GEOGRAPHY | REVIEW ARTICLE

“What happened to I’m my sister’s keeper?” A case of abuse at a university in South Africa

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Abstract: Gender-based violence is a major concern in South African society and in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which demonstrates a need to address this phenomenon. Not much is known about the forms of gender based violence and the places where they occur in these South African educational spaces. The study explored the forms of gender-based violence at public higher education institutions in South Africa and in this paper, we present the case of one campus of a public higher education institution. The study was informed by a composite theoretical framework combining social learning theory and social ecological theory.

A purposive sample of 100 students and four representatives of the campus support services were also used to generate data using an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews respectively. Qualitative content analysis was utilised to analyse the data in this study. The conceptualisation of gender based violence for the study was based on Fay’s concThe findings from the study established four forms of gender-based violence at this campus: physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse. The findings revealed that first year female students, members of the LGBTQI community and students living with disabilities were the most vulnerable to gender-based violence at this campus. The study illuminated multiple spatial areas of risk and several victim vulnerabilities at the campus which predisposed students

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Gender-based violence is a major concern in South Africa and in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which demonstrates a need to address this phenomenon. Not much is known about the forms of gender-based violence and the places where they occur in these South African educational spaces. The study explored the nature of gender-based violence at public higher education institutions in South Africa and in this paper, we present the case of one campus of a public higher education institution. The findings from the study established that there were four forms of gender-based violence at this campus: physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse. The findings revealed that first year female students, members of the LGBTQI community and students living with disabilities were the most vulnerable to gender-based violence at this campus. From the study’s findings, we recommend the establishment of support structures for vulnerable groups identified.
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**Subjects:** Education - Social Sciences; Gender Studies - Soc Sci; Higher Education; Human Geography

**Keywords:** Gender-based violence; physical abuse; verbal abuse; emotional abuse; sexual abuse

1. Introduction
This paper is focused on the relatively less researched topic of gender-based violence and campus culture in South Africa. Contemporary literature reviewed in this study indicated an increase in the number of cases of gender-based violence in South Africa in general and in higher education spaces in South Africa in particular. The study was carried out against a background of a growing increase in gender-based violence in South Africa. This paper draws from a case study of one campus in South Africa to unpack the forms of gender-based violence and identify the most vulnerable groups of students. In order to contextualise the study, the paper begins with two sections reviewing literature on gender-based violence in South Africa and students’ responses to gender-based violence (Protest action at HEIs against Gender-based Violence). Sections on the theoretical framework and research methodology precede the presentation of findings and their discussion.

2. Gender-based violence in universities in South Africa
There is an acknowledgment among scholars internationally (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Mogoatthe, 2019) and in the South African higher education context that female students are the most vulnerable to gender based violence (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Singh et al., 2015). The literature centres on predominantly sexual violence at universities and other forms of violence appear eclipsed in studies (Singh et al., 2015). It has been argued that sexual violence in South African universities is a reality and it impacts on female students’ activities to a great degree (Finchilescu & Dugard, 2018). Finchilescu and Dugard (2018) argue that female students are not safe on campuses in South Africa. Singh et al. (2015, p. 102) also opine, “Undoubtedly, female students’ activities on campus are shaped and constrained by their fear of sexual violence.” Singh et al.’s (2015) study at a South African campus reported that sexual violence was the greatest fear among female students. Additionally, female students in the same study also feared verbal assault, physical assault and emotional assault (Singh et al., 2015). Studies also revealed that sexual assault is of grave concern at universities (Singh et al., 2016, 2015) which seems ironic given that universities are edifices of education housing the best and brightest minds in society espousing critical thinking amongst students. However, universities have also become sites of abduction and homicide (Clowes et al., 2009). Over the past few years, a number of cases have been reported in the press. Among the cases reported include: In 2004, Leigh Mathews, a university student was abducted, held for ransom and murdered by a fellow Bond university student, Donovan Moodley. Clowes et al. (2009) report on the tragic murder at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) campus of a student by her boyfriend in August 2008. In 2018, a student from Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) was shot dead by her boyfriend at an off-campus residence in Durban. The murder of the University of Cape Town student, Uyinene Mrwetyana in August 2019 shows that femicide is a contemporary phenomenon in South Africa (Mogoatthe, 2019). The above cited examples of violence at HEIs tellingly reveal that the lives of female students have been lost due to violence. Additionally, these incidents further buttress the argument that cases of murder in South African HEIs are on the increase. South Africa has exceptionally high rates of violence perpetrated against women in general (National Planning Commission, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2018). Statistics from the South African Police Services database as cited in Vetten (2014) indicate that reported rape cases had increased from 44,751 in 1995 to 56,272 in 2011. While, the World Health Organisation placed South Africa’s femicide rate at 12.1 per 100,000 in 2016 (Mogoatthe, 2019). The rape statistics as well are an indication of
violent behaviour by men against women in SA (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2018), p. 3) estimates “21 per cent of women have experienced sexual violence by a partner, while 6 per cent of women have experienced sexual violence by a partner.” It has been argued that femicide is on the increase with statistics indicating SA as being “crippled” because it has one of the highest rates of rape and violence against women (BBC, 2017). The response by students at HEIs to gender-based violence is presented in the next section.

