



LIVING WITH THE WOUND

**A Research on Police
Violence, Torture and
Barriers to Justice in Kenyan
Informal Settlements
Report**

By Mukuru Community
Justice Centre

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List of Abbreviations

CJC	Community Justice Center
COVID 19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
EJKs	Extrajudicial Killings
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
LEED	Local Economic and Employment Development
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
MCJC	Mukuru Community Justice Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SARS	Special Anti-Robbery Squad
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
UK	United Kingdom
UNCAT	UN Convention Against Torture
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VOCAL AFRICA	Voices of Community Activists and Leaders of Africa

CHAPTER

1

Background

This research explores the systemic prevalence of police violence and torture in Kenyan informal settlements while revealing the socio-legal barriers that prevent marginalized populations from accessing justice. Among other developments, the promise of police reform in the 2010 Constitution and the Prevention of Torture Act - enacted in 2017 - has yielded limited results for residents of areas such as Mukuru, many of whom continue to face disproportionate instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest, and physical violence. This review examines conceptual definitions of state violence, juxtaposing international definitions with "spaces of exception," in which constitutional law does not apply to the individual. By analyzing patterns of abuse and community understandings of violence and trauma, the review makes the case that such violence is a normalized tool of governance. In addition, it examines overlapping vulnerabilities related to youth, gender, and disability, and starts a conversation about how grassroots documentation and Community Justice Centres can challenge the culture of impunity. Ultimately, the review identifies critical disjunction between institutional reform and viability of safety, and calls for thinking beyond servile governance toward inclusive, trauma-informed justice systems.

1.0. Introduction

The police landscape in Kenya is imbued with a radical tension between democracy and the vestiges of colonial state violence. The 2010 Constitution was a comprehensive and some argue transformative document that sought to subordinate the security apparatus to human rights norms and civilian oversight. Yet, for the residents of informal settlements, these fairly robust legal protections prove of little value to a life of systemic vulnerability.

In essence, policing in informal settlements does not primarily serve as a public safety service, but as means to police populations and assert the institutions of the state over spaces deemed "unruly." This logic extends from a colonial security sector purposely designed to stifle resistance by indigenous populations across the colonial emergency structure of policing, which prioritized the stability of the state over rights¹.

The “wound” left by police violence is thus both physical and structural in nature for those living in informal settlements such as Mukuru, who experience its manifestation in the form of excessive force, extortion, and eerily normal features of extrajudicial killings (EJKs). The recent discovery of bodies in the Kware area in 2024 highlight the lethal consequences of institutional failure, and the “strategic ignorance” that attends to police violence. Once again, these instances are not aberrations, but encased within a wider framework of state violence, which targets the urban poor. Accessing justice in these situations is full of challenges from social fear of reprisal to economic reasons to engage with a legal system.

The purpose of this review is to bring

together current research and literature to better understand the barriers to justice in Kenya. Such an understanding is not limited to a content analysis from a legal standpoint but goes into the sociological and psychological dimensions of “living with the wound.” The review outlines the reasoning behind a community-led response to the barriers to justice, as well as the constraints surrounding bodies of oversight like the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA). A comprehensive approach to accountability is necessitated by the behavior of oversight bodies in the context of Kenya. The review aims to bring synergy to high level policy discussions with the lower level, often muted, lived experiences of survivors and their families

CHAPTER

2

Research Methodology

¹Morris, C... (2025). Security Sector Reform and British Counterinsurgency: The Immediate- and Medium-Term Impacts of Prioritising Security in the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), the Kenyan Emergency (1952-60) and the Sierra Leone Military Intervention (2000-2002). <https://doi.org/10.23889/suthesis.69801>

2.0. Research Methodology

This section provides a comprehensive description of the research methodology employed in the study "Living with the Wound: Community Perceptions of Police Abuse in Mukuru." The research was conceptualized

and designed by the Mukuru Community Justice Centre (MCJC), with the literature review, data analysis, and visualization conducted by Antony Adoyo.

2.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative survey methods with an extensive literature review. The research adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design to capture community perceptions of police abuse at a specific point in time. This approach was chosen to provide both breadth (through the survey of 313 respondents) and depth (through contextual analysis from the literature review) in understanding the complex dynamics of police-community relations in informal settlements.

The research problem was developed by MCJC based on years of community engagement and documentation of police misconduct incidents in Mukuru. The organization identified a critical gap in systematic data on community perceptions of police conduct, which was necessary to inform advocacy efforts and policy interventions. The conceptual framework was grounded in human rights principles and community-based participatory research approaches.

Research Objectives

- To document community perceptions of police conduct in Mukuru informal

settlement.

- To identify patterns of police abuse and the demographic groups most affected.
- To understand barriers to reporting police misconduct and accessing justice.
- To gather community recommendations for improving police-community relations.
- To provide evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice reforms

Study Area

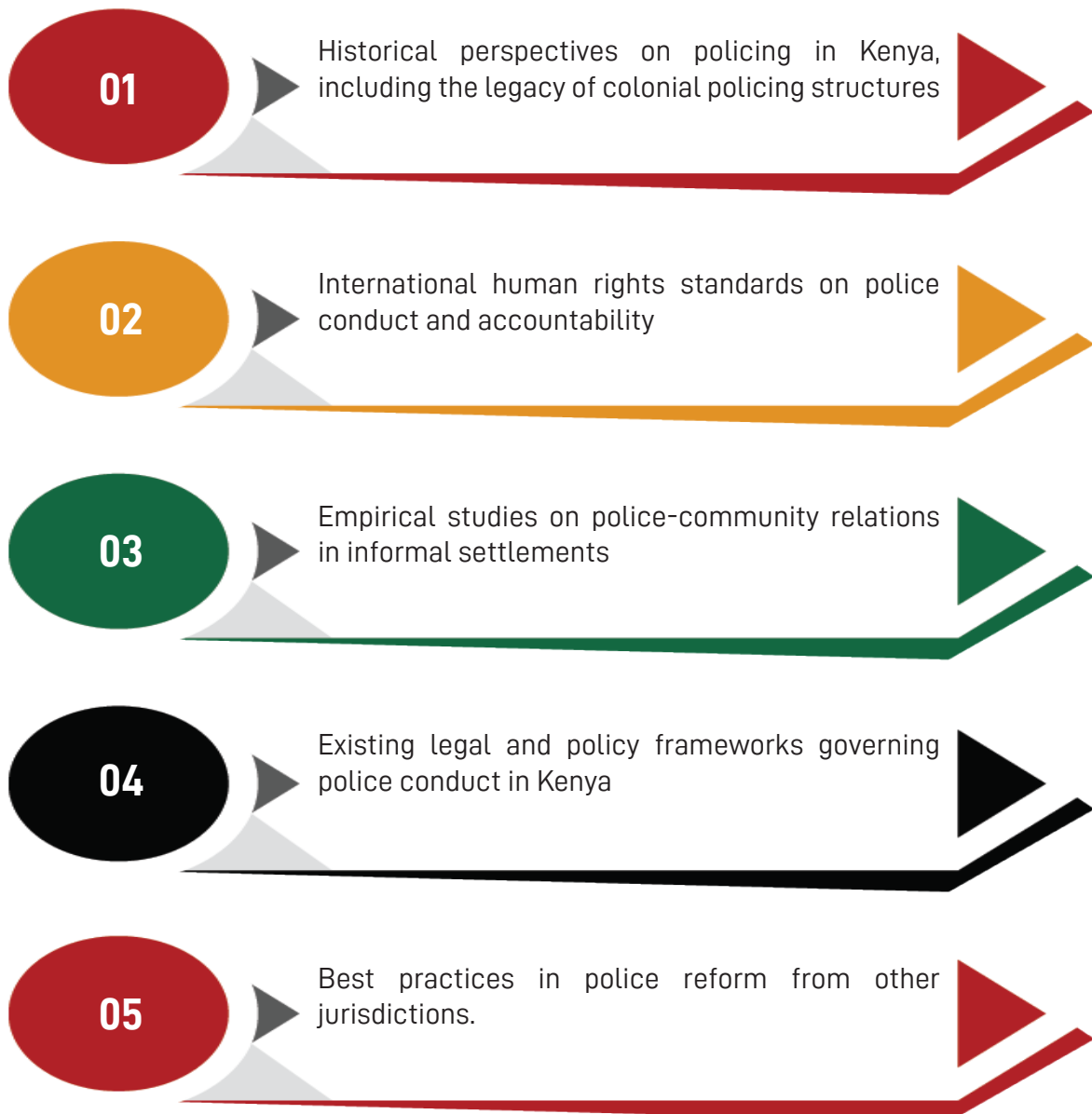
The study was conducted in Mukuru, one of Nairobi's largest informal settlements, comprising five distinct locations: Kwa Njenga, Kwa Ruben, Kware, Pipeline, and Viwandani. Mukuru was selected due to its documented history of police-community tensions and MCJC's established presence and community trust in the area. The settlement is home to an estimated 600,000 residents, predominantly low-income earners working in the industrial areas surrounding the settlement.

