# 'You go to campus with fear and come back with fear'

## University students' experiences of crime

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*In view of reports in the media on the spate of crimes plaguing South African universities, a qualitative study was conducted regarding the experience of crime by students from one urban-based university. The research formed part of a group project in which fourth-year social work students each conducted five interviews with students who were not their friends. Consistent with routine activity theory, students who were interviewed appeared to be vulnerable targets with a lack of guardianship, who were preyed on by motivated offenders. The most common crimes included theft of laptops and cell phones, and robberies at their places of accommodation. In line with cognitive behavioural theory, the crime encounter had profound psychological, financial and academic consequences for students. Students endeavoured to cope with the trauma of crime by adopting a variety of cognitive and behavioural strategies. Students' recommendations for enhancing safety included universities increasing security measures through increasing patrols and CCTV surveillance cameras, and students adopting self-protection measures such as walking in groups, being more vigilant, and not walking with headphones on. These recommendations for enhancing guardianship on the part of university protection services and police, coupled with self-protection strategies on the part of students, can potentially reduce the risks of students becoming targets of criminal offenders.*

Crime in South Africa is a serious social problem that impacts either directly or indirectly on all the country's citizens, including university students.

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Police crime statistics for the period 2015/16 – 2016/17 reveal that South Africans were 13% more likely to be murdered, than they were five years ago. On average, there were 50 attempted murders and 61 home robberies per day. As many as 136 sexual offences were committed daily, with 109 being rape cases. Forty-six vehicles were hijacked on a daily basis, and there were 16 aggravated (violent) robberies every hour. More than half of all armed robberies were street robberies, with 79 878 recorded in

the 12 months preceding 31 March. Every day an average of 219 cases of street robbery were reported. Most crimes were reported in the Western Cape and Gauteng with the busiest police stations being Cape Town Central, Johannesburg Central and Mitchells Plain.[1] However, these statistics are merely the tip of the iceberg as many crimes go unreported and unrecorded.[2]

In South Africa crime and violence are inextricably linked with poverty, under-development and the history of repression, marginalisation, alienation and violence associated with the legacy of apartheid in the country.[3] A South African Human Rights Commission conference on crime indicated that the main causes of crime include socio-economic factors – particularly inequalities and their psychological impacts; historical factors where violence was institutionalised within the state; weak regulatory systems; inefficient police services; and an overburdened social justice system. Other contributory factors are social disorganisation, substance abuse, overcrowding of prisons and the high rate of recidivism.[4]

Crime has the ability to disrupt people's lives, diminish the victim's sense of control and self-worth and create a state of uncertainty in the country.[5] It also has physical and financial costs and negatively affects the quality of life of individuals, their families and communities.[6] Furthermore, crime adversely affects perceptions about South Africa internationally and negatively affects the country's economy and the flow of direct foreign investment because of these negative perceptions.[7] According to the Victims of Crime Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa for 2016/17, although South Africans had actively taken measures to protect their property, the fear of crime prevents them from engaging in various activities such walking in open spaces, allowing children to play outside and walking to town.[8]

It is widely recognised that the impact of criminal victimisation is a highly individualised experience and that the impact of crime does not necessarily correspond to the seriousness of the crime based solely upon the crime type.[9] Moreover, crime can also affect one by being experienced vicariously through being exposed to it through someone with whom one has contact, or via the media.[10] For example, Morral et al found that fear of crime existed in both victims and non-victims of crime.[11] Anxiety was experienced by 62.1% of victims and 65.1% of non-victims; lack of confidence (in oneself as well as those who are expected to protect one) was reported by 35.3% of victims and 38.3% of non-victims; and sleeping difficulties were experienced by 32.2% of victims and 27.4% of non-victims.[12] In the aftermath of crime, victims of crime may encounter an extensive array of immediate, short-term and long-terms effects.[13] In addition, the greater the fear of being a victim of crime, the more likely the person is to engage in protective behaviour, such as avoiding threatening situations, carrying a weapon or learning self-defence techniques.[14]

