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“It can happen any time…You just never know…”

A Qualitative Study into Young Women Taxi Commuters’ Subjective Experiences of Potential Exposure to Harm, Violence and Traumatic Stress

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work, and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

.....

Kgomotso Kwele

.....

Date

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March 2016

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the subjective experiences of a population who appear to be at relatively high risk of potential violence and harm, specifically female university students who are compelled to commute by taxi on a daily basis. The study aimed to explore and document the psychological experiences of these female university students including their anxieties, levels of traumatic stress related responses, cognitions and fantasies, and conscious and unconscious adaptations to their circumstances. It was hoped that information gleaned would contribute to, and possibly expand the understanding of what the lived experience of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) might entail. In order to investigate the research questions, ten students who were identified as being compelled to use minibus taxis as their primary mode of transport to and from university participated in semi-structured interviews on the topic of their experiences in this space and how they adapt to and survive in their circumstances. The study was located in the qualitative research tradition and the interview transcripts were analysed using critical thematic analysis. The main themes were identified and presented under four sections; exposure to traumatic events, the effects and impacts of these events, managing and coping, and gender related experiences in the taxi commuting space. Exposure to traumatic events included taxi driver aggression, motor vehicle accidents, crime and violence, xenophobic attacks and gender related trauma. The most prominent effects or impacts that were identified were firstly, anxiety, fear and preoccupation with danger and secondly, numbing, resignation and hopelessness. The tactics which were employed by participants in managing and coping with their circumstances included, prayer and observation and management of their commuting environment. It was through observation and self-management that participants practiced strategies that allowed them some measure of control in terms of how they conducted themselves in the taxi commuting space. Under the final section, participants revealed their gender related experiences reporting a sense of being exploited, being subject to sexual harassment, and the constant fear of rape or sexual violation. The links between these participants' experience and the concept of CTS are presented and it is argued that many aspects of their experience appear consistent with CTS.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

A high percentage of the South African population is exposed to crime, much of it being violent in nature. In the 2007 National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS) crime statistics in South Africa were presented. According to this survey, out of the nationally representative sample of 4500 South African adults who were interviewed, 22.3% of respondents had experienced a crime in the 12 months preceding the survey (Pharoah, 2008). The 2012 National Victims of Crime Survey included questions on whether the fear of crime prevented households from engaging in day-today activities. The results indicated that more than a third of the households included in the study (35,1%) avoided going to open spaces when they were alone because of their fear of crime, followed by 23,2% of households that would not allow their children to move around or play in their area, and a further 15,7% of households that would not allow their children to walk to school alone (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

It is evident that a large number of people living in South Africa have experienced trauma as a result of exposure to high rates of criminal violence (Pharoah, 2008). In addition, it has also been observed that the general population in South Africa is at high risk for experiencing more than one traumatic event in their lifetime (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). Various studies have found exposure to traumatic events to be highest among young adults (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010; Suliman, Kaminer, Seedat, & Stein, 2005).

Daily exposure to violence and trauma is common for many individuals and communities globally, with an absence of safe spaces to escape from danger or threat. In South Africa (and other economically disadvantaged communities) recurring exposure is common, particularly to community violence, where people do not feel physically safe at home or outside their homes (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010; Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy & Benjamin, 2013; McGowan & Kagee, 2013). The incidence of crime and violence may be seen as both common and unpredictable in many South African communities. Accordingly, many people have to deal with the continuous anxiety that accompanies direct traumatic experiences in addition to the indirect experiences of those around them. Kaminer and Eagle (2010) argue that many South Africans living under particular circumstances or in particular communities do not experience a period after the trauma in which they may process the event

before the next traumatic experience occurs, thus they are faced with the continuous risk of further traumatisation (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). The term Continuous Traumatic Stress was coined approximately 25 years ago to represent the fact that for some traumatized populations the danger would never be in the past, but is in fact an unavoidable part of their daily lives in the present and potentially in the future (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013; Straker, 2013). A limited amount of research has been done exploring the construct of Continuous Traumatic Stress in the contemporary South African context. As a result, the psychological effects that South Africans experience due to cumulative and continuous trauma are not well documented in the literature.

As noted in the aims, the population of interest for this study was a young female population who use minibus taxis as their primary method of transport. Thus the following discussion is of relevance to this research study. The minibus taxi industry plays a leading role in the public transport sector, transporting up to 65% of the South African population to their destinations (Fobosi, 2013). The South African taxi industry is considered as critical in the country's public transport sector. The industry is acknowledged for supporting black South African communities by providing a decentralised, inexpensive, and more accessible alternative to public transportation (Fobosi, 2013). A large part of the South African population are compelled to use taxis as there is no other form of transport available which is as convenient and affordable. It is unfortunate, however, that taxis have also been identified as one of the most dangerous methods of transport in the country- with incidents of accidents, violent crime and sexual assault being regularly reported by individuals who use taxis on a daily basis (Chin & Huang, 2009; Dula & Geller, 2003; La Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013; Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015; Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007; Tasca, 2000).

It was therefore considered feasible that female student taxi commuters would experience high levels of exposure to potential trauma and associated anxiety on a daily basis, such that aspects of their experience might bear a resemblance to what might be understood as continuous traumatic stress. It was thus considered that it would be useful to explore the psychological experiences of such women students in order to document these experiences and potentially to elaborate some of the features of continuous traumatic stress.

1.1.BROAD AIMS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The aims of this study were to:

1. Explore the subjective experiences of a population who appear to be at relatively high risk of potential violence and harm, specifically; female university students who are compelled to commute by taxi on a daily basis.
2. Explore and document the psychological experiences of these female university students including their anxieties, levels of traumatic stress related responses, cognitions and fantasies, and conscious and unconscious adaptions to their circumstances.
3. Contribute to, and possibly expand the understanding of what the lived experience of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) might entail.

