

**EXPERIENCES OF HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS RESIDING ON CAMPUS
DURING UNIVERSITY RECESS: A PHOTOVOICE STUDY**

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DECLARATION

I, Palesa Mildred Kekana, declare that the Master's degree research dissertation that I herewith submit for the Master of Nursing (MNurs) at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.



Signature

28 July 2023

Date

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CoGTA	Department of Co-Operative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
HSREC	Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
NDoH	National Department of Health
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research
SANC	South African Nursing Council

CLARIFICATION AND OPERATIONALISATION OF CONCEPTS

The concepts referred to in the title of the research will be explained below, and their application in this study clarified.

Experiences

Experiences are disclosures of mental arrangements, and emotional states that we allow to form about the world (Janack, 2012:2). Experiences are, thus, independent worldviews. Experiences position us to understand the subject, that is, what or whom we are studying (Ross, 2017:336). In this study, experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess were captured through photographs, explained by narratives, and displayed at an exhibition.

Health sciences students

A health sciences student is a person who is undergoing training to become a health science professional at a higher education institution and is registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), in accordance with the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974. Similarly, the Nursing Act 33 of 2005 describes a nursing student as a person who is registered as a learner nurse, who is undergoing training at an accredited nursing education institution. Nursing students are registered with the South African Nursing Council for the duration of their studies (SANC, 2014:3). For the purposes of this study, health sciences students were enrolled full time for undergraduate academic programmes in a specific faculty of health sciences at a university.

Campus

A university is widely understood to comprise geographical locations with buildings, different faculties, research establishments, staff members and students (Filho *et al.*, 2015:2). Furthermore, it is a complex facility with essential functions. These functions include teaching, learning and research (Berköz & Çelik, 2016:831), as well as public engagement. The research site of this study was a university campus in South Africa with

accommodation services on its premises, which students utilised during both the academic semester and university recess.

University recess

As generally understood, recess is a break from usual activities or duties. As indicated on the academic calendar, a holiday is usually granted at the end of each quarter for a period of at least one week at the specific university where the research was conducted (Research Site, 2020a). In this study, university recess refers to a period of a week or more during which resident students usually leave the campus. Photovoice was implemented during this time to explore the experiences of health sciences students staying in residences on campus during recess.

Photovoice

As a seminal source, Wang and Burris (1997:369) describe photovoice as a photographic method that identifies, represents and empowers the community. Photovoice is a participatory visual method that employs photography and narratives to bring about social change (Cornell & Kessi, 2016:1884; Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011:2). This method is, therefore, situated within a participatory paradigm (Polit & Beck, 2017:513). Co-researchers take photographs to capture their experiences of a phenomenon, and then they interpret the images themselves (Polit & Beck, 2017:513). The three main goals pursued by photovoice are enabling and recording the strength and concerns of the community, promoting critical conversations in groups through photography, and providing platforms to reach policymakers (Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:5; Liebenberg, 2018:4). Photovoice, in this study, was a method that focused on the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess. In accordance with literature, the purpose of using photovoice was to amplify the students' voices and give them a platform to advocate for others, which could enhance transformation at the institution (Drainoni *et al.*, 2019:2; Johnston, 2016:808; Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:5; Liebenberg, 2018:6).

Co-researchers

Co-researchers are persons who collaborate with university researchers and do not necessarily have an academic background (Domecq *et al.*, 2014:89; Ocloo & Matthews, 2016:627). Based on the principles of participatory research, co-researchers actively participate as equal partners, contributing their knowledge, skills, and perspectives to shape the research agenda and conduct the study (Ocloo & Matthews, 2016:627). In this study, the co-researchers were health sciences students who resided on campus at a specific university.

ABSTRACT

This study addressed the lack of empirical research on the experiences of South African health sciences students residing on campus during university recess. The health professional governing bodies in South Africa require students to gain clinical competence through work-integrated learning, which is often undertaken during university recess. Yet, literature on this specific topic could not be retrieved. Studies on clinical learning in the health sciences environment focus solely on the clinical workplace, without considering students residing in campus residences during recess. The unknown struggles and potential challenges faced by health sciences students during recess could raise significant issues that higher education institutions in South Africa should consider. To address this research gap, participatory research utilising the photovoice method was employed to answer the research question: what are the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university? Four health sciences students were recruited through purposive sampling to participate in a series of workshops. They were provided with cameras to document their experiences on campus during university recess. Discussions and an exhibition of the photographs were conducted, resulting in the identification of 13 themes that were clustered into four, namely, sharing personal space, support services and structures, security, and character building and personal development. These clustered themes flagged that the co-researchers experienced a loss of sense of belonging, linked to inadequate support during university recess. Moreover, the study demonstrates the feasibility of implementing participatory research under challenging conditions, such as COVID-19 restrictions. The participatory method empowered co-researchers to advocate for themselves and others, thereby shedding light on issues that matter for institutional transformation. It would be advantageous to expand the research with more participants, across disciplines, and over longer periods of recess to inform policies and guidelines relating to recess periods.

Keywords: health sciences students; student experience; campus residence; university recess; photovoice

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background

Some students reside on campus during university recess, for various reasons. Their experiences of residing on campus during university recess differ, especially those of health sciences students in South Africa who stay behind to fulfil clinical learning obligations.

In South Africa, the respective health professions governing bodies require students to acquire clinical competence through clinical learning. Among these regulating bodies are the South African Nursing Council (SANC), the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), the Allied Health Professions Council (AHPCSA), the South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC) and the South African Dental Technicians Council (SADTC) (NDoH, 2020). Clinical learning prepares students for the transition from being an undergraduate student, to acquiring a professional identity (Du Plessis, 2015:3). During this transition, academic theoretical learning that takes place in the classroom is implemented practically in a workplace (Lewis *et al.*, 2010:25; Govender & Wait, 2017:52). During university recess, an opportunity is provided for health sciences students to acquire clinical experience by spending time engaged in clinical practice.

During their studies, health sciences students' stress levels increase, due to simultaneous learning in both academic and clinical areas (Langtree *et al.*, 2018:90; Masri *et al.*, 2019:619; Worku *et al.*, 2020:1). Academic workload extended working hours, formal assessments, and a fear of making mistakes have been reported to have a negative effect on student learning (Langtree *et al.*, 2018:90; Rajeswaran, 2016:2). Worku *et al.* (2020:1, 4) add perceived lack of "dormitory safety", high parental expectations and financial concerns as factors that increase health sciences students' stress levels. Moreover, in the clinical work environment, health sciences students encounter life-and-death situations that impact directly on their mental health and wellbeing (Racic *et al.*, 2017:252). A wide range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse could ensue and, in turn, impact negatively on students'

academic and clinical performance (Abu-Helalah, 2015:113; Racic *et al.*, 2017:257). It can, therefore, be argued that health sciences students are known to face a variety of stressors that could affect their personal functioning, as well as their academic and clinical performance.

Campus residence life presents its own challenging experiences. Residence students have experienced safety issues due to undesirable behaviour by fellow students, induced by substance abuse (Gopal & Van Niekerk, 2018:175). At the research site, events such as RAG¹ and an annual arts festival allow access to campus by the public, and alcohol consumption is permitted. Such events could induce disruptive behaviour, not only between students, but also between members of the public and students.

It is standard practice for undergraduate students residing on campus at the research site to vacate their residences during official recess periods (Research Site, 2021:8). The students move to temporary accommodation on campus allocated to them for the holiday. Students do not necessarily have the freedom to choose their roommates. Health sciences students could find themselves allocated to share a room with someone they are not acquainted with. Ndofirepi (2015:154) confirms that living in shared spaces could limit privacy. In addition, during the official recess period most academic, administrative, health and support services are not available.

During the academic calendar, students would usually have the comfort of accessible facilities, computer laboratories, classrooms, and study rooms as well as the library (Ndofirepi, 2015:151–158). Reading desks are available in residences, and there is sufficient light in the rooms to study effectively at any time of the day. Students have an opportunity to learn about the cultures of the different residences, they can form a social environment amongst themselves, and create new networks (Gopal & Van Niekerk, 2018:178). The students also learn to be responsible in terms of money and time management (Ndofirepi, 2015:158).

¹ RAG (Receive and Give): A charitable community-based project during which residences build floats for a parade.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health sciences students were permitted on campus to fulfil clinical learning obligations (Baloyi *et al.*, 2022). At the research site, occupation arrangements for residences were reorganised to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. Students who shared rooms were separated and moved to other rooms or residences, which exposed them to isolation. In the process, social distancing in residences could have negatively impacted the social life and support structure of the students. The implications of health sciences students moving back to campus from their homes during the pandemic were, however, unknown at the onset of the study. Health sciences students were the first group to be called back to campus, as they were considered as frontline workers during the pandemic, while other students remained at home and engaged in remote learning. Another reason for health sciences students returning to campus was the need to engage in clinical learning, which involves simulation, anatomy, and other laboratory work. Emerging literature on the topic of COVID-19 and students is discussed in Chapter 2.

At the research site, various studies have been undertaken in relation to student experiences, for instance, on the experiences of students with disabilities (Coetzee, 2018; Mutanga, 2015; Ndeya-Ndereya & Van Jaarsveldt, 2013). Other research investigated the experiences of black women graduates (Mahlala, 2015) and those undergoing PhD studies (Ts'ephe, 2015). Participatory research with first-generation, black, working-class students has also been undertaken (Calitz, 2016). More recently, research using photovoice and involving students as co-researchers was conducted on the topics of access and inclusivity (Martinez-Vargas *et al.*, 2019; Senkhe *et al.*, 2018). However, none of these studies focused on the experiences of students residing on campus, or on health sciences students. This finding suggests that there is insufficient literature on the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus, let alone during university recess or in relation to how these experiences were influenced by COVID-19-related adjustments on campus. The lack of knowledge about these and other prevailing circumstances is cause for concern and could exacerbate troubling situations in South Africa's higher education institutions in the coming years (Albertus & Tong, 2019:3). As Thomas (2018:99) asserts, the risk of not knowing could impose ongoing injustice, and

deprive students of decolonial social change and collaboration through policy development. Without adequate knowledge on this topic, there cannot be advocacy, reviews of policies or appropriate recommendations for transformation at residences of higher education institutions.

1.2 Problem statement

Due to their academic and clinical obligations, health sciences students across the globe are subject to stressors that other students do not experience (Langtree *et al.*, 2018:90; Masri *et al.*, 2019:619; Racic *et al.*, 2017:252; Worku *et al.*, 2020:1). In a study conducted in Ethiopia, Worku *et al.* (2020:4) reports on the issue of “dormitory safety” as a factor that exacerbates students’ stress. Nationally, in South Africa, health sciences students often remain in residences on campus during periods of university recess, mainly to engage in clinical learning as required by health sciences governing bodies (NDoH, 2020). However, according to the research site policy junior residence students are not permitted to stay in residence during the official recess periods as indicated in the official academic calendar (Research site, 2021:8-9).

From personal experience and encounters in the student world through student leadership at a residence of a specific university, I observed that there was much to be brought to light from the health sciences students’ experiences of being on campus during university recess. Students were, for example, expected to move to other residences to comply with university rules and policies during the recess time (Research Site, 2020b:1–4). At certain times of the year, campus could be quiet, with few people and little activity, and limited availability of support services and structures or the small businesses that usually operate on campus. Health sciences students’ experiences of staying behind on campus during university recess remain covert, because there is a dearth of literature on the topic. At the university where the study was conducted, the need was identified to explore this phenomenon, and to determine what could be done to bring about social change for these students.

1.3 Research question and purpose

The following research *question* was investigated:

What are the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university?

The *purpose* of this study was, therefore, to explore the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university, to illuminate the factors and dynamics that affect their learning and wellbeing during these periods.

1.4 Demarcation of the research

The boundaries of the study will be described regarding the discipline as well as the geographic area where it was conducted.

1.4.1 Disciplinary demarcation of the study

The academic domain of the research was higher education because the study was conducted at a university (DHET, 2022). More specifically, residence life at a South African higher education institution was explored. As the focus was on the experiences of health sciences students, the study aligns with the student experience theme of the South African thematic framework for higher education research (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2016:353). Although the study was registered under a school of nursing, I decided to widen the population to health sciences students at the university in general, as those residing on campus all had experience of the phenomenon.

1.4.2 Geographical demarcation

Geographically, the research was conducted in the central region of South Africa. The campus is situated in an urban area; the campus is 3.5 km from the city centre and 1.5 km from the nearest shopping mall. All campus facilities are located on one site, and small businesses, such as fast-food franchises, bookstores, and banks, operate in a designated

area. Students have access to health and counselling services as well as a private optometry practice.

1.5 Research paradigm

This study was guided by a participatory paradigm, which is described as “inclusive, democratic, shared, distributed, transformational and holistic in nature and purpose” (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:1). These characteristics relate directly to the primary core of the study, that is, to enrich the student voice. A participatory paradigm was employed by this study, which acknowledged each co-researcher’s worldviews and beliefs. Participatory paradigm will be discussed further in section 3.2.

The definition of the essential elements of a paradigmatic perspective, and their relevance to the study, are shown in Figure 1.1.

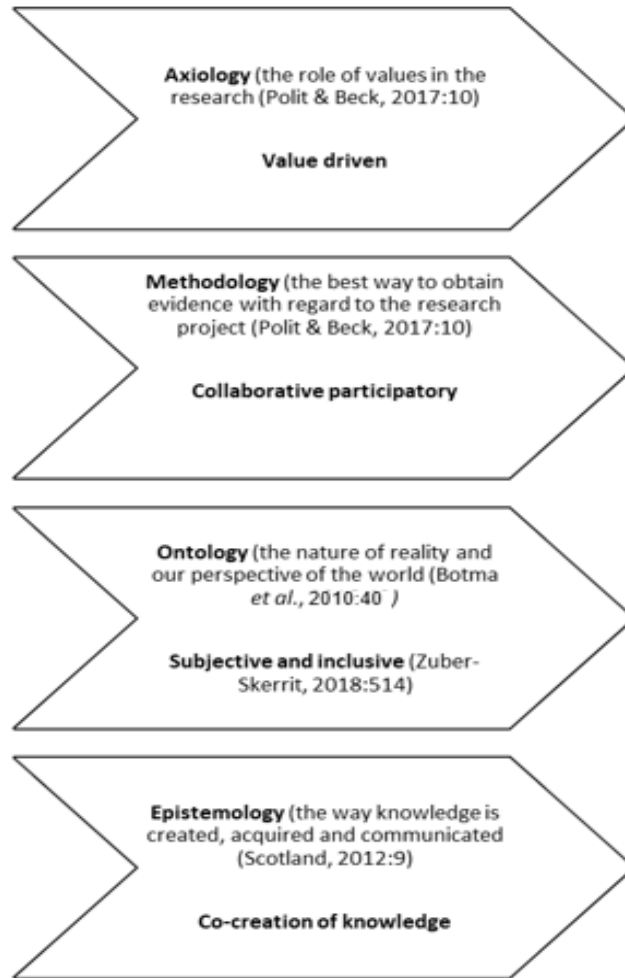


Figure 1.1: Essential elements of a paradigmatic perspective

Sources: Botma *et al.* (2010:40); Polit and Beck (2017:10); Scotland (2012:9); Zuber-Skerritt (2018:514)

Through collaborative participation, various values were formed and followed. Each co-researcher contributed to the co-creation of knowledge from a subjective perspective. Participatory action research takes an “insider”, collaborative and emancipatory approach, and involves co-researchers as co-creators of knowledge. The 3 Rs (relationship, reflection, and recognition) and 7 Cs (communication, collaboration, commitment, coaching, critical and self-critical attitude, competence, and compromise) are utilised to guide the interaction of co-researchers, and to maintain rigor in virtue and principle-based ethics. The co-researchers, thus, held one another accountable through

implementation of the 3 Rs and the 7 Cs (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:87–88). These measures will be explained in more detail in the sections on rigor and ethical issues in section 3.6. Further elaboration on the paradigmatic perspective will be done in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3). The research method and design related to the paradigm will be discussed in section 1.6. Further elaboration and application will be done in Chapter 3 under section 3.3.

1.6 Research design and method

In accordance with the research paradigm, a qualitative approach was followed by use of participatory research, whereby I involved students as co-researchers in a photovoice project. Considering that this was a relatively unexplored phenomenon, the research was of an explorative nature.

All those involved in participatory research are acknowledged to be subjective and holistic human beings who enter the research process with “feelings, emotions, motivations, views, and perspectives” stemming from their distinctive backgrounds and contexts (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:516). Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.* (2015:11) describe participatory research as a systematic process that has a focus on human self-determination, development of critical awareness, and effecting positive social change. Participatory research can be implemented on either personal, organisational, or structural transformational levels. The inclusion of students as co-researchers is in line with the goals of decoloniality in higher education, which involves a move away from making decisions for students, so that they may be more involved in knowledge production and decision-making processes (Zembylas, 2018:3). Students’ involvement as co-researchers paved the way for future participation in decision-making and knowledge production.

Through participation in this study, collaboration of co-researchers and dialogue encouraged solidarity in the student community and raised awareness of unpublicised experiences that students share amongst themselves. The co-researchers were able to be creative about their lives, to tell their stories and recognise their strengths (Polit &

Beck, 2017:482). The photovoice process not only elicited individual voices but granted the group of co-researchers an opportunity to raise a collective voice for change. Doing so emphasised the African idiom, in Sesotho, *motho ke motho ka batho* [I am because you are]. The spirit of Ubuntu and its values were observed throughout the study, by co-researchers expressing their humanity in relation to others, and being aware of their obligations towards one another (Baken, 2015:5).

The ultimate purpose of this research was to stimulate action to achieve positive change. I hope the study raises awareness of the implications for health sciences students who have to reside on campus during university recess and would assist to facilitate policy development and transformation. Although qualitative research is contextual, the findings could resonate with others in similar situations, and a rich discussion of the research process could stimulate research in other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:274; Polit & Beck, 2021:578).

1.7 Population and unit of analysis

A population, within the context of research, is a group of people with specific characteristics (Thacker, 2020:3). The population targeted by this study was health sciences students residing on campus, in residences, during recess at a specific university. These students were purposively selected according to the specified characteristics they have in relation to the research topic. Purposive sampling was, thus, implemented with the intention of achieving maximum variation. However, the small number of participants did not allow for much variation. Photovoice guidelines advise a ratio of five to six co-researchers to one facilitator (Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:16). In this study, four health sciences students responded to the invitation and volunteered to participate. Refer to section 3.4 for further elaboration on this topic.

1.8 Data collection

Co-researchers were recruited after institutional ethical clearance was granted, in accordance with the requirements explained in section 1.11. As data collection occurred

during the COVID-19 pandemic, all protocols were observed. Data were collected by applying the flexible steps of photovoice, as advised by Sutton-Brown (2014:171–172) and Wang (1999:188) and illustrated in Figure 1.2. Data collection and interpretation occurred iteratively. The first step of the study was recruitment. Thereafter, the first workshop involved a brief overview of the study and a discussion of ethical issues. In the second workshop, camera technicalities and practical operation were discussed. Co-researchers then captured photographs. In the third and final workshop, the captured photographs were analysed and discussed. The exhibition concluded the process. The researcher facilitated all the workshops. Figure 1.2 provides an illustration of the steps that were followed.

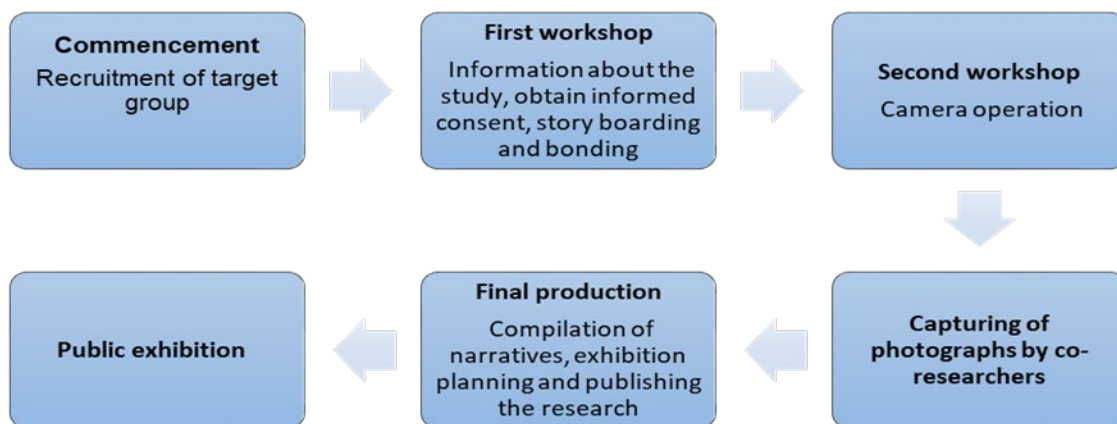


Figure 1.2: Steps of the photovoice process

Sources: Author’s own process, adapted from Sutton-Brown (2014:171–172) and Wang (1999:188)

The steps followed in this study are precisely illustrated in Figure 1.2. After gaining access to the co-researchers, logistical arrangements were made for the workshops.

1.9 Data analysis

It is important to foreground that data were collected by co-researchers, who then discussed and analysed it collaboratively. Analysis took place throughout the study, in workshops and discussions that were open, without predetermined guiding questions. An open question was presented to co-researchers, such as, 'What can you tell me about this image?'. From the elaborated answers, more questions would arise and be answered in the discussions, which developed organically from the initial question, and responses were linked to experiences. At the end of the discussion and after the questions had been answered, co-researchers collaboratively came together to discuss responses on the question 'What is the key issue represented in these images?'. Findings were thus thematically analysed through a reflexive and collaborative process. From the start of the study to the end of the exhibition, reflections were ongoing; co-researchers thought about, reflected on and shared insights about their learning, experiences of living on campus, and their personal development throughout the study.

The inclusion of students as co-researchers is in line with decoloniality in higher education, where there is a movement away from making decisions for students, so that they may be more involved in knowledge production and decision-making processes (Zembylas, 2018:3). Their involvement in the study is the start of participation in future decision-making. Through their participation in this study, an emergent process of collaboration and dialogue motivated solidarity between co-researchers. The co-researchers were encouraged to be creative about their lives, to tell their stories and recognise their strengths (Polit & Beck, 2017:482). They each shared their individual voices, though, by collaborating, they managed to raise one voice for change. This emphasises the Sesotho African idiom, *motho ke motho ka batho* [I am because you are]. The spirit of Ubuntu and its values were observed throughout the study; the co-researchers expressed their humanity in relation to others and were aware of their duties towards one another (Baken, 2015:5).

Data analysis was incorporated throughout the course of the photovoice process and involved the co-researchers. Critical thinking was integrated throughout the study by

applying the three levels described in Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher *et al.* (2015:163) and illustrated in Figure 1.3.

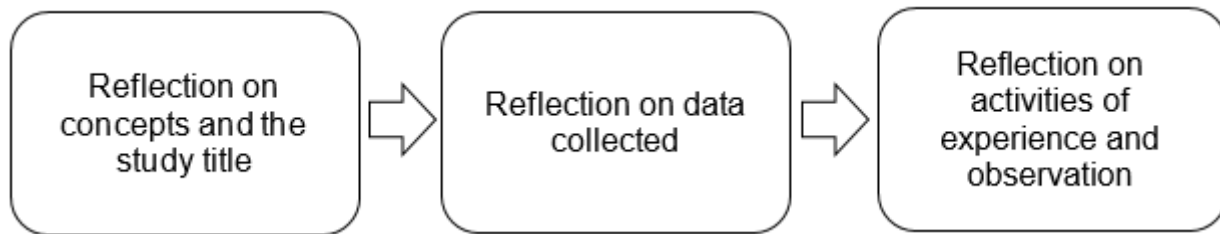


Figure 1.3: Reflections according to the three levels of action research

Source: Compiled from Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher *et al.* (2015:163)

In analysing the data, the co-researchers first reflected on the study purpose, which included the concepts and the title of the study. Thereafter, the co-researchers discussed and reflected on the collected photographs. The results of the analysis of all the data will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.10 Role of the researcher in the investigation

Zuber-Skerritt (2018:516) elucidates that “insider-research is inevitable in participatory research, where researchers become participants”. Ross (2017:327) lists the advantages of insider research as easy access to the field or participants, that data collection is responsible, that community norms and values are observed and taken into consideration, and, lastly, that the ability to interpret data with deep knowledge provides richness. In turn, the challenges facing insider research are the presumption of shared understanding of concepts, and that pre-existing relationships between the researcher and co-researcher could cause discomfort and pose risks in the discussion of main topics (Cameron, 2021; Poulton, 2021; Ross, 2017:327). When the researcher fulfils multiple roles, issues related to power may also arise. However, in this study, none of the mentioned challenges presented themselves. Instead, authority was equally shared amongst everybody involved in this study. As a health sciences graduate who previously resided on campus in an on-campus residence, and served on a residence committee team, I was positioned as a partial insider. This prior knowledge and experience facilitated

rapport and enabled me to detect subtle nuances that Polit and Beck (2021:476) refer to, which made me suited for the direct contact facilitation role. My sharing of personal experiences and knowledge with the co-researchers encouraged collaborative problem-solving. This situation resulted in trust being built and relationships being formed.

