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# **Victimization and fear of crime on French university campuses**

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## **Introduction**

The recent hashtag movement #pasdevague on Twitter, reminds us of the current situation of the issue of "violence" in educational institutions, but also how emotionally charged this theme is. While it has made it possible to make the failures of the "sanctuary" school (this republican creature where "external noises do not enter", as desired by the pedagogue Alain, 1978, p. 877) publicly visible, it has also highlighted the inconsistencies of the public processing of data provided to institutions and the imperfection of the instrument for counting victims and perpetrators. Moreover, while researchers are interested in victimization in secondary education (Debarbieux, 2004), we have very little evidence to discuss victimization of higher education students, although campuses are social spaces where student numbers continue to increase each year (see also Cacouault-Bitaud and Œuvrard, 2009).

In France, the public debate is fed by a single statistical source: police and gendarmerie statistics. However, researchers have developed general population surveys, a key tool in the social sciences when considering this subject. The genesis of investigations into victimization and feelings of insecurity can be found in the United States, where security concerns date back to the 1960s with the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (Katzenbach Commission). In 1965, the first statistical victimization studies, independent of the various federal administrations, were carried out. They will continue while improving their samples every five years starting in 1973. Thus, the focal length is reversed in order to position oneself from the victim's point of view and it is quickly observed that the reported victimizations are far higher than those recorded by the administrative services. Following the momentum of North American studies, social science researchers in France are taking advantage of this method of investigation (Zauberman, Robert, Beck and Névanen, 2013). The victimization survey then becomes the main measurement tool based on samples to which the sampling technique is applied. The aim is to gauge "a social phenomenon that has traditionally been measured only through administrative data" (Zauberman, 2015, p. 8). The 1980s, under the influence of American research, marked a major turning point when the two conceptions on the feeling of insecurity were analysed separately. At that time, work on fears grew under the impetus of the Centre de recherches sociologiques sur le droit et les institutions pénales (CESDIP). Many studies will develop in the following decades on very varied subjects with the creation of several specialized research centres on crime. Since the mid-1980s, the

State has been promoting several sectors of research on crime through the establishment of structures and bodies, such as the French Observatory for Drug Addiction (OFDT) and the National Institute for Higher Security and Justice Studies (INHESJ). This period is marked by a strong use of quantitative data in a context of public procurement "in connection with the growing importance of statistics and "expertise" in the public debate" (Mucchielli, 2004, p. 36). Within this profusion of research on crime knowledge, victimization surveys will be implemented among the French population. Today, they are entering the field of sociology of higher education.

The studies of the Observatoire de la vie étudiante (which focus on the living conditions of students in France) provide elements that provide a better understanding of the perception of inequalities (Ferry and Tenret, 2017), vulnerability (Cordazzo, 2016) and student isolation (Belghith, Giret, Ronzeau and Tenret, 2017), but leave out victimizations. After several decades of research on students (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964; Levy-Garboua, 1976; Baudelot, Estabiet, Benoliel and Cukrowicz, 1981; Lapeyronnie and Marie, 1992; Eicher and Gruel, 1996; Felouzis, 2001 ; Coulon, 2005; McInnis, 2004), apart from the study of discrimination, we have no data available on the experience of victimization and fears felt on French campuses.

## **1. University campuses: object and field**

In this context, we have an original field of investigation, those particular places of social life that are university campuses on which no such research has been conducted in France. Our research subject has different characteristics.

### ***1.1. The university campus: a particular place of social life***

First of all, university campuses in France are still located in urban areas, either in the heart of city centres or increasingly on the outskirts. The evolving links between territories and universities must be examined. From a general point of view, the relationship between universities and their territory ranges from divorce in the mid-1980s, when local communities cared little about it (degraded, aging campuses deserted by students as soon as classes ended), to reconciliation following the 2000 University Plan launched in the 1990s by the Jospin government. Within urban territories, universities are then seen as an economic, social and cultural asset, thus breaking out of their isolation from local society. In reality, the relationship between the city and the university alternates phases of rapprochement and empowerment according to various developments, including student numbers. At the time, Dubet and his colleagues pointed out that "from the early 1960s, the tremendous growth in student numbers

would break up the university palaces of the late 19th century and call into question the inadequacy between the university network and new urbanization" (Dubet, Filatre, Merrien, Sauvage & Vince, 1994, p. 24) In addition, the campus was also a place of sociability for an increasingly numerous group of young people. Indeed, the number of students enrolling in university increased considerably between 1960 and 2015, from 310,000 to 2,910,000. This phenomenon, which peaked at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, is confirmed for the recent period (2016 and 2017) for both the public (+4%) and private (+2.8%) sectors. As time goes by, higher education becomes more and more attractive for baccalaureate holders and this attractiveness is combined with the extension of the duration of studies. Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, the influx of foreign students has contributed to the increase in overall enrolment. The latter represented 12.1% of students in 2013 (MESRI, 2017: 29). University campuses can also be viewed through the specificity of student life and its constraints. Indeed, the relationship to studies, travel time, paid time or even relations between students are some of the characteristics of student life.