1.2. STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This introductory chapter is followed by four additional chapters. The subsequent chapters are briefly described as follows: Chapter two provides a review of relevant literature, including of previous research findings relevant to this research. These findings are discussed and expanded in this chapter.

The third chapter of this report provides an explanation and description of the research methodology employed within this study.

Chapter four addresses the findings, analysis and discussion of the research data generated, including the discussion of central themes identified within the data. The discussion seeks to examine the ways in which the female participants describe the impact of and cope with or manage the stress of having to use taxis as a primary mode of transport after experiencing (direct or indirect) trauma related to commuting within the taxi space.

The concluding chapter offers a reflective overview and critical evaluation of the findings, including some of the possible implications of these findings. Possible limitations of the study are discussed as well as possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review discusses a number of key theoretical and research related dimensions of the research project. The first section of this review will outline the prevalence of exposure to traumatic events in South Africa, focusing particularly on motor vehicle accidents, taxi driver aggression, and gender based violence. These aspects will be discussed in relation to the use of minibus taxis, as this is the focus of this study. Thereafter, the ensuing section will consist of a presentation on traumatic stress related responses in relation to exposure specifically to crime. In outlining material related to seminal constructs and applied research related to the study, a discussion on Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) will be offered, since the construct forms an overarching backdrop to the study as indicated in the rationale presented in the previous chapter. The discussion of this aspect will entail defining and exploring the construct of Continuous Traumatic Stress, and contextualizing it in South Africa. Finally, the usefulness of some selected classical theories focused on traumatic stress are included in the review as this will hopefully assist in understanding and framing trauma related responses. Therefore a brief discussion of the Conservation Of Resources Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1988) and Horowitz' (1986) Information Processing Model will be presented.

2.1. PREVELANCE OF EXPOSURE TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

As noted previously, South Africans are highly exposed to various traumatic events (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010; Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy & Benjamin, 2013; McGowan & Kagee, 2013). In addition to crime in general, the more prevalent traumatic events of interest in relation to this study are motor vehicle accidents, the aggression that is associated with drivers of minibus taxis, and gender based violence (Chin & Huang, 2009; Dula & Geller, 2003; La, Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013; Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015; Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007; Tasca, 2000; Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007). A discussion on these types of trauma exposure is offered in this section.

2.1.1. Motor Vehicle Accidents and Taxi Drivers' Aggression

Across developing countries, the number of road traffic accidents and injuries continue to grow due to the high rate of motorisation on the one hand and to the lack of

adequate road traffic safety measures on the other (Barrett, 2003). Pedestrians and cyclists (i.e. vulnerable road users and passengers in public transportation buses and minibuses) are more regularly exposed to road traffic collisions than other road users (Barrett, 2003). In South Africa, minibus taxis are involved in road traffic accidents more than any other type of vehicle (Barrett, 2003; Govender & Allopi, 2007).

It is noteworthy to reflect on some findings of research that has been conducted in South Africa. In Cape Town, minibus taxis were involved in crashes at a rate of 6.5% although they represented only 3.2% of all registered vehicles in 2003 (Lomme, 2008). Between 1991 and 1998 minibus taxis had the highest road traffic fatality rate per 100 million vehicle kilometres travelled in South Africa when compared with buses and freight vehicles (Ribbens, Botha & Khumalo, 2000). During the same period, the fatality rate for accidents involving buses was estimated at 10 fatalities per million vehicle kilometres travelled whereas for minibus taxis it was between 15 and 20 fatalities per million vehicle kilometres travelled. Passenger transport vehicles, i.e. buses and minibus taxis, were involved in crashes at a rate of about 3.5 times higher than that of freight vehicles (Ribbens, Botha & Khumalo, 2000). Thus it is evident that travelling in forms of public transport such as minibus taxis exposes passengers to higher risk of being involved in an accident. A study by Automobile Association of South Africa revealed that minibus taxis are responsible for an estimate of 70,000 road traffic accidents annually. This number is twice the number of any other mode of passenger transport (Automobile Association of South African, AASA, 2011). In 2009, the total number of vehicles involved in fatal crashes was 14,327. During that period, the number of minibus taxis accounted for 4.2% of all vehicles in fatal crashes. In 2011, the total number of vehicles registered was 9,945,021. The number of minibus buses and minibus taxis involved in fatal crashes between 2010 and 2011 was 1408 (9.6%) of 14,568 total vehicles involved in crashes. Of the 36 lives lost daily on South African roads, 3 are killed in minibus taxi incidents (Arrivealive, 2013). Several studies have been conducted in the developing world to examine factors that contribute to minibus taxi crashes.

In relation to the driving behaviours of taxi drivers, which contributes to the high rate of accidents that taxis are evidently involved in, it has been noted that minibus taxi drivers in peak hours push through on hard shoulders, use ‘through lanes’ to cut in front of other traffic and perform unsafe passing manoeuvres, in order to make up delays encountered at passengers loading points and to increase the number of trips (La, Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013).

Other factors associated with dangerous minibus taxi driving behaviours include excessive speed, night time driving with poor lighting, failing to keep a proper lookout, failing to give way, ignoring traffic signs and signals, changing lanes and turning without signalling, failing to have proper control, increasing age of the driver, and tailgating other drivers in front, and these driving behaviours often overlapped factors related to poor road conditions (Chin & Huang, 2009; La, Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013). These unsafe and often risky driving behaviours listed by previous researchers as the contributory factors to the minibus taxi crashes fit in one way or the other into what might be categorised as 'aggressive driving behaviours' (Tasca, 2000). There are further aspects of on-road driving behaviours that minibus taxi drivers display which have been defined as aggressive (Dula & Geller, 2003). These include: acting out on negative feelings behind the wheel (frustration and anger); purposeful or deliberate acts of physical or psychological aggression to other road users and/or passengers (verbal abuse and obscene gestures); and risk-taking behaviours (dangerous manoeuvres performed to save time) (Dula & Geller, 2003).