My position was, therefore, highly subjective when I shared my own experiences in order to make sense of the situation and to find my voice whilst providing a critical and reflexive account of my lived experiences (Baldacchino, 2011:463). In this way, my own lived experiences of being a health sciences student had a bearing on this study. However, the data collection process was not solely limited to my views. The observations and experiences of other students who were naturally embedded at the research site were crucial. Using a participatory method allowed us to collaboratively describe our experiences of a university setting to which we had 'natural access', within which we were active participants, and to do so more or less on equal terms with each other (Alvesson, 2003:174). As such, in contrast to traditional anthropologists who immerse themselves in a 'foreign' community and become 'participatory observants', I was a more natural participant in everyday activities at the research site as a nursing student. I harnessed this insider expertise for the purpose of research by turning a familiar situation into a subject of study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2016:66). As such, I was attached to the study and setting as a partial insider researcher, and the exploration of my own experiences was partly the beginning of the study (Atherton, 2020:49).

1.11 Ethical considerations

Access to the co-researchers was gained by requesting approval and permission from the relevant gatekeepers, including the Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSREC), the dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the dean of students (refer to Addendum G). I collaborated with Housing and Residence Affairs, the residence heads and residence committees to identify and approach co-researchers. I applied for and was issued a campus access permit. The safety precautions with COVID-19 restrictions were adhered to in all sessions.

Principles that usually apply to research, such as anonymity and confidentiality, play out differently in participatory research. Therefore, guidelines for participatory research were applied to ensure principles such as trustworthiness and to help mitigate against harmful bias. These variations will be elaborated on further in section 3.6.

1.12 Rigor of the research

The integrity of this research was guaranteed by enabling co-researchers' authenticity (a representation of themselves in a genuine and faithful ways) in various ways through photovoice. This process of research ensured that the co-researchers were meticulous and careful, by being comprehensive and truthful (Cypress, 2017:254). In this qualitative research, there was a fluid journey of reflection, exploration, explanation and meaning finding, which was not informed by stiff restrictions. In qualitative research, particularly when participatory research is used, authenticity is the main criterion for rigor, and is guided by the 3 Rs (reflection, relationship, and recognition). These aspects will be elaborated on further in section 3.7.

1.13 Summary

In Chapter 1, the study was introduced, and I provided a brief background in relation to the topic of the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess. Furthermore, the unknown implications of students residing on campus during university recess were emphasised to be unknown to outsiders, and there is a risk they could evolve into problems in the future. The question that is asked is whether students from other faculties, university authorities and policyholders are aware of health sciences students' experiences residing on campus during university recess. If so, can improvements or opportunities for change and adaption of policies be suggested? The knowledge gap, the processes followed to execute this study and importance of this study were also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 2 will provide various perspectives from literature pertaining the study.

1.14 Layout of the dissertation

Chapter 1: Overview of the study

Chapter 2: Perspectives from literature

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 5: Conclusions

CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES FROM LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Moving from their nesting homes to university residences presents a variety of experiences and poses several challenges for students. In addition, as indicated in section 1.1, health sciences students experience unique challenges when having to reside on campus during university recess. A dearth of published research in this regard necessitated this explorative study. It was essential to have a basic understanding of the research phenomenon and know the researchers' position in this study before engaging with co-researchers, as Holmes (2020:1–2) proposes.

To sketch a contextual background, perspectives were gained from literature on concepts related to the topic of study. With the help of the librarian, relevant databases were identified, and a Boolean search string was compiled, as indicated in Table 2.1. A total number of 257 records were accessed when the Boolean search was done.

Table 2.1: Databases and Boolean search

DATABASES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Africa-Wide Information• APA PsycInfo• PubMed• SciELO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication & Mass Media Complete• EBSCOhost:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ CINAHL with full text○ Academic Search Ultimate○ Applied Science & Technology Source○ Humanities Source Ultimate○ MEDLINE○ ERIC○ Ultimate <p>Google Scholar (publications from 2012–2022)</p>

BOOLEAN SEARCH	
Student accommodation	"student housing" or "student accommodation" or "campus accommodation*" or "campus facilities" or "on campus residence*" or "off campus residence*" or "off campus student*" or "campus student"
Higher education	"tertiary education" or "higher education" teach* or learn* or train* or educat*
COVID-19	COVID-19 or sars-cov-2 or coronavirus
Student experiences	overview or "Student* experience*" or satisfaction or "Social cohesion" or "sense of belonging" or success* or challenge* or "Coping strateg*" or "student support" or shortage* or "campus student"
Health sciences	"health* occupation*" or nurs* or "health* science*" or "health* profession*" or medical* and student*
Student voice	elicit* or explor* or investigat* And "student voice"
Recess	recess* or vacation or break* or holiday* n3 summer* or winter* or christmas* or easter* or semester* or college* or universit

The databases that were selected were determined by their relevance to the study topic. Academic articles, dissertations and theses were included and, although the range of publications included international literature, the African context was of particular interest. The timeframe was limited to academic work published between 2012 and 2022. The choice of the databases was supported by their coverage within an academic health sciences and humanities context.

No literature was found relating to the topic of residing on campus during university recess. The information retrieved during the Boolean search was organised into topics of discussion relevant to the study, as follows: an overview of student housing; challenges encountered by both on and off-campus students; overall student support strategies; student experiences, and satisfaction with accommodation and campus facilities. In conclusion, the importance of exploring student experience and eliciting student voices will be highlighted.

2.2 Overview of student housing

Increased access to institutions of higher learning globally has resulted in an influx of students, which has dramatically raised the demand for student accommodation (Kamal *et al.*, 2020:133; Veerasamy & Ammigan, 2022:147–149). In most higher education institutions in both developing and developed countries, student accommodation is, consequently, inadequate (Ghani *et al.*, 2018:4011). Students, thus, seek accommodation both on and off campus.

Kamal *et al.* (2020:134) report that the likelihood of students living on campus at the Universities of New Mexico, Albuquerque, and Nevada, Las Vegas, is relatively low – the percentage of students residing on campus is less than 10%. Ghani *et al.* (2018) report that just 25–30% of all students enrolled in most Nigerian colleges are accommodated on campus, due to a severe shortage of student accommodation, which forces students to lease housing off campus. In South Africa, where the sharp rise in student numbers over the past 30 years has resulted in inadequate availability of on-campus accommodation (Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:1; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2019:1–2). At the research site, university facilities, which were initially intended for 8 000 students, had to make provision for approximately 40 000 registered students by 2022 (Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:1). This escalation concomitantly obligated the university in question to enlarge its student accommodation capacity, which remains inadequate despite substantial development (Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:1; Mosebetsi, 2023).

Considering the cost implications of such development, it is not clear who is responsible for providing student accommodation. Some studies argue that this is a societal rather than an educational issue, while others see student housing as an essential component of a university's infrastructure (Newell & Marzuki, 2018:525; Swift, 2019:20).

2.2.1 Cost implications of student accommodation

Few universities can afford to meet the demand for on-campus accommodation, which created a gap in the market for off-campus housing (Property24, 2021). Dlamini and Mafumbate (2021:30) classify of-campus accommodation as residential units positioned

outside the institution's premises. Mzileni (2018:2) distinguishes further between accredited and non-accredited off campus residences. While accredited residences have been legally approved, and meet the requirements for accommodating university students, non-accredited residences are unregulated houses/apartments that are privately offered to students for rent (Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:6; Mzileni, 2018:2).

In South Africa, there is no national guideline governing the price that private landowners are permitted to charge enrolled university students for housing (DHET, 2015:2). Therefore, owners of unapproved, unaccredited housing can request high rental fees. The value of an apartment, projected municipal rates, mortgage rates and location are usually used to determine monthly rent (Edwards, 2019:43). Within a market with high demand, rates increase significantly (Swift, 2019:17). When choosing a place to stay, affordability is usually a determining factor, especially for students who are economically challenged (Kamal *et al.*, 2020:136). Due to inconsistent rental amounts, off-campus students often prefer on-campus accommodation, which has standard and regulated fees.

In addition to the cost, students' decision-making is influenced by what the living environments have to offer. Many students prefer comfortable living environments with access to private rooms, separate bathroom facilities, wireless networks, fitness centres, recreational activities, onsite parking, and laundry facilities (Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:3; Kamal *et al.*, 2020:136). However they must contend with whatever is available as prescribed by the limits of their budgets (Khozaei *et al.*, 2012:196). Living conditions in cheaper housing spaces off campus are often of a poor quality, with overcrowding and other issues impacting on health and safety, such as maintenance and sanitation (Kamal *et al.*, 2020:135; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2019:1). This is especially true in South Africa for students who enrol at universities in rural areas, and originate from lower socio-economic circumstances, and who have limited access to transport (Sikhwari *et al.*, 2020:4–5). It can be argued that the off-campus property market tends to cater more for relatively privileged students, and less for those in need.

2.2.2 Access and success

On-campus accommodation should meet the social and recreational needs of the institution's students (Newell & Marzuki, 2018:525; Swift, 2019:20). Depending on the institution, living on campus usually provides access to a variety of facilities and services, such as libraries, study rooms, computer laboratories, cafeterias, sports and recreation centres and administrative and health services (Xulu-Gama, 2019:19). Due to the convenience of proximity to the facilities and services, on-campus student accommodation is thought to have a significant impact on student academic achievement (Dlamini & Mafumbate, 2021:30; Makenzie, 2021:8).

Van Zyl and Fourie-Malherbe (2021:122) corroborate the finding of Xulu-Gama (2019:19) that on campus students in South Africa have substantial academic advantages compared to off-campus students. They have the added advantage of additional tutorial classes in the evenings and Wi-Fi connectivity for online learning and research (Xulu-Gama, 2019:19). It is generally accepted that students who reside on campus have a better chance of fully committing to their studies than those who travel to campus every day and live with friends, family, or in rented housing (Van Zyl & Fourie-Malherbe, 2021:122; Mbandlwa, 2021:1567–1569). As referenced in section 2.4.1, platforms such as Residence Life² create learning and living environments that support social success (Xulu-Gama, 2019:16).

It was found, however, that the majority of students enrolled at South African universities live in rented accommodation and travel to campus daily, because of the limited availability of on-campus residences (Van Zyl & Fourie-Malherbe, 2021:119). Students, therefore, often must travel substantial distances, which wastes time that they could spend on studying or resting (Callo *et al.*, 2021:1-2; Rammuki, 2019:7; Xulu-Gama, 2019:19). For low-income students, transport costs can result in them forfeiting classes or meals to afford taxi or bus fares (Walker *et al.*, 2022:97).

² Residence Life relates to administrative and programmatic oversight of student housing on university campuses. It involves managing and supporting the residential experience of students living on campus, overall operation and management of on-campus housing facilities (Hurtado *et al.*, 2020:1).

2.3 Challenges encountered by students living on and off campus

Naidoo and Cartwright (2020:3) believe that South African students deal with a variety of general problems and have vast experience of issues during their study years. Examples of these issues are safety and crime within the residence, financial challenges, psychological health of students, poor sleeping and eating patterns, housing and food insecurity and changes in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.1 Safety and crime within the residence

Crime, delinquency, violence and anti-social behaviour are not new phenomena in institutions of higher learning (Makhaye, 2017; Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020:3). This has been reported by students who were agitated and worried by the extent of crime that they had to deal with, both on and off campus (Ross & Rasool, 2019:7).

According to Buyung *et al.* (2018:1169), functionality, safety and security, and comfort of the accommodation supplied are the three primary components of an environment that is free of barriers. Ismail *et al.* (2022:1368) add that the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, prioritises four features for students: safety, comfort, the college atmosphere, and basic amenities. According to Hockin *et al.* (2021), students in the United States are victims of crime involving theft of some of their possessions, including computers, from their homes, while others are robbed at gunpoint inside their residences.

Numerous reports have been made about the safety of South African students and how they are targeted for various crimes, particularly at certain rural institutions (Molosankwe, 2020). One such instance involved University of Venda students who were sexually assaulted, while others had their laptops and smartphones stolen while they were studying for their examinations (Govender, 2020; Molosankwe, 2020; Njilo, 2020). Two students of the University of the Free State's Qwa-Qwa Campus, who resided off campus were involved in a senseless attack which claimed their lives in September 2021 (Mthethwa, 2021).

2.3.2 Financial challenges

Financial troubles have emerged as a major problem in South Africa's higher education system, one that significantly impacts students' psychological wellbeing (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2020:51). These financial challenges manifest in various ways, such as limited study budgets, overreliance on government assistance, food insecurity, poor accommodation and transportation difficulties, and inadequate living conditions characterised by a lack of essential resources and services (Case *et al.*, 2018:45–47; Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020:3; Walker *et al.*, 2022:77–78). Nyewe (2018:4620-4621) highlights that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are enrolled in higher education face financial and academic struggles. Ravhuhali *et al.* (2022:244) support this notion and assert that many students from low-income households lack essential educational resources, such as laptops and books, which hampers their ability to navigate higher education successfully. Case *et al.* (2018:11–12) emphasise the importance of financial stability within families for students to thrive academically.

Although some students receive bursaries, Ravhuhali *et al.* (2022:240) argue that the allowances provided are insufficient to cover their monthly expenses. This aligns with Pretorius and Blaauw's (2020:50-51) findings, namely that financial constraints and challenges are major obstacles for South African students in higher learning institutions. Worsley *et al.* (2021a:9) report that many students take on part-time jobs alongside their studies to supplement their living expenses, thereby exacerbating their stress levels further. Consequently, greater financial intervention is necessary to address their financial difficulties (Nyewe, 2018:4621–4622).

2.3.3 Psychological health of students

In their exploratory study on the psychological health of first-year students at an institution of higher learning in South Africa Pretorius and Blaauw (2014:467–484) discovered various factors that are crucial for first-year students' psychological health. The students' choice of the university, feeling "at home", understanding how the university works and participating in or watching sports were identified as positive elements of their results.

Concerns about exams, studying for less than 10 hours per week, and residing on university premises were identified as negative elements (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2014:479). Students who do not get along with their roommates frequently find themselves in tense situations or feeling alone (Worsley *et al.*, 2021b:9). Those who have trouble building strong relationships with their roommates frequently internalise this and feel let down or conclude the problem lies with them. Strayhorn (2019:5) concurs with Johnson (2020) that a student's performance at their university and likelihood of re-enrolling depend heavily on how connected they feel to their friends, faculty, and campus. To provide a social network that is dynamic throughout the transitional period, students stressed the importance of living with someone they can talk to or confide in about their problems (Schmidt, 2020:2–4; Worsley *et al.*, 2021b:9).

In addition, academic challenges, financial concerns, lack of sleep, and family issues are among the many types of stress that many students in South Africa experience. These factors can have serious psychological effects and a range of detrimental academic consequences, including poor academic achievement and dropping out (Beiter *et al.*, 2015:93–94). Students must, therefore, develop coping mechanisms that are different from those they used while at home or high school (Xulu-Gama, 2019:20).

Similar findings are evident in international literature. For example, Jopling and Valtorta (2019) studied students in the United Kingdom and found that many students feel dissatisfied when their expectation of having more frequent interactions with others at university, compared to high school, is not met (Jopling & Valtorta, 2019).

In turn, Neves and Hillman (2018:53–54) found that a quarter of students in the United Kingdom who perceived their university experience as less positive than expected, attributed it to having fewer opportunities to interact with others. Especially during the initial months after relocating to a new country or city to begin their academic careers, many students experience social isolation and loneliness (Worsley *et al.*, 2021b:5).

In the United Kingdom, non-academic difficulties include loneliness, a sense of isolation, depression, stress, cultural shock, and nutrition problems (Alloh *et al.*, 2018:3; Cowley & Ssekasi, 2018:113). In their investigation into the factors influencing Nigerian students'

health in the United Kingdom, Alloh *et al.* (2018:7–11) and Edwards (2019:45) discovered that transitional changes, lack access to healthcare services, and inadequate financial capability are all issues that significantly impact international students' well-being. Furthermore, the transition disrupts friendships with significant others and connections to familiar places, making students vulnerable during this time (Edwards, 2019:45; Gbadegesin *et al.*, 2022:2; Worsley *et al.*, 2021b:3–5; Xulu-Gama, 2019:20). This difficulty is experienced because students need to form new connections and become familiar with their new surroundings to make friends and feel at home where they live. However, some students struggle to make friends in their campus residences, which has a detrimental effect on their well-being, because it leads to psychological and physical withdrawal from their peers (Xulu-Gama, 2019:20).

It is, therefore, clear, from the local and the international literature, that the living arrangements of students, including their satisfaction with their current residence, as well as factors that directly impact the educational environment in which they are enrolled, have an impact on their psychological well-being (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2020:49–50).

2.3.4 Poor sleeping and eating patterns

Research shows that poor sleep and eating patterns are a challenge for many university students across the world. Both factors have been related to poorer health in general, reduced learning, lower grades, worse mood, and more reckless behaviour (Chung *et al.*, 2019:812–813; Du *et al.*, 2021:22; Taylor *et al.*, 2013:340). For example, Ramachandiran and Dhanapal (2018:2122) examined the effects of academic stress on university students in Malaysia and discovered that many of them experienced sleeping problems, such as insomnia, obstructive sleep apnoea and snoring.

Similarly, unhealthy eating habits can have detrimental effects on the overall health and well-being of students. Research has identified various factors that contribute to poor dietary choices and behaviours. For instance, a study by Smith *et al.* (2020) found that limited access to healthy food options on campus, such as an absence of nutritious meals in dining halls, or vending machines stocked with unhealthy snacks, significantly

influenced students' dietary patterns. Moreover, the availability and easy accessibility of fast-food establishments on or near campuses were identified as major contributors to students' consumption of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods (Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Mansvelt *et al.*, 2022:234–235). Another study, by Adams and Goffe (2021), reveals that high levels of stress and time constraints associated with academic demands often lead students to rely on convenient, processed, and energy-dense foods, which are typically lacking in essential nutrients. The results of a study by Du *et al.* (2021:20) reveal that depressive, unhealthy eating habits by university students are a growing concern worldwide, and that the COVID-19 outbreak may have exacerbated the issue for a sizable fraction of students.

Both inadequate sleep and an unhealthy diet can have a detrimental impact on individuals' physical and mental health, which emphasises the importance of promoting healthy sleep patterns and balanced nutrition for optimal wellbeing. Overall, it is essential to recognise the multifaceted nature of unhealthy eating habits of students and to implement comprehensive strategies to promote and support healthier choices.

2.3.5 Housing and food insecurity

In their study of housing and food insecurity among undergraduate students, Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018:128) discovered that more than half of second and fourth-year students struggled with economic precariousness, meaning, they lacked the security or predictability of basic material welfare, and this emphasises how housing and food insecurity poses a significant barrier to obtaining a bachelor's degree. Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018:124) and Ahmad *et al.* (2021:5627) indicate the most frequent food insecurity issues that students experience includes being unable to afford to eat balanced meals, admitting that the purchased food simply did not last and not being able to afford to purchase more, which results in them skipping meals altogether or reducing the size of their meals due to a lack of money for food. According to Van den Berg and Raubenheimer (2015:165), food insecurity is a disconcerting and growing issue for students at South African higher education institutions, with students from low-income families being the most affected. According to a study by Sabi *et al.* (2020:146), students sponsored by NSFAS (government's National Student Financial Aid Scheme) were more

vulnerable to severe food insecurity – 48.1% of them possessed no food because of insufficient funds, 39.6% went to sleep without eating, and almost 28% of them spent the entire day without food. These challenges were also mentioned and elaborated upon by co-researchers (refer to section 4.3).

2.3.6 Changes in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic took the world by surprise, and caused unprecedented disruptions that affected universities, staff, and students globally. Students faced numerous challenges during this time, including mental health issues, loneliness, isolation, illness, and the loss of loved ones (Schreiber *et al.*, 2020:5). The pandemic not only impacted social, economic, and academic spheres, but also resulted in a "new normal" for student life. Higher education institutions had to navigate the devastating effects of the pandemic, which led to the establishment of new norms for daily living and social interaction. Many learning institutions were compelled to close or adopt innovative teaching and learning platforms (Chavarría-Bolaños *et al.*, 2020:81).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about disruptions in global teaching and learning and forced institutions to adapt to remote instruction (Kumari *et al.*, 2022:2553; Moodley *et al.*, 2022:6; Ramos-Morcillo *et al.*, 2020:12). During this period, student life transitioned from physical interaction to online learning due to social distancing measures, resulting in isolated communities (Das *et al.*, 2021:177; Moodley *et al.*, 2022:6).

However, Rose (2020:2131) argues that not all educational approaches can be effectively implemented through remote learning, particularly in areas such as clinical training, where hands-on experience and competency acquisition are vital. Moodley *et al.* (2022:6) emphasise, furthermore, that health professions education relies on three essential components: theory, laboratory practice, and clinical practice. Health sciences students need to interact with patients in clinical settings to acquire the necessary skills and first-hand experience of patient care (Rose, 2020:2131–2132). While the shift to remote learning limited students' access to university libraries and science laboratories, health sciences students faced the additional challenge of being unable to complete their clinical

placements in hospitals (Mahlaba, 2020:120). Furthermore, health sciences students were called back to universities to assist in the fight against the pandemic or engage in various clinical learning activities. In this stressful period and at a new era of humanity, health sciences students were regarded as frontline workers; they bore professional responsibilities and were accountable for their actions. As a result, health sciences students had a unique university experience during that period.

2.3.6.1 *International literature on the impact of COVID-related changes in teaching and learning for health sciences students*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Puljak *et al.* (2020) explored the concerns and perspectives of Croatian undergraduate health sciences students. They discovered that the majority of these students adapted well to the exclusive use of online learning and believed that their universities had adjusted successfully. Similarly, a study of Saudi Arabian medical students revealed that online learning was accepted well, and students were aware of the benefits, such as time-sensitivity and enhanced time efficiency (Khalil *et al.*, 2020:5). Most students perceived this type of learning as advantageous, as they had the necessary skills in information technology to learn independently (Puljak *et al.*, 2020:4; Zheng *et al.*, 2021:9).

A study of Spanish nursing students who transitioned from face-to-face teaching to virtual learning during the COVID-19 outbreak was conducted, and some students found online learning challenging (Ramos-Morcillo *et al.*, 2020:12). These were mainly older students, students from remote regions, those with family and work obligations, and students with few electronic resources. When Duke-NUS medical students in Singapore were surveyed, Compton *et al.* (2020:946) found that approximately one third of the surveyed students preferred not to return to clinical training; the readiness of the students to do so correlated with personal traits and their conceptions of the risk posed by the clinical training during COVID-19. The readiness to return varied, based on individual differences (Clabaugh *et al.*, 2021:2).

The education system of planning, implementation and assessment was challenged. However, there were opportunities for uplifting the mode of educational transformation

and making the curriculum more flexible according to the evolving needs (Park & Seo, 2022:40-41; Toquero, 2020:3). It can be concluded, in summary, that the students abroad preferred online learning, because it posed fewer risks, provided better coping mechanisms and sufficient resources. Can the same be applicable to South Africa?

2.3.6.2 South African literature on the impact of COVID-related changes in teaching and learning for health sciences students

In March 2020, South Africa entered an official lockdown, and a state of national disaster was declared in accordance with the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002 (CoGTA, 2020a:3; CoGTA, 2020b:3). As in other countries, the COVID-19 outbreak came as a wake-up call for South African educational institutions to rethink their methods of teaching and learning in the primary, intermediate, and tertiary education sectors (Mhlanga & Mloi, 2020:4). To curb the spread of COVID-19, lecturers thought through and planned how to teach their classes while staying at home. Teaching and learning continued online during lockdown – hybrid lessons and interactive material developed as learning units progressed throughout (Mahlaba, 2020:122; Toquero, 2020:2–3).