Internationally, crime on college and university campuses has become increasingly prevalent.[15] Universities are social microcosms of the broader society and are not insulated from crime as previously believed;[16] hence university students cannot escape some of the negative forces, such as crimes that impinge on the country's safety and security.[17] According to Forbes-Mewett, McCulloch and Nyland, university students are particularly vulnerable to opportunistic crime simply because they tend to have many items of value that are attractive to thieves, such as laptops, mobile phones, iPods and wallets.[18] Robinson and Mullen studied perceptions and realities of crime at a regional, comprehensive university campus in North Carolina, USA. The majority of respondents believed that the most crime occurred in the hours of darkness (20h00 – 04h00). They reported that the typical criminal

offender on campus was a student, and areas of concern were isolated places, such as parking lots and tunnels.[19] Fox et al maintain that experiences of crime, particularly robbery of gadgets such as cell phones and laptops, affect students' academic performance on university campuses as it exacerbates the existing stresses of university life.[20] Jenning, Gover and Pudrzynska studied 564 undergraduate students at a large south-eastern non-urban university in the United States and found that students made use of behavioural changes or 'constrained behaviour' in an effort to reduce the likelihood of victimisation.[21]

There were also significant gender differences in perceptions of fear, safety, perceived risk, and engagement in constrained behaviour.[22] In a follow-up study of 997 students attending an urban university in Colorado, Tomsich, Gover and Jennings found that 8% of students had experienced at least one type of crime since enrolling at the university. Respondents indicated low-to-moderate levels of fear and perceived risk of victimisation on campus and regarded the campus as being moderately safe. In contrast with previous research, which has consistently shown that while females are less likely to be victims of crime, they tend to be more fearful of crime than men, Tomsich et al found gender differences, with females having higher levels of fear, higher perceived risk of victimisation, higher rates of constrained behaviour, and lower perceptions of overall safety on campus, than males.[23] Fisher and May explored the gendered nature of fear-provoking cues and crime-related fears of students at a public university in the southern United States. They found that fear-provoking cues such as lighting, foliage, group loitering and visibility of police were not gendered for fear of larceny-theft or fear of assault.[24] In contrast with earlier studies, Chockalingham and Murugesan, in their study of university students in India and Japan,

found that the experience of victimisation was not related to fear of victimisation.[25]

Mabolaji and Ehigie studied 281 university students in Nigeria and found that students who resided at off-campus accommodation reported higher levels of fear of crime than those who resided in on-campus accommodation.[26] However, both those living on and off campus experienced crime. Kahari studied experiences of crime by students at the University of Cape Town and found that not all crimes were reported to the police because the incident was regarded as too trivial or the belief that there was nothing the police could do.[27] Morrall et al also found that the majority of university students who were surveyed in the UK did not report the crime to the police.[28]

In view of reports in the media on the spate of crimes plaguing South African universities,[29] a qualitative study was conducted regarding the experience of crime by students from a Gauteng-based university, which is located in a metropolis that is known for its high crime rates. While the majority of studies on campus crime have taken the form of large-scale quantitative surveys, analysed via inferential statistics, a lacuna in the research literature is the paucity of qualitative phenomenological studies, which allow the voices of targets of crime to be heard. Specific objectives of this qualitative study were to examine: (1) the kind of crimes students had experienced; (2) the impact of crime on students and how they felt following this experience (3) how the students coped following exposure to acts of crime; and (4) to make recommendations for preventing crime and enhancing safety of students. The assumption underpinning the study was that we would be able to interpret the findings in respect of kinds of crime, impact on students, their coping strategies and their recommendations, based on the two theories underpinning the study, thereby contributing to the growing body of research on campus crime.

