



PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: EXPLORING RIPPLE EFFECTS OF CAMPUS SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONGST STUDENTS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: *This qualitative study explored the ripple effects of campus sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) on students at a Zimbabwean university. The purpose was to use the findings to inform the development of a conceptual framework to prevent and mitigate campus violence effects and foster safer learning environments. Adopting constructivist philosophy and interpretivist phenomenological design, the study utilized the 7Ps theoretical framework. Data from 40 participants, selected via maximum variation purposive sampling, were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Findings revealed profound impacts: victims experienced significant mental health deterioration (stress, depression, suicidal ideation), damaged self-perception, academic decline, social stigma, and isolation. Female students were disproportionately affected. The study recommended an urgent need for enhanced campus safety, robust mental health resources, creating supportive and inclusive environments to mitigate these pervasive consequences.*

KEYWORDS: Campus Violence; Sexual and Gender-Based Violence; Psychological Distress; Higher Education; Zimbabwe; Mental Health.



INTRODUCTION

University campuses are often perceived as safe spaces for intellectual growth and social development. However, educational institutions are becoming increasingly concerned about school violence (Flannery & Quinn-Leering, 2010). Increasing attention is being given to how to 'tackle' or 'challenge' sexual harassment and violence (Anitha & Lewis, 2018). Violence has permeated tertiary institutions with severe consequences on victims' mental health. Most incidents go unreported due to fear of stigma, distrust in institutional systems, and lack of empowerment (Chauraya, 2022; UN Women, 2023). Unaddressed violence exacerbates mental health issues (Banyard & Moynihan, 2011), creating a cycle of harm. Campus violence is a systemic crisis transcending borders and driven by common dynamics of power, silence, and systemic neglect. The researchers sought to provide actionable evidence to guide the timely development of a relevant prevention conceptual framework that contributes to the curbing and mitigation of this phenomenon.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Campus violence has been identified as a significant social and health issues for students in higher education. It takes various forms of bullying and harassment, which can be defined as the intentional and repeated abuse of an individual through the use of force or coercion (Campbell, 2005; Griffin & Gross, 2003; Olweus, 1993) (as cited in Fayaz et al., 2023). Campus violence research findings in the United States of America show that 78% of sexual assault survivors met Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) criteria, with 62% experiencing academic decline (Dworkin et al., 2025). Campus shootings led to PTSD (34%) and substance abuse (21%) (Lowe & Galea, 2016). Racial violence correlated with elevated cortisol levels and dropout intentions (Ong et al., 2020). These findings reveal that campus violence in U.S. universities inflicts severe and lasting psychological and academic harm on survivors, transcending immediate trauma to create long-term barriers to education and health. For a first-world nation like America, these results signify a systemic failure to protect students in presumed safe environments, indicating that advanced development and resources do not inherently prevent profound institutional violence or its debilitating consequences.

Campus Violence studies conducted in Europe show that online harassment in Germany doubled suicidal ideation rates (Baier et al., 2019). There is an increasing focus on sexual violence in higher education in the UK. A growing body of research suggests that experiences of sexual harassment and violence are widespread in university communities (Phipps and Young, 2013) (as cited in Anitha & Lewis, 2018). Recent research also suggests that institutional knowledge and action to tackle sexual harassment and violence (often described as 'lad culture') is sparse, with most university-led initiatives adopting a reactive and, often, punitive approach (Jackson and Sundaram, 2015) (as cited in Anitha & Lewis, 2018). An EU-wide study highlighted depression as the most common outcome (40%) (FRA, 2019). These findings demonstrate that online harassment in European universities constitutes a severe public health crisis, directly driving debilitating mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and suicidality among students.



In Asia, 68% of campus violence victims experienced self-blame, while 30% withheld reports due to stigma (Lai, 2024). Bullying in South Korea increased suicide risk (Gselamu, & Ha, 2020), and 25% of dating violence survivors in China exhibited Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Song & Lees, 2021). Material competition (for example, luxury items) fueled relational aggression in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2020). These findings indicate that campus violence in Asia is profoundly shaped by sociocultural norms, with internalized shame, stigma, and fear of social judgment creating powerful barriers to seeking help, thereby compounding trauma.