2.2. Literature Review

The literature review was conducted by Antony Adoyo and served as a critical foundation for the research design and interpretation of findings. The review examined scholarly articles, government reports, civil society publications, and international human rights documentation on police conduct in Kenya and comparable contexts.

Scope of Literature Review

The literature review covered several thematic areas:



Theoretical Framework

The research was informed by social contract theory, which posits that the legitimacy of law enforcement derives from the consent of the governed. When police abuse occurs with impunity, this social contract is breached, undermining both community trust and

police effectiveness. The study also drew on procedural justice theory, which emphasizes that public compliance and cooperation with police depend significantly on perceptions of fair treatment rather than just outcomes.

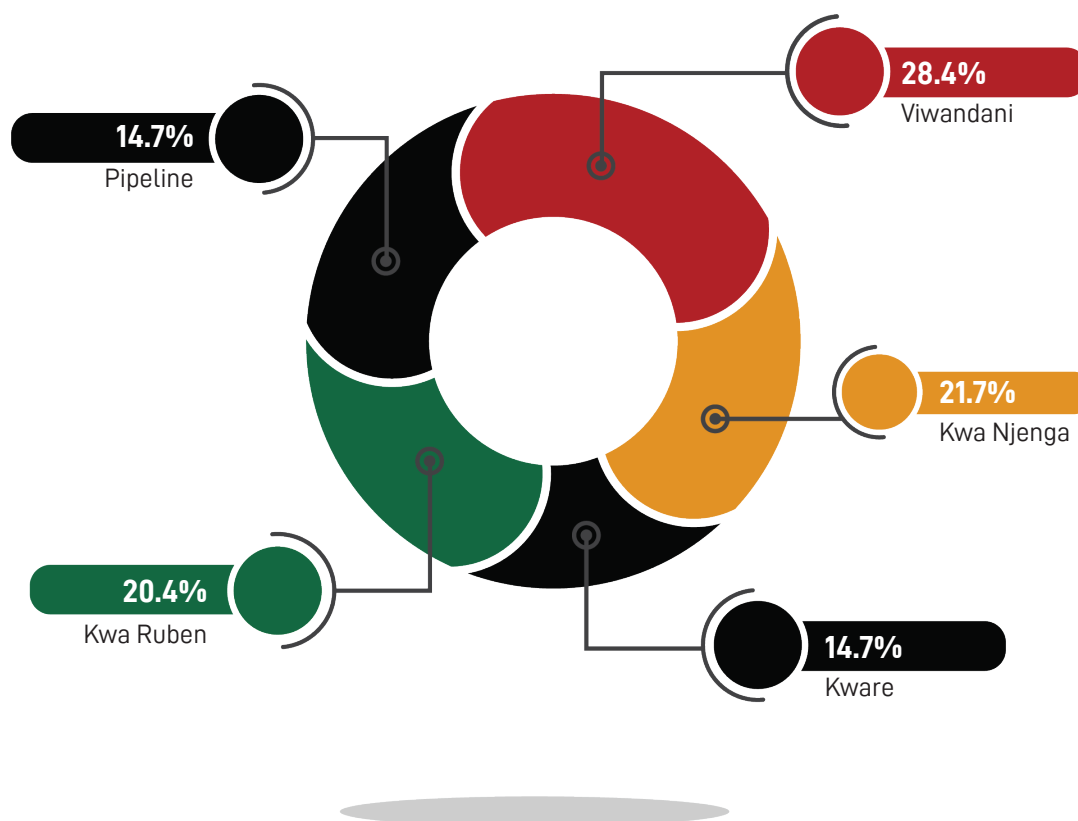
2.3. Survey Methodology

Target Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of adult residents (aged 18 and above) of the five Mukuru locations. A multi-stage sampling approach was employed to ensure representativeness. First, all five locations were included to capture geographic diversity. Second, within each location, purposive sampling was used to select areas with varying levels of police presence and community organization. Third, convenience sampling was employed to recruit respondents who were available and willing to participate during the data collection period.

Sample Size

The final sample comprised 313 respondents. This sample size was determined based on practical considerations of resource availability and the need for statistical power to detect meaningful differences across demographic groups. With 313 respondents, the study achieved a margin of error of approximately 5.5% at a 95% confidence level, which is acceptable for descriptive research of this nature. The sample was distributed across locations as follows: Viwandani (28.4%), Kwa Njenga (21.7%), Kwa Ruben (20.4%), Pipeline (14.7%), and Kware (14.7%).



The questionnaires and tools for data collection, were developed by MCJC through a participatory process involving community members, Human Rights Defenders. The questionnaire design was informed by MCJC's extensive experience documenting police misconduct in the community.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by trained community researchers affiliated with MCJC between January 26 and February 1, 2026. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using structured questionnaires. Interviewers were trained on research ethics, questionnaire administration, and protocols for handling sensitive disclosures. Data collection sessions were scheduled at times and locations convenient for respondents to maximize participation. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes.

Data Collection

Inclusion criteria were:

- Resident of one of the five Mukuru wards.
- Aged 18 years or above.
- Able to provide informed consent.
- willing to participate voluntarily.

Exclusion criteria were:

- Individuals under 18 years of age.
- Non-residents or temporary visitors.
- Individuals unable to provide informed consent due to cognitive impairment.
- Individuals who declined participation.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted by Antony Adoyo using a combination of statistical software and visualization tools. The analysis followed a systematic approach from data cleaning through to interpretation and presentation.

Data Cleaning and Preparation

Raw data was first cleaned to address missing values, inconsistent responses, and data entry errors. Missing data was handled through listwise deletion for incomplete questionnaires. Responses were coded numerically for quantitative analysis. Open-ended responses were transcribed and thematically categorized for qualitative insights.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables, including frequencies and percentages. Cross-tabulations examined relationships between demographic variables and perceptions of police conduct. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and trends rather than testing hypotheses, consistent with the exploratory nature of the research.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical principles governing human subjects research, with particular attention to the sensitive nature of the topic and the vulnerability of the study population.

Informed Consent

All respondents provided informed consent before participation. Interviewers explained the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and measures to protect confidentiality. Consent was documented through verbal agreement, appropriate for a low-literacy context where written consent might create barriers to participation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Respondent anonymity was protected by not collecting identifying information beyond demographic characteristics. Data was stored securely with access limited to the research team. Findings are reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents. Location-level data is presented in a manner that does not compromise the anonymity of respondents from smaller locations.

Protection from Harm

Given the sensitive nature of questions about police misconduct, interviewers were trained to recognize signs of distress and provide appropriate support. Referral information for legal aid and counseling services was available for respondents who disclosed traumatic experiences. Data collection was scheduled at safe locations and times to minimize any risk to respondents or interviewers.

CHAPTER

3

Literature Review

3.1. Conceptualizing Police Violence and Torture in Legal and Academic Discourse

To really get some insight into the continuance of police abuse in Kenya, it is important that we deconstruct, with precision, the terms we use to define state sanctioned harm. In both academic and legal discourse, the boundaries between abuse, torture, or brutality, and extrajudicial killings are often muddled by the overlap of violation in practice. But, in terms of issue of accountability, distinguishing between the terms is vital, plus identifying the right and appropriate legal remedial standards.

3.2. Definitions of Torture, Brutality, and Extrajudicial Killings

Torture, as framed in international law through the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), defines torture as an act carried out by a public official by which severe pain or suffering of either a physical or mental nature is intentionally inflicted on a person for a purpose, such as obtaining from that person or a third person information or a confession, punishment, intimidation, or coercion. In the Kenyan case, the Prevention of Torture Act (2017) domesticates those standards but, at the same time, the lived experience in informal settlements is, often, lower levels of abuse, yet, more frequent abuse that do not rise to the level of systemic torture in a courtroom but function in a similar way as torture, in terms of psychological effects.

²DANBABA, E. M., TEGBE, E., & Ojo, M. O. D... (2025). POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST YOUTH IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA. International Journal of Humanities, Literature and Art Research. <https://doi.org/10.70382/mejhlar.v7i6.026>

Police brutality is a broader term often used to define excessive force, which is the use of a force greater than is required for lawful objectives. Each word has implications; "brutality" may convey excess at the individual level or a lack of police discipline, while the choice of the term "police violence" implies a systemic and institutionalized tool used to maintain social hierarchies. This distinction is important because it shifts the focus from "bad apples" within police departments to the structural incentives that either encourage or tolerate violent behavior².

Extrajudicial killings (EJKs) are the most extreme form of police violence, which is the intentional killing of a person by a law enforcement official without any judicial proceeding. In many of the informal settlements, the EJK's are contextualized by the state as "crime control" measures against "armed criminals," a state narrative that legitimizes denying individuals' due process. This "shoot-to-kill" culture is a sociological phenomenon in which the police assume the role of judge, jury, and executioner, in a context of perceived ineffectualness of the formal judiciary, often in areas that are experiencing rising crime rates.