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical lens guiding the study was based on cognitive behavioural theory and routine activity theory. Knaus states that cognitive behavioural theory assumes that victims of crime experience social anxiety, which prevents them from being in places where they need to be. This fear is a rational response to a perceived threat of harm.[30] This type of anxiety is understandable if one considers that criminal incidents can cause shock, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger and lack of trust on the part of victims.[31] In a similar vein, Wilcox, Land and Hunt explain that victims of crime tend to fear crime and the places where it occurred.[32]

Routine activity theory is similar to lifestyle activity theory and emphasises how the likelihood of an individual becoming a victim of crime is predetermined by routine activities of lifestyle.[33] Routine activities are defined as any regular and common spatial and temporal patterns of activities that individuals need to engage in, including school, work and leisure. According to routine activity theory, crime takes place when a motivated offender approaches a suitable victim in the absence of other persons who may prevent the occurrence of the crime.[34] Developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), routine activity theory is at the core of 'environmental criminology' and requires the existence of three elements for a crime to occur, namely a motivated offender with criminal intentions and the capacity to act on these intentions; a suitable victim or target; and the absence of a capable guardian who can prevent the crime from happening.[35] Unarmed students living away from the security of home and walking alone are particularly vulnerable targets, and carrying valuable items such as cell phones and laptops is a further contributory factor in target attractiveness.[36] Student lifestyles that involve many nighttime activities, social events and involvement in drinking and the use of recreational drugs can further increase student exposure to crime.[37] Guardianship can take the form of the physical presence of a person who is able to act in a protective manner, such as a policeman, landlord, parent or passer-by, or in the form of more passive devices such as video surveillance. Guardianship also exists at the formal (official and institutional) and informal (personal) levels including individual self-protective behaviour.[38] In terms of policy and prevention, routine activity theory has been predominantly linked to situational crime prevention and policing, particularly areas identified as 'hot spots'.[39] Having described the main features of the two theories underpinning the study, we now proceed to explain the research methodology.

## Method

### Setting for the study

The study was conducted at the main campus of a large, multi-campus, urban South African university. A busy arterial highway runs past the northern side of the main campus. There is a shopping mall on the eastern side and a provincial hospital on the western boundary. Most of the southern area is taken up by residential houses, many of which have been converted into student lodgings in response to the growing need for student accommodation. While unemployment rates for the area are not available, the unemployment rate for the country as a whole stood at 27.5% according to the third Quarterly Labour Force Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa.[40]

The university is situated in Gauteng Province. According to information on crime trends from South African Police Services (SAPS) for Gauteng for 2017/18, murders increased by 3.2%; robbery with aggravating circumstances decreased by 3.9%; truck hijacking increased by 6.0%; attempted murders decreased by 8.4%; robberies at residential properties

decreased by 4.6%; carjacking decreased by 4.0%; bank robberies increased by 500%; cash in transit robberies increased by 142%; sexual offences increased by 5.7%; and stock theft increased by 1.1%.[41] Drunk driving continued to be the highest offence in Johannesburg according to 2018 statistics by the metro police.[42]

The impetus for selecting this particular university was the reporting of two criminal incidents targeting students. In one case a student was kidnapped at gunpoint in the university parking lot and pushed into the boot of a car after which the perpetrator then drove off with her to the bank so that he could withdraw the victim's money. When the police traced the vehicle, it was revealed that the perpetrator was also a student at the same university. In the second incident, a group of students walked off campus to buy food, and on their way back, just outside the campus gate, they were approached by two men who attempted to rob them. One of the students was shot but survived.[43] More recently in 2018 a student was killed by a taxi driver outside an off-campus residence of the same university.[44]

In response to these incidents the university's protection services conduct security foot patrols 24-hours a day, seven days a week on all four campuses. Protection services also collaborate with the South African Police Service (SAPS), Johannesburg Metro Police Department (JMPD) and the city of Johannesburg to promote a safe environment both within and around the university's campuses. Together with the Brixton SAPS, the university embarked on a continuing awareness campaign to further ensure the safety of students, encourage students to be 'street smart', to plan their routes in advance, and to be alert. While all campuses have perimeter fencing, CCTV cameras and finger print access control booms, at the time of the study the university was exploring the installation of smart cameras on various routes leading to campuses, as well as the expansion of the mySOS application for emergencies.[45]

## Research design

The study took the form of a phenomenological approach located within a qualitative paradigm. Phenomenology professes to concentrate its efforts on getting a clear picture of the things experienced by people first-hand – in this case the experience of the phenomenon of crime.[46] In line with the phenomenological perspective, the researchers focused on students' subjective experiences of crime and analysed their responses by searching for meaningful themes.

