

“FRESH MEAT”: FIRST YEAR FEMALE STUDENTS NEGOTIATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS RESIDENCES

B. Anderson*

School of Social Sciences

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1745-8379>

C. Naidu*

Department of Basic Education (Doctoral Student)

*University of KwaZulu-Natal

Edgewood Campus, Durban

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on first-year black female students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who were exposed to and experienced sexual violence. The aim of the study was, broadly, to determine how female students experience and negotiate gender, sexuality and violence in campus residences. Semi-structured individual interviews were utilised to generate data. The findings show that violence was shaped by gender and power dynamics. These students were first years, and predominantly from poor backgrounds, and therefore particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and unequal relationships.

Alcohol, substance abuse and dangerous masculinised spaces further exacerbated their vulnerability. Poverty, scarce resources and gender intersect to produce vulnerability and constrained forms of their agency that translate into transactional relationships. The findings also suggest that being first year female students have implications for how these young women negotiated their newfound freedom away from the parental gaze. The study highlights the ways in which these first-year students are aware that sexual violence is prevalent on campus particularly in certain spaces such as Dark City and residence rooms. Members of the SRC and DSRA are cited as likely perpetrators of sexually predatory behaviours.

We therefore propose that the Gender Based Violence Policy at UKZN should be introduced to first year students by way of induction courses, and that these courses should also include gender and sexuality education to help ensure that awareness around gender violence permeates the lives of all students.

Keywords: sexual violence, university student residences, vulnerability, first year female students, dangerous spaces, alcohol usage

INTRODUCTION

University students' experiences of sexual assault on university campuses has been documented by scholars around the world as a matter of grave concern (Hirsch and Khan 2020; Vandana

2020; Jackson and Sundaram 2019). This study focuses on South Africa where increasing occurrences of gender-based violence have been reported both within and around higher education institutions (Davids 2020). In 2019, incidents of gender-based violence in higher education institutions made national headline news (Davids 2020).

One of the more recent cases was the senseless murder of a female student at the University of Cape Town in 2019 (*Mail and Guardian* 2019), the incident being a poignant testimony of the failure of awareness and education programmes to address gender power relations and violence.

Qualitative studies that focus on in-depth understandings and insights into the conditions that create high incidents of sexual violence, with females being disproportionately the victims in university institutions, can provide essential insights into the scourge and thus help inform effective interventions. The purpose of this article is therefore to address these issues from the perspectives of university students, specifically the experiences of 15 first-year Black female students living in campus residences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The aim of the study was to determine how these female students experience and negotiate gender, sexuality and violence in campus residences. The focus of this article is the complex relationship between their ability to express their autonomy within the campus gendered and sexualised environment and the broader social structures of power that circumscribe their ability to foster their agency, that manifests in their choice to engage in relationships that secure residence on campus and albeit a minority, to resist sexual violence.

Emerging research in South Africa suggests that the subordination and sexual harassment of women, as well as gender violence in general are often normalised on campus residences (Clowes et al. 2009; Gordon and Collins 2013; Jagessar and Msibi 2015; Bhana and Pillay 2018). Attempts to mitigate sexual violence on campuses globally have resulted in the introduction and adoption of sexual harassment policies that attempt to provide support and information to students who experience such incidents (Wamboldt et al. 2018; Anitha and Lewis 2018). The University of KwaZulu-Natal, the setting for this study, introduced a gender-based violence policy in 2017 (UKZN 2017), in which it committed itself to raising awareness and facilitating educational interventions to address such violence.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Studies in in the global north have highlighted the pervasiveness of gender violence perpetrated against female students on university campuses (Jones, Boocock, and Underhill-Sem 2013; Cantor et al. 2015; Anitha and Lewis 2018; Wamboldt et al. 2018). One in seven UK female students, according to (NUS 2010), experienced sexual assault or physical violence while on

campus. In 2015 universities in the United Kingdom (UK), with the establishment of a task force by the government, began to give the matter greater attention (Anitha and Lewis 2018). A report on an interview-based study of UK students’ experiences of the night-time economy and how they negotiate and resist such violence indicated the ways they challenge sexual violence and the role of universities in enabling such interventions (Anitha and Lewis 2018).

