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## EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ON SAFETY AND SECURITY FROM SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED INSTITUTIONS

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*Students from distinct regions and even abroad flock to campuses of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to broaden their knowledge in diverse fields of study. These institutions offer a wide array of academic, social and sports-related programs. However, safety remains a major concern for students worldwide. The increasing number of cases of victimization on and around campuses, including at the Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs), has necessitated the serious consideration of students' safety. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of safety, as it focuses on Two (02) South African HDIs, specifically focusing at Universities of Limpopo (UL) and Venda (UNIVEN) of South Africa. This study adopted the qualitative approach, employing the case study design, with the aid of exploratory objectives. About Twenty (20) participants were selected using the non-probability: Purposive sampling to take part in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The collected data were analysed using the inductive Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) with inductive reasoning.*

*The findings discovered that inadequate lighting in certain areas of the campus, insufficient Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) in some student residences, the absence of police patrols around the campus, and the unavailability of emergency phones to contact security officials are factors that contribute to the feeling of insecurity in both on-campus and off-campus housing. The study also found that students are hesitant to travel alone at night, regardless of whether they are living on-campus or off-campus. Not surprisingly, the study found that students who reside off-campus are more afraid of sexual violence than those who reside in on-campus housing. With respect to recommendations, it is advised that it is necessary to install CCTVs in all leased off-campus accommodations as well as the on-campus residences to keep students secure. For students living off-campus, there should be enough transportation to help their movement to and from their respective homes. In addition, it is recommended that police patrols be visually evident on the campus as well as near off-campus accommodations where many students reside*

**Keywords:** *Crime, Student, Higher Education Institutions, Historically Disadvantaged Institutions, Safety and security, South Africa, Perceptions, University of Limpopo, and University of Venda*

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### 1. Introduction

For years, people have collectively ignored the potential hazards of university life, resulting in widespread, often undetected violence within the Local, National and Global context [1]. Universities and colleges are not solely institutions of education; they are also called students homes. Recent incidents of schools violence across the globe, including theft, assault, rape, sexual victimization, and murder, have brought into focus the issue of safety and security on campuses [2]. This prompted the need for a deeper understanding of safety and security in academic communities thereof.

It is disconcerting that students often enrol at universities being aware of safety and security challenges and concerns they might face. Unfortunately, many universities have high crime rates globally, however, the statistical records are often kept confidential, it is crucial to prioritize student safety. This study aims to delve into the safety concerns and issues students experience at selected Historical Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs). A study, conducted to explore 'victimisation of female students with specific reference to sexual harassment and rape', established that campus incidents of sexual harassment and rape often occur between individuals who know each other, compromising students' safety [3].

The researchers utilized the Three (03) elements of the Routine Activities Theory (RAT) to scrutinize weaknesses, experienced in the HDIs regarding immediate concerns and issues, and their potential to escalate criminal activity when disregarded. Additionally, the study examined conventional and seminal international and local literature on the matter, demonstrating the researchers' familiarity with the relevant key authors, texts, and central concepts. This was carried out to exhibit how this research adds to current knowledge and addresses the gap, identified in this section (Introduction), making it an engaging piece of work.

Selectively, an international study, conducted in the United States of America (USA) on the effects of students' perceptions of campus safety on enrolment, demonstrates an increase in the dangers and threats to students' lives on university campuses [4]. A related study on "student perceptions of safety at urban, suburban, and rural community colleges" indicates that female students are more likely than males to perceive the likelihood of victimization, regardless of geographical location [5]. The same study further shows that suburban and rural community college students held different perceptions compared to urban community college students regarding the likelihood of being victimised, but there were no significant variations in other areas [5].

As already hinted, it suggested that sexual harassment and rape incidents generally occur in on-campus residences among acquaintances [3]. In addition to this, another study focusing on 'first-year residence students' perceptions regarding safety and security revealed that students feel safer, compared to off-campus rented accommodations [6, 7]. Furthermore, according to the consulted literature studies from scholarly work, students at institutions of higher education face various safety issues depending on their locations in the world. While other international university campuses may be considered safe environments for students, lecturers, and support staff, it is important to acknowledge, that no campus is immune to crime or violence. It is further stressed, that campus safety is a serious concern for the public, educators, and parents alike [5]. Unfortunately, many instances of crime, such as muggings, theft, robbery, sexual coercion, sexual harassment, and rape still occur (Among other transgressions). Equally, security measures vary greatly across university campuses, but most offer some form of security patrol, safety escort services, and emergency phone systems ('blue lights') and phone numbers [7].

