

The Gendered Dimensions of Campus Cultism: Assessing Vulnerabilities, Academic Impact, and Institutional Support Systems Among Female Students at Kwara State Polytechnic

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ABSTRACT

Campus cultism remains a persistent threat to structural stability, physical safety, and academic excellence within Nigerian higher education institutions. While historical literature has predominantly framed cultism as an exclusively male-dominated phenomenon, contemporary trends indicate an increasing vulnerability and clandestine involvement among female students. This study utilizes empirical field survey data (N=226) from female students at Kwara State Polytechnic to systematically investigate their structural awareness of secret cult activities, the operational mechanics of peer pressure, the socio-psychological and academic consequences of cultism, and their perceptions of existing administrative countermeasures. Grounded in Social Learning Theory and Routine Activity Theory, the analysis reveals a critical structural divergence: while direct overt recruitment exposure remains low (2.21%), underlying environmental and socio-academic dynamics—such as the high proportion of off-campus residents (75.66%), fear of latent physical or sexual violence, and peer pressure (52.21% combined significance)—severely impair female students' safety profiles. Ultimately, 36.73% of the respondents explicitly feel "Unsafe" or "Very Unsafe" on campus. Inferential statistics validate that high peer pressure significantly associates with negative academic outcomes (chi-square = 3.849, $p = 0.0498$). This paper synthesizes these findings into a gender-sensitive institutional framework, recommending proactive counseling infrastructures, targeted security architectures for off-campus housing, and anonymous, safe reporting pathways.



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INTRODUCTION

The evolution of secret cults within Nigerian tertiary institutions represents one of the most persistent socio-security challenges confronting contemporary higher education. The phenomenon can be traced to 1953, when the Pyrates Confraternity was established at the University College, Ibadan. At its inception, the confraternity was organized as a socio-cultural and intellectual fellowship concerned with challenging colonial elitism, promoting academic excellence, and engaging in humanitarian activities (Eneji et al., 2019; Ojuah & Egwemi, 2021). Over subsequent decades, however, changes in Nigeria's political, socioeconomic, and institutional environment contributed to the transformation of some campus confraternities from relatively benign student associations into secretive and increasingly violent organizations. The political disruptions, militarization of civil society, and institutional deterioration of the 1970s and 1980s accelerated this transformation, resulting in the emergence of

groups characterized by secrecy, rivalry, territorial conflicts, violence, and criminal activities (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2012; Aluede, 2018).

The transformation of student confraternities into violent secret cults is closely connected to broader institutional and sociopolitical developments in Nigeria. Earlier student associations provided spaces for intellectual engagement and resistance to colonial structures, but their subsequent exposure to political manipulation altered their organizational orientation and encouraged more coercive forms of mobilization (Awe, 2001). The prolonged experience of military authoritarianism further normalized coercive power relations within Nigerian society and influenced the adoption of militaristic structures within some student subcultures (Idoniboye-Obu & Das, 2013). At the institutional level, inadequate recreational opportunities, weak governance structures, and declining institutional capacity created social and organizational spaces that secret societies could occupy (Ogunbameru, 2004). More recent evidence also suggests that rapid institutional expansion and inadequate regulatory oversight have facilitated the spread of cult-related networks beyond traditional universities into polytechnics and other tertiary institutions (Ifeonu et al., 2021).

Although campus cultism has historically been understood predominantly as a male phenomenon, emerging scholarship demonstrates that its gender dimensions are considerably more complex. Earlier accounts frequently portrayed female students as passive observers, romantic associates, or unintended victims of conflicts between male cult groups (Egbochuku, 2009; Rotimi, 2005). However, subsequent research has documented increasing female involvement in cult-related activities, including recruitment into established groups and the emergence of female-oriented wings and sister groups (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2012; Osunbiyi & Adewale, 2020; Udoh & Akpan, 2022). This development challenges the traditional assumption that female students occupy only peripheral positions within campus cultism and raises important questions about the specific forms of vulnerability, agency, coercion, and protection that shape their experiences.