There are various examples of observations that corroborate the findings that taxis have been identified as one of the most dangerous methods of transport in South Africa- with incidents of accidents being regularly reported by individuals who use taxis on a daily basis alongside reports of violent crime and sexual assault as will be discussed further (Chin & Huang, 2009; Dula & Geller, 2003; La Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013; Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015; Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007; Tasca, 2000; Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007). Accident risk, exposure to crime and threats of sexual violence are all aspects associated with taxi commuting that have been reported on in the media over the years as being of significance. Several examples of such media reports are briefly discussed below.

A South African dance group, known as V.I.N.T.A.G.E, experienced abuse by taxi drivers in 2013. The group was returning from the 'Soweto Pride' event when they were followed by a small of group of men who were whistling and making comments in Zulu as they entered the taxi rank. The group of men, understood to be taxi drivers, reportedly continued to verbally abuse the dance group members even after they had gotten into a taxi (Sowetan Reporter, 2013). Another incident was reported in Cape Town where, while taking children to school, a taxi driver overtook a row of cars at the Buttskop level crossing in Blackheath. The taxi driver ignored safety signals and proceeded over the tracks causing a train to collide with the taxi, killing ten of the children in the vehicle on impact, and leaving

four of them severely injured (SAPA, 2012). It is common for taxi drivers to disregard the rules of the road in attempts to make more trips and pick up more passengers in order to increase their income. As a result the safety of their passengers is often compromised. Another frightening incident was reported by SAPA (South African Press Association) in 2007, where a man was killed and at least nine other people wounded in three separate taxi-related shootings in and around Johannesburg. The city centre witnessed taxi operator violence when bullets started flying at the Bree Street taxi rank during lunchtime, wounding eight people. In an informal interview, a 19-year-old student from The University of the Witwatersrand, who commutes daily from Soweto, disclosed that he feared for his life, saying that "I am not going to use taxis anymore. I value my life." (SAPA, 28 May 2007). There have also been numerous incidents of gender based violence which have reportedly occurred at taxi ranks, the most well-known one being harassment experienced by two young women when they went shopping in the Noord Street taxi rank in December 2012. The two young women were taunted by a group of men about their clothes while groping them, pulling at their clothing, and taking photos with their cell phones (Molatlhwa, 2012). It is important to note that this is just a single example of a gender based violence incident which has occurred at a taxi rank, but women who use taxis have also reportedly experienced such incidents on their journey to the taxi rank from where they reside and walking to and from drop off points. Taxis have therefore become infamous for incidents such as these, to the extent that women fear what might happen to them when using taxis as their primary method of transport because this places them in public spaces in which they are perpetually vulnerable to victimization (Molatlhwa, 2012).

Hence the aggressive, violent and reckless behaviours of some minibus taxi drivers as well as the prevalence of motor vehicle accidents, appear to be significant traumatic events which South African users of public transport are regularly exposed to. In the next section, narrowing in on some of the kinds of experiences reported in the literature that may inform an understanding the experiences of the subjects who participated in this study seems appropriate. The following section of discussion encompasses female experiences of trauma, particularly in relation to the minibus taxi context.

2.1.2. Gender Based Violence

"The increasing incidents involving gender-based violence against women at South Africa's taxi ranks leave them with nothing to celebrate as we commemorate the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" (Dlamini, 2012).

In South Africa, it appears that men may experience more crime in general, whereas women may be more exposed to intimate abuse (Gilbert & Forrest, 1996). Thus, there appears to be a difference between men and women in type of crime and violence exposure. Patriarchal norms and attitudes, including those that excuse or legitimate the use of violence are viewed as driving the high rates of gender-based violence in South Africa (Rasool, 2002).

Female pedestrians are among the most vulnerable road users, accounting for more than half of the traffic-related injuries and fatalities in less motorised countries even though more men may spend time in such spaces outside the home (Seedat, McKenzie & Mohan, 2006). In a study conducted by Seedat, McKenzie and Mohan (2006) details of a phenomenological investigation into the experiences of female university students in the African city of Johannesburg and the Asian city of Delhi are provided. Individual semi-structured interviews in the two cities were used for data collection. They focused on the gendered, safety and transportation dimensions of the student pedestrians' experiences and revealed the restricting effects of their respective transport cultures and social environments on their utilization of space, mobility, energy, time, social bonding opportunities and sense of identity as women (Seedat, McKenzie & Mohan, 2006). The results of this study also revealed that the Johannesburg participants foregrounded experiences of inaccessibility, crowding and fear of crime and indicated that these tended to limit their mobility. The Delhi participants emphasised their exposure to crowding, congestion, air and noise pollution and sexual harassment (Seedat, McKenzie & Mohan, 2006).

Particular to the current study, gender based violence in South Africa within the taxi space is relevant. A well-known example is the Noord taxi rank 'miniskirt' incident, as it came to be known. This incident exposed the reality of the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa. In this infamous incident, a 25 year old woman was sexually harassed for wearing a miniskirt at the Noord Taxi Rank, being stripped of her clothing in public by several taxi drivers who viewed themselves as entitled to discipline her in respect of her form of dress. It is unfortunate that the media often emphasise the need for women to be extra vigilant when moving around at night or in what they wear in certain spaces. This in essence is saying that women should take responsibility for the fact that they may be attacked at any time (Gqola, 2007). This incident goes to show that women still do not enjoy the freedom that post-apartheid South Africa is striving to give to its citizens. This incident is just but a symptom of a larger problem of patriarchal values and attitudes that have

endured amongst some communities. The taxi industry appears to be one that remains very male dominated with a strongly 'macho' culture in operation.