3. Protest action at HEIs against Gender-based Violence
The response by women in SA society was to initiate the #Menaretrash. Samanga (2017) explains that #menaretrash “hashtag has become the rallying cry for those who want to stop an epidemic of violence against South African women by their male partners.” However, the use of the hashtag #menaretrash has been critiqued due to its generalisation that all men are perpetrators of gender based violence. Gouws (2017, p. 1) argues “These (Twitter hashtags like #menaretrash) stigmatise all men as contributing to gender-based violence.” Despite the apparent criticism of the #menaretrash, the movement has successfully managed to generate conversations on gender based violence in South Africa.

The increase in gender-based violence on campuses in South Africa triggered a wave of protests in the recent past. Karim and Kruyer (2017, p. 94) reveal that students in South Africa have “responded by hosting anti-rape protests, silent protests, mass meetings, disruptions and visual demonstrations.” Protests were aimed at disrupting existing narratives on gendered violence in HEIs and these include the Start Letting Us Talk (SLUT) protest by Stellenbosch students (March, 2017) and the #RURefERENCEList by Rhodes University students (April, 2016). Karim and Kruyer (2017, p. 94) explained that Rhodes University students “engaged in a number of non-violent disruptive acts, ranging from blockading roads and access to the university to interrupting lectures, along with more definitively unlawful acts such as intimidation and assault.” It is noted from the current literature that female students have drawn the attention of university authorities to the plight of gender-based violence on campuses through their protest action.

Due to the increase in gender-based violence, a number of HEIs have crafted policies to address violence at universities in an effort to prevent and better manage incidents that occur and to respond to incidents that have occurred which are spotlighted by the media. For example, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has a gender based violence policy which is wide in its coverage and guidelines for its implementation since 2017. Other universities like the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University do not have consolidated gender-based violence policies, but they utilise two separate policies, both of which only pertain to sexual offences: The Sexual Offences Policy and the Sexual Harassment Policy (Singh et al., 2016). Interestingly, Singh et al. (2016) established that despite the existence of such sexual assault policies, there was widespread ignorance among students about their contents. Thus, affirming the need for awareness campaigns on the sexual assault policies at HEIs in South Africa to empower students. The available policies speak to an array of GBV occurrences that could occur but there are particular incidences that have made the headlines or been spotlighted in studies, drawing attention in the public arena.

Drawing from the preceding background, the objective of the study was to explore the forms of gender based violence at one campus of a public HEI in South Africa. Additionally, the study sought to identify which groups of students are most vulnerable to gender based violence at this campus of the HEI.

4. Theoretical framework
The study was hinged on two theories, namely social ecological theory and social learning theory. Social ecological theory was originally put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1979) illustrating the interplay between the developing person and the environment. Christensen (2016) states that Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological theory has four levels: the microsystem; the mesosystem; the exosystem and the macrosystem. The four levels of social ecological theory are the individual,
relationship, community and society. Christensen (2016) modified social ecological theory and added a fifth level, the intra-level. The intra-level is located within the individual level and it provides an understanding of an individual’s development. Sallis et al. (2008) state that social ecological theory was crafted to depict that the different levels are constantly interacting to influence violence in society. According to social ecological theory, personal history and biological factors determine whether an individual becomes a victim or a perpetrator of violence at the individual level. In addition, relationships determine whether a young person becomes a victim or a perpetrator of violence. The community level in which social relationships occur, such as schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces, also influence violence. The campus sampled for this study falls within the community level of the social ecological theory but as stated in this theory other levels (individual, relationship and society) interact with the community level. Lastly, the societal factors influence whether violence is encouraged or inhibited. Therefore, the social ecological framework is based on evidence that no single factor can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk of interpersonal violence, while others are more protected from it. Social ecological theory is utilized in this study to identify people or groups at higher risk of interpersonal violence. Therefore, social ecological theory is utilized in this study to explain victimhood of gender-based violence. However, Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological theory has been criticised for focusing on the negative effects of how an individual develops (Christensen, 2016). The environment (in this study campus) can also influence students against gender based violence, which appears neglected in Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological theory. To address this weakness in social ecological theory, the researchers juxtaposed the theory with social learning theory which considers the influence of the environment.