Abrahams's (2014) study of African universities in South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya found that the campus violence victims reported depression, PTSD, and academic disengagement that were worsened by institutional silence. The victims did not report the cases because of fear of stigma, victim-blaming, and lack of trust in university disciplinary systems. Martin et al. (2025) showed that the victims of campus violence in Uganda did not report the cases because of fear of stigma, which prevented 70% from seeking counseling. SVRI & Partners (2021) study in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Zambia indicated that there were more female victims of campus violence than males. The victims experienced mental health impacts with anxiety (42% of victims), depression (35%), and suicidal ideation (18%). In South Africa, "sugar daddy" dynamics increased the risk of exploitation (Van Heerden, 2025). Sixty percent female students experienced sexual violence, with PTSD rates higher than those of non-victims (Machisa et al., 2023). The dismissal of complaints by the institution worsened depression and academic dropout rates. Nyakurerwa's (2025) study in Zimbabwe found that 100% of survivors met criteria for acute stress disorder; 62% developed PTSD. One in three students experienced online sexual harassment, linked to anxiety, sleep disorders, and self-harm amongst university students in Zimbabwe (Dube & Ndlovu, 2023).

The global research findings underscore campus violence as a global mental health crisis requiring culturally adaptive interventions. Furthermore, the findings indicate campus violence across the continents, revealing consistent patterns of severe psychological harm linked to campus violence, with variations in prevalence, reporting barriers, and institutional responses. The intersection of gender, race, and institutional neglect demands urgent, localized action. In other words, campus violence is a profound public health and educational crisis, consistently inflicting severe psychological trauma that includes PTSD, depression, and suicidality on students across all continents. Despite vast differences in development and culture, the findings consistently reveal that institutional failure and societal stigma serve as critical amplifiers of harm, turning educational environments from safe havens into significant sources of lifelong harm.

This study focused on the effects of all forms of sexual violence and gender-based violence. The study was critical in addressing practical, on-going and topical issues that have negative bearings on the reputation of higher education institutions in terms of students' safety, protection, and provision of conducive learning environments. It aimed at contributing to the achievement of prevention and reduction of campus violence in higher learning institutions through the development of a conceptual framework to guide planning and implementation of interventions.



The study was guided by the 7Ps theoretical framework, based on Mergaert, et al. (2023). This framework was relevant in this study because of its action-oriented approach, analysis, and addressing systemic social issues such as gender-based violence. The components of 7Ps include prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, provision, partnerships, and policies. These components provide a structured approach to understanding the complex nature of gender-based violence and its ripple effects. In line with the topic and objectives of this study, prevalence establishes the scope and nature of the problem. The prevention emphasizes measures to stop campus violence from occurring in higher learning institutions, while the findings on psychological distress can inform targeted, trauma-informed prevention programs. The component of protection is concerned about the safety and support for those who experience campus violence, whilst the aspect of exploring distress equips institutions to provide better protection and support services. Prosecution addresses formal accountability for perpetrators. This framework allowed the researchers to explore how institutional reporting and disciplinary processes impacted the survivors' mental health. The aspect of provision emphasizes the availability and accessibility of support services such as counselling and medical care, whilst the distress highlights the critical need for adequate service provision. The component of partnerships emphasizes the aspect of collaboration between various actors, such as university departments and community services, in endeavour to mitigate the distress of campus violence victims. The last component, which deals with policies involve specific policies that can address gender-based violence, entailing provision of evidence to critique and shape more effective, student-centred policies.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a constructivist philosophy, which underpins the qualitative research approach. This study was guided by an interpretivist phenomenological design to understand the participants' lived experiences and how the students were affected by campus violence. This research was conducted at Gweru Midlands State University's main campus. Midlands State University is a higher and tertiary institution with its main campus located in Gweru, the provincial city of Midlands province. The campus is about 290 kilometres from Harare, the Capital City of Zimbabwe.

