

## **Gender Differences In Perceived Effect Of Cultism On Campus Safety**

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**Abstract:** *The Study examined gender differences in perceived effect of cultism on campus safety. Five hundred and seven (507) undergraduates comprising 239 males and 268 females aged between 19 – 28 years with a mean age of 23years and standard deviation of 2.39 participated in the study. The Multidimensional Campus Safety Questionnaire (MCSQ): Nnedum & Unachukwu, 2008) was the instrument used for the study. Two(2) hypotheses were tested in the study, the first hypothesis stated that there will be no significant difference in the male and female students perceptions of their campus safety using their mean scores and it was confirmed: males ( $M = 39.92$ ,  $SD = 7.05$ ), females ( $M = 39.93$ ,  $SD = 7.01$ ). The second hypothesis which stated that the extent students perceived effect of cultism in the campus will not differ significantly based on their gender was rejected ( $Z[498] = .00$ ,  $P < .05$ , Males ( $M = 28.13$ ,  $SD = 7.70$ , females ( $M = 30.22$ ,  $SD = 6.07$ ). The study concludes that there is no difference in the way students perceives campus safety although a difference showed in the way they perceive the effect of cultism in the campus.*

**Keywords:** *Gender, Cultism, Campus Safety*

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### **I. Introduction**

University as conceived by Akinboye (1985) is a place for comprehensive academic and social exercises, where the youth is required to defer pleasure and settle to vigorous studies in order to attain competence in academic and social skills. This idea of the university appears to be gradually changing. The behaviours of the university undergraduates nowadays put the university environments in poor, fearful and crisis conditions to the extent that people find it hard to study effectively (Unachukwu & Nwankwo, 1997). As far back as 1995, Onwurah (1995) lamented that the present wave of students' problem behaviours in the institutions of high learning has become a subject of great concern to school authorities, parents and the public.

When the university students who are at their last years of becoming responsible adults are known to be exhibiting various deviant behaviours like raping, stabbing, victimization, molestation, harassment, fighting, stealing, cheating, impersonation, gangsterism, disrespect and cultism, they will mature into valueless human beings (Unachukwu & Nwankwo, 1997). The greatest problem behaviours facing tertiary institutions nowadays are secret cultism, examination malpractices and other forms of victimization (which could be a physical, verbal or psychological abuse of victims by perpetrators who intend to cause them harm) (Oliveus, 1993). There is an increase in various forms of violence. Violent behaviour is seen as an overt and intentional physically aggressive behaviour against another person among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria due to secret cultism. Secret cult is an association or group of people whose activities are carried out in exclusive locations and unusual times without being exposed to the uninitiated (Osakwe & Falana, 2011), gangsterism and victimization is rampant in the system. These things cause high level of anxiety and fear among students and even lecturers.

Despite the fact that all these things are being suffered by the students, most of them still do very well in their programmes. The researchers think of how they cope with the situation. This is because according to Warr (2000) fear is a natural and common – place emotion. It is an emotion that can constrain behaviours, restrict freedom and personal opportunity, produce anxiety and also threaten the foundation of communities. This implies that wrong circumstances for fears of crime are those in which there is a disconnection between fear levels and objective risk levels. Fear, then is not intrinsically bad, it is when fear is out of proportion to objective risk that it becomes dysfunctional. According to Cook (1986) fear levels dramatically higher than actual risk level are unhealthy anxieties that can lead to unnecessary restrictive behaviours.

Since these two situations of fear have been established, knowledge about how people experience crime both objectively and subjectively is an important information for those concerned with addressing crime and safety in a comprehensive or multidimensional manner. Therefore, a multidimensional examination of campus safety which is a comprehensive study on victimization, perceptions of safety, emotional fear and behavioural manifestations of fear is very necessary. It has been stated that previous victimization experiences may shape cognitive perceptions of perceived criminal opportunities, crime risk and avoidance behaviours

(Fisher & Sloan, 2003). May (2001) and Lane and Meeker (2003) revealed that unraveling women's fear of sexual assault is always discussed but objective perceptions and feelings about other crimes experienced by women, including those associated with physical assault, victimization and stalking are less often addressed.

