

Special issue: Health and Wellbeing in urban South Africa

**An easy target: Studentification, crime and safety of students in Johannesburg.**

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Abstract:

The socio-economic impacts associated with studentification are diverse. International and local research suggests that the process of studentification and growth of private student accommodation can attract certain types of crime to neighbourhoods that have a high concentration of students. Johannesburg is a popular city amongst local and regional students and attracts several thousand students each year. Some neighbourhoods have become popular student districts, providing student accommodation and spaces for student consumption. Drawing on several focus groups, netnography, and semi-structured interviews this paper explores the lived experiences of students and residents impacted by crime in studentified neighbourhoods. The findings of this paper suggest that students are exposed to certain types of targeted crime that impact their safety and wellbeing in Johannesburg. In addition, it was found that the impact of crime varies significantly according to the type of student accommodation and its location.

Keywords: studentification, crime, safety, wellbeing, Johannesburg

## **1. Introduction**

Extant literature on studentification details the wide-ranging impact this form of neighbourhood change has on the urban environment (Hubbard, 2008; Smith, 2009; Smith et al., 2014; Woldoff & Weiss, 2018). Studentification sees the in-migration of students seeking privately rented accommodation in neighbourhoods within proximity to higher education institutions (Smith, 2002, 2005). Since the early 2000s sustained research has documented this process and often focuses on the disruptive nature of studentification (Brookfield, 2019; Munro et al., 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b). The majority of scholarly attention, however, has focused on the experience of studentification in the United Kingdom and other cities located in the global North (see Sage et al., 2013; Smith, 2009; Smith & Holt, 2007; Moos et al., 2019). Some of the wide-ranging impacts include the disruption of local housing markets, the displacement and replacement of long term residents, as well the negative social impacts of parties, drunkenness and public nuisance (Smith, 2005, 2008). Overall, the impacts of studentification tend to be portrayed as negative, contributing to neighbourhood disruption and instability (Hubbard, 2008, 2009; Woldoff & Weiss, 2018). One theme that has received limited recognition in both international and local literature is the impact of crime in neighbourhoods that have been impacted by studentification. Kenyon (1997) suggests that students and student districts attract certain types of crime that affects the wellbeing of both students and long term residents. This paper aims to broaden the debate on the impact of crime in urban South Africa with a specific focus on the safety and wellbeing of students.

This paper focuses on the lived experiences of students and residents that have been impacted by crime in studentified neighbourhoods in Johannesburg. The data for this paper was obtained from seven focus groups of between six to eight participants with students from the University of Johannesburg. These focus groups were conducted between February to May 2018 and were held in person at the University of Johannesburg. These focus groups concentrated on the experiences of students residing in the following seven areas; Auckland Park, Braamfontein, Brixton, Hursthill, Johannesburg inner-city, Melville and Westdene. In addition, netnography was used, which focused on observations and content analysis of posts related to crime on the Brixton community and I love Westdene Facebook groups for over a period of five years (2013-2017). Lastly, semi-

structured interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2018 with three suppliers of student accommodation and four members of residents' associations.

## **2. Crime in South Africa**

Since the end of apartheid, there has been growing research interest on the impact of crime on society, the economy and cities (Singh, 2016). For Breetzke (2010, p. 1) "crime is a chronic social pathology of endemic proportions in South Africa". Violent crime and social conflict, however, is not a recent phenomenon in South Africa (Kynoch, 2005). Indeed, crime is not symptomatic of post-apartheid South Africa, but rather a result of centuries of unequal access to power, dispossession and oppression of black people and other marginalised groups during the colonial and apartheid eras (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2016; Lemanski, 2004). Breetzke (2012, p. 299) argues "the macro-social patterns of racial and spatial inequalities borne out of repressively enforced apartheid-era segregationist policies can be used to explain the magnitude and extent of crime in post-apartheid South Africa". During the apartheid era, townships were often sites of criminal violence and vigilantism (Kynoch, 2005). Breetzke et al. (2014), however, explains that South Africa has experienced a dramatic increase in crime in the post-apartheid era. Rising crime is often associated with countries undergoing a political transition as controls by an oppressive government is reduced (Brown, 2001; Singh, 2016). This view is echoed by Kynoch (2005) and Breetzke et al. (2014) who links the transition period from apartheid to democracy in the 1990s with a marked increase in crime.