The study selected a total of 40 participants, consisting of 28 female and 12 male students who were victims of sexual harassment. Qualitative research utilises very small sample sizes, which allow for in-depth analysis by engaging each participant to understand her/his experience concerning the research question (Hennink et al., 2011). Morse (2000) suggests that a suitable sample size for qualitative research is usually 20 to 30 participants, with the aim of addressing the study questions. Given that qualitative research usually involves a lower number of participants, the sample size selected for this study was justified.

A maximum variation sampling method was employed to select 28 females and 12 males from the population. The logic of maximum variation sampling is based on the insight that any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon. Maximum variation sampling is not interested in documenting the unique variations per se but in understanding the common patterns that cut across the variations (Shakman, 2017). Only self-identified campus violence victims of varying ages and academic



levels were included. Those who did not experience campus violence and who had less than 2 years of university experience were excluded. The researchers were interested in detailed and rich information from those who had stayed longer at the university and experienced lots in terms of the phenomenon under study.

Due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon under study, a written questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions, which participants completed independently were employed to guarantee privacy and anonymity. No names were written on the questionnaire, to prevent possible identification of participants, which could have led to physical or psychological trauma through stigmatization and discrimination of participants. This ensured that participants expressed their views without the interference of the researchers. The questions included demographic information, effects of campus violence, the affected gender, and reaction of victims of campus violence experiencing the phenomenon.

Before data collection, the researchers obtained an ethical clearance from the institution to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines. The questions were designed to avoid causing emotional harm to the participants, following the guidance of Osborne and Grant-Smith (2021) on the appropriateness of semi-structured questions in removing biases and maintaining consistency. The researchers explained to the participants the goal and objectives of the study prior to administering the questionnaire. Participants gave their informed consent, both verbally and in writing. The data were collected through a written questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions, which participants completed independently. The researchers' primary objective in employing independently completed, open-ended questions was to discover participants' perspectives, opinions, beliefs, and experiences in a thorough and nuanced manner (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). This procedure ensured participant confidentiality. According to Voutsina (2018), this approach allows for a more natural and conversational flow, encouraging participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences. All completed questionnaires were placed in a locked and secure box to which only the researchers had access. All research ethics protocols were followed before, during, and after the research process.

Within social research discourses, there is a general agreement that qualitative studies should be carried out rigorously. In this sense, rigour dominates as essentiality for quality in qualitative research (Rambaree, 2007:7). However, within social research discourses, there is a never-ending debate on how to achieve the rigour in qualitative studies. According to Guthrie et al. (as cited in Elo, Kääriäinen & Kanste, 2014:7), steps should be taken to demonstrate credibility in research reports to ensure the trustworthiness of the content analysis. Without a full description of the analysis and logical use of concepts, it is impossible to evaluate how the results have been created and their trustworthiness. An accurate description of the analysis and the relationship between the results and original data allows readers to draw their conclusions regarding the trustworthiness of the results. The study observed the standards of rigour in qualitative research. To start with, the researcher adopted and modified some questionnaires from studies such as "Violence on college campuses: Understanding its impact on student well-being" (Flannery & Quinn-Leering, 2010). The new compiled set of questions were sent to university colleagues for review and refining. The questionnaire was pre-tested and amended to address gaps before collection of data.



This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach, guided by Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method to explore psychological distress from sexual and gender-based violence ripple effects among Zimbabwean university students. This method, as described by Praveena and Sasikumar (2021), is commonly used in qualitative research, particularly in phenomenological studies. Colaizzi's method is valuable as it emphasizes the active engagement of the researcher with the data and facilitates a thorough exploration of the participants' lived experiences. It allows for a comprehensive and detailed analysis of qualitative data, providing insights into the essence of the phenomenon under study. The researchers religiously and chronologically followed Colaizzi's data analysis steps. They commenced with acquiring familiarity through immersive reading of transcripts, followed by identifying all significant statements directly pertaining to the phenomenon. Meanings were formulated from these statements and then organised into emergent theme clusters. These clusters were integrated into an exhaustive description of the experience, which was further distilled into a concise, fundamental structure. Finally, to ensure credibility, the findings were validated by returning to participants for member checking, thereby ensuring the analysis authentically represented their lived realities. (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021).

