

Perceived Risk of Victimization of Students in Private Higher Educational Institution

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ABSTRACT

Understanding victimization in college campuses is essential for addressing student safety, well-being, and educational outcomes. This research focuses on the perceived risk of victimization among students in private higher education institutions to help implement targeted interventions and promote a secure campus environment. The study considers variables such as sex, type of current residence, living arrangement, school, and socio-economic status. It explores three main aspects of victimization: fear of crime, perceived safety, and fear of vulnerability. In the study, researchers utilized a quantitative approach using a descriptive comparative method which provides descriptive information concerning the perceived risk of victimization of SMU college students. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the perceived risk of victimization when grouped according to sex. Females are generally more fearful of becoming victims of crime compared to males. The school administration should take steps to improve campus safety by increasing security patrols, ensuring better lighting, and installing more cameras in areas where incidents are likely to happen.

Keywords: administration, college, fear of crime, fear of vulnerability, females, perceived safety

INTRODUCTION

Understanding victimization in college campuses through research is critical in addressing student safety, well-being, and educational outcomes. Research in this area can illuminate the prevalence, types, and impacts of victimization experiences among college students, identify risk factors contributing to victimization, and inform the development of effective prevention and support strategies tailored to campus environments. By investigating these dynamics, researchers aim to shape policies and practices that cultivate inclusive and supportive campus climates, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience and promoting a culture of safety and equity (Cantor et al., 2019).

The American Psychological Association (2020) defines victimization as the experience of being a victim of abuse, mistreatment, or criminal activity. It includes the process through which people or communities experience physical, emotional, or psychological injury, frequently leading to different types of trauma or unfavorable outcomes. This definition emphasizes the ramifications and aftermath of victimization, underscoring its importance in comprehending the impacts on both individuals and communities.

Understanding the perceived risk of victimization of students in private higher educational institutions is imperative for implementing targeted interventions and fostering a secure campus environment as mentioned above. This is the gap the researchers aimed to address in this study.

This study focused on campus-specific issues such as sexual assault, bullying, and theft that were frequently not reported. It also addressed barriers to reporting, such as stigma and fear of academic repercussions, which are unique to the higher education environment. This targeted approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the risks and reporting challenges students face, highlighting gaps that general population studies might have missed.

An interview was conducted with the Associate Dean of School Affairs and Services For Women (ADSAS) (A. Costales, personal communications, 2024) on student victimizations inside boarding houses or on campus during the school year 2022–2023. In the first semester, reported cases included theft involving two female victims, while cyberbullying affected six female and one male victim. In the second semester, the trend in cyberbullying shifted, with one female and three male victims. Similarly, during the school year 2023–2024, theft incidents involving personal belongings were reported throughout the year. In the first semester, cellphone theft affected three students: one male and two females. In the second semester, reports included one female student whose cellphone was stolen and three male students who were victims of cyberbullying.

In relation to this, this study aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of victimization among college students, with a focus on Saint Mary's University students in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. Although the aforementioned institution already had policies and procedures in place to deter crime and unfortunate events, the results of this study can assist the school community in raising awareness and strengthening preventive measures to protect the assets and welfare of the students.

This research sought to increase awareness and implement proactive measures to protect students' well-being. It endeavors to help school administrators develop policies and allocate resources for campus security and student support services. With this, the study focused on reducing victimization, which could lead to financial loss and undermine students' sense of security. It can benefit teachers, faculty, and staff by promoting safety campaigns, workshops, and campus-wide initiatives. The findings are intended to guide resource allocation and enhance emergency response protocols.

Victimization in higher educational institutions subjects students, faculty, or staff to harmful actions or adverse treatment by others within the academic environment. This includes experiences such as bullying, harassment, discrimination, physical violence, and psychological abuse. Such victimization significantly impacts the well-being, academic performance, and overall mental health of those affected. Hence, understanding the prevalence and forms of victimization in higher education is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions to create a safer and more supportive academic environment. Addressing victimization in these settings requires comprehensive strategies to mitigate its effect on the university community (Fisher & Sloan, 2018).