Over the past few decades, several arguments have been put forward that try to explain and understand the reason for South Africa's high crime rates. These reasons are manifold and include high levels of social disorganisation, socio-economic inequality, poverty, high levels of deprivation amongst the youth and rapid immigration from neighbouring African countries (see Breetzke, 2010, 2012, 2018; Breetzke & Horn, 2006). Lemanski (2004), however, cautions that fear of crime can easily be used as a tool for "othering". This fear of crime and the "other" can fuel racist and xenophobic prejudice (Pillay, 2008).

For Comaroff and Comaroff (2016, p. 218) “crime compels us to think through - and with - it about the ways in which it has become constitutive of our world: of its micro-and macro-geographies, its visible and invisible dimensions, its politics both large and intimate”. Indeed, for Kreigler and Shaw (2016) crime occupies a specific place in the social and political lives of those who live in South Africa. Brown (2001) outlines that at the macro-level, the impact of crime often affects the economy as investor confidence (both locally and internationally), might be hesitant to invest in certain markets or regions impacted by crime. At the micro-level, it impacts public order, safety and the stability of society.

In South Africa, crime has impacted the urban form through defensive urbanism or an “architecture of fear” (Lemanski, 2004). This can be seen in the rise of gated communities in the post-apartheid era (Breetzke et al., 2014; Landman & Schönteich, 2002; Landman, 2004, 2020). Crime has impacted where people reside in cities. The middle-class lifestyle is increasingly focused on restricted spatial movement, limited social interaction and a retreat from public space (Lemanski, 2004). The growth of gated communities and other forms of defensive urbanism are criticised for reinforcing segregation and exclusion in post-apartheid urban South Africa (Landman, 2020; Lemanski & Oldfield, 2009). Indeed, the socio-spatial legacy of apartheid ensures that black and other previously disadvantaged groups who reside in townships, informal settlements and inner-cities are still disproportionately impacted by crime (Breetzke, 2012, 2018; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2016; Kynoch, 2005; Lemanski, 2004; Meth, 2017).

The battle against crime in the post-apartheid era involves multiple actors (Singh, 2016). These actors range from the regulatory schemes put into place by government and law enforcement to the rise of privatised security companies offering a range of services to regulate crime, as well as various community security initiatives nationwide. Overall, Powdthavee (2005) explains that crime can contribute to unhappiness and affect wellbeing in urban South Africa. It not only leads to financial loss but can also lead to physical and psychological trauma from the victim’s experience. For Powdthavee (2005, p. 531) “crime and the perception of personal safety are important factors in any assessment of social wellbeing and an individual’s happiness level”.

### **3. Crime in Johannesburg**

Towards the end of apartheid and during the transition period the inner-city of Johannesburg became a space of urban disorder, decline and decay, with people living in poverty and slum-like conditions - a process often referred to as the “crime-and-grime” syndrome (Beavon, 2004). The repeal of the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the opening up of the national borders to African immigrants in the 1990s saw the widespread desegregation of the inner-city and many of its surrounding working-class neighbourhoods (Crankshaw & White, 1995; Crankshaw, 2008). Continued decentralisation coupled with white and capital flight towards the city’s wealthier northern suburbs saw the inner-city and its surrounding areas become increasingly associated with social disorganisation, ineffective law enforcement and criminality (Murray, 2011; Rogerson, 1996). Indeed, the inner city of Johannesburg and its working-class neighbourhoods became a space for foreign immigrants, the urban poor and other marginalised groups (Crankshaw, 2008).

The middle-class response includes forms of escapism and defensive urbanism in post-apartheid Johannesburg (Murray, 2011). This is seen in the meteoric rise of fortified enclaves that offer spatial exclusivity and social distance (Landman, 2020; Lemanski, 2004; Murray, 2013). These include the construction of gated communities, shopping mall complexes, as well as office and industrial parks in the wealthier northern suburbs of the city (Dirsuweit, 2014; Murray, 2011). Several interventions have tried to mitigate the impact of crime. In the inner-city of Johannesburg and several other nodes such as Rosebank and Sandton, the introduction of the City Improvement District (CID) has a strong focus on the privatisation of public space and private security (Peyroux, 2006; Didier et al., 2012). In older residential areas solutions include increased private security, high walls, barricaded entrances, electric fencing and in some cases blocked off streets and boom gates (Dirsuweit, 2014; Dirsuweit and Wafer, 2006; Lemanski et al., 2008). Other crime prevention initiatives often spearheaded by neighbourhood associations include Community Police Fora (CPF) and the appointment of private security companies to patrol certain areas and vigilantism in poorer areas (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2006, 2008; Dirsuweit, 2014; Murray, 2011).