This study also draws on the social learning theory by Akers (2017). According to social learning theory, patterns of violence may arise from learned behaviour (Akers, 2017). Social learning theory is a general theory of crime and criminality which has been used in research to explain a diverse array of criminal behaviours. The conceptualization of social learning theory embodies within it four fundamental premises: “differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement and imitation.” (Akers & Sellers, 2004, p. 85). However, two fundamental principles; differential association and imitation are relevant to the forms of violence perpetrated against students in HEIs. The first fundamental principle of social learning theory is the differential association (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Akers and Sellers (2004, p. 85) argue that deviance is produced through, “direct association and interaction with others who engage in certain kinds of behaviour; as well as … indirect association and identification with more distant reference groups.” Hence, in this study the prevalence of violence against female students can be argued to be a product of direct association and interaction with people who engage in the abuse of women. Men who associate with perpetrators of violence end up perpetrating violence in their HEIs. However, social learning theory fails to explain deviant attitudes and values exhibited by young people without prior exposure (Siegel & McCormick, 2006). In order to address the shortcomings of each of the two theories, the researchers triangulated the two theories. The social ecological theory was chosen due to its relevance in unpacking how the environment influences the individual whereas, social learning theory was selected due to its premise that violence is a learned behavior.

5. Research methodology
The study was located within the interpretivist paradigm and it was qualitative in nature. The authors’ view of gender-based violence was drawn from the structural model of GBV which enunciates that the structure of societies is such that gender inequalities are evident and enhanced in particular environments due to certain norms. Due to the relevance of the structural model of GBV, the study fell under the interpretivist paradigm which sought a better understanding gender based violence at this one institution. The main focus was on qualitative data which the researchers analysed and interpreted. In addition, the study explored meanings that the participants placed on the social situations being explored (Phathongsunan, 2010, p. 2). The interpretivist paradigm allowed for the use of open-ended questions and a small number of participants because of its focus on qualitative data. The use of a small number of participants is not to
generalise but to explore the meanings which participants placed on the social situation (Creswell, 2013). In this context, the importance of understanding female students’ experiences at the selected campus as well as why male students are violent towards women was significant for the study.

The study was a collective case study involving two HEIs in South Africa. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 99) state that “in a collective case study (or multiple case study), the one issue or concern is selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue.” However, this paper draws from the case of one campus of an HEI in KwaZulu-Natal province. The researchers generated data using an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews at one purposively selected campus of an HEI. An open-ended questionnaire allowed the students to answer the questions asked in their own words (Gray, 2011). O’Leary (2014, p. 102) reveals “our inability to access every element of a population does little to suppress our desire to understand and speak for it.” The researchers purposively sampled 100 second year and third year students who completed an open-ended questionnaire. Second year and third year students were considered knowledgeable and informed on gender-based violence at the HEI. The researchers purposively drew students across the four clusters of learning areas at the campus. Additionally, four participants were purposively sampled from the campus support services to mine deep into the phenomenon. Campus support services at participating campus included personnel from the health services, counselling, disability unit and risk management services. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 157) state that when using purposive sampling the researcher considers “… whom to select as participants (or sites) for the study, the specific type of sampling strategy and the size of the sample to be studied.” The questionnaire and interview data was analyzed using the conventional content analysis technique. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identify conventional, directed and summative content analysis approaches. Hsieh and Shannon (, p. 1277) explain “in conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data.” Hence, the authors used conventional content analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data gathered through a methodical and thorough examination (Noble & Smith, 2015) of the data generated. Transcriptions were done and member checking followed thereafter. Key themes were developed after the data was initially coded. Relationships between the various variables were examined and described with linkages to behaviour patterns displayed. The study was guided by Reid et al.’s (2018, p. 70) key principles of “beneficence, do good; non maleficence, do no harm; respect for autonomy, self-determination; and equity, treat fairly.” The researchers were guided by Noble and Smith (2015) recommended methodological strategies for qualitative researchers to ensure trustworthiness which include rich and thick verbatim descriptions, data triangulation, meticulous recording keeping and engaging with other researchers1 to reduce research bias. The ethical Clearance protocol number for the study was HSS 1248/018.

