for poor abused women. "Many women in abusive situations are unemployed or to a large degree financially dependent on their partners/spouses [and] when they decide to end these abusive relationships they find themselves with no income, no place to stay, they often go back into these abusive relationships" (http://www.usaa.org.za in Charlton 2004).

On the issue of crime, and specifically crimes against women, in developing low income housing sites, the CASE/GDoH study found that between 33% and 73% of the respondents knew a woman in their community who had been a victim of violence in the past year (the

research did not specify this as gender-specific violence), including housebreakings and muggings. The respondents across all research sites reported significantly lower levels of gender-based violence – rapes and domestic abuse – as compared with the sample of homeless women in this study although it is important to note that the research methodologies applied in the two studies are different, and the results therefore cannot be easily compared. The highest proportion of women reporting gender-specific violence (18%) was in Sonder Water, a greenfield site that was at the time of the CASE/GDoH research at the earliest stage of development (as compared with all of the research sites) with no services and people still residing in shacks.

The Southern African Regional Workshop on Shelters for Abused Women, held in 2001, recommends second stage accommodation, along the lines of transitional or social housing schemes, in terms of which women can rent subsidised accommodation, preferably linked into counselling support, for a longer period. Given the precarious economic situation facing many poor homeless women, this accommodation would need to be heavily subsidised, and the in-built assumption that women could accumulate savings to ease their way into permanent accommodation, needs to be seriously tested. The transitional housing schemes in this research sample are not functioning as such, with many residents having lived in these schemes for well over the prescribed period of eighteen months. And some homeless women, who had lived in transitional schemes, had found themselves back on the streets after eighteen months, for lack of income and accommodation alternatives. A proper review of all transitional and social housing schemes is required to ascertain how they are functioning, whose needs are met through this schemes in the absence of state subsidies to cover operating costs, and their appropriateness as a model for supporting abused women and their dependents.

A comparative two-city study on domestic violence in public housing in the United States finds that the location and design of public housing developments has an influence on the incidence of aggravated assault of women living in these developments. The study applies a situational approach to crime prevention, which views most crimes as the perception of would-be offenders of (a) opportunities for illegal behaviour, and (b) risk of apprehension. The authors find that the location of housing developments in residential neighbourhoods, as opposed to the Central Business District (CBD), increases the effort required for would-be offenders to commit offences because of restricted access to the enclaves. They are distant from the CBD and other commercial areas and there is limited public transportation available. Furthermore, the relative distance of these developments from taverns reduces violence associated with the consumption of alcohol. They note that 'natural' surveillance by neighbours and passersby is crucial to deterring crime in housing complexes. Garden-apartment-style developments, with a fewer number of units, afford residents less privacy and anonymity. Neighbours, who are more aware of activities in and around the living spaces, would be perceived as posing a risk to would-be offenders (Holzman, Hyatt and Dempster, 2001).

In line with the above finding, the CASE/GDoH research identifies gender-sensitive housing and settlement design as critical to reducing violence against women and increasing their sense of personal safety. Some of the suggestions regarding housing design, applicable to this research, are a back door so that women and children can more easily escape an abusive partner and an inside toilet, since it is unsafe for women to venture out at night. A settlement layout that is focused on creating safe communal spaces upon which

houses look, rather than the standard linear grid design would also ensure greater safety for women and children (CASE/GDoH 2000).

Raphael (2001), reviewing the emerging research on violence against women in public housing estates in the United States, turns our attention back to the social factors underpinning domestic violence and argues that the "cultural ecosystem" in public housing developments determines the prevalence of domestic violence. The density of the projects and the environmental disorder that arises from this, may serve as a more adequate explanation for a lower incidence of aggravated assault against women living in certain public housing developments, than location and architectural design. She makes a significant argument, of particular relevance to this study. Drawing on the work of Lori Heise, who posits an integrated, ecological framework for understanding gender-based violence, she notes a range of social factors that can be used to predict abusive behavior. These include unemployment and/or socio-economic status, isolation of women and the family, and delinquent peer associations. She contends that all of these factors coexist in the "exosystem of public housing" (Raphael 2001: 704).

The density of high-rise public housing units in larger cities creates an environment in which a large number of unemployed persons live amongst one another. Men who are unemployed and, therefore, unable to support their families and fulfill cultural expectations of men as providers, might feel an increased need to exercise control over their partners through violence, as the most 'normal' paths for personal power and prestige are blocked off from them. Public housing developments are generally characterized by large numbers of unemployed men creating and feeding off a culture that encourages sexual aggression and other 'macho' activities, including violence against intimate partners. In addition, public housing complexes are also characterized by high rates of community crime, and poor police response to incidents of crime, and domestic violence in particular. In this context, community members are unlikely to intervene in situations of domestic abuse because it is dangerous to do so, and they know that they are unlikely to be supported by the police, community institutions or other social services. A high degree of social disorder and low morale in public housing estates reduces community cohesion and the tendency of residents to support one another. Raphael argues that this lack of cohesion makes domestic violence possible. The smaller number of units, leading to lower population density levels and a slightly different cultural eco-system, may be a better explanation for a lower incidence of domestic violence in small garden apartments. Moreover, the integration of public housing developments into more affluent residential areas may mean that police responses to crime and domestic violence are stronger and more consistent, and hence contribute to a less anarchic and more stable social environment.

The need for a more integrated approach that addresses the social and physical determinants of women's safety or vulnerability to violence is also supported by a gender and development review of the Cato Manor presidential lead project in Durban, a large urban renewal project. The review concludes that while gender sensitive physical planning goes some way to reducing violent crime, especially against women and children, it is on its own insufficient. The authors of the report note that, while the majority of people consider the Cato Manor area safe in the day, gender-based violence may still be prevalent, but difficult to discern, and the resources available for women victims of crime minimal. The report suggests the need for targeted interventions during the planning and post-delivery stages of low-income housing delivery to address violent crimes affecting women

and children (Beall et al 2002 in Charlton 2004).

3. Methods of Information Gathering

Following initial unsuccessful attempts to set up focus groups with homeless women, the researcher enlisted the support of a male activist who had been working in the inner city and was able to assist her make contact with five homeless communities: Phuthaditjaba, Pim Street, Cornelius House, Tshepo House and the Methodist Church.

The activist formally introduced the researcher to the various communities and, thereafter, arrangements were made for the researcher to return and conduct interviews with women living in these communities. The participants volunteered themselves during the initial introductory meetings. The researcher's initial plan was to conduct four interviews in each homeless community. However, as word of the focus of the interviews spread amongst women in the various homeless communities, more women volunteered to participate. A total of twenty-eight interviews were conducted across the five communities.

The interviews were conducted using a questionnaire comprising a mix of closed and open-ended questions, which addressed the major issues that the research sought to investigate. Each interview was conducted over approximately one hour and canvassed basic biographical information; women's experiences of violence in their personal relationships, in their community and on the streets; women's perceptions about safety; their responses to violence and perceptions of insecurity; and their views about what should be done, and by whom, to increase their safety and reduce their vulnerability.

Because many of the questions were open-ended, the interviewees focused on their most immediate and pressing concerns for their safety and well being, with these aspects being probed in more detail by the interviewer. Moreover, the women also shared their experiences at varying levels of depth, with some of the interview transcripts offering very detailed and rich insight to the experiences and views of the women, while others were quite superficial.

This report presents a qualitative analysis of the information yielded through the interviews, complimented by the three focus group discussions. Where standard closed-ended questions were administered to the interviewees, we have been able to derive statistics, which are presented in the research findings section. These statistics *inter alia* cover basic demographic and biographic information; women's perceptions of safety concerning their place of residence; and their experiences of inter-personal and gender-based violence in their homes and community of residence.

Because of the small size of the overall sample, and the much smaller sampling of women in each of the research sites, the statistics presented in this report cannot be generalised to the population of women residents in each of the sites, nor can they be generalised to all homeless women living in inner city Johannesburg. Despite these limitations, the statistics do complement and support the qualitative analysis, and indicate the types of issues that should be probed further in survey-based research of homeless women living in inner city Johannesburg, as well as other communities of informal settlements around the Johannesburg metropole.

Three focus groups – two comprised of a mix of women living in different homeless communities in the inner city, and a third with women living in a building owned by a paper recycling company, popularly known as Benjamin's Building after the owner of the company, on Pim Street - were also conducted. The focus groups were an important complimentary research method, affording the women the opportunity to breach the 'walls of silence' and engage one another around their experiences of violence and their perceptions of safety. The focus groups constituted a platform, albeit inadequate, through which homeless women themselves could begin to strategise around possible responses on their part, and to map out practical solutions and identify appropriate interventions to be undertaken by government and service providers working in the arenas of housing, and violence against women.

A mapping exercise was used to elicit critical information on women's perceptions of safety and vulnerability, and their experiences of violence. In the course of the interviews, interviewees were asked to draw maps showing the routes they use and the physical spaces they occupy or traverse when looking for work, going to work, or socialising. After drawing these maps, interviewees were then asked to mark the places they perceive, or have experienced, as being safe or unsafe. A cross was used to indicate places they considered to be safe and a star to indicate areas they felt to be unsafe.

An additional research methodology employed by the researcher was participant observation. At the research sites, the researcher spent time closely observing the interactions between residents, the events and happenings, and the general conditions of existence in these homeless communities. These periods of observation confirmed much of the information gleaned through the interviews with homeless women, and yielded a wealth of additional insight to the experiences and needs of women living in conditions of acute poverty and socio-economic vulnerability. These observations informed and strengthened the analysis and conclusions of the research.