Universities turned to remote teaching and learning because of this hybrid learning adjustment to save the academic year. Although remote learning could save the academic year, lecturers and students had to depend on their own internet connectivity in their remote locations (Mahlaba, 2020:122). The social complexities of home schooling, online teaching and learning presented significant challenges to universities, such as inadequate data for lecturers and students to access the materials needed for e-learning (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020:243). According to Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2019:371), the majority of underprivileged South African students did not benefit from these adjustments in terms of access to online learning. The difference between those with access to computers and the internet and those without appeared to be a significant problem that impeded the viability of online learning in South Africa (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019:371). According to a systematic review by Rodrigues *et al.* (2019:94–95), several programmes and policies were created and put into place to address this issue.

As a result, institutions offered students laptops and Wi-Fi access on the campus and, in residences, internet efficacy was sufficient (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019:90).

Moodley *et al.* (2022:5) add that sending students home during the COVID-19 lockdown period changed the learning environment because this shift increased distraction, which made the home environment unsuitable for learning. Martin (2021:10), like Moodley *et al.* (2022:5), affirmed that some students' family commitments increased, for instance, having to help children with their schoolwork.

It is noted that students did not have sufficient resources to study at home during the COVID period. Much support was needed from families and institutions to make their studies at home efficient.

2.4 Overall student support strategies

During their academic journey, both on- and off-campus students must deal with distinctive challenges. Health sciences students face additional difficulties in extension compared to other majors. To guarantee the success of all pupils, universities have adopted numerous student support approaches. Tinto (1993:209) mention that the likelihood of students successfully completing their courses increases when they have fulfilling social and intellectual experiences during their university education. Therefore, in line with Tinto's theory of student integration, it is the responsibility of all parties involved with the university to ensure that students receive the necessary support to engage fully with the opportunities that come with being a student.

To support students effectively, various strategies can be implemented based on students' specific needs. It is crucial to identify these needs, so that the appropriate support can be provided strategically to promote academic progress and achievement.

This section will discuss the strategies employed by universities to support students, as well as student uptake and coping strategies.

2.4.1 Strategies employed by universities to support students

Internationally, universities have taken up proactive approaches to addressing housing instability and homelessness on their campuses (Mendoza, 2019:169). For instance, West Chester University's implementation of the "Promise Program" assists students by covering housing expenses during university recess, which is a crucial time, as recess periods can pose challenges for student residences when students are required to vacate their rooms (Mendoza, 2019:170). In Botswana, Pansiri and Sinkamba (2017:52) advocate for expanding student achievement programmes beyond the classroom, to enhance the overall student experience. Consequently, there is an increasing emphasis on providing financial support for students.

In South Africa, Xulu-Gama *et al.* (2018:1302–1314) highlight the importance of understanding the diverse needs of students at higher education institutions. The South African government offers support to students from low-income households through the NSFAS, which has made progress in expanding access to higher education. However, not all students are covered, due to funding limitations (Ravhuhali *et al.*, 2022:233). Case *et al.* (2018:45-48) suggest that NSFAS should consider aiding students from middle-class households who face financial constraints and whose families are unable to cover the full costs of higher education (Van den Berg & Raubenheimer, 2015:165–166). Doing so would require increased funding and improved administration, both by the fund itself and by academic institutions (Butler-Adam, 2016:1).

Furthermore, not all students have access to financial aid or initiatives that support student nutrition – programmes such as Thoho-ya-nzie and No Student Hungry (Ravhuhali *et al.*, 2022:241). Government loans are only available to permanent residents, placing international students at a disadvantage regarding loan and bursary applications (Case *et al.*, 2018:45; Hanbazaza *et al.*, 2017:210). These students are also less likely to seek assistance from friends or family members when facing food insecurity.

At Durban University of Technology, Xulu-Gama (2019:17) explains, Student Housing and Residence Life, in collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, manages a residence educational programme. The programme aims to

enhance students' overall achievement and foster long-lasting student communities where living and learning intersect. The residence coordinator, in partnership with the Student Housing and Residence Life department, implements this programme in all university residences, and tailors it to meet the specific needs of each residence (Xulu-Gama, 2019:17).

Despite the implementation of structural strategies by universities, students require additional support strategies to navigate their university years successfully.

2.4.2 Student uptake and coping strategies

In their study on coping strategies of on-campus and off-campus students from low-income families, Ravhuhali *et al.* (2022:241) emphasise applying for the NSFAS, using the library, and participating in initiatives such as Thoho-ya-nzie. In addition, students can manage their social functioning in several ways, for example by resisting peer pressure, confiding in friends who are facing similar difficulties, maintaining friendships with other students who are enrolled in the same course to form study groups (Case *et al.*, 2018:63–65; Ravhuhali *et al.*, 2022:241; Sikhwari *et al.*, 2019:295). Worsley *et al.* (2021b:8) remark that there are numerous benefits to having a companion close by with whom to discuss the pressures and difficulties of student life.

Students should engage in self-development by adjusting and being willing to adapt, be self-motivated and remain focused, disciplined, and committed to achieving success (Ravhuhali *et al.*, 2022:241; Sikhwari *et al.*, 2019:295). Despite coming from low-income homes, students from disadvantaged backgrounds not only managed to meet the socioeconomic requirements of higher education, but also excelled in both teaching and learning, with their family history serving as their primary inspiration (Sikhwari *et al.*, 2019:294). Hanbazaza *et al.* (2017:210) found, however, that foreign students were less likely to ask friends or family for food to help them out of a tight situation.

It is noted that support plays a significant role in students' lives if they are to succeed and thrive. Institutions have established platforms to support students in their several needs, and students have individualised numerous coping strategies, however, availability of on-

campus residence epitomises all other strategies that ensure that students are satisfied with accommodation and campus facilities.

2.5 Student experiences and satisfaction with accommodation and campus facilities

In this section, we will delve into the realm of student experiences and satisfaction with accommodation and campus facilities, by exploring the crucial factors that shape their overall university life.

Omar *et al.* (2021:79–80) identified three education service factors that appeared to have an impact on students' satisfaction in Malaysian higher education institutions, namely accommodation, transportation, and sports. Rahman *et al.* (2020:326) and Gbadegesin *et al.* (2022:17) add that recreation and transportation services all significantly contribute to elevating students' satisfaction. Transportation and sports facilities were found to have positive effects on students' satisfaction (Omar *et al.*, 2021:80). Another student need is accommodation (Sikhwari *et al.*, 2020:2–5). According to Xulu-Gama (2019:16) and Sithaldeen *et al.* (2022:67–70), student accommodation has a significant role as a moulding setting for students' achievement.

Berköz and Çelik (2016:830–844) discovered, in their study of students' opinions of the campus's physical and social environment, as well as their expectations of service, that there are high levels of student satisfaction when facilities are available and functional. Entol *et al.* (2019:1–7) studied students' contentment with on-campus accommodation at Politeknik Kuching, Malaysia, and discovered that students were happy with the facilities, including the bedrooms, bathrooms, and other amenities. However, certain factors contributed to students being less satisfied with the on-campus living environment, among which limited space, lack of privacy, lack of freedom and poorly maintained facilities (Muslim *et al.*, 2012:603). Students who lived on campus reported that visitation limitations, rules and noise affected their experiences of living on campus negatively (Kamal *et al.*, 2020:136).

Napitupulu *et al.* (2018:12–19) assessed the quality of the university facilities and services and discovered a low level of satisfaction among students, as well as gaps between student expectations and perceptions regarding the quality of the facilities, which were below expectations. The conditions and availability were not as perceived to be. Another assessment of students' satisfaction with public universities in Bangladesh indicated that students were unhappy with the accommodation (Rahman *et al.*, 2020:326). Low levels of satisfaction related to security measures against outsiders, accessibility for the impaired, student parking lots, and night lights on campus (Berköz & Çelik, 2016:839; Edwards, 2019:109). The extent to which students' expectations are met, therefore, contribute to their experiences at university. Students' perceptions and views about the university are based on their assessment of the quality of facilities. A student's experience commences when a learner applies for university entrance and ends at graduation. In between, there are recess periods that offer time for students to take a break and refocus, without having to apply cognitive effort. Zavacky and Michael (2017:48) declare that recess is beneficial for students, as it grants them the opportunity to recharge, increases the level of physical activity, improves cognitive intelligence, and improves social and emotional development.

At the research site, there is a mid-year recess period of approximately three weeks between semesters and a summer break of approximately 2 weeks (Research Site, 2019). During this recess period, students are reliant on one another for support and a sense of rejuvenation. It is, therefore, important that the students voice out their experiences in their own voices, in a collaborative manner. The importance of exploring student experiences through their own voices emphasises the importance of this study, as student experiences are explored during recess through students' own voices.

2.6 Importance of exploring student experience - eliciting student voice

Hong *et al.* (2020:1) refer to the importance of conducting research on student experiences to test whether institutions and systems provide sufficient support for students. By understanding students' experiences from their various backgrounds,

improvements can be made in university education systems and policies, social inequality can be resolved, and universities may rise above their competitors (Hong *et al.*, 2020:9). Each student's experience is unique and forms part of a bigger picture.

Strydom and Loots (2020:31) suggest that student voices be incorporated in different ways at academic institutions. Understanding student experiences could, however, be a challenge and an opportunity for institutions to adapt policies and protocols (Hong *et al.*, 2020:10). Education institutions should encourage cooperative relations between students, lecturers, leaders, researchers, policymakers, content designers and education specialists. Students can represent the broader community by sharing their experiences, knowledge, and insight (Kelchen & Li, 2020:720; MacGillivray & Nadeau, 2017:805). However, the student voice reportedly still has minimal impact in relation to decision-making for institutional policies (Bloemert *et al.*, 2020:434). Skerritt *et al.* (2021:16) explain that the voice of the student is missed when it is perceived as representing just a consumer. Students, consequently, often feel that they do not have the power to project and convey their voices to influential university decision-makers (Cornell & Kessi, 2016:3).

Strydom and Loots (2020:26) argue that including students in research promotes students' engagement as co-creators and experts. When researchers place students in a participatory role and decision-making position, it proves institutional commitment to changes of teaching, learning and institutional development. Students should be empowered to make their own decisions on how they wish to portray their personal learning experiences (Bloemert *et al.*, 2020:434; Conner *et al.*, 2022:763–764). Strydom and Loots (2020:32) emphasise that students' voices are diverse, and each should be utilised as a contribution to chief aspects of institutional initiatives to improve student success and ensure quality teaching and learning.

Although student voices have been heard in relation to teaching and learning, literature is not as clear about their involvement in decision making or policy development in residence life. Student involvement could however contribute to constructive action, particularly through research. Students could be data sources, engage in dialogue, or

initiate research, but their voices should never be compared or ranked (Bloemert *et al.*, 2020:434-444). It was therefore important for students to not only relate their experiences and opinions in this study, but to be involved as co-researchers. They actively participated in data collection, analysis and interpretation, as well as dissemination of the findings.

2.7 Summary

This chapter consulted literature to obtain an overview of student housing, its cost implications, and how access to it contributes to student success. It also reported on challenges faced by both on-campus and off-campus students, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education. Furthermore, the study discussed overall student support strategies, followed by reports on the experiences and satisfaction of students with accommodation and campus facilities. Lastly, the importance of exploring student experience and eliciting their voice was explained.

Altogether, the review of literature provided in this chapter shows that the development of a supportive living and learning atmosphere at a university is important for students' learning and well-being. Consequently, it can be argued that providing adequate and safe accommodation that is conducive to learning – especially for vulnerable students – is the university's institutional responsibility.

The review indicates that there is a small but growing body of literature on students residing on university campuses. Within the existing literature, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of health sciences students. The review suggests that there are some challenges faced by health sciences students who reside on campus, which may result in higher levels of stress compared to students in other fields. Furthermore, there is no doubt that increased levels of stress are detrimental to wellbeing. This study, therefore, addressed a research gap involving the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess. The unique changes brought about by COVID-19 were also considered. The next chapter will discuss the methodology applied in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As reported in Chapter 2, there is a shortage of research on the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus in the South African context. Little is known about what these students experience when they have to remain on campus during recess in order to fulfil parts of their clinical training. This gap in knowledge justifies the research conducted by this study, which pursued the following research question:

What are the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university?

Chapter 2 presented perspectives from literature, which highlighted that it is important to consider the extent to which student learning and wellbeing are affected, not only by the teaching and learning arrangements of higher education institutions, but also by the living arrangements they provide institutionally.

In this chapter, the research paradigm, approach to the research, participant selection and recruitment, study design, the data collection and analysis methods used to conduct the research to answer the research question will be discussed. Furthermore, the entire research process will be elaborated upon, and the ethical considerations applied, as well as applicable rigor, will be reflected on.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the way a person learns and understands the world's reality (Kamal, 2019; Orman, 2016; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). This term originated from a Greek concept that means pattern (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In other words, a paradigm can be defined as someone's beliefs and values about the world. This study was guided by a participatory paradigm, and comprised components of research that assisted the researcher and co-researchers to co-create and attain knowledge based on their subjective experiences. The participatory paradigm assisted in providing direction to data

collection and analysis processes, as it guides the approach to the research and its various process (Erdem, 2020:185). Research paradigms can also inform the ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology of a study; each of these elements will be discussed in the next subsections. Refer to Figure 1.1 for a visual representation.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology assists the researcher to question and understand the nature of reality and our perspective of the world (Botma *et al.*, 2010:40). There are multiple realities to be explored in relation to health sciences students who reside on campus during university recess. These realities can be constructed through interaction with the co-researcher. The study was, thus, subjective, and inclusive (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:514). Each co-researcher shared their own views and perspectives of their experiences.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the ways in which knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated (Scotland, 2012:9). In this study, knowledge was co-created by all research participants (including me, as a facilitator in this process). Co-creation of knowledge occurred in this study by soliciting the views and acknowledging the voices, knowledge, expertise and experiences of the co-researchers, which was valued and honoured equally (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019:410). Health sciences students were involved as co-researchers in the photovoice process; thus, they became co-creators of knowledge about the experiences of residing on campus during recess (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:516).

3.2.3 Methodology

Methodology refers to the way the evidence is obtained for the research project (Polit & Beck, 2017:10). In this study, the methodology was motivated by collaboration and participation. The research was conducted “with, for and by” rather than “on” people who are affected by the research problem (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015:14). The study was conducted with co-researchers, who were an information rich source of data (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt,

2013:6; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:516). The data was obtained for the research project by following the 3 Rs (relationship, reflection, and recognition) of participatory research. As mentioned, the collection of data involves democratic, authentic, trusting, supportive relationships, continuous collaboration, critical reflection, and recognition of the co-researchers' achievements and successes. The students who were research participants in this project are therefore called 'co-researchers', and photovoice – which will be explained in further detail in section 3.3.1 – was used as a method (Wang, 1999).

3.2.4 Axiology

The role of values and ethics in research is examined by axiology (Brown & Dueñas, 2020:546; Polit & Beck, 2017:10). This study was fully driven by values. As mentioned in section 1.6, the research was guided by the 7 Cs of participatory action learning action research (PALAR): communication, collaboration, commitment, coaching, critical and self-critical attitude, competence, and compromise. All these elements contributed to character building for the co-researchers (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:10–11; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:88). By being guided by the 7 Cs, the co-researchers held one another accountable during this study. In PALAR, the 7 Cs form the foundation of ethical decision-making.

3.3 Research design and method

An explorative study that gathered qualitative data was considered to be the most suitable. I concentrated on the phenomenon of health sciences students remaining on campus during university recess. And as mentioned in the introduction, this phenomenon was researched from the perspective of health sciences students at a university in South Africa. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the research was guided by the 7 Cs of PALAR. Whilst there are a range of participatory methods that can be guided by these 7 Cs, photovoice was the method of choice to collect and analyse the qualitative and visual data (drawings, photographs, captions, group discussions). The final stage of photovoice is the exhibition which is a form of disseminating the research findings to the public. Traditionally, photovoice is used in communities outside of higher education settings, for

example, in marginalised rural communities. In this study photovoice was applied within a higher education setting, therefore the community comprised of health sciences students. Figure 3.1, as adapted from Wood (2020:195), illustrates a comprehensive participatory research process.



Figure 3.1: Participatory research process

Source: Adapted from Wood (2020:195)

The steps captured in the figure were adapted from Wood (2020:195) and implemented in a unique way to collect and analyse data. This means that the three steps in the participatory research process were adhered to as follows:

- Co-researchers were collaboratively involved in the collection and analysis of the data;
- They collectively identified the themes portrayed in their photographs; and
- In each workshop, they reflected on their learning and development.

The ultimate purpose of this research was to raise awareness of the implications for health sciences students who have to reside on campus during university recess, and to facilitate policy development and transformation of certain policies and protocols stipulated for the recess period, where necessary. The specific method used to achieve this will be discussed in detail in the next section.

3.3.1 Photovoice as a participatory research method

Photovoice, as a participatory method, involves the use of photography and narratives to bring about social change (Cornell & Kessi, 2016:1884; Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011:2). Wang and Burris (1997:369), as a seminal source, state that photovoice as a photographic method can help identify community problems, represent community views and enhance communities. In photovoice studies, co-researchers usually produce and exhibit photographs to stimulate dialogue about social issues (Wang and Burris, 1997: 368). In South Africa, visual participation methods have previously been used to make a difference in the lives of co-researchers. This strengthened the motivation to use the method in this study (Moletsane, 2012:5–6).

I used photovoice to explore the implications of residing on campus during university recess based on the experiences of health sciences students. Cameras were given to the co-researchers, and through the facilitation of dialogue and storytelling, rich data were generated to bring about awareness of the challenges students face, and to bring attention to overlooked issues that are important for institutional change (Han & Oliffe, 2016:111). The co-researchers photographed their everyday lived experiences in relation to the research topic, and that of their surroundings, after which they were provided with an opportunity to talk about the reasons for taking the specific photos and to explain why the images they captured were of importance and significance to them (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019:401).

In international literature, it is argued that student voices are amplified when they, as co-researchers, present photo evidence and accompanying narratives to illustrate the issues at hand (Han & Oliffe, 2016:111; Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:5; Johnston, 2016:808; Liebenberg, 2018:6; Drainoni *et al.*, 2019:2). Locally, the three main strengths highlighted in research with students in South Africa are that photovoice enables student communities to voice their concerns, it promotes critical conversations through photography, and provides opportunities to reach policymakers (Cornell & Kessi, 2016: 1880; Martinez-Vargas *et al.*, 2019:61–62; Mathebula & Martinez-Vargas, 2021:58–63).

The specific advantages and strengths of using photovoice in this study will be outlined next.

3.3.1.1 *Advantages of using photovoice*

In this study, photovoice was utilised to investigate the experiences of health sciences students who remained on campus during university recess. Co-researchers were given the chance to be involved in decision-making affecting the university community and themselves by presenting their opinions and voices through photography (Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:5). This method specifically combines photography and narratives that enable co-researchers to co-create knowledge, make recommendations, and have an influence on policy based on their stories, as individuals who are affected by the emergent issues (Hannes & Parylo, 2014:256; Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:115; Martinez-Vargas *et al.*, 2019:4).

Mathebula (2019:81) recommends that, to balance the unequal power between students and policyholders and promote justice in the structures of knowledge-making in higher education, co-researchers should be valued as information rich sources. Co-researchers were indeed valued as valued as knowers in this study. Photovoice enabled them to voice messages or share their university life stories in a way that could enhance information for policymaking (Johnston, 2016:808; Walker & Mathebula, 2020:195–196). In this research, photovoice was useful, because it also allowed involvement of the students from beginning to end, without consuming too much of their time, which enabled them to still achieve academic success (Martinez-Vargas *et al.*, 2019:4).

Despite its benefits, there were challenges to be considered in using photovoice. The challenges and limitations will be discussed next.

3.3.1.2 *Challenges of using photovoice*

One challenge was that co-researchers initially wanted to meet my expectations, rather than portraying their own stories. Additionally, they felt pressured by a desire to create or capture something beautiful to impress viewers, thus, deviating from the research question. Some were also uncomfortable about operating an expensive camera (Ronzi *et al.*, 2016:738–741). As an alternative to cameras, co-researchers were allowed to use

their smartphones to capture the images. Another limitation is that photovoice can be time consuming for co-researchers, as they have to attend workshops and sessions in addition to the responsibilities related to their academic schedules. However, if the sessions and workshops are strictly time limited, as scheduled, the process can be efficient, and time will not be wasted. In addition, for the facilitator, photovoice projects are logistically demanding, as they require a variety of resources, such as suitable venues, stationery, digital cameras, and exhibition planning strategies (Sutton-Brown, 2014:180).

On a deeper level, uncomfortable emotions could surface during the interpretation of the captured photographs (Woodgate *et al.*, 2017:4). Grief and inability to compose oneself emotionally might have been faced while interpreting photographs, for instance, when narrating an experience of loss. In addition, an object signifying an event could arouse emotions related to the past (Röttger-Rössler & Scheidecker, 2019:86). Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.* (2015:87) advise, however, that emotions and thoughts need to be recognised, acknowledged, and explored, even when it might be difficult, as they play a significant role in influencing what and how we learn. This is because emotions play a critical role in reflection, they form an inherent part of the photovoice process and the study. Nevertheless, I did arrange that a staff member of the university's student support department would be available if a referral was needed.

In conclusion, the benefits outweighed the challenges for several reasons. Firstly, students often feel that they do not have power to reach and convey their voices to influential university decision-makers (Cornell & Kessi, 2016:3). Photovoice was, specifically, helpful for use with university students, as it amplified their voices and developed their self-confidence by requiring them to create and present photo evidence and accompanying narratives to illustrate issues that affected their university experiences (Drainoni *et al.*, 2019:2; Johnston, 2016:808; Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:5; Liebenberg, 2018:6). Secondly, it is envisioned that some form of institutional change could ensue, or at least be inspired, because photovoice is known to stimulate critical dialogue and policy development (Han & Oliffe, 2016:111–112). Thirdly, students valued the experience for the opportunity it presented for personal development, because it exposed them to alternative ways of expressing themselves and conducting research. Finally, photovoice

not only enabled the students to be co-researchers, but allowed them to analyse and criticise the world around them, thus, encouraging the development of critical consciousness about their lived experiences (Rolfe & Peters, 2014:9).

3.3.2 Population and unit of analysis

The population targeted was health sciences students residing on campus in residences during recess at a specific university. On this campus, there were 18 residences, two co-ed residences and one newly built co-ed health sciences residence with 250 beds (Research Site:2020c). The number of health sciences students residing on campus at the research site at the time the study was undertaken is unknown, because the department of Housing and Residence Affairs declined to make statistics available, despite the researcher following applicable protocol and submitting requests to the relevant management personnel.

Co-researchers who were most information rich were selected by means of purposive sampling (Polit & Beck, 2017:493). A purposive unit of analysis was useful, as it guided the selection of co-researchers who were relevant to the study. In addition, heterogeneous purposive sampling, or maximum variation, as explained by Polit and Beck (2017:493), was intended to be applied to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. An effort was made to make use of maximum variation by including students from different health professions, course years, genders, and race groups. Key dimensions of variation were identified and experiences of students who differed from one another as much as possible along these dimensions were sought. Photovoice guidelines advise a ratio of five to six co-researchers to one facilitator (Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:16). For this study, four health sciences students responded to the invitation and volunteered to participate. It is important to emphasise that the unit of analysis becomes more purposive when there is a greater number of inclusion and exclusion sample selection criteria. Additionally, in a study using a qualitative approach, it is less important to have a large number of co-researchers, and more important to capture the nuance and depth of the lived experiences and to facilitate rich discussions (Aspers & Corte, 2019:147; Noble & Smith, 2015:34; Riggs & Treharne, 2015:59). In

another words, the sample was not aimed at being generalisable. Although not intentionally included as participants, visitors at the exhibition could write their views and opinions in the visitors' book, which contributed to enriching the data. The research problem of this study was inspired by my personal experience and, more specifically, various personal challenges that were experienced whilst residing on campus during university recess (Polit & Beck, 2017:31). It is acknowledged that these personal experiences are not necessarily applicable to other students and that every student's experience is unique.