Primarily, this study aims to identify the perceived risk of victimization of students in a private higher educational institution from January 2024 to December 2024. The study investigated the students' fear of crime, perceived safety, and fear of vulnerability within the specified time frame. Specifically, this study determined the demographic profile of the respondents, which includes sex, type of current residence, living arrangements, school, and socio-economic status. Additionally, it also determined the respondents' perceived risk of victimization, their fear of crime, perceived safety, and fear of vulnerability. Furthermore, it determined if there is a statistically significant difference in the perceived risk of victimization among respondents when grouped according to profile variables. Finally, a seminar was organized to raise awareness of potential crimes students might face, focusing on preventing property theft and promoting safety measures both on campus and in their boarding houses, during both day and night hours.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers utilized a quantitative approach with a descriptive comparative method to provide detailed information about the perceived risk of victimization among SMU college

students. The descriptive aspect was employed to present the students' profiles and their perceived levels of victimization. Meanwhile, the comparative component analyzed significant differences in the perceived risk of victimization when students were grouped based on their profiles. Data collection was conducted through a survey questionnaire.

The research was conducted at Saint Mary's University to determine the perceived risk of victimization of its college students. Moreover, there has been no study on victimization conducted and such study is crucial in the collection of data that the administration can use to develop programs for the prevention or resolution of victimization.

The study respondents consisted of third-year and fourth-year students from the four schools: the School of Teacher Education and Humanities (STEH), the School of Health and Natural Sciences (SHANS), the School of Engineering, Architecture, and Information Technology (SEAIT), and the School of Accountancy and Business (SAB). The respondent data was sourced from the official enrollment records for the first semester of the school year 2024–2025.

The inclusion criteria for the respondents are as follows: the student must be an enrolled Marian student and must be in their third or fourth year of study. The exclusion criteria include transferees, individuals with incomplete data, and those with a conflict of interest.

Using the Raosoft Calculator with a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence level, and a 5% response distribution, the total sample of respondents was computed: 62 for the School of Teacher Education and Humanities (STEH), 66 for the School of Health and Natural Sciences (SHANS), 65 for the School of Engineering, Architecture, and Information Technology (SEAIT), and 65 for the School of Accountancy and Business (SAB).

The respondents were recruited through the following steps. First, the researchers approached the students deliberately, ensuring a gradual and respectful interaction during their vacant times. The guidance counselor remained available via phone, ready to speak directly 12 with the respondents, offering support and guidance as needed. This setup aimed to create a supportive environment for the students while facilitating effective communication and understanding during the research process. If the students agreed to participate, they were asked to sign the informed consent form. Once the consent form was signed, the respondents began answering the questionnaire, which took approximately 20 to 25 minutes. Alternatively, if the students preferred to complete the questionnaire at home, the researchers collected their contact information and followed up after 1 to 2 days. Students also had the option to complete the questionnaire via a Google Form.

The research instrument is a standardized survey questionnaire authored by Ferraro and LaGrange (1987), titled "Fear of Crime in America." This questionnaire was incorporated into the study by Truman and later adapted by the researchers. This survey included a range of crimes, from —being cheated, conned, or swindled out of money to—being raped or sexually assaulted. Respondents were asked to rate their fear of each crime on a scale from 1 (not at all afraid) to 10 (very afraid), providing a nuanced interpretation of fear levels. The first part of the questionnaire reflects the profile of the respondents in terms of sex, type of current residence, living arrangement, school, and socio-economic status of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire was adopted based on Truman's study. The research instrument was initially pilot tested and achieved a reliability score of .92. After being used in the actual study, its reliability score improved to .93.

The data gathered in this study were subjected to various statistical treatments. Frequencies and percentages were presented for the profile variables of the respondents, while mean ratings and standard deviations were used to determine the students' perceived level of victimization. A t-test was employed to compare perceptions based on sex, and one-way ANOVA

was used for comparing perceptions based on type of current residence, living arrangements, school, and socio-economic status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Of the total respondents, SHANS accounts for the highest percentage of respondents, at 32.1%. Following them are SEAIT and SAB, each with 25.2% of respondents. The least number of respondents comes from STEH, which represents 17.5% of the total. In terms of socio-economic status, a diverse range of financial situations within their families is seen. Out of the total, 81 students come from families that can live comfortably and save money regularly, while 139 students belong to families that meet their basic needs and can save occasionally. A smaller group of 35 students have families that are able to meet their basic needs but cannot save, and 3 students come from families that struggle to meet even their basic needs.