Similarly, in the USA, the Campus Security Act was put into effect with the passage of the Higher Education Amendment Act of 1998, also known as the 'Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Public Law 105-244)', to increase awareness of crimes, committed on college and university campuses [7, 8]. Moreover, many countries lack legislative frameworks requiring colleges and universities to disclose criminal incidents that take place on their premises, there exists an opportunity for change. By adopting the USA Higher Education Amendment Act, 1998 and making 'campus crime statistics' available, in addition, relevant stakeholders, such as university campus management, students, lecturers, support staff, and parents, can all be aware of potential crime incidents. This can allow them to better prepare for enrolment within the HDIs. Against this backdrop, the literature review section follows featured possible student perceptions of campus safety, as well as the proximate causes of student victimizations in line with the study title.

## 2. Literature review on student safety and security

Concerns over safety and security on college campuses are common among students. Reasons for these concerns include the diversity of the student body, a large number of strangers on campus, and past incidents on campus [9]. Research has shown a range of issues related to campus safety, including the need for security services and student perceptions of fear [10]. It is highlighted that students' fear of victimization is heightened at night compared to during the day. The study also sought to explore the root causes of these fears and how they affect students and faculty. The study focused on whether students had experienced victimization and if so, what form of victimization had occurred [11, 12]. The results showed that 7 % of student respondents had been victimized by a type of crime on or near campus. Additionally, the study examined indirect victimization, including whether the respondents knew someone who had been a victim of a crime, committed on campus, revealing that 24 % of the students who responded knew someone who had been victimized. Notably, men and women had differing perceptions of safety when it comes to specific incidents, such as rape. For instance, studies suggest that women are more likely to experience threatening incidents on college campuses, leading them to feel more fearful and take extra safety precautions [3, 13, 14]. Additionally, women often perceive themselves as belonging to a group that is more victimized than others, which may contribute to their perception of danger on campus [15]. It is also revealed, that many women avoid certain areas of campus at night, avoid walking alone, and remain vigilant for suspicious activity [6].

However, most students, particularly women, tend to take precautionary measures to ensure their safety on campus as per several studies. These safety strategies include avoiding specific campus areas or walking alone at night, carrying an object that can be used to defend themselves or even carrying a weapon [16]. This provides a better explanation for why women are more vulnerable to crimes. Another study focusing on "Student perceptions of safety initiatives, assessing views of critical incident prevention and

response,” collected survey data from over 5,000 students across six (06) colleges in Illinois to evaluate student perceptions of safety initiatives.

The cited survey inquired about students' fear of crime while they were on campus. The students were also asked to report their perceptions of risk, victimization experiences, and protective behaviours. Additionally, this survey inquired about on-campus safety initiatives that the students found to be effective [2]. Therefore, some of the major study themes and challenges based on findings of the cited study were as follows:

### **2. 1. Students reported low levels of fear of crime while on campus**

The respondents of the cited survey reported they experienced higher fear levels at night as compared to during the day. The results also indicated that fear concerning property crimes was higher during the day than personal crimes, whereas fear for the two categories of crime was relatively similar during the night. However, there may be differences for specific offense types.

### **2. 2. Actual victimisation while on-campus was uncommon**

In the year prior to taking the survey, only a small minority of students reported experiencing incidents of robbery or physical assault while on campus. However, property crime victimization was more widespread, with attempted or actual theft being the most frequently reported offense. Despite this, the vast majority of students did not report experiencing any such crimes in the previous year while on campus.

### **2. 3. Students reported engaging in behaviours, intended to protect themselves from some risk of victimisation**

The availability of services on a given campus is assumed to have influenced certain actions. At night, traveling in groups and avoiding areas, perceived as dangerous, were the most common actions related to how students got around campus. According to a study, around one in five students reported carrying a protective device, although only a small fraction reported having carried a firearm on campus [2]. Based on the study's themes and challenges, it can be inferred, that the most relevant issues are students' beliefs about safety and proactive strategies within the USA context. It is worth noting that similar challenges are encountered in the HDIs. A proactive approach could greatly assist in addressing these challenges. Additionally, HEIs have reported violent incidents such as burglary, theft, murder, and sexual assault, which highlights the importance of enforcing safety precautions for the wellbeing of faculty, staff, and students [16]. One point to consider is that safety measures may redirect resources, such as funds and time, from educational pursuits towards overall safety and security in the university.