3.1 Critical reflections on the research process

Reflections on the research approach and methods employed offer a few important lessons to inform future research of this nature. Firstly, homeless women are on the extreme margins of society. They have been rendered virtually invisible by government policy and programmes and fall outside the reach of most civil society organisations and service providers, which has led to a deep mistrust of 'outsiders.' Their conditions of existence are extremely fragile and vulnerable, with a high level of dependency on men - relations that are almost without exception characterised by abuse, often of a fairly extreme nature - for access to the most rudimentary shelter and income. While there is some limited evidence of cooperation between individual homeless women, they are in the main fragmented and disorganised. It was therefore critical that the researcher establish links to homeless women through a person that was trusted and known to the homeless communities.

Secondly, and related to the above, in the early stages of the research we sought to build a working relationship with an organisation actively engaged in supporting homeless people. Our analysis here was that it would be critical for the research to feed into and support existing work with homeless people. It was hoped that the research would highlight the particular gender needs of homeless women, and the specific obstacles they confront gaining access to safe, affordable and secure housing and basic services. In highlighting the

gender- specific constraints to homeless women satisfying their housing needs, the research could bolster and deepen the strategies, whether of government lobbying or organisation building, pursued by organisations working with homeless people. This remains an ongoing challenge, given that traditionally there has been very little collaboration between organisations addressing housing and homelessness, and those combating gender-based violence. Thirdly, in terms of the actual research methodology used, we feel that it was appropriate to pursue a mix of individual interviews and focus groups. The individual interviews allowed us to elicit information of a deeply personal nature, and to explore particular aspects and dimensions of the experiences of individual women, which if revealed through a group, may have rendered them vulnerable to the loss of shelter and income. The use of focus groups, as a complimentary research method, was successful in creating a rare space for homeless women to engage one another on their experiences and to map out collective responses to their shared problems of homelessness and violence.

Finally, the research process also raised important ethical considerations, which bear mentioning here. Since the aim of the research was to explore the relationship between homelessness and women's perceptions and experiences of safety, the interviews often raised deeply personal and traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence and rape, as well as issues of tenure insecurity, unemployment and alcoholism. In the interviews, many of the women were visibly traumatised, and often cried, as they recounted horrifying stories of abuse and personal trauma and spoke about the deep fears and uncertainties in their lives. At these moments, the researcher would ask whether the woman wished to proceed with the interview. Without exception, the women were determined to complete the interviews.

With time, the researcher came to understand that the interviews were cathartic, representing a rare opportunity for the women to share their experiences and their pain. Many of the women interviewed repeatedly spoke of their personal isolation and mistrust of their partners, of friends and of the people they live with. The interview space, with the relative distance of the researcher from the day to day lived reality of the homeless women, was sufficiently 'safe' for women to share their problems and their experiences without fear that what was divulged would be used against them. The interviews strongly suggest that relations within the home environment and within the settlements are so deeply abusive, competitive and alienating that women do not usually trust those they live with to hold personal experiences in confidence.

The researcher also felt compelled to practically respond to the problems the women were experiencing. The one offer made to the women was that of therapy at the CSVR trauma clinic. None of the women chose to pursue this option, and the researcher left contact numbers in case they changed their minds. Three of the women interviewed indicated that they needed assistance to leave their abusive partners, and the researcher offered support to place them in a shelter. One of the three women was ultimately assisted to obtain a place in an inner city shelter.

At times, the researcher was concerned that the women's participation in the research might render them vulnerable to further abuse by their partners. One particular incident confirmed this fear. One day while the researcher was interviewing a woman, her partner approached the car where the interview was being conducted and demanded an explanation for what was happening. He became angry and threatened to hit the woman if she did not get out of the car immediately. Despite these threats, the woman indicated that she wished to continue

with the interview. The researcher, fearing for the woman's safety, requested that they abandon the interview. When the researcher returned the following day, the same woman indicated that nothing had happened to her. After this incident, the researcher always raised the question of risk with the women and sought assurances that they would not be jeopardising their personal safety because of the research. None of the women identified as research informants elected to retreat from the research for fear of being punished by their partners.

It is also important to note that despite the best efforts of the researcher to explain the purpose of the research to the women, a perception developed over time - especially amongst the male partners - that the researcher was a social worker or was poised to assist in the resolution of people's problems, in particular the problem of shelter. One respondent, for example, revealed that her partner permitted her to speak to the researcher because he thought she could assist them to find a place to stay. This misunderstanding of the researcher's role may have unwittingly created greater openness to and support for the research process.

4. Description of Research Sites

4.1 Cornelius House

Cornelius House is a transitional housing initiative managed by the Johannesburg Trust for the Homeless (JTH). As mentioned previously, the JTH is a partnership between the private sector City of Johannesburg Partnership and a couple of churches. Cornelius House, on Cornelius Street, is located on the edge of the City. At the time the field research was conducted, the building was inhabited by approximately 70 people, and had twenty-four hour security. Most of the residents were families consisting of a couple and their children. Visitors were required to present identification and were only permitted to enter the building between 4pm and 10pm. The residents had to apply to have visitors stay with them overnight or for a couple of days. Cornelius House was administered by a non-resident manager and also had a governing body whose members visited the house from time to time.

While Cornelius House was established as a 'model' transitional housing initiative expected to accommodate homeless people for a maximum period of six months until permanent social housing was made available, the majority of residents had lived there for two years or more. Many of the respondents regarded Cornelius House as their home and had no viable alternatives for accommodation. Residents paid rent of R300 per month for a room and access to communal facilities.

Five interviews were conducted with women residing at Cornelius House.

4.2 Phuthaditjhaba House

Phuthaditjhaba, a transitional house previously managed by the Randburg municipality, is located in Vrededorp. Like Cornelius House, the residents had been living there for an extended period, some for as long as five years. A few months before the interviews took place the manager who had been working there was expelled by the residents. In his place, the residents elected a committee to run the house. Some of the informants reported their

unhappiness with the committee's conduct and its management of Phuthaditjhaba house. A number of shebeens were operating at the time and the informants reported feeling unsafe because of this. The residents paid R100 rent per month for a room. Most of the people shared accommodation with others to reduce the rent to a more manageable R50. Couples and their children occupied some rooms, while a few people lived alone.

Phuthaditjhaba House was initially set up as a transitional house, with a learning and training centre which would assist the residents to learn new skills to obtain employment, thereby paving the way for their exit from the transitional housing system. At the time the field research was undertaken, the learning and training component to Phuthaditjhaba was no longer functional, although a small group of people were making grass mats and bedside lamps to generate income.

A total of four interviews were conducted with women living at Phuthaditjhaba House.

4.3 Pim Street

Pim Street in Newtown, near the CBD, has a number of abandoned factories, buildings and shops, which accommodated approximately 300 people at the time of the research. There was no formal water supply and residents used two mobile toilets provided by the Metropolitan Council. A total of six interviews were conducted with homeless women living on Pim Street. Of these, three women lived in shacks on the pavement, while the other three women lived in rooms in a converted garage on Pim Street. The owner of Benjamin's, a paper recycling company in Newtown, permitted people to live in this garage (Benjamin's building) on condition that they sold the paper they collected to him. In exchange, the residents did not pay rent and obtained free access to water and a shared toilet. Their access to Benjamin's building was precarious and conditional upon the paper-collectors fulfilling the terms of their agreement with Benjamin's. Couples, as well as single men and women, shared accommodation in Benjamin's building.

A further eight women, who collected paper for recycling and resided in Benjamin's Building, were also reached through a group discussion. Five of these eight research participants had previously sheltered at the Turbine Hall, an abandoned electrical power station, until the Council evicted them to Ebumnandini, an informal settlement outside Roodepoort, approximately 30 kilometres away from the CBD. While they had built shacks in Ebumnandini, the women lived at Benjamin's during the week, as their livelihood was dependent on paper collection and they could not afford to commute to the inner city on a daily basis. The majority of women 'migrated' back to Ebumnandini for the weekends when they could afford to do so. One of the eight respondents had lived in an abandoned building on Bree Street until she was evicted by the Council and came to 'live' in Benjamin's building.

The paper collectors were paid a pittance for their work. A kilogram of newspaper, cardboard or computer paper collected earned them 31 cents, 50 cents and 80 cents respectively. To make 'real' money the women had to collect at least four large bags of different paper, preferably the white paper or cardboard, which obtained a higher return of income. To supplement their paper-collecting efforts during the day, some of the women also stayed out late to collect boxes that the hawkers left on the streets after businesses closed. The women returned to Benjamin's between 8 and 10 o'clock at night.

4.4 Tshepo House

Tshepo House belongs to Intersite, a company that owns Park Station, one of the bigger transport terminals in Johannesburg. In 1995, Intersite removed people living in an informal settlement at Park Station. Following the intervention of a group of concerned activists, Intersite agreed to relocate people to Tshepo House on Carr Street, near Fordsburg. The agreement struck at this time was that the residents would pay a monthly rental of R100.

At the time the field research was conducted, Intersite would periodically send security guards to Tshepo House to collect rent monies. When residents could not afford to pay, the security guards would either remove the doors to their rooms or lock the doors until their rent obligations were discharged. While this strategy occasionally worked, the majority of residents simply moved back into the rooms and constructed makeshift doors with cardboard, curtain or other materials. Those who were locked out usually had duplicate keys, which they used as soon as the security guards had left. As a result, many of the rooms were not occupied, while a few residents remained on, even when there were no doors to secure their accommodation. There was no security at Tshepo House and the doors were never locked.

A total of eight interviews were conducted with women residing at Tshepo House.

4.5 Methodist Church

This informal settlement in Vrededorp was previously a Methodist Church. The majority of respondents had lived there for well over six years. Some of the residents lived inside the church, where wood panels had been used to partition the building into numerous small rooms. The majority of residents had lockable doors, but the rooms were exposed at the ceiling. Other people lived in shacks, constructed out of plastic, in the yard of the Church. Most of the structures were so small that people could only sleep in them, with others just a rudimentary pile of plastic under which people could sleep at night and take cover on rainy days. There were no amenities in the yard, so the women had to walk to the nearest cemetery to use the toilet facilities and to collect water.