3.3. International and National Legal Frameworks for Prevention

Kenya is a party to various international instruments prohibiting torture and extra-judicial killings, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Domestically, Article 25 of the 2010 Constitution establishes the right to freedom from torture and to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as a non-derogable right - one that cannot be restricted even during a state of emergency. This bedrock legal foundation is further supported by the National Police Service Act and the IPOA Act, both of which were intended to create a culture of professionalism and accountability.

The Prevention of Torture Act (2017) was a milestone in legislation, providing a specific legal basis for the prosecution of torturers in state institutions, expanding definitions of torture to include mental suffering, and providing severe penalties for perpetrators of torture. The Act also provides for protections for the victims and witnesses of torture, taking cognizance of the fact that the key barrier to reporting was the fear of the state. The legal frameworks developed are meant to create congruity in Kenyan policing with the dictates of global human rights and rule of law standards.

Practical Efficacy of Existing Legal Frameworks

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned strong legal framework, there exists a significant "implementation gap." The practical efficacy of such laws is often tempered by the lack of political commitment, limited capacity for oversight organizations, and deep culture of silence in the Police Service. For residents of informal settlements, the law is often a distant concept that provides little protection from the immediacy of the "sweeps" and "shake-downs."

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) has had some success in investigating individual high-profile cases of police abuse; however, it has faced some notable challenges to obtaining a conviction once in the hands of the courts. The high burden of proof required in a criminal defence, compounded by the police being the custodians of forensic evidence and the scene of the crime, leads to cases being dismissed all together. The "gold standard" of prosecution is often challenged by other problems, such as obtaining accurate fact-finding when the victims of the prosecution are drawn from marginalized groups which are treated as uncredible by the defense³. In the end, the legal protections provided in the 2017 Act do not seem to have measurably improved safety for the residents of Mukuru or similar settlements.

³Combs, N. A... (2017). Deconstructing the Epistemic Challenges to Mass Atrocity Prosecutions. Faculty publications. <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1888>

3.4. Patterns and Prevalence of Police Abuse in Informal Settlements

The prevalence of police abuse in Kenya is not ubiquitous; it is geographically and socially constrained to specific “zones of exclusion.” The zones of exclusion are generally informal settlements marked by higher populations sizes; low formal infrastructure (such as roads, schools, or clinics); and economic precarity, serve as the main sites of police abuse and misconduct.

Common Forms of Abuse and Misconduct Reported

The forms of abuse reported by residents are multiple and often inextricable. The most common interaction, though, is likely the arbitrary arrest of individuals, usually as the pretense for extortion. In this regard, young men are apprehended with no clear, formal charges for evidence of a specific crime, and then, as a result of their arbitrary arrest, are often forced to pay “bribes” in exchange for their liberty. This only deepens the economic cycle of police abuse where the legal arena becomes transformed into a predator marketplace for the poor.

Physical violence, occurring from beatings with blunt instruments to the deployment of tear gas within residential spaces, is routinely utilized during “security operations.” In more egregious incidents, sexualized violence is utilized as an intimidation mechanism, particularly against women who are most often targeted during night raids or while in police cells⁴. Tortured confessions still remain a standard issue, where physical pain is inflicted to elicit a confession from the accused of something he may not have committed, thus effectively bypassing the requirement for an in-depth investigation⁵.

Spatiotemporal Patterns and Geographical Areas of Concentration

Abuse often follows common spatiotemporal patterns. Many operations take place under the cover of night during “curfews” or “sweeping” operations where the absence of street lights and residences determined by settlement locations allow for “invisible” acts of abuse. The spatial location of the slum, with narrow alleyways and no escape routes, allows police to “herd” residents into compact groupings, facilitating mass arrests without public scrutiny.

Geographically, that violence is concentrated where there are higher levels of “securitized governance.” These settlements are those in which the state, at its most basic level, regards the population as having fundamental suspicion, and therefore treats the entire community as criminal. The discovery of the bodies from Kware in 2024 illustrated how these sorts of “dumping grounds” next to informal settlements were used to dispose of the victims of extra-judicial killings, and demonstrated the geography of state-led lethality.

Factors Contributing to the durability of systemic abuse

There are multiple factors which perpetuate this environment of impunity. The first is the “criminal” label put on the urban poor; applying the terms of “thug”, or “terrorist” diminishes the legitimacy of the grievances from the residents, and ultimately allows the state to justify the use of lethal force. This discourse is frequently internalized by the broader public; therefore,

⁴Hardt, S., Stöckl, H., Wamoyi, J., & Ranganathan, M... (2022). Sexual Harassment in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Qualitative Systematic Review. *Trauma Violence & Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221127255>

⁵DANBABA, E. M., TEGBE, E., & Ojo, M. O. D... (2025). POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST YOUTH IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA. *International Journal of Humanities, Literature and Art Research*. <https://doi.org/10.70382/mejhlav7i6.026>

⁶Morris, C... (2025). Security Sector Reform and British Counterinsurgency: The Immediate- and Medium-Term Impacts of Prioritising Security in the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), the Kenyan Emergency (1952-60) and the Sierra Leone Military Intervention (2000-2002). <https://doi.org/10.23889/suthesis.69801>

there are few protests made when “suspected criminals” are ultimately killed by the police.

The second factor is the internal disciplinary mechanisms of the National Police Service which is both opaque and preserves its own agency. The “blue wall of silence” prevents officers who even witness abuse from reporting their colleagues engaging in abusive behavior. The third factor is that due to inadequate levels of training, officers rely on colonial methods of intimidation and force because of a lack of training in modern, human right based policing methods. The final factor is that in security sector reform, the priority is to prioritize short term stability over long term democratic governance, which also reinforces structures that inhibit long term accountability⁶.

3.5. Community Perceptions and Trust in Law Enforcement

The relationship between police and community members in informal settlements is premised on a mistrust that has become ingrained from years of exposure to negative encounters. The loss of trust has implications for public safety, as well as the effectiveness of any community policing strategies.

Perceptions of Police as Allies vs Threats

In several areas of Nairobi, the public does not view the police as a source of protection but as a leading cause of insecurity. Residents routinely share they feel more comfortable with local informal security organizations than with uniformed officers. The police are described as “predators”: they show up in the settlement to extract wealth or, at worst, kill, rather than to facilitate crime reduction. This perspective of police vulnerability is supported by research that finds residents are usually more frightened of arrest or police harassment than they are of civilian crime⁷.

While there are cases that lead individuals to seek out police intervention with respect to emergency situations, interactions between residents and police officers are accompanied by a level of anxiety. The “relational perspective” posits that trust is not a static condition but is built or undone via every interaction of daily life. In low-income urban settlement contexts like Kaptembwo and Karagita, studies show that while some type of marginal trust can be developed through positive engagements, it can be dissipated in one failed act⁸.

Historical Events and Their Impact on Community Attitudes

A community’s collective memory shapes attitude and behavior. High-profile instances of violence leave “wounds” on communal memories. In 2016, the murder of human rights lawyer Willie Kimani, his client, and their taxi driver by police officers communicated that even the well connected, with lawyers and social capital, are not safe. In informal settlements, police mechanisms for the forced evictions of residents in 2021 from Mukuru, with police officers representing the most excessive use of force, cemented the view that the state sees its residents as disposable.

The Kware incident in 2024 has now become a current reference or “breaking point,” an indication of the state’s ultimate failure to protect its citizens. Such milestones or historical events create a “feedback loop of distrust,” whereby communities cannot cooperate because of historical trauma. When communities observe that perpetrators have not faced consequences,

⁷Mwanza, M. M... (2025). Barriers to effective community policing: A case study of Kizingitini in Lamu County, Kenya. African Quarterly Social Science Review. <https://doi.org/10.51867/aqssr.2.4.42>

⁸Mutahi, P., Höglund, K., & Elfversson, E... (2024). Policing and Citizen Trust in Kenya: How Community Policing Shapes Local Trust-Building and Collaboration. African Affairs. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adae018>

this diminishes a community's willingness to engage with the formal justice system.

The Role of Perception in Cooperation and Public Safety

A lack of trust creates challenges for police. When the police are viewed as a threat, residents are not likely to report crimes, give witness testimony, or join community policing committees. As noted earlier, the "silence" is not disinterest, but a rational way to survive in a high-risk environment⁹.

Without community cooperation, police are forced to rely more on "intelligence led" operations that too often involve coercive processes and practices. This is further distancing officers from individuals and communities. The police and other enforcers will create a cycle, using more force to "assert control" as they would say because they do not have compliance from the residents. Additionally, when there is not a trusted formal justice system in place, this creates conditions for "mob justice", or the reliance informal systems that may, or may not, follow the standards of human rights. In the end, these movements undermine the rule of law.