In reviewing literature on gender based violence amongst female taxi users in South Africa, the issue of xenophobia came to be deliberated. Although a rather specific issue this was considered worth mentioning as part of this discussion as it highlights the phenomenon of xenophobic attacks towards foreign females in the taxi commuting space which is not uncommon. Violence against foreigners and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but are normalised ways in which South African society interacts with these groups of people (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008). Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino's (2008) research into xenophobia indicates that foreigners from other parts of Africa have reported taxi commuting to be an arena in which they are commonly subject to abuse and threat. Foreign women in particular seem to be vulnerable to harassment and even assaults. Taxis are complex spaces where a multitude of gestures and behaviours are assumed to be 'known', and knowing such symbols is viewed as indicative of carrying the identity of South African national. Not knowing these markers of 'belonging' can distinguish someone as foreign. In addition, taxi drivers have a reputation of being generally violent and abusive and often imbue their taxis with their prejudices and attitudes, contributing to an atmosphere of group xenophobia. Being identified as foreign then opens the woman up to both verbal and physical abuse from the taxi driver (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008).

Based on information presented above, it can be said that female users of minibus taxis are possibly regularly exposed to traumatic events as they are subject to attacks from taxi drivers, taxi queue marshals and other males in this environment. It would appear that women are highly sexualised in this space and are often at the risk of exposure to sexual harassment. Motor vehicle accidents, the behaviours of taxi drivers, and gender based violence are not the only types of trauma that female commuters are exposed to. Crime is a significant factor in South Africa which many are exposed to as noted in the introduction to the study. Thus in the ensuing discussion, exposure to crime, as well as the traumatic stress related responses to such exposure is highlighted.

2.2. TRAUMATIC STRESS RELATED RESPONSES IN RELATION TO EXPOSURE TO CRIME

Given the widespread crime and violence in South Africa, the country is viewed as one of the most stressful societies in the world in which to live (Masuku, 2002). As a result,

the general public is thought to be at high risk for developing trauma-related mental health problems (Masuku, 2002). Approximately one third of all crimes documented by the police in South Africa are violent, translating into hundreds of thousands of offences. During the 12-month period of 2004/05, about 19 000 murders, 55 000 rapes, 127 000 aggravated robberies (generally involving the use of a weapon), and 249 000 serious assaults were recorded by the police (SAPS, 2005, p.56).

One of the forms of victimization that has been studied and documented within the traumatic stress literature is that of being exposed to crime (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005). Although combat related trauma has dominated much of the writing on traumatic stress related conditions there is a body of evidence that indicates that being a victim of crime can render individuals vulnerable to trauma related conditions such as PTSD, and that this is particular true of life threatening crime and crime that involves physical violation, such as rape (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005). The elaboration of traumatic stress in relation to exposure to crime and violence in South Africa is finding increasing purchase, in part because of the prevalence of interpersonal crime in the country, and there is a growing body of writing about such exposure and its impact. It is evident that a high proportion of the South African population, including students as young adults operating in the world, has been exposed to some form of criminal violation. A recent study conducted by McGowen and Kagee (2013) on South African university students reported that approximately 90% of the sample had experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, and that male and female students reported similar levels of exposure to traumatic events. With regard to symptoms of post-traumatic stress, those students who had experienced a traumatic event reported more severe post-traumatic stress symptoms than those students who had not (McGowen & Kagee, 2013).

A study conducted by Scott (2012) investigated the posttraumatic stress symptomatology of a student population based in Johannesburg, in relation to crime exposure. In her study, she employed self-report questionnaires to obtain responses which were then analysed statistically. The findings for the relationship between crime exposure and posttraumatic stress symptomatology indicated that increased exposure to crime was predictive of higher posttraumatic stress symptomatology. However, when a comparison of the relationship between non-crime related traumas and posttraumatic stress symptomatology was conducted, the results suggested that crime exposure was not the only predictor of posttraumatic stress symptomatology (Scott, 2012). Included under non-crime related trauma

were reported events such as the unexpected loss of a family member and exposure to accidents, particularly motor vehicle accidents.

Vrana and Lauterbach (1994) found that 84% of US College students had experienced at least one traumatic event and over a third had experienced three or more traumatic events. Where this study differed from the South African research is in the observation that male subjects reported exposure to a considerably higher number of traumatic events in comparison to females. The death of a significant other was found to be the most frequently occurring traumatic event, followed by serious accidents, natural disasters, rape and unwanted sexual activity, witnessing assault or death, abuse, and violent crime (Vrana & Lauterbach, 1994).

Engelbrecht (2009) conducted a study on a sample of 216 first-year university students at the University of the Witwatersrand. Engelbrecht's (2009) research assessed indirect and direct exposure to crime-related trauma that was of a violent nature. The results of the research indicated high levels of exposure to violent crime, including direct and indirect exposure. Almost half the sample (47%) reported exposure to violent crime in the preceding 12 months. Her findings also indicated that about 20% of the total sample reported traumatic stress symptomatology of clinical concern. It was evident that greater exposure to traumatic events was associated with higher levels of traumatic stress symptomatology (Engelbrecht, 2009). In McClurg's (2015) related research study, also conducted on university students at a Johannesburg University, exposure to crime-related traumatic events was reported almost twice as often as exposure to non-crime related trauma. A total of 249 crime-related events and 128 non-crime related events were reported. It is thus evident that university students report high levels of exposure to criminal events, particularly in large urban areas such as Johannesburg, and that increased levels of exposure are associated with higher levels of traumatic stress symptomatology as might be anticipated (McClurg, 2015).