Other countries have also expressed concern about the spate of violence against women at university campuses, with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) showing similarities with other countries, revealing a high prevalence of sexual violence, with females largely being victims, men being perpetrators and low reporting rates. In Australia, increasing awareness of gender and sexual violence, and providing support for students, is now an overriding concern, given the high prevalence rate of sexual violence and its underreporting (Towl and Walker 2019).

Canadian research showed that students in their first two years appeared to be more at risk, as they fall prey to the most common perpetrated tactics such as incapacitation due to alcohol and drugs as well as the use of force (Senn et al. 2014). Studies in the United States of America (USA) (Krebs et al. 2016; Hirsch and Khan 2020) found that a culture of alcohol and drug consumption helps perpetuate gendered norms that increase incidents and risks of sexually violent behaviours. Female students who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs were more likely to become victims of gender-based violence (Krebs et al. 2016; Hirsch and Khan 2020). Hirsch and Khan (2020) view spaces such as dormitory rooms (USA term for residence rooms), and where students engage in alcohol and drugs, as sexualized, and argue that together with cultural norms, and peer group pressure work to influence the ways in which young university students experiences and interpretations of sex and sexual violence are shaped.

Research in the global south have also emphasised the need for research-led interventions into gender violence at universities (Treffrey-Goatley et al. 2018; Singh, Mudaly, and Singh-Pillay 2015), with young female students starting university often being eager to explore their newly discovered freedom (Dranzoa 2018). For many first-year female students, especially those who live in campus residences, it is their first experience of being away from home and thus from any form of parental or familial surveillance (Gordon and Collins 2013). Such a situation, however, also laid students, particularly females, open to highly negative experiences, including sexual harassment and rape (Gordon and Collins 2013). The findings of research in a South African university highlights that sexual violence, particularly amongst female students living in university residences, is widespread, and their activities are determined and constrained by fear of sexual assault (Singh et al. 2015). It is mainly first-year students who are exposed to a “party rape culture” where they are not only pressurised to consume alcohol and

drugs but also pressurised to engage into having unprotected sex, which makes them vulnerable to gender-based violence (Armstrong 2006).

In other South African studies, hangouts at university campuses, where alcohol and drug abuse and sexual activity is rife, provides a social and cultural context in which gender-based violence is most likely to occur (Gordon and Collins 2013; Clowes et al. 2009; Hames 2009). Using Participatory Visual Methods, amongst 15 participants in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, researchers found that universities are used as sexual hunting grounds, where males prey on female students (Treffrey-Goatley et al. 2018). There is an implicit link to sexual violence in the metaphorical use of “meat” and “the hunt” which reinforces harmful gender norms that continue to produce violence against women (Treffrey-Goatley et al. 2018).

The effects of persistent financial distress for many poor South African university students led to the #FeesMustFall (FMF) campaign in 2015. As an increasing number of Black students access higher education, race and class inequalities are becoming more evident, with many requiring financial aid from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which is funded by the state as a loan and bursary scheme (Booyesen 2016). According to Mbembe (2015), the recurring student protests for more financial support and better living conditions in campus residences are linked to broader social conditions, and the fight for equal, non-sexist based on non-racial ideals and a fairer and just future.

One of the effects on university students of this non-deliverance of the promises made by the new political dispensation after the transition to democracy in 1994 is that inequalities persist, and result in systemic and structural impacts. For example, many students are faced with problems associated with lack of accommodation, which for female students increases the potential of them engaging in transactional relationships that might give them preferential access to accommodation on campus. Gender inequalities in South African universities intersect with the country’s history of colonialism and apartheid, with poverty, structural inequalities and the continued subordination of women based on dominant ideological and cultural norms.

