



Cost Implications of Violent Student Protests on Students in Higher Education Institutions – A Case Study of the University of Free State (UFS), South Africa

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Abstract

The study comes against the background of the upsurge in violent student protests across the universities in South Africa with adverse consequences for both students and institutions. This provides the impetus for this paper, which provided insight into the consequences of violent student protests, from the socio-economic perspective. Within this context, this study adopted an interpretive paradigm to understand the lived experiences of students who have participated in violent student protests. Theoretically, it drew on Waters, Hyder, Rajkotia, Basu, and Butchart's (2005) understanding of the consequences of interpersonal violence, which looks at the effects of violence beyond personal harm. The study adopted a qualitative design, and the sample included students from various political parties and student organisations at the University of Free State (UFS). Data for this study was collected interviews using an interview schedule. Qualitative analysis was performed using Nvivo12 Pro. The findings were presented following the research objectives that focused on identifying the cost implications of violent protests on students. The study reveals that restricted access to campus resources, loss of study time, and suspensions of student activists were notable consequences encountered after protests. Furthermore, the study found that transport and legal fees were among some of the financial costs incurred by students due to violent protests on campus. Overall, the study recommends conflict resolution mechanisms, the promotion of non-violent advocacy training and improved communication channels to mitigate violent student protests at higher learning institutions. This paper presents a significant contribution by providing a localised perspective on the socio-economic impacts of student protests in South Africa, rooted in comprehensive qualitative research. The use of established theoretical frameworks offers a robust scaffold for analyzing protest dynamics. The findings of this paper aim to improve knowledge and understanding of the nature of violent student protests. As such this study adds to the knowledge base on violent student protests with a particular focus on cost implications uncounted by students. The study highlights the often cost implications encountered by students since much focus is on deeds students are engaged in during protests.

Keywords: Cost; Higher Learning; Students; Violent Protests; Court Orders

Introduction

This study sought to determine the cost implications of violent student protests in South African higher learning institutions. Over the past decade, a wave of violent student protests swept across South African universities. It appears that peaceful consultations between students and university management it is losing place within South African institutions. The continued occurrence of violent protests (Mokoena, 2014; Oxlund, 2016; Dumako, 2019) and its growing popularity among South African university students (Hall, 2016; Oxlund, 2016) suggests that violence is the pivotal language that individuals within the university management in South Africa easily fathom. The peak of the violent protests was in 2016 when students across the country, staged violent protests over free higher education among other things (Hall, 2016), which resulted in a national shutdown of universities. This period was a difficult one for universities as libraries, laboratories and vehicles were torched; artworks were indiscriminately destroyed (Habib, 2018). These actions reinforced the idea that the use of violent tactics remains most effective for students to engage with university management in the event of disagreements. Although it is understood that in some universities management does not act on student grievances until a protest is conducted, such cases display a sign of weak administration. The remnants of such actions motivate this study as these protests have socio-economic impacts on students and universities. When students feel like their voices are not being heard or excluded from the formal decision-making processes of the university, they take to the streets to express their frustrations.

In March 2021, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Dr Blade Nzimande publicised a report which showed the devastating cost impacts of student protests at universities in South Africa. The report indicated that from 2020 to early 2021, South African institutions experienced well over ten violent student protests which amounted to R32791 397.00 of cost maintenance for universities (Mahamba, 2021). The University of the Free State (UFS) encountered a series and consistent annual student protests after the 2016 period. For example, the UFS- QwaQwa Campus reported that on the evening of Monday, 4 April 2022, two buildings were set alight during a protest over NSFAS payments issues (UFS, 2022). These are essential matters to students that should be handled with urgency. The UFS-QwaQwa Campus 2022 student violent protests alone resulted in severe damages to buildings estimated at R35 million of damage costs. Therefore, research must identify the costs associated with violent protests; prior writings on student protests have neglected this aspect. Moreover, the lack of precise documentation and systematic assessment of the socio-economic consequences resulting from violent student protests at universities offers a basis for this qualitative research study since protests result in damage to universities and grievances to students. Waters et al. (2005) described how violent protests have negative costs that go beyond direct victims, perpetrators and financial burdens on the host communities. Costs in this context refer to the negative after-effects of violent student protests. This further involves critically focusing on the impact these violent protests have on student well-being. As such, the integration of firsthand accounts enriches the narrative and deepens the context for the cited following theoretical perspective. This paper is divided into seven sections. Section one introduces the study. Section two deals with the literature review and is followed by the theoretical framework in section three which grounds the study. In addition, section four provides an overview of the methodology used in this research study and section five presents analysis and interpretation of the findings. Lastly, section six focuses on the conclusion and section seven on recommendations.