In the South African context, the research of Norman, Schneider, Bradshaw, Jewkes, Abrahams and Matzopoulos (2010) suggests that interpersonal violence is a major health risk because death, physical injury and HIV infection are amongst its possible costs. In addition to these physical concerns, the mental health risk associated with interpersonal violence, which may lead to major depression and anxiety disorders, is also emphasized in their research. In agreement with these findings is Edward's (2005) research which stresses the substantial public health concern created by the high levels of PTSD in South Africa. These high levels

of PTSD are attributable to the distressingly high degree of exposure to violence, including accidents and violent crime. Norman et al. (2010) also explain the compounding effects of the development of PTSD in the aftermath of violent crime exposure, such that the likelihood of developing other psychological disorders such as depression and substance abuse is increased when there has been preceding PTSD (Norman et al., 2010). While a minority of people exposed to traumatic events develop a diagnosable condition, such as PTSD, it has been observed that most people exposed to traumatic events will have some form of disturbance in the form of a traumatic stress related response (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010).

It is evident that people who are afraid of being exposed to crime may change their perceptions and behaviour, particularly in contexts where they feel greater levels of risk or exposure to danger. When they go out, they may tend to avoid activities which they perceive as dangerous, including walking down some streets, getting too close to individuals who appear to be suspicious, travelling on public transport, or going to certain forms of public entertainment (Box, Hale & Andrews, 1988). When compelled to engage in such environments they may become fearful and hypervigilant. The production of fear in individuals requires recognition of a situation as possessing at least potential danger, real or imagined. This conception of potential danger is what is referred to as 'perceived risk' (Hicks & Brown, 2013). Perceived risk can be debilitating in that it may come to constrain and shape people's levels of engagement with others and the environment. One of the ways in which countries, including South Africa, attempt to gage how severe perceived risk levels in relation to crime are amongst citizens is by assessing "Fear of Crime" (FoC) in community based surveys. Such measures generally employ a set of questions pertaining to how safe or comfortable people feel to operate in their homes and/or neighbourhoods during the day and night. It has been suggested the FoC levels may reflect non-clinical kinds of trauma impacts in relation to direct and indirect exposure to crime, including anecdotal accounts (Engelbrecht, 2009).

Criminologists have indicated that gender is one of the strongest predictors of fear of crime. A large number of studies on fear of crime have found that the level of women's fear of crime is two or three times higher than that of men (Engelbrecht, 2009). Empirical analyses have studied female fear in the context of the vulnerability and victimization models, where women's fear of crime is typically understood to be exacerbated by their fear of rape and sexual assault. This focus is not surprising given the unique victimization experiences of women and the socialization processes that influence female cognition and, in

turn, women's fear of crime (Engelbrecht, 2009; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Hanslmaier, 2013; Hicks & Brown, 2013; Ozascilar, 2013).

In general, it appears that in addition to and linked to women's fear of sexual assault is their sense of physical vulnerability and inability to protect themselves from a possible attack. In Englebrecht's (2009) research on students from the University of the Witwatersrand mentioned previously, the central aim of the study was to investigate the relationships between exposure to violent crime, traumatic stress symptomatology, and fear of crime. In reporting her findings, fear of crime was found to be prevalent in the sample. Findings showed support for the relationships between exposure to violent crime and traumatic stress symptomatology, exposure to violent crime and fear of crime, and fear of crime and traumatic stress symptomatology (Englebrecht, 2009). In addition it was found that female subjects reported significantly higher perceived severity of exposure to violent crime, hyperarousal related symptoms and fear of crime than male students. Female subjects were found to report significantly higher levels of both traumatic stress symptomatology and fear of crime (Engelbrecht, 2009), indicating that South African patterns of response with regard to gender are similar to those observed internationally.

Traumatic stress symptomatology often interferes with effective work performance (Edwards, 2005a, 2005b) due to intrusive traumatic symptoms and concentration problems (Hamber & Lewis, 1997). The experience of trauma has been associated with a decrease in self-reported general health, quality of life and quality of family life (Peltzer & Renner, 2004). Over the two decades preceding 2002 the Johannesburg Hospital Trauma Unit has seen an unprecedented rise in the number of trauma patients and it has been established that such trauma- related injury is predominantly due to interpersonal violence (Bowley, Khavandi, Boffard, Macnab, Eales & Vellema, 2002). Trauma in South Africa has been seen to target the young and productive in society, placing a major burden on health infrastructure (Bowley et al., 2002). Traumatic stress symptomatology has been researched in a number of different populations in South Africa, for example, amongst psychiatric populations not directly presenting with trauma-related concerns (e.g., Mkize, 2008; Van Zyl, Oosthuizen, & Seedat, 2008), primary health care patients (e.g., Carey, Stein, Zungu-Dirwayi, & Seedat, 2003; Peltzer et al., 2007), police officers (e.g., Peltzer, 2001), taxi drivers and passengers (Peltzer, 2003), private security officers (e.g., Pillay & Claase-Schutte, 2004), and university populations (Engelbrecht, 2009; Friedland, 1999; Jacobs, 2002; McClurg, 2015; Peltzer, 1998). Rates of traumatization and patterns of trauma responses differ across these samples.

And it appears there is no clear general pattern. For instance, the rate of exposure to crime and related traumatic stress related responses in South Africa is higher than those found in international studies (Vrana & Lauterbach, 1994). Additionally, studies presented above indicate that there is a higher correlation between exposure to crime, in the South African context, and the development of traumatic stress symptoms than in findings from international studies (McGowen & Kagee, 2013; Scott, 2012; Engelbrecht, 2009; McClurg, 2015; Norman et al.; Edwards, 2005). However, a pattern was found by Engelbrecht (2009); South African patterns of response with regards to gender to crime exposure are similar internationally.

