

Review of: "Drug-Free School Locality through Crime Prevention Strategies – The Case of Kerala"

Romina Fucà¹

¹ University of Verona

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Several environmental factors can potentially contribute to drug use and related incidents in urban areas, including **Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), the capital city of Kerala, India**

- **Urbanization and Population Density**, which can lead to social and economic disparities, increased population density, and limited access to opportunities.
- **Availability and Accessibility** to drugs due to higher population density, transportation networks, and economic activities.
- **Peer Pressure and Social Networks** can foster social networks that may encourage or normalize drug use, especially among vulnerable populations.
- **Stress and Mental Health** because urban life can be stressful, and individuals may turn to drugs as a coping mechanism.
- **Economic Disparities**, which can contribute to substance abuse as a means of escape or as a response to social inequality.
- **Entertainment and Nightlife** because urban centres often have vibrant entertainment scenes, which can lead to increased drug use in certain settings.
- **Tourism and Transient Population**: considering that Thiruvananthapuram is a tourist destination, the transient nature of the population can sometimes contribute to a higher prevalence of drug-related activities.

This is the approach the authors of this paper use for analysing drug-related crimes in Thiruvananthapuram as reported by the **State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB) Vazhuthacadu, Thiruvananthapuram**, a government agency under the authority of the Kerala Police responsible for collecting and maintaining crime data, including several types of crimes such as drug-related offenses.

It must be noted, Thiruvananthapuram is a notable academic and research hub and home to the University of Kerala, APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University, the regional headquarters of Indira Gandhi National Open University, and other important schools and colleges among many other relevant State- and central-government financial boosters (Wikipedia source retrieved at: [Thiruvananthapuram - Wikipedia](#)).

Governments, community organizations, and public health agencies work together to implement strategies aimed at prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and education to address drug use and its related consequences. «According to an

article published by The New Indian Express on March 3, 2022, Ernakulam recorded the highest number of cases registered by the excise department under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in 2021 in the state of Kerala. The department registered 3,922 NDPS cases in 2021, of which 540 were in Ernakulam. [...]» (**Bing summary of sources on the Indian local news in 2021–22** lastly retrieved on August 25, 2023).

According to this authors' study conducted in Kerala, "the concentration of drug-related cases is in the innermost city center, specifically the East Fort area." The Central School Trivandrum and its immediate 500m vicinity were selected for in-depth analysis. "There are also the presence of many crooked ways and a lack of segregation of pedestrian and vehicular access, and many isolated spaces are also present, which can lead to such issues. Overlapping the cases, it was found that such areas lack surveillance and the lack of activities in certain areas is one of the main causes of such activities." (**see authors' lines at page 15**)

The study relied on reported cases from the SCRB and generated a Kernel Density Map of the crimes from 2018-22. Nearby beverage outlets, vacant spaces, unauthorized vendors, unmaintained dumping areas, and parking lots, can indeed be identified as facilitators for illegal activities according to the principles of **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory** highlighted in this paper. CPTED is a theory that focuses on modifying the physical environment to reduce opportunities for crime and enhance community safety. It emphasizes the role of urban design, architecture, and land use planning in deterring criminal behaviour.

Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) and the **Place Management Hypothesis (PMH)** are two distinct approaches within the field of crime prevention, both of which focus on addressing specific environmental factors to reduce crime. However, they differ in their primary emphasis and strategies. Here's a breakdown of the differences between SCP and PMH:

- SCP focuses on altering immediate environmental circumstances and opportunities to prevent crime. It aims to manipulate the situational factors that facilitate criminal behavior. Key features of SCP include:
 - **Targeted Interventions:** SCP aims to make specific criminal acts more difficult, risky, or less rewarding by modifying the physical or social environment in which they occur.
 - **Crime-Specific Strategies:** SCP interventions are tailored to specific types of crimes or criminal activities. Examples include installing security cameras, improving lighting in crime-prone areas, or using access control measures to restrict entry to certain places.
 - **Opportunity Reduction:** The core principle of SCP is reducing the opportunities for crime. By increasing the effort, risks, and rewards associated with criminal activities, SCP aims to deter potential offenders.
 - **Rational Choice Theory and Situational Decision-Making:** SCP is often grounded in the rational choice theory, which suggests that potential offenders make decisions based on the perceived benefits and risks of engaging in criminal behaviour other than on the specific circumstances of the situation.
- PMH focuses on the management and maintenance of public spaces to prevent disorder and crime. It emphasizes the role of place managers, such as property owners, landlords, and community organizations, in creating safe and well-maintained environments.

Proper zoning and regulation of street vending, along with clear guidelines for licensing and enforcement, are CPTED strategies to maintain order, explicitly praised by the authors in their conclusions at page 21. CPTED emphasizes proper waste management, lighting, and surveillance to discourage illegal activities. Poorly designed or inadequately lit parking lots can be locations for theft, vandalism, or other crimes. CPTED principles recommend improving lighting, visibility, and natural surveillance to enhance safety in parking areas.

It is important to note that while CPTED strategies can be effective in reducing crime, they are often more impactful when combined with other community-based approaches, law enforcement efforts, and social programs. Last but not least, tensions or conflicts between different age groups can contribute to both perpetration and victimization. Intergenerational conflicts may involve issues like gang-related violence or disputes. Though, the authors of this paper restrain themselves to environmental factors contributing to the increasing of crimes in the area of study.

Analysing drug crime patterns near schools in Thiruvananthapuram can therefore provide valuable insights that contribute to predictive policing, spatial planning, awareness campaigns, and policy formulation. Studying drug crime patterns near schools in India can be useful for several reasons, including predicting future hotspots, reducing crime through spatial planning, and raising awareness among citizens. As a matter of fact, spatial planning refers to the strategic design and organization of physical spaces within a city or region. This might include improving lighting, increasing police presence, implementing surveillance systems, and enhancing community engagement around schools. Effective spatial planning can deter criminal activities and create safer pathways for students.

Since data on drug crimes near schools can inform evidence-based policy formulation, the authors also underline that inferring unreported drug-related crimes from data reported by SCRB can be challenging, and that there are certain statistical and analytical techniques that researchers and analysts use to make educated estimations. These techniques provide rough estimates and assumptions and should be used cautiously, because of the following potential biases:

- *Dark Figure of Crime*: The “dark figure of crime” refers to unreported or underreported crimes. Researchers often assume that reported crimes represent only a fraction of actual incidents.
- *Underestimated and/or overestimated use of survey data or victimization surveys* By comparing survey results with reported crime data, we can estimate the extent of underreporting and/or overreporting.
- *Crime Rate Ratios*: Analysing reported crime rates in relation to other factors, such as population demographics, socioeconomic factors, and law enforcement presence can be also challenging for scholars in the field of CPTED.

Figure 4 shows the formation of delinquency is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by a variety of social, economic, and individual factors. Here’s a breakdown:

- **Community Context: Poverty: Economic deprivation:** Lack of resources and increased stressors, which may contribute to delinquent behaviour as individuals seek alternatives for survival.
- **Population Decrease:** Weakening community ties and formal social controls.
- **Population Heterogeneity:** Social fragmentation and/or reduced social cohesion.

It is therefore important to recognize that the relationship between these factors is dynamic and interactive. Additionally, individual factors such as personal history, psychological traits, and life experiences also play a significant role in the formation and persistence of delinquency.

Requested amendments:

- Please solve the acronym at State Crime Record Bureau (SCRB) first time it appears in the title of Figure 11.
- Please solve the acronym at Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) first time it appears in the title of Figure 2.