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The study had 28 female and 12 male participants. The table 1 below shows that 28 of the participants were females, whilst 12 were males who had experienced campus violence. More females volunteered to participate in the study than male students, which might be an indication that females experienced campus violence more than their male counterparts. On the other hand, the traditional patriarchal norms in Zimbabwe entail that men usually do not reveal their mental health struggles, as it may be perceived as a weakness. Males find it difficult to seek counselling services as compared to their female peers. These results are a practical reflection of the behaviour of females when it comes to openness and health issues compared to their male counterparts, who are still stuck in traditional norms. There were more participants (24) in higher academic levels (4.1-4.2) than in lower levels (16), which is (2.1-2.2), indicating more years of lived experiences, which was a positive notion for the study in terms of in-depth knowledge.

Table 1: Participants' Characteristics (education, gender, age, and victim status)

Academic level	Gender	Ages	Victim of Campus violence	Total	
				Females	Males
2.1	Females	22-24	Yes	4	
2.1	Males	22-24	Yes		2
2.2	Females	22-25	Yes	7	
2.2	Males	22-25	Yes		3
4.1	Females	23-26	Yes	8	
4.1	Males	23-26	Yes		2
4.2	Females	23-26	Yes	9	
4.2	Males	24-30	Yes		5
Total				28	12

Source: Researchers



Effects of Campus Violence (CV)

In terms of effects of campus violence experienced by students, the majority (26) cited that they experienced stress, depression, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, low confidence, and low coursework performance. Most female (18) participants perceived themselves as failures in life because of the impact of campus violence on their lives. Both male and female participants regretted their situation and, at one time, had suicidal ideations.

One participant had to say: *"I have been performing very low academically since experiencing sexual violence. I ask myself why me, why me out of all the females, I really feel like a failure in life"*

Another participant said, *"I was shocked when a lecturer asked for sexual favours from me. Indeed, I felt very afraid that I will fail his module, I had never thought that someone like a lecturer will ask for such things."*

The results indicated the presence of mental health impacts, as shown by most participants who cited the experiences of stress, depression, and suicidal ideation. These aspects indicated a significant toll on their mental health. The participants also cited anxiety, which might lead to serious psychological issues that require attention and intervention. The results indicated self-perception issues amongst the participants. These were revealed through citation of low self-esteem and low confidence, suggesting that victims internalize the violence they experience, leading to a negative self-image. This can create a vicious cycle where individuals feel unworthy or incapable, further affecting their mental health. The findings further showed academic performance decline amongst the victims. The statement about low coursework performance due to perceptions of failure highlights how violence can affect academic success. Victims may struggle to concentrate or engage in their studies, impacting their overall performance and future opportunities. The results also indicated the social stigma and isolation amongst the victims. The belief that others perceive them as failures can exacerbate feelings of isolation. This social stigma may discourage victims from seeking help or engaging with peers, further compounding their struggles. Sexual exploitation was evidenced in this study as asymmetric power existed between the lecturers and students. The existence of sexual harassment can exacerbate anxiety, leading to depression and other serious mental health issues.

Within the 7Ps theoretical framework, these results indicated the presence of a high prevalence of mental health impacts, like depression and suicidal ideation, underscoring the urgent need for robust mental health provision of counselling services. The need for strong institutional policies are required to prevent sexual exploitation enabled by asymmetric power between lecturers and students. In terms of protecting victims, clear reporting mechanisms and anti-stigma campaigns are needed to combat the social isolation that deters help-seeking. There is a need for a collaborative partnership between universities, health services, student associations, and advocacy groups to address the interconnected academic decline and self-perception issues. Ultimately, a comprehensive framework integrating all 7Ps is necessary to break the vicious cycle of violence and its severe psychological consequences.