Section 2. Perceived Risk of Victimization

Table 1

Perceived Risk of Victimization in Terms of Fear of Crime

Indicators	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
1. Being cheated, conned, or swindled out of your money	6.36	2.67	Neutral (Neither fearful nor fearless)
2. Having someone break into your home while you are away	7.28	2.73	Moderately High Fear Felt
3. Having someone break into your home while you are there	7.56	2.90	High Fear Felt
4. Being raped or sexually assaulted by a stranger	8.08	2.98	High Fear Felt
5. Being physically assaulted by stranger	7.80	2.84	High Fear Felt
6. Being attacked by someone with a weapon.	8.15	2.71	High Fear Felt
7. Being robbed or mugged on the street	7.87	2.69	High Fear Felt
8. Being stalked by a stranger	7.51	2.76	High Fear Felt
Mean Rating	7.58	2.39	High Fear Felt

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49 (No Perceived Fear); 1.50 – 2.49 (Little Fear Felt); 2.50 – 3.49 (Some Fear Felt) 3.50 – 4.49 (Light Fear Felt); 4.50 – 5.49 (Moderate Fear Felt); 5.50 – 6.49 (Neutral (Neither fearful nor fearless)); 6.50 – 7.49 (Moderately High Fear Felt); 7.50 – 8.49 (High Fear Felt); 8.50 – 9.49 (Very High Fear Felt); 9.50 – 10.00 (Extreme Perceived Fear)

Table 1 shows that “Being attacked by someone with a weapon” had the highest mean rating of 8.15, falling within the range of 7.50–8.49, which indicates a high level of fear. On the other hand, the item “Being cheated, conned, or swindled out of your money” received the lowest mean score of 6.36, falling within the range of 5.50–6.49, which indicates a neutral level of fear (neither fearful nor fearless).

Section 3. Comparison of the Perceived Risk of Victimization When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Table 2

Comparison of the Perceived Risk of Victimization When Grouped According to Sex

Perceived Risks	Sex	N	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description	<i>f</i>	<i>df</i>	P-value	Decision
Fear of Crime	Male	99	6.84	2.52	Moderately High Fear Felt	-4.001	258	.000	Significant
	Female	159	8.04	2.19	High Fear Felt				
Perceived Safety	Male	99	7.16	1.73	Moderately High Fear Felt	.851	256	.395	Not Significant
	Female	159	6.98	1.49	Moderately High Fear Felt				

Fear of Vulnerability	Male	99	7.09	2.39	Moderately High Fear Felt	-2.406	256	.017	Significant
	Female	159	7.76	2.03	High Fear Felt				

* Significant at <0.05

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49 (No Perceived Fear); 1.50 – 2.49 (Little Fear Felt); 2.50 – 3.49 (Some Fear Felt); 3.50 – 4.49 (Light Fear Felt); 4.50 – 5.49 (Moderate Fear Felt); 5.50 – 6.49 (Neutral (Neither fearful nor fearless)); 6.50 – 7.49 (Moderately High Fear Felt); 7.50 – 8.49 (High Fear Felt); 8.50 – 9.49 (Very High Fear Felt); 9.50 – 10.00 (Extreme Perceived Fear)

The computed result for fear of crime is ($p=0.000$) and ($p=0.017$) for fear of vulnerability, indicating significant responses. For perceived safety, the result is ($p=0.395$), meaning the responses are not significant.