Recent studies suggest that female vulnerability to campus cultism is embedded in broader social and institutional conditions rather than being attributable solely to individual criminal motivations. Female students may encounter peer pressure, harassment, economic insecurity, coercive recruitment, sexual exploitation, and inadequate institutional protection. In some circumstances, affiliation with cult groups or powerful peer networks may be perceived as a means of obtaining protection, social status, economic resources, or immunity from harassment (Osunbiyi & Adewale, 2020; Udoh & Akpan, 2022). At the same time, the expansion of off-campus student accommodation can weaken parental supervision and reduce students' proximity to institutional security mechanisms, thereby increasing exposure to unregulated peer networks and neighbourhood-level criminal activities. These conditions are particularly important for understanding the experiences of female students whose vulnerabilities may extend beyond the conventional physical confrontations typically associated with campus cultism.

Despite administrative interventions, institutional disciplinary measures, and legal efforts to suppress cult-related activities, campus cultism continues to pose significant threats to students' academic experiences, psychological well-being, and physical safety. Conventional institutional responses have frequently emphasized surveillance, disciplinary sanctions, policing, and physical deterrence. While these measures remain important, they may not adequately address less visible forms of insecurity experienced by female students, including psychological coercion, fear, academic disruption, recruitment pressure, harassment, and the threat of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). A gender-sensitive understanding of campus cultism is therefore necessary to complement conventional security approaches and to identify interventions that reflect students' actual experiences.

This issue is particularly significant in the context of Kwara State Polytechnic, located in Ilorin, a major urban centre situated at the intersection of northern and southern Nigeria. The institution provides an important setting for examining the intersection of gender, student mobility, residential location, peer networks, and campus security. Limited availability of on-campus accommodation means that a substantial proportion of students reside in privately rented accommodation and other residential areas outside the immediate institutional environment. Such spatial separation may reduce students' access to institutional security and support mechanisms while increasing their exposure to community-level crime, coercion, harassment, and cult-related activities. Female students may therefore encounter different forms and degrees of vulnerability depending on where they live and the social environments through which they move.

Existing studies have made important contributions to understanding the historical development, causes, organizational structures, and consequences of campus cultism in Nigeria. Earlier scholarship established the historical and sociological foundations of the phenomenon, while subsequent studies have increasingly examined institutional weaknesses, peer influence, gender, and the changing nature of cult-related activities (Ajayi & Ayodele, 2012; Aluede, 2018; Eneji et al., 2019; Osunbiyi & Adewale, 2020; Ifeonu et al., 2021; Ojuah & Egwemi, 2021; Udoh & Akpan, 2022). However, an important empirical gap remains. Much of the existing literature addresses campus cultism as a general institutional security problem, with comparatively limited empirical attention to how female students in polytechnics specifically experience, perceive, and navigate cult-related insecurity. Insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between female students' residential location, awareness of cult activities, recruitment exposure, peer pressure, socioeconomic motivations, and the multidimensional consequences of cultism for academic performance, psychological well-being, and physical safety.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on female students at Kwara State Polytechnic and by examining campus cultism through a gender-sensitive empirical lens. Its originality lies in bringing together dimensions that are often examined separately in previous research: students' demographic and residential characteristics, awareness of cult activities, exposure to recruitment, perceived peer and socioeconomic influences, and the academic, psychological, and physical consequences of cult-related insecurity. The study further incorporates students' assessments of existing institutional anti-cultism measures and their recommendations for improving campus security. By centering the experiences and perceptions of female students rather than treating them merely as peripheral victims of a predominantly male phenomenon, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of campus cultism within a Nigerian polytechnic context.

Accordingly, the overall objective of this study is to examine the gendered dimensions of campus cultism among female students at Kwara State Polytechnic using primary survey data. Specifically, the study seeks to: (i) examine the demographic characteristics of female students and assess their spatial vulnerability in relation to on-campus and off-campus residence; (ii) assess their level of awareness of cult-related activities and exposure to direct or indirect recruitment; (iii) examine the perceived influence of peer pressure and socioeconomic incentives on vulnerability to cult-related involvement and recruitment; (iv) assess the multidimensional effects of cult-related activities on academic performance, psychological well-being, and physical safety; and (v) evaluate students' perceptions of existing institutional anti-cultism policies and identify their recommendations for developing a more effective and gender-sensitive institutional security framework.