Seven shebeens were operating in the yard at the time the research was conducted, and drug trading was reported to be a problem. This resulted in a constant presence of outsiders in the settlement, which greatly increased the threats to residents, especially women and children.

Five interviews were conducted with women residents at the Methodist Church.

In addition to the Pim Street Focus group, two other mixed focus group discussions involving women from various homeless communities in the inner city and around the Johannesburg metropole were conducted. The first mixed focus group (referred to in the research findings section as group 1) reached a total of eleven women, with two residing in Protea South, an informal settlement in Soweto; seven women from the Drill Hall; one woman from the Turbine Hall; and one other woman from Bertrams. The youngest participant in the group was 30 years, with the oldest being 72 years of age. A significant proportion of the group participants were mature in age, with five participants being 55 years and older.

The second mixed focus group discussion comprised five homeless women, with three participants living on the streets and in Nugget Park, and two living in abandoned buildings in the inner city. This mixed group is referred to as group 2 in the research findings section that follows.

5. Research Findings

This section of the report presents the major findings of the research. The first part sets out basic demographic and biographic information on the twenty-eight homeless women interviewed in this research project. The second part deals with the major fears and insecurities of the homeless women who participated in the research. The third part presents and analyses women's understandings of what it means to be safe, and what conditions they believe would need to change for them to feel safer in their places of residence, work and in their lives more generally.

5.1 Demographic and biographic profile of interviewees

Age

The age profile of the interviewees was fairly young, with 24 (86%) of the sample aged 40 years and younger. The youngest respondent was 23 years of age, and the oldest 57 years. There was a mix of ages across the research sites.

Type of dwelling

Twenty-one (75%) of the respondents lived in informal rooms or shacks within buildings, with the balance of 7 (25%) residing in shacks on the pavement or on grounds outside the main residential building. The respondents from Tshepo House, Cornelius House and Phuthaditjhaba House all resided in rooms within a building. In the case of the Methodist Church, three women resided in shacks outside of the main building, with the remaining two respondents living in shacks inside the Church. Three of the women respondents from Pim Street lived in shacks on the pavement, while the remaining three respondents lived in shacks or rooms inside a building.

Income

The research methodology does not permit an actual quantification of income earned by the women, the proportion of income derived from different sources, nor an assessment of the actual extent of reliance of homeless women in this sample on male partners or family members for survival. Five (19%) respondents indicated that they did not earn any income and are entirely dependent on their male partners, family members and fellow residents (in the case of one respondent), for income to survive. One of the five women mentioned that she is from Lesotho and has not been able to secure a permit to work. Interestingly, three of the five women who did not work resided in Cornelius House. The research suggests, but cannot confirm, that the profile of residents at Cornelius House was slightly different from the rest of the sample of homeless communities, with a higher proportion of men in particular employed in the formal sector, resulting in a more socially and economically stable resident population. The higher monthly rental of R300 could also have attracted residents that have higher and more reliable incomes, relative to other populations in the

sample. The greater socio-economic stability of Cornelius House residents may offer one explanation, amongst others, for why most of the women respondents from Cornelius House reported feeling comparatively safe and secure in their homes and place of residence.

The remaining 22 (81%) respondents derived their income from the informal sector, which basic survivalist activities include selling foods and other basic goods, the sale of alcohol (with one woman brewing her own beer to sell), piece work (mainly washing and ironing), collecting cardboard, paper, plastic and copper for recycling, the making and selling of crafts (one respondent), sewing (one respondent) and portering at Park Station (one woman). While the research was unable to ascertain actual income levels, many of the women complained that they were barely able to eke out an existence and many struggled to pay rent, where this was required, and buy sufficient food to survive. Some women mentioned that they had been forced to leave prior places of residence because they could not afford to pay rent, lights and water, and a few women indicated that they sometimes went without food for days.

Dependent children

Seventeen respondents (61%) had two children or less. One woman reported having seven children (the highest number), while two women did not have children. Six women had three children. Of those women with children, 12 (46%) did not reside with any of their children, 10 (38%) had one or more children living with them, and the balance of 4 had all of their children with them.

The breakdown of these numbers by place of residence is most revealing of the conditions under which women were living, and their assessment of the risks these posed to the welfare of their children. The women living in Pim Street, the Methodist Church and Tshepo House were less likely to report having their children living with them. These three residences were reported to be unstable, quite violent and were generally regarded as unsafe by the women respondents. In comparison, most of the women living in Phuthaditjhaba House and Cornelius House had some of their children residing with them. Comparatively speaking, these two residences were more stable, better managed and less violent than the other sites in the sample.

Many women spoke of their fears for their children in their homes, places of residence and on the streets. Women were fearful that they might be hurt or abducted, and some were concerned for their children's education. It is impossible to derive firm conclusions with this limited sample, but the research certainly suggests that the women respondents in these different sites had made an assessment of the risks to their children of residing with them – in terms of their physical safety, access to education and their general well-being – and had, in the case of those sites which were most unstable, elected to rather have their children reside elsewhere.

Male partners and cohabitants

Of the total sample of women, 19 (68%) resided with male partners, 5 (18%) resided on their own, and the balance of 4 (14%) shared accommodation with friends and other family members. That only five woman in the sample lived on their own suggests that the majority

of women (and this is borne out by the comments of the women respondents) were reliant on their male partners, and to a lesser extent friends and family, to maintain access to accommodation and obtain income for survival. This is discussed further in the section on women's fears.

Length of time in Johannesburg and place of residence

None of the respondents had been in Johannesburg for less than twelve months. Ten respondents (36%) had been resident in Johannesburg for less than five years, while 9 (32%) had been living in Johannesburg for between five to 10 years. The balance of 9 (32%) had been living in Johannesburg for over 10 years, with three of the women respondents having lived in Johannesburg for over 20 years. The homeless women in this sample were, in the main, not new arrivals to the city. The majority had lived in Johannesburg for an extended period of time but had still not managed to secure adequate, safe accommodation for themselves.

On the length of time spent in place of current residence, 7 (25%) had been there for less than six months, 12 (43%) had been resident between seven months and 2 years, and 9 (32%) had been resident for over 2 years, with eight respondents having stayed in their place of residence for between 4 and 5 years.

Three of the research sites were designated as transitional housing initiatives, where residents were expected to stay for a short period (around six months) and then leave for more secure, permanent accommodation. Seventeen respondents (61%) resided in transitional houses. Of these, only 3 had been resident for 6 months or less, with the majority (9) having lived in their current residence for between 7 months and two years. The remaining 5 had been resident for over two years, with some having lived in the transitional house for between four and five years.

This research suggests that transitional houses have actually become permanent places of abode for many of their residents in the absence of real, affordable and well-located alternatives for accommodation in the city. Even if alternatives were available, many women in the sample were engaged in income-earning activities which required that they live centrally and commute to homes on the edge of the city over the weekend. Two of the women in the sample indicated that they had alternative accommodation outside of the inner city which they returned to over the weekends, while the majority of participants in the Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion indicated that they had shacks in Ebumnandini, an informal settlement outside Roodepoort, approximately 30 kilometres away from the CBD, which they returned to over weekends. These women indicated that they could not afford to commute into the city on a daily basis to collect paper and cardboard for recycling, their sole source of income.

In the mixed group 1 discussion it emerged that some of the women living in the Drill Hall had previously lived in a shelter on Albert Street. After eighteen months of residence the women were asked to leave the shelter and find alternative accommodation. The argument presented to them was that the shelter offered is temporary (for no longer than eighteen months) during which time residents are expected to find their own accommodation and employment. In the absence of state assistance for housing and no prospects for employment, the women returned to the streets and were living in the Drill Hall at the time

the field research was conducted.

Reasons for becoming homeless

Some, but not all, of the women spoke about the reasons underlying their homelessness. Most of the respondents had migrated to Johannesburg in the hope of securing employment. Some of the women came to Johannesburg to join husbands or partners that had already secured employment and access to shelter. These were the fortunate few, most of whom resided in the two transitional houses, Cornelius House and Phutaditjaba House. For those that arrived in Johannesburg without prearranged accommodation, many found themselves on the streets, where they would befriend other homeless people or meet up with other *homeboys/girls* (defined variously as people from the same town, district or province, or people who share the same language and cultural identity) with whom they would share accommodation until they managed to secure alternative shelter. A number of the women spoke about their endless search for a permanent place to stay, moving from one place to the next either because they could not afford to pay rent and/or basic service charges, or because of evictions. A number of the women had experienced multiple evictions over the duration of their stay in Johannesburg. As mentioned in the preceding section, some of the women that participated in the focus group 1 discussion had been rendered homeless when asked to leave the transitional house they resided in. Interestingly enough, many of the women in Cornelius House did not define themselves as homeless, speaking to a level of tenure security and permanence (that in truth cannot be possible in a transitional housing arrangement), which other respondents in the sample did not seem to experience in their place of residence.

5.2 Women's fears

The majority of women interviewed feared physical, emotional or sexual violation and abuse. The women, however, emphasised different spheres or domains in which they felt most fearful. Some women were most anxious in their home environment – the personal space they shared with their partners – while others felt most threatened by the community in which they lived. Other women emphasised their fear of the world 'out there', referring to the streets and spaces where they work, commute, socialise and go about their daily business.

Women's fears were complex and multifaceted and extended well beyond the expected fears of criminal violence, such as muggings and shootings, and gender-based violence, such as domestic abuse and rape. The gender division of labour gave rise to fears that reflect the major responsibilities that women carry for the welfare and safety of their children, and to some extent also of their partners. Many women spoke of their daily struggle to ensure the reproduction of the household – securing adequate nutrition for themselves and their children, maintaining access to shelter, and ensuring that their children were able to attend school – and expressed grave fears about their ability to sustain their precarious day-to-day survival strategies. Some of the women were most fearful of being evicted from, or losing access to, the very inadequate shelter they had managed to secure for themselves and their children.