The research formed part of a group project in which the class of 91 fourth-year social work students each conducted five interviews with students who were not their friends, making a total of 455 interviews. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who met the following inclusion criteria: first, they needed to be currently registered as undergraduate students at the university where the study was conducted, and could be doing any qualification. Second, they needed to be in their second, third or fourth year of study for an undergraduate degree. Third, first-year students were excluded because they were still transitioning from school to university. Fourth, participants needed to have experienced at least one criminal act during their time at university. Those who agreed to participate completed a consent form for participation and a consent form for audio recording of the interview.

For the purposes of this article, instead of analysing all 455 interviews, a systematic random sample of every seventh interview was analysed, making a sample of 65 participants. Thematic analysis of the data involved searching for the themes that emerged from the responses. Ethical clearance was granted by the university's Faculty of Humanity's Ethics Research Committee.

## Limitations

As the study was located within a qualitative paradigm, we did not include quantitative data such as prevalence and types of crime across the sample; place, day and time in which crimes occurred; responses from campus security and SAPS; distinction between crime on-campus and off-campus; or prevalence of kidnapping and hijacking. A further limitation was the use of a non-probability sample which precluded generalisation of the results to other universities.

## Results

### Profile of participants

Of the 65 interviews that were analysed, 30 interviewees were male and 35 were female. Their ages ranged from 20 to 25 years. The vast majority (61 or 93.8%) were black students with only four (6%) being white. In terms of year of study, 22 interviewees (33.8%) were in second year, 29 (44.6%) in third year and 14 (21.5%) in fourth year. They were all registered for undergraduate degrees. The degrees included a range of courses across the faculties of Humanities, Engineering, Law and Commerce.

Results are presented in accordance with the three objectives of the study and analysed in terms of the two key theories underpinning the study, namely routine activity theory with its threefold emphasis on crimes committed by a motivated offender, lack of guardianship, and the availability of a vulnerable target; and cognitive behavioural theory with its emphasis on the impact of crime on victims and their coping responses.

### Motivated offenders

In terms of objective one, we did not focus on specific types of crime but instead asked participants about the types of crimes they had experienced. The most common types of crime experienced by students were robbery, or the taking of property from another person by force or intimidation, and theft or taking of someone's money, property or services with the victim not necessarily being present.[47] For example, many participants reported that they had been robbed of their technology items such as laptops and cell phones as well as money, as reflected in the following responses:

> I was walking facing down listening to music and the time I took my head straight I see him coming. He had a bag and when he came close to me he just, his hand was inside the bag, and he just took out the gun. I was so ... like I froze ... I gave him the phone ... he took my wallet as well because he wanted the money.

> Like he took a knife out of his pocket. He was like give me your bag or I will stab you.

> They were driving a car. The car just park[ed] and someone came out from the car and pull[ed] out the gun and told me that I should stand. Then they took everything and then after that the car left.

It was apparent from the responses that students had been targeted by a motivated offender with the specific intention of committing a crime.

### Lack of guardianship

It is concerning that students were not only exposed to crime off campus, but that crime also occurred in places where students assumed their property was safe, within the university environment. A participant explained how he experienced theft of a laptop in the library:

> What really happened is that I was studying at the library and then I had to go to the loo (restroom), so I left my laptop on the study desk with my iPad. When I came back from the toilet my iPad was not there. And I asked people whom I was sitting with.