The risk of “othering” is evident in Johannesburg. Local police and private security routinely profile and harass foreigners, street kids, informal traders and black men (Murray, 2011). The production of privatised enclaves has contributed to further concentration of wealth and exclusion

which has left the “in-between” or remaining public spaces to suffer from neglect and increasing vulnerability to criminal activity (Murray, 2011). For Dirsuweit (2014) fear of crime cuts across different income and racial groups and has become routinised and part of daily urban life and contributes to dysfunction and disconnection in Johannesburg.

#### **4. Understanding the link between studentification and crime**

The term studentification was coined in the early 2000s and details the changes that occur in neighbourhoods that have seen an influx of students seeking privately rented student accommodation near higher education institutions (Smith, 2002, 2005). Studentification has seen the creation of student neighbourhoods or districts that have brought about several social, economic and physical changes to the urban environment (Holton & Riley, 2013; Smith, 2009; Smith et al., 2014). Two main forms of student housing can be identified, these include housing in multiple occupation and purpose-built student accommodation. Housing in multiple occupation is traditional single-family dwellings that are shared amongst several students (Hubbard, 2008). In recent decades there has been the growth of purpose-built student accommodation, which sees the widespread property development of high-density student apartments or dormitory-style developments (Mulhearn & Franco, 2018; Sage et al., 2013). The locational characteristics of student accommodation tend to favour neighbourhoods within proximity to higher education institutions, inner-city neighbourhoods with easy access to public transportation and other entertainment or leisure facilities for students (Chatterton, 2010). Several case studies in extant international and local literature detail the various social, economic and physical impacts associated with studentification. These impacts are often focused on the negative aspects of studentification which can be seen as disruptive and destabilising for existing or long term residents (Brookfield, 2019; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b; Smith, 2008).

The link between studentification and increased crime has received marginal scholarly attention.. Kenyon (1997) argues that neighbourhoods with a large concentration of students are often targeted by criminals for house burglaries and muggings. Long-term residents fear that housing in multiple occupation will attract crime to areas (Kenyon, 1997). Cortes (2004) agrees that there is a perception of an increased crime rate in studentified areas. In addition to student housing, the

proliferation of bars, clubs and other services geared towards the student market could increase civil disturbances and crime in certain areas (Chatterton, 2010; Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Cortes, 2004).

Several studies outline that students' locational choice for student accommodation focuses on proximity, affordability and safety (Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b; Sage et al., 2013). Indeed, for Hubbard (2009) the locational consideration for students in the United Kingdom is influenced by cost, proximity and safety (Hubbard, 2009). Sage et al. (2012a) explain that fear of crime and a bad reputation of a neighbourhood may make some areas less desirable for students. In some cases, however, students opt for cheaper locations, despite a bad reputation of crime and safety. In such cases, cost and affordability become the main motivation (Hubbard, 2009; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b; Smith, 2002). Malet-Calvo (2018) argues that despite occasional incidences of crime some students tend to live in working-class districts that are in the early stages of gentrification because of the affordability it offers. Those who are willing to pay more for safety tend to opt for purpose-built student accommodation. This is reflected in the rise of student 'gated communities' (Hubbard, 2009; Nakawaza, 2017; Sage et al., 2013). Overall, in the global North, the expectations of proximity, convenience and safety are key locational considerations for students (Fincher & Shaw, 2009; Grabkowska & Frankowski, 2016).

The concentration of housing in multiple occupation in studentified neighbourhoods is often negatively associated with noise, nuisance, litter and crime (Hubbard, 2009). Indeed, Munro et al. (2009) argue that the concentration of a high number of young people in certain areas can lead to disputes, conflict, neighbourhood disruption and street crime. In terms of crime, Hubbard (2009, p. 1905) explains "local residents' groups in affected areas consequently weave a narrative in which studentification is accused of exacerbating late-night noise, littering, petty vandalism... and making areas susceptible to crime". In addition, Allison (2006) argues that the seasonality of students' tenancy can attract burglars to studentified neighbourhoods during holidays. In an attempt to mitigate some of these negative impacts Hubbard (2008) explains that across the United Kingdom various community-university groups have been established to improve town-and-gown relations. Some of these initiatives include the introduction of off-campus security patrols, campaigns against anti-social behaviour, as well as student safety and anti-crime campaigns.