A few women also expressed a deep fear of contracting HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases from their partners. In addition, many women mentioned a fear of

dying and, related to this, expressed great concern for the future welfare of their children.

5.2.1 Fear of partners

Seventeen (65%) of the respondents reported domestic abuse, including physical, sexual, economic and emotional abuse. All of the Methodist Church residents reported that their partners hurt them, followed by Tshepo House (seven of eight respondents), Phuthaditjaba House (two of three respondents), Pim Street (two of four respondents), and Cornelius House (one of five respondents). These statistics, while in no way representative of the experiences of the population of women in these homeless communities, nonetheless suggest that in communities where there are extremes of economic and social dysfunction – where people are barely able to survive on a day-to-day basis, where basic social services are poor and inaccessible, where the living environment is not regulated and communally managed – then relations between men and women in the private domain may be more dysfunctional than in communities of people that enjoy more socio-economic stability.

The Methodist Church and Tshepo House, as mentioned previously, were residences characterised by extremes of poverty, social instability, violence and tenure insecurity. The high reported levels of domestic violence and abuse are, therefore, not surprising given the context within which people were living. Cornelius House was a much more stable residence, with respondents reporting generally lower levels of inter-personal violence, more security and a structured internal management system in which residence rules may be more or less enforced. These factors, coupled to the suggestion of more economic security amongst the households of the women respondents, could explain the lower reported levels of domestic abuse in this particular residence.

While broader social and economic conditions, and governance arrangements within a residence may influence the scale and extent of domestic abuse, violence against women is a feature of life for women respondents across the various homeless communities in this research sample. Twenty (80%) of the respondents indicated that they had seen male residents hurting women in their place of residence. All of the women living in the Methodist Church and Phuthaditjaba House had seen men hurting women in the residence, with high levels reported in the case of Tshepo House (6 of 7 respondents) and Cornelius House (4 of 5 respondents). The lowest level of violence against women reported was amongst the Pim Street respondents (3 of 6 respondents). This tends to suggest that even in residences that are reported to generally be safer, less violent and better managed – in the case of this research, Cornelius House and Phuthaditjaba House - violence against women remains a significant problem.

Across the sample, the incidents of physical abuse affecting women respondents that were reported on ranged from slapping, kicking and punching to stabbing and broken bones. Some of the respondents reported horrifyingly violent attacks that had left some of them scarred, disabled and often incapacitated by fear.

> He has ruined my face as you can see (she has many scars on her face)… he was strangling me and I could feel the air coming out … I thought I was going to die. If you could look at me in the face, you would not be able to tell that it is me. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> He smokes drugs…dagga and he drinks sometimes, so when that happens he gets violent and… he has hurt me a lot of times. He once stabbed me… he used to hit me and gave me blue eyes … He once broke my leg and then he wouldn't let me go to the hospital. I stayed here until my leg was healed on its own… even now it isn't straight. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I am now in big trouble…I am pregnant and this is the third month. Now you see we are not having a good relationship anymore. This man never beat me up before but now lately he hits me. He speaks to me once or twice and then starts a fight and hits me. When that happens I run away and sleep in other people's houses. When he hears where I am sleeping then he goes there and swears at them … he does not care if those are old people…and then he swears at me too and says 'You can leave you bitch, eh what …' So those things make me feel bad. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

Six women (21%) reported a deep, unshakable fear of being killed by their male partners, with two women identifying this threat as the greatest source of fear in their lives. Interestingly, three of the six women resided in Tshepo House, which from respondents' testimony is characterised by extremes of gender abuse, crime and inter-personal violence.

> I am afraid that the man I live with could strangle me. They say we only live together, so that is why I am afraid that one day he might kill me. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> If I don't keep quiet, anytime I can be dead, something terrible could happen to me. He is not a South African, his home is in Zimbabwe and when he threatens me he says that he could kill me and then disappear to Zimbabwe and no one will find him… He sometimes hits me with anything he can find and then he threatens to kill me…He also says that he is going to buy a gun and shoot me with it and then kill himself too … My child is too young…who would look after her? - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

> I fear for my life over everything else. My main worry is that this man could kill me. I am not so worried about dying… the main thing I am worried about is how my child will get home. I don't know how she would get by if I died. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Some women mentioned having been raped by their partners, and also being forced into having unprotected sex, often accompanied by a tacit or explicit threat of eviction or violence.

> I told him: 'the minute we get away from people you start hitting me until I have to beg you and tell you that we can go and sleep together.' I do that to keep him from hurting me. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjaba***

> He goes to smoke the pill and then when he comes back he wants to have sex with me forcefully. He fights with me … I am not going to hide that. – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

Because of the low income and mostly precarious survival strategies of the women respondents to this research, many of the women found themselves quite dependent on their male partners for access to shelter and income. As a result, women were often unable to assert themselves sexually, whether to decline sex or to negotiate safer sex, leading to women's fears about contracting sexually transmitted diseases, and specifically HIV/Aids. Related to this, a small number of women expressed a profound fear of dying, with associated concerns for the future safety and welfare of their children.

> You see I am not safe with him and I am also not safe from diseases but there is nothing I can say because the women he sleeps with… they don't practice safe sex. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I might get hurt here … this man may give me a disease … this is not my body. I suspect that I might have the disease. What if it eats me up and then in the end I die? My children don't know where my home is. They don't know their uncles … They would not know what to do … - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjaba***

Even one woman who had managed to break away from her partner, and was living separately from him, could not escape sexual coercion.

> No! I don't live with him. He lives out there…he does not even have a proper place … But you know he treats me so badly … because I don't know who he sleeps with or what he does… when I see him he wants to have sex … and when I ask him to wear a condom … he never has it. I tell him 'I don't want to get all sorts of diseases. It's better if you wear a condom.' I know he drinks a lot and that he likes sleeping with drunken girls … But there is really nothing that I can do … He says that I am the only one but I always wonder why I feel pain when he is gone after we have slept together. I am afraid of Aids … all I see is that people die from it - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjaba***

Economic abuse of women by their male partners was quite commonplace, with women reporting that their partners fail to support them and their children, choosing instead to squander scarce household financial resources on alcohol, drugs and 'cherries' (girlfriends). Men's failure to adequately support their partners and children gives rise to fights, with some women reporting that they hit or hurt their partners to extract resources and support for the family.

> When we fight … it is the matter of money. I don't know how he expects me to support all these children on my own, pay rent, and take them to school while he does nothing… So I stab him and make him take out the money. What else can I do? You cannot hit a man … All you can do is stab him. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> He does not support my children. It takes us fighting and hitting each other to get money for the children. I have to take the money by force from him. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

> What bothers me is the man I live with. He used to disappear for months

> sometimes and not support the children. Even now he has a lot of women … Sometimes I have to hit him to get money for rent and food for the child. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> Once we had a child… after a year… he started to change and sometimes he would not sleep at home … and he never used to bring anything for the child. So we used to fight. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

The women respondents also described emotional abuse, with their male partners calling them names, swearing at them and threatening to harm or kill them. Two of the women reported that their men brought girlfriends 'home', either to have sex, or in one case to reside in the shared home. This caused great emotional pain for the women and led one respondent to abandon the shelter she shared with her male partner.

> He just becomes really rude and threatens me sometimes… The thing is that he had many cherries… and they used to come to the room… but what can I say? - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Many of the respondents who lived with their male partners were entirely dependent on them for maintaining access to shelter, with only a small handful describing their current accommodation as their own, and in some instances entered into these relationships in order to obtain accommodation.

> I was struggling for a place to sleep and so he asked me if I had any place to go. He invited me to come to his place. … sometimes I am thinking that 'eh … I want to go home', but I don't have money. This man is panda (makes means for us to make a living)… but it is not enough for me to go home. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjaba***

> I used to live alone in no 65 … then I never used to work and I had two other young children and so I decided to take them to their father … When I came back they wanted rent … but I could not pay because I had no money. While that was happening I met this boyfriend that I live with here … this is his room. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> I walked around looking for piece jobs and a room and ended up starting an affair with a man here. This man took me and built a shack for me here … – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

Some of the women reached through the research expressed a desire to escape these abusive relationships, but had few options for shelter and survival.

> I am confused. I depend on him because I don't have any money and I cannot really leave him. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I think that maybe if I could work then I won't be so dependent on him. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> The problem (why the woman cannot leave her partner) is that I have not found a job yet. If I did, I would get myself another place and leave him in that shack. – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

One woman who reported leaving her abusive partner was forced back into the abusive relationship because of her inability to secure alternative affordable accommodation.

> I didn't want to come back to him… but the one problem… at the Igoli Inn (where she had escaped to) they locked the room up with our things inside. And then he got some money to go and get my things there. So I know that I am not safe. I have thought about going to social workers but then I think about where I am going to work. That is my problem now. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Others mentioned a fear of being hurt by their partners should they attempt to leave the relationship.

> The life that we live here is not safe. Serious because we live with boyfriends who beat us up… even when you don't want to live with him anymore and you have decided to leave him, if he does not agree then you cannot leave. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I was running away from him… He used to hunt me down and get me and when I refused to go with him, he would hurt me. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> My child always tells me that she's tired of this life … but I tell her that we can't just leave like that because then we will be hurt … Living here is not safe. I don't wish to continue staying here. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

The interviews point to many contradictions in the relations between men and women in these homeless communities. Some of the women were probably most at risk from being hurt or killed by their partners, and clearly identified their abusive partners as the major source of their fears. Paradoxically however, there was a perception that women need male partners to protect them from other men in their communities. In particular, some of the single women mentioned that they were more vulnerable to abuse, often by other women, in the absence of a male partner.