Table 1 shows the profiles of the representatives of various student support services at the campus that were selected for this study because of their close working relationship with students experiencing challenges on campus. The researchers purposively selected the participants from each of the student support service units to ensure that there was triangulation and enrichment of the data in addition to the participation of students who populated an open-ended questionnaire.

| Pseudonym  | Responsibilities                                      |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Temble (SS1) | Student therapy services                             |
| Mandla (SS2) | Coordinator of cross-cutting health and wellness advocacy campaigns |
| Thabile (SS3) | Student health services                              |
| Rose (SS4)   | Student special needs services                        |
There was triangulation of data (Rolfe, 2006) through different instruments and data sources (students and university support services) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Pseudonyms were utilised throughout this article.

6. Findings
The researchers present below the main findings that emerged on the forms of gender based violence at the one campus of a public higher education institution in South Africa. The findings revealed the following forms of gender based violence: verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse.

7. Verbal and emotional abuse
The students and members of the support service indicated that a common form of gender-based violence at the campus was verbal abuse. The researchers noted from this study that the verbal abuse led to emotional abuse. The verbatim narrations on verbal and emotional abuse at the campus are presented and analysed below:

Mandla (SS2) revealed, “There have been a few cases of verbal violence against the LGBTQI community at our campus. The LGBTQI community is normally targeted in the shuttles or student residences. Most of the violence against the LGBTQI community is verbal: insults and name calling.” Mandla (SS2) further stated “With the LGBTQI, most cases are males to other males and a few cases or males to females, corrective rape. In 2017, a student was raped and passed away, she died off campus as a result of corrective rape.” Mandla’s statement revealed that the one incident of gender-based violence identified by the participant had a fatal outcome. Additionally, the nature of the gender-based violence was an effort by the perpetrator to force the victim to conform to society’s heterosexual norm. Essentially, the statement reveals that some students at the campus were intolerant of the LGBTQI community who are thus ‘othered’ because they do not conform to normative sexual behaviour. The verbal abuse of members of the LGBTQI community was also mentioned by a student who indicated in the questionnaire that “LGBTQI are discriminated against and violated by calling them names.” These narrations revealed that there was verbal abuse of the LGBTQI community at the institution but in specific spaces such as at residences and in the transport shuttles carrying students. It was thus evident that members of the LGBTQI community were vulnerable to verbal abuse in the student residences and on shuttles which resulted in emotional trauma for them as they sought advice and counselling from support services. These findings on the vulnerability of members of the LGBTQI community at this campus is consistent with studies by Boonzaier and Mkhize (2018) at the University of Cape Town and Abaver and Cische (2018) at Walter Sisulu University. Additionally, vulnerability of members of the LGBTQI community was noted in some sections of South African society in a study by Polders, Nel, Kruger and Wells (2008). The targeting of LGBTQI in student residences and shuttles aligns with the social learning theory which explains deviant behaviour as a product of direct association and interaction.

Incidents of verbal and sexual abuse at the campus largely targeted female students. Tembie (SS1) revealed that “There is a common trend of female students reporting that violence occurs when the boyfriend demands unprotected sex. The female students will be verbally abused for asking the boyfriend to use contraceptives.” Tembie’s statement reveals that there were power struggles in some of the heterosexual relationships at the campus. Additionally, consent to engage in sexual intercourse was misconstrued by some male students to mean unprotected sex. Thus, there was a failure in some relationships at the campus to respect female partners’ desire to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and STIs. Additionally, Thabile (SS3) from the health services indicated that they had “treated more than 50 STIs in the past 5 months.” Thabile (SS3) further explained “They [female students visiting the clinic] have STIs … they say ‘my man doesn’t want to use condoms or when they get pregnant, they say ‘my man didn’t want me to use contraception.’ They are verbally abused by their partners when they try to refuse sex without protection and they are coerced into having sex with their boyfriends without any form of protection.” Mandla (SS2) also stated “this campus is small but the rate of infections is higher than on
other campuses of this institution.” It is noted from the narrations by Thabile (SS3) that cases of STIs may be related to violent refusals by male partners to engage in protected sex. The female students feel coerced into unprotected sexual relations. A female student also explained that “Some male students think that they have power over us female students. Some males treat females as inferior especially when they are dating them, they abuse females verbally.” It is evident that some male students considered themselves to be more superior to their female partners when in a relationship. Furthermore, due to this superiority complex by some of the male students, it resulted in verbal abuse of their female partners. Thus, the findings indicated that some female students were being abused by their partners. Another female student revealed an incident that she witnessed as a bystander “I saw a male student trying to talk to a female student on campus and she excused herself because she was in a hurry. The guy started saying mean words to her. He told her to go to hell with her big ……….” It was evident from the narrations by the participants that some female students were exposed to general verbal abuse on campus from male students apart from being sexually abused by their boyfriends.