### **2. 4. Theoretical framing**

This study is backed by the RAT, as developed by these scholars [14], they claimed that an individual's daily activity and lifestyle may influence the risk of being a victim of a crime. This study comprehensively utilized the RAT to further elucidate campus/university crimes [14]. By utilizing the RAT, discussions on possible shortcomings in the university's safety measures were presented, with a possibility of potentially increasing a likelihood of criminal activities. Moreover, the RAT is a helpful framework in identifying the presence of guardians (Physical and passive contexts) that are already in place at the selected HDIs of this study, as well as observing possible risky behaviours and potential targets, making it a valuable tool for this study.

#### *Presence of a likely offender/motivated offender*

The motivated offender is a crucial element in understanding crime according to the RAT. This theory argues that in order for a crime to occur, three elements must be present: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian [14]. Without any one of these elements, a crime would not occur, offenders are likely to be found within the surrounding community or even within the student body itself, and their motivations for committing crimes can range from economic to psychological [5, 17]. Colleges and universities across the world are especially vulnerable as they contain suitable targets for offenders, such as motor vehicles, bikes, and valuable items like stereo equipment and desktop computers [18]. Overall, the RAT is a valuable tool for understanding crime from an offender's point of view. Committing a crime requires a likely offender to consider a target as suitable, while there is an absence of a capable guardian. The offender's assessment of the situation is what determines whether the crime will take place. Offenders have various reasons for committing crimes, including greed, poverty, drug addiction, amongst others.

*Presence of a suitable target*

Considerably, an offender's suitability as a target depends on Four (04) factors:

- 1) Value,
- 2) Physical visibility,
- 3) Accessibility, and;
- 4) Inertia.

Therefore, this study addresses how a target can be identified [14, 17]. Accessibility relates to the ease, with which an offender can approach a target without drawing attention to oneself. A suitable target for a crime could be a wallet, purse, car, or someone for personal assault or sexual victimization, among other things [17].

*Absence of a capable guardianship (Protections)*

In this study, the concept of guardianship encompasses both living beings, such as neighbours, security personnel, officers, and police officers, as well as mechanical devices, such as burglar alarms, CCTV, and locks that deter criminal activity either through their mere presence or through direct or indirect action [14, 17]. It should be emphasized, that technological aids are also capable of fulfilling the role of guardians. It is important to note, that guardianship need not necessarily be fulfilled by a human being [14].

*The application of the Routine Activities Theory on student safety and security*

The RAT theory proves useful in this study. Colleges and universities across the world naturally house suitable targets for offenders, such as accessible motor vehicles, bikes, and high-value items that are easy to carry, including stereo equipment and desktop computers [14]. The probability of crime occurring increases in the absence of a capable guardian. Research, sparked by RAT, consistently shows that criminal victimizations are associated with individuals' lifestyles, daily routines, and demographics, rather than randomly distributed in society [17]. Subsequently, the changes in personal routine activities' structures influence crime rates by affecting the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians for committing a violation. It is further established that RAT shapes the amount of exposure to crime that people experience in relation to how valuable or vulnerable they or their property is, and whether they and their property are well guarded. The likelihood of a criminal event increases when potential offenders, suitable targets, and the lack of capable guardians converge [14, 17].

### 3. The aim and objective of this study

The aim of the study was “to explore perceptions of students on safety and security from the selected HDIs.”

Moreover, to accomplish the study aim, the following Five (05) objectives guided this study:

1. To explore experiences and beliefs on students' safety and security.
2. To determine fear of various crimes and victimisations on-and-off campus during the night.
3. To highlight victims of various crimes at on-and-of campus accommodations.
4. To describe risk factors of students' victimisations.
5. To offer strategies to be adopted to mitigate various crimes occurring at on-and-off campus accommodations.