3.4 Data collection process

Ethical clearance was received from the HSREC at the research site before the study commenced. Access was then requested from the relevant stakeholders, as mentioned in section 1.11. Co-researchers were then recruited through various health sciences departments via WhatsApp groups. Emails were also sent to Housing and Residence Affairs, to be distributed to the residence heads and School of Nursing lecturers. Lastly, hard copies of invitations were posted on the noticeboards of all on-campus residences. Health Sciences students – co-researchers – who were interested contacted me to volunteer to participate in the study. In this study, four health sciences students responded to the invitation and volunteered to participate. A total of three workshops took place, and their content will be further elaborated on in this section.

As an icebreaker at the first workshop, the co-researchers used positive adjectives with the same initial letter as their names to introduce themselves. These adjectives were used as pseudonyms and replaced the co-researchers' real names in the reporting of findings. Table 3.1 contains details of the volunteer co-researchers.

Table 3.1: Co-researchers' details

Year	Course	Pseudonym
First year	Dietetics	Bold
First year	Medicine	Indomitable
Fourth year	Nursing	Nice
Fifth year	Medicine	Yesum

Dates were set with these co-researchers according to their schedules. The commencement of the study and the first workshop coincided with Level 3 of the COVID-19 national lockdown, during which only selected students, mainly those in the health sciences, were allowed on campus.

The second workshop was held on the same day, in the afternoon after a lunch break from the first workshop. We decided to merge the first two workshops for minimum exposure during the COVID-19 wave, and to minimise the amount of time that was demanded by the project. During this period, it was enforced that a maximum of 50 students should gather in closed spaces, with a distance of 1.5 metres between each; everybody had to wear masks. Sanitising took place before, during and after the gathering – I purchased the sanitiser myself. Co-researchers were not permitted to share any resources without them being sanitised. I thus provided each co-researcher with all the necessary equipment and resources to adhere to the rules and protocols of COVID-19. All protocols and COVID-19 prevention steps were followed in the meetings.

The final workshop with the co-researchers and co-supervisor took place at a local restaurant over breakfast. All COVID-19 protocols and prevention methods were again adhered to. I, as the facilitator, co-created knowledge with the co-researchers under supervision. Neither the co-researchers nor supervisors were remunerated, however, refreshments were served at every workshop and session. Everybody participated voluntarily. All workshops took place between the 26 June 2020 and 10 July 2020.

Furthermore, individual discussions were held with co-researchers when they were available on weekdays.

Co-researchers were guided throughout, which started on a more practical level and ended with deeper critical reflection. Data were collected by following the flexible photovoice steps presented in Figure 3.2. In this process, data collection and interpretation occurred simultaneously.

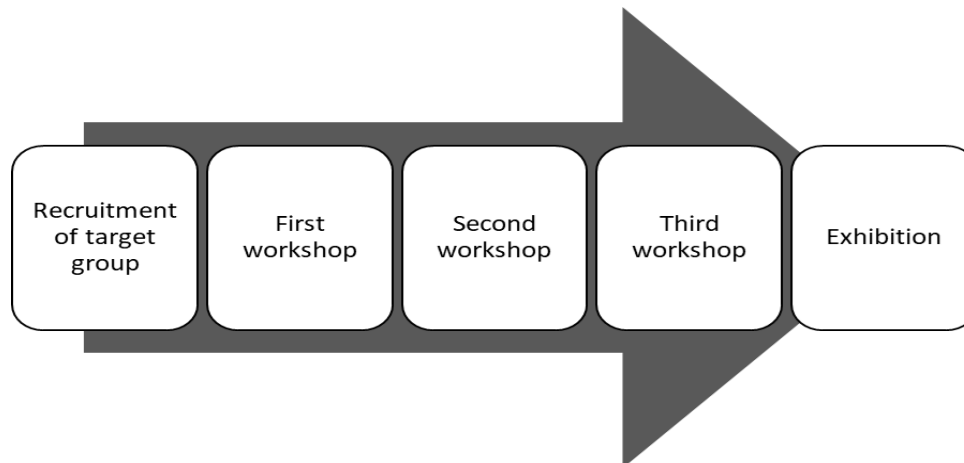


Figure 3.2: Implementation of photovoice steps in this study

Source: Adapted from Sutton-Brown (2014:171–172) and Wang (1999:188)

These steps that were followed during facilitation of the workshops will be elaborated on in the following subsections.

3.4.1 Recruitment of research participants

This was the first step, when all health sciences students residing in residences on campus during recess at a specific university were approached and recruited for the study. It was believed that they would be the most information rich sources of data, and they would benefit from the research (Polit & Beck, 2017:493).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I experienced and observed that the campus residence regulations were stricter than usual. There were restrictions making the campus inaccessible to most students, especially during lockdown Levels 4 and 3. To access the campus, one needed to apply for a campus access permit, unless it had been

automatically issued by one's department. Applying for an access permit was a lengthy procedure, as the application underwent assessment by different departments. An online screening questionnaire had to be completed to receive a code of entry. Not having internet access or a gadget was another challenge facing gaining access to campus. This contributed to limiting the number of students who volunteered to participate.

3.4.2 First workshop

Information about the study was provided, informed consent was obtained, and storyboarding and bonding was facilitated. The co-researchers were introduced to photovoice by means of a facilitated group discussion. The concept of photovoice, as well as its purpose and methodology and the potential risks of the study were discussed with the co-researchers. Co-researchers were clearly informed that a requirement of photovoice was that the photographs would be published and exhibited to create an opportunity to contribute to social change. The process of obtaining informed consent was managed in cooperation with the co-researchers, including agreements relating to photographic material and the use of cameras (refer to Addendum A for the informed consent form for co-researchers). A camera responsibility contract was discussed (refer to Addendum B). Co-researchers were informed that they had to acquire permission before they photographed anyone or objects belonging to anyone other than the co-researchers themselves (refer to Addendum A).

An initial prompt for photography was created, based on the research question that was presented to the co-researchers. As part of relationship building and brainstorming, co-researchers were given time to illustrate on a chart their "varsity experiences" in residences to date during university recess, as preparation for the second workshop. This also formed a basis for designing a storyboard, which is a visual planning tool that plots the series of events in telling a story (Sherman, 2023). There were no restrictions on the form of the storyboarding. It was explained that anything could be used illustrate the experiences, such as words, symbols, or signs. I provided coloured paper charts and markers and requested all the co-researchers to draw their university experiences as they related to residing on campus during a university recess (refer to section 4.2.3), the

reflective narrative drawings that served as part of the storyboard of each co-researcher will be presented alongside the broad findings of the photovoice workshops). According to Woodgate *et al.* (2014:148), drawing enables co-researchers to take an introspective approach, of thinking how they wish to present, through photographs, their lived experiences of remaining on campus during recess. The storyboards simplified the task of taking photographs in response to the research question, as they gave the co-researchers a basis from which they could work to capture related photographs. Each co-researcher developed their own storyboard and then presented it to the group. In closing, the co-researchers provided and received individual feedback from one another and from the facilitator regarding their storyboards.

The first workshop thus allowed the co-researchers time to reflect on their experiences, and to think about visual representations of these experiences before the second workshop where they would gain some knowledge about photography and basic training for taking photographs for storytelling purposes.

3.4.3 Second workshop

This workshop, facilitated by the researcher, occurred just before the co-researchers went away to take photographs. The workshop was dedicated to educating co-researchers about using the camera, followed by practical implementation of capturing photographs. Including advice related to ideas such as staging photos of moments if they were unable to take pictures of in naturally occurring events. The workshop also entailed the distribution of cameras, which were on loan from the Higher Education and Human Development research group at the research site.

The original plan was to have a professional photographer train the co-researchers in the use of a camera. However, due to campus COVID-19 regulations, an alternative approach was adopted, involving training through YouTube videos in conjunction with the researcher's basic understanding and knowledge of cameras. The co-researchers received camera operations training by watching selected YouTube clips. This was done in response to the limitations imposed by COVID-19, which eliminated the option to

provide training face to face with a professional photographer. After watching the training video, the co-researchers had a short practise session in the workshop venue.

The acronym SHOWeD, as suggested in Catalani and Minkler (2010:438) and Wang *et al.* (2000:84), was presented to assist co-researchers when they took photographs. Figure 3.3 illustrates the relationship between data collection and simultaneous analysis throughout the study. In addition, it shows how knowledge is created and transformation occurs as the study emerges.

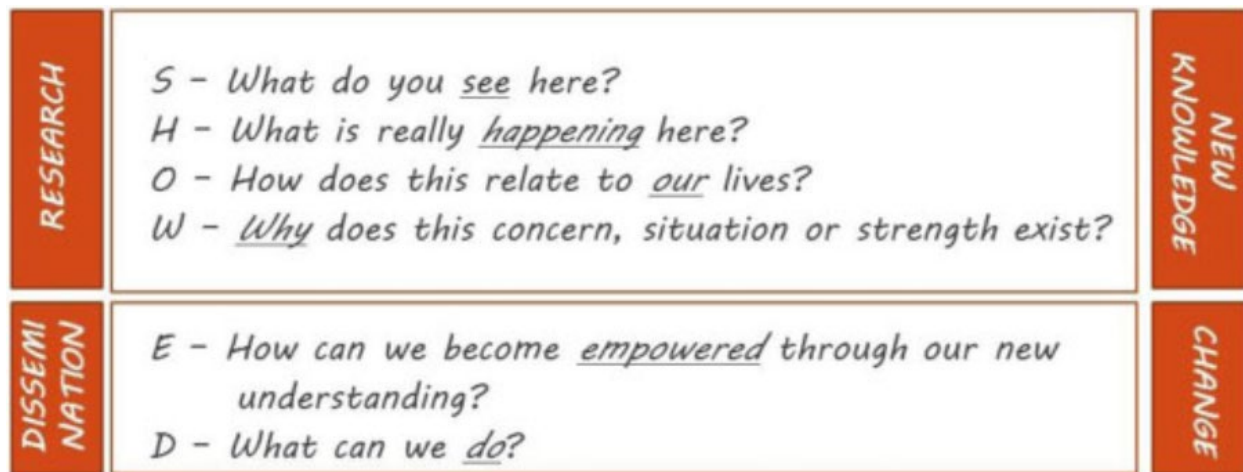


Figure 3.3: SHOWeD and its relationship to knowledge development and social change

Source: Liebenberg (2018)

The acronym SHOWeD was discussed as a guideline to capture photographs (Catalani & Minkler, 2010:438; Liebenberg, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2000:84). Thereafter, co-researchers were given an hour to familiarise themselves with the basic use of cameras, and they practiced taking photographs outside the workshop venue as a break. When they returned, it was discussed and decided, together with the co-researchers, that seven days would be the ideal timeframe for co-researchers to take pictures in response to the research question. The co-researchers were provided with a notepad with the printed acronym as a reminder and prompt. The notepad was also supposed to be used as a diary to draft ideas, suggestions, and feelings while they captured photographs. The

workshop was concluded once it was agreed that the co-researchers understood the task at hand, and that they had received all the necessary information, resources, and preparation to fulfil the task of capturing photographs that reflect their experiences of remaining on campus during recess.

In the next workshop, a slightly different guide was used to analyse the photographs. Although they are different, SHOWed and PHOTO (discussed next) intertwine because they together provide a framework for thinking about photography before-, during-, and after the photos are taken.

3.4.4 Third workshop

The co-researchers shared their unique experiences about remaining behind on campus during university recess via photo illustrations (with captions) and spoken narratives. The acronym PHOTO, as explained by Hussey (2006), was utilised to analyse each individual photo captured by the co-researchers. During the dialogue session, the PHOTO acronym was used to discuss the photos:

- P – Describe your **P**icture?
- H – What is **H**appening in your picture?
- O – Why did you take a picture **O**f this?
- T – What does this picture **T**ell us about your experience of residing on campus during university recess?
- O – How can this picture provide **O**pportunities for us to improve the student experience and contribute towards policymaking?

Thereafter, co-researchers each selected three to five of their photos that they found most significant for answering the research question. The co-researchers, thus, set aside photographs with similar meaning and context and assigned a theme. Thereafter, the photographs that did not fit in any context were set aside and voted for by all co-researchers. Those with majority votes were prioritised and assigned a theme as voted

by everybody and included for exhibition. Throughout the process, we kept in mind that every VOICE (Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience) matters (Jongeling *et al.*, 2016:93). As the researcher and facilitator, I assisted in analysing content and context. General themes were identified from the collective photographs and testimonies (Sutton-Brown, 2014:177). This assisted in finding differences and similarities between the photos (Boonzaier & Mhkize, 2018:88). Table 3.2 illustrates the themes as discussed by the co-researchers.

Table 3.2: Themes according to photographic experiences of co-researchers

Themes:
1. Sharing personal space
2. Diversity
3. Hygiene
4. Noise levels
5. Isolation and loneliness
6. Support services and structures
7. Assistance with moving
8. Access to campus facilities
9. Access to healthcare services
10. Security
11. Personal safety
12. Food security
13. Character building and personal development

These themes were grouped into four broader thematic clusters for the exhibition and will be discussed as such in Chapters 4 and 5. During the workshop, the co-researchers planned the structure of exhibiting and publishing photographs. Due to the COVID-19

pandemic and its restrictions, it was difficult to reach a final conclusion about the venue of the exhibition and whether to have the exhibition in person or online. However, it was decided that the physical exhibition should still occur, with limited attendance numbers and strict adherence to COVID-19 restrictions, if possible. In the end, a virtual exhibition method was considered but not opted for. The co-researchers continued to generate creative ideas about how they wished their work to be exhibited and they decided which gatekeepers and relevant departments to invite to the exhibition. It was noted that the guest list should include people who have the power and authority to make decisions to bring about policy change. In the end, some relevant stakeholders with power and authority at the institution did manage to attend the exhibition, and showed interest in the exhibited photographs by engaging with the co-researchers on the floor and requesting that I make my findings available for review once the academic purpose has been achieved.

3.4.5 Public exhibition

This was the final and closing step. A physical exhibition was planned at the research site by researcher and the co-researchers. The co-researchers all preferred a face-to-face exhibition over an online one, and to be present on the day. They were contacted and informed of the event in good time. The exhibition took place on 04 April 2022 at the Francois Retief Building, as it had the most walk-ins and exposure to stakeholders. The exhibition occurred two years after the third workshop, in order to allow time to print the photographs, make logistic arrangements and obtain permission and approval from the faculty. The exhibition took place in the COVID-19 pandemic. The students and viewers could, thus, still relate to the exhibited photographs and give feedback on the photos. This timeframe of the COVID-19 pandemic created a broader dialogue during the viewing.

There was a visitors' book in which viewers could record their views and opinions after viewing the photo exhibition (refer to Addendum C). The visitors' book that was present on the day the photos were exhibited, in which viewers recorded their views and opinions, contributed to enriching the data. The voluntary input from the viewers after they had viewed the photographs at the exhibition was considered as implied consent. Nobody

wrote their names next to their comments or provided any information that could identify the commenters.

Additionally, there was a pamphlet for viewers at the entrance, containing information about the study. Co-researchers were present to take questions and provide feedback.

The raw data collected from workshops and training sessions and the exhibition were stored in a dated, sealed envelope and locked in a safe. The audio recordings from sessions were saved on a memory stick with a password, transcribed and stored on an encrypted hard drive. Recordings collected from workshops and sessions will be deleted from the electronic original devices once transcribed and recorded in the dissertation. The data will be kept for five years to enable auditing, if necessary, or checking when disseminating the research.

3.5 Data analysis

All workshop discussions were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed by myself; the transcriptions supplemented the data collected through the photographs. All data collected from workshops and discussions were transcribed by listening to the recordings and typing it in a Microsoft Word document, in English, in preparation for data for analysis. The positive pronouns that the co-researchers chose to describe themselves during the opening of the first workshop were used as pseudonyms.

In qualitative studies, data analysis involves the systematic searching, organising, and categorising of data collected via interview transcripts, observation notes or other non-textual material, utilised by the researcher to answer the research question and increase their understanding of the phenomenon (Wong, 2008:14). It includes what was seen or heard in common words and themes, what was collected, and what was thought of (Maree, 2019:124). However, because this study was participatory, we essentially analysed data throughout the workshops and sessions. For example, co-coding with the research participants was done as the photographs were being discussed. These images were discussed within the group, as metaphors for their life situations, experiences, and/or emotions; each co-researcher captioned their selected images, which were later

categorised into various themes. This was done by grouping photos that addressed similar issues. The co-researchers' verbal interpretations of the images were therefore of importance in achieving a deeper understanding of the rich symbolic meaning(s) of photos (Woodgate *et al.*, 2017:3).

As such, a reflexive thematic analysis process was used in this study (Alhojailan, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Different themes for the exhibition and the narrative layouts were identified after the photograph grouping exercise described above. The grouping of photographs assisted in finding differences and similarities between the photos (Boonzaier & Mhkize, 2018:88).

Figure 3.1 was adopted and incooperated as a guideline for this study. It lead me to Figure 3.4 (Wong, 2008:15), which was adapted to analyse the data collected by the co-researchers.

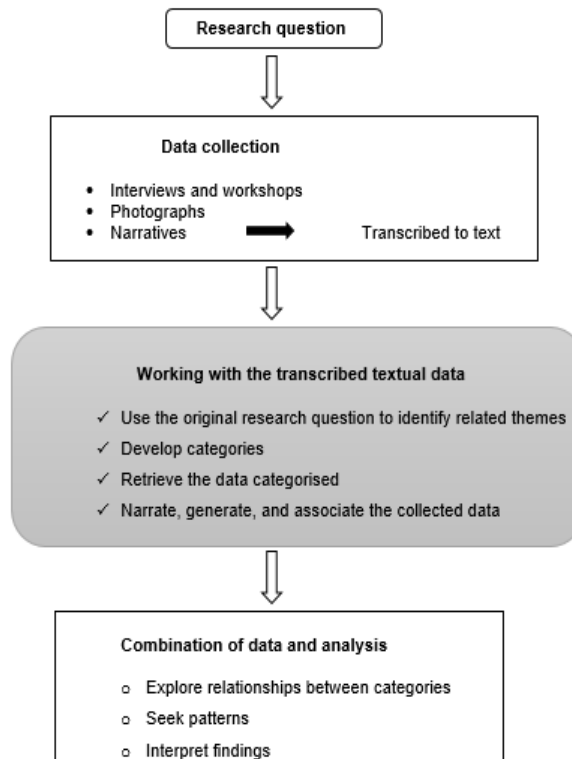


Figure 3.4: Process of data analysis

Source: Wong (2008:15)

Reflection and data analysis occurred continually and throughout the study, not only at the end of the data collected, as the study was emergent.

It is important to note that there were different levels of analysis. Whilst most of the data was collectively analysed in group settings during the third workshop, other data was analysed by myself, outside of the workshops. For example, all participants were involved in interpreting their drawings and photographs, and the focus group discussions also served as a space for them to reflect on the narratives that they created through their individual photo stories. However, the data gathered through the exhibition visitors book was loosely analysed by myself only. Ultimately, I integrated the separate sets of analysed data.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Before the commencement of data collection, ethical clearance was requested and granted for this study, and permission was obtained from all relevant gatekeepers (refer to section 1.11 for details). Participatory research indicated an augmentation view to ethics by incorporating virtue- and principle-based approaches (Resnik, 2012:335).

3.6.1 Principle-based approach

A principle-based approach was incorporated to guide the responsibilities and behaviour to be followed when making collaborative decisions (Resnik, 2012:335). As a guideline, the Belmont Report was applied, which honoured beneficence, respect for human rights and justice (Brothers *et al.*, 2019; Kang & Hwang, 2021; Millum, 2020; Polit & Beck, 2017:139–142; White, 2020:20–22). Figure 3.5 is an illustration of the principles applied in the study and the way they were applied.

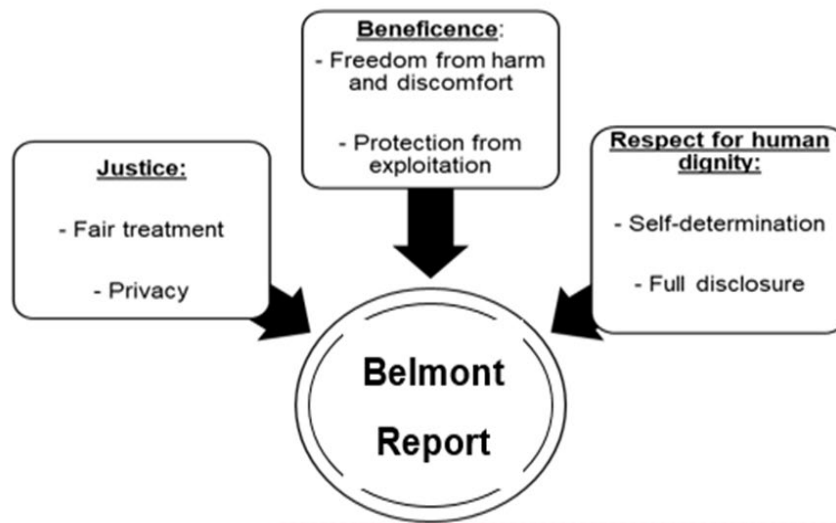


Figure 3.5: Belmont principles adopted in the study

Source: Compiled from Polit and Beck (2017:139–142)

The figure illustrates that each principle protects certain human rights. The three principles and respective human rights will subsequently be discussed.

3.6.1.1 Beneficence

Beneficence protects persons from harm and discomfort as well as exploitation. The right to freedom from harm and discomfort, together with the right to protection from exploitation, were constantly reviewed and taken to consideration (Ross, 2017:327).

I applied the beneficence principle by seeking to minimise harm and maximise benefits (Anabo *et al.*, 2019:144; Brothers *et al.*, 2019:167; Polit & Beck, 2017:139). The right to freedom from harm and discomfort, together with the right to protection from exploitation, were constantly reviewed and taken to consideration (Ross, 2017:327).

Co-researchers were protected from physical harm by adhering to all COVID-19 protocols and regulations. All sessions occurred on campus or at facilities in close proximity to the campus, and refreshment breaks were taken during all sessions and workshops, for the sake of comfort. A psychology professional was arranged on campus in case a co-researcher experienced emotional triggers and stimulation. The co-researchers incurred no costs; thus, financial harm was eliminated.

All co-researchers were given an equal voice in this research. There was no power imbalance as the co-researchers were my age, and I do not have extensive research knowledge and experience yet, so I did not appear as supernumerary. In this co-creation of knowledge, everyone who participated was acknowledged for their contribution to the study.

3.6.1.2 *Respect for human dignity*

The right to full disclosure and self-determination were embraced under the principle of respect for human dignity (Polit & Beck, 2017:140–141). A continuing legal process, including potential risks and benefits, where co-researchers were enabled to voluntarily decide whether to participate as a research subject or not, was applied before any research commenced and continued throughout the study (Nnebue, 2016:5). Before the study commenced, the co-researchers were fully informed about the research; questions were invited before they were requested to give consent. A full disclosure process was followed. The co-researchers volunteered to take part in the study and to exhibit and publish the photographs (refer to Addendum A). An information flyer (refer to Addendum D), which the co-researchers kept, accompanied the consent form. During the study, informed consent was also obtained before any external person, object, or place that was photographed (refer to Addendum A). Consent was constantly revised and applied as the study unfolded and issues emerged, thus, making use of process consent (Polit & Beck, 2021:138). This collaborative and transactional approach to consent was deemed suited for participatory research. The data collection process commenced immediately after all voluntary consent had been obtained. Co-researchers were informed that they could withdraw from participation without negative consequences. Lastly, co-researchers were not informed beforehand about the refreshments.

3.6.1.3 *Justice*

The principle of justice protects the rights to fair treatment and to privacy (Polit & Beck, 2017:138). Anabo *et al.* (2019:146) define justice as a fair dissemination of the risks and benefits of research and epitomises its application in the selection of subjects. Co-

researchers were selected fairly and made aware that participation was voluntary. Withdrawal at any research stage was possible without negative consequences. All the co-researchers were treated equally, and their privacy was respected. Discrimination against any age, gender, race, religion, or language was prohibited.

Co-researchers in a photovoice project are known as they participate in the dissemination of the research findings, and therefore their privacy was respected according to their expressed needs. As mentioned in section 1.11, anonymity and confidentiality principles play out differently in participatory research. The co-researchers were alerted from the onset that their voices, faces and general identities would be revealed in this study. This was understood and it was emphasised that, especially on the exhibition day, they would be present on the floor to interact and discuss their photographs with stakeholders and passing viewers. However, I ensured that, in recordings and transcriptions, the co-researchers were referred to by pseudonyms and not their real names from the commencement of the study. To maintain confidentiality, the purpose was to keep photographic material for the public exhibition and academic dissemination. Audio recordings and raw data, however, will be destroyed after the academic purpose has been achieved.