> I am not safe here because there is no order…Like me, I don't have a man here … sometimes when you greet a man here and then he decides to brush up against you or touches you and then you have his wife insulting you calling you a bitch because her man touched you. We are not safe because you don't have a man. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjaba***

> I think they (other men in the Drill Hall) do this to us (swear and threaten) because we are older women and do not have the protection of male partners. – ***Participant, mixed group 2 discussion***

5.2.2 Fear in places of residence

Sixteen (59%) of the respondents reported feeling unsafe in their community or place of

residence, with four women of this number emphasising that their primary reason for feeling insecure related to their violent partners. Women living in Tshepo House, the Methodist Church and on Pim Street expressed most vulnerability compared with women from other homeless settlements in this sample.

Many women's fears stemmed from inadequate security, with doors to the residence not being locked and residents' having little or no control over the movement of 'outsiders' in and out of the shelter. At least two of the respondents from Tshepo House mentioned that they had felt increasingly insecure since the security left the building, and noted that the doors were no longer locked.

All of the women living at the Methodist church felt that it was unsafe. There was no security at the Church, and women felt further exposed to danger because of the seven shebeens operating in the Church yard, as well as the presence of drug dealers which attracted many people from outside of the community. Women reported that people became drunk and then harassed or started fights with them. A few women from the Methodist Church reported, in general terms, that residents had been shot and killed by outsiders, with one woman mentioning a very specific incident in which a resident had been killed, which left her feeling deeply vulnerable.

> I would not say that we are safe because once there was a man who got inside here (in the Church) and shot a person dead. We were all here, sleeping … Two people have been shot in here … We are afraid for a while when things like that happen but then it passes again and then we think maybe we can continue to live here because there are no other places to live in. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

Many of the respondents living on Pim Street, including Benjamin's Building, identified their principal source of fear as the unsecured nature of their settlement or dwelling to which tsotsis (criminals) could easily gain entry at night to steal from or rape them.

> Here in the room, people come and go all the time. Anyone could walk in and stab or shoot me. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

> Most of the women are afraid of the tsotsis. I am afraid that I may be attacked by the tsotsis because they are able to get in even if you have locked the doors. – ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

> Even if they (the tsotsis) managed to open the door where we live, they would not leave you. They would tell you now to do something else … if they tell you to do it, what are you going to do? If they came here and said lie down, won't you lie down? You will … they have guns, there is nothing you can to do to the tsotsis. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

The majority of women respondents living at Phuthaditjhaba felt relatively safe from the threat of outsiders gaining entry to the building and hurting them. They attributed this sense of security to the building being locked at night. All of the women living at Cornelius House felt relatively safe as long as they were inside the building. They linked their

perception of safety to the presence of security guards at all times, who closely monitored the entry of 'outsiders' to the building.

Many women, across the research sample, emphasised their fear of people living in the settlement. Fifteen respondents (75%) indicated that they had witnessed residents in their settlement hurting someone. Women respondents living in Cornelius House reported the lowest incidence of inter-personal violence between residents. Participants in the two mixed group discussions also reported problems of residents hurting and killing one another.

Some research respondents reported serious incidents of violence involving residents in which someone has been seriously assaulted or killed.

> I am even afraid to talk because on Saturday they killed a young man who lives there (in an abandoned building). They killed him and then put him in a rubbish bin, I heard the gun going off 'Qhoo! Qhoo!'. They beat up the two people who went out to see what was happening. These are people that live with us. – ***Participant, mixed group 2 discussion***

> A man was killed here. He was killed by the people who live here. … he was the man who used to help us with all the problems. That made me very sad. It was the first time that I had seen someone being killed by people by their own hands…they were hitting him and stabbing him… Since then I realised that the people here are no good because he was hurt by the people he used to live with … That is what I could say frightens me about this place. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Many women talked about people fighting and hurting one another in their place of residence, and often associated this violence with drunkenness and the abuse of drugs.

> People fight all the time. They hit each other. That place is kwaMnyamandawo (the dark place). – ***Participant, mixed group 2 discussion***

> The people who live here are people who drink alcohol, they take drugs and things like that … so they are fighting all the time. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> The people who live here turn against each other… at those times it is no longer important that we all live together. It is… 'fuck!… fuck!… voetsek! … voetsek!' And then they pull knives out … that is why I am saying that I just live here because I have no other place to go." - Respondent, Tshepo House "I was hurt by a girl and her boyfriend who stabbed me with a beer bottle yesterday. I ran away and they took me to hospital. I don't trust anybody where I live after that girl attacked me yesterday. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

> Where we live there are people who drink too much and then they fight all the time… like right now my child is outside here and I could be busy in here and not see people fighting outside… they could hurt her. This place Phuthaditjhaba is not safe at all because even the people who run this place (members of the

committee) sell alcohol and they hit their wives and as it is they are not setting a good example for the people who should respect them. I do not feel safe here because there is no order. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

Ten respondents (41%) also reported having been hurt by people living in their place of residence. Most of the women who had been hurt lived in Tshepo House and the Methodist Church, with no incidents reported in the case of Cornelius House, the most stable of all the homeless communities in this sample.

> The people here have no respect at all. I was once stabbed by one of the men here because I was asking him why he was urinating in front of me. – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

> Sometimes they lie about me and then I get beaten up and all sorts of things happen to me. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Many women complained that they did not like or trust many of the people they lived with and some emphasised their frustration at not being able to exercise some control over how people live together.

> This place does not have any order… there are robbers and prostitutes. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> Everyone does what they like… when you try to talk to people, they tell you this is not your home… you cannot tell them what to do. What can you say? - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

A number of the women living in Tshepo House mentioned their fear of one particular male resident, who had informally appointed himself as the 'caretaker'. He was described as a violent man, who carried tremendous uncontested power in the residence, and extracted payments from residents by threatening them with violence. A woman on Pim Street also mentioned her fear of young men in the settlement who "threaten to hurt us if we don't pay rent to them. They make us pay R10." The 'informal management' arrangements in some of the buildings lead to violence and intimidation of residents, and are therefore a source of fear for some of the women.

> That man … they say he is the caretaker but the people at the office never told us there was a caretaker… Now that man, he's the kind of person who can't live with people. He has beaten a lot of people. He's even been to jail for that but he comes back and does it again. This kind of life does not appeal to me. If I can find another place I will move out of here. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Some of the women in the sample did not feel threatened by fellow residents in the building, and were generally quite satisfied with the management of their residence. This is particularly true of Cornelius House and Phuthaditjhaba House. One of the woman emphasised that she felt very secure and safe in her residence, and trusted the people she lived with.

> I trust them because it is people I know, I have lived with them for a long time. This feels like home now. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

In Cornelius House, all of the residents felt safe in their place of residence. None of the women reported shebeens to be operating in the building, which seemed to be a major explanation for them feeling safe and secure. This sense of safety had, however, been shattered in the week prior to the interviews with the kidnapping of a child by a woman staying with one of the residents. The Cornelius House residents were shocked that someone who had come to live among them, and whom they had accepted as their own, could have breached their trust and taken the child. Respondents reported feeling nervous about the safety of their own children.

The research revealed a high level of inter-personal tension, conflict and violence between women in the various homeless communities. Some of the women reported conflict between women over employment opportunities, and fights over cardboard. The women also battle over men. The survival of homeless women centres on their relations with men – men are the source of income, shelter and also, ironically, of protection from other men in the homeless communities. Women therefore compete with one another for the patronage and protection of men. This led to many women feeling quite fearful of other women in their communities.

> They hate me for my hands… they think that I will be grabbing all the jobs that we get offered here. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> The women mainly fight over men. They want to play around with your man … they want to ask him for money. But if you ask their men for money then they fight you and say you are taking him away. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> Last year there was a girl who used to fight with me. We were fighting over my boyfriend. She hit me with a stone on the mouth and my teeth came out. I am afraid that that girl may still hurt me. She still fights with me for my man. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

> Like last year… my partner and me was by the shebeen here in Braamfontein. I was coming up the road to this place… four women attacked me because of jealousy… you see I am a coloured woman and I stay with a black man. That means he can't jol (party) with a black woman. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

The research suggests important links between the level of organisation and management of the residence, and the extent to which it is perceived to serve the interests of the residents, and women's experiences and perceptions of safety and fear in the place of residence. In Cornelius House there is a strong correlation between the existence of twenty-four hour security, and close regulation of the entry of 'outsiders', and the women's sense of safety. Some of the women reported that the security guards would intervene when their partners assaulted them. There was a manager and a governing body that supervised and ensured the smooth management of the building. In addition there were rules governing residents' life in Cornelius House, which were well displayed on a public notice board. This must, in part, explain why there were no shebeens operating in Cornelius House at the time of the field

research, thus removing one of the greatest sources of fear and insecurity for women across the sample. However, it is clear that these rules were not always implemented. While some of the women reported male abuse of women as a feature of life in Cornelius House, no one had ever been expelled from Cornelius House for beating a woman, in clear contravention of the rules.

Most of the women in Phuthaditjhaba reported feeling quite safe in the building. This was partly attributed to the presence of security guards. A manager of the building had, a few months prior to the research, been expelled and replaced by a resident's committee. A history of formal management of the building, initially by an outsider but later replaced by an organised presence of residents, might explain why most of the women reported feeling fairly happy and safe in their residence, relative to other women in the sample. However, the research did suggest an erosion of the governance arrangements in the building, with some women reporting that members of the committee were abusing their authority and running shebeens in the place of residence, which made them feel less secure.

The women respondents from Tshepo House also mentioned having felt safer at an earlier time when the doors were locked and security guards were present. Since these measures had fallen away, women felt much more insecure.