This implies that there is a significant difference in the perceived risk of victimization when grouped according to sex. Females are generally more fearful of becoming victims of crime compared to males. To support the results above, a study by Mansoor and Hasan (2016) discussed how females, as members of a marginalized and vulnerable group, may perceive themselves as potential crime victims, leading to heightened fear of crime and a greater tendency to engage in precautionary behaviors Bonar et al. (2020) supports this saying that college students' perception of being at risk of victimization differs between genders. Women are more likely than men to experience feelings of insecurity and sexual violence on campus. Risks like substance abuse and mental health issues may result from these encounters. It is necessary to comprehend these variations in order to develop safer and more effective programs for all students.

In their study, Jennings et al. (2007) also noted that women continue to be more afraid about crime on college campuses. Although they help lower perceived threats, enhanced safety measures like campus guards and better illumination might not entirely eliminate fear-driven behaviors. Women are at greater risk than males to experience sexual violence, while men are more likely to commit sexual violence against women, according to Black et al. (2016). In addition, the study of Fisher and Sloan (2018) found that women reported significantly higher levels of fear compared to men across various types of crime, especially at night. However, they noted that environmental factors like familiarity with the campus and safety measures could influence these perceptions.

Furthermore, in their 2019 study, Kammer-Kerwick et al. examined college students' perceptions of their vulnerability to victimization and discovered significant sex-based differences. According to the study, women report being victimized more frequently than males and feel more at danger overall. In particular, statistics from research on sexual harassment at colleges showed that women were more likely than men to be the target of such incidents and to feel more exposed to them. This emphasizes how important it is to comprehend the particular safety issues that women encounter on college campuses.

These findings are similar to the study of Gómez-Galán et al. (2021) that victimization is more common among female students in social and legal sciences, as well as the humanities and arts. This raises concerns about their safety and well-being, possibly due to the close interpersonal interactions, group activities, and public engagement often involved in these fields.

Table 3

Comparison of the Perceived Risk of Victimization When Grouped According to School

Perceived Risks	School	N	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description	f	df	P-value	Decision
Fear of Crime	STEH	65	7.43	2.71	Moderately High Fear Felt	1.33	254	.940	Not Significant
	SHaNS	63	7.70	2.21	High fear felt				
	SEAIT	65	7.61	2.05	High fear felt				

Perceived Safety	SAB	65	7.58	2.58	High fear felt	.393	254	.758	Not Significant
	STEH	65	7.00	1.94	Moderately High Fear Felt				
	SHaNS	63	6.91	1.42	Moderately High Fear Felt				
	SEAIT	65	7.20	1.62	Moderately High Fear Felt				
Fear of Vulnerability	SAB	65	7.09	1.30	Moderately High Fear Felt	1.709	254	.166	Not Significant
	STEH	65	7.67	2.28	High fear felt				
	SHaNS	63	7.08	2.14	Moderately High Fear Felt				
	SEAIT	65	7.89	1.90	High fear felt				
	SAB	65	7.35	2.39	Moderately High Fear Felt				

* Significant at <0.05

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49 (No Perceived Fear); 1.50 – 2.49 (Little Fear Felt); 2.50 – 3.49 (Some Fear Felt); 3.50 – 4.49 (Light Fear Felt); 4.50 – 5.49 (Moderate Fear Felt); 5.50 – 6.49 (Neutral (Neither fearful nor fearless)); 6.50 – 7.49 (Moderately High Fear Felt); 7.50 – 8.49 (High Fear Felt); 8.50 – 9.49 (Very High Fear Felt); 9.50 – 10.00 (Extreme Perceived Fear)

The computed result for fear of crime is ($p=0.940$), for perceived safety is ($p=0.758$), and for fear of vulnerability is ($p=0.166$), meaning the responses are not significant. The schools SHANS, SEAIT, and STEH exhibit a high level of fear regarding crime. All schools show moderately high levels of fear concerning perceived safety. Additionally, STEH and SEAIT have a high level of fear regarding vulnerability.

This means that the perceived risk of victimization is consistent across students from different schools (STEH, SHANS, SEAIT, and SAB), showing no significant differences in how they view their vulnerability to crime. This suggests that the school environment itself may not be the primary factor influencing perceptions of risk. The study by Rader and Haynes (2015) highlighted that neighborhood crime rates have a significant impact on students' fear of crime, regardless of the type of school they attend. Students may worry about criminal activity from their neighborhoods affecting the school setting. The findings of Kohm et al. (2011) revealed notable differences in fear levels between Canadian and U.S. students. Specifically, Canadian students exhibited significantly higher levels of fear, especially regarding violent crimes, compared to their U.S. counterparts.