### 4. Materials and methods

The research approach, used in this study, was qualitative, with an exploratory research design, chosen in order to delve into issues of safety concerning students at the Two South African selected HDIs, focusing on UL and UNIVEN. This study aimed to gather valuable insight in order to describe the challenges and concerns facing students on and around the selected campuses. The data collected was confined to UL and UNIVEN. From a total population of at least 35000 respondents (20000 at UL and 15000 at UNIVEN, by the time of conducting this study), the non-probability: Purposive sampling was used to select about Twenty (20) participants, ranging from first-year [Undergraduate students] to the postgraduate levels. The semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of these participants, who were all students at selected universities. The collected data was analysed using the inductive TCA, an analysis technique, used for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data by coding and identifying themes or patterns and often used to elaborate on themes through the interpretation of the in-depth experiences of participants [18].

In this study, the participants' (Students') private information was kept confidential. The researchers ensured that real names or identities of all selected participants were not revealed. The data, gathered during data collections process, was only accessed to the research team. Their responses to the posed questions are going to be kept for Five (05) years [From the year 2020-onwards], to be destroyed thereafter. The captured data was safely kept in an electronic file. The findings of this study were reported in a Dissertation form and other academic accredited publications. Furthermore, the participants were provided with all pertinent details of this study and their consents were obtained, with the permission, granted

by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC), TREC/17/2018: PG of UL, as well as the granted permission to conduct research at UNIVEN in the 2018 academic year.

## 5. Result and discussions

Through inductive TCA, the collected data has been analysed in this study, as collected from the selected HDIs, namely: UL and UNIVEN, this study interviewed approximately 20 participants and identified various study themes and challenges from the recorded individual interviews and transcribed, as discussed hereunder. Therefore, this study uses direct verbatim quotations from selected students' participant perceptions and experiences on their safety. Table 1 depicts the codes, used during the discussions of the main themes.

Table 1

Clarification of the adopted codes	
UL	University of Limpopo
UNIVEN	University of Venda
P	Participant
M	Male
F	Female

Source: Researchers emphasis (2020-2023)

### 5.1. Theme 1: Experiences and beliefs on students' safety and security

In light of the student's experiences, it was revealed that towards the end of August in 2016, the community of UL was stunned by the news that a male student residing off-campus had been shot [19]. The student had been severely injured, which highlighted the ongoing trend of robberies and attacks. This prompted numerous other students to come forward and confess how unsafe they feel both on and off campus [19]. When questioned about their experiences of safety on campus or around the campus, student participants shared their feelings of unsafety. The following statements were recorded:

*"Yeah...during a social event, such as Freshers' Ball [Bash to welcome first-year students - An event meant to welcome newly registered first-year students] where even non-students manage to enter [within] on-campus...when you are drunk someone might follow you to the bathroom or your room unnoticed and harass you sexually or rape [you]"* (FP2, UL)

*"Yes during recess when students are at home... criminals come to the campus... steal keys at the security control gate and do door to door [Start opening rooms with the intention to steal students belongings]"* (FP10, UNIVEN).

On 'beliefs,' It has been disclosed that HEIs are renowned for generating knowledge, instructing students, and promoting overall societal progress. However, campuses are also common targets for criminal activity, such as theft, vandalism, burglary, hazing, and rioting [20]. To better gauge the level of campus safety among student participants, they were asked to assess whether or not they feel their respective campuses are safe. The following verbatim statements were recorded:

*"Yes ... on-campus seems to be safe as compared to off-campus"* (FP1, UL).

*"Yes...It is safe...I do not know about other students, but I feel safe"* (FP6, UL).

*"I would say yes, because when I travel at night the security officers accompany us, especially during exams"* (FP4, UNIVEN).

According to student participants at both respective institutions, their campuses are perceived as safer compared to those who reside off-campus. This is largely due to the universities hiring private security to safeguard the students within the campus parameters. However, students who rent apartments off-campus may not experience the same benefits and instead feel unsafe. At Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) Soshanguve South Campus, an 'Imbizo [A community meeting]' was held by the current [2023] Police Minister [Honourable Bheki Cele] and his top management members, following an attack on a first-year student named Promise Masoka. During the incident, Promise was overpowered in a toilet and almost raped. Unfortunately, she was also slapped in the face and stabbed in the tongue to silence her screams [19].