Rose (SS4) from the special needs services also indicated that students with disabilities were victims of verbal abuse at the campus. The abuse of students living with disabilities was verbal but it also led to emotional trauma. Rose (SS4) stated that students living with disabilities were “victims of name calling.” Additionally, Rose (SS4) noted that students living with disabilities were disrespected by fellow able-bodied students. Students living with disabilities reported to the special needs advisor that name calling affected them leading to them being traumatised.

Furthermore, the study established that verbal abuse occurred within learning spaces during lecture times. One student explained “Some students are being bullied by other students verbally in classes. I was once a victim of bullies, they were laughing at me when I struggled to pronounce some English words. They would also just tease me because of my appearance.” Thus, it can be noted that some students were victims of verbal abuse within learning spaces due to their inability to communicate in English. Additionally, the statement above suggests that there were some incidences of intolerance of students who struggle with the pronunciation of English words. The above verbatim quote suggests that verbal abuse was also disruptive to learning as students who struggle with expressing themselves in English (not their mother tongue, so they are ridiculed) were targeted as well as for their appearance. Additionally, it was evident from the student narrations that verbal abuse occurred within learning spaces in lecture theatres (as well as residences and shuttles as earlier indicated).

Verbal abuse was also extended to political electioneering at the campus. One student reported that “Verbal violence occurs during SRC election campaigns. Students will be engaging based on different political parties, obviously the opinions will always differ, and students insult each other in the name of politics. Female candidates are easy targets for verbal abuse during election campaigns.” From the student’s statement it can be noted that some verbal abuse at this campus was committed in the name of politics. Thus, it can be argued that some verbal abuse at this campus was due to political intolerance. Additionally, the statement indicated that some female candidates were verbally abused during SRC election campaigns. Another female student also stated that “Verbal violence occurs during student protests. Female students are attacked in order to force them to join the protests.” Thus, some female students were verbally abused at this campus during the many student protests. Furthermore, it can be noted from the statement that coercive power in the form of verbal abuse was utilised to force some students to participate in student protests. Unwilling female students were coerced to join student protests through verbal violence. The participants revealed that name calling and insults were thus prevalent during campaigns for SRC elections as well as during student protests which are a common annual occurrence at this HEI.

It was further revealed that some students did not consider verbal abuse as actual violence. One student revealed, “Most students do not consider verbal abuse as a form of violence and even if they
want to report, they don’t have evidence for it. Most of the time the senior students usually badmouth the new female students.” The participant indicated that there was a misconception that verbal abuse was not a form of violence warranting for it to be reported because of a lack of evidence. The participant indicated that there was a disparity in the understanding of violence between female students and male students. Some male students who perpetrated verbal abuse did not consider their behaviour to be violent. There was a different perception of what constitutes verbal abuse by female students. Furthermore, senior male students were alleged perpetrators of verbal abuse directed towards the first year female students. The above views revealed the power differences in status (first years/ senior student relations) which resulted in verbal abuse at the campus.

The above narrations by both support services and students reveal that there were some incidents of verbal abuse on the campus. The most vulnerable groups to the verbal abuse on the campus were the female students: those living with disabilities, first years and members of the LGBTQI community. These findings can be explained through social ecological theory which illustrates the interplay between the person and their environment. The vulnerable groups identified in this study are a mirror of the vulnerable groups in the wider South African society (Polders et al., 2008). It can be argued that verbal abuse on the campus targeted numerous groups with the minority groups being the most plagued as typified by students living with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI community. Moreover, the idea that the minority were being targeted further suggests that there was a lack of tolerance among some students of “others” at the campus. The perpetrators of verbal abuse at the campus were signalised to be mostly senior male students who preyed on these vulnerable groups. Additionally, it was also evident from this study that verbal abuse occurred on campus facilities/assets such as shuttles, at lecture venues and in student residences.

