Youth and Gang Violence in African Townships: Exploring the Link to Exclusion from Recreational Facilities

G. Nokukhanya Ndhlovu
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5736-3345
University of Fort hare, South Africa
khanya.nokun@gmail.com

Pius T. Tanga
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1359-8729
University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Abstract

Research shows that recreational facilities play a pivotal role in youth development, including reducing levels of delinquency and taking the youth off the streets where they are vulnerable to many social ills. However, in South Africa, it appears that many poor African townships have been excluded from accessing this fundamental human right. This article discusses the experiences of youths from Nyanga in the Western Cape and Bophelong in Gauteng, who perceive to have been excluded from accessing well-resourced recreational facilities. Principally, the article explores the way in which this exclusion has influenced youth gang violence. The article adopts an exploratory, qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions of the topic. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were conducted and the data were analysed using the data analysis approach developed by Tesch. The findings show that relevant youth development practitioners have excluded African youths from fully and actively participating in recreational activities. As a result, many of the youths are idle and this has increased their vulnerability to gangs and problem behaviour. The findings also show that there is a link between youth, troubled behaviour, and exclusion from recreational facilities. A conclusion is that well-resourced recreational facilities can help reduce youth gang involvement in marginalised communities. It is recommended that relevant youth development practitioners provide infrastructure and recreational services to offer marginalised youths alternatives to engaging in gangs and violence.

Keywords: African township youths, South Africa, gangs, social exclusion, recreational facilities

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Introduction

Growing up in post-apartheid South Africa is a gruelling experience for many black (African and Coloured) youths, African youths in particular (Soudien 2007). Many of them are poor and belong to a society that has gone through dehumanising and devastating racial subjugation, which has consequently prevented them from developing a sense of belonging and citizenship (Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy 2012). Many young people have limited access to basic human rights, including limited access to recreational facilities which increases their vulnerability to risky social behaviour. This may be as a consequence of perceived gaps in service rendering for example by relevant youth development practitioners and their misunderstanding of the links between marginalisation, participation in recreational activities and troubled social behaviour (Weinstein et al. 2014). These practitioners include those employed in the public, private sector and civil society to serve the needs of South African youths.

This article defines a gang as a group that has a name, a propensity to inflict violence and to engage in crime, and in which violence and delinquency perform a functional role in promoting group identity and solidarity (Hallsworth and Young 2008). The article will contribute to knowledge on the intricate link between recreational facilities and gang involvement in marginalised communities. It seeks to help youth development practitioners to better understand the significant role played by recreational facilities in reducing gangs in marginalised communities.

This article will therefore explore the way in which exclusion from otherwise well-managed and well-resourced recreational facilities has affected youths in two South African townships, namely, Nyanga in the Western Cape and Bophelong in Gauteng. These townships were identified because they are faced with various development challenges, are affected by the issue of youth and gang violence, and are representative of the social issues pervading both these provinces. The research objectives of the article are to explore the way in which exclusion from well-resourced recreational facilities has influenced the social issue of youth and gang violence in Nyanga and Bophelong and to explore the experiences and challenges in these townships in relation to recreational facilities.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Social Exclusion

According to the United Nations (2016, 18), "Social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state." The World Health Organization (WHO 2010) maintains that exclusion is a dynamic and multi-dimensional practice which is the product of unequal power relations connecting at the economic, political, social, and cultural levels. Both definitions highlight the various social levels

in which social exclusion can be exercised. These also interconnect at other levels including individual, group, community, and global levels.

Haralambos and Holborn (2013) identify the accessibility or absence of social services in a community, government policies on welfare and the global economic climate, and also other contributors to an individual or community's chances of being vulnerable to social exclusion. This theory is relevant to this study because South African township youths have been excluded from engaging effectively in socio-political and socio-economic activities which has adversely affected youth development (Chetty 2014; Statistics South Africa 2017). In emphasising this exclusion, Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy (2012) state that even though they are formal members or citizens of South Africa, they are excluded from the rights and benefits which their status as South African citizens is meant to confer. This has resulted in them experiencing a number of social problems including inequality, poverty and insecurity, which consequently forces them to find alternative means of gaining access and agency in their communities and the country at large. The alternatives include involvement in socially unacceptable behaviours to attain a sense of belonging (Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy 2012).