Fortunately, a security guard intervened and apprehended the would-be rapist. Despite this, the incident has raised serious concerns about the safety of students on and off campus. Tshabala, who is a representative of the Women's Desk, emphasised the seriousness of the matter by highlighting the incidents of break-ins in rooms and the general lack of safety in the community. "We are safe nowhere -

not on campus and not off campus. The community and the university do not have a relationship," she stated [21, 22].

### 5. 2. Theme 2: Fear of various crimes and victimisations on-and-off campus during the night

The student's witnessed fear and perceptions on their safety and security are influenced by various factors. Individuals move in and out of concern depending on the situation [23]. The emotions of fear, experienced by a student spending time on the field, vary with every circumstance. Being present on the field consistently during the day or night, in familiar or unfamiliar areas, can affect their sense of safety [23]. As such, when asked about their late-night travel on or off-campus, student participants responded. The following verbatim statements were expressed:

*"For my personal safety, I had to buy a knife...Because sometimes I come out of the library or from group discussions very late...Some students use stones or empty bottles to defend themselves"* (MP5, UL).

*"I prefer not to study on campus late after dark... But during the exams, I am forced into studying until late...I end up walking alone to off-campus"* (FP1, UL).

*"I usually travel alone...and I know that is unsafe...I had to run if needs be...especially when I see a group of people, I get scared"* (MP3, UL).

The indicated narrations clearly convey the concern of some students when it comes to walking at night. The fear of being mugged or attacked may contribute to their perception of unsafety. Students occasionally walk around at night, including some who travel between on-campus and off-campus locations. As demonstrated by the responses provided, students are aware that walking at night comes with the risk of victimization.

### 5. 3. Theme 3: Victim of various crimes at on-and-off campus accommodation

The lately prevalent demand for more campus accommodation among students of the UL after a fellow student was shot off-campus [20]. While the university has built new residences, there are only around 6000 places available for over 20 000 students [20], leading researchers to inquire whether the students had been victimized by crime either on-campus or off-campus. Interestingly, the majority of participants experienced criminal victimization in off-campus rented accommodations rather than on-campus residences. Overall, the results emphasize the pressing need for more suitable and safe accommodation options for students in and around the UL campus. The following statements were recorded in verbatim:

*"Yes... I have been a victim of crime off-campus...last year (2017), Two armed male robbers robbed me and my cousin at around 5 am an afternoon"* (FP2, UL).

*"Yes... I was stabbed in my right foot [Leg]"* (MP5, UL).

*"Not really, but it happened in my presence...we were coming from the campus to off-campus at around Eight (08) Post Meridiem (PM) at night...at this other corner they were mugging this other student and he ran in our direction after being mugged then we had to run with him... his phone and money were already taken"* (MP9, UNIVEN).

Another male student participant narrates his painful situation in verbatim:

*"Yes, at around 1 am in the morning, I was still studying because I was writing a test on Friday, so I heard this lady who screaming for help. She was staying at the same residence as I was. Therefore, I took my baseball bat, I saw two guys and they were not wearing masks. I saw that there were robbers. I was going there [to assist] but I heard a gunshot...then I went back to my room and locked the battler, switched off the lights, and hid my laptop under my bed. After they took the lady's laptop and cell phone and his boyfriend's cell phone and short warning shots in the air and went to another room in the same yard. Her battler was not locked they broke into the room they asked her where her laptop was, she did not have one then they took her phone at gunpoint luckily, they did not shoot. Then they came to my room, they broke the door. I was wearing a jean and it was dark and I was holding my baseball bat for defence, he came in and I hit him with my baseball bat when he came again then I hit him again on the shoulder he went outside then those two guys followed him. 76 They discussed and then came back to my room.... they tried to push, and I was behind the door pushing back.... and one of them broke.... the window and fired shots in my room then I surrendered. They came into my room, switched on the light, they pointed a gun at me and they told me to drop the bat, one of them picked up the bat and started hitting me with it. On the other hand, the other one was asking me where my laptop was. I told them I did not have a laptop. Then they asked where my phone is I told them it was on top of the fridge, while the other continued hitting me all this time and I was trying to fight back. They were about to leave when one tried to obstruct*

*me with the bed, so that I do not see where they were going and that is when they found the laptop, they left and came back a bit later and beat me again for lying to them about the laptop they left me paralyzed on the floor”* (MP8, UL).