They told me that some guy came and he knows me and we are friends so he took my iPad. So only to find out that I do not know the guy. So I went to the securities to ask for CCTV footage so that I can see who the guy was. So actually there was no camera where we were sitting. So there was no further investigation, nothing happened. I just moved on, like I forgot about the thing.

This student tried to obtain help from campus security, but was not assisted, underlining the limitations of the CCTV system as a guardian. Another student reported losing her valuables while writing exams: 'My laptop was stolen outside the exam venue ... we were not allowed to bring our bags inside the venue,' suggesting a complete lack of guardianship.

## Students as vulnerable targets

Students were also vulnerable to crime in their communes and residences, which should be safe places, and a home environment. For example, students reported that:

Our commune was broken into at the beginning of the year. It was very late at night when we were woken up by commotion outside. They broke the kitchen window using a brick and were able to gain access into the house. We were then shuffled into a corner at gunpoint while five other guys went room to room stealing electrical appliances. They stole laptops, cell phones, laptop chargers, iPads, tablets, the microwave and the kettle.

Some people came into our room at res. They stole my roommate's (hair) straightener, my straightener and her phone.

As vulnerable targets, students also reported kidnapping and hijacking incidents. For example, in one case, a student was abducted and forced to withdraw funds from his bank account

I experienced crime when I was kidnapped on the way back from campus to my commune late in the evening. A car pulled up next to me and the front passenger asked for directions. While responding one of the guys pointed a gun at me and told me to climb into the back seat. They then drove to another suburb about 10 kilometres away where I was forced to empty my bank account. They ran off with R3 000 and left me stranded in an open veld.

It seems that students were not only vulnerable to crime on campus but were also vulnerable to serious crime when off campus. The above student was abducted, but was not harmed. In another incident, a student was hijacked and badly injured, as he relates: 'It was a car hijacking and kidnapping…And one of them pulled out a screw driver and he stab[bed] me on my back.'

In many of the incidents related by students, they were threatened with weapons and even kidnapped during robberies. Exposure to such serious crimes could have various psychological impacts on these students as discussed below.

## The impact of crime on students

In terms of the second objective, we explored the impact of crime on students from a cognitive behavioural theory perspective. Understandably, fear was one of the overarching impacts of crime as highlighted in the quotes below:

You go to campus with fear and come back with fear.

I am afraid now to travel alone during around half past six because I am afraid that maybe I will be attacked again.

I feel so insecure every time I have to go back home or to school … anything can happe ... a car can park and then someone could get out of the car and then someone can request your stuff with a weapon.

As a consequence of fear, students became more vigilant.

It made me to be more vigilant as a student that certain places are not safe as other[s], especially at certain times. And another thing, you know this kind of stuff it happens now, it is happening to me you know. It is frustrating because you want to be comfortable and safe wherever you stay, but there is other people with other intentions, they see it as an opportunity.

The fear and hyper-vigilance led students to feel distrustful of people in general.

It is going to make it harder for an individual to earn my trust, just because of that experience. So another thing is humanity is perceived in a 'beastful' manner and in a very selfish way. Because they don't care how one feels or how one's life value is, you know? Because for me I actually seemed like an animal because this is the behaviour we are treating each other with you know.

They also felt disillusioned with the police, the university and university security, who they felt had neglected to protect them or assist them in dealing with incidents of crime. This disillusionment with the lack of guardianship is conveyed in the following quotes:

The security guys are never helpful. All they ever do is give excuses. You ask them to take you to (name of university residence) they tell you it's against university policy. What is their job actually? The police will ask you what happened but

at the end of the day there is nothing they can do.

I feel disappointment towards the university. When I left the security of my home the university was supposed to offer me that security.

I felt violated as someone committed an act of crime against me and the people employed to protect me could not do anything about it. They did not seem to care at all.

As a result of the above, students experienced varying psychological responses, including anger.

I was emotionally affected because I felt a lot of anger towards the perpetrators because of their actions. I was angry at the police because they responded very late and did not take our call as an urgent matter. I was angry at the landlord because he failed to install burglar bars. I was angry at myself for believing that the landlord would deliver on his promise of installing the latest security systems. We are in an all-female commune.