Youth Development in South Africa

The United Nations (n.d.) defines development as a multifaceted plan aimed at achieving a higher quality of life for all people. Development seeks to promote social justice and empowerment of excluded populations through active participation, equal access to services, poverty alleviation and a commitment to human rights (Patel 2015; Patel and Hochfeld 2013). Development centres on access to rights and opportunities and participation in social, economic and cultural activities with a focus on the previously disadvantaged communities (Midgley 2014). Similarly, youth development is a process which engages youths to meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, to feel cared for, and to develop skills and competencies that provide them an opportunity to contribute to their day-to-day lives. This process involves various people connected to youth development collaboratively working together to achieve positive outcomes in the lives of youths (Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman 2004; Motlhaolwa 2016). The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2015–2020 states that youth development is about the integration of youth programmes that help boost their capabilities to change society and the economy, which includes programmes that deal with various youth challenges while providing them with the support that they need, the advancement of constructive results, especially for those who are currently excluded (The Presidency 2015).

In South Africa, youth development comes in the wake of various youth challenges but specifically marginalised communities facing exclusion from various development opportunities and fundamental resources (Motlhaolwa 2016). The NYP (The Presidency 2015) acknowledges the multifaceted challenges facing the youth and articulates the importance of redressing the specific challenges and needs facing them. Considering this, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA 2017) in its Integrated Youth

Development Strategy (IYDS) calls on the government, private sector, and civil society to initiate and implement programmes promoting youth development that transforms youths and their respective communities.

The Role of Recreational Facilities in Redressing Gang Violence in Marginalised Communities

The important role played by recreational facilities such as athletic or sport facilities, fitness centres or gyms, community halls, parks, libraries and cultural facilities should not be underestimated. This point was underscored in a study by Özgen and Balc (2015, 20) which found that "during the research it was discovered that recreational activities had a great effect on relaxation, socialization . . . to prevent and reduce crime the participation to recreation becomes more important". A study in Cape Town, South Africa, found a link between idle youths and troubled social behaviour including drug abuse and violence (Wegner 2011). An important study by Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019) in a South African township found that access to recreational facilities was one of the driving forces behind learners leaving gangs. Weinstein et al. (2014) state that children with little to no access to recreational activities are more likely to engage in problematic behaviour such as joining gangs and substance abuse. Berdychevsky, Stodolska and Shinew (2019) identify recreational facilities as important primary and secondary prevention and tertiary rehabilitation methods of responding to youth gangs and violence. Professionally managed recreational facilities also provide young people with a healthy environment in which they can learn positive socialisation (make friends), develop leadership skills and learn decision-making (Gould 2016). Witt and Caldwell (2010) also highlight the importance of structured, context-specific, well-thought-out, and adult-supervised recreation programmes. These authors also emphasise the role these programmes play in developing youths, reducing juvenile delinquency, reducing antisocial behaviour, and preventing youth exposure to violence.

However, in South Africa, youth development practitioners have not valued the role played by recreational facilities in the lives of poor communities (Denoon-Stevens and Ramaila 2018) in terms of inconsistencies in service delivery. These inconsistencies are perceived as social exclusion and have constrained the participation, agency, and voice of poor youths, forcing them to engage in troubling behaviour (Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy 2012).