Many colleges and universities are unable to provide on-campus housing to all their students, and the number of registered students may exceed the number of available residence beds. Due to this, students are often forced to seek out alternative off-campus rental accommodations.

The majority of students who live off-campus are susceptible to criminal behaviour, according to the cited responses. Due to a lack of on-campus housing, many HEIs are unable to provide accommodation for their pupils. Consequently, certain pupils must search for alternative rental accommodations off-campus. It is observed that crime on and around the University of Cape Town (UCT) campuses influences both men and women, with the most vulnerable group being those who walk or wait alone. He also noted that small groups of women have been frequently robbed in crime hotspots [22]. Students and staff at the UCT sometimes experience criminal incidents, including the theft of cell phones and money, as well as robbery of laptops, clothing, and student cards. However, in a few robbery cases, victims have been injured. As a result of a lack of sufficient on-campus housing, many HEIs are unable to provide accommodation for their pupils, forcing some to seek alternative rental accommodations off-campus.

#### **5. 4. Theme 4: Risk factors of students’ victimisations**

Victimization of students on university campuses is highly influenced by their alcohol and drug intake, which increases the likelihood of committing crimes and decreases their ability to recognize dangerous situations [2]. The reasons behind students' victimization are numerous. When queried about factors that could contribute to victimization, the student participants provided several possibilities. Overall, the relationship between alcohol and drug use and criminal victimization on university campuses cannot be ignored and warrants further attention [2]. The following statements verbatim expressions were recorded:

*“We wear expensive and valuable clothes and carry expensive cell phones and laptops... perpetrators need those things, so that they can buy drugs and alcohol to maintain their addiction”* (MP4, UL).

*“I would say alcohol, which may result in harassment of female students and there are some students who smoke nyaope, which can also contribute to their victimisation”* (MP3, UL).

*“There is not enough lighting on campus... after gate 2, they [Management] should at least install some streetlights”* (MP1, UNIVEN).

As the Three aforementioned responses assert, it is emphasized that the possession of expensive and valuable items increases the likelihood of becoming a victim. Perpetrators addicted to alcohol and drugs may sell said items to fuel their addiction.

#### **5. 5. Theme 5: Strategies that could be adopted to mitigate various crimes occurring at on-and-off campus accommodations**

University campuses are typically protected by private security companies to maintain safety and security. However, when it comes to addressing alcohol and drug use, maintaining order can be difficult, especially during events like the annual Freshers Ball and there is a connection between campus crime and student use of alcohol and drugs, which is why universities invest resources in educating students on how to protect themselves [2]. It is also noted, that while it is not practical to prevent all college students from drinking or using drugs, it is possible to teach them how to do so safely and responsibly [2]. Notably, Normah Zondo, a Spokesperson for the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), advises students to walk in groups when leaving campus and to keep valuables like cell phones and laptops out of sight [23]. In this study, researchers asked students for potential solutions to reduce criminal incidents and to gauge their understanding of safety and security measures related to issues they face at their respective institutions. To this end, the following verbatim responses were recorded in this section:

*“I think the University management should build more residences on campus and there should be more security personnel patrolling off-campus”* (FP9, UL).

*“Campus management should create [build] more residences to accommodate all those students who are residing off campus”* (FP1, UL).

*“I think when a student reports an incident [crime] on campus or off campus...there must be support groups... Mafoko security should also be given powers to patrol the surrounding area of the campus”* (FP2, UL).

*“I think security has to be beefed up to be more effective... I feel they are not doing their job effectively...Most of the time they ignore us...especially when calling them”* (MP1, UNIVEN).

*“As students, we must report the crimes to security on campus, so that they can trace criminals through CCTVs”* (MP2, UNIVEN).

Students have a clear understanding of the issues they face, as evidenced by their responses. To better engage with campus safety, it has been proposed that police and security officials increase patrol around the campus and surrounding areas. Additionally, the construction of more residences to accommodate all registered students has been suggested at many universities.