In a comparative study of Sweden and South Africa by Morrell and Hearn (2012), wealth and access to resources show vastly different results, with Sweden being a well-resourced, high-income nation with relatively narrow gaps between rich and poor, male and female, and South Africa being a middle-income nation with wide disparities of wealth between male and female as well as between, Black and White. The overall rates of gender-based violence particularly rape and intimate partner violence in South Africa was extremely high (Morrell and Hearn 2012). Their findings highlight how race, class and gender intersect, and its effects for Black, poor females, which has implications for the females in this study and consequences for the

constructions of violent masculinities.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST AND INTERSECTIONALITY: A THEORETICAL FRAMING

We draw on Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, and on post structural (Foucault 1997) conceptualisations of power, which enabled us to explore how gender power is so much more than a fixed entity in which dominant men are omnipotent against vulnerable and weak women. Our analysis of gender violence on campus thus requires an understanding of power being multifaceted, and must consider the central importance of class, race, gender and age, and how these factors shape how respondents experienced and negotiated campus life.

The very notion of violence being predicated on a social construction, such as gender, raises questions that extend beyond essentialist understandings of violence and aggression. The norms and narratives of power, and more specifically, Foucault's (1997, 291) reference to “relations of power” should be considered. Foucault (1997, 292) explains that power is always present in human relationships “whether they involve verbal communication ... or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, ... any relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other ...”. The potential to “wreak boundless and limitless violence” exists wherever an individual is perceived or constructed as inferior or as an object that is easily disregarded (Foucault 1997, 292).

Female students' experiences of power are not uniform, and those of gender violence are also contextually differentiated. Thus Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory enables an understanding of the multiple intersections of structural and socio-political forms of oppression, drawing attention to how oppressive conditions limit agency. An intersectional approach is a complex process through which a multiplicity of social realities, including socio-cultural and economic systems of power, are entrenched in the learning environment and in the experiences of our participants. Intersectionality as a concept emerged from feminist theory (Crenshaw 1991), and is particularly useful in examining the cumulative process through which race, class, gender, age and sexuality can overlap, shape and be shaped by social interactions. The effects of intersectionality in social interactions can confer advantage and deleteriously effect student experiences of campus life. Following an intersectional approach, both the individual student's experience and the interweaving nature of structural inequalities that underlie their experiences are important. In so doing, our concern is to highlight how these students articulate and interpret their experiences and the circumscribed ways through which sexual violence is negotiated.

As Crenshaw (1991) argued, a nuanced understanding of intersectionality requires attention both to the experiences of power and inequalities, if the two can, indeed, be separated.

These theories help by showing how the intersections of race, gender, class and age exacerbate vulnerable positions of first-year female resident students, and how the multiple responses indicate both constrained agency and resistance to male sexual violence.

Kaufman et al. (2019), Clowes et al. (2009) and Hirsch and Khan (2020) have drawn attention to the ways in which power relations circumscribe women's ability to express their autonomy and freedom in contexts where men exercise more power than women. We argue that the female students in our study were able to express their autonomy and negotiate educational spaces, albeit limited, in ways that allowed them to show resistance within gender relations of power. We use an analytical lens that recognises the post-structural accounts of power as being relational in order to unpack the respondents' ability to make sense of the specific experiences of marginalisation they were subjected to, and to explore their responses and resistance to such subjection.

METHODS

Our study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, which has separate male and female residences as well as those that cater for students who cohabit. The residences have single and double rooms with communal ablution and kitchen amenities. A large proportion of the Black students at the university, particularly those from rural areas and urban townships, were dependent on grants or bursaries and food allowances. Many of the students living in campus residences were from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds and often struggled to maintain their basic needs, such as food and toiletries.

At the time of our research, the UKZN Department of Student Residence Affairs (DSRA) was tasked with ensuring the equitable and efficient management of the university's accommodation, and regulating the selection and placement of students in all University-owned and administered residences in order to achieve maximum occupancy levels (UKZN 2016). The Student Representative Council (SRC) is key in mediating student access to campus residences, its role as the highest decision-making structure of student governance at the university being to offer a number of services to students.

