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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education. If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

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ECOLOGIES OF DISTRESS: HOW OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING AFFECTS STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract:

Students' tenancy in rural and previously disadvantaged universities is a catalyst for poor mental health among university students in a transforming country. In 1994, South Africa opened doors to previously disadvantaged communities to access higher education. The influx into universities during the post-apartheid era put a strain on infrastructure including access to accommodation. As such, students sought accommodation in neighbouring communities to access education. This transition exposes them to unregulated establishments that may compromise their mental health. However, less is understood in terms of how these rented and unaccredited houses affect the mental health of the students. The purpose of this research was to understand the mental health challenges faced by student tenants in rented houses in a previously disadvantaged university situated in a rural area. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, this study investigated how the interconnected layers of student living space affected their mental health challenges including environmental health, security and criminality. The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore the lived experience of students living in rented houses. Data was collected through semi structured interviews and focus group discussions with 27 students and 3 university personnel who were purposively selected. The study interviewed the participants between 2019 and 2022 as part of a PhD study. The Covid19 regulation was observed. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, strict referral strategy was implemented. The study used a thematic analysis framed through Bronfenbrenner's five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The result indicates that the constant worry surrounding gunshots and security are great threats to the students' poor mental health. In conclusion, student mental health is a systematic rather than an individual phenomenon. The study

recommends that the university should contextualise and implement the norms and standards for student housing as issued by the DHET. To also strengthen the mesosystemic links between the institutions and landlords' policies towards protection of students' quality of mental health, the environmental health and social security issues.

Keywords: *mental health, accommodation; rural university; student rented housing; student tenancy*

1. Introduction

The situation of mental health impact of student rented housing on rural university students is a complex phenomenon and need to be explored and understood within the multiple ecological lenses (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Kitchen et al., 2019). Student housing largely shapes how students experience higher education. Higher education transformation policies which promoted massification and globalisation have impacted easy access to on-campus accommodation (Serfontein and Smit, 2024) because universities could no longer provide accommodation to all students who need it (Kobla et al., 2018; Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024). This is despite the positive impact on-campus accommodation has on students' academic performance. The local villages continue to experience influx of students seeking accommodation. It is not fully understood how these community owned accommodation affects the mental health of the student within the rural context even though they may contribute positively to the spatial development of the area (Leboto-Khetsi et al., 2024). Generally, students' mental and physical health get affected by their transition to new university and the assumption of adult responsibilities such as managing their finances, cooking and taking care of their academic work (Worsley et al., 2021a; Worsley et al., 2021b; Duffy et al., 2019).

The increase in students' numbers into higher education is motivated by various reasons yet, impact students in a similar manner. As such, South Africa is not the only country faced with complexity in student accommodation in public higher

education. For instant, in the residences proximate to Kenyatta University, in Kenya, Kiruru and Ogola (2020) surveyed 395 students in private accommodation, and determined that the situation in 50% of these properties were not acceptable. They found that even though security did not have a bearing on the student performance, however, the quality of water, sanitary conditions was found wanting. Furthermore, there was not adequate internet connectivity. In the similar light, in Southern Nigeria, Mbee and Akpoghomeh, (2017) investigated trends in rented off-campus student accommodation with a survey of 798 respondents, they noted that the family dynamics and the youthful population contribute to the rising student enrolment which ultimately affect the bed space capacity, hence there is pressure on higher education for student accommodation. The high demand for the external accommodation influence rise in rental prices which further affect students mentally.

Internationally the demand for student accommodation is driven by international students' mobility, for example in Asia international students are a major driver for students' accommodation demands. As such, student accommodation is handled differently to the African context in that universities are focusing on their mandate without being involved in accommodation of students. Eisenberg et al. (2009), provides a descriptive analysis of association of mental health and academic outcome in their study of college students in the United States

of America (USA). They argue that ‘mental health problems may affect human capital accumulation and socio-economic imperatives of the individual, household and the country’ (Eisenberg et al., 2009, p. 1); and further suggest that institutions of higher learning should invest resources towards mental health of students. Similarly, Long (2014) argues that an accommodation that student resides in likely to determine the behaviour of a student. As such universities carry significant responsibility in ensuring a holistic approach towards students’ support (Hussain et al., 2013).