**The limitations of the study.** This study was confined to UL and UNIVEN, as the selected HDIs in South Africa, however, other HDIs exist, these are the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), the UNIVEN, the University of Fort Hare (UFH), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the UL and the University of Zululand (UNIZULU).

Moreover, other limitations of this study were demarcated to the following aspects:

– **Subjectivity:** Perceptions are subjective and can vary widely among individuals. Different students may have different experiences and perspectives on safety and security based on their personal encounters and background on this subject.

– **Sample bias:** Studies, conducted on this topic, may have limitations in terms of the sample size and representativeness. It may be challenging to capture the opinions of all students at the selected HDIs, and the study findings might not fully reflect the diverse range of perspectives.

– **Time sensitivity:** The safety and security landscape at UL and UNIVEN is dynamic and can change over time. New initiatives, policies, or events may have occurred since then that could impact students' perceptions.

– **Underreporting of various crimes:** Some experienced incidents of crime includes ‘harassment, or violence,’ which may go unreported due to various reasons, such as ‘fear, mistrust, or lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms.’ This underreporting can result in an incomplete understanding of the safety and security situation on campuses.

– **Contextual factors:** Students' safety and security concerns can be influenced by various contextual factors, such as the geographical location of the university, surrounding communities, and socio-economic conditions. These factors can differ significantly among the selected HDIs, making it challenging to generalize findings across institutions, but making it possible to transfer the study findings to other settings to face the same problem.

Overall, the prospects for further research could be extended to Doctoral level to further determine the safety and security on campuses with specific reference to sexual harassment and rape. Thus, to ensure the safety of their students. To this end, it is recommended that all the South African HDIs should consider constructing additional on-campus residence facilities. Additionally, property owners for off-campus accommodations should ensure that their facilities comply with safety and security regulations and standards. It is advisable for individual HDIs, such as UL and UNIVEN, to maintain a list of all rented off-campus accommodations, which meet advised regulations and standards to strictly promote safety, prioritizing crime awareness campaigns and programs is also recommended.

## 6. Conclusion

This study concludes with the following considerations for the HDIs [UL and UNIVEN] management:

**Experiences and beliefs on students' safety and security:** For the HEIs, there is a serious need to further explore the experiences and beliefs on students' safety and security. This study thoroughly explored students' safety and security. This study is deemed valuable to South African HDIs, as they can use studies, such as this one on their safety aspects, to market themselves to potential students.

**Fear of various crimes and victimisations on-and-off campus during the night:** The main goal of this study was to have an understanding of whether students at UL and UNIVEN face similar crimes and victimisations, regarding on-and-off campus during the night. Overall, these issues require urgent responsive interventions by HDIs management and other relevant stakeholders, within the public and private platforms.

**Victim of various crimes at on-and-off campus accommodation:** The authorities within the HEIs sector should prioritize safety and security measures for students residing on-and-off campus, they should ensure efficient learning, within a secure academic environment. Reportedly, many students living off-campus face vulnerability to criminal behaviours due to insufficient on-campus housing. A common belief among students is that on-campus housing provides a safer environment than off-campus housing, this current norm should be readdressed.

**Risk factors of students' victimisations:** Emanating from the adopted RAT to this study, it is conclusively found that female students perceived that they are more vulnerable to victimisation, particularly, with respect to sexual harassment and rape. The discussed 03 elements of the RAT were proven by this study to indicate that both fear of sexual harassment and rape were established. Furthermore, this study



revealed that the majority of students do not report their victimisation to either the police or campus authorities (Control), these practices should be urgently changed.

**Strategies that could be adopted to mitigate various crimes occurring at on-and-off campus accommodations:** As students at HDIs continue living in fear of walking on-and-off campus, whether after dark or during the day, additional studies should be conducted on this subject. The students residing off-campus are more likely to become victims of crime than those living on-campus, more especially those who walk alone in the dark or at night. Students' lack of confidence in reporting criminal incidents to campus control or the local police and associated factors relating to insufficient lighting, absence of police and security patrols both on-and off-campus, consumption of alcohol and drugs, and the possession of expensive and valuable items that contribute to students' victimization should be immediately addressed.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this study, whether financial, personal, authorship or otherwise, that could affect this study and its findings, as presented in this study.

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#### **Data availability**

Data will be made available on reasonable request.

#### **Use of artificial intelligence**

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the current work.

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