8. Physical abuse

The findings from the study further indicated that there were incidents of physical abuse at the campus. Tembie (SS1) stated “I have attended to one incident, involving a female student who was stabbed with a knife by her boyfriend. She was stabbed for having another affair with a woman. The boyfriend stabbed the victim because he felt disrespected by being double-crossed with a lesbian.” Tembie’s statement above explained an incident of a female student who was stabbed by her boyfriend because of infidelity. Additionally, the perpetrator of the violence was allegedly infuriated by the discovery that his girlfriend was bisexual and had another relationship with a female student. Most importantly, the above statement revealed that some of the sexual violence occurred within romantic loving relationships. A boyfriend who was supposed to be loving had turned violent and stabbed his partner in a “romantic loving relationship”. This finding is described by Fay (2008, p. 1) as “when your perfect partner goes perfectly wrong.” Another female student explained that “One of my female friends was beaten up by her boyfriend at our residence [campus residence] for no apparent reason. I have seen many female students being assaulted by their boyfriends.” The above quotes indicate that some female students were vulnerable to physical abuse in their relationships with male students. The physical abuse reportedly occurred in the student residences both on and off-campus. Essentially, the study noted that some loving relationships turned violent at the selected campus.

The participants indicated that physical abuse included attempted rape and actual rape. The study revealed that cases of sexual abuse of female students by male students occurred at the campus. A female student indicated “Yes I have [experienced sexual abuse], my homeboy” paid me a visit in my room. He is a student here on campus. As we were sitting he suddenly wanted to force himself on me. I fought him and fortunately he gave up and left. What happened to I’m my sister’s keeper?” This narration by a female student shows that she regarded her “homeboy” as a brother and she was traumatized by the attempted rape. Furthermore, the female student indicated that she had expected her “homeboy” to protect her as a brother and not to prey on her. The phrase can be traced to the story of two brothers Cain and Abel in the Bible in Genesis 4:1–9. The Urban Dictionary
(2021) explains that the phrase means “one who protects his brother from the world, and other people.” Thus, it follows that “a sister's keeper” is expected to offer protection to the sister from a gender-based violence caveat. However, surprisingly the brother (labelled as her brother because he is from her hometown) is supposed to protect his sister but he wanted to prey on his sister. The concept of “a sister's keeper” can be viewed as essential in addressing the scourge of gender-based violence since would-be perpetrators are also supposed to be “keepers” of their sisters. Additionally, a “keeper” would show love and care and not be expected to prey a sister, which would resultant help to ameliorate the forms of gender-based violence on campus.

Additionally, this indicates that this female student was vulnerable to sexual abuse by a known colleague at the student residence. Moreover, worryingly is the revelation that the female student was not safe from her peer whom she viewed as a community acquaintance prior to their enrolment at the public higher education institution. Essentially, the views by the student above suggested that the perpetrator of sexual violence at the university could be anyone, ranging from trusted known peers to complete strangers. These findings on the vulnerability of female students at this campus concur with the study by Singh et al. (2015). Singh et al. (2015, p. 1) unpacked the “what, who and where of female students’ fear of sexual assault on a South African University campus.” Additionally, the reported attempted rape above resonates with conclusions by Sigsworth (2009, p. 1) that “anyone can be a rapist.” Sigsworth established that sexual violence in South Africa was perpetrated by both known people and strangers to the victims. Thabile (SS3) also revealed that “One female student was raped at a party. She was invited by a fellow female student. At the party they were flashy guys with nice cars and she was lured into one of the cars and raped.” Mandla (SS2) also similarly narrated a case which drew his attention: “Interesting case last year was on a stalker targeting female students in their residences in 2018. In some instances he forced himself onto them sexually, others he would run away after touching them inappropriately, most cases happened in the dark. Some cases were not reported … the students themselves apprehended him.” The above articulations indicate that the female student fell victim to external strangers at an off-campus party. It was further evidence that the external predators were working in cahoots with other students on campus. Also, residences and university platforms were identified as areas of risk. In addition, Mandla (SS2) revealed that “The perpetrator of sexual violence might be affiliated to a certain political organization on campus. The victim might not open up because she is scared. Some activists tell victims that they know big people in politics and so the case won’t go anywhere.” Tembie (SS1) similarly explained “sexual abuse is associated with student accommodation. There were allegations of the student body being involved in sex for accommodation.” These views allege that student representatives also preyed on female students desperate for accommodation in university residences. Thabile (SS3) added “If they don’t get accommodation, they have to give sex to the members of this student body and they told her ‘she has to give to get’- you have to give something to get accommodation.” The female students tried the university residences but without success and “they need to be on the university premises near the library.” Furthermore, Mandla (SS2) indicated “its females [who are abused], mostly the first year students who don’t have accommodation, don’t know much of campus, they become easy prey. The new student falls prey to guys who are already here. They will tell her ‘I know somebody who is in the student body, who can speed up the process … most students (females) they cohabit, they unwillingly become girlfriends … when the boys start abusing the girls, then we hear about it. The female student will not want to report it, after when it’s sorted out (the accommodation)’ then it is brought to the attention of the support services.” The above narrations revealed that some new students without accommodation were sexually abused at the campus. Thus, it can be noted that some incidents of sexual violence at the campus were related to the lack of accommodation at university residences. Some female students without accommodation are given a false impression that senior students who are well-connected can arrange accommodation. Resultantly, some of the female students become desperate and consent to sexual relations in exchange for accommodation. Additionally, one participant indicated that some of the abused female students only report their ordeal after they receive accommodation. Mandla (SS2) added “The guys here would easily beat a girl in a relationship because it’s done
in the community, in the rural areas, they know you are somebody's lady and they won't report it. The perpetrators defend beating a girl (their girlfriend): ‘as a man you show your strength. It's about power … According to … rural culture, it's about status, the power to be a man. It's about being ‘macho' you must step up or be called names … you are a softie, you are not a man.” Key in the narration by Mandla was the depiction of internalised stereotypes by male abusers. The internalised stereotypes were explained using social and cultural justifications for males to violate females. Gender-based violence at the university was linked by one participant to the community in general and rural culture in particular. The narrations by the participants exposed that there were allegations that members of the student body were responsible for sexual exploitation of the first year female students in need of accommodation. Thus, they were engaging in “sex for accommodation” arrangements with female students desperate for a place to live whilst studying at the public higher education institution which appears to have inadequate accommodation for its students. The participants thus indicated that female students were being preyed on by external strangers, their peers and students with links/ belonging to the student body.

