

Insecurity: Students divided over on-campus, off-campus hostels

UMUCHIMA Town is one of the host communities of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). Because of its proximity to the campus, the town hosts students, who occupy majority of the buildings in the area.

In Marken Suite, one of the houses, three students were recently arrested by the police for an offence bordering on cultism. Though eyewitness said the students may not have been cultists but their actions could have made residents to think otherwise.

CAMPUSLIFE gathered that the students, who did not go home during semester holiday, engaged in drinking spree in their rooms for days.

After getting drunk, our correspondent gathered, one of the students started throwing empty bottles through the window. This drew the attention of the building caretaker, who stays on the ground floor. The compound was littered with pieces of broken bottles.

When the caretaker moved to stop them, the boys threatened to "deal with him" if he dared to question their action. Immediately, the caretaker reported the matter to the police and the boys were arrested. They were later said to be cultists terrorising the area.

This is typical of students in off-campus halls of residence. Before the Academic Staff Union of Uni-

versities (ASUU) strike, there was a growing fear among FUTO students living off-campus over their security given the alarming rate of assault, intimidation, rape, killing and robbery in the institution's host communities.

While students were writing the first semester examination, there were cases of rape and armed robbery in off-campus hostels. A student of Chemical Engineering, Okechi Ogbonnaya, fell victim when he was mistakenly shot dead by a group of bandits being chased by Man 'O' War cadets. The incident occurred at Lafarge Lodge in Umuchima.

Students believe that they are safe when they live on campus since the institution's security personnel's jurisdiction does not extend to off-campus hostels and host communities. The situation is not different in other universities where students live off-campus.

A few years ago, members of the Umuariaga community, which hosts Michael Opara University of Agriculture, Umudike, lynched a student of Physics, Kingsley Udeme. The offence of the victim was that he assaulted his landlord after failing to pay his rent.

In January 2011, members of Ihiagwa Vigilante Group burnt a student of the Federal Polytechnic in Nekede (FEDPONEK) alive. The victim, identified as Bena, was al-

leged to attempt to steal a laptop. He was led to the Ihiagwa Market Square where he was burnt.

Nine months after, two FUTO students alleged to be robbers were burnt alive at the T-Junction, near Ihiagwa Magistrate Court. The victims whose names were given as Okechukwu Nwosu and Martins Chibuzor were 100-Level FUTO students.

Despite these despicable acts in

off-campuses, some students still prefer off-campus hostels to school accommodation. Such students claim that their privacy is guaranteed in off-campus halls of residence.

Investigation by CAMPUSLIFE revealed that rent is higher in off-campus hostels compared to school accommodation. For instance, FUTO students pay between N100,000 and N120,000 for accom-

modation in Umuchima, Eziobodo and Ihiagwa communities.

The figures are about 600 to 700 per cent more than the N15,000 they would have paid for a campus hall.

Eziobodo, where over 50 per cent of FUTO students live, lacks drainage, which makes the area prone to flood. Each time it rains, the streets are covered in flood water.

•Continued on page 36



•A flooded part of Eziobodo community