The study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it extends existing scholarship on campus cultism by foregrounding gender and spatial vulnerability within the Nigerian polytechnic environment. The study also provides an empirical basis for connecting social and behavioural explanations of cult involvement with the environmental and institutional conditions that shape students' exposure to insecurity. Practically, the findings can assist institutional administrators, student-affairs departments, security personnel, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders in designing interventions that move beyond generalized anti-cultism measures toward targeted, evidence-based, and gender-sensitive strategies. By identifying the specific vulnerabilities experienced by female students and incorporating their own recommendations, the study may contribute to improved prevention, early intervention, student protection, and institutional responses to campus cultism.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive, non-experimental cross-sectional survey design utilizing mixed-method analytical techniques. Quantitative data fields provide structured distributions, frequencies, and percentage aggregations, while open-ended qualitative modules allow for contextual, thematic text-level auditing. This approach ensures that statistical trends are evaluated alongside the lived realities and direct policy feedback of the respondents.

Research Setting and Target Population

The study was conducted at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The target population was strictly limited to enrolled female students across various academic tiers, including National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) levels. Respondents represented a broad

spectrum of academic disciplines, including but not limited to Science Laboratory Technology (SLT), Mass Communication, Statistics, Marketing, Agricultural Technology, Civil Engineering, and Crime Management.

Sample Size, Sampling Technique, and Data Collection Protocols

The primary dataset used in this study comprises $N = 226$ fully completed responses extracted directly from the primary institutional dataset. A purposive, non-probability sampling technique was deployed to ensure that the sample captured female students from various age groups, levels of study, and residential accommodations, minimizing selection bias across departments.

Data collection was executed digitally over a multi-month field window using standardized electronic survey structures. The questionnaire was distributed across students' messaging channels, mobile communication loops, departmental association channels, and residential off-campus hub networks to facilitate broad access to the female student population.

Data Collection Instrument, Validity, and Reliability

The data collection instrument was a structured digital survey consisting of twenty items organized into five thematic blocks: Section A (Demographic Metrics), Section B (Exposure and Awareness Dynamics), Section C (Behavioral and Social Drivers), Section D (Vulnerability and Impact Assessment), and Section E (Policy Evaluation and Strategic Solutions).

To ensure face and content validity, the instrument was pre-vetted by a panel of three higher education administrators and senior sociologists specializing in campus security. A pilot study was conducted with a small cohort of female students ($n=20$) not included in the final sample; a reliability check on the primary Likert-scale evaluations regarding socio-academic pressures yielded a robust Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.81$, confirming high internal instrument consistency prior to formal field deployment.

Data Analysis Framework and Inferential Modeling

The quantitative dataset was cleaned, curated, and processed utilizing Python 3.10 with the pandas, numpy, and scipy.stats. Descriptive analysis generated frequencies and percentage distributions to map baseline indicators. To move beyond descriptive indices into statistical validation, inferential data modeling was conducted using Chi-Square (X^2) Tests of Independence. This technique specifically evaluated whether spatial configurations (housing typologies) and cognitive variables (peer pressure intensity) held statistically significant dependent relationships with safety outcomes and academic performance metrics, establishing a 95% confidence threshold ($p < 0.05$). To provide a complete statistical picture, Cramer's V was calculated to measure effect sizes.

Therefore, to create 2x2 contingency tables for Chi-Square analysis:

- i. Perceived safety was grouped into "Safe/Neutral" (combining Very Safe, Safe and Neutral) versus Unsafe (combining Unsafe and Very Unsafe) to clearly separate students reporting active fear from those who do not.
- ii. Peer Pressure was categorized as "High Peer Pressure" (to capture Very Significant and Significant) versus "Low/Neutral Pressure" (which also captures Neutral, Insignificant and Very Insignificant).
- iii. Academic Performance Impact was categorized as "Negative Impact" (Negatively and Significantly Negative) versus "No/Positive Impact" (No impact, Positively, Significant Positively).

Out of the total sample ($N=226$), 84 respondents provided written open comments. The qualitative responses were analyzed manually using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. The analysis involved familiarisation with the responses, generation of initial codes, identification of recurring patterns, review and refinement of candidate themes, definition and naming of themes, and interpretation and reporting of the resulting thematic patterns. The qualitative findings were subsequently considered alongside the quantitative results to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of students' reported experiences and perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

This investigation adhered strictly to institutional ethical research guidelines for human subject interactions. Prior to accessing the survey fields, all participants were presented with a mandatory digital informed consent waiver outlining the study's academic purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage without administrative penalty. All participants read and accepted a digital informed consent form before filling out the survey.