Today, almost all general baccalaureate holders and almost three-quarters of technological baccalaureate holders are enrolled in university. Considering the share of an age group that obtains a baccalaureate and the growing proportion that continues its studies in higher education, about 60% of young people study in one of the courses of higher education. Nationally, 58% of 20-24 year olds are engaged in higher education, from all social backgrounds. This democratization concerns in particular the children of workers and employees who gradually enter university, although the gap between the most and least privileged remains: 74% of children in managerial and intermediate professions are graduates of higher education compared to 38% of children of workers or employees over the period 2013-2015. In 2016, children of managers and higher intellectual professions are over-represented (36%) in higher education (Belghith, Giret, Ronzeau and Tenret, 2017, p. 2) compared to their proportion (18%) in the working population (INSEE, 2016). Moreover, women have made a breakthrough in higher education since they are now in the majority (55%) and completely dominate the Humanities and Social Sciences fields (70%). On the other hand, they are proportionally less numerous in scientific fields, very selective fields, and among doctoral students. In the end, the university represents 62% of the student population, which means that it is far ahead of the IUT and the *Grandes Écoles*. In 2015, students receiving direct financial assistance in the form of grants or loans amounted to 710,000 (€6 billion). The increase in the population has as a corollary its diversification in terms of living conditions as well as its social characteristics. The triennial study by the OVE shows an increasing sense of

integration of students into the life of their institution; 39% said they were fully integrated in 2016 compared to 34% in 2013 (Belghith, Giret, Ronzeau and Tenret, 2017, p. 3). In 2016, students received their financial resources (89% of students) in three different but sometimes complementary ways: income from paid employment (33%), public assistance (31%) and family assistance (25%). In total, as in 2013, 46% of them were employed during their studies (Belghith et al., p. 5), earning an average of €704 per month. This income has increased by 122€ over the last three years. While almost half of the students work to finance their studies, one part is involved in an activity related to the studies they are studying (15% of employees) and another is involved in an internship or work-study program (30%). Nevertheless, 36% of them have a paid activity not related to studies, most often part-time over six months (Belghith et al., p. 6). Although there is a decrease between 2013 and 2016 (-8 points), 57% of scholarship students still say they "do not have enough money to cover their needs". There is no significant change in the way students live between 2013 and 2016: "as in 2013, one third of students [are accommodated] at their parents' home and one third of them live in rental accommodation, alone or with a partner. Among the other types of accommodation, shared accommodation and accommodation in university residence also remain stable for 11% and 12% of students respectively" (Belghith et al., p. 8). Finally, the SEW study makes a significant contribution to the health status of students, stating that if it is considered satisfactory overall, psychological fragility increases. Indeed, although two-thirds of those surveyed in 2016 said they were satisfied with their health status, women, roommates, foreign students and students of working class origin were generally less satisfied with their health conditions. For example, 58% of students from the most vulnerable social classes say they are satisfied with their health. Ultimately, reports of suffering for one of the symptoms increased (+6 points) (Belghith & al., Chart 8, p. 9). Students are also more likely than the general population to deprive themselves of medical care (13% for financial reasons). The 23-25 age group is the most affected, which is explained by the gap in which this age group finds itself and acts as a double process: the family ceases to play its protective role and protection from work is not yet effective for the self-employed.

### ***1.2. Aix-Marseille University: territorial specificities***

As of January 1, 2019, the number of universities in France stood at 70. Faced with this proliferation, Aix-Marseille University (AMU), the largest university in France and the largest in the French-speaking world, constitutes a privileged field of research. AMU is divided into five campuses, four of which are located in Marseille, the fifth taking place in the city of Aix-

en-Provence. This first major subdivision masks the spread of the various sites, which number 54 throughout the PACA region. We will focus here on three of the Marseille campuses.