There has been growing research interest on studentification in South Africa (see Ackermann & Visser, 2016; Donaldson et al., 2014; Gebadegesin et al., 2021; Gregory, 2020; Gregory & Rogerson, 2019a, 2019b; Ndimande, 2018; Visser & Kisting, 2019). Despite this growing interest, the link between studentification and crime has received limited recognition in local literature. In Stellenbosch, Benn (2010) maintains that students' locational choice is influenced by safety first, then followed by affordability and proximity. Housing in multiple occupation or student communes contain a large number of electronic devices such as televisions, computers and cellphones and criminals are aware of this making housing in multiple-occupation an easy target for burglary (Benn, 2010). Donaldson et al. (2014) argue that student accommodation is prone to become targets for criminal activity. Permanent or long-term residents fear that studentification can change an area into a crime hotspot. Donaldson et al. (2014, p. 25) explain “as crime is a main push factor to sell one’s property, a domino effect takes place with more and more permanent residents putting their properties on the market and developers are moving in”. Overall, in Stellenbosch there is a strong perception that student accommodation in an area is the main reason for increased incidences of crime (Donaldson et al., 2014).

In Bloemfontein, Gbadegesin et al. (2021) note that there is evidence of the increased crime in areas with a high percentage of unregulated student accommodation suppliers with the most common type of crime being house burglaries. They also note that there is a gendered dimension to crime with women more susceptible to rape and sexual harassment (Gbadegesin, et al., 2021). In Johannesburg, Gregory and Rogerson (2019a) explore the wide-ranging impacts associated with housing in multiple occupation or student communes as they are known in South Africa. Safety concerns and the impact of crime is noted as a challenge at student communes. In Braamfontein, the growth of a spontaneous night-time economy and public drinking has led to crime, fights and is seen as a destabilising factor in this student district (Gregory & Rogerson, 2019b).

Existing South African higher education policies have a limited focus on off-campus student accommodation and safety. A ministerial review conducted in 2011 by the national government Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) revealed the challenges of student



accommodation and underscored the challenges linked to crime and safety of students (DHET, 2011, p. 80).

*A number of these off-campus facilities are located a considerable distance from the campus which they serve. In many instances, the buildings are located in areas unsuitable for student accommodation from a safety and security perspective. A number of leased facilities are located in high traffic density areas, and often adjacent to bars, clubs, liquor outlets and other establishments which attract high levels of crime. Several incidents of mugging, rape, robbery and assault involving weapons were recounted by students. Access control is generally poor to non-existent.*

The outcome of the ministerial review was the release of the policy on the minimum norms and standards for student housing at public universities (DHET, 2015). The policy outlines that student accommodation suppliers must be located within a 20-kilometre radius from campus. In addition, secure transport must be provided if the supplier is further than five kilometres from the campus. The policy underscores "*sites should be carefully selected with the safety, security and well-being of students in mind*" (DHET, 2015, p. 5). It further states that "*universities must liaise with local enforcement agencies dealing with the safety of students*" (DHET, 2015, p. 7).

Since the release of the policy on the minimum norms and standards for student housing, the majority of public higher education institutions have released guidelines or institutional policies on the accreditation and regulation of private student accommodation suppliers. For example, the University of Johannesburg released its policy on privately-owned student accommodation in 2016 (UJ, 2016). This policy has limited mention on the impact of crime on students wellbeing and states there must be "*evidence of an appropriate level of security at the premises and that all students understand their responsibility for safety and security*" (UJ, 2016, p. 29). The policy further outlines that transport must be provided to and from campus at regular intervals between 06h00 and 22h00 if the accommodation is located further than two kilometres from campus (UJ, 2016).

## **5. Studentification and crime in Johannesburg**

The city of Johannesburg is an important city for accessing quality higher education. The city is home to two major universities and several private colleges that draw thousands of students each year (Gregory, 2020). The University of Johannesburg is spread across four campuses in Auckland Park, Cottesloe, Doornfontein and Soweto and has around 50 000 students (UJ, 2019). The University of Witwatersrand is located in Braamfontein and Parktown and has close to 40 000 students (WITS, 2018). Several private higher education institutions are also located in the greater Auckland Park and Braamfontein area. Therefore, the student geographies of Johannesburg are largely concentrated in the residential and commercial areas surrounding the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand (refer to Figure 1).