It is then necessary to look at the students' daytime and nighttime emotional fears along with cognitive personal risk perception. Hence the present study on perceived effect of cultism on campus safety.

In all the matriculation messages presented to new students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria for the past years, the focus was on warning against joining secret cult and gangsterism. Also when student go to sign the matricular, they are given papers of undertaken to be of good behaviours to sign, all these are geared towards reducing campus violence. In United States of America, Baum and Klaus (2005) discovered that there are three main crime categories found in campuses namely; stalking, physical assault victimization and sexual victimization. These forms of victimization are perpetuated by both student themselves and some members of staff on students. In Nigeria, Unachukwu and Nwankwo (2004) quoting Akuegbu (1998) stated that there are at least 41 cult groups in existence in Nigeria campuses which students use to harass or victimize their fellow students and some lecturers. Hence, there is always questions about the safety of life and movement in the campuses.

These cultists make life unpleasant, disruptive and even inhibit learning by victimizing and intimidating other students thus the problem of the study put in a question form, is "how do students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University perceive their campus safety?". In line with this, the main objective/purpose of the study is to examine the effect of cultism on campus safety.

Reviewing past empirical works, it was noticed that Fisher and Nasar (1995) presented one of the first empirical studies of fear on campus with their work on the micro level physical cues associated with fear in and around the Ohio State University's Wexner Centre for the Visual Arts. They found that certain aspects of the built and/or natural environment were associated with student fear, including "areas that were characterized by limited prospect, much concealment and difficult escape" (Fisher & Nasar, 1995, p. 232). In a study of campus fear using a national sample of college students, Fisher and Sloan (2003) examined daytime and nighttime emotional fear, along with cognitive personal risk perception, across college men and women for a variety of specific crimes (for example: larceny theft, robbery, simple assault, aggravated assault, and rape). Women's personal risk perception and daytime emotional fear levels exceeded those of men for every crime except larceny theft while for women's nighttime emotional fear, their levels exceeded those of their male counter parts for all offenses examined.

Also, in studying the effects of crime on college students, Dull and Wint (1997) found that those students who had been victims of crime had less fear of personal crime, but more fear of property crime, than those not victimized. The Angus Reid Report (1999) found that while 19% of non-victims express a great or fair amount of fear of being a victim of crime, 30% of victims express this fear (p. 54).

Some research has suggested that girls are more likely to be both perpetrator and target of the relational, indirect or social victimization (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996); Archer and Coyne (2005), observed that relational victimization is more prevalent in girls than boys. Gender has been found to be the strongest predictor of fear. Women have much greater fear of crime than men, but are victimized less than men. Women's fear comes mostly from their Vulnerability to sexual aggression: women are ten times more likely to be sexually assaulted than are men (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Women do not simply become aware of this fear one day, nor are they born with it: rather women are socialized into thinking that they are vulnerable to attack if they, for example, go out alone at night. Parents, peers and media emphasize and reinforce this fear, and women are expected to succumb to it (Joe-Akunne, 2013).

**To address this, two (2) hypotheses were formulated thus:**

- There will be no significant difference in the male and female students perception of their campus safety using their mean scores.
- The extent students perceived effect of cultism in the campus will not differ significantly based on their gender.

## **II. Method**

**Participants:** Five hundred and seven (507) volunteer regular male and female undergraduate students from five out of the nine faculties in Awka Campus of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, aged between 19 and 28, with

mean age of 23years and standard deviation of 2.39 participated in the study. 121 were of the Faculty of Social Sciences, 93 from Law, 112 from Management Sciences, 87 from Engineering and 94 from Physical Sciences.

**Instrument**

The instrument for the data collection is a questionnaire titled Multidimensional Campus Safety Questionnaire (MCSQ) developed by Nnedum and Unachukwu (2008). The instrument was validated by experts. It was validated in Igbo population and the current study also used participants from similar Igbo population. A Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.98 was obtained.