The affected gender category

Participants cited that females were more affected because they sought ‘fancy things’ (such as expensive, fashionable clothing, and accessories) and looked down on each other. While others indicated that females were weaker and could easily be preyed on, especially on issues of sexual harassment.

One participant said, “.... because as a female, males here at the campus believe I am weaker and I can be easily sexually preyed on”

“Sexual harassment is very common here at the campus, I think something should be done to serve innocent females”, said one participant

“I came here very innocent, but the environment is sexually harassing me, I do not trust any male, be it a student or lecturer” said one participant

The research results revealed that female students experienced more university campus violence at a higher rate than their male counterparts. The campus environment presents social dynamics and competition, as indicated by the fact that females were affected more due to desires for ‘fancy things’ and looking down on each other, which shows a social environment where competition and judgment among female students may contribute to conflict. The results further indicated the aspects of social dynamics and competition, social stigma, and isolation. The assertion that females were perceived as weaker and more easily preyed upon, particularly regarding sexual harassment, highlights significant gender-based vulnerabilities. This underscores the importance of improving campus safety measures, educating all students about consent and respect, and creating supportive environments to empower female students. Generally, the results call for targeted interventions to address both the social dynamics contributing to conflict and the systemic issues around gender-based violence on campus.

Based on the 7Ps framework, the results reveal a high prevalence of campus violence disproportionately affecting female students, necessitating targeted prevention programs to address the social dynamics of competition and judgment among them. Clear policies must be established to combat the gendered belief that females are weaker and more easily preyed upon, which drives their victimization. Enhanced security and reporting systems are required to protect students, especially from sexual harassment, while prosecution processes must be transparent to deter perpetrators. The provision of safe spaces and empowerment initiatives is crucial to counter isolation and stigma. Finally, strong partnerships among university departments, gender units, and student association groups are essential to create a consistently supportive environment.

Typical reaction of victims of campus violence

Pertaining to the question on how victims of campus violence typically react, the majority (26) of the participants indicated they react negatively by withdrawing from others and having suicidal thoughts because they felt useless.

One participant said, “...you feel useless and the only solution and safe way is to keep a distance from the rest”



Another participant said: *“After such experiences, the only thing that comes into your mind is suicide thinking”*

In terms of how victims of campus violence reacted, the results indicated the aspects of isolation and an inferiority complex. These were supported by the citation from participants that they reacted negatively and withdrew from others. Other participants cited suicidal ideations because they felt useless. Isolation and an inferiority complex can lead to serious mental health problems, which can lead to high emotions, irritability, and suicide. The results call for engagement and dialogue with all stakeholders, including students, to come up with solutions that can improve and bring safety to students on campus environment. Higher education institutions need to leverage on inductions and orientations of first-year students and continuously conduct awareness at the beginning of every semester. They can create campus-free violence open days in each semester, where students participate in a simulation of a envisioned safe, peaceful, and conducive environment through campus road shows, music, and dance.

In terms of 7Ps, the high prevalence of severe reactive outcomes like isolation, inferiority, and suicidal ideation underscores the critical need for early prevention through continuous orientation and semesterly awareness campaigns. To protect vulnerable students, institutions must proactively identify and support those showing signs of withdrawal, they should not suffer in isolation but be empowered to report cases of campus violence. Support services and counseling provision are urgently needed to address issues of silence, which result in mental health crises. Clear anti-violence policies must be enacted and enforced, with prosecution of perpetrators to deter further harm. The call for stakeholder dialogue highlights the essential role of partnerships to co-create solutions like violence-free campus open days, which can rebuild a safer community culture.