This descriptive study utilized purposive sampling to recruit 15 first-year, Black, female students living in university residences. We conducted one hour-long, individual, semi-structured interviews with each participant in their student residences. Qualitative data was obtained through audio-recorded interviews that were transcribed and thematically analysed through the development of codes that indicate the similarities and differences among their responses.

The aim of the study was to determine how these female students experience and negotiate gender, sexuality and violence in campus residences.

The interview questionnaire schedule consisted of three sections: the first obtained information about their age and background, the second consisted of questions about their observations and experiences of sexual violence and the third explored the ways in which they deal with these observations and experiences.

Given the nature of the topic, self-reflexivity and researcher positioning were central concerns and unavoidably shaped both how we conducted the fieldwork and interpreted the data that were generated. The second author, who conducted the interviews, was also a student at the university. While she was able to access and create rapport with the respondents to a far greater extent than an outsider would have been able to achieve, it is also important to acknowledge the impact the relationships she developed had both on her objectivity and the data generated. She reflected on how listening to other young women narrate their experiences of gender violence “filled me with despair as I felt helpless, being a mother myself”. Importantly, this study provided these young women with the opportunity to speak about their experiences, which they felt was therapeutic because, as one respondent said, “we are too embarrassed to speak about this”. We ensured that all our participants were aware that there was a university counsellor available to help them if they desired.

RESULTS

The 15 female students were aged 17–21, lived in single room accommodation, were from rural and informal areas, and had completed their schooling the previous year. Five themes emerged relating to *how* they experience and negotiate gender, sexuality and violence in campus residences, these being: 1) new found freedom, sexual debuts and agency; 2) sexual harassment: rape and sexual coercion by senior students, SRC and DSRA members; 3) alcohol and sexual coercion; 4) dangerous spaces: dark city and residence rooms and 5) the effects of sexual violence on first year female resident students.

New found freedom, sexual debuts and agency

Dranzoa (2018) asserted that young female students starting university are often eager to explore their newly discovered freedom. According to Gordon and Collins (2013), being away from home and parental or familial surveillance is the first experience for many first-year female students who live on campus residences. However, such a situation opened students, particularly first-year females, to sexual risk, albeit by choice.

Noma: "There are no strict rules. You do whatever you want, whenever You can have your boyfriend whenever."

This stress on independence and being able to do whatever they wanted indicated that the participants were highly aware of their agency, and were able to navigate student life of decision-making on their own. Thus, sexual decision-making became a personal choice, showing their sexual agency.

Sne: "New things coming into my life, I've adapted new lifestyle ... I started doing things I've never done before, for example sex, personally I've never done sex."

Pinky: "You lose your virginity and you have unprotected sex."

While some female students *were aware* of their ability to make choices regarding having sex, which included their sexual debut, there was also the recklessness and awareness of engaging in unprotected sex, exposing them to sexual risk. Using a post-structuralist lens, it is evident that these young women *are* sexual agents who are able to decide when and how to have sex, thereby destabilizing the traditional assumption of men dictating the timing and nature of sex. In this instance, losing their virginity was both Pinky's and Sne's choice.

While life on campus *gave* the students the opportunity to experiment with activities that they may previously have regarded as being socially and culturally unacceptable, they were aware of risky sexual behaviours that accompanied their freedom to choose.

Sne: "A lot of cases (GBV) are reported, but you find the university cannot address it because of culture, because of religion, because of what you call interpretation, because when these girls come to the university, they are taught at home that a woman without a man is nothing so they believe that they get their identity from having males."

It is evident in the above extract that some females were aware of the ways in which culture, religion and patriarchy intersect to limit their agency in their home environments. Being in a university environment allowed them to disrupt notions of women's positions that define them by having a male partner. It is within this context that some of these first-year females were able to make their own decisions.