Although several mental health and housing studies have established a nexus between the two elements; limited attention has been paid towards the effects of student tenancy on university student mental health. Mental health is better understood within the broader context of an individual and interactions with his or her context (Guy-Evans, 2020). On the similar token, mental health in university campuses is a growing phenomenon which focus in different areas of a student life (Christy, 2020; Eloff and Graham, 2020; Evans, 2003; Giamos et al., 2017; Wood, 2012; Wynaden et al., 2014). The impact of student accommodation on students’ mental health in higher education is one widely studied area globally including in South Africa (Evans, 2003; Evans et al., 2003; Haavik et al., 2017; Worsley et al., 2021a; Worsley et al., 2021b). The understanding of the prevalence of mental health in adolescence and young adults encouraged research in higher education, on the impact of massification of higher education including the added responsibilities that students face as they transit from home environment to university. Although many studies were not conducted in a similar environment as the current study area, but the literature is relevant in understanding the extent of the

mental health problem in higher education in general. Wood (2012) argue that the issue of student mental health should not be left entirely in the hand of counselling units, but it should be the responsibility of the whole campus communities.

A Canadian study established that in some colleges, stigma, accommodation and access to mental health services as well as coping mechanism are identified to be key in student mental health prevalence (Giamos et al., 2017, Baghoori, Roduta Roberts and Chen, 2024). Christy (2020) studied medical health students’ perception that they may appear weak if they disclose their mental health challenges. While it has been shown that there is growing mental health research in higher education globally, however, there is a notable silence in higher education about mental health, Wynaden et al. (2014), argue that silence could be interpreted in many ways including the unwillingness of staff and students to talk about their mental health challenges; but also it could be that the staff do not talk about mental health with students because of their own struggle with mental health. To assess the impact of student rented houses on student mental health, the current study is framed in large part by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986a; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The different concepts of the theory have widely been used in public mental health; in studies that used various approaches like case studies, cross sectional studies cohort studies and in reviews. Eriksson et al. (2018) review of the different use of the theory found that scholars use different concepts inconsistently from the earlier concepts to the latest model, i.e. the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Yaban and Gaschler 2025).

Bronfenbrenner's theory posits that the experience of the student is better understood holistically (Guy-Evans, 2020). Further, the theory allows the researchers to understand how interconnected factors at multiple levels of social ecology are contributing to student mental health in rented houses, the theory assist the researchers to identify and suggest strategies at multiple levels of analysis to understand the mental health of student tenants in rented houses. As such, the study considers the five systems of the model as nested in each other. The systems are i) Microsystem, ii) Mesosystem, iii) Exosystem, iv) Macrosystem, and v) Chronosystem, this model to the researchers' knowledge has never been used in studying the mental health of university student tenants in a rented house at the rural comprehensive university.

Aim

The aim of the study was to use Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) to understand the ecological situation in student rented houses and its impact on student mental health in a rural university.

Objective

To use the interconnected nested systems of ecological theory to investigate the mental health effect of rented houses on student tenants.

Question

How is the use of the interconnected nested systems of ecological theory contributes to investigation of the mental health effect of rented houses on student tenants?

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

This study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm which posits that reality is socially constructed and subjective. The paradigm aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as it seeks to understand how students perceive and interact with the various layers of their rented environment. By adopting interpretivist lens, we explored various ways in which the environment, safety and social security shape the mental health status of the students.

2.2. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative case study design focusing on a rural and previously disadvantaged university in South Africa. This design was selected because it allows an in-depth investigation of rented houses, host community dynamics and the university as a single interconnected unit of analysis. The approach is suited to ecological theory as it facilitates the collection of data across interconnected levels.