Literature Review

In the last decade students from universities all over the continent have engaged in different forms of violent protests; often using it as a means for goal completion. The status quo is also similar in South African universities in Africa. To put pressure on university management, students from universities have often organised protests against the university authorities. In most cases, however, these protests have

turned violent, and have led to injuries and threats to life for students and staff of these universities (Plaut, 2010). While having the ability to lay the foundation for socio-political activism beyond the particular university within which it occurs, student violent protests have also led to the loss of lives (for both students and university employers), destruction of university properties (Nkosi, 2012); temporary shut-down of the universities or suspension of academic activities (Dumako, 2019), and probably many more issues that have an adverse effect on the health, economic and social life of the university community. For example, in 2021, Walter Sisulu University (WSU) students engaged in violent protests where a campus cafeteria was looted in the process (Viljoen, 2021).

Academic Cost

Many protests result in total shutdowns of universities, which might be for hours, days, or even months, leading to a complete cease of administration and all academic-related activities (Lewis, 2021). Student protests impact the universities' programmes, such as lectures, examinations, conferences, graduations, and research (Klaasen, 2020). For example, in the 2016 #FeesMustFall protests, many universities experienced shutdowns leading to the extension of the academic calendar and postponement of tests and examinations. These interruptions put students under pressure on their academics, and some failed because they could not handle the workload afterwards. Most affected universities could not complete their programmes, with the University of Cape Town (UCT) Faculty of Health Sciences opting for a 'mini-semester' in January 2017 to facilitate the completion of academic work remaining from 2016 (Karim and Kruyer, 2017). Other universities proceeded with examinations in guarded venues during the final days of the protests, while still others seem to have used marks students had achieved up to the beginning of the protests as the final marks reflected on certificates (Dandara, Chimusa, Wonkam, 2017).

There is the incessant closure of institutions of learning whenever there is a protest, which adversely affects the scope and curriculum of the programmes offered (Davids, 2016). Protests disrupt institutional activities and have contributed to poor educational standards as examinations are conducted without completing the course contents. If universities cannot complete their academic year, some students may miss out on the chance to graduate on time. As a result, students may choose to drop out entirely rather than try to fund another costly year of study (Wingfield, 2016). This has dire consequences on research studies across universities since any breaks in some research programmes mean students have to restart many activities, often from scratch. Some research programmes cannot be switched off for a day, week or month and then restarted where you left off (Wingfield, 2016). This results in submission delays, which is problematic as research is often done using grant or industrial funding. Granting agencies expect progress reports and researchers are expected to deliver on what they would have promised. Industry funding usually requires quarterly reporting, which can be cut if the research outputs are not achieved (Wingfield, 2016). Undeniably, working and lower-middle-class students cannot access higher education without financial support. Hence, the loss of an academic year has dire implications for students since we have those students who have to graduate, which is an enormous risk of scarce financial resources since lack of money is one of the reasons for high student protests.

Economic Cost

Many protests result in financial costs for universities, as protesting students sometimes vandalise or loot university property (Czerniewicz, Trotter and Genevieve, 2019). During the protests that kicked off in September 2016, buildings and vehicles at several universities mentioned were burnt by rioting students resulting in substantial financial losses for universities. Universities had to bear the costs of rebuilding and replacing damaged assets (Lewis, 2021). As previously mentioned in March 2021, the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology released a report indicating that the estimated cost incurred by universities owing to vandalism and theft by protesting students was above R32 million (DHET, 2021). This responsibility to pay for the damaged properties mainly rests on universities, as there are rare cases where students incur these financial costs.