DISCUSSION

Effects of Campus Violence (CV)

The study revealed that victims of campus violence experienced severe mental health effects, including stress, depression, and suicidal ideation, alongside low self-perception, academic decline, and social isolation. These findings were similar to studies done by Baier et al., 2019; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2019; Gselamu & Ha (2020), Abrahams (2014), Koss & Dinero (1989), and SVRI & Partners (2021). The similarities in research findings on the psychological effects of campus violence across different global contexts, from Zimbabwe to the United States, Europe, and Asia, can be attributed to several interconnected factors. The similarities indicate that campus violence is a systemic and transnational crisis, not isolated to specific regions. The findings also suggest that while cultural contexts vary, the roots of campus violence, particularly power abuse, institutional settings, and stigma, are universal.

The study also found that the victims experienced low self-perception, academic performance decline, social stigma and isolation, and anxiety. These findings were in agreement with most studies conducted in Asia, America, and Africa, particularly those by Fisher et al. (2000), Dworkin et al. (2025), Lai et al. (2024), Gselamu & Ha (2020), Abrahams (2014), Dube &



Ndlovu (2023), and SVRI & Partners (2021). The similarities in the findings reveal that trauma responses (for example, PTSD and depression) are biologically universal, while institutional failures (underreporting, victim-blaming) and patriarchal power structures perpetuate harm across cultures, as evidenced in studies from the United States of America (Dworkin et al., 2020), Asia (Lai et 2024), and Africa (SVRI, 2021). These shared outcomes highlight that campus violence is a systemic crisis transcending borders, driven by common dynamics of power, silence and systemic neglect.

From a 7Ps framework perspective, the findings revealed a global prevalence of severe and uniform effects, such as depression and academic decline, confirming campus violence as a systemic crisis, demanding policies that are standardized yet culturally adaptable to address universal institutional failures. Prevention must target the common roots of power abuse and stigma, which transcend borders, through consistent international guidelines. Protection mechanisms are urgently needed to combat the universal trauma and isolation victims experience, while the provision of mental health and academic support is a fundamental global need. Effective prosecution requires overcoming the widespread underreporting documented across continents. Ultimately, the universal nature of these effects underscores the critical need for transnational partnerships to share strategies and uphold institutional accountability everywhere.

The affected gender category

The study indicated that female students were more affected by campus violence more than their male counterparts, facing vulnerabilities rooted in patriarchal norms and unique social competition driven by materialism. The study found that the females faced social dynamics and competition, as indicated by their desire for "fancy things" and looking down on each other. While global campus violence research emphasizes male-perpetrated violence, this study uncovers how female social competition, rooted in materialism and class stratification, creates unique pathways to victimization, adding to negative mental health impacts. These dynamics align with Nguyen & Tran's (2020) findings on relational aggression in Vietnam and reflect broader intersectional pressures (Collins, 2019) in resource-scarce settings. The macroeconomic environment in Zimbabwe has not spared the students, as they sometimes compete and form social structures based on economic status, of which the 'have-nots' tend to be isolated and suffer depression. The findings in this study further indicated the females' vulnerability to violence, as they were perceived as weaker and more easily preyed upon, particularly regarding sexual harassment. The findings revealed that female students were more vulnerable to campus violence, which aligns (SVRI & Partners., 2021 & Machisa et al., 2023), reflecting shared patriarchal norms, institutional gender biases, and underreporting cultures across the African continent. These parallels are reinforced by similar comparable socio-structural barriers such as stigma and weak policy enforcement in African universities. This consistency highlights regionally pervasive gender-based violence dynamics, giving credibility of the study's findings within a broader African academic context.

From a 7Ps perspective, the findings revealed a higher prevalence of violence against female students, rooted in universal patriarchal norms and localized social competition, necessitating policies that specifically target gendered power imbalances and economic stratification on campus. Prevention programs must address the unique pathways to victimization, including materialism-driven relational aggression among females, while protection measures must counter the perception of females as weaker and more easily



preyed upon. The provision of support services must be sensitive to the intersectional pressures of gender and economic status that exacerbate isolation and depression. Effective prosecution is hindered by widespread underreporting and institutional gender biases prevalent across the African continent. Therefore, strengthening partnerships between universities, gender advocates, student association groups and economic empowerment programs is crucial to dismantle the socio-structural barriers and create a safer, more equitable campus environment for all.