Sexual harassment: Rape and sexual coercion by senior students, SRC and DSRA members

The female students' ability to enact any form of agency was both enabling and oppressive. Enabling, as they were able to exercise an ability to but also oppressive due to the perpetual threat and actuality of violence, and because they often could not avoid being complicit in sustaining the very power relations they sought to subvert. Our findings suggest that the first-

year female resident students were "soft targets" for sexual violence due to their economic vulnerabilities and age. Our respondents recounted how even DSRA and SRC members perpetrated sexual crimes:

Lunga: "Female first year students are largely victims on campus and they are mostly harassed by senior students, including SRC and DRSA student assistants. What happened to this first-year student was a form of quid-pro-quo: the guy had authority and connections to help the needy student get a residence."

Lerato: "A guy from the DRSA department offered help to a vulnerable female first year who had no accommodation, but it was later discovered that the motive behind it was sex."

Although there were respondents who were forced into situations that included accommodating and being complicit in sexual transactions amidst gender and broader race and class inequalities, these are framed as sexualised resources for the expansion of heterosexual masculinity. It was also a site for sexual coercion, especially when transactional sexual relations were resisted. SRC representatives and members of the DSRA who are also responsible for providing and allocating accommodation at campus residences are implicated in using their power and authority to coerce students into engaging in transactional sex in exchange for accommodation. This form of sexual coercion was regarded as widespread at UKZN by the students, and was an exchange of sex for rooms.

A desperate need for accommodation renders these females vulnerable to male "predators" who use their positions of authority to abuse the system. Some male SRC members thrive on relations of gender power and hierarchical inequalities, and prey on first year young females who lack social and economic power. Other studies at university campuses have illustrated the salience of transactional relationships for the purposes of status and material gain (Clowes et al. 2009; Masvawure 2010). Zembe et al. (2013) showed how female students became embroiled in unequal relationships through their attempts to meet their various needs, and were inadvertently exposed to gender violence, much like the students in our study.

Masvawure (2010) however, showed how in a University in Zimbabwe amongst 10 economically disadvantaged students, transactional sex had various meanings for different students. The female students tried to balance their relationships with multiple men while simultaneously exercising some degree of some control which became sexual. This was not unlike the female students in this study, who engaged in transactional relationships that were largely sexually violent (Masvawure 2010). Some of the current participants were forced into such transactions amidst gender, age as well as broader race and class inequalities.

Nathi: “When identifying victims, it is always females Say maybe they want to get a residence on campus, a male SRC member would ensure they get it but only on condition that the female student is okay with him touching her in her private part or even sleeping with him just to get a room on campus.”

Nonhlanhla: “Especially with the first-year females ... in most cases there is no funding ... the best way to make life go on is to find a partner ... now partners will be 2nd, 3rd, 4th year or postgrads. When I got to the room ... the guy was beating up the girl ... hes saying Ive been paying for her ... buying food and now she is refusing to give me sex. ... I bought you something, now you have to repay me.

These excerpts show that sexual violence on campus was predominantly perpetrated by senior male students who targeted first year female students. Gender, age and class thus intersected due to the unequal power relations between first year female students and SRC/DRSA members, male privilege and seniority, which resulted in an exchange of sex for material benefits, with senior male students negotiating sexual favours from new female students. This form of transactional sex can be associated with what is referred to as “sex for basic needs” (Treffrey-Goatly et al. 2018). The multiple intersections of structural and socio-political forms of oppression draws attention to how oppressive conditions limit agency. The students’ perspectives allude to the fact that sexual violence is deeply embedded in gender inequality and discrimination, which is deepened by the intersectionality of gender, race, class and age

Alcohol and sexual coercion

Research shows that drunk men are *more* likely to be violent both in intimate and casual relationships, implying that the linkages between substance abuse and sexual behaviour need to be more specifically addressed (Townsend et al. 2011). Research shows that a significant number of sexual assault victims at universities were inebriated at the time of assaults, with binge drinking being identified as a facilitator for sexual assault perpetration and victimisation (Mouilso, Fischer, and Calhoun 2012).

Sne: “If someone buys you a drink for free, then you refuse to sleep with them, they start insulting you, calling you names.”