With the massification of higher education in South Africa and the severe shortage of on-campus or university supplied student accommodation, the majority of students are channelled into privately supplied student accommodation. Two forms of student accommodation dominate in Johannesburg and include housing in multiple occupation and purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodation (Gregory & Rogerson, 2019a, 2019b). Many of the students who study at the University of Johannesburg are first-generation university students who come from other provinces or the periphery of the province (Gregory, 2020). Thousands of students are channelled into off-campus student accommodation and therefore rely on university transport, private shuttle services or walking to access campus. The experience of crime varies according to the type of student accommodation and its location.

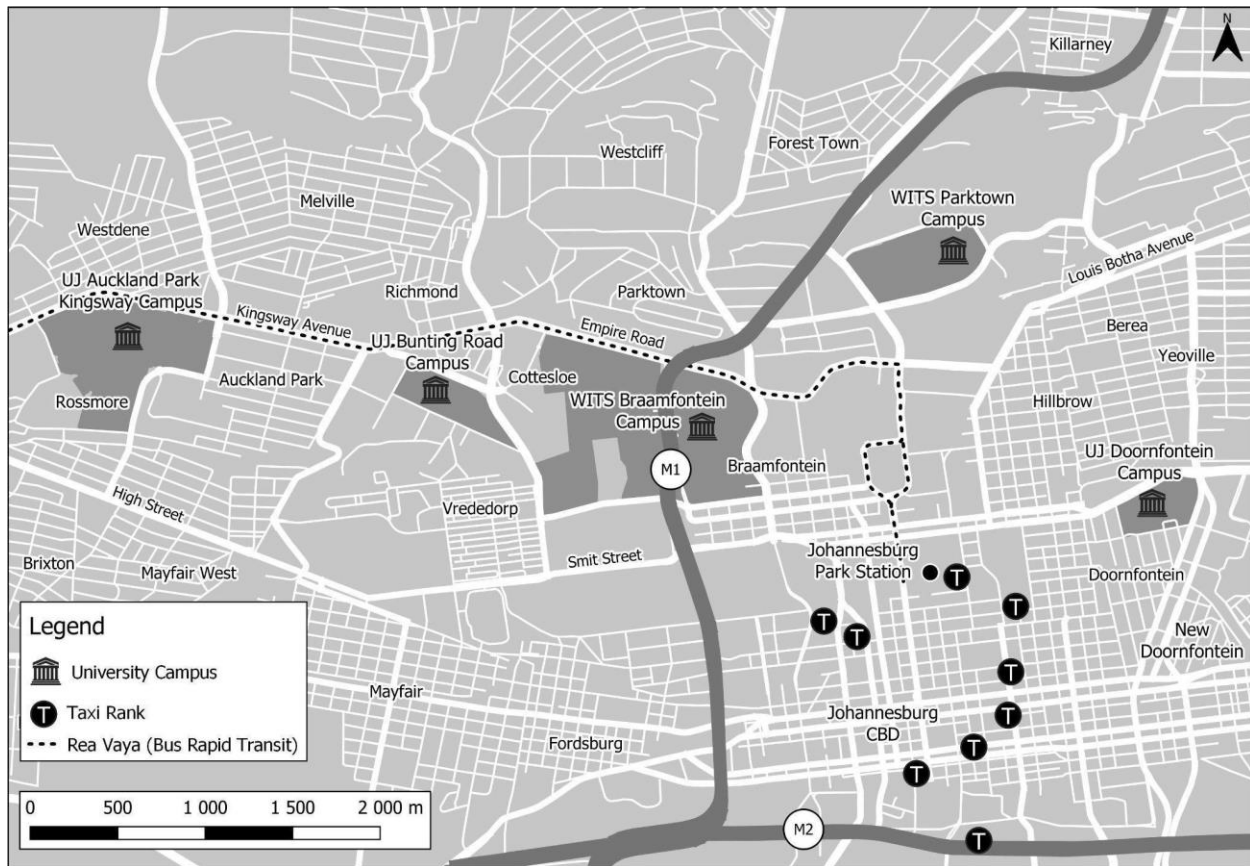


Figure 1. Student geographies of Johannesburg (Source: Author).

### ***5.1 Security risks to housing in multiple occupation***

The majority of housing in multiple occupation in Johannesburg is located in the residential areas surrounding the University of Johannesburg's Auckland Park Kingsway campus (refer to Figure 1.). The residential areas that have been included in this analysis are Auckland Park, Brixton, Hursthill, Melville and Westdene. These areas have the highest concentration of accredited, non-accredited and illegal suppliers of housing in multiple occupation (Gregory & Rogerson, 2019a).