3.6.2 Virtue-based approach

A virtue-based approach speaks to the moral character of those involved in research (Resnik, 2012:333). Virtue-based ethics is not linked to any ethical rules; however, it is based on a person's development and sense of humanity around others. This participatory research was guided by a collaborative approach to ethics, thus, value-based ethics was pursued, as embodied in the 7 Cs, namely, communication, collaboration, commitment, coaching, critical and self-critical attitudes, competence, and compromise. The 7 Cs are illustrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: The 7 Cs of value-based ethics

Values	Description
Communication	Communication with one another and everybody involved in the project, to build trusting relationships.
Collaboration	Collaboration by students in different faculty fields and skilled people, for example the supervisor from the Nursing school and the co-supervisor who specialises in photovoice.
Commitment	Commitment towards the project, oneself, and scheduled times.
Coaching	Coaching one another within the project and during workshops to generate knowledge.
Critical and self-critical attitude	A critical and self-critical attitude is essential to acknowledge collaboration in this study. Every voice matters.
Competence	Competence in the facilitation of the workshops by the researcher and co-researchers in operating the cameras.
Compromise	Compromise by all involved to enable full participation, collaboration, and transformation.
<i>Character building</i> emerged through application of the values.	

Source: Compiled from Zuber-Skerritt (2018:519) and Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.* (2015:87–88)

The co-researchers held one another accountable to these shared values throughout the research. Ultimately, as exponents in participatory research explain, character building emerged (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:87–88). Towards the end of the research, the co-researchers reflected and acknowledged how the challenges they had experienced contributed to their personal growth and development (refer to section 4.3.4.).

3.6.3 Risk/benefit ratio

The risk/benefit ratio is not applicable in participatory research, nor for this study, because everybody was in touch and had a platform to verbalise. All participants were co-researchers in conducting the study, hence, there was no power imbalance. The study did not pose any serious risks or have concrete benefits. However, photovoice, as a method, has its own advantages and challenges, which were elaborated upon in section 3.3.1.

3.7 Rigor of the research

In participatory studies, the co-researchers are collectively responsible for the rigor of the project. The focus is on authenticity, rather than taking measures to ensure trustworthiness. Authenticity was consequently the main pillar of rigor in this study, guided by the 3 Rs, namely relationship, reflection, and recognition (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013:6; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018:519).

The workshops encouraged a space for *relationship* forming amongst co-researchers, which made it possible for us to collaborate effectively. These sessions enabled co-researchers to get to know one another on a deeper level, trust each other and realise the general similarities between and differences amongst themselves. While getting to know each other, a holistic approach to the study was maintained (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015: 85). Not only did the co-researchers establish relationships within the group, but we also developed the ability to share experiences publicly, thus, extending our relationship to the outer community.

Reflection continuously took place amongst the co-researchers during the workshops. By sharing their different experiences and reflecting amongst one another, deeper knowledge about themselves and the community was created (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:85). Transformation occurred as the co-researchers progressively engaged in deeper reflection and sharing. Furthermore, personal transformation occurred in the co-researchers themselves when they realised their experiences and acknowledged their personal strengths during the recess times. Not only was it transformative for them, but

also for others we engaged with, who recognised common experiences. In addition, there was the beauty of acknowledging the differences in experiences. Furthermore, this individual and collaborative transformation reached out externally to relevant stakeholders and fellow students through the exhibition when co-researchers shared their experiences through photographs. Dialogues were created and awareness was raised.

I acted professionally and encouraged democratic participation and decision-making. I constantly kept in mind that the study was about co-creation of knowledge – there was no power imbalance. This transformative process encouraged assertiveness by individuals and provided them with “a voice”, which enabled them to have an influence on change and development in their setting (Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.*, 2015:86). Personal, professional, institutional, and organisational and community transformation occurred in this study through reflection (Wood, 2020:10–11).

Photovoice promoted critical thinking skills, which were essential during critical reflection. Zuber-Skerritt, Wood *et al.* (2015:85) declare that it is essential that critical reflection should take place in participatory research if transformational learning is to occur. During the photovoice process, the co-researchers first reflected on the study purpose, which included the concepts and the title of the study. Thereafter, they discussed and reflected on the collected photographs. These images were discussed with the group as metaphors for their life situations, experiences, and/or emotions, and were categorised. Photos were grouped according to themes, and every co-researcher captioned their selected images. The co-researchers' verbal interpretations of the images were useful to help them achieve a deeper understanding of the rich, symbolic meaning(s) of photos (Woodgate *et al.*, 2017:3). To encourage social transformation and recommendations, the co-researchers reflected on their observations and experiences of the overall study as compiled into a feedback document through interviews (refer to Addendum E).

Every co-researcher's work was celebrated, acknowledged, and *recognised*. This was not only done individually, but also amongst one another. By doing so, a door for further

research was opened (Zuber-Skerrit, Wood *et al.*, 2015:86). Wider recognition took place in the form of the public display of photographs and giving co-researchers the opportunity to explain their experiences to stakeholders. In return, the viewers wrote feedback in the visitors' book at the exhibition (refer to Addendum C for these recorded comments.) This event turned the co-researchers into vital elements of inclusion in policy production and making recommendations (Budig *et al.*, 2018:4).

3.8 Effects of COVID-19 on the research process

When the workshops of this study were held, it was regulated that only 50 students could be together in a closed space, they had to be masked continuously, a 1.5 metre social distance had to be maintained between students, and sanitising had to take place before entering the premises, during the workshops and after the workshops. During that time, only health sciences students who were vaccinated could access campus. Matters changed as the study progressed and lockdown levels were relaxed. Students from other departments returned and could access campus, the social distancing rule decreased to 1 metre between persons and greater numbers were allowed in closed spaces. Some regulations stayed the same throughout the study, for example, students had to be fully vaccinated to gain access to campus. Secondly, the requirement to sanitise was still applicable, and health sciences students still resided on campus during university recess, and they continued to adhere to these protocols and regulations. I took advantage of the lifting of COVID-19 rules and regulations by presenting the exhibition face-to-face. This study is still relevant, despite the changed regulations, as students still reside in recess accommodations, for various reasons.

3.9 Summary

Answering the research question and realising the purpose of the study, which was to explore experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess, required the application of specific tools and procedures to collect and analyse data. This chapter explained the research methodology, tools and procedures that were

utilised, as well as the research paradigm, study design, population, sampling, data collection and data analysis processes. Furthermore, an in-depth explanation of the ethical considerations was given. Themes emerged during the data analysis process, as guided by the research question, and that guided the data categorisation. The next chapter will discuss these themes and other findings of the study. Zuber-Skerritt (2015:7) describe participatory research as a process that has a focus on human self-determination, development of critical awareness, and positive social change. This can be achieved on either a personal, organisational, or structural transformational levels. In the findings, which will be discussed in the next chapter, the achievement of change across these dimensions will also be considered.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The lack of empirical knowledge regarding this study's topic, combined with my personal experience as an alumna nursing student and leader, served as the inspiration for this study. The ultimate reason for conducting the research was to explore potential avenues for policy improvement and raising awareness about this issue.

After receiving ethical approval as referred in section 1.11, I commenced to explore the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess at a specific campus. Qualitative data were collected in response to the research question:

What are the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university?

This chapter aims to address the research question by presenting and reflecting on the data obtained through the voices of the students, which were captured through photographs and narratives. The contextual background to the findings is provided first, followed by a presentation of the findings according to clustered themes. The theme of Sharing Personal Space will be explored, with subthemes Diversity, Hygiene, Noise Levels, Isolation and Loneliness, and the Effects of COVID-19. Additionally, the theme of Support Services and Structures will be discussed, encompassing subthemes Assistance with Moving, Access to Campus Facilities, and Access to Healthcare Services. The theme of Security will then be explored, highlighting subthemes of Personal Safety and Food Security. Finally, the chapter will delve into the Discovery of Character Building and Personal Development. The data will be presented thematically and triangulated with relevant literature before the emerging themes will be discussed in depth.

4.2 Contextual background to the findings

A contextual overview of the co-researchers and encounters with them during the three workshops will be presented to deepen understanding of the findings.

4.2.1 Contextual information about the participants

When the co-researchers contacted me to indicate their willingness to participate, I obtained basic background information about them, as portrayed in Table 3.1, and made logistical arrangements for the workshops.

The four co-researchers were all African women, representing different cultures and speaking different home languages. To ease the facilitation process, I inquired from the co-researchers whether they would be comfortable with English as a medium of communication. All co-researchers were competent in English and preferred it as a medium. Maximum variation was intended to be applied in this study, but was not possible, due to the limited number of co-researchers.

4.2.2 Summary of the workshop proceedings

To establish a comfortable environment and build rapport, I made a conscious effort to connect with the co-researchers on an equal level. I always wore casual clothes when we met, to put them at ease.

At the first workshop I introduced myself by my first name and shared my university background, to gain their trust and encourage openness (refer to section 3.4 for more information about the workshops and exhibition). The co-researchers were invited to voice their views and opinions throughout the study, as photovoice promotes. They were regularly reminded that their participation was voluntary, and that withdrawal would not have any consequences. Bold and Nice were anxious at first, expressing concern that data could be used against them if it were connected to them. However, I reassured them about confidentiality and use of pseudonyms in the reporting of the findings, which eased their minds, and they continued with participation in the study.

We sat around a table, shared our backgrounds and our university experiences thus far. To create a relaxed atmosphere, each co-researcher was asked to think of a pseudonym matching the first letter of their names, which they would be comfortable being called throughout the research process. The words that were chosen were Yesum, Indomitable,

Bold, and Nice. I also participated and used the word Patience, because of my patient character. Each of us elaborated on the reason for choosing the specific pseudonym as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Co-researchers' names and reasons for chosen pseudonym

Pseudonym	Co-researcher's motivation	Co-researcher's notable character from the interactions
Yesum	"I couldn't think of anything starting with a Y, I just made up Yesum which stands for awesome."	Yesum was humble in spirit. She was the most knowledgeable about the university and residence policies and protocols. Very straight, to the point and wanting precise directions.
Indomitable	"I chose Indomitable because I could not come up with a better name. I must be honest, Indomitable is not something that I am now but striving towards. I'm the eldest of three children."	Indomitable was very well spoken and outspoken. She took the lead in most decision-making processes, whilst also welcoming the input of other co-researchers.
Bold	"I am Bold and have always been."	Bold was quiet and only spoke when it was her turn or when requested to do so. She was, however, the most passionate about using her life's experiences to create change. I noted that she was most comfortable asking questions when she did not understand.
Nice	"I am the second child, only girl amongst four. I am considered to be the most Nice amongst them."	Nice was an extrovert and the funny member of the group. She volunteered to respond first in most cases. She was very helpful and handy in managing resources and ensuring health measures in the group.

It was interesting to note during the workshops how the pseudonyms suited their personalities and characters. **Yesum** proved to be a steadfast co-researcher, as her precise nature offered structure and direction for the rest of the group. She showed great interest in my story and verbalised that she was grateful for the platform, as she had been waiting for an opportunity to voice her experiences. She mentioned that this study was assisting her to do something good and to effect change before she graduated and left the university. She also voiced being grateful for this study, as it distracted her from the chaotic COVID-19 period and gave her a sense of belonging.

Indomitable voiced matters that the other co-researchers might have withheld. For instance, she expressed concern about exposure to SARS-COV- 2 and appeared anxious about it. Adherence to the COVID-19 protocols offered reassurance and progressively eased the co-researchers' uncertainties.

Bold was quiet though eager, and she asked questions when she did not understand or as the need arose. During the second workshop, Bold was distressed, as she was unfamiliar with the operation of a camera. We paused and spent more time educating her about the camera to boost her confidence. She was grateful for the assistance.

Nice provided comic relief during uncomfortable situations. She was health conscious and very helpful in ensuring that we adhered to COVID-19 protocols. For example, she constantly reminded the group to sanitise. Nice was also the person who assisted in tidying up after the workshops and gathering cameras.

In the third workshop and in the selection of the pictures, Indomitable was more outspoken and took the lead in the group. I, thus, kindly reminded the group that every voice counted and would be considered. All co-researchers followed the instructions and concepts during the sessions.

On completion of the workshops, the co-researchers verbalised that they had enjoyed participating in the study, and that it had been something they had never expected to enjoy as much as they did. All the co-researchers attended the exhibition. They showed great excitement to be there and interacted with the viewers. Nice mentioned that she

was honoured to see her photos on display and to have people engaging with what she was experiencing.

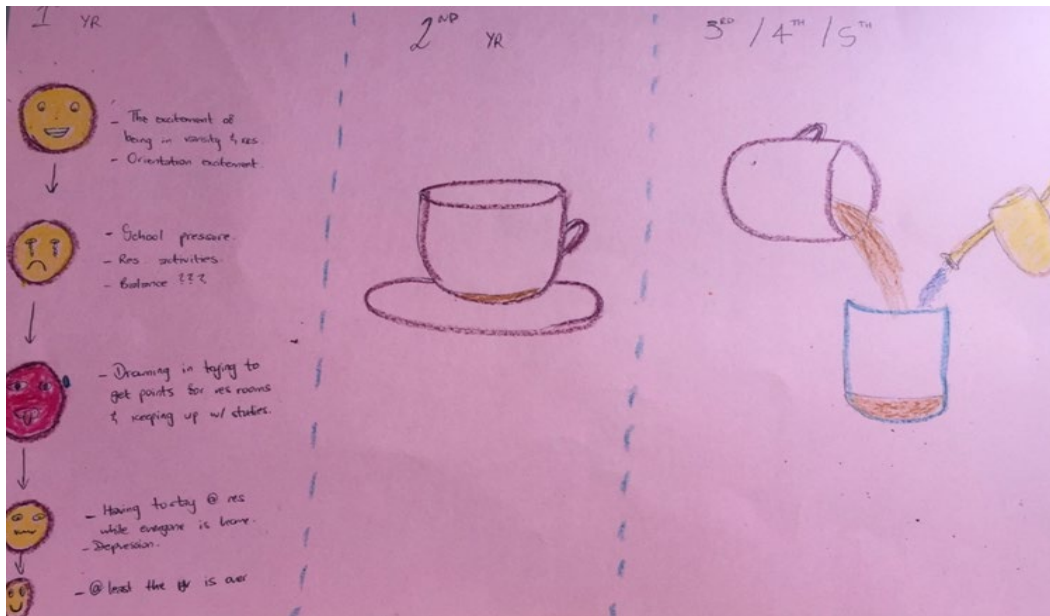
4.2.3 Drawings

In preparation for answering the research question via visual representation, coloured pens and papers were distributed to all co-researchers at the first workshop, to draw a sketch of university recess experiences. It was an activity that was intended to ease the environment, build trust and introduce the visual and reflective elements of the data collection process. This section will elaborate on the drawings.

Literat (2013:87) states that drawings can portray relationships between visual elements. Drawings, thus, create a medium of expression that is not always accessible via writing or speech. During the drawing time, interaction between us started developing as each expressed themselves uniquely through their colours and drawings. We, furthermore, presented ourselves by standing in front of other co-researchers and explaining the drawings. The concentration and enthusiasm were notable. At the end, the co-researchers verbalised that the activity had been fun.

The breaks between the various workshop activities served as opportunities for us to get further acquainted with one another through informal conversations about our drawings and experiences. These discussions made us feel more at ease– which helped establish rapport within the group as well. The drawings are subsequently displayed together with the supporting narratives of the respective co-researchers.

Yesum



For the first year I used emojis. It was so exciting; I was shy and an introvert. But I decided I am going to start on a clean slate and be an extrovert. But as the studying continued, there are res [residence] meetings, studying and crying. Between the year, there was a difficulty of roommate problems and moving in and outside the residence during recess. The frustration of seeing everybody being on holiday, but you have to wake up, study and sleep and do it over again. Second year, the cup is very empty. I was empty because of the frustration of school and res. I was losing myself, becoming a puppet. In my third and fourth year, I realised I should start filling my cup to pour over into others' lives. I decided to take charge over my res life and accept my circumstances.

Figure 4.1: Yesum's drawing and explanation

Indomitable



I drew a mind map. In the middle are the similarities. Unlike most of the people here, I never had sunshine. It's still bad. I made the mistake of preparing for university life by watching cheesy American videos. I expected my residence to be the same as those shown there. Fancy furniture and all. To come here and realise res is still the real life, was disappointing. At first, I thought that everyone is worthless in res and I hate everybody. But during the lockdown I realised I was imposing my thoughts and expectations on everybody and having to realise that it made res life easier. The residence assistants are not as helpful as they should be, they are apathetic. I also missed the first few days during recess. I have a distinct memory when I moved in and I was with my father, the RA who approached us was about to tell us something and another kid came. She just said something we did not know what it was, and she left. I never knew anything from then and had to ask everybody around. The noise during recess I did not appreciate. The pillow illustrates that I was taken out of my comfort zone. During recess I participated in Stagedoor [a student musical performance], which was very nice. Here, sometimes I battle with food security. So, during recess I thought I would be able to participate in these transformation sessions when they have this American person who will be talking about how to be a better person, but I could never as I was always in class.

Figure 4.2: Indomitable's drawing and explanation

Bold



My colours are in a rainbow illustration. It goes from dark to light thus explaining my ups and downs. When I came here, it was still during university recess, and I missed the orientation. I missed everything, communications. I had to figure my way out, but the RA's helped out. Res during recess is a very big adaptation. It is not like at home, there is nobody checking up on you, doing your laundry, help with dishes. Living with a roommate was difficult. Culturally, she is Coloured. Also, she studies better during the day and I better during the night. So, I would feel the pressure when she studied during the day. I went to Block A, I do not know if you are familiar with the people. They assist you with study methods, try to help you find your own way. So, they told me to do things at my own pace. I am a very private person in terms of bathing and cooking, sometimes people look too much, and she liked to ask why am I doing this and that? Academically, it's nothing like matric. A huge change over a short period of time. Also, I enjoyed the res spirit.

Figure 4.3: Bold's drawing and explanation

Nice



My diagram is of seasons. Winter, brown and dusty. When I first started at res it was dry. It was difficult to adapt during holiday period as I had to share with a roommate whom I do not know their values, morals, and beliefs. It was my first time having a roommate. The curfew was also difficult to adapt to. Autumn, things were shaking off and a bit of light was coming. Spring came along, midyear! It was a bit better because I knew the procedures, the laundry times and learnt how to adapt to roommates. I adapted to meetings, but they were long, I had to learn time management. Summer, the most exciting time. There were flowers. I was well adapted and could juggle between res activities. Throughout the process I learnt to accept that I have to stay behind during university recess, even if it was difficult. It is in June and December. It was tough. I told myself it's okay, it has to be done.

Figure 4.4: Bold's drawing and explanation

The researcher is positioned as a listener when the co-researchers present their drawings (Literat, 2013:94; Jellema *et al.*, 2022:2–4). This is important, as the drawing is a subjective product of the co-researcher and the perceptions, and their lived experiences will, thus, be explained best by the co-researcher themselves. By doing so, I could develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of the drawings. We learn from these

drawings and captions that there is a great deal of emotion and feelings experienced by students during their university years and recess period. Even though the experiences differ, they identified and agreed on common challenges, for example, when the co-researchers collaboratively selected the themes that they wished to exhibit.

4.3 Findings

In a typical photovoice study, each co-researcher produces their own narrative by selecting a limited number of photographs in accordance with a corresponding storyboard (Walker & Mathebula, 2020:198–200). For example, the collection could take the form of a series of six or more photos that reflected their individual experience of remaining on campus during recess. In this study, this was done differently. Instead of presenting each person's photo essay individually, it is presented according to the themes that were created collectively. This was done to emphasise the solidarity between the co-researchers and to express that we have one voice with the common purpose of raising awareness. Refer to section 3.4.4 for an elaboration on the selection of photographs and thematic analysis. These themes were discussed and agreed upon by all of us to be displayed and exhibited for public viewing. The collectively chosen themes were clustered for purposes of discussion as clarified in Table 4.2. All the captured photographs, with their captions, of all the co-researchers are attached in Addendum F.

The findings in this chapter are, therefore, based not only on the photographs chaptered by the co-researchers, but also based on the data gathered through the drawings, discussions in workshops, and through the exhibition. It is important to reiterate that the themes were identified collectively and agreed and voted upon by the co-researchers. The visual drawings were electronically uploaded with permission, and feedback from the exhibition as recorded in the visitors' book, which was also transcribed and saved electronically (refer to Addendum C). As such, the chapter brings the various types of qualitative data together in this chapter. Quotes from the co-researchers' captions, and quotes from the feedback provided by viewers at the exhibition often accompany the explanations of the photographs (refer to Addendum F for a compilation of all photographs

taken by the co-researchers). The comments of the viewers will be distinguished by the letter “V” and their number in the visitors’ book. The data from the workshop recordings and visitors’ book are thus integrated in this chapter. Table 4.2. summarises the themes discussed in this chapter, alongside an indication of the sources of data referred to under each theme.

Table 4.2: Identified themes

Theme	Source of origin
4.3.1 Sharing personal space 4.3.1.1 Diversity 4.3.1.2 Hygiene 4.3.1.3 Noise levels 4.3.1.4 Isolation and loneliness 4.3.1.5 COVID-19 effects	Yesum, Nice, Indomitable, Bold, V4, V6, V15, V23, V27, V41, V43 and V45.
4.3.2 Support services and structures 4.3.2.1 Assistance with moving 4.3.2.2 Access to campus facilities 4.3.2.3 Access to healthcare services	Yesum, Nice, Indomitable, Bold, V1, V26 and V27.
4.3.3 Security 4.3.3.1 Personal safety 4.3.3.2 Food security	Nice, Bold, Yesum, Indomitable, V17 and V33.
4.3.4 Character building and personal development	Nice and Bold.

The themes will be discussed and supplemented with data in the form of photo captions, and excerpts from workshop discussions and visitors’ book transcriptions.

4.3.1 Sharing personal space

Sharing of personal space is inevitable when someone lives in a residence during their undergraduate years. The theme of sharing personal space will be explored, with subthemes diversity, hygiene, noise levels, isolation and loneliness, and the effects of COVID-19.

Based on my experience in the student community when I lived in a residence, a student usually shares a room with another unless they acquire privileges such as serving on a residence committee or being a top academic performer. In that case, a student could be allocated one of the few private rooms in the residence.

Students are allocated to share their personal space with total strangers, whom they must get acquainted with. As Yesum mentioned, she was an introvert, which made it challenging to have a roommate. She returned to the room tired, and the extrovert roommate wanted to talk the whole time. When she did not talk, the person thought she had a negative attitude. Nice similarly elaborated:

At times, with us doing practical work during recess and a roommate who is always in the room due to their own reasons, you become uncomfortable because they are always there and you not. I mean you are sharing your space with a stranger you just met on that day (Nice).

Yesum and Nice highlighted that sharing their personal space contributed towards “uncomfortable discomfort”. Yesum captured a photograph (Figure 4.5) to illustrate her perspective on the enjoyment of her personal space and how it allowed her the flexibility to create a homely environment when she was alone in her room and not sharing it with another student.



At least, during this time, I can have some privacy and not share a room with anyone. Yes, both beds are mine. The aim was to make the room “homely” since I could not go home (Yesum).

Figure 4.5: Yesum’s photo representing sharing

Students value their personal space (Barsukova *et al.*, 2015:293–294). The co-researchers acknowledged that everybody had different personalities and it became a challenge when ones’ roommate did not meet your personality expectations. If the roommate is enrolled for a different course or in a different year, one can be disappointed, considering the differences in the academic calendar and social status, and if the other is provided with more vacation time or breaks. V41 stated that, as a res student themselves, they all had experience of segregation, because one feels left out every time other students go home, and you cannot because of personal reasons. Furthermore, V41 emphasised that they even did not enjoy staying with a student that is in a lower year in their current studies than they were, as they do things differently. For example, a 3rd year living with a 2nd year.

Bold said that she enjoyed her space and being alone during the recess times. Having a roommate would, thus, interfere with her personal time and space. Welsch *et al.* (2019:1) explain that discomfort is often caused by violations of personal space, and that this discomfort is experienced immediately after one’s personal space is invaded. On the other hand, communal living is beneficial, as it decreases isolation by reducing feelings of loneliness, enhances residents’ quality of life, improves physical and mental health,

facilitates mutual support and a sense of community (Carrere *et al.*, 2020:2; Schmidt, 2020:2–4; Worsley *et al.*, 2021b:9).