Zinhle: “When a guy buys you alcohol and when you guys are done and get back to the res he expects you to give him like sex as payment for those drinks.”

Zinhle: “Students get drunk and boys take advantage especially first years ... cases of rape.”

Sne: “During bashes a lot of rape takes place ... cold drinks are or alcohol ... drinks are spiked and the girl doesnt remember who she is, who is her neighbour ... the guy takes her to his res ... they have sex, he takes her back, then takes another girl they buy girls drinks, in return they want sex.”

Hypersexualised males and their pursuit of sexual gratification with multiple female conquests also results from the lure of alcohol. The spiking of female drinks has been cited as one of the ways in which they become intoxicated and are susceptible to being sexually violated. The lack of research to draw on regarding spiking the drinks of college and university students is glaring, with a Canadian study on college students showing that some males continue to use alcohol as a way to gain females who are encouraged to render themselves intoxicated as part of having a good time (Benedet 2010).

Zinhle: "The women are drunk, they get dragged ... aggressively."

Sne: "They get drunk and they started violating another persons right ... she was bleeding ... bruised ... he beat her up. ... there was this guy he was licking her vagina."

Sne: "They wear in an inappropriate manner, they wear bum shorts, they wear lace tops that are revealing their underwear. I think the way we dress as women because they are wearing short skirts."

The social processes are implicated in how some female students place the burden of protecting their bodies on those females whom in their view, dress in a way that causes sexual violence. This is evident of horizontal oppression, whereby some females regulate and police the ways in which other females dress.

Insidious victim blaming that normalises gender-based violence and perpetuates the cycle of underreporting, or not reporting, results in the victims mistrusting the university authorities' commitment to assist them, and they therefore keep their experiences hidden (Gordon and Collins 2013).

Zinhle: "No, I never report anything because Im scared of the guys, because you know they are powerful. She reported the issue ... his friends went to court to pay his bail ... he came back just like that."

Lerato: "Sometimes like the SRC ... some of them are corrupt because you go and report someone whats a friend of an SRC, they will make sure that the case is disappeared, no action will be taken."

It is evident that several factors contribute to the under-reporting of gender-based violence at universities. Amongst the reasons given are the ways in which sexual violence was sanctioned and defended by other males who supported the perpetrators (for example by paying their bail), or ensuring that charges of sexual assault are negated. Additional consequences are that rape victims who report sexually violent incidents are subjected to the further threat of violence by the perpetrators or their friends, thereby prohibiting them from seeking any form of assistance.

Thandi: “We are first years now and ... you are scared (to report). ... and she will even be beaten up for even reporting the incident.”

Lerato: “Friends of the SRC beat up girls and they are not excluded, they beat up girls and they are not arrested, SRC rape girls but they are not arrested.”

It is paramount to understand that sexual violence occurred in a context where these female students fear of reprisal offered them no option but to remain silent after being sexually assaulted. In some cases, the lack of physical evidence is sufficient to silence females from reporting an assault, and even in instances where there is physical evidence, it is either not reported or they suffer in silence due to their awareness of the lack of any will on the part of authorities to act against perpetrators.

Sne: “These boys on campus are very strategic, they make sure they dont touch your face, but they give you the beating of your life on your body. Some Ive seen bruises ... like youve been hit by a mob.”

Dangerous spaces: Dark city and residence rooms

Our fieldwork found that campus residences became hunting grounds and dangerous spaces for first year female students. Dark City is one such space on this university campus, being poorly lit at night with little security presences, and regarded as being a “masculine space” where male students congregate near the students union. It is in an open area that is at the centre of the social space on the campus, through which students need to pass to access the various parts of the campus that surround it. It is an open space that females avoid and take the longer routes to their residences, the library and lecture theatres. It was regarded as a focal point of unwanted encounters, where predominantly senior male students who intimidated female students who walked through the area . Such university spaces are areas of male control, which restricted access across the space, particulaly to female students. According to Nompilo:

“When I first came to campus, of course you know guys [are] trying to pick up women. When you [are] in your first year, the third or the fourth years think of you as fresh meat. Theres this place on campus called Dark City. Its generally where all the goons [drunk males and those high on drugs] hang out and do their funky businesses [such as] smoking dagga [marijuana] or drinking, and they [are] all crowded there.”