Some students experienced sleep problems, flashbacks and nightmares.

Immediately after the incident I could not sleep at all. I spent countless hours worrying about the criminals returning. I constantly check[ed] that the doors and windows were locked.

The only thing I was thinking about was the gun pointed at me and I was just scared from that time. I went home [to] my room and I just slept. I couldn't stop thinking about it even if I tried sleeping I couldn't sleep and from that time I just thought going to campus was too risky.

I was physically and emotionally affected as I had flashbacks and nightmares about the crime and my studies suffered too as I

could not focus or study due to lack of sleep.

In addition to the psychological impacts expressed above, students were also adversely affected in terms of their personal sense of security, financially because of the loss of equipment and money, and academically.

The incident affected my sense of security a lot because I did not feel safe at all outside campus or my commune. I was affected financially as my bank account was emptied … My studies also suffered because I failed a module from second year as I did not attend evening lectures for the remainder of the semester.

Losing my laptop also affected my studies as I had to rely on campus computers meaning that I left the campus late which also left me vulnerable to muggings … I am now very protective over my gadgets and super cautious about where I leave them.

My academics were affected. I got delayed because I lost some of my work.

Despite exposure to some horrendous crimes and the lack of support and assistance received, some students expressed an ability to exercise resilience as captured in these responses:

Yeah I was actually on immediate bounce back because my friend was traumatised by this whole situation, she was crying hysterically … but I felt like I had to be the stronger, so, if my friend is crying I can't also be crying. Like it's too much to take in so I just moved on with life. I was assisting her in her trauma but I just ... I thank God that we didn't get hurt ... our lives, everything else is still intact. So they are just prized possessions – if they are gone you can still get another one, it's fine.

It's just a matter of moving on and just accepting things as they are and just hoping that they don't happen again you know.

In summary, in the aftermath of the crime, students experienced fear, disillusionment, increased vigilance, sleep problems and flashbacks. Yet some responded with resilience.

## Dealing with the trauma of crime

In terms of the third objective, we examined the coping strategies students used to deal with the trauma of crime and make themselves less vulnerable as targets. These strategies can be divided into cognitive and behavioural strategies Cognitive strategies involve attempts at trying to change one's thought processes about the situation, while behavioural strategies involve tangible and observable changes, such as withdrawing from others or conversely seeking social support or problem avoidance.[48]

Examples of cognitive coping strategies included the following:

I had to sit myself down and counsel myself you know and try to actually face the situation.

I'm trying my best because one of my friends gave me an advice that eh, I must be strong as a man and stand still.

If it's not a drastic thing, then I'm going to be like just keep calm … deal with it. It shouldn't go that far, pretty much no one died. Then it's fine. If I didn't lose the most important things, then it's okay.

Students also utilised behavioural coping strategies. A common strategy was to go for counselling.

Initially I did not go for counselling. But after I failed a semester module I went for therapy. It was beneficial because it helped me to deal with my security issues

which prevented me from living my life and attending late lectures.

I went for counselling, but then I could not get help there because these guys they ask you there what happened? What do you think must happen? So I would go there thinking that they will provide solutions to my life but they give me more problems so nothing has changed in my life. Basically I am still the same person that I was last year.

I suffered from anxiety and I went for counselling. They did help me to overcome the stress, other emotions and how to cope with my studies and with myself. And yeah it did help me. That's how I was able to overcome whatever I was experiencing.

Some students sought support from friends and family.

The girls at the commune supported each other through the ordeal and we voiced our grievances with the landlord who then upgraded the security system.

I told one of my roommates, I trusted her and I told her what happened and she told me, No, just calm down. You'll be okay. Things like this happen.

I just spoke to my parents about it.

Spirituality, prayer and religion became a source of solace.

All you can do is pray. I trust in God for all my protection. Once I have prayed I feel at ease.