It can, therefore, be argued that having a roommate during the recess period, especially if the roommate is a stranger, increases the need for personal space. There are times where one is fortunate not to be allocated a roommate at all, or if one is allocated a familiar person. In such cases, the co-researchers verbalised it to be enlightening and relieving. However, we live in a diversified country with a large population, and this diversity cannot be ignored.

4.3.1.1 Diversity

Students from diverse backgrounds choose to stay in on-campus residences during university recess for various reasons. During their stay, they are required to adapt to the specific values, rules, and protocols of the residence they are residing in. It also offers students an opportunity to meet and holistically interact with others as they live together.

According to Trentham *et al.* (2020:6), it is crucial to understand how we perceive diversity among our peers. This diversity can encompass factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, abilities, as well as students speaking different languages and pursuing different courses of study. The ability of students to adjust and settle into the on-campus residence appears to depend on their individual personalities and character traits. Bold explained:

For me it is a bit easier because I am a social butterfly. I have always been open to learn diversity (Bold).

When students feel at home amongst others it creates a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Dutta *et al.* (2021:194) emphasise that a sense of belonging and safety are prerequisites to a student's capability to learn and progress throughout their university experience. This suggests that institutions must have hearty policies to address student belonging and issues of discrimination.

We hereby learn that students do not always welcome diversity openly and are not always comfortable with different people around them. For instance, different students have different hygiene practices, however not all practices are accommodating to everyone.

4.3.1.2 Hygiene

From my personal experience, hygiene has always been one of the major problems in residences during university recess. Three co-researchers reported that the cleaning services were inadequate during university recess:

The people leave their food to rot in the kitchen when they go home after writing ... Decreased cleaning services (Nice).

Nobody takes care of the refuse removal (Bold).

Bathrooms run out of toilet paper and are less maintained (Yesum).

The viewers at the exhibition also seemed to be very intrigued by the photographs relating to hygiene in residences during recess. They related to the photographs and commented that hygiene was very problematic and rarely monitored during recess and could become unbearable (V27).

I resonate with the story about hygiene. At my res we ran out of toilet paper for the entire weekend. It was so frustrating because now we had to take out the little money we had and buy toilet paper (V23).

Although the number of universities and allocation of resources increased notably over the years, sanitary and hygiene facilities still need to be improved (Kabiri *et al.*, 2021:15). Co-researchers missed the feeling of being in an environment that was clean and neat. It is also evident that, over the years, there has been little improvement relating to hygiene in residences during university recess.

During this time, students often observed variations in lifestyles and approaches to various activities among their peers. Some of these differences were not perceived positively, such as unhygienic practices and excessive noise levels during the recess

period. These observations are influenced by the diverse personalities of the students and will be discussed further in the next section.

4.3.1.3 Noise levels

During the workshops, the co-researchers seemed to be most concerned by the noise levels during university recess, though some co-researchers verbalised having enjoyed the quiet time and environment. Nice mentioned that it was better during recess because fewer people were usually around. In contrast, Yesum stated,

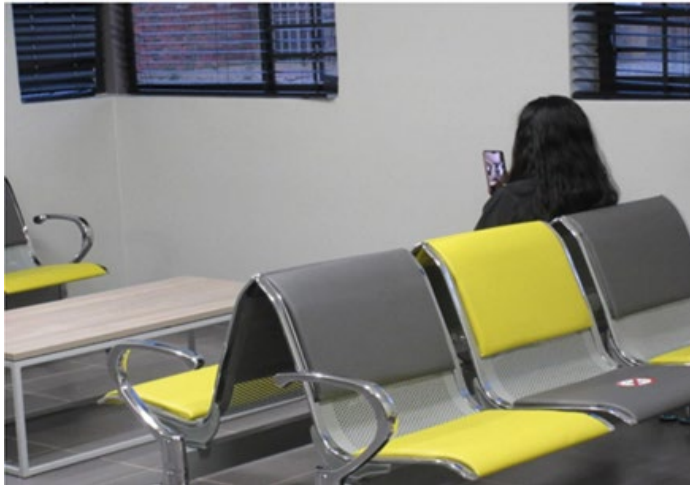
There are first years who sing until July. So, you are fighting a losing battle. In addition, there is Mangaung stadium that hosts a concert every Friday, busting your windows.

It was noted that discomfort due to noise was not only caused by internal students, but also by external social events that were hosted near the campus. Depending on the capacity of the residence, there seemed to be a noise problem during university recess, as students and viewers raised it. However, some argued that it gets quiet during recess, and they enjoyed the quiet times, and used it as a time for reflection. Yesum mentioned that she enjoyed the peace on campus, when she could take a walk and relax, especially at the Bridge (area for shops and restaurants).

Thattai *et al.* (2017:1) state that noise has both direct and indirect special effects, which affect our health and could make our surroundings miserable. Chere and Kirkham (2021:3) report that it is evident from research that environmental and surrounding noise influences learning. In support of the literature and photographs exhibited that referred to noise, a viewer said,

I was also a medical student at the research site. Tough to always stay behind. I had a huge problem with noise, quiet spaces are highly recommended from my side (V45).

Indomitable expressed her concerns about noise in a photograph (Figure 4.6).



Kitchen-cum-phonebooth: One would think that with less people around, the residence would be quiet enough to check in on Mom in peace. However, seeing as the neighbours sought to fill the silence themselves, yet it was quiet enough to hear the phone call next door, this student sought privacy in the kitchen (Indomitable).

Figure 4.6: Indomitable's photo referencing noise

Academic achievement is negatively impacted by noise, and it annoys some students.

During the COVID pandemic, there were fewer students on campus, and social events were prohibited and/or limited. This period was, thus, quiet, and peaceful for some students, although the quiet also caused feelings of loneliness and isolation.

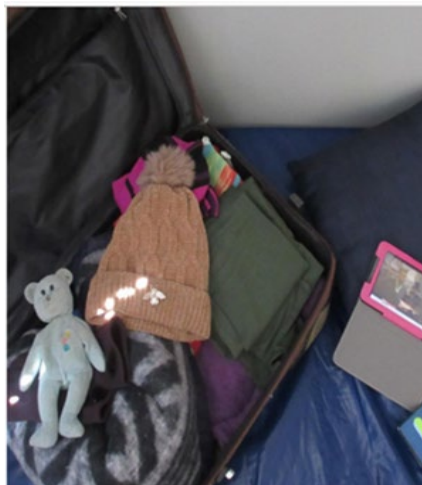
4.3.1.4 *Isolation and loneliness*

Students may experience feelings of isolation and loneliness at a tertiary institution, which affect their mental health. According to Worsley *et al.* (2021a:9) and Mzileni (2019:35), loneliness is common, and some students express unhappiness with the degree of assistance provided in residences in this regard. Contributors to mental health and psychosocial issues can be bereavement, family and relationship problems, peer pressure, trauma from the past and present related to crime and gender-based violence, anxiety and mood-related disorders, psychotic disorders, and substance abuse and dependence (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020:3).

Increased levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness seem to occur when students feel uncomfortable in their living space on campus because of exposing themselves to other,

unfamiliar students they do not know at all and have to share a room with (Candini *et al.*, 2021:2611–2612; Worsley *et al.*, 2021a:6). Students could feel isolated in the presence of others. However, roommates can be a source of practical and emotional support, which is extremely significant when students move away from their familiar, supportive family to attend university. Others, however, found it difficult to engage with their roommates because of disparate social preferences and styles or a lack of common interests (Worsley *et al.*, 2021a:9). It was noted by the researcher that the on-campus residence plays a significant role in supporting students' sense of belonging and/or success.

COVID-19 exacerbated feelings of loneliness and isolation, as the co-researchers narrated. As evidence, Indomitable photographed her feelings of isolation and loneliness.



She's the only one small enough to keep you sane. This childhood friend was a keen ear for the psychosis that streamed from her lonely owner's mouth (Indomitable).

Figure 4.7: Indomitable's photo representing loneliness

The childhood toy captured in the photograph in Figure 4.7 provided Indomitable with comfort and sanity during the recess. She did not have any other close contact or source of support to reach out to.

Students who do not utilise social and communal spaces experience higher levels of depression and loneliness (Rahman *et al.*, 2017:1–3). It is, therefore, beneficial for students to have strong social connections with other residence students, to alleviate depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness, as new friends can be sources of

enjoyment, provide both instrumental and emotional support and assist in adapting to the new residence environment (Diehl *et al.*, 2018:5; Worsley *et al.*, 2021c:6).

At the photovoice exhibition, viewers, including a parent and alumni, were able to relate to the feelings of loneliness and isolation expressed in this photograph, and stated,

As a parent I can relate because my daughter is also facing a problem of loneliness and of stress due to sometimes the roommate is going home and she is left alone in the room because she is living far from home. I think if they can do something about the students who will be staying at the residence when everyone is at home comfortably with their families. This loneliness causes them stress (V15).

Recess is a lonely time for students. An alumni noted that seeing this as an alumni and staff member, they were reminded of what students go through and how one can feel really isolated in this space (V6). The isolation is worsened by students having less access to resources during recess. Loneliness and isolation are not a recent problem but has always been problematic. According to the co-researchers, COVID-19 rules and regulations merely aggravated the feelings of loneliness.

Isolation and loneliness can affect different spheres of a student's life in disadvantageous ways, as the photograph captured in Figure 4.7 and comments suggest.

4.3.1.5 *Effects of COVID-19*

As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic its effects were a reality, not only in the requirement to observe protocols during data collection, but in the lives of the co-researchers. At the university where this study was conducted, COVID-19 compliance officers were appointed to advise and assist with compliance to regulations and protocols.

Various measures of prevention were implemented in accordance with the various levels, namely, primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention (Cass *et al.*, 2021:5-6; Walke *et al.*, 2020). Figure 4.8 illustrates the different levels of prevention.

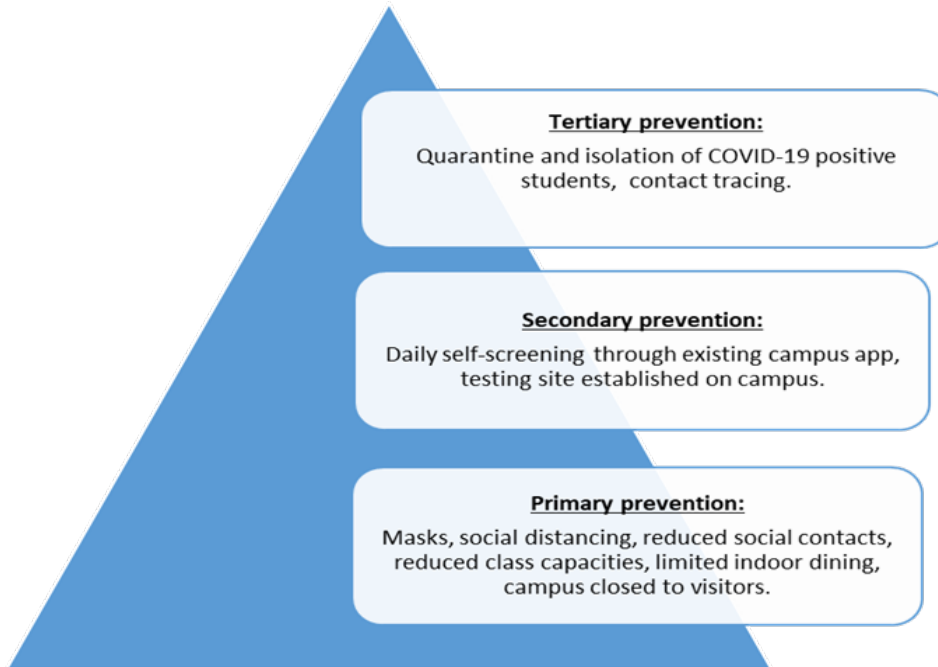


Figure 4.8: COVID-19 levels of prevention

Source: Cass *et al.* (2021:5–6); Walke *et al.* (2020)

The different prevention measures had to be adhered to by all of us to ensure our safety and health. For this study to be successful, we mainly applied primary and secondary prevention measures. Indomitable, however, believed that, during recess period, the students did not adhere to COVID-19 regulations. In her photograph she captured that everything looked good on the outside, however, there was little adherence to basic rules and protocols on the inside.



Health stops at the door: On the outside, this residence would impress the Health Minister himself, but within is blatant disregard for basic non-pharmaceutical interventions (Indomitable).

Figure 4.9: Indomitable’s photo representing the effects of COVID-19

COVID-19 had immeasurable effects during the recess period, even though rules were put in place. Yesum voiced during the discussions that she had always had a roommate until COVID-19 happened. When one of them was exposed to the virus, they had to be separated. She could not go home because it meant that she would have to quarantine on her return.

It was thus difficult (Yesum).

This period’s rules and regulations were a disadvantage to some students, and advantageous to others, as they mentioned that they were allocated a room for themselves, and they enjoyed the privacy. Yesum stated she was allocated a single room because of the COVID situation, and really enjoyed living alone. In support of her experience, V4 mentioned during the exhibition,

As a student staying in res on campus, I feel like I do not have privacy in my room. I sometimes need to study aloud when I revise my work but it’s hard to do so when I have a roommate. I must say, COVID regulations were not really OK, but the fact that we stayed alone was cool (V4).

This period, during which drastic protocols and measures had to be implemented for the wellbeing of the students and the community at large, was probably one-of-a-kind in the human lifetime. We were anxious and fearful. Co-researchers, together with viewers,

verbalised that their mental health had been greatly challenged during this time, as there were uncertainties of what was and what was to come. Knowing that COVID-19 rules and regulations were in place at the research site provided the students with ease and a sense of safety.

Students needed much support, especially those on campus during this period and the recess.

4.3.2 Support services and structures

Support services and structures play a crucial role in fostering a conducive and nurturing environment for students, and for facilitating their academic success, personal development, and overall well-being. Carrere *et al.* (2020:21) mention three types of social support, namely functional, emotional, and recreational support. Functional support includes activities such as housework, meal preparation, and care during illness. Second, emotional support involves having close friendships, listening, or providing support when someone has a personal problem. Lastly, recreational support is provided through different social activities organised by residents themselves. Support services and structures will be discussed in this section, as will the subthemes of assistance with moving, access to campus facilities, and access to healthcare services.

When students are not settled and comfortable in the on-campus accommodation during recess, their academic comfort is also disrupted. We learned that activities and areas of relief were offered to the students during recess, however, there is still much room for improvement of holistic student support. One of the areas they need assistance with is moving from their original residence to the recess accommodation. In addition to from transportation, students have a need for support in other domains too.

4.3.2.1 Assistance with moving

Problems with accommodation changes can lead to anxiety and stress for students, as Martin (2021:10) emphasises. The physical movement of belongings to another residence was quite problematic for the co-researchers. They claimed that they had to move heavy appliances and large pieces of luggage which was beyond their strength. Nice explained:

I had to take my own fridge. My hands could not take it. I have a massive fridge and I had to carry it down alone, down the stairs. That was the last time I moved the fridge out (Nice).

V26 wrote in the visitors' book that,

As health sciences students we are expected to return earlier to school. We are allocated to different residences every time, sometimes the support structure provided is not enough or provided at all. I relate with both those. This tends to be problematic as a student because we can't settle into a residence knowing you might be told to move back to your own residence at any time. This also affects how one get comfortable academically (V26).

To provide support and raise awareness of this issue, Yesum captured the struggle of lack of assistance with moving with all your belongings in a photo (Figure 4.10).



I understand I have to stay behind during recess, but can I at least stick to one place? Moving around every now and then is like adding fuel to the blasting flames of emotions and thoughts already going on in my mind (Yesum).

Figure 4.10: Yesum's photo representing moving

Their lack of physical strength and inability to move large appliances put the co-researchers at a disadvantage when they had to move physical objects that were heavy and burdensome.

V27 commented that they related with the struggles the co-researchers experienced when they had to move to other residences. It was exhausting and mentally taxing for them to accomplish, especially in the absence of support or proper consideration by the university.

Despite these struggles, co-researchers also mentioned that they received transportation assistance from the Housing and Residence Affairs department, which helped them move their belongings during that time. Nice captured the transportation assistance provided during the time of recess in a photo (Figure 4.11). This support, they mentioned, was a relief, and they were grateful for it.



Minister of Transport from Res to Res (Nice).

Figure 4.11: Nice’s photo representing moving

We took into consideration, furthermore, that every residence has its own culture and tradition. Physically and emotionally, students adapt and settle within those historical cultures and traditions in residences and make it a second home for them during recess. Nowok *et al.* (2018:870) declare that residence histories are thoroughly intertwined with personal satisfaction and wellbeing.

During university recess, when students are allocated accomodation, they physically move from their settlement with all their belongings, thereby leaving their culture behind and adapting to another of a new residence. When students leave their residences behind, their access to facilities and resources may change.

4.3.2.2 Access to campus facilities

Universities recruit students by showcasing their facilities and resources. Price *et al.* (2003:214) explain that, when universities recruit students, they market the availability and quality of accommodation, together with other accessible facilities (canteen, sport facilities, academic facilities etc.). According to Kim and Kim (2020:2), campus facilities have numerous functions, such as providing education for students, conducting research and providing facilities for students to rest. These facilities contribute to the quality of education rendered and the satisfaction of students, as the main consumers.

During recess times, co-researchers reported that these vital facilities were not operational – the very same facilities they were promised would be operational throughout to assist them. Indomitable voiced that,

You cannot really be social in the gazelles during holidays because some students will be studying there. And most gazelles are not homey, there are plastic chairs stacked in ours and a projector. You are not even allowed to touch the computer. I feel like the mere fact that you have a [Research site] student card means that you have access to the entire campus, why should I be treated like a prisoner of some section? (Indomitable).

Students lacking access to facilities was compared to imprisonment in their own territory. V1, a staff member at the university, reported that they saw that most students took a long time to gain access to some of the buildings, and that was wrong. Bold captured a photograph illustrating that the inaccessibility to facilities made her feel “imprisoned” and kept her away from home.



Is it my home away from home
or my home is just kept away
from me? (Bold)

Figure 4.12: Bold's photo regarding accessibility

Regarding these feelings of “imprisonment”, the co-researchers expressed further that the inaccessibility of facilities was a constant harsh reminder that they were not at home.

Students resided on campus during university recess, away from their homes, for different reasons. Health sciences students remained on campus mainly for academic purposes. If campus facilities are inaccessible to them, their stay on the campus is made difficult and, thus, their academic performance was disadvantaged. Additionally, the inaccessibility to campus healthcare also degrades the students' lives and experiences.

4.3.2.3 Access to healthcare services

On regular academic days, the on-campus healthcare facility operates during office hours, which are from Monday to Friday, 07:45 to 16:30. Services that are provided include General Practitioner/Family Physician consultations, Physiotherapy and Primary Health Care services (Research site, 2022). However, we noticed during discussions and feedback that we all had had experiences of being either sick or in need of medical attention during the university recess. During this time the on-campus health facility was closed or operated with restricted hours. One then had to seek medical attention externally – there is a public and private hospital near the campus – or, if you cannot afford medical attention, avoid it. Lacking funds, students rather self-medicate, and stay in residences until they heal, if it is a minor illness.

If you are sick, you are sick until you heal (Yesum).

Nice expressed the wish that they had standby health practitioners on campus at the research site, especially at night.

According to section 27 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) and the National Health Act 61 of 2003, access to healthcare is a constitutional right in South Africa. Everybody should have access to healthcare services and never be limited or denied it.

De Villiers (2021:3) emphasises that public health facilities are overburdened by diseases and challenges. This is a major concern, as the facilities are unable to accommodate the burden of demands. When students need medical attention during university recess, they seek help at external public or private health facilities – if they are financially well off. Those who seek public health assistance are likely to have to queue for long periods with other general patients, and could end up being seen only at a later stage, or never. While students wait for assistance, their valuable academic time goes to waste, as the time spent waiting could have been used for academic purposes. This delay in accessing healthcare services can impede students' progress and hinder their ability to manage their academic workload effectively. Some students do not have the financial capacity to seek private treatment, thus, they are forced to stay in residences and heal naturally. This contributes to feelings of loneliness and impairs their mental health.

For example, Yesum stated that she needed more emotional support during university recess and the times of COVID-19. In her pursuit of reaching for help, she contacted the student service helpline at the specific university. She verbalised that it was beneficial to her, and an effective means of support.

I reached to the 24-hour student helpline, 23:00 at night, but I did not have a proper conversation because I was crying. It was at the time where a lot of people were dying due to COVID and I was concerned about my parents. I spoke to the lady, read my Bible and felt a lot better (Yesum).

Yesum received the assistance she needed through the helpline, and it lightened her concerns. Her personal problems were listened to, and she was supported.

Support should, however, be holistic and not only concern one's emotional being. Safety is also a concern for students when have to go of the campus to seek help, especially at night. The general safety and security of the students was flagged as one of their major concerns.

4.3.3 Security

The theme of security referred to personal safety and food security. The literature reported on in section 2.3.1 highlighted and elaborated on the challenges related to safety and crime within residences for students overall. Pretorius and Blaauw (2020:51) refer to other issues, such as congestion in campus housing and rising crime rates observed in many higher education institutions, which are particularly troublesome due to their detrimental effects on students' wellbeing and academic performance.

Security needs are comprehensive, though co-researchers mainly referred to personal safety and food security.

4.3.3.1 Personal safety

Presently, students fear for their safety on campus. The co-researchers had very strong opinions about safety and security on campus during recess, based on their experiences and views.

Carrico (2016:49) argues that violent crimes occur are randomly and unpredictably. South Africa has, in recent years, experienced protests at universities due to gender-based violence, unaffordable registration fees and various other reasons. One of the biggest South African university protests was the #feesmustfall protest campaign (Dlamini & Olanrewaju, 2021:220). During these events, the safety of students could have been threatened and violated. There seems to be no relationship and trust between students and law enforcement regarding the latter fulfilling their protective duties.

During the discussion, the co-researchers expressed concerns about their isolation on campus during recess and expressed doubts about their safety. Bold mentioned that

there were multiple ways of ensuring protection on campus, for instance panic buttons and on-site security enforcement. In response, Nice asked another co-researcher:

Do you trust that the securities will come when you scream? I don't (Nice).

This question and its answer emphasised a distanced relationship between protection services and students. During the discussion, Nice mentioned examples of incidents where students' safety was threatened:

Sometimes, you are going to work and living with this strange person in the room you do not know what to leave on the table or hide. You are never sure! So I will prefer being in my room or rather move in some holiday res with my roommate
There was an incident in a residence I lived at where a guy swiped in a girl's res. He had a hoodie on and just walked past the security by the gate. Only when he was a bit further, the security realised and called him back. I mean, we do not know people's intentions. He might have even stolen the card somewhere (Nice).

In contrast, V33 mentioned that campus feels safer during recess, as you can see more familiar faces, and the security during recess was very good. Schafer *et al.* (2018:320) suggest that both protection services and local law enforcement should be trained in preparation for hazards and violent incidents. Furthermore, on-foot protection service visibility should be increased to patrol the campus.

Students do not only require physical safety for their wellbeing. Food security is also a crucial part of the student lives.

4.3.3.2 Food security

Food insecurity is the absence of food security or the lack of it (Sabi *et al.*, 2020:144). There are various food drives and initiatives at universities in South Africa, however, students still report experiencing food insecurity. According to Van den Berg and Raubenheimer (2015:165), food insecurity is more prevalent and severe at the university where this study took place than at universities in countries such as the United States and Australia. Each of the co-researchers emphasised their deep experiences and views relating to food security. Yesum and Bold agreed that they basically have survive on bread

and noodles. Putting a timeframe on survival on bread and noodles, Yesum stated that it might be for a whole month. In support, the other co-researchers voiced their experiences:

I really struggled with food security and other people around me also struggled (Indomitable).

I have always heard about these food drives and foodbanks, but I have never seen it. You hear about it especially during university normal days. During recess there is nothing! I do not know if we have to speak out about it but it just disappears. And when you move to some different res, the foodbank is only for those living in that res (Nice).



Believe it or not: these are my meals for the next three weeks. So much for being a “health science” student hey? (Yesum)

Figure 4.13: Yesum’s photo relating to food security

At the exhibition, most viewers spent the most time on the food insecurity photos and had questions about it on the floor.