Absolute participant anonymity was maintained by ensuring no personally identifiable data (e.g., full names or structural student matrix numbers) were archived, and institutional emails were automatically hashed. Data access was strictly restricted to the primary research team via secure, encrypted local environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Demographic and Spatial Profiles

The initial phase of data analysis mapped the demographic characteristics and housing distributions of the sample population. The quantitative distributions are presented below:

Table 1: Demographic and Spatial Profile of Respondents (N=226)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Age Cohort	Under 18	9	3.98%
	18-21	125	55.31%
	22-25	83	36.73%
	26-30	8	3.54%
	Above 30	1	0.44%
Degree of Study Tiers	National Diploma 1 (ND1)	46	20.35%
	National Diploma 2 (ND2)	165	73.01%
	Higher National Diploma 1 (HND1)	8	3.54%
	Higher National Diploma 2 (HND2)	5	2.21%
	Missing Data (NaN)	2	0.88%
Accommodation Type	Off-Campus	171	75.66%
	On-Campus	55	24.34%

The age distribution shows a high concentration of respondents within the late adolescence and early adulthood phase, with 55.31% falling between 18–21 years and 36.73% between 22–25 years. This developmental stage is frequently associated with heightened vulnerability to peer conformity and social transition anxieties. Academically, the sample is heavily anchored by National Diploma students (73.01% ND2 and 20.35% ND1), representing individuals early in their higher education trajectories.

The most vital structural insight from Table 1 is the housing metric: 75.66% of the female students reside Off-Campus. Viewed through Routine Activity Theory, this finding highlights a systemic vulnerability. Over three-quarters of the female population live outside the immediate security architecture of the institution, residing in surrounding municipal neighborhoods where structural guardianship is minimal or absent.

The critical finding in Table 1—revealing that 75.66% of female respondents live off-campus—presents an ideal case study for modern environmental criminology. By applying Routine Activity Theory, Okeshola and Mudbare (2013) establish a direct statistical correlation between unregulated off-campus student private tenancies and heightened vulnerability to localized predatory crimes. When students reside outside institutional boundaries, they lack what Felson (2002) defines as "formal institutional loops of guardianship." This spatial vulnerability is exacerbated by regional infrastructural deficits. Aloba and Olatunya (2023) examine student housing around Kwara State and point out that municipal zoning laws fail to compel private landlords to provide basic security measures like perimeter fencing, secure access control, or external lighting. Consequently, as George (2019) argues, female

students navigating these dark, unmonitored off-campus environments are systematically exposed to neighborhood-level gang rivalries. This dynamic turns routine daily movements, such as returning from evening library sessions or navigating local transit hubs, into high-risk activities.

2. Cult Awareness, Recruitment Exposure, and the Peer Pressure Vector

The survey examined the intersection between general awareness, explicit direct recruitment exposure, and the socio-behavioral influence of peer pressure.

Table 2: Cult Awareness and Direct Recruitment Metrics (N=226)

Survey Query	Response Option	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Aware of cult activities within the institution?	No	137	60.62%
	Yes	89	39.38%
Have you ever been directly approached to join?	No	221	97.79%
	Yes	5	2.21%
Have you ever received explicit cult-related threats?	No	214	94.69%
	Yes	12	5.31%

Table 3: Perceived Impact of Peer Pressure on Female Cultism (N=226)

Likert Scale Evaluation	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Significant	70	30.97%	30.97%
Significant	48	21.24%	52.21%
Neutral	48	21.24%	73.45%
Insignificant	44	19.47%	92.92%
Very Insignificant	16	7.08%	100.00%

The empirical results reveal a notable divergence: while a dominant 97.79% of respondents state they have never been directly or overtly approached to join a cult group, nearly 40% (39.38%) acknowledge a clear structural awareness of active cult operations within and around the polytechnic ecosystem. This indicates that while overt, public-facing recruitment targeting females remains statistically low, cult operations and visibility are prominent. Furthermore, 5.31% of respondents (n=12) report receiving direct personal threats linked to cult activities, highlighting active exposure to intimidation.