2.3. Sampling and recruitment: Purposive and Snowball Sampling

To map the ecology, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select 30 participants (27 students) and (three (3) university personnel). The researchers interviewed the participants and stopped at the point of saturation. Due to the Covid19 lockdowns, the researchers targeted the students who were available in rented houses during the time of the study. Two of the university staff members were the only professionals working in the counselling Centre and the

one staff member was a clinic manager who had a comprehensive knowledge regarding the information needed for the study. The participating students were enrolled as full time students despite their level of study. They resided in community owned off-campus accommodation that was not accredited. Snowball sampling was also utilized to further identify student in the tenancy ecology.

2.4. Data collection method: Ecological multi-method

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to explore the direct interaction that the students had with their immediate living space (microsystem) and their experiences with the university support services (mesosystem). Further observations were made of where photographs of environmental health issues were captured. This method provided visual evidence of 'proximal stressors' contributing to the mental health of the student tenants. To understand the broader systemic context researchers analysed university policies, municipality by-laws and the DHET norms and standards (macrosystem). Data were collected in 2019 and 2021 in King Cetshwayo region of KwaZulu Natal Province in South Africa from *uMhlathuze*, *Ndlankubo*, *Mall* and *Emathuneni* (socially constructed names of areas where students stayed).

2.5. Data analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Atlas.ti 9 (a computer assisted qualitative analysis software (CAQAS)) was used to facilitate the analysis. The system was used to manage the complex nature of ecological systems. All data, transcripts and pictures were

uploaded in the system as documents. To manage the ecological complexity, code groups were created. The themes were deductively mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's systems for example codes related to student housing norms and standards were categorized under macrosystem.

2.6. Ethical Considerations (The Chronosystem of Distress)

The study received an ethical approval from the University of Zululand. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, particularly the mental health, security issues and Covid19 pandemic period that the study was conducted in, strict ethical protocols were followed. An informed consent was sought from all the participants. The participants were informed of their rights to withdraw at any stage of their participation. Permission was sought from landlords where interviews were done in the rented houses, to enter the premises, including where taking of pictures was involved. The distress protocol was implemented. In instances where participants disclosed suicidal ideation, the researchers followed a referral protocol to the university counselling centre, the Campus clinic and ultimately to the Provincial hospital. A 24-hour helpline was shared with all participants in case they needed assistance. Participant number was used instead of their real names to maintain confidentiality.

2.7. Reflexivity: Researcher as participant in the ecology

As researchers we recognize that we were active participants in the research. Our presence had a potential to influence the collection of data and its analysis. We also acknowledge our position as university employees at the time of conducting the study which could influence how

participants viewed us as people of influence. The participants were assured that we did not have any relationship with the landlords or influence any decision within the university structure. The first author used reflective journal to capture her emotions which allowed her to differentiate between her emotions to the voices of the participants. Importantly, the first author was highly aware of her verbal and non-verbal language which could trigger the participants and ultimately affect the interview process leading to premature termination of the process. Finally, during data analysis, she allowed the themes to organically emerge and avoided boxing the data in pre-set themes.

3. Results: Ecological Impact of rented housing

The mental health of student tenants is not resultant of their individual agency but its largely shaped by the nested systems within their living environment. The results suggest that prevalence of stress, fear, anxiety, and traumatic disorders was high among the participants. The cause of fear and anxiety could directly be attributed to the actions of 'amadabuka' (criminal gangs who are notorious for making lives of university students miserable). The constant sound of gun shots at night are the cause of their trauma, especially for those students who were nearly shot or knew someone who had the similar traumatic experience. As a result, some students get diagnosed with traumatic disorder due to the experiences that they were faced with in the rented houses that include robberies and rapes including killings for others. But other students were found to be stressed because of other things other than the rented houses directly. Those include the amount of academic work that overwhelm them. For some is their

relationship with their partners that are stressful. It was discovered that some students who stay in rented houses end up cohabiting with their partners and get subjected to gender based violence. Some students end up focusing much on their relationships and forget the core reasons why they came to university.