AMU was created in 2012 following the merger of the three public universities in the region (Université de la Méditerranée, Université de Provence, Université Paul Cézanne), a process initiated by the law n° 2007-1199 of 10 August 2007 on the freedoms and responsibilities of universities (the so-called LRU law or the Péresse law). The ambition of one of the youngest French universities is evolving internationally (10,000 foreign students). It is currently the busiest in France (74,000 students enrolled) and even the largest French-speaking campus in the world for at least two reasons: number of students and budget. In the first place, it is only their embedding in the urban fabric that distinguishes the three campuses studied. First of all, the Luminy campus is located in a special geographical location within the Calanques National Park, in a southern peri-urban area, very far from the city centre and away from any major business centre. Secondly, the Saint-Charles campus is very much part of the urban space, finding a central place in the city, wedged between the SNCF station, the bus station and the Autoroute du Soleil. Third, the northern neighbourhoods, a peripheral space, impoverished and in the process of urban restructuring in recent years, are home to the Saint-Jérôme campus. Consequently, this territorial diversity underlines the interest of the analysis that will follow. These different aspects led us to these three campuses to measure the victimations suffered and the fears felt by the students.

## **2. Methodology**

Based on American research, particularly in the context of the Crime and Safety Survey Program (Fleury DeVoe & Bauer, 2011; Barrett, Jennings & Lynch, 2012; Sloan, Fisher, Cullen, 1997; Simon, 1994), and on the tradition of French surveys (Robert and Zauberman, 2011, 2017), this Marseilles university context has been the subject of victimization surveys.

Within these multiple debates exacerbating the security theme, certain categories of population and certain territories particularly concentrate these discourses and representations charged with fantasies (Mucchielli, 2001). Among all urban territories, the French suburbs are the subject of the greatest stigmatization, accumulating, through the prism of security, the most negative representations. This mechanism, which stigmatizes specific territories, is also particularly intense in the city of Marseille, now the second most populated city in France with about 866,600 inhabitants where socio-spatial contrasts are striking (INSEE, 2016; see also Donzel and Bresson, 2007, p. 90). A city considered in many respects to be a bad student at the

national level, sometimes described as indomitable or rebellious (Dell'Umbria, 2006), is often overwhelmed by both the government and the national media more than the concrete reality of delinquent or criminal acts suggests (Mucchielli, Raquet, Saladino and Raffin, 2014). Marseille is subject to politicization and media coverage that embraces everything related to delinquency or crime to the point of talking about a Marseille Bashing (Mucchielli, 2015). These very negative representations are concentrated in the northern districts of the city (Pujol, 2016) where the "shit districts" contrast sharply with the "chic districts". Within the multiple social spaces, we seek to study university campuses under the aspects of victimization and insecurity by posing the hypothesis that these aspects maintain a link with their integration into the urban fabric. The campuses selected for their different socio-spatial locations on the scale of the city of Marseille allow this hypothesis to be tested. ORDCS<sup>1</sup> was used to support this groundbreaking field survey.

### ***2.1. General considerations***

Given the size of this university, it was necessary to make a selection based on several criteria. It seemed interesting, from a comparative perspective, to focus on a single geographical area. The concentration of 80% of the sites in the Phocaean city predestined the latter to be chosen. Aix-en-Provence, another campus that was nevertheless important, particularly because of its size, was left out. In addition, it was appropriate to focus only on the city of Marseille in order to ensure comparability, coherence and homogenization. The simple criterion of the differentiated national reputation of these two urban nuclei is sufficient to understand the extreme heterogeneity at different levels of these two cities between which a "battle of the centres" is being fought (Peraldi, 2015, p. 95). Finally, the selection of sites was also based on the strong contrasts in the socio-spatial location of the three university campuses mentioned above.

The main objective is to highlight and compare the acts of delinquency to which students on Marseilles campuses may have been victims during an academic year, whether or not they have informed the central administrative services or the police and gendarmerie. The victimization survey has the advantage of allowing a count of victims, but also an evaluation of the feeling of insecurity. In the continuum of discussions and debates on security over the past forty years, it is necessary to distinguish between opinions, risks of victimization and feelings of insecurity.

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<sup>1</sup> The scientific research programme called the Observatory of Delinquency and Social Contexts ran from 2011 to 2015 under the direction of sociologist Laurent Mucchielli, research director at the CNRS and specialist in deviance phenomena and security policies.

The initial problem is to detach oneself from common sense and break with the preconceptions about the phenomenon. On this emotionally charged subject, the evidence often contains misleading representations. As such, Duprez and Hedli's (1992) qualitative research in the North highlights the dichotomy between individuals who are afraid of crime and those who are only concerned about it. In short, we must not confuse the distinct mechanisms of fear and concern, the first refers to a feeling, the one we are seeking to know, while the second expresses an opinion. Fear can be considered as "an apprehension of risk" in partial association with local delinquency (Pottier and Robert, 1997) or with reported victimizations (Pottier, Zauberman and Robert, 2002). The second dimension of the sense of insecurity lies in the concerns about delinquency, which are being raised to the level of an important, even a priority social problem.