When examining behavioral drivers in Table 3, 52.21% respondents identified peer pressure as a "Significant" or "Very Significant" factor influencing female alignment with cult networks. Evaluated through Akers' Social Learning Theory, this confirms that differential peer associations function as a primary pathway for subcultural involvement. Even in the absence of aggressive, forced physical recruitment, cognitive assimilation occurs through close-knit peer networks, social modeling, and the normalization of deviant social status.

The empirical reality that 52.21% of respondents view peer pressure as a highly significant factor (Table 3) warrants a closer examination via advanced social psychological models. While Akers' Social Learning Theory outlines how deviant definitions are acquired, Bandura (2001) explains the underlying cognitive mechanisms, showing how intense peer group conformity triggers selective moral disengagement. This process allows young students to mitigate the perceived risks associated with criminal involvement. In female campus subcultures, this vulnerability manifests in complex ways.

Nwankwo and Omeje (2015) note that female students frequently encounter structural victimization, including harassment from male cultists or exploitative instructors. This creates what Adewale and Ojo (2018) term the "Protection Paradox." In an environment with low institutional trust, joining a parallel female sister group or aligning with a male confraternity is rationalized as a protective shield to guarantee physical safety and secure social immunity. Additionally, Oluwatobi et al. (2022) highlighted the accelerating socio-economic pressures by social media subcultures ("bragging with bad society"), reinforce these associations. These peer groups offer access to alternative economic streams, transactional networks, and social validation, helping students offset the anxieties of navigating a volatile educational environment.

3. Multi-Dimensional Impact and Subjective Safety Scale

The study evaluated the systemic costs of cultism by measuring observed consequences and mapping students' feelings of personal safety on campus.

Table 4: Lived/Witnessed Consequences of Cult Activities (N=226, Multiple Responses Allowed)

Observed Consequence Category	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Academic Disruptions	44	19.47%
Psychological Issues (Anxiety, Depression, Trauma)	39	17.26%
Absolute Negation ("No" / "None of the above")	35	15.49%
Physical Violence	24	10.62%
Sexual Violence	15	6.64%
Social Stigmatization	15	6.64%
Combined/Overlapping Impacts (e.g., Academic + Violence + SGBV)	52	23.01%

Table 5: Subjective Safety Scale of Female Students (N=226)

Perceived Campus Safety Index	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Very Safe	55	24.34%	24.34%
Safe	51	22.57%	46.91%
Neutral	37	16.37%	63.28%
Unsafe	60	26.55%	89.83%
Very Unsafe	23	10.18%	100.00%

Table 6: Perceived Impact on Personal Academic Performance (N=226)

Impact Scale	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
No Impact	152	67.26%
Negatively	44	19.47%
Significantly Negatively	19	8.41%
Positively / Significantly Positively	11	4.86%

The data underscores the broad impact of cultism. Academic disruption remains a primary concern, with 19.47% noting general disruptions and 27.88% explicitly reporting that their personal academic performance has been altered "Negatively" or "Significantly Negatively" (Table 6). Under continuous threat conditions, cognitive focus shifts from academic excellence to basic survival, resulting in class absenteeism and lower performance.

The psychological toll is equally severe: 17.26% of respondents identify the onset of psychological issues, including acute anxiety and depression. Physical violence (10.62%) and sexual violence (6.64%) emerge as distinct threats within the student ecosystem. This environment explains the findings in Table 5: 36.73% of the female students explicitly feel "Unsafe" or "Very Unsafe" on campus regarding cult operations. This substantial proportion of students reporting low perceived safety indicates that existing administrative countermeasures do not fully alleviate student anxieties.

The documented Impacts of cultism—including negative academic performance (27.88%), psychological issues (17.26%), and sexual violence (6.64%) shown in Tables 4 and 6—align closely with modern clinical and educational research. The psychological distress identified by students matches the findings of Owioye and Yusuf (2011), who report that chronic exposure to latent campus security threats induces generalized anxiety disorders, hypervigilance, and clinical depression among female undergraduates. This psychological burden directly hinders academic focus. Akinrefon et al. (2020) utilize multi-level modelling to demonstrate that high-fear campus environments cause significant drops in student grade point averages due to trauma-induced absenteeism, cognitive fragmentation, and class avoidance during periods of cult unrest. The most severe manifestation of this environment is the deployment of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Agibu and Okunola (2017) emphasize that male cult networks frequently use sexual assault and physical intimidation as tools to assert territorial dominance and punish non-compliant female student groups. This systemic vulnerability explains why 36.73% of our sampled population explicitly feels “Unsafe” or “Very Unsafe” on campus, reflecting a deep-seated fear that impairs their holistic educational experience.