There is also the manifestation of physical abuse in coerced sexual relationships on the campus. Some students without funding were also not spared from sexual predators. Findings suggest that the university was unaware of the existence of predatory behaviours targeting some of the students without funding. The massification of higher education in South Africa caused shortages in accommodation for students at some universities. The campus selected for this study had accommodation challenges which compounded the challenges faced by students who relied on funding. Tembie (SS1) revealed “There are a number of strange things happening with the young generation. Some students are sexually abused because they will be in relationships which they call ‘friends with benefits’.” It was noted that female students were involved in such relationships in return for the benefit of accommodation. The above verbatim quote indicated that female students were being sexually abused in these relationships.

Physical abuse at the campus was also linked to alcohol abuse. Tembie (SS1) stated “At times the perpetrator of sexual violence on campus is under the influence of drugs or alcohol or both. We have had incidents whereby both the victim and perpetrator will be tipsy.” The above quote suggests that both the perpetrator and victim will be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The apparent link between sexual abuse and alcohol abuse was also revealed by one student who narrated that “Once some students are under the influence of alcohol they become aggressive and short-tempered, they can't control themselves. Female students end up being victims of this aggression.” Another student indicated “Physical abuse occurs on campus especially when there is a bash. Boys always become violent under the influence of alcohol and they can't handle rejection by female students.” Aggressive tendencies which are normally concealed become exposed due to the influence of alcohol on male students at this campus.

From the above articulations it is evident that female students were vulnerable to physical abuse. The female students were reportedly being physically abused by their boyfriends, students linked to the student body as well as strangers. The researchers noted with concern that it was ironic that the structures put in place to protect the female students from predators had turned out to be predatory. It was apparent from this study that the main forms of gender-based violence prevalent at the campus were physical, verbal and mental abuse. Physical abuse was being perpetrated against female students by strangers, boyfriends, community acquaintances and members of the university student body. The study also revealed that the forms of gender-based violence at the campus were linked, as revealed by their relatedness (verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse) and affecting the most vulnerable on campus.
9. Discussion of findings
This section discusses the key themes and theoretical insights that emerged from the findings of this study. The themes are the targeting of vulnerable groups, the spread of sexually transmitted infections and students’ multiple vulnerabilities.