Interviews with suppliers of student accommodation revealed that the impact of crime remains a challenge in these neighbourhoods. The challenges surrounding safety and crime have impacted suppliers both in terms of costs involved in securing properties and the risk of protecting students against the threat of crime (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 18 August 2017). Suppliers of housing in multiple accommodations must invest in security systems such as alarms, electric fences, and other security measures. Overall, access control is particularly difficult at housing in

multiple occupation where several student tenants are living and entering the property throughout the day and during evening hours (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 19 April 2017). This increases the risk of burglaries and robberies. The majority of housing in multiple occupation suppliers are located within a two-kilometre radius from the university campus. Therefore, these suppliers are not legally required to supply students with a shuttle service. The majority of students rely on walking to and from campus, making them susceptible to muggings (Interview, Student Housing Supplier, 9 November 2017).

It was found that in Johannesburg students are largely motivated to stay at housing in multiple occupation based on its proximity to campus. This said affordability and safety are also key considerations. One of the greatest challenges for students living in housing in multiple occupation is the impact of crime on their wellbeing (Westdene Focus Group, 11 May 2018). Students have developed several strategies to minimise the risk of exposure to crime. These include not walking to and from campus during the early morning or late afternoon or evening hours. This impacts the amount of time that can be spent on campus. Students opt to walk in groups and try not to walk with valuables such as laptops, tablets or phones. This is a challenge for many students as these devices are often needed for learning (Melville Focus Group, 16 March 2018). Despite these strategies, students are still susceptible to street muggings, and in some cases burglaries or home invasions. Students that have experienced crime are often left with severe trauma, which in turn impacts their academic performance and affects overall wellbeing (Brixton Focus Group, 2 March 2018; Hursthill Focus Group, 23 March 2018). Students feel that areas such as Auckland Park and Melville are perceived much safer than areas such as Brixton, Hursthill or Westdene. Students also expressed the view that the university and police must introduce more security and further measures to ensure student safety both on and off-campus. Students feel that security patrols must be visible not only on main routes but throughout these neighbourhoods (Auckland Park Focus Group, 9 March 2018).

For the residential communities that surround the University of Johannesburg, there is a definite perception of increased crime due to studentification. The local community of Auckland Park felt that the development of housing in multiple occupation attracted crime and contributed to the aesthetic decline and devaluation of property prices in the neighbourhood. Some residents draw a

link between the presence of students and housing in multiple occupation with a marked increase in certain types of crime. Students and housing in multiple occupation are seen as easy targets for criminals. There is evidence that the growing student population and proliferation of housing in multiple occupation have stimulated certain types of crime, particularly street muggings, home invasions and burglaries (Interview, Member, Auckland Park Resident's Association, Johannesburg, 14 August 2017).

A Brixton Community Forum Member (Interview, 2 October 2018) details the type of crime that students and housing in multiple occupation are susceptible to:

*The crime was not as bad as it is now. Students are such easy targets and they attract crime to the area. They make themselves targets, walking in the street on their devices. They display that they've got all these devices. There was this commune where 15 guys went in there and they stabbed the one boy and cleaned them out. [Criminals] watch the communes and their routine of how many people go in and out and they hit at the right time. The one commune across the road from me has been cleaned out twice. The number of students that have been robbed coming to and from campus is a regular occurrence. Street robberies are usually with a car that pulls up next to students and robs them. The trauma behind it for these students is the worst thing.*

Several members from the community have noted that housing in multiple occupation tends to lack stringent security making them susceptible to burglaries. In addition, the pedestrian nature of students exposes them to a greater risk of mugging. A resident in Brixton posts: “*my neighbours, a student commune had just been robbed earlier tonight – held up with firearms, they took laptops, cell phones and wallets from all the students living there*” (Brixton Community Facebook Group, 2015). Instances of street muggings are common in areas surrounding the university. Another Brixton resident cautions that “*students or pedestrians, in general, should not walk visibly with electronic devices such as phones, tablets or laptops. But this will not stop muggers, knowing that most people do carry a device. Two years ago, I assisted a UJ student who was shot outside our house for his cell phone. He missed months of university and almost lost his life*” (Brixton Community Facebook Group, 2015). In Westdene a resident shared: “*attempted mugging of students last night outside my gate, heard screaming in the street, went to look through the crack*

*in my gate to see what was going on, saw two hooded individuals attempting to rob two students. I shouted HEY! – the muggers got a big fright, cocked their gun and took a leisurely walk up toward Empire road”* (I Love Westdene Facebook Group, 2017).