4. Policy Evaluation and Administrative Adequacy

The final data block examined institutional policy awareness and evaluated students' perceptions of administrative efficacy.

Table 7: Institutional Awareness vs. Performance Evaluation (N=226)

Evaluative Metric	Response Option	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Aware of institutional anti-cultism policies?	No	140	61.95%
	Yes	86	38.05%
Is the institution doing enough to combat cultism?	Yes	180	79.65%
	No	46	20.35%

Table 8: Prioritized Student Measures for Administrative Intervention

Strategy Option	Frequency (f)	Valid Percentage (%)
Increased Security Presence	105	46.46%
Psychological Support and Counseling	36	15.93%
Awareness and Educational Campaigns	33	14.60%
Stricter Enforcement of Existing Policies	24	10.62%

Multi-pronged Solutions (All Options Combined)	Integrated	28	12.39%
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An interesting paradox is evident in Table 7. A substantial 61.95% of female respondents admit they are not aware of specific institutional anti-cultism policies on paper, yet a large majority (79.65%) perceive the institution to be taking active steps toward mitigating the problem. This suggests that while students witness general administrative and disciplinary efforts, there is a communication gap regarding codified policies and reporting channels.

When asked to prioritize future interventions (Table 8), 46.46% prioritize an increased physical security presence, followed by psychological support and counseling (15.93%) and educational awareness campaigns (14.60%). This distribution emphasizes the demand for a balanced approach combining visible deterrence with supportive institutional infrastructure.

The paradox in Table 7—where 61.95% of students lack awareness of specific anti-cultism policies despite 79.65% acknowledging general administrative efforts—underscores a persistent challenge in higher education management. Imonikhe and Oluyemi (2014) argue that traditional anti-cultism approaches in Nigerian polytechnics rely too heavily on reactive, punitive measures, such as mass expulsions or aggressive policing, while neglecting proactive communication and student support.

To bridge this policy gap, Oyeleke (2019) highlights the importance of publicizing institutional guidelines and introducing anonymous, accessible reporting mechanisms to reduce fear of retaliation. Furthermore, Babatunde and Adebayo (2023) suggest that addressing the roots of cultism requires a transition toward comprehensive student welfare models. This includes expanding on-campus housing to provide physical protection, establishing mental health counseling centers to counter negative peer learning, and creating student-led counter-narrative campaigns. Implementing these comprehensive frameworks enables educational institutions to move beyond reactive deterrence and build a sustainable culture of campus safety.

Inferential Statistical Modeling (Chi-Square Analysis)

To validate the conceptual links established by our theoretical framework, the primary categorical data was analyzed using Chi-Square (chi-square) Tests of Independence. This step evaluates the statistical significance of relationships between spatial configurations, peer networks, perceived safety, and academic metrics.

1. Inferential Test 1: Spatial Accommodation Type vs. Subjective Safety Profile

The first test evaluated whether a student's housing location (On-Campus vs. Off-Campus) statistically depends on their perceived campus safety index (grouped into "Safe/Neutral" vs. "Active Fear: Unsafe/Very Unsafe").

H0: Perceived campus safety is independent of student housing locations.

H1: Perceived campus safety is significantly dependent on student housing location.

Table 9: Contingency Matrix for Accommodation vs. Perceived Safety (N=226)

Accommodation Modality	Safe / Neutral / Very Safe	Unsafe / Very Unsafe	Row Margin Totals
Off-Campus	106	65	171
On-Campus	37	18	55
Column Margin Totals	143	83	226

Computed Chi-Square Metric: 0.2985, Degrees of Freedom: 1, Asymptotic Significance (p-value): 0.5848

Because the computed p-value (0.5848) is well above the standard statistical significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), the study fails to reject the null hypothesis (H0). This indicates that within the target polytechnic environment, feelings of being unsafe are distributed across both housing modalities. This suggests that the perceived threat of cult activity is experienced as an institution-wide challenge, affecting both on-campus residents and off-campus populations.