Women felt most insecure in those buildings where there was no security – Tshepo House, the Methodist Church, and Pim Street, including Benjamin's Building. Women also reported feeling more fearful in those buildings where there was little or no organisation and management. In the case of Tshepo House, where women were most fearful, there was no security and no internal organisation but rather a self-appointed 'slum lord', whose presence seemed to create even more fear and insecurity for the women. At the Methodist Church there was a clear relationship between the absence of security, and the lack of formalised management of the building - either by residents or an external body - and women's fears. While women respondents from Pim Street did not feel safe in their place of residence, the majority of the participants in the Benjamin's Building group discussion did not express a fear of fellow residents. This could, in part, be explained by the presence of an owner who seemed to manage people's access to the shelter. The women from Benjamin's Building did, however, express a vulnerability related to the absence of formal security regulating the entry of outsiders to the building, as well as a fear of being evicted from their accommodation.

Related to the organisation and management of the places of residence, many women emphasised their concerns about the operation of shebeens, and in the case of the Methodist Church the problem of drug dealing, which increased the presence of outsiders in the residence and greatly exacerbated women's fears of violence. Many women mentioned that when people are drunk there are more fights and innocent bystanders are often shot or stabbed. Many women specified that they were most fearful at night, over the weekends and at month-end since this was the time when shebeens and taverns were at their most active both inside and outside their residences. None of the women from Cornelius House mentioned shebeens, and general problems of drunkenness in the residence, as a problem. All of the women from the Methodist Church mentioned this as a problem, as well as a significant number of respondents residing in Tshepo House, Phuthaditjhaba and on Pim Street.

5.2.3 Fears of the world beyond the residence

Women also spoke of their deep fears of being hurt in some of the places where they earn a living, commute and socialise. Women living in Phuthaditjhaba and Cornelius House, the two settlements where women felt most safe inside the residence, expressed their greatest fears and concerns for their safety on the streets. The women who participated in the mixed group 1 discussion, and lived in the Drill Hall, also mentioned their fear of the streets, and particularly the area around the Hall.

> When you pass in that street if you are a woman they take you. The one thing that I am afraid of, I don't want to walk… I don't want to go anywhere alone. I am scared … I am also afraid of being raped… He will lock you up in his place and be there for a long time and then when he is done he kills you. No one will know where you are. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> It is not very safe (in Mayfair) because a girl was raped there, but then I walk there during the day. I can see the troublemakers when they are coming … I pretend to ring the bell in one of the houses nearby … Even my body tells me they might hurt me - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

> I am most afraid of being shot. People always think that you have money if you are working. I am afraid they may try to rob me. Things are bad in Johannesburg because people have died in horrible ways." – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

> I am afraid that if I stay out beyond a certain time (six o'clock) I may get hurt. It is because the area is unsafe that makes us limit the time we spend outside. If I am late I sleep at the place wherever I am to save my life. – ***Participant, mixed group 1 discussion***

In the case of women residing in Benjamin's Building on Pim Street, and some of the interviewees from Pim Street that also collect paper and cardboard for recycling, they were deeply fearful of being hurt or dying on the streets. This group of women spent most of their time on the streets, and often only returned to their shelter fairly late in the evening. They were, therefore, most exposed to the various dangers that exist for women on the streets of the inner city.

> We are most unsafe at night around 10pm when we come from collecting the boxes. You don't know what could happen to you on the way, you just trust in the Lord. When you get in you say thank you. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

> One day I was bending down breaking down the cardboards… they shot a person right in front of me. When I stood up to look I saw the dead person … I left the boxes like that … and took what I already had and did not go out again that day. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

> Above being killed, being mugged… (I am afraid) of meeting with the tsotsis. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

The women from Benjamin's Building and some respondents from Pim Street also mentioned that, during the day, they were harassed and threatened by the taxi drivers who intentionally drove close to their carts and tried to force them off the road. This group of women also spoke of their victimisation at the hands of the general public who abused them and called them 'hobos.'

The women were asked to identify particular spaces or places where they felt unsafe. Eleven (46%) of the respondents identified specific streets and public places as unsafe. However, five of the respondents identified their place of residence and four of the women identified their personal domestic domain as the places where they felt most unsafe. In the case of the latter, the women's deep fear of their home environment was related to their violent partners. Four of the women indicated that they felt safe on the streets of Johannesburg at all times.

There was often a close correlation between women's perceptions of a place as dangerous and their direct experience of being raped, mugged or assaulted, the experience of others close to them, or rumours circulating in the homeless community in which they lived. The public areas women cited as particularly dangerous were Park Station and Noord Street, a taxi rank. The women felt unsafe in these places because of the presence of large crowds, which they believed made people vulnerable to muggings. One woman had an experience of her brother being mugged inside a train and had subsequently associated trains with danger and avoided this mode of transport.

Some streets like Pritchard, Von Wielligh and Delvers were identified as unsafe because of the crowds, shootings between taxi drivers, and gambling activities. Bars and taverns, and the areas immediately surrounding them, were universally considered places where women were unsafe and in danger. These places were associated with intoxicated men who rape and assault women. Many of the women mentioned cases of attempted rape or rape of women known to them in shebeens and on the adjacent streets.

Eight respondents indicated that they were always insecure in the places they had identified as unsafe, with seven women indicating the night as the time when they felt most unsafe. The remaining five respondents identified weekends and month-ends, when people have some money for alcohol, as the most dangerous times for women to venture out, especially at night and alone.

Some of the women, especially those who beg on the streets and seek piecework, identified particular suburbs - Vrededorp, Mayfair and Linden - as dangerous. The suburbs are quiet during the day, and because the houses are walled off, the women thought that if they were attacked no one would come to their aid.

On the question of when unsafe places feel safer, nine of the respondents indicated that unsafe places are never safe. Some of the key factors which increase women's sense of security on the streets of the inner city include the presence of security guards or police officers, despite the fact that many women also complained that the police are generally not responsive to their problems.

5.2.4 Lack of response from police and other authorities

Many of the women, particularly those residing at Tshepo House and the Methodist Church, complained that the police do not take their grievances seriously, which increased their fears in their homes, in their communities and on the streets.

> The police turn us back … even when you go to them with a case and you tell them that you have fought with a boyfriend … they tell you that you must go back and solve your problem. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I would feel safe if I knew that if anything happens to me and I report to the police then they will take it seriously… and not forget about it once I am gone. And if it is something serious then action should be taken. The police first want to see you seriously hurt before they take action. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> So I had him (her abusive partner) arrested at first…but I don't know whether he bribed the police or got bail … I don't know how (he got out) - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> … it does not help to go the police, even when you go to the police to report the case (assault by partner), you see him walking outside the following day and then he really wants to kill you for having reported him. – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

The women from the Methodist Church mentioned that, due to the high rate of violence in their communities, the police and emergency services such as ambulances no longer respond to their calls for assistance. This neglect leaves women and other members of their communities feeling deeply vulnerable and insecure.

> The ambulance does not come to this place anymore because people get hurt all the time … If you phone the ambulance you must go to the shop and then you have to pretend to be living elsewhere. The man next door was helping us but he does not bother anymore…what does it help? The people are fighting all the time. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

> They say that they are tired of the people from this place because everyone who gets hurt is from this place. All the patients who come from here cannot even pay. It does not matter that the person is hurt badly…we cannot call the ambulance … we call the police … People fight here and then they take each other to the police station. They then pay each other compensation and go to the police to withdraw the charges. The police are also tired of us. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

Some of the participants in the mixed group 1 and 2 discussion complained of inefficiency, corruption and harassment of homeless women by the police.

> The police do not help. Everyone knows that. If they see that it is the people with whom they share the spoils of crime they do not care and the criminals can do whatever they like to you … Should we perhaps toyi-toyi to get them to do

their work?" – ***Participant, mixed group 1 discussion***

One day the police came and I was sitting with a group of other women and they called me. They told me that they were arresting me. They demanded that I give them money if I wanted them not to arrest me. I gave them money so that they could let me go. – ***Participant, mixed group 2 discussion***

5.2.5 Fear of being evicted

Some of the research respondents from Tshepo House and the Methodist Church, as well as many of the group participants from Benjamin's Building, expressed great fear of being evicted from their shelter by the powers that be - the council and the building owners - and in the case of a Methodist Church respondent, the owner of the shack she lives in. The women have no security of tenure, little knowledge of their rights and no access to organisations that can support their struggle to maintain access to existing shelter or to find alternatives. Many of the homeless women are thus doubly insecure – they are vulnerable to losing access to accommodation secured through their male partners, and because the conditions of access for both men and women are insecure in relation to external forces (the council, owners, managers, other tenants and 'outsiders'), women share tenure insecurity with their male partners.

Sometimes they (the security guards sent by the owners of the building) come here and when you owe rent they take you out of the room … or they take the door out … so it is not safe … we don't know what our rights are when they do that to us, they do anything they want anytime. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

This is not a straight place. We are not permanent. If the owners of the place come here and throw us out we will tell them that we don't have any other place to move to. I cannot say I am safe because I am not permanent here. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Even now he (the owner of Benjamin's Building) sometimes comes and throws us out when he is angry … that is when he finds out that some of us have been selling somewhere else … He tells us: 'Get out I am closing this place down. I provide you with this place so you can work for me.' – ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

[We are not safe] living in a place like Drill Hall where they have been promising to move us for months. We sit there but we do not really know what is happening. – ***Participant, mixed group 1 discussion***

I have suffered a lot because the white man who owns that building (an abandoned building on Main Reef Road that was occupied by homeless people) sets the dogs on us all the time. It is not a good place. – ***Participant, mixed group 2 discussion***

… the two of us who live in that shack have to pay rent… we pay money for that corrugated iron … We don't feel like we are safe… let me just say that we are living in this place illegally … – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

5.3 How women dealt with their fears

This aspect of the research is significant for the insight it provides into the coping strategies employed by homeless women, and suggests the types of strategies that could be contemplated to support homeless women in their communities.

An almost universal response to domestic abuse, violence in the community and fear of the streets, is for the women to retreat and seek isolation. There is limited evidence of women in this study reaching out to actively support one another and devise organised, collective responses to threats and problems.

