

Social malaise is often manifested in behavioral reactions of individuals against people or on the built environment. Theft and robbery and vandalism and graffiti are some of such reactions. Defensibility, surveillability and territoriality of space are vital in deterring offenses against people and the built environment. Examining this notion with reference to the public housing in Colombo. A general study in 38 public housing schemes and two case studies were conducted. The incidence of vandalism and graffiti in relation to their location and extent of damage were recorded. Causes of offences were studied by conducting unstructured interviews with randomly met residents.

Findings show that housing blocks having more than four floors, under-utilised public spaces and unconcealed service networks are more vulnerable to vandalism and graffiti undefined spaces, pocket spaces formed by unauthorized additions, and under-utilised green areas in the immediate vicinity of the housing blocks are also vulnerable. The interviews revealed that the offenders are mostly residents or accomplices of residents. These findings indicate that surveillability and territoriality of space are vital in deterring offenses against the built environment. However the notion of defensible space may not be applicable in the same manner since the offenders are from the same community.