Exclusion from Recreational Facilities and Youth Gangs: The Interconnections

In South Africa, social exclusion is still a concern and young people are significantly influenced (Graham and De Lannoy 2017; Mogapi 2015; Swart 2013). They are excluded from access to basic rights including recreational facilities which play a fundamental role in dealing with youth gangs and violence (Berdychevsky, Stodolska, and Shinew 2019). Wedged on the margins of inclusion, youths find themselves exposed to and engaging with gangs in order to find their place and identity in a society that has excluded them (Cooper and Ward 2012; Mguzulwa and Gxubane 2019;

Monareng 2016). MacMaster (2010) reiterates that gang violence has manifested in socially excluded communities and likens this to a virus that has ravaged them. Zaaroura (2016) observes that the increasing exclusion has pushed many African youths to violent crimes and gang life. They resort to gangs because of many social issues, but specifically because of the socio-economic and structural conditions affecting them (MacMaster 2010). In confirming the reproduction of violence in poor communities, Baird (2012) also emphasises the increasing links between exclusion and gang violence. Monareng (2016) aptly states that a lack of access to social justice and opportunities have substantially contributed to violence and crime. Consequently, the issue of youth and gangs is interlocked with exclusion (Wegner et al. 2016) and is an indication of a failure to understand the link between marginalisation, participation in recreational activities and antisocial behaviour (Weinstein et al. 2014).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative and exploratory approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions of the way in which exclusion from access to well-resourced recreational facilities has influenced youth gang violence in their communities. This approach provided the participants a platform to explain how they understand and interpret these perceptions (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011).

The target population consisted of three groups, namely, unemployed young people from Nyanga and Bophelong, former gang members from Nyanga and Bophelong, and informants from civil society and the government sector working with current or former gang members and on issues of youth development from the Western Cape and Gauteng. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of 18 unemployed youths aged between 14 and 35 years, 18 former gang members between the ages of 14 and 35, and 36 informants. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to hand-pick a particular sample based on the nature of the phenomena being studied and the characteristics of potential participants (Marlow 2011). Former gang members were selected based on their self-identification as former gang members and their suitability to help achieve the first objective which was to explore the way in which exclusion from well-resourced recreational facilities has influenced the issue of youth and gang violence in their communities. The informants were selected on the basis of their relevant work experience and knowledge on the subject of youth gangs and their suitability to help to achieve the second objective which was to explore the issues and challenges in Bophelong and Nyanga in relation to recreational facilities. Unemployed youths provided supplementary information to buttress what was reported by the informants and former gang members.

The researchers used two data collection methods. The first method used in-depth interviews which were conducted with all informants and all former gang members from both provinces. This allowed the researchers to ask questions and to follow up on the responses from the participants (Morris 2015). The second method used focus group discussions which were conducted with unemployed youths. Hennink, Hutter and

Bailey (2011) define a focus group as an interactive discourse led by a trained facilitator and conducted with a group of preselected participants. Priority is placed on a specific set of concerns or questions to be posed in a structured manner so that each participant has a chance to respond.

Tesch's (1990) method of data analysis was used. This method generally involves the process of identifying patterns in the data to generate themes and subthemes. Every interview was transcribed in English, however, those interviews in isiZulu, Sotho and isiXhosa were first translated into English. Contradictions, similarities, and uniqueness in content were identified and labelled in consideration of the research objectives. Labels linked to each other were highlighted in a similar colour code. The data were then grouped into main themes and subthemes and reported in the two labels with the major themes reported first, followed by the minor themes. This process made sure that the labels reflect the main objectives of the study. Actual quotes were used in discussing the findings which were critically linked to the literature review (Tesch 1990).

Before the data collection process, ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the selected university. Informed consent was sought from the participants before the research process and utmost care was also taken in ensuring that the participants were provided with sufficient information concerning the research process and the phenomena under study. According to Yin (2014), this allows the participants to make informed decisions on whether they are interested in participating or not. In order to ensure respect for personal privacy and anonymity of both youths and institutional role players, pseudonyms and composite profiles were used to ensure the safety of the participants (Kruger, Ndebele, and Horn 2014).

Research can impose on people's lives, hence for this research, the participants, especially those identified through institutions, were made aware of their right to voluntary participation. They were also informed that they were not forced to participate and were free to withdraw at any time they felt uncomfortable.

Findings and Discussion

This section begins with a presentation of the characteristics of the participants, followed by a discussion of the themes and subthemes in line with the research objectives of the study. The demographic profile of the participants is illustrated in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1 shows that a total number of 18 former gang members were interviewed. It also reveals that in both Bophelong and Nyanga, all the former gang members dropped out of school and that they joined gangs while they were still very young.