3.6. Lived Experiences and The Multidimensional Impacts of Violence

The ramifications of the incidents of violence perpetrated by police far extend beyond the direct, physical injury. The violence impacts psychological destabilization, economic insecurity, and social cohesion at the level of the entire community as a whole.

Perceptions of Police as Allies vs Threats

For individuals, the psychological effects of policing violence include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic anxiety, and depression. "Habituation to trauma" implies although the community may lower its acute alarm response to police violence, the long-term mental health effects are profound and frequently untreated¹⁰. The trauma is both individual and communal, affecting the nature of familial interactions and the lens of authority through which children view the world around them.

Economically, a single police encounter can lead to destruction. The cost of "bail," a euphemism for an informal bribe; the lost wages from being locked up; and the medical costs of having injuries treated can plunge them into abject poverty. In Mukuru, many, who live paycheck to paycheck, might weigh the cost of taking time off to attend court or go to the police station with the "opportunity cost" of restoring justice to themselves, a cost too high for many in the community. Socially, victims of police violence can experience ostracization, particularly if labeled a "criminal" by the police, creating isolation in their own communities¹¹.

Qualitative Documentation in Contextualizing Lived Reality

Quantitative data is often unable to capture the "texture" of the violence. Although stats can show the number of EJK in a given timeframe, it cannot reveal the "living with the wound" aspect of violence, what a mother feels after a son was taken or how a young man who was arrested and falsely accused at police discretion and made to testify, becomes impaired the rest of his life. Qualitative research generates the "thick description" necessary to contextualize understanding behind the mechanisms of normalization and resistance.

⁹Mwanza, M. M... (2025). Barriers to effective community policing: A case study of Kizingitini in Lamu County, Kenya. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*. <https://doi.org/10.51867/aqssr.2.4.42>

¹⁰Clemente-Suárez, V. J., Martínez-González, M. B., Benítez-Agudelo, J. C., Navarro-Jiménez, E., Beltrán-Velasco, A. I., Ruisoto, P., Arroyo, E. D., Laborde-Cárdenas, C. C., & Tornero-Aguilera, J. F... (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Disorders. *A Critical Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph181910041>

¹¹Hardt, S., Stöckl, H., Wamoyi, J., & Ranganathan, M... (2022). Sexual Harassment in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Qualitative Systematic Review. *Trauma Violence & Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221127255>

Documentation is a form of resistance. Mukuru and other communities generating records of what happened are a means of claiming their right to be heard and their right to justice. "Counter-documentation" is an essential method of documenting evidence for human rights work, providing the necessary documentation for institutional advocacy, and possibly supporting survivors in pursuing reparations.

3.7. Targeting and Vulnerability in Marginalized Populations

Although police violence can happen to anyone at any time, targeting can freely unfold against certain marginalized groups within informal settlements. Targeting is compounded by systemic racism or bias, economic status, and geographic location.

Demographics of Most Frequently Targeted Groups

Young men between the ages of 18 and 30 are the most frequent target. There is a "gendered suspicion," whereby the combination of youth and poverty equals criminality to the state¹². Young men, particularly, are stopped and searched based on their appearance, clothing, or simply because they "look like trouble" at a certain time and place.

This group is considered a "security threat" that needs to be managed through intimidation. As the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and other similar movements in Kenya have made evident, urban youth are the overwhelming victims of "proactive" policing strategies that privilege suppression rather than protection. This selective targeting has a generational impact, as it alienates a whole generation from the state and its institutions.

Systemic Drivers of Vulnerability in Informal Settlements

Furthermore, vulnerability is highly contingent on the structural characteristics of the settlements. For many residents that lack formal legal status, they are "legally invisible" and have fewer available resources to contest an arrest. Additionally, without basic infrastructure like lighting and paved roads, these settlements are "perfect" for police operations because they do not attract public and media attention.

Moreover, the "political economy of justice" indicates that those with the least amount of money have the least amount of protection. In fact, in a system where (on occasion) freedom can be "bought," as one would expect, the inability to pay a bribe puts the poor at increased risk of being detained or experiencing worse treatment. This disconnect is also referred to as a "justice gap," where the law is a luxury good, as it is only accessible to those who can afford it.

Intersectionality of Age, Gender, and Disability in Experiences of Abuse

An intersectional lens identifies even more aspects of vulnerability. Young men, while they are the main targets of force (often lethal), women experience police violence in gendered ways as, for example, sexual harassment, or "secondary victimization" when they attempt to seek justice for their sons, husbands or relatives¹³. Additionally, because women are more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence in informal settlements, their experience with police when they report such violence is often met with dismissiveness or as further violence¹⁴.

People with disabilities are also an overlooked group. People with disabilities may not be able

¹²DANBABA, E. M., TEGBE, E., & Ojo, M. O. D... (2025). POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST YOUTH IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA. *International Journal of Humanities, Literature and Art Research*. <https://doi.org/10.70382/mejhar.v7i6.026>

¹³Ringwald, B., Tolhurst, R., Taegtmeyer, M., Digolo, L., Gichuna, G., Githo, M. M., Phillips-Howard, P. A., Otiso, L., & Giorgi, E... (2022). Intra-Urban Variation of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Men in Kenya: Evidence from the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605221120893>

¹⁴Hardt, S., Stöckl, H., Wamoyi, J., & Ranganathan, M... (2022). Sexual Harassment in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Qualitative Systematic Review. *Trauma Violence & Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221127255>

to comply with police orders, such as “run” or “lie down” as officers expect due to physical or cognitive conditions, leading to an escalation of force, with officers interpreting the individual's actions as non-compliance or resistance. Children and the elderly in informal settlements are often captured in “sweeps” and experience physical and psychological effects, through tear gas and raids. Recognizing intersectional nuances will be necessary in creating safety and justice interventions that are inclusive.

When the police are both the perpetrators and the key investigators, reporting is a “suicide mission” for many people. This type of environment requires a rethinking of the model of justice and who is prioritized in models of justice within Kenya's informal settlements, toward models that prioritize survivor safety and support accounts that are made by the community.

3.8. Structural and Social Barriers to Accessing Justice

For residents of Kenyan informal settlements, the journey to justice is marred by a deep chasm between constitutional protections that exist on paper and the legal exclusions that exist in fact. In Mukuru, for instance, the road to accountability for police violence is sharply blocked by a range of structural barriers and social pressures that effectively shield policing from scrutiny. These structures are not just bureaucratic failures; they are grounded in the socio-economic conditions of urban poverty.

Fear of Retaliation and the Silencing of Victims

Fear of retaliation is the primary barrier to legal recourse for victims of police violence. In contexts where police are all-seeing and essentially unaccountable, the act of reporting a crime by an officer is regarded as a high-risk act that is unlikely to yield results. Research on surveillance threats identifies that targeted civilians have a constant feeling of imminent harm in their interactions with police and that feeling ultimately shapes their willingness to engage with formal justice processes¹⁵.

The fear of retaliation is justified, because police are often the facilitators of the very system that is intended to investigate them. When a victim attempts to report an incident at a local police station, they are often met by the perpetrator's co-workers or subordinates. This situational proximity can lead to immediate intimidation, including verbal threats or even the possibility of the victim being charged with a counter-offense. In many cases, the “surveillance threat” is not limited to the victim, but can extend to the victim's family or social network, thereby creating a collective silence that reinforces the concept of impunity.

Fear of Retaliation and the Silencing of Victims

Barriers to justice are further complicated by the social stigma of victims of police violence. In the dominant state narrative, young black men living in informal settlements are reflexively regarded as “criminal elements” or “thugs.” This increases their suffering and allows for the public legitimization of and rationalization behind the use of force. When a person is killed or tortured by the police, the onus is often placed on the family to prove the deceased was innocent, and not the onus on the state to prove the use of force was justified.

Criminalization has serious social repercussions; if the victim is perceived to be connected to “criminality,” their family may be ostracized. Research in other post-conflict or violence-ridden contexts reveals that communities prefer to establish protective masculine norms that reinforce collective security above individual rights, sometimes even sanctioning social

¹⁵Billies, M... (2013). Producing Bodies, Knowledge, and Community in Everyday Civilian Struggle Over Surveillance. CUNY Academic Works (City University of New York). https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1797

action against those who threaten the order¹⁶. In Kenyan settlements, this manifests as a lack of willingness to support a neighbor's pursuit of justice, as it could further invite police scrutiny to the community.

Institutional Inaction and Gaps in Oversight Bodies

The institutional framework established to provide oversight, most especially the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) is mired in significant operational constraints that curtail its efficacy. Even though IPOA was established to help ameliorate the nexus between police misconduct and accountability, its reliance on police cooperation to gather evidence is a serious vulnerability. In the "Peacebuilding Puzzle" dimension observed in transitional societies, "institutional engineering" often fails when local elites and established bureaucracies capture the very institutions to ensure order¹⁷.