Some residents feel that owners of housing in multiple occupation and students tend to be uninvolved and do not participate in local community security initiatives. Indeed, students are seen as a transient population group who is not as actively involved in community initiatives as long term residents. For example, students are not on local community WhatsApp groups where incidents or issues surrounding crime are discussed. Furthermore, owners of housing in multiple occupation do not necessarily live in the area they own properties and are detached from community initiatives linked to crime prevention (Interview, Member, Melville Resident’s Association, 18 August 2017).

Some residents blame the university for the perceived increase in crime; *“UJ caused this problem by not providing enough accommodation for its students, UJ must solve this problem! Our area is going downhill because of all the criminals in the area that come after the soft targets – students walking to class and communes where there is no security”* (I love Westdene Facebook Group, 2017). The university, however, has introduced private security patrols, but these only cover main routes. The impact of crime in the areas surrounding the university is also compounded by the lack of visible policing from the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) and the South African Police Services (SAPS).

One positive social impact noted by some residents is that they feel students contribute to increased pedestrian activity in the area and this adds social vibrancy to neighbourhoods. Some feel that increased pedestrian activity lessens the risk of house burglaries as it is a form of public policing. A Brixton Community Forum Member (Interview, 4 October 2018) underscores: *“students certainly contribute to street life in Brixton, it keeps the area vibrant and there are always people on the street. It does contribute to a sense of public policing because there are more feet on the street”*. This said, they also highlight the risk: *“at the same time it makes people more vulnerable as people on street are targeted, it also brings a lot of crime”*.

## ***5.2 Security risks to purpose-built and retrofitted student accommodation***

Thousands of students are channelled into high-density purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodation in Braamfontein and other parts of the inner-city of Johannesburg. There is a marked difference in security at purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodation. Purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodation is often seen as a panacea in dealing with the challenges associated with housing in multiple occupation. For non-student residents, this type of housing concentrates students away from residential areas. For students, it is seen as a much safer environment as many of these developments are “gated communities” or have strict access control, security guards, shuttle services and other security measures in place. The challenge for many students, however, is the location of some of these developments which tend to be located in the inner-city of Johannesburg. Students are faced with a lack of safe public or third spaces, with many students indicating “in-between” spaces are dangerous. Students safety concerns are mostly linked to walking around in certain parts of the inner-city. Students are constantly aware of their safety; *“you just have to be conscious and aware of your surroundings, and you have to plan your trip and times. I never walk alone, I always walk with a group of friends and I make sure that I do not have valuables on me”* (Respondent - Johannesburg Inner-City Focus Group, 16 February 2018).

Despite the perception of increased risk of crime in the inner-city, some of the students have indicated that they feel safer in purpose-built and retrofitted student accommodation compared to housing in multiple occupation. Suppliers located in the inner-city offer a shuttle service and students do not have to walk to and from campus. Furthermore, the security at these buildings tends to be better, including security guards and biometric access, which is absent at housing in multiple occupation. One student explains that *“inside the building we are safe but outside is very dangerous. When we walk to campus we face danger”* (Respondent - Johannesburg Inner-City Focus Group, 16 February 2018). Another student states that *“it’s the in-between spaces from your building to transport [and] to campus that are dangerous”* (Respondent - Johannesburg Inner-City Focus Group, 16 February 2018).

Some students feel that the safety of the area outside of the building is not taken into consideration during the accreditation process and this exposes students to increased risk of crime. A student recalls:

*There is a building close to my residence where homeless people stay on Jeppe street. It burnt down and they had to move. Now they are just outside our building, you step out of our building and there are just homeless people. Doing their injections and stuff and it's just not safe* (Respondent - Johannesburg Inner-City Focus Group, 16 February 2018).

A challenge for some students is the number of homeless people or people living in illegally occupied buildings near student accommodation as this poses a security threat to students. There is a general perception amongst students that it is the homeless and people living in illegally occupied buildings that are responsible for street muggings and other forms of crime in the inner-city.