Typical reaction of victims of campus violence

Victims of campus violence reacted negatively to campus violence through isolation, inferiority complex perceptions, and suicidal ideation, reflecting a profound sense of worthlessness. This isolation, perceived inferiority, and suicidal ideation were due to feelings of worthlessness, aligning with global evidence, revealing universal trauma patterns shaped by institutional and socio-cultural factors. In Germany, Baier et al. (2019) documented similar elevated suicidal ideation linked to peer harassment, while in Asia, Lai et al. (2024) identified self-blame and stigma-driven silence as key barriers to reporting. South Korean research (Gselamu & Ha, 2020) further echoed the isolation-suicide nexus, particularly where social exclusion mediated distress. Notably, parallels extended to gendered reporting disparities: male victims in China underreported due to shame (Song & Lees, 2021), mirroring African contexts where fear of stigma and institutional betrayal suppressed disclosures (Abrahams, 2014 & SVRI, 2021). Uganda's findings (Martin et.al., 2025) reinforced this, with 70% of victims avoiding counseling to evade judgment. These findings revealed cross-cultural congruence in psychological responses to campus violence. The similarities might be largely due to neurobiological trauma responses, where violence triggers universal stress pathways (for example, PTSD, depression) regardless of cultural context. Furthermore, the structural failures, where institutional inaction (for example, weak reporting systems) and normalized victim-blaming perpetuate cycles of silence. Cultural stigma could be one of the key factors though manifestations differ (for example, shame in Asia, masculinity norms in Africa), stigma universally suppresses help-seeking.

From the 7Ps framework, the findings indicated a prevalence of universal trauma reactions like isolation and suicidal ideation, underscoring a critical need for prevention programs that proactively dismantle the cultural stigma and institutional inaction that suppress help-seeking globally. To protect victims, campuses must create truly confidential reporting systems that counteract the fear of judgment documented from Germany to Uganda. The provision of accessible, non-stigmatizing mental health services is essential to address the neurobiological impacts of violence, such as PTSD and depression. Robust policies must mandate trauma-informed institutional responses to end the cycle of victim-blaming and betrayal. Strengthening prosecution pathways requires overcoming gendered barriers to reporting, such as shame in male victims. Largely, these cross-cultural parallels highlight the necessity for international partnerships to share and implement evidence-based interventions that address both universal trauma and localized structural failures.



IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study made a distinct contribution to the literature on campus violence, revealing materialism-driven violence, where competition over status symbols exacerbated aggression, and Zimbabwe's economic crisis intensified class-based victimization. This research provided the crucial phenomenological perspective that grounds the 7Ps model in the lived experiences of the target population. It brought a deeper understanding rather than studying factors in isolation

CONCLUSION

The study revealed campus violence as a systemic crisis transcending borders. The study indicated that campus violence was driven by common dynamics of power, silence, and systemic neglect. The findings demonstrated significant congruence with global research, while also revealing context-specific factors that highlight the unique socio-cultural and economic environment of Zimbabwe. The study was among the first to explicitly apply and support the 7Ps using rich qualitative data from Zimbabwe. The researchers recommend Higher Learning Institutions to promote mandated Campus Violence reporting systems and trauma-informed support. They should also support regular workshops on consent, bystander intervention, mental health, and conduct campus "violence-free days" to promote solidarity. Students can establish student-support groups and take accusations of harassment seriously. Students are encouraged to provide feedback on institutional policies and initiatives, promoting a culture of open dialogue and continuous improvement regarding safety and welfare on campus. Both teaching and non-teaching university staff should be educated so that they take violent threats seriously, are aware of and knowledgeable about the warning signs of violent behaviour. The Higher and Learning Institutions should develop ongoing security and crisis intervention plans based on the unique needs of their campuses and ensure updating of such plans in line with the changing environment and needs. Monitoring and evaluation of violence prevention programs should be continuous.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researchers recommend national-level studies that use mixed-methods research to determine the prevalence of campus violence in Higher and Tertiary learning institutions.



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