During recess, they perceived that, when students do not have sufficient food, they underwent an unanticipated and uncontrollable starvation period. V17, who said they also had an underprivileged background, it really pained them that students who could not afford to return home for recess, had to suffer and starve, because they did not have

money for food either. They believed the university should change the policy of closing residences during recess.

Inaccessibility to campus venues and cafeterias are contributing factors for food insecurity. Even with established food drives, organisations, and foundations against student hunger at the research site, there is still an enormous need for food security. Whilst food security support programmes are available, there are social implications for those accepting the support. Sabi *et al.* (2018:15) indicate that some students are hesitant to sign up for the food security support programme because they believed that doing so would reveal their low socioeconomic level on campus and cause them to be stigmatised. Similarly, Indomitable mentioned that there was functional support in their residence during university recess through a foodbank. However, the protocols of the process, she felt, were belittling. She stated,

There is something like a foodbank in our residence and I went to the relevant person to go ask about it and hoping for a referral to maybe the “no student hungry campaign”. That person just told me to send them a message of what I need and they will bring it to me. I just felt I am not a beggar; I am not going to beg like that (Indomitable).

Dewidar *et al.* (2022:7) report that when students from under-represented groups engage with traditional systems and measures in the academia, they face several obstacles to success. The prevalence of food insecurity poses significant challenges to students' overall wellbeing and academic success. Insufficient access to nutritious meals can adversely affect students' physical health, cognitive abilities, and emotional resilience, and hinder their capacity to fully engage in their studies and achieve personal growth.

4.3.4 Character building and personal development

During recess, the co-researchers were faced with a range of both positive and negative circumstances. They encountered challenges that required their active participation and problem-solving skills to ensure a comfortable stay. Typically, the usual support services and structures were not fully operational during this period, necessitating students

residing on campus to find alternative ways to meet their needs. With limited external assistance, the co-researchers relied on themselves to navigate this time. During such instances the co-researchers came to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities. They gained a deeper awareness of their own abilities and learned to rely on their own resourcefulness and resilience to overcome obstacles. This self-discovery and personal growth contributed to their overall development and equipped them with valuable life skills – beyond the confines of their academic pursuits.

For instance, in the narrative of her drawing, Nice mentioned that she had learnt to accept the fact that she had to stay behind during university recess.

even if it was difficult ...I told myself it's okay, it has to be done (Nice).

Her realisation reflects a development of maturity and acquisition of self-determination to make the necessary sacrifices to achieve her personal goals. Similarly, Yesum captured her experience of rainy days, which she said symbolised renewal and character development (Figure 4.14).



Rain is a gift from God. To me, it symbolises something new being birthed. Through all these challenges, I'm grateful my character is being developed! (Yesum)

Figure 4.14: Yesum's photo about character building and personal development

During difficult times, co-researchers explored their inner strengths and higher powers. In agreement, Nice and Bold mentioned:

I had to get out of my comfort zone (Nice).

I think I have developed time management (Bold).

There was a strong sense of growth and gratitude in relation to experiences of adversity as portrayed in the co-researchers' drawings (section 4.2.3), photographs, and narratives.

Wagner and Ruch (2015:3) declare that certain character strengths are related to classroom success and academic progress, among which hope, perseverance, love of learning, prudence, self-regulation, gratitude, perspective, teamwork, and social intelligence. The development of these character strengths was evident, specifically in the narratives of Yesum, Nice and Bold. As Yesum noted when she explained her drawing, she realised that she should start filling her cup "to pour over into others' lives". This suggests that she had realised that, to take care of others, she needed to put her wellbeing first.

The co-researchers recognised their strengths and, in response to viewers' comments at the exhibition, verbalised that it brought much relief to see that they were not the only ones who had experienced what they did on campus. Based on the co-researchers' experiences and feelings, it is, therefore, important that we take note of and hear their student voice, and to raise awareness, not only to stakeholders, but also among other students (section 2.6). The co-researchers acknowledged that all their experiences were necessary to strengthen and promote growth for their lives after university, even if they had not chosen or prepared for these experiences.

4.4 Summative discussion

In this chapter, the findings of the study were presented according to four thematic clusters that were identified by the collective analysis: the impacts of sharing personal space; the importance of various support services and structures on campus; the need for a better sense of security; and different ways that being a university student builds character. These thematic clusters address the interrelated issues that were highlighted by the individual photo narratives that the four co-researchers produced. It is for this

reason that the findings were not presented according to each student's narrative, but rather thematically.

Importantly, the findings identify some of the effects of COVID-19, which are important to consider, even though this was not an objective of the study. It is important to consider these effects because, as mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation (section 1.1), during the national shutdown in South Africa, strict measures and health protocols were implemented to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 and ensure the health and safety of students. Therefore, drastic changes were made to teaching and learning, which transitioned from face-to-face teaching to hybrid learning. As the findings in this chapter show, health sciences students residing on campus and undergoing clinical learning during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic had to adhere to unique changes in residence policies, including isolation, quarantine, social distancing, difficulties with campus access, constant mask usage, and more. These changes exacerbated the challenges faced by health sciences students under normal circumstances and made their remaining on campus during recess even more challenging. This study, therefore, brings to light a unique perspective and understanding of the experiences of students residing on campus at a South African university. This unique perspective was enabled by the use of photovoice, which allowed students to capture visually and through text what it was like for them to be studying and living on campus during recess. More specifically, the findings offer a view of the impact of residing on campus during recess on health sciences students, and the added effects of doing so at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next chapter, I will summarise the research problem and process by giving a broad overview of the factual conclusions, which filtered to two emergent themes, and the conceptual conclusions of the study. I will present conclusions based on the findings presented, with provide some considerations for future research. Furthermore, I will discuss the limitations of the research and what value this study could add to the literature and institutional world. Lastly, I will reflect on my own learning as I conducted this study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university. In this chapter, the conclusions will be consolidated based on the findings in response to the research question:

What are the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during recess at a specific university?

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, which set the scene of the background in relation to the topic, presented the research question and described methods utilised to select relevant co-researchers and to collect and analyse data. In this chapter, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations and rigor in research were also explained. Chapter 2 elaborated on perspectives from literature according to the relevant topics that were identified in relation to the study topic. Research methodology was discussed in Chapter 3, which involved an extensive view of the research paradigm, research design, data collection process, data analysis, ethical considerations, and effects of COVID-19 on the research process. Chapter 4 presented the findings according to clustered themes and the photographs taken by the co-researchers. Chapter 5 will present the conclusions and recommendations of the study. In this chapter, firstly, the research problem and process will be summarised. Thereafter, the factual and conceptual conclusions will be discussed, as the 13 themes were clustered into four; from the discussion of the findings two emergent themes were identified. Propositions for consideration, suggestions for future research, limitations of the study and the value of research will follow. Lastly, a self-critical reflection on the research process will conclude the study.

5.2 Summary of the research problem and process

Health sciences students have unique obligations and requirements related to their academic programmes, compared to other students. The respective health sciences and

nursing governing bodies in South Africa set standards for education and training with the aim of developing competent health professionals. The requirements include clinical placement as part of work-integrated learning. Health sciences students, therefore, often remain on campus to achieve certain clinical learning outcomes when other students “go on holiday” during university recess.

During the recess period, holiday accommodation policies and protocols are implemented, which differ from the usual policies that are in force during the academic year. The students are obliged to make drastic adaptations and change their usual ways of living on campus. From personal observation and experience, I knew living on campus during university recess had implications but realised that my experience did not portray the full picture from the perspective of current health sciences students. I also realised that students did not have opportunities and relevant platforms to voice their experiences in pursuit of social change.

Furthermore, an initial search exposed a dearth of literature on the topic. This motivated me to explore the phenomenon and broaden the knowledge base within a particular context. I was guided by a participatory paradigm, and I employed photovoice, a method that elicits participant voices and facilitates social change. To generate data on this topic, health sciences students who reside in campus residences during recess were recruited to participate in the study. These co-researchers depicted their experiences by capturing photographs and formulating narratives. A collaborative thematic data analysis was performed after data collection. Selected photographs and related narratives were publicly exhibited at the research site. Essential stakeholders, such as representatives of the housing and residence services, as well as management, staff and students from the Faculty of Health Sciences attended and could write anonymous reviews in a visitors' book. The reviews increased the richness of the data and were integrated in the findings of the research.

5.3 Factual conclusions

Factual conclusions are the facts exposed through the data collected and analysed by the study (Leshem, 2020:16; Trafford & Leshem, 2008:140) – the research findings. The collaboratively agreed upon themes were clustered into four themes with subthemes, as presented in Table 4.2. Firstly, sharing their personal space contributed to students being uncomfortable and uneasy while in the residences. Consequently, the subthemes diversity, unhygienic practices, noise levels, isolation and loneliness, and the effects of the COVID-19 the pandemic were identified. Secondly, the support services and structures available to students, which should act as a buffer, were found to be insufficient. Factors contributing to the inadequacy of support were assistance with moving, as well as limited or no access to campus facilities and healthcare services. As moving into a residence for recess was inevitable, this was a significant subtheme. Thirdly, security was raised as a concern. It flagged the subthemes of a need for both personal safety and food security during periods of recess. Lastly, despite their concerns and the challenges they faced, the co-researchers voiced that character building and personal development occurred.

5.3.1 Sharing of personal space

Sharing of personal space is unavoidable for undergraduate students living on campus in residences, and it is likely that students would be required to live with total strangers at some stage of their studies. This person is likely to be of a different race, age, culture, and/or degree course, because higher education institutions in South Africa are inclusive. The co-researchers identified this as a point of concern and discomfort.

From a humanitarian point of view, the co-researchers acknowledged the diversity, however, they were still uncomfortable and did not appreciate having different people around them. It was noted that the unwelcoming perspective stemmed from prejudice towards other students based on their conduct. The co-researchers were not in favour of others intruding into their personal space. Both noise and silence were noted as environmental stressors, together with unhygienic practices derived from inadequate

cleaning arrangements during recess. In addition, the unhygienic environment was a constant reminder to them that they were not at home. It triggered feelings of isolation and loneliness, made worse by taking into consideration that this was a period of separation, when unfamiliar rules and protocols were imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 restrictions and protocols also had an impact on the students' personal lives and their mental wellbeing.

5.3.2 Support services and structures

As students advance to subsequent course years, their needs also change and intensify. They consequently require more support from the institution, their families, and friends. As health sciences students remain behind during recess, they must follow rules and protocols relating to recess residence. They must physically move all their possessions and clear their rooms. Moving to and fro is tedious and the co-researchers reported this activity to be daunting and physically demanding. It was, however, voiced that the transportation support provided by the institution brought relief.

When they had settled into holiday accommodation, co-researchers reported that even in their allocated areas they would still not have access to the usual facilities, for example, the computer lab. They were limited to campus facilities inside their original residences and open venues on campus. The health facility on campus operated during office hours or was closed during recess. This forced the co-researchers to either self-medicate or, if they could afford it, consult external health services.

5.3.3 Security

The co-researchers voiced that personal safety was a major cause for concern because there were fewer people on campus during recess. The presence of protection services personnel was rare, and this contributed to feelings of uncertainty and mistrust. Even with measures in place for safety on campus, for example, panic buttons, students still felt unsure and doubted whether protection services would respond. The co-researchers expressed that they perceived a distant relationship between students and campus protection services. Not only was personal safety a concern, but food safety as well.

The institution has organisations in place to assist students with food security. These are well established and known to students, however, the efficiency thereof, especially during recess period, was deemed inadequate. Generally, the co-researchers struggled with their nutrition and food security during recess. They had to live on whatever they had or could afford. The closing of the food outlets on campus during recess and due to COVID-19 restrictions exacerbated the food insecurity, as students did not have many options. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffered the most, as they were already living on the bare minimum.

5.3.4 Character building and personal development

The co-researchers expressed that, despite their struggles in difficult periods, they underwent personal growth and development, which was unexpected. They found themselves having to cultivate various skills to navigate and survive – skills that they believed would be beneficial in their lives beyond graduation. Through the sharing of their experiences, the co-researchers discovered their own strengths and capabilities, as these challenging circumstances compelled them to become resilient individuals.

Gratitude was also a sentiment voiced by the co-researchers, as they recognised that they had to overcome their challenges, albeit not optional or desirable. This acknowledgment of their circumstances emphasised the importance of appreciating the resources and support available, even if limited, while simultaneously highlighting the need for improving conditions for students during recess.

Co-researchers' reflections highlighted the transformative nature of their experiences, the growth they experienced, and their recognition of the value of resilience and gratitude. Such insights contributed to understanding the complex dynamics and implications of students' experiences during university recess and underscore the significance of providing adequate support and resources to ensure their wellbeing and success.

5.4 Conceptual conclusions

The factual conclusions were conceptualised through abstract ideas and theories, as suggested by Trafford and Leshem (2008:140).

The co-researchers in the study categorised their experiences of living on campus during university recess into four clustered themes, as mentioned in section 5.3. Three of these themes are the sharing of personal space, support services and structures, and security, all of which highlight concerns regarding a loss of sense of belonging and inadequate support. On a positive note, the co-researchers also mentioned that character building and personal development, the fourth theme, occurred unknowingly and prepared them for the future.

Figure 5.1 is an illustration of the conceptual conclusions of the study.

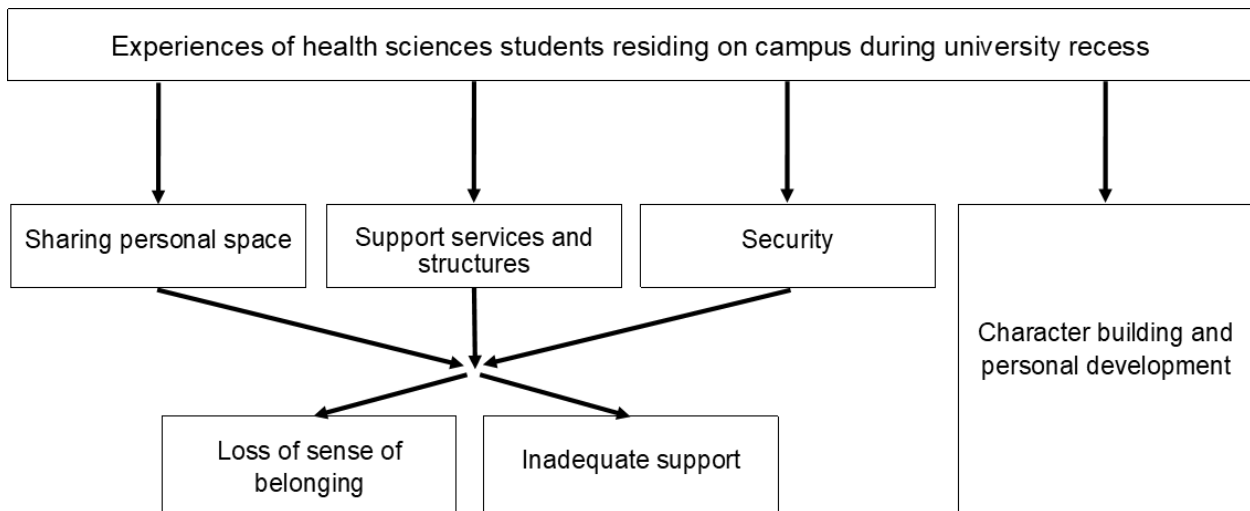


Figure 5.1: Conceptual conclusions

Source: Researcher's own

As highlighted in section 4.4, the loss of sense of belonging and inadequate support emerged as themes.

5.4.1 Loss of a sense of belonging

During the initial stages of recruitment and welcoming of students, education institutions often invest significant effort in creating a sense of belonging and providing extensive attention to the incoming students. Particularly students who are fortunate enough to live in on-campus accommodation, are greeted with the promise that it will be their "home away from home". However, as the co-researchers progressed in their studies and settled into their respective programmes, they noticed a decline in the attention and support they received. This reduction in support and attention, coupled with the contrasting experience of the initial welcoming, led to feelings of loneliness and a loss of a sense of belonging among the co-researchers.

These feelings were exacerbated during university recess. With reduced campus activities and a smaller number of fellow students present, the sense of community and belonging that typically characterises campus life diminished significantly. The resulting isolation and disconnection had a profound impact on the co-researchers' overall wellbeing and experiences during the recess period.

Additionally, the inaccessibility of facilities and services also contributed to these feelings of isolation and loss of a sense of belonging. The unhygienic and noisy environment served as a constant reminder that they were not in their familiar home environment and did not truly belong there. Some even likened this experience to being imprisoned and forcibly separated from their homes.

It is crucial for education institutions to prioritise creating an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of the stage of their studies. By addressing these challenges, institutions can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance students' overall wellbeing during both regular academic periods and recess.

5.4.2 Inadequate support

The co-researchers expressed that having limited assistance with moving when being required to relocate during recess was an arduous and overwhelming task. The physical demands of moving heavy objects such as refrigerators proved to be physically taxing for them. Moreover, they felt a sense of insecurity and doubted the preparedness of campus security services during this period. The closure of campus facilities, small businesses, and healthcare services, which are essential components of student support, also had a negative impact on the co-researchers. These resources are usually readily available and contribute to the overall student experience. Their closure left the co-researchers with no alternatives but to seek help externally, which imposed financial burdens for some students who were unable to afford external sources of support. This situation led to a sense of stagnation and helplessness among the co-researchers.

The theme of inadequate support sheds light on the insufficiency of available support services and structures during recess. Students face challenges in accessing academic resources, counselling services, safety and security measures, and other forms of assistance that are typically accessible during the regular academic term. The absence of such support exacerbates feelings of isolation and hampers students' ability to effectively address their academic and personal needs.

These observations underscore the significance of providing comprehensive support services and structures that remain accessible and responsive to students' needs throughout the recess period. It is essential for institutions to address the gaps in support services and structures, to ensure that students have adequate access to academic resources, counselling, safety and security measures, and other essential services. By doing so, education institutions can help mitigate the negative effects of inadequate support, promote student wellbeing, and facilitate a more inclusive and supportive environment during recess.

5.5 Propositions for consideration

Several considerations emerged in response to the factual and conceptual conclusions. Although this was a contextual study with a limited number of participants, the data were enriched through the comments of stakeholders who attended the photovoice exhibition. Therefore, the co-researchers felt strongly that they could forward propositions for consideration by relevant stakeholders, based on the identified needs:

1. Revision of the policy relating to moving to different residences during recess.
2. More hands-on support for students when moving their possessions to different recess accommodation.
3. Sensitive management and increased activity of food drives and foodbanks during recess periods.
4. Increased access to facilities such as computer labs and laundry rooms in temporary residences during recess. Comprehensive student card activation on being assigned recess accommodation.
5. Increased access to on-campus healthcare services during recess periods, for instance, through the availability of a locum; an on-call or telehealth system, a mobile clinic or a temporary clinic at a specific recess residence.
6. Access to business and shopping centres.
7. Continuation of cleaning services at open residences during recess periods to maintain hygiene.
8. Increased presence of and access to protection services.

This study confirmed that students experienced uncovered and underlying issues during university recess, and platforms had not previously been created for them to voice these issues. Implementing these suggestions could enhance health students' living conditions, provide more specific support, and ultimately enhance their sense of belonging.

5.6 Suggestions for future research

It is suggested that research relating to the nature of this topic be conducted on a larger scale at the research site and be replicated at other universities in the country. It would also be beneficial to conduct the research over longer recess periods, to capture a fuller picture and involve more participation or co-researchers.

It would be advantageous to expand the research to other departments, beyond the Faculty of Health Sciences, so that institutions can compile comprehensive policies and protocols relating to recess periods.

Photovoice as a flexible and participatory research method was found to be useful and can be applied in other studies, as it creates deep knowledge and rich data. It also gives co-researchers an opportunity to advocate for themselves and others.

5.7 Limitations of the research

There was little evidence as provided by prior research studies about the study topic, which restricted foundational knowledge as a point of reference for the research. This indicates the need for further research on this topic. Another limitation was gaining access to the campus and students due to the COVID-19 regulations at the time of the study. The stress and restrictions related to the pandemic also limited the number and diversity of co-researchers. We could, therefore, not fully achieve maximum variation. Nevertheless, I managed to obtain ethical clearance, gatekeeper approval and permission from the COVID-19 regulatory team in due time, which enabled the study to commence at the planned time, even if the number of co-researchers (four) was slightly smaller than the anticipated minimum of six participants.

Implementing photovoice for the first time was challenging, yet exciting, as I needed to read and educate myself about the process. Furthermore, I had to facilitate the workshops and discussions myself, which was time consuming though ultimately beneficial, as it allowed observation and insider research.

In the presentation of the findings, the discussion was presented thematically, and not as separate photo narratives of each individual, because the co-researchers had decided and voted for this format. The reason for this decision was that we wished to raise a collective voice.

5.8 Value of the research

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess and the implications thereof were unknown in the research world and at the specific institution under study. The value of this research will be determined by the contribution it could make at the specific institution, and in the initiation of further research on this topic. Students in the Faculty of Health Sciences are taught about the importance of a healthy, holistic life. I hope that this study will contribute to raising awareness about the implications of residing on campus during university recess and will facilitate action for positive change amongst all stakeholders at the university. I also hope that the study will be significant in providing knowledge and understanding about this topic, not only on an institutional level, but also for the relevant health professional governing bodies.

On a practical level, the study reflects the kind of adjustments that could be made to implement participatory research under less ideal conditions, which were brought on by the necessity to adhere to COVID-19 related restrictions and regulations.

Finally, this study gave the co-researchers an opportunity to advocate for themselves and for others, which is empowering. The exhibition bridged the gap between students and policy decision-makers, as it raised awareness among educators, faculty management, and other students about the challenges experienced by health sciences students residing on campus during university recess.

5.9 Reflection on my own learning

Writing a research paper requires persistence and consistency. One needs to have a passion for your topic and a clear understanding of your methodology.

Why did I choose to pursue this topic? From my previous experiences as a health sciences student living in a residence, it has always been my wish to voice my experiences and advocate for change in policies and protocols during the recess period, where necessary. However, I was never presented with an opportunity to do so. This sparked the passion to create a platform, academically, for current health sciences students to advocate for themselves and others.

It was difficult to construct the research based on literature, as very little was found relating to the topic. The dearth of literature on this topic encouraged me to read more, research and enquire on a broader level. I also had to depend on the chosen method, and to trust that more information and knowledge would emerge as we progressed. Fortunately, photovoice is accompanied by guidelines that made the facilitation of workshops and discussions easier. Choosing photovoice as a novel method was, however, very frightening. Nonetheless, I wanted to challenge myself in the academic field, acquire new knowledge and experience in a pleasurable way.

A less pleasurable experience was that the study was conducted during a very stressful and extraordinary time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did I have to overcome adversity inflicted by the pandemic in my personal life and workplace, but it was challenging in the context of the research. Being on campus at that time of the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating the workshops and exhibition in a "sanitised, social-distanced" environment, was stressful. I had to ensure that all who attended had the required documents to access campus and that all protocols were observed. The venue where the workshops took place was big, had enough ventilation and allowed social distancing. It was easy to sanitise as the equipment was minimal. I had to adapt to "the new normal" and ensure that all protocols and measures were adhered to throughout the study. Although it caused a delay in my planned study timeframe, the flexibility of the photovoice method allowed the study to continue. The execution of photovoice taught me about time management, flexibility, as well as integration of entertainment and academia.

The exhibition was the highlight of the study and bridged the gap and fulfilled the purpose of engaging the wider university community. People who attended the photovoice

exhibition included students of the Faculty of Health Sciences, students from other faculties, off and on-campus students, health sciences alumni and alumni from other faculties, staff members, Housing and Residence Affairs management, representatives of the cleaning department and parents of students. The stakeholders showed interest in the exhibition and requested that I avail my dissertation to the institution once completed, for further dialogue and possible policy improvements. A copy of the dissertation will be sent directly to the Housing and Residence Affairs department stakeholders. The completion of this study will, thus, bridge even more gaps on an academic and institutional level.

Managing to conduct this study under strict and tight conditions developed my character too. I have grown and developed as a person in the academic field. I believe that there is still even more room for growth in this nature of topic.