Although South Africa is characterised by high rates of trauma exposure researchers have only fairly recently begun to study the possible impact of multiple traumas (Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson, Moomal, 2007). Using national data from the SASH study, Williams et al. (2007) reported that the majority (55.6%) of South Africans over 18 years of age have experienced more than one traumatic event in their lifetimes. A breakdown of the data on the number of traumatic events showed that 19.2% reported experiencing only one trauma, 17.6% reported two, 12.9% reported three, 15.9% reported four or five, and 9.2% reported six or more traumatic events. Approximately a quarter of the SASH sample reported exposure to four or more traumatic events in their lifetimes, indicating high levels of multiple exposure to traumatic events in South Africa. These figures appear to be higher than those found internationally (e.g., Kessler et al., 1995; Resnick et al., 1993) and suggest that South Africans are more vulnerable to multiple exposure to traumatic events in their lifetimes.

A number of factors appear to place individuals at risk of developing more severe trauma related symptoms including individual, event and context related features. It has been asserted that although PTSD is frequently experienced in response to traumatic events, it is most persistent when an individual's processing of the trauma results in feelings of anxiety about severe and current threat (Scott, 2012). When individuals are continuously exposed to severe and current threat, they are unable to process traumatic events as they would if the danger was a once occurring event that can be placed in the past. Individuals, who experience possible exposure to trauma which is on-going, usually due to their circumstances, may not present with classic PTSD, as this diagnosis refers to a 'post' condition in which danger is understood to have subsided. Instead, they are more likely to experience continuous traumatic stress as will be elaborated in the following section.

2.3. CONTINUOUS TRAUMATIC STRESS

CTS is proposed as a supplementary construct within the lexicon of traumatic stress to define the effects and experiences of individuals who live in contexts of existing and on-going danger (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). Continuous traumatic stress (CTS) is a term which was coined in the 1980s in the collective work of anti-apartheid health professionals. It was first introduced into the literature in 1987 by Gillian Straker and members of the Sanctuaries Counselling Team (1987). The term CTS continues to have relevance despite the fact that, it was originally devised in the context of political violence and social conflict and not in the context of criminal violence (Straker, 2013). Eagle and Kaminer (2013) suggest that one of the populations that may be viewed as experiencing CTS are people living in high violence communities in which there is little option of escaping environments of this nature, as will be elaborated further.

Four essential characteristics of CTS are considered in relation to existing formulations of complicated traumatic stress, these being; the context of the stressor conditions, the temporal location of the stressor conditions, the intricacy of identifying the difference between real and perceived or imagined threat, and the absence of protective systems (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). It has been postulated that the impact of environments where there is on-going stressors can be differentiated from that which is comprehended by PTSD which focuses on physiological and psychological responses that continue to intrude into the present that are based on past exposure, to traumatic events. CTS is understood to occur in contexts in which danger and threat are erratic, as well as pervasive and substantive (Straker, 2013). Amongst the many existing contexts, an example (which is of relevance to the proposed study) of a common context for CTS is where there is chronic community violence, where gangs are dominant and state security forces are unable to intervene to protect community members, for example the Cape flats would reflect a community of this sort (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). Those living in environments of on-going threat have often experienced previous exposure to traumatic events, where it is often multiple exposures to such events; nonetheless, it is argued that the prime concern in CTS is with current and future safety, rather than with past events (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). When the primary focus of traumatic awareness is on danger which is anticipated, it is probable that thoughts are dominated by fantasies of what could possibly occur and how it could be avoided (Straker, 2013). Individuals in such circumstances are faced with the task of developing the ability to be able to differentiate between real or imagined threat that could pose a real, immediate, or

substantial threat from other everyday stimuli and also to prepare to manage potential future traumatization (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). One of the defining features of CTS is the realistic, versus the imagined, consideration of possible threat. It is therefore important to be able to distinguish between more paranoid type responses and reasonable preoccupation with safety (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). Although CTS has been proposed as a construct that may have relevance in describing the experiences of individuals and groups living within persistently violent and unavoidable conditions it has not been thoroughly empirically researched and is a fairly new field of study. What the mental health impact of such circumstances is upon individuals and groups remains to be further explored. Although the articles in the special issue of *Peace and Conflict* on CTS (2013) make it clear that the description of characteristic features of the impact of living under conditions of continuous traumatic stress requires more systematic investigation and refinement, there are nevertheless some shared observations about probable effects. It seems that even optimal adjustment to such environments still poses adverse effects to mental health and physical and psychological wellbeing (Stevens, et al., 2013). In Bell, Méndez, Martínez, Palma, and Bosch's (2012) study in Colombia, violence related to on-going armed conflict was commonly associated with fear, anxiety and sleep disturbances. Using case examples, they illustrate how responses to situations of on-going traumatic stress may in fact be normative and adaptive, as opposed to pathological, but nevertheless may warrant psychological support to optimize coping under such conditions. One model that has been proposed to explain how it is that people who are exposed to traumatic events tend to develop traumatic stress related conditions and/or develop more resilience based strategies for managing extreme events is the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) developed by Hobfoll and colleagues (1989). It is thought that this framework may be useful in thinking about how people attempt to remain resilient in contexts of continuous traumatic stress and how they may attempt to retain their 'resources'.