It is important to note that the inner-city of Johannesburg cuts across a diverse range of neighbourhoods, with some perceived much safer than others. Overall, students residing in areas such as Doornfontein, Joubert Park and Hillbrow feel more unsafe in their environment than those living in Marshalltown or Braamfontein. This is partly linked to the voluntary City Improvement Districts (CIDs) that are still active in areas such as Braamfontein and Marshalltown. The CIDs offer private security patrols and cameras in public spaces. A student living in Marshalltown notes that *“Marshalltown is safe and quiet. So, there are not too many harsh things that are happening here”* (Respondent - Johannesburg Inner-City Focus Group, 16 February 2018). A student living in Braamfontein explains *“I could say that Braamfontein is safe... there is security on every corner of Braamfontein and there are cameras as well. You can hear people on the street around 2 am. I feel comfortable walking alone”* (Respondent - Braamfontein UJ Focus Group, 23 February 2018).

Both Braamfontein and Marshalltown are traditionally commercial areas with a limited residential component. Doornfontein, Joubert Park and Hillbrow, however, are high-density residential areas, where immigrants, the urban poor and other marginalised groups are concentrated. Gregory and Rogerson (2019b) recognised the growth of a night-time economy in Braamfontein. Indeed, the party culture that has emerged in Braamfontein introduces another layer of vulnerability. Spontaneous nightlife in the form of unregulated street parties and public drinking increases the vulnerability of students in public spaces exposing them to certain types of crime.



## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

The impact of crime on students has received limited attention both in international and local literature (Donaldson et al., 2014; Gregory & Rogerson, 2019a, 2019b; Sage et al., 2012a, 2012b, Sage et al., 2013). The debate on the impact of crime and its effect on the wellbeing of residents is of particular concern in cities located in the global South. These cities tend to have high levels of income inequality, poverty, unemployment and informal or unregulated urban spaces that can exacerbate crime (Lemanski & Oldfield, 2009). South Africa is no exception, crime has become part of the urban experience (Dirsuweit, 2014). In Johannesburg it is evident that studentification contributes to the increase of certain types of crime in neighbourhoods close to university campuses.

In the South African context, there is still a large proportion of student accommodation suppliers that are unregulated (Gbadegesin, et al., 2021; Gregory & Rogerson, 2019a; Ndimande, 2018). These unregulated suppliers of student accommodation do not necessarily conform to the DHET's policy on the minimum norms and standards for student accommodation or adhere to the standards set out by university policies. Therefore, students that are channelled into such properties face a greater security risk, are more susceptible to the impact of crime and this affects their wellbeing and academic performance. Overall, students are both the victims of increased crime and perceived to be the reason for the attraction or increase in crime in studentified neighbourhoods.

The experience related to safety and crime differs according to the type of student accommodation and its location. Overall, it was found that students living in housing in multiple occupation face greater risk due to poor access control at such properties and that many students have to walk to and from campus. Students that reside in purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodation have indicated that they feel much safer in such buildings where there is strict access control, a shuttle service and security guards. The challenge, however, remains that many of the purpose-built or retrofitted student accommodations are located in the inner city of Johannesburg. The greatest challenge for students residing in the inner-city is the increased risk of mugging in public spaces.

There is also the risk of "othering", with some students blaming the homeless and those residing in illegally occupied buildings as perpetrators of such crime.

Indeed, neighbourhood dynamics are not prioritised with the development and accreditation of student accommodation. Some suppliers are located in notoriously dangerous parts of the inner-city where safety in public spaces cannot be guaranteed. Both the DHET and university policies should outline the creation of safe student districts. The University of Johannesburg's policy on privately-owned student accommodation for example has a limited focus on the impact of crime and places the responsibility of safety on the student. Whilst the university has invested in private security patrols in the surrounding neighbourhoods, their visibility and impact is limited. Therefore, greater intervention from the University of Johannesburg is needed to ensure the safety of their students off-campus.

Furthermore, there is a need for collaboration with suppliers of student accommodation, local law enforcement and community associations to actively mitigate against the impact of crime which not only affects students but long-term residents. At present discussions are held in silos with a limited collaborative effort to ensure improvement of overall student safety and wellbeing. Overall, there is a need for stronger crime prevention programmes. Many students are not from Johannesburg and might not know the city or understand the risks that await them. Therefore, first-year students, in particular, need to be educated on the risks of crime in studentified neighbourhoods.

It is important to note that some of these experiences are not limited to students but affect the majority of South Africans that are pedestrians, use public transport and frequently walk in public spaces. This paper contributes to a much broader debate on how crime has become part of the urban experience in South Africa which affects residents quality of life, livability and wellbeing.

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