For example, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) reported two cases related to fire hoses and extinguishers that were damaged during student protests, and the repairs for these were estimated at R250 000 (DHET, 2021). In addition, CPUT reported suspected arson cases involving the burning of lecture rooms, with repair costs amounting to approximately R2.6 million (Mahamba, 2021). In the report, Rhodes University also reported minor vandalism cases due to break-ins, and the damages amounted to about R5 000 (Mahamba, 2021). Lastly, the Central University of Technology (CUT) had violent incidences reported in 2020 during student protests at the Welkom and Bloemfontein campuses, and the repairs completed in 2020 amounted to R1.4 million (DHET, 2021).

In June 2020, Sefako Makhetha University (SMU) reported six cases of vandalism during student protests, with repairs that amounted to R30 220 (DHET, 2021). The University of Venda also reported vandalism during student protests in November 2020, and repairs cost the university a total of R133 227 (Mahamba, 2021). The minister called on the police to act decisively against acts of violence and property damage. Universities usually find themselves in these predicaments - the potential costs of staff being harmed, as well as property damage, and losing the academic year, are too costly to predict. Therefore, universities have to act to protect their resources (Duncan, 2016).

Protests cost universities considerable resources (Mottiar and Bond, 2020). For example, in the case of the CUT 2020 violent protests, one staff member said during an interview "we have to assign contractors for repairs of damaged properties; it is an immense leakage given the financial crises the University is grappling with" (Klaasen, 2020). The above-mentioned cases show the financial burden that violent protests alone have on institutions. The University of the Free State (UFS), QwaQwa campus on Monday, 4 April 2022, reported two buildings were set alight. The buildings, which housed the clinic and a computer laboratory, were almost destroyed, with damage to both buildings estimated at R35 million (UFS, 2022: 1). On Sunday, 16 May 2016, at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) Kingsway campus the Salam auditorium was burnt, according to the university the costs of the damage amount to over R100 million (Oxlund, 2017).

Unfortunately, previous literature on violent protests, especially in South Africa, has neglected this aspect. There is barely a systematic analysis of how students' violent protests have adverse effects on both the perpetrators of the violence and the host communities where such violence is carried out. This paper fills this research gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study explores the costs of violent student protests, particularly on students. Theoretically, this paper draws on Waters, Hyder, Rajkotia, Basu, and Butchart's (2005) theory of interpersonal violence. The theory points out that violence has long-term social, physical, economic, and psychological consequences. Waters *et al.* (2005) explain the consequences of such acts in two opposing arrangements: indirect costs and direct costs. According to the theory, direct losses include loss of lives, assets, and financial resources. For instance, the UFS-QwaQwa Campus 2022 student violent protests alone resulted in severe damages to buildings estimated at R35 million of damage costs. Consequently, such financial responsibilities fall onto the university solely. Meanwhile, Indirect costs include time, lost productivity, and compromised quality of life due to physical or mental problems. On 22 February 2022, following a recent violent protest on the UFS-QwaQwa Campus, the university management decided to temporarily close the campus until further notice. Both direct and indirect costs can be ascribed to violent exposure, and some consequences are not evident until years after exposure. Also, the theory plays a crucial role in facilitating our understanding of the costs of violent behaviour because South Africa has a dilemma of frequent violent student protests across the country's institutions.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study as it fits well when a researcher strives to reveal knowledge or an understanding of the nature of reality about a social phenomenon (Merriam, 2014). Furthermore, the fundamental goal of a qualitative study is to gather and create knowledge while analysing and understanding human experiences (Neuman, 2014). The study employed a phenomenology research approach. According to Kendall (2008), phenomenology is a wide-ranging form of study where the researcher looks to gather information that explains how individuals experience a phenomenon and how they feel about it. The research site for this study was the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa. The UFS has three campuses: Bloemfontein, South, and QwaQwa Campus. The Bloemfontein and the South campuses are both located in a metropolis in Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State Province in South Africa. Meanwhile, the QwaQwa campus is located in Phuthaditjhaba, a rural area in the Eastern Free State. The QwaQwa campus formerly known as University of QwaQwa (UNIQWA) was an officially a black university mainly for teaching programmers, it was incorporated into the UFS in 2003. The distance between Bloemfontein and QwaQwa ranges between 319, 2 km to 335, 8 km, depending on the roads one uses (UFS, 2022).