In addition, the spatial and economic distance between informal settlements and oversight bodies is a political barrier. For an individual from Mukuru, the direct cost of transport, a day's loss of wages, and time-consuming justice means that having access to the formal justice system is a "luxury good." This is similar to patterns discovered in other contexts where the spatially conceived delivery mechanisms of support services failed to take into account the realities of the most marginalized populations¹⁸. Without localized, accessible, well-financed, and multiple forms of accountability, institutional accountability will only register as an abstract concept to people who live precariously.

3.9. The Normalization of Violence and Its Long-term Implications

In many informal settlements in Kenya, police violence has become commonplace, transcending into an expectation of life in such settlements. The process of normalization produces consequences not only for the psychological effects it has on residents but also for the social bonding of the informal community.

Mechanisms of Habituation to Repeated Police Violence.

Habituation occurs when a community experiences a process of trauma over prolonged and chronic exposure. The malign effects of policing, through arbitrary arrests, "sweeps", and violence culminate in an adaptive state where the community is diminished in its "alarm response." Diminished alarm is not simply acceptance, but rather an adaptive strategy for survival amid risk. The "pains of warehouse living", and constant surveillance, are similar to carceral spaces or semi-carceral spaces, whereby people have essentially adapted their behavior as a strategy to manage risk and avoid conflict, even at the expense of their rights¹⁹.

In Mukuru, habituation is evident through the physical movements residents adopt, deliberately avoiding certain roads and areas at night, or carrying "bribe money" routinely. This embodied experience of everyday war reinforces a political order in which the state's monopoly on violence is occurring not to provide security, but to reinforce its destabilizing presence in order to deter social order²⁰.

¹⁶Lindsey, S... (2019). Women's Security After War: Protection and Punishment in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. <https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-aqdm-7511>

¹⁷Barma, N. H... (2016). The Peacebuilding Puzzle. Cambridge University Press eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316718513>

¹⁸Lechlech, L... (2020). Post-Rape Care and Justice in South Africa: Improving Support Services for Survivors of Sexual Violence... Scholars' Bank (University of Oregon). <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/25658>

¹⁹McKendy, L... (2018). The Pains of Jail Imprisonment: Experiences at The Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre. <https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2018-12664>

²⁰Lake, M... (2022). Policing Insecurity. American Political Science Review. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055421001441>

Cultural and Social Acceptance of Extrajudicial Actions.

The normalization of violence is compounded by some members of society, who argue that “tough policing” is required under the extreme conditions of high crime rates. Repeated violence is sometimes described as an emergence of “instant justice”, in the absences of an effective and trusted justice system of law enforcement. This tolerance is linked to the ways that hegemonic state discourses reductively silence the history of political and social exclusion, framing the situation of violence, as simply a matter of risk, and preemptive action²¹.

This acceptance produces a splintered community response. On the one hand, some residents resist police abuse; on the other, those who for whatever reason do not resist may stay silent or even tacitly accept the aggressive tactics if it seems like it will correspondingly enhance their immediate safety. This reality creates another barrier to uniting a community response to systemic abuse.

Long-Term Effects of Normalization Violence on Community Cohesion and Healing

In the long-run, the normalization of violence undermines the social contract. When the perception of the state is as a predator instead of protector, community solidarity suffers. Observing or experiencing violence with no recourse to redress results in collective trauma which is almost never treated.

Research on post-conflict reconciliation has indicated that the “wound” remains present in the community without official acknowledgment and guarantees of non-repetition, which inhibits communal healing and rebuilding²². In informal settlements, the absence of such standards means that subsequent generations have also inherited the trauma, which perpetuates the cycle of violence and distrust.

3.10. Coping Mechanisms and Community-Led Responses

Despite significant barriers to justice, residents of informal settlements have developed impressive coping mechanisms and community-led initiatives to document abuses and provide support for survivors.

Informal Systems of Justice and Social Support

In the void created by an untrustworthy state legal system, informal systems often emerge. These may include “Nyumba Kumi” (ten homes) systems, elders council, or local social groups to mediate a degree of support and mediation. Although these systems are not always adequate to deal with police torture cases, they provide an indispensable safety net for the social and economic outcomes of abuse.

The “social and solidarity economy” (SSE) model, used in refugee and marginalized contexts, provides a framework to consider how local entities respond to or fill the void of public systems that have failed²³. In the Kenyan settlement context, this occurs as community-based organizations that provide emergency funds for medical treatment or legal fees for individuals sought by police violence.

²¹Pettinger, T... (2020). The subjugated knowledge of Prevent: UK terrorism pre-emption and the disruptive history of Northern Ireland. Warwick Research Archive Portal (University of Warwick). <https://openalex.org/W3120819942>

²²Moffett, L... (2017). Transitional justice and reparations: Remediating the past? Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781955314.00028>

²³OECD. (2023). The social and solidarity economy as a partner along the refugee journey. OECD local economic and employment development (LEED) working papers. <https://doi.org/10.1787/174514e3-en>

Social/Community Justice Centres in Advocacy

The most significant advancement in the fight for accountability has been the emergence of Community Justice Centres (CJsCs), such as the Mukuru Community Justice Centre (MCJC). With CJsCs, we can observe a paradigm shift toward “bottom-up” human rights documentation and reporting as they train residents how to document occurrences of police violence. CJsCs provide an essential source of counter-evidence to the state narrative.

The CJsCs' act of counter-documentation is a form of resistance that reclaims the narrative of the settlement from one of predisposed criminality to that of rights-bearing citizens. This process resonates with how civilians in other hyper-surveillance urban spaces use their engagement with police to claim power and build critical knowledge²⁴.

Building Collective Resilience

Building collective resilience means building networks of solidarity to resist and respond to state violence. These networks include psychological support groups, public forums to share testimony, and localized early-warning systems to warn residents about impending police “sweeps.”

The strategies discussed in this section are fundamental to disrupting the “culture of silence.” CJsCs and other grassroots organizations enable the community to move from the suffering of the individual to the suffering of the group. This resilience is about thriving, not just surviving, and fighting for a “modern political order” that meets the needs and rights of the urban poor²⁵.

3.11. Evaluative Review of Interventions and Accountability Solutions

An evaluative review of interventions aimed at preventing police violence indicates many half-measures and failures. Though legal reform has occurred, the application of that reform has been varied in our translating into safety improvements for the populace living in informal settlements.

The Effectiveness of Legal Reform and Oversight Mechanism

The most recent reform to the law took place in 2017, with the Prevention of Torture Act, which gives a useful legal structure to prosecute offenders. However, the changes in personnel reform does not seem to engender changes in the performance of law enforcement officers within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), at least as suggested in the research. While personnel recruitment and compensation elements of reform have occurred, there are still gaps in policy language regarding welfare benefits and deployments, all of which play a role in officer morale and performance²⁶.

The so-called “Peelian Principles” of policing by consent remain a distant ideal in regards to policing as it impacts the urban informal settlements of Kenya. While reform measures often typically strengthen the coercive ability of the state, promptly increasing accountability seems to come later, which may only reinforce the behaviours of abuse that the reforms seek to dislodge in the first instance²⁷.

²⁴Billies, M... (2013). Producing Bodies, Knowledge, and Community in Everyday Civilian Struggle Over Surveillance. CUNY Academic Works (City University of New York). https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1797

²⁵Barma, N. H... (2016). The Peacebuilding Puzzle: Political Order in Post-Conflict States. Calhoun: The Naval Postgraduate School Institutional Archive (Naval Postgraduate School). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316718513>

²⁶Ong'ale, M. A., Mwangi, J., & Sirera, M. A... (2025). Influence of personnel reforms on performance in law enforcement among directorate of criminal investigations officers in Kenya. African Journal of Empirical Research. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.6.2.49>

²⁷Lake, M... (2022). Policing Insecurity. American Political Science Review. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055421001441>

Community Engagement and Safety Improvement Models

Models of community engagement that center member voices have been the most effective, where a measure of safety is achieved. Approaches that have situated "Nyumba Kumi" leaders and civil society staff in these roles may ameliorate the trust gap. However, for these processes to work, they must go beyond "ticking boxes," and engage with the power relationships between the police and the community²⁸.

The success of community engagement processes arises from the perceived legitimacy of the interventions by those living in informal settlements. Justifying authority, even in goodwill, can fail, especially with the state engaging in reconciliation or safety models, all the while potentially further victimizing the group that is the subject of safety models²⁹. Calls for community-police forums in Kenya often highlight that the community is used for intelligence purposes rather than in collaborative processes.

Holistic Support Systems: Legal Aid and Psychosocial Care

Though reflective of the justice reforms, their efficacy must not just include access to legal aid, but also offer and integrate psychosocial care for survivors. Experiences of survivor support-through services such as, "Thuthuzela Care Centres", informs us that appropriate centres for care, support, and counseling are imperative for legal aid- provision contexts³⁰. Within Kenya and the context of urban informal settlements, there was no integrated service to support survivors, and thus survivors will be forced to access informal systems, often at great cost, both personally and financially³¹.