I pray the entire moment … until such time when I get to campus and on my way back … which is not visible [to outsiders]. I will not put in headsets.

I will not leave my room without praying.

Others became more vigilant.

You just become more aware of your surroundings.

I am always cautious, because of what happened at the back of my mind. Whenever I am walking, I try to view everyone at a negative perspective because I can't trust anyone.

Some students adapted to the experience of crime by changing their way of dressing and consciously avoided displaying gadgets. In this way they attempted to be less vulnerable targets for criminals.

Since the crime, even the way I dress has changed … I must not attract them (criminals) and carry less gadgets.

I switch off my phone when I'm going to walk. Even if I did not switch it off but I'll try to put it in pockets.

A further strategy for reducing vulnerability was walking with others and avoiding walking alone.

I also take the precaution of trying to find out from my housemates where I stay who is going to campus at a certain time so that at least there is safety… that you are walking with someone else.

In contrast to this approach of safety in numbers, some students chose to be alone.

I wouldn't go out and interact like I actually stayed in my room a lot after that because I was already alone at res. I had like one or two friends but now it was just like I don't want contact, don't come close to me, just leave me alone.

In summary, cognitive coping strategies included keeping calm and accepting the situation, while behavioural coping strategies included going for counselling, seeking support from family and friends, praying, and avoiding displaying gadgets.

## Recommendations offered by students

In terms of the study's fourth objective, students were asked to make recommendations to address crime and improve safety. The first set of recommendations related to universities increasing security measures or guardianship.

I think that the management needs to take crime seriously because I am not the first person to experience crime, I know that. So, we should install more security inside the library not to just check when people get in. Also, inside there should be people standing there watching everybody. What are they doing? What are they there for? Having ... what do you call this security service where you can go and put our stuff so they can be safe?

The security around campus must be tightened up because late at night people are being robbed inside the campus and a few girls have filed for rape. So it is no longer safe even in the campus that we are studying in. So we just need some strong security and some CCTV footage.

Protection services must ensure that all cameras are working and the staff can also show empathy towards victims of crime… We need a community policing forum, escort services from protection services and students can create a crime watch group where they can notify each other of suspicious activities.

While students expected the university to create a more secure environment and improve options for identifying and dealing with criminals, they also suggested options for how students could protect themselves and reduce their vulnerability to crime.

Students can take security measures for themselves by carrying a can of pepper spray or a taser to ensure that crime does not affect them the way it has affected me.

Another precaution which maybe they could take is offer us self-defence classes.

Walk without music, like don't have your earphones on. Don't make yourself an unnecessary target.

Walk in groups. Don't walk alone during the nights or during the day because it is not also safe during the day as well.

Having presented the key results from the study, we now proceed to interpret and discuss these findings.

## Discussion

The most common crimes reported by students were those perpetrated by a motivated offender and included theft of laptops and cell phones, being abducted and having funds stolen from one's bank account, being hijacked and injured, experiencing a robbery at a commune or student residence, and having one's belongings stolen after being threatened with a knife or gun. These types of crimes were consistent with those documented by Kury and Winterdyk who conducted an international study and found that the most common kinds of crimes experienced by students included criminal damage, theft/robbery and burglary.[49] Students were unfortunately vulnerable to crime both on and off campus, including in their residences and communes. Many were held up at gun or knife point, with serious impacts. In terms of routine activity theory, unarmed students walking alone could be regarded as highly vulnerable targets for criminals. Moreover, many students live in university residences or student accommodation off campus and do not have the security, protection and guardianship of parents and home environments.