The study employed semi-structured interviews as a method to collect data. Nieuwenhuis (2007) defines an interview as a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect in-depth data and learn about the participants' notions, views, beliefs and actions. The semi-structured interview is best suited for this research approach as it enables flexibility during the interview and can accommodate developing perceptions and notions that the researcher did not think of (De Vos, 2018).

Participants were sampled using primary and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative research is where a researcher gathers data focusing on in-depth, subjective data that will be analysed to lay bare themes, topics or other patterns for understanding (kendall, 2008). Furthermore, the study employed a non-probability sampling with a specific focus on snowball sampling techniques. This technique was ideal in this context because it helped in identifying those individuals who were on campuses and directly affected by the violent protest. According to Bhardwaj (2019), the snowball process collects samples quickly and is cost-effective. The technique is most appropriate because it follows a referral method where one participant connects to another. Upon identifying and recruiting initial participants, the researcher asks to be referred to other participants who share similar characteristics (Neuman, 2012). Hence, the data collection revolves around picking participants through referral until the point of saturation. The target population for this study included student leaders (e.g. executive members of student structures and associations), student representative council (SRC) members, and university personnel who directly deal with student affairs in the institution.

The sample for this study consisted of fifteen participants, from all three campuses cutting across gender, age groups, grades, and disciplines. In this study, an interview schedule was used as an instrument for data collection. The interview schedule contained questions categorised into participation and experience in violent student protests. The interview schedule is helpful as it ensures that the participant's experience is the same for all respondents during the interview, reducing the risk of bias in the interview process (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Ethical issues were considered in the process of the study. This study followed all the ethical guidelines prescribed by the University of the Free State for dealing with human subjects. The researcher had to apply for ethical clearance from the Faculty of Humanities Scientific Committee and Ethics Committee at the UFS, and the ethical clearance application was approved. Informed consent forms were distributed to the participants ahead of the qualitative data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the practice gave participants an option to decide participation. Furthermore,

privacy and confidentiality were highly adhered to during and after interviews with participants. Participant's details were not linked to their responses in the study. In light of this, fictitious names (Pseudonyms) names were used to reference participants' narratives. The data gathered was strictly used for the research purpose for which it was originally collected. In this study, the interview data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, through the Nvivo12 Pro software open coding system.

Presentation of Findings and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings of this study. Two cost-related implications associated with students were identified. The costs were grouped as themes under a broader theme "cost implications of violent student protests". Analysis of data established 'economic implications' as the most prevalent implication of the protest followed by "academic challenges". As such the first theme was labelled economic implications as a result of expenses of travelling after the eviction of students and legal fees that occurred due to imprisonment. Lastly, academic implications touched on the lack of study time and access to resources as a result of shutdowns.

Economic Implications

a. Transport fees

This study found that students are disproportionately affected during protests, especially students in campus residences, as they must immediately vacate university residences when the university decides to close during protests. This causes numerous problems for students as they have to go home, and most find themselves stranded as they often do not have money to go home coming from different provinces around the country. Transport fees become a stern worry for students especially if parents do not have money to send them to come back home. One student participant put it:

Students residing on campus are expected to vacate with immediate effect whenever there are violent protests. The institution does not even consider whether you have money or not, or whether you have a family nearby, or you do not. Mind you, most of the student population in our university on our campus are from rural areas. They have financial challenges and are expected to vacate, while they have already spent money on groceries (Thato).