Reparations serve an important function in an integrated answer. Collective reparations that address the lack of services and infrastructure within informal settlements can help offset historical and structural marginalization that aids police abuse, not just individual reparations³¹. This is a genuine sign of commitment by the state to "build back better" and combat the root issues of urban inequality³².

3.12. Identification of Research Gaps in Contemporary Literature

Although there is a growing body of literature on police violence in Kenya, there remain significant gaps, especially regarding the lived experiences of people in informal settlements.

Under-researched Aspects of Police Violence in Kenya

A significant gap is that there has yet to be any empirical research into "alternatives to coercion." Existing research tends to focus on documenting the prevalence of abuse, but there has been a scarcity of evaluation of demonstrated interventions that are specifically designed to reduce the use of force in mental health crises or other vulnerable exchanges³³. The impact of police violence on certain marginalized groups (like refugees, immigrants or foreigners) is also under-documented, despite the evidence of their capacity for experiencing greater vulnerability^{34 35}.

²⁸Johnson, A. K. & Sloth-Nielsen, J... (2020). Safeguarding Children in the Developing World—Beyond Intra-Organisational Policy and Self-Regulation. Social Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9060098>

²⁹Graydon, C. J... (2016). Valuing women in Timor Leste: the need to address domestic violence by reforming customary law approaches while improving state justice. Minerva Access (University of Melbourne). <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/112628>

³⁰Lechlech, L... (2020). Post-Rape Care and Justice in South Africa: Improving Support Services for Survivors of Sexual Violence... Scholars' Bank (University of Oregon). <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/25658>

³¹Moffett, L... (2017). Transitional justice and reparations: Remediating the past?. Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781955314.00028>

³²Rohwerder, B... (2020). Social Impacts and Responses Related to COVID-19 in Low- and Middle-income Countries. OpenDocs (Institute of Development Studies). <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15625>

³³Gooding, P... (2021). Mind the Gap: Researching 'Alternatives to Coercion' in Mental Health Care. Cambridge University Press eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108979016.021>

³⁴Hassan, R., Sanders, T., Gichuna, S., Campbell, R., Mutonyi, M., & Mwangi, P... (2021). Informal settlements, Covid-19 and sex workers in Kenya. Urban Studies. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211044628>

³⁵Pincock, K... (2020). UNHCR and LGBTI refugees in Kenya: the limits of 'protection'. Disasters. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12447>

Limitations in Prioritizing Survivor Voices and Lived Experiences

Academia often privileges legal and institutional analysis over the "subjective" experience of punishment and abuse. Future studies will require more qualitative research to explore the "pains" of police engagement, from the survivor's perspective³⁶. We will need to look into issues like how the "surveillance threat" re-arranges the lived experience and psychological landscapes of everyday residents in ways that formalized legal documentation would not be able to reflect³⁷.

Knowledge Gaps Regarding Justice Barriers in Specific Settlements

Finally, we also lack data which views each settlement as individual and specifically accounts for the geographic and social contexts that shape the distinct character of an area (and the barriers to justice therein). While Mukuru has been highlighted as an area of advocacy, other settlements may have unique barriers to justice based on factors such as proximity to power, their internal social system, or simply the history of engagement with the state. Future studies should aim for a more granular critical understanding of how "spaces of exception" are produced and maintained, across the urban landscape.

3.13. Conclusion

The "wound" of police violence within Kenyan informal settlements is a multi-faceted occurrence that is the product of intersectional poverty, historical marginalization and state failure. Grappling with the issues this review has conceptualized, the barriers to justice are about more than simply the absence of law, but are instead structural and social issues that produce a "loop of impunity" that silences victims and normalizes abuse.

The occurrence of discovered corpses in the Kware dumpsite in 2024 is a somber manifestation of the effects of systemic failure. It confirms that instead of relying on institutional engineering from upper levels, a new method of using the urban poor's own lived experiences and safety must take precedence. True justice in Mukuru, or similar settlements, is not only to include legal remedies, but it requires a complete rethinking of the relationship between the state and its most vulnerable citizens, when the police is no longer a terror but a guarantee of rights. The work of Community Justice Centres provides a glimmer of hope here, showing that even the most disenfranchised and marginalized humans can begin to heal the wound and demand the justice they deserve through documentation, collaborations, and resilience. The state and international communities must move beyond the rhetoric and invest in structural change and necessarily holistic support systems to make that justice a possibility.

McKendy, L... (2018). The Pains of Jail Imprisonment: Experiences at The Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre. <https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2018-12664>

Billies, M... (2013). Producing Bodies, Knowledge, and Community in Everyday Civilian Struggle Over Surveillance. CUNY Academic Works (City University of New York). https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1797

CHAPTER

4

Survey Findings

4.1. Key Findings

With 313 total respondents, the data reveals a crisis of confidence in law enforcement institutions. The gender distribution (67.1% male, 29.7% female) reflects the reality that young men bear the disproportionate burden of police interactions in informal settlements.

The finding that 37.4% of respondents hold a "Very Negative" view of police, combined with 30.4% reporting that trust has worsened over time, indicates a deteriorating relationship that demands urgent intervention. The statistic that 55.6% have had or know someone who has had a negative experience with police suggests that police misconduct is not an isolated phenomenon but a systemic issue affecting the majority of the community.

Most concerning is that 60.1% of respondents would not report police abuse, creating a culture of silence that perpetuates impunity. The overwhelming consensus (83.4%) that young men are targeted points to profiling practices that require immediate policy attention.

4.2. Demographic Analysis

Gender Analysis

Gender Distribution

Male Female Prefer not to say

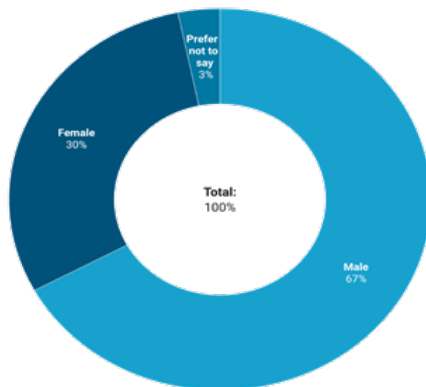


Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: Primary Data collected by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The gender distribution data (67.1% male, 29.7% female, 3.2% prefer not to say) reflects both the demographic composition of Mukuru and the gendered nature of police interactions. The predominance of male respondents aligns with the finding that young men are perceived as the primary targets of police attention. This gender imbalance in police encounters warrants gender-sensitive approaches to police reform and community engagement.

Figure 1: Gender Distribution

Age Group Distribution

The age distribution reveals that 79.5% of respondents fall within the 18-35 age bracket, representing the most economically active and politically significant demographic. This concentration of young adults in the survey population underscores the importance of addressing their specific concerns, as they represent both the present and future of the community. The relatively small proportion of respondents aged 46 and above (5.8%) may indicate either demographic realities or reluctance among older residents to participate in surveys about police conduct.

Age Group Distribution

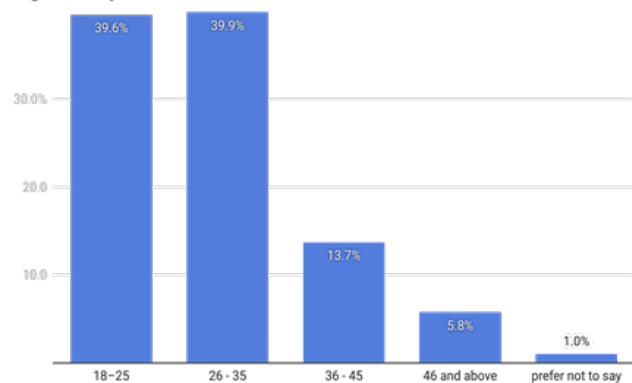


Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: Primary Data Collected by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Age Group Distribution

Location Distribution

Location Distribution



Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: Primary Data collected by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The geographic spread across five locations (Viwandani 28.4%, Kwa Njenga 21.7%, Kwa Ruben 20.4%, Pipeline 14.7%, Kware 14.7%) provides a representative sample of Mukuru's diverse neighborhoods. Viwandani's higher representation may reflect either its larger population or heightened awareness of police issues in that area. The relatively even distribution ensures that location-specific dynamics are captured while maintaining overall community representativeness.