10. Forms of gender based violence: targeting vulnerable groups
The study established that female students in particular were exposed to different forms of gender-based violence: physical, verbal, emotional and sexual. It can be argued that the findings from this study that this campus (community level) is a microcosm of South Africa. The concerns raised by the participants in this study align with the worries of the wider South African society in terms of gender-based violence. Sigsworth (2009, p. 01) in a synopsis of sexual violence in South Africa concluded that “anyone can be a rapist.” Therefore, the findings from this study buttress the lamentation by Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Buti Manamela that “… young women in our society are no longer safe. They have to look behind their shoulder at all times for fear of rape, robbery or death; and sometimes from familiar faces masquerading as brothers, uncles or fathers.” Therefore, the study’s findings on physical abuse mainly perpetrated against female students at the campus, begs the question “what happened to being my sister’s keeper?” that is males protecting females. Moreover, the similarities in trends of gender-based violence on the selected campus and findings on other studies from South African society buttress social learning theory. Social learning theory argues that criminal behaviour such as gender-based violence in this study is learned from society. Mandla, alluded to this when he revealed that male students during workshops would argue that it was acceptable in the rural areas to show a man’s power over his woman by beating her.

The study established that the predators preyed on the most vulnerable groups of students on the campus. The most vulnerable students identified by this study were new female students and students living with disabilities. It emerged from the study that first year female students were victims of both sexual and verbal abuse from the senior students at the campus. The study further established that the first year female students’ vulnerability was worsened by lack of accommodation and funding to seek accommodation.

11. Students’ multiple vulnerabilities
Additionally, the study further established that there were multiple spatial areas of risk in educational contexts. These areas of risk included student residences, shuttle and lecture rooms which were evolving into spaces of gender-based violence. Hence, the researchers argue that there were multiple spatial areas of risk at this campus that predisposed students to violence. The study revealed that students who belonged to specific groups were considered as soft targets, the most vulnerable in this study. The findings in this study are consistent with a study, carried out at the University of Zululand by Nhlanana and Ige (2014), which established that members of the LGBTQI community were soft targets for verbal abuse on campus. Additionally, vulnerabilities were compounded for first year female students with disabilities by virtue of belonging to multiple groups which are both vulnerable, for example, female students who were members of the LGBTQI community.

Another theme that emerged from the discussion on the findings on the nature of gender-based violence at the campus was that of “soft targeting”. Soft targeting was exhibited in the victims being members of the LGBTQI community and students living with disabilities at the campus. The study concludes that such minority groups at the campus were subjected to verbal abuse due to social stereotyping. Members of the LGBTQI community were being verbally abused in the student residences and shuttles while students living with disabilities were targeted in learning spaces. This finding resonates with that of Abaver and Cishe (2018) who reported discrimination of members of the LGBTQI community at Walter Sisulu University.
12. Sexually transmitted infections
The researchers also noted that gender-based violence resulted in a spike in sexually transmitted infections at the campus as revealed by the health services at the campus. The study linked the worrying sexually transmitted infections at the campus to sexual violence. It was noted that female students were violated by their male partners who refused to use condoms. This finding concurs with Mash et al. (2010) that there still is unequal power in sexual decision making in South Africa. It was also revealed that cultural impacts from the community environment was responsible for determining the behaviour of male students who were resorting to violent outbursts directed to their girlfriends which they believed was acceptable behaviour. Therefore, it can be argued that the situation in the public higher education institution may mirror the status quo in certain communities of South Africa.

13. Victim and perpetrator profile
The study established a critical link between physical abuse and alcohol abuse. Participants suggested a link between incidents of physical abuse and intoxication at the campus amongst both male and female students. Furthermore, some female students were also sexually violated by their boyfriends who were under the influence of alcohol. Hence, alcohol can be viewed as a contributory factor to physical abuse on this campus as the predators become violent while the victims become susceptible to abuse under the influence of alcohol.

14. Conclusion
This paper presented findings from a study on the forms of gender-based violence at a selected campus in South Africa. The study was paradigmatically interpretive and it followed a qualitative approach. Data was generated using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A theoretical framework combining social ecological theory and social learning theory was used. The study established that there were four forms of gender-based violence at this campus: physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse. The most vulnerable groups of students were identified by the study as first year female students, students living with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI community. Due to the vulnerability identified by this study, it is recommended that the campus establish adequate accommodation options and support systems for first year students, students living with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI community. Additionally, counselling for substance abuse should be strengthened.

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Notes
1. This sub study is part of a multisite HEI’s study on inequalities in higher education led by Prof Lungi Sosibo and funded by the NRF. Data generated is regularly presented at the workshops held for the sub-studies.
2. Homeboy is a term used by students to denote a male student coming from the same rural area; township or neighbourhood. Students at the university normally treat their “homeboys” (and homegirls) like their brothers/sisters when at university. Thus, the attempted rape was a deviation from the brother/sister relationship expected among students from the same rural area, township or neighbourhood.
3. The “friends with benefits” phenomenon denotes sexual relations in return for material or financial benefit. It is euphemism used among students to refer to transactional sex.

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