The sudden closure of the university during protests puts many residence students under enormous pressure as they have to make alternative means to get home. The study finds that transport fees are the primary concern for campus-residing students due to eviction from residences as a result of violent protests. As such, students must come up with alternative accommodation arrangements when they do not have transport money to get home. This becomes another challenge in finding alternative accommodation. For example, in a statement by the university on Tuesday, 22 February 2022, following a recent violent protest on the QwaQwa Campus, "the university management has decided to temporarily close the campus until further notice. This decision was taken after careful consideration and in the interest of the safety of students and staff. Accordingly, students are expected to vacate the campus by 11:00 on Wednesday, 23 February 2022" (UFS, 2022). Many protests result in financial costs for universities as protesting students occasionally cause property damage, vandalise or steal university property (Tandwa and Lizeka, 2019). As a result, universities implement such orders to minimise and prevent further protest-related damages (Lewis, 2021). Student participants stated:

When it comes to students, whenever there are protests, some have to vacate, and most of the time, it is in the middle of the month, and no one has money. I mean, we cannot afford it. So, you find students who become homeless, foodless, and stuff like that. They have to sleep in garages and gates. It is really sad. I remember that even when protests started, they stopped emergency residences. So, we had to accommodate students ourselves at our own accommodation. I remember

one of my friends using a single room, but he had to sleep with five guys in a room simply because there was no way to pay for a guest house (Neo).

The financial implication is that you are telling students who are fighting for money to leave. You are not giving them money to go or alternative accommodation. Now that is a big problem. It just angers me. Also, the financial implication is that you are not cognisant of the fact that most black students do not have money. In the middle of the month, parents cannot send their children money to get a taxi back home, and students are left stranded (Ithabeleng).

Due to mandatory removals from university residences, students endure stressful experiences as they feel abandoned by the university and find themselves isolated. This further touches on a previous study by Kumalo (2018) that suggests that in subsequent violent protests, there is a neglect of the trauma endured by students as they will be expected to go back to lectures and write exams and tests as usual, without considering their distress. Other than the constant stress concerning the need for transport fees, some students have to acquire legal fees, specifically for those who get arrested during protests.

b. Legal fees

The study's findings show that some students sustain further economic costs from being arrested during protests. As such, students are required to obtain funds for bail and legal representation. Furthermore, some participants indicted having ongoing cases of public violence, vandalism of property and court interdicts posed on them by the university:

I was arrested, and luckily at home, we are financially okay. We had to ensure that I got a lawyer to assist me. That lawyer cost around R4000. I got bail of R500 rand. Now imagine if it was a student with no parents living off this NSFAS money. It becomes a problem because they do not have my privilege. My parents can assist me in ensuring that I do not get arrested (Bonolo).

We did not have anywhere to fall back on when we got arrested. Who is going to fund my legal fees? I had to ask myself, so it is a risk when getting arrested (Marvin).

Court-related fees resulting from one being arrested solely become the students' responsibility. The inability of students to afford legal fees often leads them to spend time in jail. Even before that, some students must acquire attorneys for assistance and attending court proceedings requires even more money. This becomes problematic for students as they often cannot afford such expenses. At times universities have responded to student protests by approaching the courts to prevent students from protesting on campuses. However, according to Hall (2016), universities should think carefully before using court interdicts to regulate protests because interdicts are not always the best way to deal with campus protests.

Academic Implications

a. Loss of study time

An important concern of the finding is that many violent protests resulted in a total shutdown of the Universities for some days/ weeks and a complete cease of administration activities. As such students lose study time whenever a protest occurs impacting their performance and this disrupts the rest of the academic calendar. The theory of interpersonal violence posits that violent protests have direct and indirect costs (Waters et al., 2005). Indirect costs include time, lost productivity, and compromised quality of life due to physical or mental problems (Waters et al., 2005). Some participants explained that:

When a protest occurs, we know that there will be a halt in academics or that students will be blocked from attending classes. That happens because we are now seeking solidarity among students. After all, others cannot go to class while others are fighting for their issues. So, the question is, who must then go to the forefront and fight for you? (Thato).

Frequent protest disrupts the study schedule. As a result, students are bombarded with extra tests and assignments. This puts so much pressure on them. As a result, students fail, leading to academic exclusion (Bonolo).