Many of the women, especially from Tshepo House, mentioned that they do not have friends in their community, with some indicating that friends have in the past been disloyal and placed them at risk, while others feel that friends can only bring more problems. The kernel in much of this distrust of friends relates to the competition between women for male power and patronage.

> I don't go anywhere and I just keep my boyfriend's company only. My friends won't help me with anything. The minute I go out of here, they will tell him I have gone with other men. So I just stay with him. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I can't say that I have friends here because the women who live here befriend you because they want something from you. So I can't trust any of them because he sleeps with some of them. I don't have any friends here. I talk to them but I can't share any of my secrets or seek advice from them - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I don't have any friends and I don't want any friends. Friends cause problems for you when you also have your own problems. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

Many of the women also spoke of the fragmentation and atomisation of people in their communities. This is particularly true for the most violent and dysfunctional of the homeless communities in this sample, Tshepo House. A common complaint of women is that people in their community do not respond to protect women that are being beaten by their partners, nor do they assist people who are in trouble.

> Life is not comfortable because even the people here don't try to help me when I have problems … that is because I don't mean anything to them. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> Even when I am being beaten up no one helps me. They just look on. I think it is because they are afraid of him. He is very violent. His power is like he has a demon in him. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Some of the women mentioned that the only way to survive the violence of their communities and to be safe, is to not trust in people and to retreat from human contact.

> I just keep my mouth shut you see and then I am safe. If I see something happening, I'm not going to tell the person anything… I just keep my mouth shut. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

> You cannot trust that you are safe because you know them. People become dogs even if you know them. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

> I leave the people that I live with alone. I spend most of the time away from the room doing my work or at MaButhelezi (a friend). – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

Many women responded to their fear of the streets by retreating and staying indoors as much as possible.

> I just stay here and play card games in here. So we stay away from the streets. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> After I have finished ukuphanda (scratching like a chicken, referring to her collecting paper and cardboard on the streets) I come back inside here and don't go out at night. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

> I stay here … I don't roam around… I just stay in my place. – ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

A respondent who was abused by her male partner had sought isolation as a strategy for avoiding further abuse, which led to great unhappiness for her.

> Most of the time I stay here because when I go anywhere he thinks that I have gone to see other men. I cannot go anywhere… I am not enjoying myself. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Some of the women that participated in the mixed group 1 discussion emphasized the importance of homeless women organizing to protect themselves and deal with their problems. The one woman proposed that the group discussion could serve as a starting point for homeless women *"fighting for safety in the areas we live in because these things (violence, intimidation and insecurity) happen and they happen to us".*

Two of the women from the Methodist Church put forward the idea of women in their community organizing to defend themselves. One woman had this to say:

> I think that women should come together and then do something to fight these men because these men see us as nothing… You don't even have a voice to speak up and say something. – ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

A few of the women respondents mentioned their efforts, and the efforts of others, to respond to the problems of women living in their communities. The obstacles to a collective response included the fear of being hurt when intervening to assist a woman who was being assaulted or raped, as well as women's limited power within their communities.

These efforts towards cooperation, though tenuous, represent a potential base from which to build a greater spirit of collectivism, which remains critical to realising many of the respondents' aspirations for a better life.

> When we see that he is really hurting her then we go to the man and plead with him not to hurt her. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I asked other women what they are saying when some women are hurt all the time. I was thinking maybe we could do something about it. The other women ask what they could really do because they do not run the place. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

> There was a man who once fought with me. He wanted to go out with a young woman who lives here. I asked him how he could want that girl because she was very young and he was living with a woman in the house. That made him angry and he hit me with a hammer on my head. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

5.4 Women's views on safety

Women's conceptualisation of what it means to be safe is the mirror opposite of their fears. The 'safe life' that the women respondents envisaged was a life free of violence and danger in their homes, their communities and on the streets. They dreamt of living in secure, comfortable housing, and having access to basic services and amenities, such as water, electricity and good, safe schooling for their children. The housing and services must be affordable. In addition, many women aspire to having a permanent job, off the streets, that would enable them to live independent of men, and to have sufficient income to build a safe and secure life for themselves and their children. Many of the women also spoke longingly of being safe in a family and community of people whom they trusted and could rely upon to take care of and support them. There is an important social and emotional need, which equates safety with living in a functional, caring community. Finally, many women spoke of the need for greater police responsiveness to their problems, more visible policing of public spaces, and improved security in their buildings.

5.4.1 Freedom from violence and danger

Many of the women who participated in this research strongly associated safety with being free of abuse, violence and danger in their personal relationships, in their communities and in public spaces.

> Being safe is a way of making sure that you are safe from all dangerous things. It is about living comfortably and not being in danger. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I think that being safe is about whether I am free where I live… there is nothing that I fear or there is nothing that makes me feel afraid all the time. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> Being safe is living in a place where you will not be hurt or be troubled by anything. - ***Respondent, Methodist Church***

(You are safe) … if you are living with someone who does not abuse you and treat you like nothing. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

I feel safe when no one hurts or attacks me. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

5.4.2 A safe home and basic services

Many of the women mentioned that they would feel safe if they had a comfortable secure home for themselves and their children, if they lived free of the threat of eviction, could exercise some control over how they live, and had access to basic services and amenities. Importantly, some women emphasised that they wished to have a home of their own to be independent from men and to free themselves from domestic violence and abuse.

I wish there was a way of finding a safe place to live in. What I was wishing for was to find my own place for my daughter and me because I don't want to live with a man anymore. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

I think that things would be much better if I moved out of here and find a place where people are willing to work and there my child would be among people because I don't like hiding her. I want to live in a centre that is orderly. - ***Respondent, Phuthaditjhaba***

Being safe means having a place for myself to live in. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

I cannot get away from him because he can always trace me. I also work with him at Park Station. I wish there was a way of finding a safe place to live in. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

Being safe is living in a place that the government has given you where you can do what you like because you are living there legally. You are safe when you are free and can make decisions for yourself. – ***Participant, mixed group 1 discussion***

Many of the participants in the mixed group 1 discussion emphasized that they want their own homes. They complained that they had applied for government subsidized houses many years back, and expressed tremendous frustration at the slow pace of delivery by government. One woman, in desperation, issued the question *"where do they think we should go? They are the government because of the people but they do not think of the people"*. The woman, in addition, placed emphasis on the tenuous economic circumstances of the homeless women in her community, and advised that government houses be made available at no cost and, in addition, proposed an increased subsidy to pensioners so that they would not be rendered vulnerable to homelessness again.

5.4.3 Employment

Many of the women equated safety with having a secure, permanent job, which would enable them to earn sufficient income to live comfortably and provide for the basic needs of

themselves and their children. The women living on Pim Street and in Benjamin's Building in particular, who work on the streets collecting paper and cardboard, feel particularly vulnerable and strongly emphasised their need for safe employment off the streets of the inner city.

> If we were able to get other jobs that do not involve collecting boxes, I think that we would be safe. We must be all over the place. You know if we were just working in one place we know we would be safe. - ***Participant, Pim Street (Benjamin's Building) group discussion***

> I think that it would be better if I can find a job in the kitchens (suburbs) and go to live there. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> If you are working and are living comfortably wherever you are … that is being safe. - ***Respondent, Cornelius House***

> It would be safe for me if I moved back to my house (the respondent has a house in Dobsonville, but cannot live there because of her income-earning activity). I would go back if I got a different (permanent) job. I would even stop drinking then. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

5.4.4 Safety as being part of a caring community

Many of the women strongly emphasised the importance of being part of a community of people that care for and support one another. Women often referred back to their experiences at 'home' - their community of origin - where they felt they could trust people, and where people would respond if they were experiencing problems. Women generally felt safer when they were part of a community where there was mutual care and trust.

> When I am visiting Pimville (where a family member resides) it is the same as being at home … there is someone I can talk to about my problems. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I feel safe when I am at home… because when I am there I feel free, that is a place I was born in and I can walk anyhow because there are no problems … when I get home I feel welcome. - R***espondent, Cornelius House***

> Being safe I think is living a good life, being free. What makes me feel safe is maybe to live with a man who treats me well and being on good terms with the people I live with and knowing that if I have a problem I can solve it with someone. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

> I am safe when I am with my sister. She does everything for me and looks after me. She gives me money and everything. I am safe when I am away from the women I stay with. – ***Respondent, Pim Street***

5.4.5 Greater responsiveness by police and increased security

Some women mentioned that they would feel safer if the police took their complaints

seriously, properly investigated their cases and took action against the perpetrators of violence and abuse. Women also identified a need for more visible policing of public spaces, which they consider unsafe.

> I would feel safe if I knew that if anything happens to me and I report to the police then they will take it seriously… and not forget about it once I am gone. And if it is something serious then action should be taken. The police first want to see you seriously hurt before they take action. - ***Respondent, Tshepo House***

In addition, women mentioned the need to improve security in their places of residence, and specifically that security guards should be placed at the entrance of the building to regulate access, and that doors should be locked, particularly at night.

6. Concluding Discussion and Recommendations

South Africa's current housing crisis is an enduring feature of the legacy of colonial and apartheid land dispossession and racially based spatial development, as well as housing policies and practices aimed at controlling the use and occupation of space as a means of social exclusion. In the post-apartheid era housing policies, which ostensibly aim to overcome this racially exclusionary legacy, have ironically served to entrench key aspects of spatial exclusions, albeit now on the basis of socio-economic status and access to resources. This continuation takes place in large part because the housing policies are rooted in a market-driven policy that have required the beneficiaries of public housing subsidies to raise additional resources of their own in order to secure a house.