Table 1: Characteristics of former gang members

Former gang member	Age	Level of education	Reason for leaving school	Who they live with	Age of joining gangs	Year they quit gangs
Tebogo	18	Grade 8	Gangs and drugs	Siblings	11	2017
Keneilwe	23	Grade 9	Gangs stabbed him at school	Friends	13	2015
Tsoarelo	24	Grade 8	Gangs and drugs	Extended family	14	2016
Lereto	35	Grade 9	Shot by rival gangs	Siblings	14	2012
Motsamayi	34	Grade 9	Gangs, drugs and crime	Aunt and cousins	10	2010
Malerato	25	Grade 10	Gangs and drug abuse	Mother	15	2014
Nthabiseng	23	Grade 9	Drug abuse	Mother and aunt	12	2014
Baxter (Bax)	15	Grade 9	Expelled for selling drugs at school	Aunt and brother	10	2018
Anele	20	Grade 10	Gangs and substance abuse	Mother	14	2018
Drake	24	Grade 9	Rival gangs wanted to kill him	Mother	14	2018
Mzapopo	31	Grade 11	Became a gangster but is now employed	Grandmother	13	2017
Vato	16	Grade 8	Gangs	Brother	11	2018
Vhura	18	Grade 9	Gangs and substance abuse	Grandmother	11	2018
X	16	Grade 9	Expelled for selling drugs	Mother	14	2018
Kwanda	16	Grade 10	Expelled for drug abuse	Mother and siblings	10	2018
Bhobho	15	Grade 9	Expelled for selling drugs at school after he joined a gang	Mother and siblings	10	2018
Caretaker	23	Grade 11	Rival gangs wanted to kill him	Friends	13	2016
Criss cross	22	Grade 9	Gangs and drugs	Siblings	14	2017

Table 2 shows that 18 unemployed youths were interviewed. It also reveals that all the unemployed youths are school dropouts and that most of them have a criminal record and are using or have used drugs.

Table 2: Characteristics of unemployed youth

Unemployed youth	Age	Level of education	Reason for leaving school	Who they live with	Socio-economic status	Substance abuse status
Khotso	32	Grade 8	Got involved with the wrong crowd	Mother	Unemployed and doing community service for mugging	Nyaope*, alcohol and cigarettes
Kamohelo	26	Grade 10	Expelled for selling drugs	Mother	Unemployed and doing community service for robbery	Dagga, alcohol and cigarettes
Karabo	29	Grade 9	Got bored with school	Siblings	Unemployed and doing community service for mugging	Alcohol, dagga, cigarettes and nyaope
Thabiso	28	Grade 9	Got involved in criminal activities	Siblings	Unemployed and doing community service for common robbery	Cigarettes, alcohol and nyaope
Katleho	29	Grade 9	Drug abuse	Mother	Unemployed and doing community service for mugging	Alcohol, cigarettes and dagga
Thato	32	Grade 10	Got bored with school after he started using drugs	Extended family	Unemployed and doing community service for common robbery	Dagga, cigarettes and alcohol
Thuto	30	Grade 10	Got expelled for drug abuse	Grandmother	Unemployed and doing community service for armed robbery	Nyaope and alcohol
Mpho	32	Grade 11	Drug addiction	Aunt	Out on parole	Cigarettes and alcohol
Maboza	35	Grade 11	Many challenges	Grandmother and Uncle	Unemployed	Recovering drug and alcohol addict
Justin Bieber	18	Grade 10	Smoking and drugs	Both parents	Unemployed	Recovering drug addict