Nompilos metaphor, in which she describes “fresh meat”, referring to the age of first year females being prey to roaming males, related to dominant masculine norms prescribing male predatory behaviour. According to Treffrey-Goatley et al. (2018), the metaphors of “meat” and

“the hunt” and their links to sexual assault shed light on the harmful gender norms that give rise to violence against women.

The excerpts below show that unsafe spaces for these first-year students extended to the supposed “sanctity” of their private spaces (the residence rooms). In addition, they are not free to move around the campus at night, despite the library being accessible to them 24 hours. This has negative implications for their ability to access academic spaces without fear of being attacked, and therefore impacts their academic lives.

Nombulelo: “There was a guy who was raping girls here in residence, getting in the rooms.”

Amanda: “The girl came running into our room and she was half-naked, only the bra and panties and when you try to establish what is happening, you find the guy is chasing her, so now we try to resolve this, but the guy is hurting us.”

Despite the desire to assist and support their female peers from sexually violent acts in campus rooms, other female students were prevented from doing so due fear of further victimisation and reprisals. Studies revealed that female students do not report gender-based violence because they fear reprisal from the perpetrator and that they may not be believed, as the traumatic incident may have caused them to block out details to reduce the impact. They may also fear being accused of being complicit or worse, of provoking the assault and blame themselves for what happened (Singh et al. 2015; Gordon and Collins 2013).

Pretty: “Definitely at res [in the residence], I would say at night ... you dont want to be here at night. I think anywhere here at night youre going to be feeling unsafe.”

Nomsa: “Theres no sort of guidance or control here [in the campus residence] in this situation so that adds to it and makes it a bit rifer [more common].”

Kwanda: “Sexual harassment has happened in one of the residences in dorm rooms where senior students who hold certain positions in the SRC access the students dorm rooms, sexually violate force females and threaten them not to report, and bribe them with money for [their] silence.”

Kwandas utterances highlight how the first-year female residence rooms are easily accessible to male students, which should be private spaces, and were therefore unsafe. These students live in residences, and with no support or protection are forced to find ways to navigate their lives in ways that render them vulnerable to senior students in powerful positions. A deeper analysis of the data reveals that under-reporting or not reporting of gender-based violence is evident of their lack of confidence in the university security and Risk Management Services (RMS). Apart from the students’ perceptions of the security and RMS being ineffective, weak

and not inadequately trained or not trained at all to deal with issues of gender-based violence, they claim that they are also corrupt and easily bribed to ignore incidents of male students accessing female students rooms, with the resultant effect of their being sexually assaulted. This is evident in the following excerpts:

Sne: “These are boys ... we dont know how they got in, we have no idea how the security will let them in.”

Amanda: “The security is not tight ... you find the security not in their positions ... the security is staying in the TV room watching TV. Like I said our security is pathetic ... she was beaten it was four oclock in the morning ... when the security lady supposed to be helping and asking for backup ... she said, leave him, go to RMS and open the case ... she folded her arms, she didnt even call for backup.”

Empirical research highlights additional reasons for the under-reporting or non-reporting of gender-based violence that include the lack of trust of university structures, their lack of knowledge of university gender-based violence and harassment policy, as well as fear of victimisation and stigmatisation (Moletsane and Theron 2017; Gordon 2017; Gordon and Collins 2013).

The effects of sexual violence on first year female resident students

Sexual violence in the higher education sector has been a global concern for many decades and has far-reaching public health, economic and social consequences (Moletsane and Theron 2017). Students who have been previously sexually violated are prone to depression, anxiety and headaches, may be less likely to perform academically. Students may sometimes struggle in silence against violent and aggressive males, and against patriarchal gender norms that disempower them, rendering their suffering and abuse invisible (Moletsane and Theron 2017; Harris, Hemson, and Kaye 2014; Masten and Wright 2010). Some participants were able to observe and describe the impact of gender-based violence on the victim.