5.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess revealed the challenges they face. The emergence of eye-opening themes highlighted the persistence of certain practices, some of them problematic, that have not changed over the years. To promote the wellbeing of students, it is crucial for universities to establish robust academic support services and structures that can assist students in pursuing their educational goals. Adequate student support is a fundamental aspect of evaluating the quality of higher education institutions. Therefore, it is imperative to align the support services and structures with the specific needs of students, and to continuously strive for improvement to create a supportive and nurturing environment for all – and during all periods of the academic calendar.

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ADDENDUM A: INFORMED CONSENT

I understand that I will be taking part in a research study about experiences of health science students remaining on campus during university recess: a photovoice study that involves photographs and my personal stories. I understand that I will be fully involved in this research project.

I realize my participation is voluntary and understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without any consequences in the present or future. I understand that the information obtained in this study may be exhibited and published. I, therefore, agree to be audiotaped during interviews and workshops. I understand that I will not be identified and my personal information will remain confidential if I choose so. If not I give authorization to be photographed and am aware that whether moving or still, I will be recognizable. I have been made aware that data will be stored in hard copy and memory sticks with passwords securely by the researcher and supervisor. This data will only be accessible through the research team and I am aware of the copyrights I have to the images. I understand that I may contact the researcher PM Kekana (073 4828 092)- pmokoena041@gmail.com, the supervisor Dr D van Jaarsveldt (082 423 5695) - vjaarsvd@ufs.ac.za or the co-supervisor Dr Mikateko Höppener (079 555 1131) if I have any enquiries or concerns about the research project. For any complaints I may contact the Secretariat and chair of the University of the Free State Health Sciences Research Committee at 051 401 7794.

I hereby agree to participate as the study has been comprehensively explained to me and all questions have been answered.

Name and surname:

Student number:

Signature: **Date:**

Cell: **E-mail:**

Consent for being photographed and my pictures to be published

The undersigned:

Surname: _____

First name: _____

Date of birth: _____

Address: _____

Contacts: _____

give consent to be photographed on _____(date) by _____ during a Photovoice training for a study based on experiences of health science students remaining on campus during university recess. I further authorize that the photographs may be published by PM Mokoena.

Seen and approved:

City: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

DATE

ADDENDUM B: CAMERA RESPONSIBILITY CONTRACT

This is an agreement form for the use of a camera and permission to use photographs and video clips in the research with the title: Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study.

I _____ (name, surname and student number) am aware that I am allowed to use the camera lent to me by the researcher PM Kekana for the allocated period.

This camera:

_____ (brand name) _____ (model) _____ (number)

will be loaned with good trust and responsibility in me. In case of any damage or neglect to the camera, I will be honest and accountable in reporting to the researcher about it as soon as possible. I also give consent for the photographs I take to be used and shared in presentations and publications related to the project.

Responsible person:

_____ (Name) _____ (Signature)

Researcher:

_____ (Name) _____ (Signature)

_____ (Signed at) _____ (Date)

ADDENDUM C: COMMENTS FROM EXHIBITION ATTENDEES

Photovoice exhibition

04 April 2022

Faculty of Health Sciences foyer

10h00 – 17h00

Transcribed comments from the visitors' book:

1. I saw that most students they take long to have access to some of the buildings and it is wrong.
2. I can relate to what these students are going through as I am a health science student. It is not easy to deal with pressure when everyone is on a holiday and resting except for you. The research demonstrated our struggle very well.
3. Sharing becomes really a lot at times especially if you are not doing the same course as you have different time schedules and courses are different. Holidays are different too.
4. As a student staying in res on campus, I feel like I do not have privacy in my room. I sometimes need to study aloud when I revise my work but it's hard to do so when I have a roommate. I must say, COVID regulations were not really ok, but the fact that we stayed alone was cool.
5. I saw that most students who stayed behind in res during recess is not really their choice. They are forced by circumstances. If they had a choice they would go home because for one, they did not have enough food to eat. But overall they still find comfort in their 'home' which is the residence.

6. Seeing this as an alumni and staff member, I was reminded of what students go through and how it really can be isolating in this space.
7. Seeing this exhibition really cemented the realities that some of my classmates face. I really liked how honest and real it was.
8. I realised that it can be hard for students to acclimatize with the university environment during 'isolation'/lockdown. Some are not coping with the silence and restriction.
9. The photovoice exhibition truly showcased one's realities that a student goes through when being on campus during recess. The commentary made it personal and gave an in depth view on the experiences of students.
10. We can relate to most of things that are being displayed here as students and thank you very much for making everyone aware and ensuring that we all feel it together as students. We really hope for change and that this is expanding to the rest of the campus to ensure that we as medical health students are taken care of.
11. Not seeing a lot of people on campus is very depressing, even now that we still have to keep distance even at our residences. Is that not supposed to be our home away from home where we live with others?
12. All that I see, I can relate to. Food security is indeed a problem. I love how real the exhibition is!
13. I can relate to how tough it was in lockdown times when we were the ones left behind at res. So the exhibition did the right thing by bringing this into people's attention.

14. I can relate to how peaceful the residence was when everyone went home. For the first time this year, I was able to do a self-introspection and be able to figure out what my way forward would be. When my friends came back from recess, I was a changed person.
15. As a parent I can relate because my daughter is also facing a problem of loneliness and of stress due to sometimes the roommate is going home and she is left alone in the room because she is living far from home. I think if they can do something about the students who will be staying at the residence when everyone is at home comfortably with their families. This loneliness causes them stress.
16. Coming from underprivileged background is so hard finding your way in. Yes, resources are there but truth be told, you are used to them being given to you. Now you have to find your way and it wasn't easy for me. But God helped me through it all, He was always watching and I am thankful for such organisation like yours that remind us that we are powerful. Thank you.
17. Coming from an underprivileged background, it really pains me that during recess students are forced to go home or they suffer and starve all in the name of not affording to go home or have enough food. I feel university should change the policy of closing res during recess.
18. Even though we were at home in lockdown, we really do feel sorry for the students that had to stay on campus in that time.
19. Loved it! Very relatable!
20. This exhibition is very relatable and true. Everything shown here is what I believe to be every students experience. Food insecurity is the worst but all in all, this is perfect. Xoxoxo

21. I also relate on the fact of lack of assistance with moving that is kinda too much for me because at first I have to now try and adapt to a new place.
22. Having your own space will make students focus more on their studies as others cannot focus in the presence of other people.
23. I resonate with the story about hygiene. At my res we ran out of toilet paper for the entire weekend. It was so frustrating because now we had to take out the little money we had and buy toilet paper.
24. As an off campus student I wasn't aware of how students have to move between residential buildings and how lonely it can get in a place that is known to be full of people. In future I hope students can be allowed to reside in one res for recess and be given more opportunities to socialize during recess times.
25. Noise levels: Was hoping recess to be quiet and peaceful but I take it as some people took that as an opportunity to be free. I regret now not going home.
26. Lack of assistance with moving and support structure: As health sciences students we are expected to return earlier to school. We are allocated to different residences every time, sometimes the support structure provided is not enough or provided at all. I relate with both those. This tends to be problematic as a student because we can't settle in to a residence knowing you might be told to move back to your own residence at any time. This also affects how one get comfortable academically.
27. I relate so much with the moving around. It is extremely exhausting and mentally taxing especially without any support and proper consideration from the university. Hygiene was also very problematic. OMG!!!! Rarely monitored during recess so it

became unbearable. Food security – sometimes we are expected to stay behind and study due to the workload during recess and there is no provision for food!

28. As a student who stays on campus as well, there are a number of things which I can relate to. Support structure – due to the fact that we constantly have to move it was difficult to do so without the assistance such as with luggage and fridges. Moving around – it would be best that we stay at our respective residences to avoid the up and down of moving around.

29. I can relate to a few of these topics, even at the communes around the university. This initiative/awareness give students a platform to express/say the things they feel. You realise how much students go through and keep within because of the rules at the houses they live in. 1. Loneliness and not being able to talk about stuff 2. The COVID regulations 3. The noise levels.

30. Financial security is a huge issue especially during the starting months when bursaries have not yet allocated funds, and more especially for students without any funding. I wish something could be done to help. Also, with my anxiety, I can never imagine having to constantly move around, I might be robbed, who knows?

31. Res was peaceful when it was empty and now that everyone is back, it has become a nuisance hence why I left this year.

32. Safety and security part is very relatable!

33. Campus feels more safe as you can see more familiar faces and the security during holidays is very good. Kind regards.

34. Res is a peaceful space and security at res is relatable!

35. Being on campus was great because I was able to have access to the library.
36. Campus is safer than out campus residence because people get robbed easy there, even if during recess you feel safer.
37. I like the privacy I had and experience of not having a roommate. I even liked how quiet the place was.
38. The regulations on the outside look picture perfect but it is far from reality of the living standards offered by countless institutions. Very relatable content and more realistic awareness. Job well done!!!
39. This period may have however become too lonely for others and lead to depressed moods- when campus is empty.
40. Res should be an environment where your health holistically should be taken care of. Adjustments should have been made during COVID recess as I can imagine it only heightened the problem.
41. As a res student all I experience is segregation because I feel left out every time other students go home and I can't because of personal reasons. I even do not enjoy the fact that I have to stay with a student that is doing a year less than me because we do things differently and the conditions are not soothing.
42. I enjoyed being on campus during recess because I felt like I could breathe again and having to occupy the room alone since me and my roommate have different values and different perspectives in life. It is important to have space.
43. My stay at res during recess was relatively interesting. I do not know if it was because I was homesick but I experienced more loneliness and declining mental

health during that period. The fact that some of the food outlets closed early and some didn't open at all increased stress and food security. Last year when I had to come back for my resit exam there was no warm water for a duration of time.

44. It was an insightful exhibition on raising awareness on the effect of lockdown on mental health, especially on campus residence. I totally relate as I live on campus and I did indeed suffer some sort of isolation and some loneliness from the lockdown.

45. I was also a medical student at the UFS. Tough to always stay behind. I had a huge problem with noise, quiet spaces are highly recommended from my side.

46. I am glad to see that my difficulties were shared by many. Nonetheless, there are many other challenges to which I cannot relate, which are still impactful to the productivity of the students. This exhibition is a snap-shot of the challenges of an on campus life. I hope there will be more opportunities to project the student voice. I want to see more done in terms of promoting equality in residences. I have lived in both Roosmaryn and Ardour – the difference in the development of each of the residences is deplorable. One student shouldn't be more important than another based on what they're studying, however, this inequality is reinforced in the gross differences between older and newer residences.

Exhibition feedback from the researcher:

After all data has been collected and themed by us, a photovoice exhibition was held on the 04 April 2022 at the Faculty of Health Sciences foyer from 10h00 – 17h00.

The exhibition was graced with the attendance of the study supervisor, the study co-supervisor, co-researchers, health sciences students from different courses and years, off campus students, parents, Alumni, Department of Housing and Residence affairs, Food environment department, Bidvest cleaning department, Faculty of Health Sciences personnel and Nursing department personnel.

The display was arranged according to themes numbered systematically from 1 to 13. The selected pictures were printed on high resolution, high quality paper with a black background and captions written in white next to each picture. These were then pinned on display boards which were set in a T-shape to allow a fluent flow and easy movement. In the middle of the T-shape isle were the catering table with food for everybody who attended the exhibition and the visitor's book for reviews. Outside the foyer was an invitation welcoming board with a brief overview of what the study is about and the exhibition being held inside.

The audience was very interactive, questioning and commenting on the exhibition. Some felt a need to spread the news about the exhibition which was taking place by posting in their class groups and social media pages. People took time to look and analyse as they walked through, as if they were re-living these captured moments. Questions arose such as:

- Why is our sample size small?
- Is this a protest?
- What are our intentions with the exhibition?

Positive feedback was given in general. The food and snacks catered by Kovsieln were highly praised by everybody.

The co-researchers found it of great pleasure and empowerment when they were able to answer the questions which arose from the audience in person. They also claimed to be feeling proud to see their work being acknowledged and displayed, reaching its purpose.

ADDENDUM D: INFORMATION FLYER

JOIN US AS WE PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess:

A photovoice study

ARE YOU?



A health sciences student

Residing on campus

Interested in transformation

What is the study about?	What will be expected from you?	How will you benefit?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The experiences of health sciences students residing on campus when other students are not around ➤ Raising awareness ➤ Encourage change and learn from you and other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attending workshops at the beginning of the project ✓ Participating in group discussions ✓ Attend an exhibition at the end of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📷 Capturing your experiences on camera and narrating them 🗣️ Reflecting and sharing 🙋 Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time

If you are interested, kindly contact/whatsapp the researcher Palesa Kekana on 073 4828 092/086 269 3773 or pmokoena041@gmail.com.

This study is supervised by Dr Deirdre Van Jaarsveldt (082 423 5695) and co-supervised by Prof. Mikateko Mathebula (079 555 1131).

ADDENDUM E: POST EXHIBITION INTERVIEWS

Interview 1

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

1. How has your participation in this study affected your life?

It has given me an appreciation for reflecting on my lived experiences and has shown me how to use photography in this regard. It improved my time-management in that I have seen that I can satisfy a non-academic commitment while managing my academic life.

2. Were you able to relate to the study topic?

No. The study topic was related to spending recess in residence. As a result of the pandemic, staying behind was not an option. Even if things were different, I would not have stayed behind during a recess.

3. What did you enjoy most throughout the research?

I enjoyed the opportunity to express my views with regards to University affairs without fear of prejudice. I had this freedom because I was able to engage with people with whom I was unfamiliar and as such unafraid of how they would react to my thoughts. All the same, it was a safe space; the engagement never became extreme because we were moderated by the researcher.

4. What did you dislike most throughout the research?

I did not like the pressure to meet the researcher's deadlines to produce pictures for her study.

5. **Are you pleased with the quality of the research done?**

I cannot comment on this as the final write-up of the study has yet to be produced.

6. **What can we improve on in our next study?**

More participants ought to be recruited. A larger sample size will make for more reliable results.

7. **Do you think such work could benefit others, promote social change and raise awareness?**

I feel that it could raise awareness in that the photography format unequivocally exposes some of the challenges that students face, from said students' vantage point.

I don't think it would result in social change because a lot of the themes covered by the participant's pictures, namely food security and psychological welfare, is already managed by initiatives like food drives and student counselling. Even if said initiatives are not as effective as they should be, since they are already there, I doubt the managers thereof will not see the need to improve them. I don't think pictures could benefit others whatsoever.

8. **How do you wish your work to be exhibited?**

I would like a hybrid exhibition (that is, part virtual, part in-person) at which I am physically present to explain the meaning of my pictures and respond to the audience/engage in dialogue regarding my pictures.

9. **Any other comments and recommendations?**

Communicating with the researcher was difficult sometimes. I feel like the researcher should clearly lay out when she can be expected to respond to messages.



Interview 2

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

1. How has your participation in this study affected your life?

* Participating in this study has helped by teaching me to express myself. Verbal communication has always been hard for me, so by participating in this study, I was able to learn a new way to tell my story, through pictures.

2. Were you able to relate to the study topic?

* Yes. I could relate a lot to the study since I had been a res student for my entire university phase.

3. What did you enjoy most throughout the research?

* The part I enjoyed the most was taking the pictures. I've always loved art, and photography is one of the things I'm planning to pursue.

4. What did you dislike most throughout the research?

* The pictures we could use to tell our stories were limited in the sense that all researchers had similar pictures. To a certain extent, I understand the reason behind it because we were all experiencing the same res life, maybe with just minor differences here and there.

5. Are you pleased with the quality of the research done?

* For someone who was participating in this kind of study for the first time, I am pleased with its quality.

6. What can we improve on in our next study?

* Improvements can be made by allowing more time for the researchers to tell their story, especially in the case of tertiary students since there is a lot on their plate. Also choosing the time further from the exam while the minds are still clear could allow the researchers to be more creative.

7. Do you think such work could benefit others, promote social change and raise awareness?

* Yes, definitely. Firstly, it would attract people because it's different to ordinary way of doing research. Our generation loves new things, so doing something extraordinary is a better way of raising awareness as it is exciting, and people would actually pay attention, and thereafter implement the change because they were listening.

8. How do you wish your work to be exhibited?

* A live exhibition would be best. It will allow one to answer questions that could arise from any part of the work, and clear out any confusion from the guests.

9. Any other comments and recommendations?

* Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this study. My interest in research had died, but due to this extraordinary method of doing research, the fire was rekindled.



Interview 3

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

1. **How has your participation in this study affected your life?** It has given me a platform to express the greatness and to show which areas of res life can be improved on for future generations.
2. **Were you able to relate to the study topic?** Yes. I was, as I was a student residing in an on campus residence.
3. **What did you enjoy most throughout the research?** I enjoyed being around people that could understand the challenges we go through at res and of course the outings we had, being in a different environment brought out different energies and we were able to open up better.
4. **What did you dislike most throughout the research?** Time management, our sessions would go on for more than the anticipated time.
5. **Are you pleased with the quality of the research done?** Yes, it was more interactive rather than just a series of straight questions with no discussions.
6. **What can we improve on in our next study?** Having more than just a few contact sessions and actually helping the researcher hands on with the information handed in rather than just submitting.
7. **Do you think such work could benefit others, promote social change and raise awareness?** Yes, I believe research is one of many ways to bring about change in any place for it is done by the people for the people.

8. **How do you wish your work to be exhibited?** Physical (face to face) exhibition would be appreciated if possible.

9. **Any other comments and recommendations?** Studies with a small number of people seems to be more manageable and you are able to notice and regard each perspective to whatever is being researched which makes the people in it feel more valuable so thank you for trusting us with nurturing this baby of yours it was indeed a great pleasure.



Interview 4

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

1. How has your participation in this study affected your life?

I got to understand how privileged I was in terms of how I experienced my first year at res as a health science student after hearing all the different stories from other participants. I have more knowledge on how things used to work prior to covid like health science students going to holidays residences and they did not have much of food and the impact it had on them.

2. Were you able to relate to the study topic?

Yes, I had to live in Akasia and Harmony because of covid regulations and going back to res was difficult as somethings I had to carry myself in the sun, reason being HRA only takes the heavy luggage. When I was in Akasia it was last year and we were not allowed to come fetch our things and so I was staying there without a refrigerator and other basic things like my blankets etc.

3. What did you enjoy most throughout the research?

Getting to know other people and different experiences of being a health science student at res, seeing how some of the participants who stay in the same res as me had a completely different experience than I did. Being heard and being a voice for many others with similar experiences.

4. What did you dislike most throughout the research?

There is nothing that I disliked

5. Are you pleased with the quality of the research done?

Yes

6. What can we improve on in our next study?

Making it clear when recruiting what it really is about, most of the students who did not participate thought it was mainly just photography and did not know what it really was about.

7. Do you think such work could benefit others, promote social change and raise awareness?

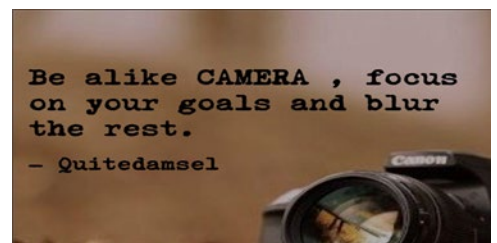
Yes

8. How do you wish your work to be exhibited?

By change, that when students go to holiday residences and temporary residences their wellbeing is priorities and that they are as comfortable as they would be at their respective reses with everything they need and that HRA is there to help with everything that needs to be moved and not just microwaves and refrigerators and luggage.

9. Any other comments and recommendations?

No



ADDENDUM F: COMPILATION OF ALL PHOTOGRAPHS AND EXHIBITION

Compilation of all photographs

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S_qjIRpqqeeh4s7_-326v7kPjVZ4D8jfN/view?usp=drive_link

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1S6Wf_CKhT_Ts4_tO5Vs8v5R4TVBfOLr0/edit?usp=drive_link

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1e8KEv2ipmokoNc0DZeP7G4JY7a4iYk0h6HMr8/edit?usp=drive_link

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wycnlclppnh9uojDVipAacl3bkQmZZmF/edit?usp=drive_link

Exhibition



ADDENDUM G: APPROVAL LETTERS

Gatekeeper's approval letter



Office of the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation
Kantoor van die Viserektor: Navorsing en Internasionalisering

23-Jul-2020

Dear Ms Palesa Mokoena

UFS AUTHORITIES APPROVAL

Research Project Title:

Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

This letter serves as confirmation that your request to collect data from students and/or staff members at the University of the Free State for your research project has been approved provided that you also have ethical clearance for the research from the ethics committee at the University of the Free State.

Please make sure that you also obtain your ethics clearance letter containing your reference number from the ethics committee after you have received this letter before you conduct your research.

Kind Regards

**PROF RC WITTHUHN
VICE-RECTOR: RESEARCH & INTERNATIONALISATION
CHAIR: SENATE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

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HSREC approval letter

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HEALTH SCIENCES
GESONDHEIDSWETENSKAPPE

Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

28-Jul-2020

Dear Ms Palesa Mokoena

Ethics Clearance: Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

Principal Investigator: Ms Palesa Mokoena

Department: School of Nursing Department (Bloemfontein Campus)

APPLICATION APPROVED

Please ensure that you read the whole document

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Health Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee that you have been granted ethical clearance for your project.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2020/0479/2508**

The ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the HSREC for approval to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise. This includes any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

A progress report should be submitted within one year of approval, and annually for long term studies. A final report should be submitted at the completion of the study.

The HSREC functions in compliance with, but not limited to, the following documents and guidelines: The SA National Health Act. No. 61 of 2003; Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes (2015); SA GCP(2006); Declaration of Helsinki; The Belmont Report; The US Office of Human Research Protections 45 CFR 461 (for non-exempt research with human participants conducted or supported by the US Department of Health and Human Services- (HHS), 21 CFR 50, 21 CFR 56; CIOMS; ICH-GCP-E6 Sections 1-4; The International Conference on Harmonization and Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH Tripartite), Guidelines of the SA Medicines Control Council as well as Laws and Regulations with regard to the Control of Medicines, Constitution of the HSREC of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

For any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact HSREC Administration: 051-4017794/5 or email EthicsFHS@ufs.ac.za.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. SM Le Grange
Chair : Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Office of the Dean: Health Sciences

T: +27 (0)51 401 7795/7794 | E: ethicsfhs@ufs.ac.za

IRB 00011992; REC 230408-011; IORG 0010096; FWA 00027947

Block D, Dean's Division, Room D104 | P.O. Box/Posbus 339 (Internal Post Box G40) | Bloemfontein 9300 | South Africa



HSREC re-approval letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE
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VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



UFS·UV
HEALTH SCIENCES
GESONDHEIDSWETENSAPPE

Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

25-Apr-2022

Dear Ms Palesa Mokoena

Ethics Number: UFS-HSD2020/0479/2508-0004

Ethics Clearance: Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A photovoice study

Principal Investigator: Ms Palesa Mokoena

Department: School of Nursing Department (Bloemfontein Campus)

[Submission Page](#)

SUBSEQUENT SUBMISSION APPROVED

With reference to your recent submission for ethical clearance from the Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the HSREC that you have been granted ethical clearance for your request as stipulated below:

- **Annual re-approval:** The ethical clearance of this project is extended to 24 April 2023.

The HSREC functions in compliance with, but not limited to, the following documents and guidelines: The SA National Health Act, No. 61 of 2003; Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Structures and Processes (2015); SA GCP(2020); Declaration of Helsinki; The Belmont Report; The US Office of Human Research Protections 45 CFR 461 (for non-exempt research with human participants conducted or supported by the US Department of Health and Human Services- (HHS), 21 CFR 50, 21 CFR 56; CIOMS; ICH-GCP-E6 Sections 1-4; International Council for Harmonisation (ICH) Harmonised Guideline, Integrated Addendum to ICH E6(R1), Guideline for Good Clinical Practice (GCP) E6(R2), 2016, SAHPRA Guidelines as well as Laws and Regulations with regard to the Control of Medicines, Constitution of the HSREC of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

For any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact HSREC Administration: 051-4017794/5 or email EthicsFHS@ufs.ac.za.

Thank you for submitting this request for ethical clearance and we wish you continued success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Prof. A. Sherriff

Chairperson : Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Office of the Dean: Health Sciences

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ADDENDUM H: EDITOR'S LETTER

Declaration

25 July 2023

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+264 813359120
hettie.human@gmail.com

Thesis: Experiences of health sciences students residing on campus during university recess: A Photovoice study

Student: Palesa Mildred Kekana

I confirm that I edited the thesis, checked the references, and recommended changes to the text.



MA Language Practice



+264 813 359 120 | hettie.human@gmail.com