2. Inferential Test 2: Perceived Peer Pressure vs. Personal Academic Performance Impact

The second test evaluated whether the intensity of peer pressure in student social circles (grouped into "High Peer Pressure" vs. "Low/Neutral Pressure") is significantly related to negative academic performance impacts.

H0: Negative academic performance impact is independent of perceived peer pressure intensity.

H1: Negative academic performance impact is significantly dependent on perceived peer pressure intensity.

Table 10: Contingency Matrix for Peer Pressure Intensity vs. Academic Outcome (N=226)

Perceived Peer Pressure Intensity	Negative Academic Impact	No / Positive Academic Impact	Row Margin Totals
High Peer Pressure	40	78	118
Low / Neutral Pressure	23	85	108
Column Margin Totals	63	163	226

Computed Chi-Square Metric: 3.8494, Degrees of Freedom: 1, Asymptotic Significance (p-value): 0.0498

The chi-square test yielded a p-value of 0.0498, which falls below the significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H1). This establishes a statistically significant relationship between high peer pressure and negative academic impacts within the female student body. Viewed through Akers' Social Learning Theory, this statistical dependency suggests that when female students enter social networks with high peer pressure, the resulting socio-academic stress often leads to real-world academic disruptions and performance drops.

Qualitative Thematic Auditing (Lived Experiences)

An inductive qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses (n=84) regarding necessary support systems for female students revealed three core themes.

Theme A: Undercover Surveillance and Technical Guardianship

Respondents repeatedly expressed a desire for a shift from visible, static policing to discreet, proactive intelligence gathering. They emphasized the need for enhanced security measures to maintain safety without disrupting regular campus activities. The data emphasizes that overt security checkpoints can be bypassed by motivated offenders, necessitating undercover operations and technological tracking.

"We need CCTV camera around the school and also secret agents, that are not noticed but walk around the school premises to make sure everything is in order." (Anonymous Respondent, SLT Department)

Theme B: Structural Social Pressures and Targeted Freshman Counseling

The qualitative entries highlight that newly admitted students face intense social pressure to conform. Respondents noted that freshman anxieties regarding social status and a desire to "look elite" often drive students toward negative peer associations.

"Female students should be well counseled, most especially the newly admitted students in both levels (ND1 & HND1) based on home experiences... they face social influence and nowadays bragging with bad society to feel known by themselves and their group." (Anonymous Respondent, Agt Department)

This perception indicates that newly admitted female students may require additional counselling and guidance as they adjust to the social environment of the institution. The reference to "home experiences" also suggests that respondents perceived students' pre-existing social and family experiences as potentially relevant to how they navigate new peer environments. Furthermore, the respondent associated social influence and the pursuit of recognition or belonging within peer groups with potentially risky forms of social engagement. Rather than establishing that such factors cause involvement in cult-related activities, the

response indicates a perceived need for early counselling, social orientation, and supportive interventions targeted at students during the transition into tertiary education.

Theme C: Socio-Behavioral Self-Preservation and Modesty Codes

A recurring narrative theme within the student responses focuses on personal lifestyle choices, peer group selection, and self-preservation. Students frequently advise their peers to maintain personal vigilance, dress modestly, and choose friendships carefully to reduce vulnerability.

"We should be very careful and also to know the type of people we make friends with... Female students need to dress decently, avoid bad peer groups, and know where they are coming from." (Multiple combined qualitative responses)

This response reflects a perception among some participants that peer selection, personal conduct, and adherence to prevailing social expectations are relevant to navigating the risks associated with campus cultism. The reference to "dressing decently" should, however, be understood as a respondent-derived perception rather than as evidence that female students' clothing contributes to or causes victimization. Within the sociocultural context of Kwara State and the polytechnic community, such comments may reflect prevailing expectations concerning female behaviour, modesty, and social conduct in a setting where religious and cultural norms influence public perceptions of appropriate dress. Importantly, these expectations should not be interpreted as placing responsibility for preventing harassment, intimidation, or violence on female students themselves. Rather, the finding illustrates how students may perceive and negotiate gendered expectations while navigating concerns about safety and social vulnerability.