The crime encounter had profound psychological, financial and academic consequences for students. Participants developed a fear of crime, criminals and returning to the place where the crime had

occurred. They also experienced trauma-related symptoms such as anger, sleep problems, flashbacks and nightmares. These emotional effects are consistent with those reported by Morrall et al where victims experienced feelings of anger, shock, fear and depression after experiencing crime.[50] While these are the common short-term responses, they may turn into long-term depressive effects, including anxiety, insomnia, panic attacks and flashbacks, which are manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that can last for months or even years.[51] The experience of crime also affected students' academic performance. Participants also experienced a lack of trust in people and disillusionment with agencies mandated to protect citizens. In a similar vein, Shapland and Hall reported that victims experienced shock and loss of trust and faith in society, particularly in the local community or in relation to the social group or place where the offence occurred.[52] This limitation on mobility was reported in the present study too. However, despite the emotional, financial and academic impacts, some students demonstrated resilience and the ability to move on with their lives.

These findings provide support for the cognitive behavioural theory guiding the study, which argues that victims of crime experience fear and social anxiety, which prevent them from being in places where they need to be, such as the library, lectures and university residences.[53] According to cognitive behavioural theory, fear is a rational response to a perceived threat. Fear of crime has two components, namely the emotional fear of victimisation and the cognitive perceived risk of victimisation.[54] The findings are also in line with routine activity theory, which emphasises how the likelihood of an individual becoming a victim of crime is predetermined by routine activities of lifestyle.[55] In the case of participants in the study, routine activities included studying at the library, attending lectures, shopping for groceries and so forth.

Students endeavoured to cope with the trauma of crime by adopting a variety of cognitive and behavioural strategies. Cognitive strategies employed included positive self-talk, confronting the situation and taking control of one's life. Behavioural coping strategies included deriving support from friends and family, becoming more vigilant, changing one's way of dressing and avoiding displaying gadgets, walking with others, and choosing to be alone. These are examples of what Jennings, Gover and Pudrzynska refer to as 'constrained behaviour', designed to reduce their victimisation risk.[56] They can also be regarded as self-protective behaviours, which Tewksbury and Mustaine consider to be a form of guardianship, highlighted in routine activity theory.[57] While the strategy of isolating oneself could be positive and therapeutic in affording the person time to process what had happened, it could also be negative by isolating the person from potential sources of support. Unlike Morrall et al's finding, where only a minority of students sought health intervention, several students in the present study reported making use of psychological counselling services offered by the university.[58] Other students found solace in prayer and religion. In this regard, Greef and Loubser maintain that religion and spirituality play important roles in helping people to survive life stressors.[59]

Students' recommendations for enhancing safety included universities increasing security or guardianship measures through increasing patrols and CCTV surveillance cameras. They also recommended that students adopt self-protection measures to reduce vulnerability to crime such as self-defence courses, walking in groups, being more vigilant, and not walking with headphones on.

## Conclusions and recommendations

University campuses are generally perceived to be relatively secure places; however, results from this research show that they are not immune to crime. In line with routine activity theory, results

indicate that students were vulnerable targets of motivated offenders and often lacked guardianship. The findings from the study also provide support for Wasserman and Ellis's contention that crime can affect victims psychologically, socially, financially, physically and spiritually,[60] as well as academically, which is consistent with cognitive behavioural theory.

While most South African universities have policies and services in place to protect students and staff, universities, in conjunction with police, need to enhance security through increased visible patrolling of areas not only within but also adjacent to campuses, especially in the evenings. University authorities need to provide transport for students when evening classes are scheduled, when they need to attend off-site internship training, and when they return from the library to student residences late at night. The university where the study was conducted must be commended for addressing many of these issues.

Students need to be made conscious of crime around and within the campus precincts and alerted to crime hotspots based on police statistics. They need to avoid displaying their valuables, carrying excess cash and should leave identity documents and licences in safe places. Students need to be encouraged to walk in groups, memorise emergency contact numbers and report crimes to both the university as well as the South African Police Service. There is also a need for strategies to improve the public's trust in the police and the criminal justice system.

Consistent with routine activity theory, these policy and prevention recommendations for enhancing guardianship on the part of university protection services and police, coupled with self-protection strategies on the part of students, can potentially reduce the risks of students becoming victims/targets of criminal offenders who prey on vulnerable students.

However, colleges and universities need to collate statistics on campus crime and evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes to make campuses safer.

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## Notes

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