Poor black women in particular, who bore the brunt of the colonial and apartheid land, spatial control and housing policies, and today suffer the greatest impact of declining formal employment, are especially excluded from accessing housing subsidies because they often do not have adequate resources of their own, nor are they able to raise additional resources from financial institutions. Thus far, policies which have aimed to address the housing needs of those excluded from accessing their own housing subsidy, including social housing, have failed to meet the needs of the poorest people, including many poor black women, who are unable to pay the required rental and maintenance fees. A small pilot programme in the City of Johannesburg which aimed to provide a series of "transitional housing" initiatives have proven insufficient to meet the needs of the growing numbers of homeless people in the inner city, and have also tended to become more or less permanent accommodation for residents who lack any real economic prospects of making the significant leap from transitional to social housing financial requirements for rental, service and maintenance.

The study also suggests that provincial and City settlement and housing policies pursued to date, which have been aimed at resettling homeless communities in informal settlements on the periphery of the City, are not appropriate. The majority of women in this study derive their income from a range of activities that require their proximity to the inner city, with many of the women interviewed having initially migrated to Johannesburg in search of work. Access to employment opportunities – even the most precarious and informal – was the factor lying at the heart of homeless women's determination to remain in the inner city, and to endure extremely difficult, and often life-threatening, conditions of living. The women respondents from Benjamin's Building, and some of the residents in the other

homeless communities, are engaged in a pattern of internal city migration. They live and work, collecting paper and cardboard, in the inner city during the week and migrate to the edge of the metropolitan area, usually to informal shack settlements, over the weekends. The women's livelihoods rest on their ability to access the inner city, and have no alternatives for generating income on the distant periphery of the city.

Twenty-two (81%) of respondents to this study, are employed in economically precarious work in the informal sector, with the remaining five women (19%) relying on their male partners, family members and fellow residents for income to survive. Not one respondent was formally and securely employed. The women reported great struggles to secure resources to pay the most minimal rent, of between R50 and R150, even with the assistance of their male partners. Some women said they had been forced to leave previous accommodation because they could not afford to pay rentals and service costs. If the economic marginalisation of the homeless women in the study sample were taken as fairly representative of homeless women living in inner-city Johannesburg, it is clear that this group of homeless women would not be in a position to mobilise the additional resources required to access formal housing through existing programmes, nor would they be able to afford to pay for basic services, such as water and electricity.

It remains to be seen whether the recently unveiled Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Integrated Sustainable Human Settlements, which proposes subsidy changes such that the 'hard-core' poor (0-R1 500 income per month) receive a full housing subsidy of R28 000, with no requirement for a monetary contribution or sweat equity, will address the problems of affordable housing for the very poor. The requirement of payment for basic services, increasingly on a metered basis to ease service cut-offs by the state and the private sector, will continue to place services beyond the reach of many poor people. And the peripheral location of low-income housing developments - dictated by the high price of urban land, existent bulk infrastructure, as well as City and provincial economic development plans – will remain a serious impediment to the income-earning activities of poor people, such that are represented in this research sample. In the absence of City and provincial housing policies and programmes that are supportive and enabling of poor people's city-based survivalist strategies, it is likely that patterns of oscillating internal city migration will remain a feature of life for many poor people, with the attendant problems of great tenure insecurity and vulnerability to violence in their place of inner city residence.

At a social level, the research findings clearly demonstrate that the extremely precarious economic status of the homeless women in these communities serves to deepen their dependence on male partners for their survival, and the survival of their children, rendering them particularly vulnerable to domestic violence at the hands of their partners, including both direct physical, emotional and economic violence, as well as increasing their risk to exposure to HIV/Aids through their lack of power to negotiate safer sex in their relationships. Economic dependence also limits women's options, with some women reporting the lack of options for accommodation and their inability to pay for services as reasons for their failure to leave, or alternatively being forced to return to, these abusive relationships.

More than half (65%) of the respondents reported experiences of domestic abuse, with the highest prevalence in those homeless settlements that display extremes of social and economic dysfunction – high tenure insecurity, no or little security with non-existent or

weak internal management and governance systems, and high levels of inter-personal violence between residents, often associated with alcohol and drug abuse. While domestic violence was a problem across the sample, the research does suggest that domestic abuse may be more prevalent in those communities in which there is greater economic insecurity and social instability.

The research has also shown that homeless women's fears extend to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability in their place of residence, with sixteen (59%) of the respondents reporting feeling unsafe in their community and ten (41%) of the women reporting having been hurt by a resident of their community. Fears were most prevalent in those settlements that are more 'informal' and lack security and formal arrangements for governance and management. While women feared 'outsiders' gaining entry to their residence and hurting or killing them, many held a deep fear of other members of their community. Fears were exacerbated in those settlements in which shebeens operate, leaving women feeling most vulnerable and fearful for themselves and their children at night and over weekends. Single homeless women interviewed – a particularly vulnerable and excluded group often falling outside popular conceptions of 'homelessness' – often faced the additional insecurity of attacks from other women who may perceive them as a threat to their own economic reliance on male partners.

Beyond the doors of the women's accommodation spaces, the women respondents also described their fears of rape and other forms of violence in places where they work, or in the wider community, especially at night. They spoke of particular vulnerability in spaces where people socialize, such as shebeens and taverns, and in their immediate environs. Women fear crowded places, especially major transport hubs, and surrounding areas where women fear being mugged, raped or assaulted. In addition, some women spoke of their fear of the deserted suburbs and their high walls, where they fear that nobody would respond if they confronted 'trouble-makers'.

Women's understandings of what it means to be safe are complex and multi-faceted. The respondents placed great emphasis on their desire to be free of violence and danger in their domestic environment, in their communities and on the streets. The women also spoke of the need for a safe comfortable home, over which they would have secure tenure and control over how they live. For some women, being free and safe is linked to their ability to choose to live independently of men. Many of the women acknowledge that their ability to live independently and their freedom to make choices that are in the best interests of themselves and their children cannot be separated from their ability to earn a reasonable income. Some of the women emphasized their need for a permanent secure job that would take them off the streets. Importantly, many of the women also spoke of their emotional need to live in a community characterized by mutual trust and concern. The notion of safety that women hold, therefore, extends beyond the physical and economic, to the notion of an emotional and psychological 'home', with its attendant features of love, support and care.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations that emerge from this study include the following:

- Housing policy requires a fundamental rewriting to provide adequate, secure, safe, long-term accommodation for those without sufficient resources of their own to

participate in the market. The basis of such a rewriting should begin by recognising access to adequate and secure housing as a prerequisite for development, and that the state must take a lead in mobilising resources to provide housing for all regardless of their ability to make a financial contribution. In addition, making profits from the provision of housing should be outlawed. The gap between transitional and social/collective housing should be narrowed by capping rents and writing off service charges, recoverable through a policy of citywide or national cross-subsidisation. Also, considering the additional costs of maintenance borne by residents of social housing, this programme requires revision to ensure that residents are eventually able to obtain equity in their residences.

- The collective/communal housing ethos ostensibly underpinning the social housing programme should be expanded. Instead of rentals, alternative methods for tenants' contributions should be explored in order to address the needs of the very poor.

- At present, housing policy frameworks are constructed around the assumption of a male-headed nuclear family. These need to be adapted to take into account the rising number of female-headed households and single women requiring accommodation, as well as the realities of domestic violence and abuse. Black homeless women experience the greatest tenure insecurity and should be prioritised in the provision of safe, secure housing.

- The Housing policy should be reviewed to ensure the release of appropriately located land closer to the city, and to ensure that the needs of poor people whose livelihoods depend on their access to employment opportunities in the inner city, are adequately accommodated.

- Minimum standards for transitional housing should be established and monitored for implementation. At the minimum, transitional housing should be managed according to a set of rules that are evolved with the agreement of residents. A management, or governing structure, which involves residents, and women residents in particular, of transitional housing should be established to oversee the implementation of agreed rules. Residents should have access to disciplinary procedures, and recourse to an external monitoring or oversight body, possibly located in the Department of Housing, should the management or governing structure prove inefficient or derelict. In addition, all transitional housing should have 24-hour security that monitors entry and access to the building, and doors should be locked at night.

- Transitional housing should be accessible to homeless people – whether as single individuals or families - until secure formal housing is provided, and the state should subsidise the costs of maintenance. Should outsourcing of the management of transitional housing be required, this should only occur on a not-for-profit basis.

- Consideration should be given to piloting 'women's only' transitional and social housing initiatives to accommodate single women and their children who are escaping violent partners and who seek homes and living environments that offer more security and freedom from violence.

- Residents in 'squats', where people have taken over abandoned buildings to establish places of residence in the absence of alternatives, should receive priority attention to obtain access to safe formal housing. Immediate measures should, however, be instituted to improve living conditions in these buildings:

    - By-laws regulating the sale of alcohol should be enforced to close shebeens operating in or near places of residence; and

    - The council should provide emergency water supplies and toilets and 24-hour security.

- Occupation of land or abandoned buildings should be decriminalised and a moratorium placed on evictions pending the rollout of a comprehensive housing programme.

- Relocations of homeless people or poor residents from land or buildings should only take place if tenants agree on the basis of a mutual plan involving the provision of equivalent or better alternative accommodation which, in particular, does not disrupt the residents' access to existing economic opportunities.

- Public spaces, especially around major nodes of transportation – train stations and taxi ranks - should receive priority attention by the Metropolitan Council for visible and active policing.

- The police services must be overhauled to ensure that cases of violence against women are treated with the sensitivity and seriousness they deserve.

- Finally, the public service commitments encapsulated under the Batho Pele campaign must be tangibly enforced through a combination of incentives and severe penalties to ensure that public servants – especially the police, magistrates, and hospital and ambulance personnel – properly service the needs of the poorest and most marginalised population group in the City of Johannesburg – homeless women and their children.

- Organisations engaged in work with homeless communities should seek to support homeless women in the inner city organize as a specific constituency, with a view to addressing their particular problems of 'double' tenure insecurity, unemployment, health and social service needs and gender-specific violence.

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