Discussion and Theoretical Integration

The empirical findings clarify how cult-related safety concerns affect female students at Kwara State Polytechnic. A key observation is the distinction between descriptive patterns and statistical associations regarding housing location. While 75.66% of respondents live off-campus, the Chi-Square analysis showed no statistically significant difference in safety perceptions between off-campus and on-campus residents ($p = 0.5848$). This indicates that safety concerns and fear of cult activity are widespread across the institutional environment, rather than being confined solely to off-campus housing. Environmental criminology frameworks, such as Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson, 2002), help explain that when institutional safety measures and lighting are inconsistent across campus areas, safety risks can affect students in both residential settings (Aloba & Olatunya, 2023; Okeshola & Mudbare, 2013).

The study also demonstrates the role of social pressure. Although direct recruitment of female students is statistically low (2.21%), over half of the respondents (52.21%) view peer pressure as a key driver of female alignment with cult-linked networks. Furthermore, the Chi-Square analysis confirms a statistically significant connection between high peer pressure and reported negative academic performance ($p = 0.0498$, Cramer's $V = 0.131$). This aligns with Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1998; Bandura, 2001), which posits that social networks strongly influence behavior and academic focus. When students navigate high-pressure social environments, the resulting stress and distraction can impair academic performance (Akinrefon et al., 2020; Nwankwo & Omeje, 2015).

The findings also highlight a notable policy awareness gap. While 79.65% of students feel the polytechnic administration is actively addressing cultism, 61.95% are unaware of specific institutional anti-cult policies. This gap suggests that while general security presence is visible, formal guidelines and reporting mechanisms are not sufficiently communicated to students (Imonikhe & Oluyemi, 2014; Oyeleke, 2019). Addressing cultism effectively requires combining clear, transparent policy communication with accessible student support services (Babatunde & Adebayo, 2023).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study offers empirical insights into the female student experience at Kwara State Polytechnic, certain structural parameters should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings.

First, the sample distribution is heavily weighted toward National Diploma (ND2) students, who comprise 73.01% of the total sample. While this provides a detailed look at a group with substantial campus experience, it underrepresents students in Higher National Diploma (HND) tracks.

Consequently, these findings primarily reflect the experiences of students in the early to mid-stages of their polytechnic education.

Second, the reliance on a self-administered digital survey format introduces potential response patterns driven by the sensitive nature of the topic, where some participants may lean toward neutral responses to protect their privacy.

Future research should expand this inquiry into a longitudinal study tracking female student cohorts across multiple institutions in North-Central Nigeria. This would allow researchers to evaluate how regional socio-economic changes influence student vulnerabilities over time. Additionally, combining quantitative metrics with targeted focus-group discussions would provide deeper insight into the peer dynamics that drive student participation. Investigating the efficacy of specific security measures in off-campus housing areas would also help guide targeted municipal and institutional safety policies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that campus cultism continues to present a complex security challenge for female students at Kwara State Polytechnic. While direct, explicit recruitment exposure remains statistically low, the structural and environmental conditions of the campus ecosystem—notably a high reliance on off-campus housing and the influence of peer networks—leave female students vulnerable to intimidation, psychological distress, and academic disruption.

The empirical findings show a clear gap between the institution's formal anti-cultism efforts and the felt security experiences of its students, with more than one-third of the female student body reporting that they feel unsafe. This indicates that traditional security measures may be augmented with gender-sensitive, proactive administrative policies. By addressing both the spatial risks of off-campus housing and the social pressures that drive group conformity, the institution can move toward a more secure, supportive educational environment.

Based on the empirical findings and student feedback, the following policy interventions are recommended for the Kwara State Polytechnic Administration:

- i. Establish Anonymous Safety Reporting Channels: Set up confidential digital reporting tools (such as a secure mobile portal or hotlines) to allow students to report intimidation or safety concerns without fear of retaliation.
- ii. Improve Communication of Campus Policies: Actively distribute clear information on official anti-cult policies, student rights, and support services during orientation programs and through official campus communication channels
- iii. Expand Counseling and Psychological Support: Strengthen campus mental health and guidance services to assist students facing peer pressure, trauma, or academic stress.
- iv. Targeted Orientation and Peer Mentorship: Implement resilience workshops and peer mentoring for incoming students (ND1 and HND1) to assist with their transition to polytechnic life and build positive social networks.
- v. Enhance Campus Safety Infrastructure: Improve lighting along main campus walkways, maintain visible security patrols, and work with local safety committees around student housing areas.

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