The above excerpts confirms that after protests, students experience major setbacks regarding their studies. Moreover, protests impact the university's programmes, such as lectures, examinations, conferences, graduations, and research (Klaasen, 2020). One participant explained that:

There have been so many protests on our campus this year, so we are not on the same path as the academic calendar set at the beginning of the year. We are way behind schedule. So students are bombarded with extra assessments and extra classes, which puts pressure on them. Students are going to be failing, and some be academically excluded (Ithabeleng).

Furthermore, this study established that student protests have implications for funding outcomes. Due to loss of study time, students end up failing their modules, resulting in loss of funding and further putting students at risk of academic exclusion due to poor performance. Previous studies also acknowledge that there are implications that manifest as a result of protests. However, other participants believe that the academic costs they endure are not severe and that the student population they are representing is not that much affected academically when protests do take place. Such beliefs were best captured from some participants:

I would say there is a huge implication or a negative one on the part of students because if I do not have a meal allowance, it means I cannot concentrate in class. So having a protest and then the university closing does not negatively impact the students we represent. And I need to emphasise that it does not have a negative implication on the students that we represent, but obviously, on the privileged ones. I mean, they do miss out on lecture time, but at the same time, those are privileged people who can catch up, you know when a university is closed, they have textbooks (Ithabeleng).

The implications are that though they will not be classes, the implications are not going to be large because when the majority is not attending classes, the minority will also be implicated. So, therefore, it brings a halt to the entire thing (Thato).

Much academic time gets lost when protests occur, resulting in academic delays due to the closure of campuses. The closure of campuses also affects access to resources which students need for online learning and teaching.

b. Lack of access to resources

The study further finds that whenever protests occur on campuses leading to a temporary closure of the campus or university some lectures get conducted online. This method disadvantages off-campus residing students as this restricts their access to university resources such as computer laboratories, libraries and workshops. According to participants:

When we have violent protests, and the institution is forced to shut down momentarily, they move things to online learning. Online learning caters for other faculties but does not cater for other faculties. For instance, I am from the Natural and Agricultural Sciences (NAS) faculty, and sometimes you are not even given an extension. In the NAS faculty, we are supposed to do practicals, and most of our modules need face-to-face contact learning. It is not easy to do online because some things must be written on boards; you have to explain to lecturers how to derive certain equations. We are expected to do all these things online; we are expected even to do the practicals online. The lecturers are supposed to give you data, and then you analyse it now (Thasos).

The transition to online learning because of protests disadvantages other students as most students come from poor backgrounds. Some students from poor backgrounds do not have resources such as Wi-Fi and facilities needed to conduct experiments.

Even though the university's closure during student protests is meant to be a safety and preventative measure, it has consequences for academic activities. Even if intended to prevent unlawful protests, measures such as curfews, and restricting access to campus, make organising lawful protests, and many other students' lives more challenging (Oxlund, 2016). The study further found that students who reside off-campus are categorised as more violent and often the first group to be denied access to campus premises after protests. Student participants said:

In April, when we were protesting, the campus was closed for off-campus students because they were classified as, you know, violent students. Only students who reside on campus were allowed to use the campus facilities like our computer labs, and so students who were living off-campus were expected to attend classes online. So yeah, those were the conditions they faced; sometimes even, they were expected to write tests, do assignments, and submit them on time (Thato).

It is unfair that a certain proportion of students are going to class, studying and passing and have all the materials, and others don't, but we are fighting for the same thing (Ithabeleng).

There is a perception shared among the participants that the university community perceives off-campus residing students as more violent than those who reside in campus residences. However, it is worth mentioning that most students in the institution reside off-campus, meaning the majority are affected whenever protests occur. Off-campus students are more affected as they are usually restricted access to campus premises during protests or the closure of campuses and they are often left out of accessing the university resources needed to do their academic work. They often have to wait until they are allowed back; meanwhile, students residing on campus had access to resources the whole time. Furthermore, students get denied access because they are either suspended or accused of being the ones to influence other students into protesting.

c. Suspensions

The study finds that student leaders have a high risk of suspension from the university upon arrest or being identified as leaders of a protest. Once a student is suspended from the institution, their academic work is directly affected. Student participant mentioned:

When you have been suspended, automatically, you cannot be part of the institution. You are not allowed to perform academic activities or even be on campus. So already, those students are way behind, which automatically would lead them to fail. So, it is a problem. I do not know how it can be solved, but it is a huge problem (Bonolo).