Unemployed youth	Age	Level of education	Reason for leaving school	Who they live with	Socio-economic status	Substance abuse status
BC	20	Grade 10	Gangs and drugs	Mother	Unemployed and has been to juvenile prison	Recovering drug addict
King	20	University dropout	Substance abuse	Extended family	Unemployed	Recovering drug and alcohol addict
Mtho	35	Grade 11	Criminal activities	Brother	Unemployed and has served time in prison	Recovering alcohol addict
Ramaphosa	18	Grade 11	Got bored with school	Uncle	Unemployed	Recovering drug addict
Layila	32	University dropout	Dropped out of university in 2008 because of gangs, drugs abuse and robbery	Parents	Unemployed and has served time in prison	Recovering drug addict
Xolisa	24	Grade 9	Gangs	Extended family	Unemployed	Recovering drug addict
Phetho	34	Grade 10	Drug abuse	Extended family	Unemployed	Recovering drug addict
Hlengi	30	Grade 8	Drugs, gangs and crime	Siblings	Unemployed and has served time in prison	Recovering drug addict

* "A street drug commonly found in South Africa, which is a mixture of low-grade heroin, cannabis products, antiretroviral drugs and other materials added as cutting agents" (Mthembi, Mwenesongole, and Cole 2018).

Table 3 shows that 36 informants were interviewed. The informants emanated from different fields and various backgrounds. Their area of work included working with youths, youth gangs, school gangs, social and community development issues.

Table 3: Characteristics of informants

Pseudonyms of informant	Area of focus	Affiliation
Terry	Gangs	Government
Nontokozo	Gangs	Government
Meme	Gangs	Government
Lwandle	Gangs	Government
Malebogo	Community development	Government
Thabo	Ex-offenders	Government

Pseudonyms of informant	Area of focus	Affiliation
Lebogang	Ex-offenders	Government
Kananelo	Social crime and gangs	Government
Onka	Youth development and gangs	Government
Ragile	Social development	NGO
Bohlokoa	Social crime and life skills	NPO
Thabile	Youth development and gangs	NPO
Sibusiso	Youth and social crime	NGO
Dr Z	Death, gangs and community development	Academia
Tshepo	Community safety and gangs	Community
Thuso	Community safety and gangs	Community
Thabang	Youth development	Community
Dumisa	Youth development	Community
Tsepiso	Youth development and gangs	Government
Sesethu	Gangs and youth at risk	Government
Ntokozo	Youth, crime and gangs	Government
Senzo	Community development and crime	Government
Hephi	Ex-offenders and gangs	Government
Mzikazi	Community crime and youth gangs	Government
Sihle	Community crime and youth gangs	Government
Melikhaya	Community crime and youth gangs	Government
Thando	Education, experience in dealing with gangs at schools	Community
Khanya	Community safety	Community
Dube	Community safety	Community
Thabani	Youth development	Community
Khubo	Youth development	Community
Hlengiwe	Substance abuse, youths at risk and gangs	NGO
Nkosazana	Substance abuse, gangs and youths at risk	NGO
Esihle	Gangs and youths at risk	NGO
Madoda	Community violence	Academia
Lethu	Gangs and violence	NGO

NGO: non-governmental organisation
NPO: non-profit organisation

The next sections present the three main themes and their subthemes.

Theme 1: Exclusion from Well-Resourced Recreational Facilities and the Influence on Youth Gangs

The research objective on which this theme is based was to explore the way in which exclusion from well-resourced recreational facilities has influenced the issue of youth gangs in the two townships.

Subtheme 1.1: Idle youths and unaccounted time

The research findings indicate that the issue of idle youths and unaccounted time is one of the main realities facing youths in the two communities; Swart (2013) attributes this

to their exclusion from youth development. Hall (2019) notes the concerns regarding the large numbers of South African youths who are not in employment nor in education nor in training and the impact of this significant number of idle youths on troubled social behaviour and community safety. Similarly, the narratives showed a strong link between idleness and crime with many young people sharing that youths have too much time on their hands "which is a recipe for mischief". It was stated that youths lack the facilities that can keep them occupied and off the streets, and in their opinion end up passing time through joining gangs and then are compelled to join in with violent and criminal behaviour such as stabbing and killing each other, doing drugs and "ukubloma emakhoneni" (being idle on street corners). Former gang members especially attributed their involvement in gangs and crime to a lack of programmes that can keep them busy with developmental activities. They admitted:

> This thing of us and gangs, it's just an issue of having too much time and limited recreational facilities. If we had things to do, we wouldn't be having all this time to be killing each other. We have too much time here, gangs and drugs keep us busy Ausi. (Nthabiseng, Bophelong)

> After school, we have nothing to do sisteri [township slang for my sister]. There are no facilities to keep us occupied and we don't want to go back to the situations at home. We have too much free time and we are free to move around with guns and knives not books. (Vato, Nyanga)

Some informants noted that youths with too much time on their hands are a ticking time bomb. It leaves them vulnerable to social ills such as substance abuse, crime, or gangs. These findings are in consonance with those of Sharp (2010, 1) which note that "unengaged, bored, and uninvolved youth are at higher risk for negative outcomes such as delinquency, substance use, and school dropout". The findings suggest that access to recreational facilities can help reduce young people's unsupervised time and idleness while distracting them from gangs and crime. Outley, Bocarro and Boleman (2011) similarly argued that in communities plagued with gangs and delinquent youths, recreation centres can be used to deal with youth-related challenges and to encourage prosocial behaviour.

Subtheme 1.2: Gang involvement and drug abuse

The importance of programmes that are youth friendly and specifically benefit youths from underprivileged backgrounds is highlighted in the IYDS (NYDA 2017). However, many of the informants and young people contended that children growing up in townships find themselves joining gangs and abusing drugs because they lack youth-friendly facilities. Studies confirm that young people who do not have after-school supervision and who do not participate in recreational activities are more vulnerable to risky social behaviour. Recreational activities aimed at skill building and the development of self-esteem are therefore important in the protection of young people from the appeal of gangs (MacKinnon 2009). All former gangs and many unemployed

youths acknowledged that they were exposed to drugs and gangs because they lacked recreation opportunities. Two former gang members indicated:

> Our homes are too small, they are suffocating us. There are no facilities for young people in this area, young people have nothing to do. Living in this place is frustrating, we are drowning and we have nowhere to relieve ourselves. We need facilities or else we join gangs and do drugs just to forget about our circumstances. (Malerato, Bophelong)

> Sisteri, this place lacks recreational facilities that's why we end up deep in drugs and gangs. There is nothing to do in the township my sister. We don't have a place to go to clear our heads, we live in cramped spaces and need fresh air but we don't have those places. (Drake, Nyanga)

The research data suggest that there is a link between young people, troubled behaviour and exclusion from recreational facilities. This is supported by Wegner et al. (2016) who indicate that a lack of recreational facilities such as sports and cultural activities leaves youths from marginalised communities with limited opportunities for recreation other than gang involvement or being at home. The narratives indicate that facilities offer several personal and interpersonal benefits and, in their absence, African township youths achieve a sense of belonging through engaging in crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse (Swart et al. 2012). The narratives reveal the way in which recreational facilities influence young people's behaviour and future; to corroborate, Denoon-Stevens and Ramaila (2018) note that the failure to pay attention to parks and public facilities has attracted social ills. The foregoing accounts underscore the social exclusion theory and the related consequences of excluding young people from fully and actively participating in social life (MacMaster 2010; Monareng 2016).

Theme 2: The Issues and Challenges in Bophelong and Nyanga in Relation to Recreational Facilities

This theme is linked to the research objective: to explore the issues and challenges in Bophelong and Nyanga in relation to recreational facilities.

Subtheme 2.1: Unsupervised recreational facilities used by gangs

In line with the existing literature, the findings reveal that youths from Bophelong and Nyanga are unable to participate in the benefits of citizenship fully or directly (Swartz, Harding, and De Lannoy 2012). Many participants (informants and youths) projected this exclusion as a lack of well-resourced, safe, and supervised recreational facilities. They highlighted that the few facilities that are available are either abandoned or unsupervised; as a result some of them have been used as a platform for antisocial behaviour including the use by gangs and drug lords. Thus, instead of serving as areas of recreation that help to keep young people safe, these spaces are now traps for the vulnerable young people. The sentiments from informants in both provinces support these assertions:

Neglected parks and unsupervised recreational spaces create this challenge of gangs. And the poor who are without support or employment are influenced by gangs. (Dr Z, Gauteng)

Then there was a park and then this park was captured by gangs simply because there was nobody who was owning the space, so they decided that the space is theirs. (Madoda, Western Cape)

The findings in both Bophelong and Nyanga reveal that gangs have commandeered unsupervised community facilities. Davey and Wootto (2017, 76) also found that "locations used by young people maybe particularly susceptible to crime and anti-social behaviour . . . unused or unsupervised areas can be vulnerable to certain types of crime". This reflects the importance of supervised facilities in the lives of young people. Many young people indicated that well-maintained and supervised facilities could enhance their quality of life by giving them space to breathe, away from their dire circumstances of living at home. In addition, this could ensure that they are safe and not exposed to gangs. In confirmation, Outley, Bocarro, and Boleman (2011) elucidate that in communities plagued by gangs and youth delinquency, structured recreation centres and parks can be used to redress youth-related social ills. Similarly, Perry and Munien (2016) highlighted the importance of well-organised public recreational spaces in promoting social cohesion as well as boosting the health and well-being of community members. The research findings show that involvement in safe recreational activities can help deter the socially excluded young people from participating in gangs, drugs and delinquent acts.

Subtheme 2.2: Facilities not meeting the real needs of young people

Recreational facilities dealing with youth challenges must meet the real needs of youths to provide proper and relevant support to marginalised young people (Berdychevsky, Stodolska, and Shinew 2019). However, the findings highlighted that facilities do not speak to the contexts and needs of township youths. This then defeats the whole purpose because they fail to attract the very people that they are meant to serve. This echoes the findings of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (2007, 1) which put forward that

Too often the planning for a facility commences on a whim or at best a perception that a facility is required without any assessment of whether it is in fact needed by the community it is intended to serve. This often results in facilities that are inappropriate.

In Bophelong, the issue of facilities not meeting the real needs of people was not discussed. In Nyanga, some young people observed:

Our access to resources is very limited. We don't have adequate recreational facilities, there is no space, just shacks. (Caretaker, former gang member, Nyanga)

> Sisteri, ekasi [the African township] is full of useful people doing useless things. A lot of talents and gifts are wasted ekasi because of limited resources, that's why people end up using their gifts for wrong things like crime. . . There is a lot of frustration in ekasi sisteri. Our access to resources is very limited. Look, for example go around Nyanga and look around, the facilities are not attractive. (BC, unemployed youth, Nyanga)

These findings indicate the importance of understanding specific youth needs and contexts to bring about holistic and targeted programmes that prevent and redress antisocial behaviour. Echoing these findings, Berdychevsky, Stodolska and Shinew (2019) maintain that organised recreational facilities play an important role in removing youths from marginalised crime ridden communities off the streets and keeping them occupied with constructive development tasks. However, the research data show that facilities in Nyanga are failing to meet the needs of youths because they lack programmes that can keep young people busy and away from gangs and crime. Context-specific and appropriate recreational facilities can have a stabilising influence on the lives of marginalised youths, including reducing gang involvement. The research findings confirm that parks and recreation programmes are not just about fun and games but should be organised and supervised to provide exceptional opportunities for young people to fully develop and become responsible adults (Witt and Caldwell 2010).

Theme 3: Quality of Programmes Required

This theme is linked to the research objective: to explore the issues and challenges in Bophelong and Nyanga in relation to recreational facilities.

Subtheme 3.1: Skill-building programmes

Skill-building programmes provide young people with a safe and accepting environment that supports the development of their knowledge and skills in various ways, for example, through art, sport, vocational education, and service learning, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles and positive patterns of social interaction (Administration for Children and Families 2001; Zimmerman, Phelps, and Lerner 2008). However, in both communities, many informants and young people highlighted the absence of skill-building programmes while highlighting their benefits. Skill-building programmes were described as playing an especially important role in marginalised communities with unskilled, unemployed and unemployable young people. They were described as vital in diverting youths from gang and crime involvement while empowering them with economic and social development skills. To further elaborate on this, two informants working with gangs shared:

> We don't have good programmes . . . Programmes that engage youth at high risk are vitally important. Give them social and economic development programmes together with safe spaces where they are not exposed to drugs, violence or negative parents and role models. (Malebogo, Bophelong)

> Our programmes are very limited . . . They should have a variety of programmes that keep people of Nyanga off the streets. These programmes should focus on developing them, their skills, teaching them as well as empowering them. (Sihle, Nyanga)

The NYP 2015–2020 places emphasis on youth programmes that help to boost the capabilities of marginalised youths through youth development programmes dealing with all spheres of their lives including social and economic development (The Presidency 2015). Similarly, the findings demonstrate the importance of taking a holistic approach to youth development through the provision of programmes that not only have an impact on social aspects but that also include economic and human development. The importance of using skills development programmes in crime and violence prevention should not be underestimated. Well-organised and intentional recreational programmes provide a positive platform for youths to challenge themselves, work hard to realise their dreams and be successful and to participate in healthy competition (Butts, Bazamore, and Meroe 2010).

Subtheme 3.2: Consistent programmes not once-off measures

The study findings revealed that recreation programmes can play a profound role in redressing gang violence in the two communities. However, it was noted that in both Bophelong and Nyanga, programmes are often once-off and inconsistent, and have a negative impact on their ability to take youths off the streets and away from gangs and crime. To illustrate this point, Bax, a 15-year-old former gang member, complained about the once-off holiday programmes that are sometimes initiated in Nyanga indicating that there is a need for consistency as most children in the area have nothing to do during school holidays and therefore "start being naughty during school holidays". An informant further explained:

> And sometimes also the community structures that we have are not resourced to ensure that they roll out their programme for sustainability so that we don't do things once off and then you find out that these young people are involved in positive activities for a period of two to three weeks and after that they fall back into their negative lifestyle. (Hlengiwe, Nyanga)

In line with the existing literature, the findings revealed that in marginalised communities, it is important that measures attempt to bring change to the individual and the environment and this can be done if they are consistent and reliable. A lack of well-resourced, reliable, consistent and well-managed recreational facilities means that a significant number of young people have nothing to do for long periods every day, consequently increasing their vulnerability to the negative influences of their peers and strangers (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council Committee on the Science of Adolescence 2011; Ward, Van der Merwe, and Dawes 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings suggest that exclusion from well-resourced recreational facilities has influenced the uptake in youth gangs in Bophelong and Nyanga. There is a lack of programmes that can provide youths with alternatives to being on the streets and from gang memberships. A lack of well-resourced and well-managed recreational facilities means that a significant number of youths are idle every day, consequently rendering them vulnerable to gangs. It also emerged that some unsupervised facilities are being corralled by gangs for illicit activities and this has further exposed young people to gang activities and criminal behaviour. In addition, the few facilities that are available do not meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries. Not only has this contributed to troubled youth behaviour and exposure to gangs, but it has also hindered their development into healthy and fully functioning young people. This is a concern that the community and service providers should be dealing with.

It is recommended that the Department of Sport and Recreation in collaboration with various youth development practitioners from the government, civil society and relevant communities develop and sustain systems for the management of recreational facilities used by marginalised youths. These facilities can include parks, skills-development centres, athletic or sport facilities, fitness centres or gyms, arts and craft centres, community halls, libraries, and cultural facilities. Furthermore, facilities should be well-resourced, professionally managed, structured, supervised, context-specific, directly targeting youths, long-term, attractive and accessible to all community members on equal terms and strengthened in relevant policies. Participation, interdisciplinarity and collaboration should be fundamental principles of engagement so that all relevant role players, stakeholders, and affected youths are aware of their responsibilities in this endeavour. In consultation with the intended beneficiaries, the government and civil society should make it a priority to implement programmes that engage youths who are unskilled, idle and at high risk. These youths should be given socio-economic development programmes together with safe spaces in which they are not exposed to drugs, violence or negative role models. These programmes should also embrace cultural as well as psychological aspects as they both influence their participation.

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