This implies that male students who are white, have higher GPAs, and feel safe in their neighborhoods are more likely to feel safe at school, while those who have experienced previous victimization, attend schools with larger class sizes, or face issues of disorder at school are more likely to feel unsafe (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2012). Mowen and Freng (2018) found that school security measures are typically associated with a reduced sense of safety among both parents and students, suggesting that security measures may increase feelings of insecurity. Additionally, Theriot and Orme (2016) reported that American students and those who have been victimized feel less safe, whereas males, students with stronger school connections, and those with more positive views of school resource officers tend to feel safer.

The victimization of students at school is currently a matter of grave public concern (Schreck et al, 2003). The average percentage of sexual violence involvement (broadly defined) was almost 29%, according to the most current systematic analysis of sexual assault at HEIs in the U.S. setting (Anderson et al., 2019). This finding highlights the significant frequency of perpetration among HEI students.

Using income and education as substitutes for socioeconomic level, Keane (1995) found that women with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to be too anxious to be outside their homes at night or to travel alone after dark. Poverty is known to be associated with physical correlates (such as substandard living and working conditions) that may put women at

higher risk of victimization. It has also been proposed that women with the lowest incomes—who are also likely to have low educational attainment—typically live in poverty.

In the study of Jones et al. (2020), students in high-poverty schools were significantly more likely than students in low-poverty schools to experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, experience suicidal thoughts and attempts, not go to school because of safety concerns, be threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, be bullied on school property, be physically forced to have sexual intercourse, and be victims of sexual and physical dating violence. According to the study of Schafer (2018), students may perceive fewer protective measures from campus security due to systemic inequities or their own limited trust in institutional support systems. This can contribute to a sense of vulnerability and fear. Furthermore, public private higher educational institutions often have different resources, security protocols, and campus environments compared to public institutions. Some studies suggest that private institutions have fewer security resources, which may affect students' perceptions of safety (Kerr & McKeown, 2021).

Conclusion

Among the respondents, the majority are female, live in their own house, reside with their family, enrolled in SHANS, and belong to families that can meet their needs and occasionally save, as indicated by their demographic profiles. In terms of perceived risk of victimization, the results revealed that respondents had a high fear of “being attacked by someone with a weapon” under the fear of crime category. For perceived safety, the item “how safe from crime do you feel inside your home during the day?” received the highest mean rating. Similarly, in the fear of vulnerability category, “being attacked by someone with a weapon” also had the highest mean rating. Moreover, there is no statistically significant difference of the perceived risk of victimization among respondents when grouped according to profile variables. A seminar can be organized to increase awareness of potential crimes students might face, focusing on preventing property theft and promoting safety measures both on campus and in their boarding houses during day and night hours.

Recommendations

Students can help protect themselves and others by staying aware of their surroundings, especially at night, and using campus safety services like escorts or emergency buttons. Building a strong group of friends for support and reporting concerns through campus systems can also make the campus safer. Finally, students should trust their instincts and take any threats to their safety seriously. Moreover, the school administration should take steps to improve campus safety by increasing security patrols, ensuring better lighting, and installing more cameras in areas where incidents are likely to happen. They should also offer programs that educate students on consent, how to step in as a bystander, and mental health support, while making it easy for students to report issues anonymously and access the help they need. For teachers, they can help by creating a classroom where all students feel safe and respected. They should watch for signs that a student might be struggling, like changes in behavior or performance, and be ready to listen and offer support if a student needs help. Teachers should know about campus resources, like counseling or reporting services, and guide students to these if needed. Finally, future researchers studying the victimization of college students should look at different factors that might make students more at risk, like gender, race, income, and mental health. It is important to focus more on the experiences of underrepresented groups, like LGBTQ+ students, students of color, and international students, to make sure all students get the help they need.

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