Lerato: “She did go for counselling ... maybe 4–5 weeks she didnt leave her room ... always indoors, crying.”

Amanda: “Sometimes they drop out of school and sometimes they suffer depression.”

Zinhle: “It had an impact on my studies, my records went down.”

Lerato: “She is not coping on campus, she is not going to class (lectures) ... she lost weight ... it affected her bad ... academically, her health. Apparently, she fell into depression ... her parents came to fetch her.”

Sne: “Ive seen a girl who said, I dont wanna ever have a man near me ... I dont wanna get married ... I hate men ... Ill never forgive men ... crying ... isolating themselves ... failing

academically ... being excluded from university.”

Sexual violence can have a detrimental effect on female students, as there is a sense of helplessness with the institution, and can have negative consequences for their educational achievement. These include drop-out, weight loss, academic under-achievement, missing lectures, depression and self-isolation.

There are also other extreme forms of repercussions, such as disillusionment and hatred towards men, which can result in unhealthy relationships that range from not wanting any relationship to resisting ideas of marital unions. Their lack of confidence in the institution to assist them to get justice or have the perpetrators appropriately disciplined results in their inability to adequately deal with the events emotionally.

Nomsa: “I do know how to defend myself ... if you do that to me, I'm gonna do it back. I did hit him.”

As demonstrated in the above extract, the propensity to resist violence by hitting back is evident. Nomsa showed inner strength and agency in her ability to resist male violence, *despite* the retaliation in the form of violence in itself. It is under these violent circumstances that she has to protect herself with whatever resources she has.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to determine how these first-year Black female university students experienced and negotiated gender, sexuality and violence on campus residences. These students who were mainly from poor backgrounds rendered them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and unequal relationships. These findings show that these students' experiences were bound within and shaped by gender and power dynamics.

Alcohol, substance abuse and dangerous masculinised spaces further exacerbated their vulnerability and constrained their agency. Poverty and scarce resources on campus residences together with gender inequalities intersect to produce vulnerability and constrained female agency translated into transactional relationships.

Our findings suggest that being first year female students has implications for how these young women negotiated their newfound freedom away from their parental gaze, and how this affects their agency within an institution that purports to have their best interests at heart. The paucity of literature on the spiking of college students' drinks requires attention, and while some female students took advantage of their freedom by engaging in drug and alcohol

substance usage, it is not without the risk of being deliberately intoxicated and drugged by male students. Some of these freedoms translated into some experiencing their sexual debuts, thereby translating their agency into transactional relationships, while some resisted by emphasising the importance of academic achievement. The study highlights the ways in which these first-year students are aware that sexual violence is prevalent on campus, particularly in certain social spaces, such as Dark City, and residence rooms.

The article also highlights how university social structures of power such as the SRC and DSRA are cited as perpetrators of sexually predatory behaviours. For new resident female students in particular to not have confidence in the relevant university powers and authorities that are assigned and elected to assist and support them, indicates serious problems in the administration and accountability of the relevant authorities. The fact that the participants indicated that problems were reported to university authorities, with little support, suggest that they know that the problems exist, but have done little to address them.

The findings demonstrate the detrimental effects that sexual violence perpetrated on these first-year students can have on their education, psychological and mental wellbeing and future relationships. We therefore propose that the Gender Based Violence Policy (UKZN 2017) should be workshopped to all students, both male and females, using induction courses, and these courses should also include gender and sexuality education to help ensure that awareness around gender violence permeate the lives of all students. There also needs to be greater awareness to all students about the implications of perpetrating sexual violence, including university social and authority structures such as RMS, the SRC and DSRA. The findings highlight that it is indeed the whole institution that needs to be addressed. It needs to be stated that educating and workshopping students about the policy, but keeping the same systems in place that prevents them from getting help and justice will do nothing to address the problem because while the awareness of its occurrence is evident, the reasons for it not being dealt with by the university structures remain a concern.

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