Secondly, the study also found that trauma was not only reported by the students but also was confirmed by the counsellor and psychologist that students present with trauma due to robberies or the rape that they experience in their rented houses. Nevertheless, male students in the study were found to be reluctant to seek professional help citing culture as their reason. They thought it was a sign of weakness and also feared that others would judge them.

Thirdly, it was found that students' academic workload affects them mentally. Some students cannot cope with the work while some get stressed because they have enrolled for programmes that they did not necessarily like hence they could not cope. The other academic related matter that stresses the students is access to resources like WIFI to be able to do their work. These were the issues because they cannot stay on campus long enough to study due to the fear of amadabuka and not having access to WIFI in their rented houses. So, for those that reported having access to WIFI in the rented houses, had to pay for it and it was not always easy because of lack of money. The explanation for the need of WIFI is the situation brought by the pandemic, that forced the teaching and learning to be online which require data for students to access teaching material and their lessons.

Lastly, it was found that landlords and caretakers affect mental health of students directly and indirectly. Indirectly through the decision that the landlords take to make students share a room, and with the type of the houses they build, this arrangement results in undesirable situations. For example, in some houses, students are made to share in threes or twos. This is one of the factors that affect student mental health in that they have to share a room with strangers, and sometimes there is conflict between the roommates. Directly, some landlords and caretakers make the lives of their student tenants difficult in that, they want sexual relationships with the female students. On its own, this affects the students emotionally because if they refuse, they end up being treated differently.

In this section students and professionals demonstrate the extent to which the rented houses affect the mental health of students. The results are broken down into ecological systems.

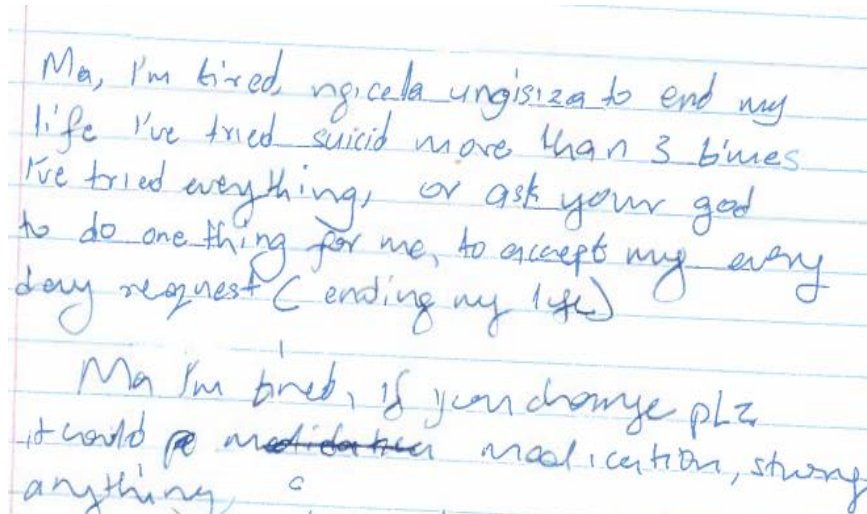
3.1. Microsystem (the immediate environment)

P3 (Adult, Female) The student tenants lose their belongings in the hands of criminals. They live in constant fear and anxiety when hit by the realities of crime and rape cases in these rented spaces. They fear that they could be victims of rape or repeated robberies.

Across the data the microsystem is characterised by life threatening encounters and poor quality of student lives which acts as a primary stressor. The poor quality of environment expose students to overcrowded rentals, waste that is not properly managed, poor street lighting, poor ventilation and structural safety. Most dominantly excessive anxiety and fear due to lack of security and gun shots was reported by all participants. These proximal processes are a source of stress instead of providing a safe space for the students. The students' accounts of their immediate environment were confirmed by the counselling staff who were part of the study. For example, P30, who is a female student claim that she barely concentrate everytime she hear about robberies and rape incidences from other rentals. The situation depress her because she knew that she does not have any alternative to move. The extract from P3, a University staff member who directly and on a daily basis assist distressed students, demonstrate the mental health impact of the experiences the students go through.