**Procedure**

The researchers visited the Association of Students of each faculty told them of the research and pleaded with them to gather students who are willing to participate in the research in their faculty’s quadrangle in two days, to enable the researchers administer the questionnaire. In two days, the researchers went to the faculties and administered the questionnaire which was also collected back the same day to minimize loss. A gift of pen (biro) was given to each participant. A total of 618 questionnaire copies were distributed out of which 539 were returned giving a return rate of 87.2% and 507 representing 94.1% were found useable.

**Design and Statistics**

The independent subject design was adopted for the study while the Independent Z-test statistics was used in testing the two hypotheses for the study.

**III. Results**

The result of the statistical analysis of the data obtained in the study are presented in the tables below:

**Table 1:** Presented the Summary of Z-test analysis of male and female students perception of campus safety

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	df	Z	Sig
Perception of Campus safety	Male	239	39.92	7.05	498	-.02	.98
	Female	268	39.93	7.01			

Results from table 1 indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female students perception of campus safety based on their means; males (M = 39.92, SD = 7.05) and females (M = 39.93, SD = 7.01).

The table also, indicated that based on the Z-test analysis at  $Z(498) = .98, P > .05$ , there was also no significant difference. Thus the first hypothesis was upheld showing that male and female students perception of campus safety is on the same level indicating no difference.

**Table 2:** Presented the Summary of Z-test analysis of the extent students (male and female) perceived effects of cultism in the Campus.

	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	S.D	df	Z	Sig
Campus Danger	Male	239	28.13	7.70	498	-3.39	.00
	Female	268	30.22	6.07			

Results from table 2 indicated that there was a significant difference  $Z(498) = .00, P < .05$  in the extent students perceived effect of cultism in the campus. Thus the second hypothesis was rejected showing that there was a significant difference between males (M = 28.13, SD = 7.70) and females (M = 30.22, SD = 6.07).

**IV. Discussion**

The findings of the study showed that only hypothesis 1 representing the perception of campus safety was upheld while hypothesis 2 representing the perceived effect of cultism in the campus was rejected. This is in consonance with some findings while some also did not share the findings of this study.

Based on the perception of campus safety. It is seen that the trend in the campus where cult activities are common place appears to be unhealthy. This finding is supported by Unachukwu and Nwankwo (1997) who stated that the behaviours of the University undergraduates nowadays put the university environment in poor, fearful and crisis conditions to the extent that people (students) find it hard to study effectively in them. In the same vein, the work of Fisher and Nasar (1992) found that certain aspects of the built and/or natural environment were associated with student fear, including “areas that were characterized by limited prospect, much concealment and difficult escape”. This is believed to affect both the males and females on equal basics. The inquiry into the extent male and female students perceived the effect of cultism in campus showed that there was a significant difference. This result does not agree with the findings of Eyibe (1995) who believed that, all

Nigerian institutions of higher learning have recorded different incidences and deaths arising from secret cults in the past years and that the experience by the students are on an equal basis.. Eyibe also stated that the records of institutions on cultism are replete with horror and terror. In the same vein, Joe-Akunne (2013) believes that the issues and incidences of horror caused by cultists could be said to have been for the past ten to fifteen years and these incidence are experienced by both males and females . Based on these quotations by Eyibe (1995) and Joe-Akunne (2013) one can easily conclude that such a campus must be very dangerous for people to operate in, thus threatening the safety of students on campus.

Based on the above discussion, it is necessary to conclude that students (male and females) perceive the campus environment as unsafe. It is then recommended that recreational activities should be provided in campuses to engage the attention of students when they are less busy with academic work. The campus environment should be attractive and bushes cleared so that students will find it difficult to find places they will hide to carryout any crime.

Psychological guidance should be well established in the campuses so as to help the students and also any student found to be involved in any crime, victimization or cult activity should be severely punished to avoid repetition by others.

## V. Conclusion

Although generalization of results of this study is limited by its scope, the study is nonetheless a major contribution to existing literature on the effect/implication of cultism, victimization and danger on the safety of students on campus.

It is also relevant for university authorities who take the issue of safety in campus lightly. Further study in this area is recommended, so as to close gaps that have not been covered by the present study such as cultural variables and other universities.

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