When students are on suspension, they are excluded from academic activities and the campus itself, which puts them at risk of failure due to absenteeism. Their absence from academics has further consequences involving time for completing a qualification and funding. Furthermore, the study finds that students believe their suspensions from academic activities and other activities on campus grounds it is just a tactic that the university uses to discourage them and silence them from participating in student protests. Student participant said:

We can never shy away from the fact that when there is a protest, certain leaders will be arrested to silence them. Not only that, but the management will always try to find ways to ensure that it pins the blame for the vandalism on such an individual who was part of that protest (Bonolo).

Many student activists/leaders hold the view that courts are being used to intimidate and instill fear into protesting students (Ndelu et al., 2016). Student participants stated that staff members advised them

to leave politics, and student activism and focus on their academic work only if they wanted to finish their courses and graduate. As one participant said,

Let me give you a typical true-life scenario now. Three weeks back, I was also arrested, and after I got out, I was told to leave these things (student politics) alone (Thato).

The arrest of student leaders during protests is a common feature among universities, UFS is no exception and students believe that this is done to scare the constituents that a leader represents. As a final point, students believe the arrest of student leaders is a deliberate attempt by the university management to shut them down and make examples out of them. In recent years, universities have responded to student protests by approaching the courts to prevent students from protesting on campuses. However, universities should not use interdicts to regulate student protests when they could lawfully handle protests by adopting university policies on the protest because university policies apply equally to all of the students at a university (Klaasen, 2020). Unlike interdicts, which apply only to the specific students mentioned in the court order and bind those individually. The findings of this study are in line with the literature within social science research. For example, Chen (2009), Braha (2012), Menashri (2012), Hodgkinson (2013) and Oxlund (2016) demonstrate that riots are strong agents of human rebellion. Its consequences affect various aspects of society be it economic, teaching, health, environmental, and socio-economic issues.

Conclusion

The study highlighted important insights regarding violent student protests. Firstly, it is apparent from the primary data and the literature discussed in this study that violent student protests have been occurring in the past and will still persist into the future. In addition, the literature section discussed three identified costs of violent protests (financial, health and academic). Using Waters et al (2005) theory of youth violence provided an understating into looking at the effects of violence beyond personal harm. It further helps structure the inquiry and interpretation. The findings were presented following the research objectives that focused on identifying the cost implications of violent protests on students. Key findings of this study indicate that due to violent protests, students often lose study time as a result of protesting, which leads to suspensions of classes. Some students end up being suspended from the institution because due to their involvement in protests. The shutdown of the university results in a lack of access to resources on the part of students, as they are now restricted from accessing campus.

Lastly, transport and legal fees are financial costs students encounter due to violent protests. Due to protests, the university often opts to shut down, meaning students who use campus accommodation have to vacate their residences. This often leaves students stranded as they have to find transport money to get home. Another financial cost related to protests is legal fees for legal representatives and bail, specifically for those students who would have been arrested during protests.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

a. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Establish formal structures (e.g. grievance committees, student-staff forums) for timely identification and resolution of student grievances before they escalate. The university management needs to be more understanding in their dealings with the students and understand the political dynamics and power struggles associated with these student structures, which can sometimes make negotiations difficult. This is imperative when it comes to disputes which the university has no control over.

b. Promote Non-Violent Advocacy Training

Integrate awareness of peaceful protest, civic engagement, and negotiation skills into student orientation and leadership programs. Student protest leaders need to learn more about their responsibilities and duties when organising protests within the University, especially in line with the protest management policy. Moreover, this includes managing protesting students, so that they do not get violent, even in the face of intensification. Protests are used to communicate a message, especially when university management is not prepared to engage with students equally and transparently.

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