## ***2.2. The questionnaire***

At the beginning of the survey, we considered the biases associated with generalized individual computerized procurement as ultimately high to introduce it. Indeed, the risk seemed too great to seize a mass of students who saw in the victimization survey a way to report observed acts or delinquency. It was necessary to look at the source that affect and other sources of emotion that this type of study can generate. The use of a so-called on-the-fly questionnaire was also to be excluded since, once again, respondents are asked to participate on a voluntary basis.

To do this, the idea was to negotiate upstream with the department heads, then more directly with the teachers, to use a quarter of an hour of the course time - a period when the student is available - to deploy our questionnaire and thus reach masses of "captive" students, but also to reach the whole person. In other words, both victims and non-victims had to be addressed. It should be noted that we intervened in courses where attendance was mandatory in order to capture a subset of the student population with heterogeneous socio-economic and academic characteristics. In this way, we generally collected the declarations of the Bachelor's students at different times of the day by varying the days of the week (Monday to Friday). In this case, the only method of procurement was the paper questionnaire. Then, the technique of collecting the responses of the Masters (smaller promotions) is summed up in a computerized handover of an identical questionnaire in the computer room, most often in our presence in order to orally introduce the study conducted; a method that facilitated the coding of the data and reduced the time consuming aspect of our research system. The doctoral students were investigated by sending an email (2 reminders), sometimes by the doctoral schools, sometimes by research directors, and sometimes by us via lists obtained from the laboratory directors. But each time, the electronic link was sent with a text specifying our request and the framework within which



it was made. Then, in general, we favoured closed-ended questions in order to avoid another potential bias. Indeed, the excess of open-ended questions in a questionnaire tends to cause respondent fatigue and increase avoidance behaviours for some questions, coupled with an approximation in the answers, making final exploitation more difficult. About ten minutes to submit to the questionnaire was the maximum appropriate time considered, a limited time that we took into account during the design work. Finally, victimization surveys ask about the past, usually the previous year or the two previous years. Consequently, the temporality was determined on the academic year preceding our study. If the respondents' statements are based on their memories, the event in question must also be perceived by the victim as a victimization and the victim must be able to verbalize it. Despite these pitfalls and the absence of a perfect instrument, victimization surveys are those that most closely approximate the reality at a given time on a specific population, while the statistics of criminal institutions largely reflect their activity, whose priorities change over time. Comparison with other available sources is a way of checking for matches or discrepancies and possibly showing trends. In short, "a film says more than a photography" (Zauberman, 2015, p. 11).

After collecting the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (age, sex, place of residence, year of registration, grant allocation, income level, mode of transport), a first section of the questionnaire questions the satisfaction of the study environment through 4 indicators (drugs, acts of vandalism, site cleanliness, lighting). The second section of the questionnaire focuses on the fears expressed on and around campuses during the day, at night and during the home-university journey. The declaration of a victimization takes place in a last general section. The initial question is formulated as follows: *During the previous academic year, were you a victim of any of the following incidents?* There are then 7 potential victimizations (Theft or attempted theft of your car or two-wheelers; Theft or attempted theft of an object in or on your car, Voluntary act of vandalism on your car or two-wheelers, Theft or attempted theft with or without violence of personal object(s); Insults or verbal threats; Discrimination; Physical violence or attempt). Thus, students who declare themselves victims (filters) are then invited to answer one or more modules (if they declare several different victimizations) that specify the frequency, temporality and location of the victimization. Then, victims are asked for information about the perpetrators (if identified) and their behaviour after the fact (simple reporting, handrail, complaint). In the case of multivictimization on the same item, the respondent is informed that we are only interested in the last fact that he or she suffered.

The period studied is from September 2012 to June 2015. The corpus is composed of 1,250 usable questionnaires: 529 people in Luminy (6% of students), 364 in Saint-Charles (22% of

students) and 357 in Saint-Jérôme (11% of students). The collection of questionnaires was large enough to allow statistical adjustment of the sample based on SEW data on the following socio-demographic variables: sex, age, year of enrolment, whether or not they were scholarship recipients, place of residence. In the study of the victimations we present, we have chosen to speak in terms of confidence intervals. Indeed, the confidence interval reflects the statistical accuracy of the result and appears in the tables below as percentages in square brackets. Thus, rather than punctually estimating the true unknown value of the parameter  $\theta$  (victim rate), we looked for an interval that "most likely" covered this true value.