The responses of the participants show that the safety and security in rented houses cause anxiety and fear amongst students. This result with the students' support units assisting the students who present with anxiety and traumatic stresses linked to the

safety in rented houses. Some cases are critical and require urgent attention like the one case that has suicidal ideations (see P1 below). The situation in the rented houses persuade some students to use drug or even commit suicide.



Ma, I'm tired, ngicela ungisiza to end my life I've tried suicid more than 3 times I've tried everything, or ask your god to do one thing for me, to accept my every day request (ending my life)

Ma I'm tired, if you change plz it could be medication, malication, strong anything.

Figure 1 Handwritten note from Participant 1 expressing suicidal ideation (reproduced with permission)

Figure 1 is a note of a student who attempted suicide three times and request me to assist her to kill herself. She says *'[ma] I am tired please assist me to end my life, I have tried suicide more than three times. I have tried everything or ask your God to do one thing for me to accept my everyday request (ending my life). [ma] I am tired, if you change, please, it could be medication, anything strong, I am tired I have had enough'*.

The case for P1 was handled with sensitivity required. Despite the critical nature of her situation P1 declined to be referred for assistance. However, the interview was stopped and was carried in two separate sessions following the participant's request.

The first session was stopped when the researchers realised that the participant was triggered and was under the influence of drugs. During the following week of data collection, participant requested to be interviewed, hence the researchers arranged the interview. She claimed that she wanted her story to be known so that those who are coming after her know the conditions in the rented houses. During the first interview session, P1 was under the influence of drugs which she claimed was as a result of her situation and needed assistance. The study arranged for full support for the participant through the university counselling centre. Following the second interview, the participant attended counselling and took therapy and rehabilitation. The study also arranged for an external assistance for the participant. This case demonstrate the helplessness, desperation and vulnerability that students experience in rented houses.

wear or present myself. I think I am a victim of my circumstance.

3.2. Mesosystem (inter-setting connections)

There is an unsettling observed in disconnections and inconsistencies between the tenancy and the university. The lack of communication and cooperation between the tenancy and the university characterises the gap and struggle that students go through navigating the two spaces. The university lacks control over the rented space due to lack of approaches to implement the norms and standards as issued by the DHET. The lack of cooperation by the landlord and the choices that students make to stay in rented houses makes it difficult for the university to provide effective and efficient counselling, health and security services to the community of students in the rented houses. In addition to the failures and gaps between the tenancy and the university, some students experience stress from their experiences with their families. Which as a result compound the mental health situation that they face in the rented houses. Student tenants remain trapped between the academic system that expect performance and housing that threatens their safety. P1 relates her experience which demonstrate the dynamics between and across systems.

P1(24 years, Female, Emathuneni) i have used various forms of medication for my anxiety during my stay here but non of them assists. I have attempted suicide several times due to my experiences one being robberies enroute to campus and being repeatedly raped here in the same rental space. I would not even attribute my unfortunate encounters to how I

The statement above demonstrate the vulnerability, helplessness, the frustration of P1 who have been raped multiple times in her rented house. She has attempted suicide more that two times. She even gave me a note that request me to help her with anything that could assist her to commit suicide. To help her to cope P1 is on narcotics. She also have a history of sexual abuse from a male family member. She suffers rejection from the family because in 2018 she did a DNA test which came negative declaring the only father figure that she new to be her father was not a biological father. Since then she stated that life has never been easy for her.

3.3. Exosystem (External Decisions)

The mental health of student tenants is largely affected by decisions made extrinsicy. We observe this through the municipal failure to enforce the bylaws. Waste and other municipal services are lacking which eventually make students to stay in risky and unhealthy environment. The spacial planning of the area has been left to the community to zone it. There is no proper zoning and streets where the rented houses are and resemble the slumification. Pervasively, student reported how the decisions that the university take during strikes to let students leave campus during unsafe hours, motivates students to decide on staying in rented houses which ultimately results in the impact on their mental health. Some external decisions that prove to affect students mentally are those that are made nationally such as whether NSFAS approves their application for funding or not. Some of these decisions and fear of amadabuka motivates use of drugs and cohabitation,

which promote additional challenges such as gender based violence among the students.