4.3. Police Perception Analysis

Police View Distribution

Police View by Location

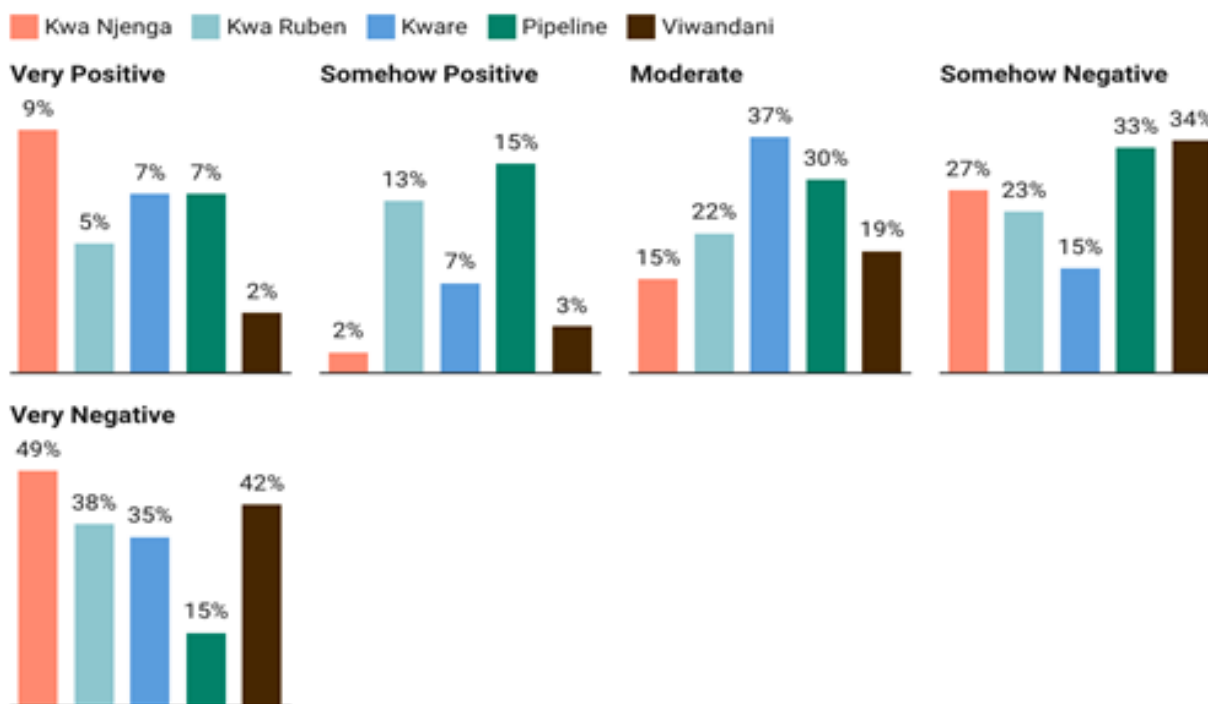


Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: Primary data collection by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3

Figure 3 presents a striking geographic breakdown of community perceptions of police conduct across five locations within the Mukuru informal settlement. The data reveals significant variations in police-community relations, with some locations experiencing notably more positive or negative perceptions than others.

Viwandani

Viwandani stands out as the location with the most concerning police-community relations. A staggering 42% of Viwandani residents hold "Very Negative" views of police—the highest among all locations. When combined with the 34% who view police as "Somewhat Negative," a troubling 76% of Viwandani residents express negative sentiments toward law enforcement. Conversely, only 2% hold "Very Positive" views and 3% "Somewhat Positive" views, totaling a mere 5% positive perception. This represents a crisis of confidence that demands urgent, location-specific intervention.

Kwa Njenga

Kwa Njenga exhibits the most polarized views among all locations. While it records

the highest "Very Positive" rating at 9%, it also has the highest "Very Negative" rating at 49%. This polarization suggests that police encounters in Kwa Njenga are highly inconsistent—some residents experience positive interactions while others face severe misconduct. The 27% "Somewhat Negative" view means that 76% of residents hold some degree of negative perception, comparable to Viwandani but distributed differently across the severity spectrum.

Kware

Kware emerges as the location with the most moderate views of police. An impressive 37% of Kware residents rate their view as "Moderate"—the highest among all locations. This suggests either more balanced police-community interactions or a population

that is less engaged with police, resulting in neutral perceptions. Notably, Kware has the lowest "Very Negative" rating at 35% and the lowest "Somehow Negative" rating at 15%, indicating relatively better police relations compared to other locations.

Pipeline

Pipeline presents a mixed but concerning picture. While it records the highest "Somehow Positive" view at 15% and a respectable 30% "Moderate" rating, it also has the second-highest "Somehow Negative" view at 33%. The "Very Negative" rating of 15% is the lowest among all locations, suggesting that while negative encounters occur, they may be less severe than in other

areas. Pipeline's profile suggests room for improvement through targeted community policing initiatives.

Kwa Ruben

Kwa Ruben demonstrates consistently moderate-to-negative perceptions. With 38% "Very Negative" and 23% "Somehow Negative" views, 61% of residents express negative sentiments. The 13% "Somehow Positive" rating is the second-highest, but the 5% "Very Positive" rating is among the lowest. The 22% "Moderate" rating suggests a significant portion of the population remains undecided, representing an opportunity for positive engagement.

Comparative Analysis

When examining positive views (Very Positive + Somehow Positive) across locations, Pipeline leads with 17% (2% + 15%), followed by Kwa Ruben with 18% (5% + 13%), Kware at 9% (7% + 2%), Viwandani at only 5% (2% + 3%), and Kwa Njenga at 11% (9% + 2%).

For negative views (Very Negative + Somehow Negative), Kwa Njenga and Viwandani are tied at 76% each, followed by Kwa Ruben at 61%, Pipeline at 48%, and Kware at 50%. This geographic variation in police perceptions suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to police reform will be insufficient.

Implications for Intervention

The geographic variation in police perceptions suggests that intervention strategies must be tailored to each location's specific context. Viwandani and Kwa Njenga require urgent, intensive interventions given their high negative perception rates. Kware may serve as a model for understanding what factors contribute to more moderate police-community relations. Pipeline shows potential for improvement with its relatively lower "Very Negative" ratings. Kwa Ruben presents an opportunity to engage the significant "Moderate" population to shift perceptions positively.

The data underscores the need for location-specific diagnostic work to understand the underlying factors driving these perception differences—whether they relate to specific police units, community characteristics, historical incidents, or socioeconomic factors unique to each location.

Trust in Police Changes

The trust trajectory data reveals that trust is moving in the wrong direction: 30.4% report trust has worsened compared to only 9.3% who report improvement. The fact that 47.6% report no change suggests that for nearly half the community, police conduct has remained consistently poor over time. This stagnation in trust levels indicates that existing accountability mechanisms are failing to produce meaningful improvements in police behavior.

Trust in Police Changes

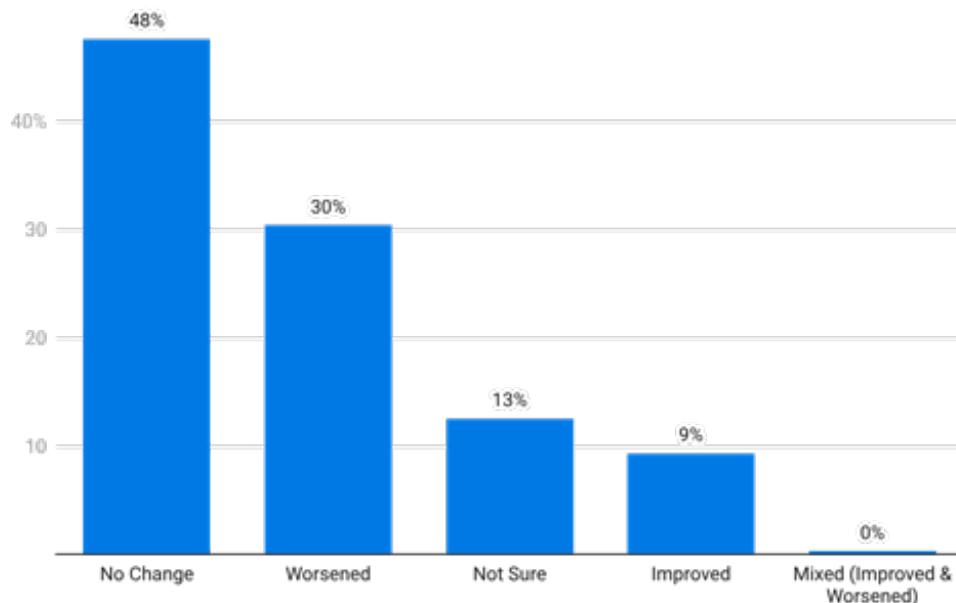


Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: Survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4

4.4. Experiences with Police Abuse

Negative Police Experience

Police Experience

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure/Prefer not to say

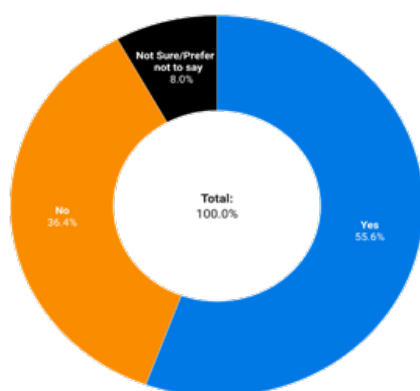


Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: A survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The finding that 55.6% of respondents have personally experienced or know someone who has experienced police abuse demonstrates the pervasiveness of misconduct. When combined with the 8.0% who preferred not to say (possibly indicating fear of disclosure), the true extent of police abuse may be even higher. The 36.4% who reported no negative experience represents a minority perspective that should be understood to identify what factors contribute to positive police encounters.