2.4. CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THEORY

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory predicts that resource loss is the principal ingredient in the stress process (Hobfoll, 2001). Resource gain, in turn, is depicted as of increasing importance in the context of loss. Because existing resources may also be used to attempt to prevent resource loss, at each stage of the stress process people are increasingly vulnerable to negative stress sequelae that, if on-going, may result in rapid and impactful loss spirals (Hobfoll, 2001). COR theory is seen as an alternative to appraisal-based stress theories

because it relies more centrally on the objective and culturally construed nature of the environment in determining the stress process.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) stress model provides a useful framework within which the impact of adverse experiences on individual functioning following traumatic stress can be examined. This theory has been developed as a general stress theory that helps explain both why certain circumstances are experienced as stressful and the nature of people's reactions to stressful circumstances (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989; Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993). As a general theory of stress COR can assist in understanding both the similarities and differences which are characteristic of responses to traumatic stressors, in the context of major stressors, everyday stressors, and minor hassles. Thus the model has applicability both for stress and traumatic stress. The model's basic principle is that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources. The COR model focuses on the extent to which individuals are able to maintain social (e.g., family roles, work roles) and personal (e.g., possessions, sense of optimism) characteristics that can be engaged to accomplish strengthening goals (Hobfoll, 1988) even under stressful conditions. The model labels these social and personal characteristics as resources. COR theory postulates that resource loss is the central feature in the stress process. Resources are defined as the objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual. Examples of resources include mastery, self-esteem, learned resourcefulness, socioeconomic status, social networks and employment (Hobfoll, 1989).

The definition of stress within COR is derived directly from the theory and the above mentioned basic principle: psychological stress is defined as a reaction to the environment in which there is (a) the threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the net loss of resources, or (c) a lack of resource gain following the investment of resources. Both perceived and actual loss, or lack of gain are predicted as sufficient for producing stress (Hobfoll, 1989). When such losses are excessive, stresses may fall into the category of traumatic. According to this theory, when not currently confronted with stressors people strive to develop resource surpluses in order to compensate for the possibility of future loss. In contrast, in instances where individuals are ill equipped to gain resources they are likely to be particularly vulnerable to stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Such individuals lean toward prevention of resource loss, or what some have termed self-protective styles. It is possible, for example, that constricting movement in an environment that is perceived as dangerous might be seen as a

conservation of resources where it is difficult to build sufficient resources to counter forthcoming losses. In the case of the current study it is postulated that the requirement to use public taxi transport on a daily basis is likely to contribute to a constant depletion of psychological resources that may translate into stress or possibly a form of traumatic stress such as CTS and that it may be of interest to think about resource depletion or resource retention or resource cultivation in this kind of context. In an attempt to enrich and expand on the understanding of responses to traumatic stress, it is also useful to briefly consider Horowitz's founding information processing model of traumatic stress impact, a brief discussion of which is offered below.

2.5. HOROWITZ'S INFORMATION PROCESSING MODEL

Cognitive processing models of post-trauma reactions propose that persons enter situations with pre-existing mental schemas (Horowitz, 1992) that are fundamentally disrupted by exposure to traumatic events. These schemas contain information about the persons' past experience as well as their beliefs, assumptions, and expectancies in regard to future events (Hollon & Kriss, 1984). The experience of trauma confronts individuals with information that is inconsistent with that contained in existing schemas about their safety and imperviousness to danger or threat. Horowitz (1986) argued that for recovery to occur, new information inherent in the traumatic experience must be processed until it can be brought into accord with existing inner models. In addition, modification of pre-existing schemas may take place to accommodate the new information (Horowitz, 1992). Attempts to integrate threat-related information require exposure to unpleasant stimuli, resulting in increased arousal and a desire to avoid, or escape, thoughts and reminders of the trauma (Horowitz, 2001). The emphasis which is placed on the term avoidance in this model refers to a general construct that includes avoidance and escape behaviours as well as cognitive reattributions (Creamer, Burgess & Pattison, 1993). Until a traumatic event can be incorporated into existing schematic representations it is stored in active memory and the psychological elements of the event continue to produce intrusive and emotionally upsetting recollections. This in turn contributes to avoidant behaviours and the individual may become stuck within a vacillating cycle between intrusion and avoidance or at one pole of this kind of response. The numbing (both psychological and physiological) that often occurs in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; American Psychiatric Association, 1987) is seen as a defence against the breakthrough of intrusive images. The aim is for the individual to be able to temper the extremes of either response in order for material in active memory to become absorbed into

long term or narrative memory. This may be much more difficult to achieve in unstable contexts in which re-engagement with ideas of risk is required.

In many respects Horowitz's early work informed other approaches to trauma intervention. In early research on trauma, it was suggested (Lang, 1977, 1985; Foa, Steketee & Rothbaum, 1989) that the experience of a traumatic event results in the formation of a 'fear network' in memory that includes: (a) stimulus information about the traumatic event; (b) cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural responses; and (c) interpretive information about the meaning of the stimulus and response elements of the structure. Two conditions are required for the reduction of this kind of fear. First, fear-relevant information (i.e., reminders of the trauma) must be made available in a manner that will activate the fear structure: If the fear structure is not accessed it will not be available for amendment. Second, information that is incompatible with that existing in the fear structure must be made available so that the memory network can be modified (Lang, 1977, 1985; Foa, Steketee & Rothbaum, 1989). Effective processing of this new information results in the dissociation of response elements from stimulus elements in the fear structure and in the modification of information about the meaning of feared stimuli and responses. Many other authors (e.g., Chemtob, Roitblat, Hamada, Carlson, & Twentyman, 1988; Janoff-Bulman, 1985) have argued from similar perspectives. In each case the central theme is that of successfully processing or integrating the trauma into a schematic representation that restores feelings of security and invulnerability (Creamer, Burgess & Pattison, 1993).