P27 (21 years, Female, Emathuneni) I get scared and stressed a lot by the prevalence of rape in this area. My school work add to my stress including my NSFAS application that was not successful. This is difficult because I will have to seek financial support from my parents who are not working.

The statement above shows that students have a lot to take care about including payment of their fees, their safety including the prevalent rape incidences that leave them afraid every time. However, this is above the amount of workload that they have. In sum the situation in rented houses seem to be complex and the experiences that affect students' academic work and mental health are equally complex. The students live in fear and must always think about their safety even when they are busy with their work on campus. The events that happen at night like gun shots affect students' concentration. Some students resort to drugs and cohabitation to cope with their academic work.

3.4. Macrosystem (Culture and economic belief)

At the highest level there is an expressed suicidal ideation by some students which Bronfenbrenner call a 'breakdown of ecology'. Alternatively the economic nature of these rented houses in the area has encouraged the community to build with less regard for bylaws or safe structure. The vivid helplessness of the municipality and the tribal land management also drives the unstructured planning in this area including the lack of services.

3.5. Chronosystem (Time and transitions)

The effect of time is observed in various levels as student transition through interconnected and complex phases of their stay in the rented houses. Ultimately students react differently to how staying in rented houses affect them mentally. Some students who stayed in the rented houses are comfortable and do not think they get affected overtime. However, there are students who do not choose to reside in rented houses until they could not get on-campus accommodation. These students leave home with a hope of improving their livelihood only to find themselves living in accommodations that are worse more than their homes. Moreso, the fixed nature of the tenancy lease add pressure to the students that they have to endure trauma before a possible transition occur, either to on campus accommodation or a better place. P4 explains the possible effect that student tenancy has on the mental health of students. The University Psychologist weight in the experiences of students and how they get affected.

P4 (Adult) Some of the major stressors that students present with are anxiety, traumatic stress and depression. The highly reported incidence that cause this is robberies in the rented houses. These students battle a lot dealing with the experiences, and eventually fall into depression due to lack of support.

This counsellor (P4) confirms the common things that impact the students mentally like the anxiety, the traumatic stress and depression that they experience during robberies. This shows the effect of time, that the trauma gets prolonged because the

students cannot take the experiences out of their minds. However, the way students react to the traumatic experience overtime is determined by their individual characteristics because some students who have been in the same situation are able to deal with the trauma especially if there is support from family.

P10 (23 year, Female, Mall) As students we have acknowledged our challenges in these rented houses. We cope by sharing our challenges and fears with other students or even our siblings who experienced the same thing. By that we avoid stressing our parents at home who are dealing with their chronic health issues. We believe our parents should not be disturbed at home. We also try to organise ourselves into groups when walking from and to campus to avert being mugged.

The statement shows that students have found strategies to cope with the trauma that they experience from the robberies, rapes and attacks. This on the other hand is the way to find approaches to avoid stressing their parents. Students here demonstrate a sense of agency to fight to make a change in their own lives; in that if they tell their parents about their experiences, they might be destructed from their vision of obtaining their degrees (Klemenčič, 2015). Besides joking about their experiences as coping strategies, the students also use their siblings and friends who have been in the same situation and fully understand what they are going through. This is evidence that they've somewhat achieved posttraumatic growth despite what they go through (Sheline and Rosén, 2017); additionally, it demonstrate that the student have non-tangible resources

to deal with their situation which strengthen their sense of coherence (Eriksson, 2017).

4. Discussions

The findings of this study shows that the mental health of student tenants is not influenced by events that take place at their immediate spaces as well as broader living spaces. Adopting an ecological systems shows that the rented housing impose stressors at multi-level of student tenancy.