Figure 5

Police Actions of Concern

The ranking of police actions of concern reveals a pattern of systemic abuse: Arbitrary Arrests (67.1%), Extortion/Bribery (55.9%), Beatings (48.6%), Long Detention (37.1%), Killings (32.6%), and Evictions (30.7%). The predominance of arbitrary arrests and extortion suggests that police interactions are often motivated by financial gain rather than public safety. The significant concern about killings (32.6%) indicates that extrajudicial violence is a lived reality for many community members.

Police Actions of Concern

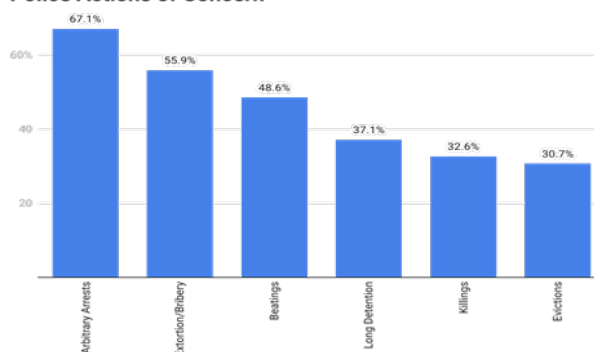


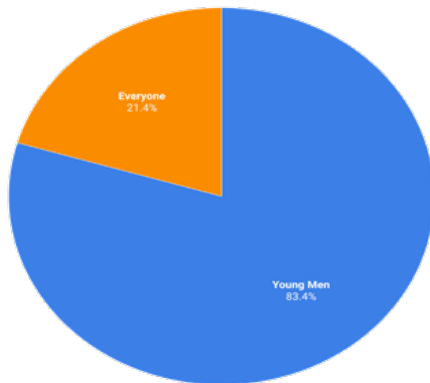
Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: A survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 6

Groups Most Targeted

Groups Most Targeted

Young Men Everyone



Everyone here also includes women and families

Chart: Antony Adeyo • Source: A survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The overwhelming consensus (83.4%) that young men are most targeted by police confirms the existence of gendered and age-based profiling. The 21.4% who believe “Everyone” is targeted suggests that while young men bear the brunt, no demographic is entirely safe from police misconduct. This targeting pattern has implications for youth development, as young men may avoid legitimate economic activities to minimize police encounters.

Figure 7

4.5. Barriers to Justice

Negative Police Experience

The finding that 60.1% would not report police abuse, with only 12.1% affirming they would report, represents a crisis in police accountability. The 14.4% who would “Sometimes” report and 13.4% who are unsure indicate that even among those not definitively opposed, reporting is not the default response. This culture of non-reporting creates a veil of silence that protects abusive officers and perpetuates cycles of misconduct.

Would You Report Police Abuse?

No Sometimes Not Sure/Prefer not to say Yes

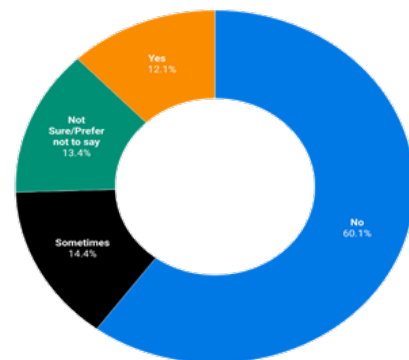


Chart: Antony Adeyo • Source: A survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8

Barriers to Getting Justice

Barriers

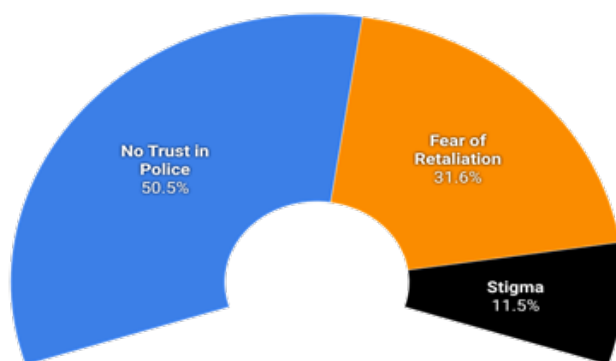


Chart: Antony Adeyo • Source: A survey conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The barriers analysis identifies three primary obstacles: No Trust in Police (50.5%), Fear of Retaliation (31.6%), and Stigma (11.5%). The dominance of trust deficits over fear suggests that even if safety concerns were addressed, the fundamental lack of confidence in police institutions would remain a significant barrier. The stigma associated with reporting police abuse (11.5%) indicates social dynamics that discourage victims from coming forward.

Figure 9

Support Needed by Victims

Type of Support Needed

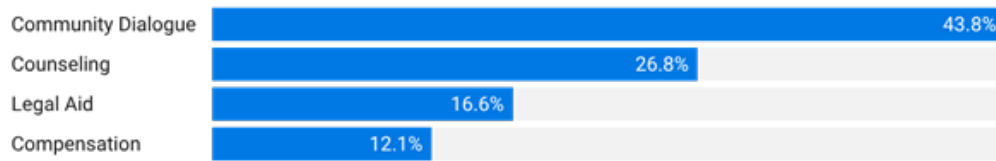


Figure 10

Chart: Antony Adoyo • Source: A survey Conducted by Mukuru Community Justice Centre • Created with Datawrapper

The support needs expressed by respondents prioritize Community Dialogue (43.8%), followed by Counseling (26.8%), Legal Aid (16.6%), and Compensation (12.1%). The emphasis on dialogue over legal remedies suggests that community members seek restorative rather than purely punitive approaches to addressing police misconduct. This preference should inform the design of police accountability mechanisms.

CHAPTER

5

Recommendations

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- ▶ Develop a rapid response network that can deploy legal observers to police stations when arrests occur, ensuring due process rights are protected.
- ▶ Create safe spaces for young men to discuss their experiences with police and develop collective strategies for protection and advocacy.
- ▶ Launch a "Know Your Rights" campaign specifically targeting the 18-35 age group, using peer educators and Human Rights Defenders.
- ▶ Organize annual community forums on police accountability that bring together residents, civil society, and police representatives in structured dialogue.
- ▶ Maintain a centralized database of police misconduct incidents that can identify patterns and support advocacy for systemic reform.
- ▶ Conduct follow-up research to track changes in community perceptions and police behavior over time.

- Document successful cases of police accountability to demonstrate that reporting can lead to meaningful outcomes.

Recommendations for the Inspector General of Police

- Implement mandatory human rights training for all officers deployed to informal settlements, with specific focus on the rights of young men who are disproportionately targeted.
- Establish a rotation policy that limits the duration of deployments in high-tension areas to prevent the development of adversarial relationships.
- Create an anonymous reporting mechanism within the police service that allows officers to report misconduct by colleagues without fear of retaliation.
- Implement a performance evaluation system that includes community feedback as a component of officer assessments.
- Mandate regular community policing forums in each location, with attendance required for all station police officers.
- Respect, obey and implement the Kenya Constitution.

Recommendations for Government.

Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR)

- Establish a permanent presence in Mukuru to monitor police conduct and receive complaints.
- Conduct regular inspections of police stations to monitor detention conditions and adherence to legal procedures.
- Publish annual reports on police accountability in informal settlements with specific recommendations for reform.

Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA)

- Simplify and publicize complaint procedures to increase the currently low reporting rates.
- Establish mobile complaint reception units that visit communities regularly.
- Provide regular feedback to complainants on the status of their cases to rebuild confidence in the process.

CHAPTER

6

Conclusion

This Research provides compelling evidence of a crisis in police-community relations in Mukuru that demands urgent and comprehensive intervention. The data reveals patterns of systemic abuse, widespread mistrust, and a culture of silence that perpetuates impunity. The finding that 60.1% of community members would not report police abuse represents a fundamental breakdown in the social contract between citizens and law enforcement institutions.

Addressing the crisis documented in this research will require sustained commitment from all stakeholders, significant resource investment, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about police conduct in informal settlements. The community has spoken through this research; the challenge now is to translate their voices into meaningful action that restores trust, ensures accountability, and creates a safer environment for all residents of Mukuru.

The wound described in this research will not heal overnight. It requires a comprehensive treatment plan that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of police misconduct. With coordinated action across civil society, police leadership, government agencies, and the legal system, the vision of a Mukuru where residents can trust and cooperate with law enforcement is achievable. The time for action is now.

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