## **Conclusion**

This research discussed the results of victimization surveys for students on three campuses. We have taken care to stress the importance of categorising the acts of delinquency declared by students and to dissociate ourselves from an unfortunately (!) too widespread discourse on the evolutions or the current state of "delinquency". We have established a hierarchy of victimizations. From there, we saw that the Saint-Jérôme campus, located in the northern districts of Marseille, reported a percentage of victims that exceeded what can be seen in the city centre (Saint-Charles) and in the Parc des Calanques (Luminy). From this point of view, the withdrawal of campuses from the city centre, omitting all the concerns related to the eccentricity of a place of study and residence for some - how to get there, how to do your shopping, etc.? - largely protects against local crime. Also, the capacity of a campus has no influence on the level of recorded delinquency. More than the number of students on a campus, it is the type of incivility observed that seems to make the difference. While overall victimization rates on the campuses surveyed are lower than those recorded among the Marseille population – suggesting that the campus appears at first sight to be a more secure space – students are undoubtedly first affected in their moral and psychological integrity (insults, threats, discrimination). Interpersonal violence remains the exception. With regard to the theft of students' material goods, our results show that the objects in the car are the number one target of local crime and that it is students in outlying neighbourhoods who suffer the most. The university must reposition itself as a space of socialization and as an institution, through its teachers and administrators, that must promote equality, open to its environment, open to society. The acts of discrimination identified take place largely within the framework of inter-knowledge, which suggests delinquency between users of the university site. Thus, the high proportion of discriminatory acts is partly the result of a lifestyle that exposes young people more than any other age in their lives. However, there is a card to be played here in terms of

gender equality in particular and social cohesion as a whole, given the silence of the victims, which is sometimes assumed to emanate from fear, sometimes from indifference or even from a lack of trust in the institutions in order to reduce this major social phenomenon. Similarly, racism also finds expression in spite of the university ethos of both tolerance and diversity, which undoubtedly preserves this place of knowledge from its greater exacerbation in the rest of society. Ultimately, only victims of object theft tend to file complaints with the authorities. A significant discovery breaks with certain prejudices. Indeed, there is no result to suggest that the night period favours action, regardless of the victimization studied. The particularity of the downtown area is the high proportion of students who are victims of incivility around the university, suggesting scenes from everyday life where, when clashes occur, insults can be pronounced. Students on the North End campus are facing numerous attacks on property in their vehicles.

Students are statistically unequal in terms of delinquency, some categories of individuals are more exposed and affected by different types of delinquency. The statistical tools we have used provide an opportunity to highlight a series of correlations between the crime suffered and the socio-demographic characteristics of the victims. This set of correlations in turn offers the opportunity to draw a portrait of the victims. Students tend to define themselves as victims as their graduation and age increase. In general, the experience of victimization greatly increases the chances of often feeling insecure at night, but also of perceiving the study environment as degraded. Victims also report being more frightened when they travel or leave the campus at nightfall. Another correlation could be established between the victims of insults and the possession of a scholarship, suggesting a link between financial fragility and the experience of victimization. These data therefore offer us the possibility of targeting certain types of users in particular, in particular through prevention campaigns in which all education stakeholders are involved by building relationships that promote student involvement.

The predominant place of moral and psychological violence represents the other side of the coin, with sexism and racism at the top of the list. Moreover, when we talk about predation towards consumer objects, theft is mostly carried out in the absence of the victim, excluding in most cases verbal or physically violent interaction. In the end, the overall feeling of insecurity remains rather low. Fears are highly concentrated during the night, underlining the strength of the nocturnal imaginations that feed this feeling. All other things being equal, campus students in socially more favoured areas are those who most often claim to be safe both in transportation and when travelling on campus. Conversely, the reputation of the urban centre and the northern districts, conceived as a shared, temporary and localized social representation, associated with

a name and resulting from more or less powerful and formalized social evaluations, has a social consistency and a character shared by a proportion of students. This way of looking at a neighbourhood has the power to create fears without the reality of delinquency necessarily being the cause. These reflections lead us to rethink the question of the university climate as others have done before us on the school climate. Indeed, the latter is at the heart of the relationship to knowledge, of didactic and pedagogical interactions (reference). The feeling of well-being as well as that of justice in the educational institution are crucial for the success of students. To think of the climate is to pose in another way the question of the relationship between socialization and learning through the question of the meaning of studies.

The questions that have been raised during this research relate largely to the question of social cohesion in these public spaces that are university campuses. The survey attempted to fill a scientific gap to improve the understanding of this student world. Future research will undoubtedly make it possible to consolidate these initial lessons concerning the nature of victimization and the feeling of fear.

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