At the microsystem, the environmental health related conditions such as overcrowding, poorly managed waste, lack of ventilation contribute directly to the anxiety and stress experienced by students is consistent with the findings that physical space affect those who inhabit the space psychologically. The students immediate social environment impact on their privacy and ultimately may cause conflict. Foulkes et al's (2021) work from the study done with undergraduate students confirmed that conflict tend to stem from shared living spaces affect students negatively. Studies such a Kimball and Thoma (2019) argue that the proximity of significant others in student with disability played a positive role on how they handled how other people perceived them. This study confirms the importance of family and significant others in dealing with similar matters that have potential to affect students mentally. The failures in the interaction between the rented houses and the university affect student tenants adversely. Due to desperation, students end up being suicidal and use drugs. While research is inconsistent in proving causality but does explain the possible scenarios in such experiences. Sheline and Rosén (2017) assessment of 557 university students found that students with posttraumatic growth are less likely to have suicidal risk despite the

psychological challenges that they had experienced. But in the case of P1, it

confirms Nock et al., (2008); Nock and Kessler, (2006) observation that the multiple events similar to what P1 experiences are risk factors leading to suicidal ideation, which explain the events in P1's life. The study showed that culture can affect how some male students receive interventions. Male students in the study were reluctant to seek help as compared to their female

5. Conclusion

The mental health of students in the rented houses is not an isolated psychological phenomenon, but the resultant of a complex ecological system. This analysis has demonstrated that the mental health experience of the students is culmination of failure across the layers of the Bronfenbrenner's framework. The dynamics in these rented spaces demonstrated that at the microsystem the environmental health issues are compromised and the ecosystems is affected by the security issues, rape and criminal activities. The macrosystem compromises the dignity of student over capitalist gains. The findings reported here provides an understanding of the safety and security, academic workload and impact of landlords and caretakers on mental health of the student tenants. The paper further provides perspectives on which institutions of higher education and their partners who provide student accommodation should focus on to intervene.

While the study was based on a small sample and one site the results cannot be generalized. However, the findings have

counter parts even despite their traumatic experiences, because they did not trust anyone including not wanting to tell counselling staff about their problems. They believe it makes them less of being men. This finding is aligned to existing literature that males know less about mental health hence their poor professional help seeking behaviour. Also, that it is normal to be reluctant to share any information with other people due to lack of trust for them (Haavik et al., 2017).

the potential to influence higher education policies relating to student accommodation and student mental health. The success of the support and proposed interventions can have broad reaching benefits in reducing adverse outcomes on the mental health of student tenants in all developmental systems. Re-engineering these systems through targeted policy-specifically by strengthening the mesosystemic link between universities, municipalities and DHET- we can move from a reactive model of mental health care of students to a proactive protective ecosystem. Transforming student tenancy from a source of precarity into a foundation for academic success requires a commitment towards the student developmental, physical and psychological safety.

Hence, the study recommends the following multi-systematic approach: universities should work collaboratively with other affected parties to customize and enforce the norms and standards as per DHET. This will ensure that at microsystem the students' needs are met. Establish a channel of care where university counselling centre and landlord discuss critical identifiers of distressed

students and advise university to respond which will further assist the university to intervene at the mesosystemic level to link with parents and guardians. While the use of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory provided a holistic lens through which to view student tenancy, several limitations are acknowledged; a key limitation of this study is the difficulty in quantifying the direct impact of macrosystemic and exosystemic factors on individual student tenant mental health. Also, the cross-sectional nature of the study may not fully capture the cumulative impact of the experiences of the students on their mental health. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that development is a process over time. Further, the study looked at multiple issues spreading from environmental health issues, security to policy matters. The study may lack depth that a more focused mental health study could provide regarding neurological aspects of the students' mental health experiences and behaviours. Finally, the

study relied heavily on student self-reporting which could also compromise transparency due to fear that they would be victimized by their landlords. This suggests that the ecological map presented here may under-represent the true nature of the situation in the rented houses.

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