Creamer, Burgess & Pattison (1993) conducted a study where subjects were assessed after a multiple shooting in a city office block. The subject group comprised 158 office workers who were in the building at the time of the shootings. The methodology of this research was a repeated measures survey, with data collection at 4, 8, and 14 months post-trauma. Measures included the Impact of Events Scale (IES) and the Symptom Checklist-90 Revised. A Path analysis was performed with the IES utilized as an indicator of cognitive processing. Intrusion and avoidance were shown to mediate between exposure to trauma and symptom development. Intrusion was also found to be negatively related to subsequent symptom levels (Creamer, Burgess & Pattison, 1993).

On the basis of this study and observation of longitudinal patterns Creamer, Burgess and Pattison (1993) argue that intrusion precedes escape and avoidance, with the latter conceptualized as a form of coping strategy, albeit often maladaptive, in response to

discomfort which results from intrusive memories. This differs from the model proposed by Horowitz (1992), in which avoidance is generally seen to both precede and follow intrusion. Horowitz (1992) argued that avoidance and intrusion both occur as powerful memories which threaten to, or in actual fact do break through existing defensive mechanisms. Creamer et al., (1993) argue, however, that the intrusion of cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural elements of the trauma occurs once the traumatic memory network is formed, because the network is likely to be activated by a wide range of stimuli.

A high level of exposure to trauma, and negative interpretations of the threatening elements of the incident will result in a powerful memory network and thus increased levels of intrusion. It is also reasonable to assume that levels of intrusion at later points in time will be predicted by earlier levels (Creamer, Burgess & Pattison, 1993). Although the prime determinant of avoidance levels in Creamer et al's (1993) model is the degree of intrusion, it is also likely to be influenced strongly by pre-existing styles of coping. Those persons who habitually use denial and avoidance as strategies to cope with stressful situations will presumably continue to do so after a traumatic incident (Creamer, Burgess & Pattison, 1993).

Although the information processing model is built on the concept of 'posttraumatic stress' as opposed to CTS it is valuable in offering some formulations regarding how individuals who are exposed to trauma may respond. Some of these responses, in particular anxiety, avoidance and numbing, can be linked to the hypothesised experiences that individuals who live in contexts of CTS endure.

2.6. CONCLUSION

In reviewing some of the key literature pertinent to this study it is evident that exposure to violent crime is prevalent amongst South African university students, and the relationship between traumatic stress symptomatology and exposure to crime (direct and indirect) has been shown to be significant (Engelbrecht, 2009; McGowen & Kagee, 2013; Norman, Schneider & Bradshaw, 2010; Scott, 2012; Vrana & Lauterbach, 1994). In relation to the research study described here, and based on both research findings and anecdotal accounts, it appears plausible that female students who use public transport are possibly continually exposed to traumatic stimuli, including threat of crime, and that they were an appropriate sample to access and interview when considering what the lived experience of existing in such contexts might be. Various studies conducted on the fear of crime confirm the high levels of perceived risk in South Africa, with significant differences in gender. In

these studies females have been shown to have higher levels of fear in relation to crime in comparison to males (Baron, 2011; Box, Hale & Andrews, 1988; Chiricos, McEntire & Gertz, 2001; Engelbrecht, 2009; Ferraro, 1995; Franklin & Franklin, 2009; Hanslmaier, 2013; Hicks & Brown, 2013; Lee and Ulmer, 2000; Ozascilar, 2013). Given the high levels of crime (including, in and around taxi ranks) (Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007), trauma in relation to exposure to violent and/or non-violent crime, fear of crime in South Africa, and the potential impact this has on psychological, physical and relational well-being, the aforementioned aims of this study can be considered relevant.

It can be observed that the two theories on responses to trauma reactions, those of COR and information-processing, adopt rather different standpoints. However, both models are valuable in relation to this study as they contribute to the understandings of responses to be expected from individuals who are exposed to traumatic events. Horowitz' model highlights the importance of intrusions and conscious avoidance or numbing that takes place psychically after one is exposed to a trauma, whereas Hobfoll (1988) focuses on the loss of resources (psychologically and physically) that one experiences after exposure to traumatic stress. These formulations of responses to traumatic stress conditions may be helpful in shedding some light on the experiences of the young women taxi commuters interviewed for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

As outlined in the introductory chapter the broad aims of the study were to explore the experiences of female university students who are compelled to commute by taxi on a daily basis with respect to exposure to threatening and traumatic stimuli related to this aspect of their lives. The study aimed to identify what forms of traumatic events commuters might be exposed to, what reactions they observe/d in themselves and how they have attempted to cope with these circumstances. It was hoped that the study would contribute to the elaboration of aspects of the lived experience of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS).

3.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What risks (if at all) do female students who use public minibus taxi transport perceive are operative in this environment?
2. What forms of trauma exposure, either direct or indirect, do female students describe in relation to minibus taxi commuting?
3. What kinds of effects does such exposure appear to have on these commuters?
4. How do these female students manage anxieties associated with daily minibus taxi commuting, particularly those associated with risk of exposure to possible harm/violence?
5. How does the description of managing potential threats associated with daily taxi commuting appear to relate to the construct of continuous traumatic stress?

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology. This approach included the thorough analysis of material allowing the researcher to capture depth, detail and nuance (Paton, 2002). This theoretical orientation was chosen for this study as it enabled the complexity of individual's experiences to be explored. Qualitative research is devoted to an emic ideographic position appreciating rich portrayals of the social world and favouring the search for meaning and understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, Elliot, Fisher & Rennie, 1999, Stevenson & Cooper, 1997). Qualitative research also allows for smaller samples to be used, while still attempting to attain in-depth and intimate information (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995).

The decision to use a qualitative research method was guided by the nature of the research questions posed which involved inquiry into the experience and perception of risk by the participants, how these experiences appear to affect them, how they deal with the perceived risk and how this risk is determined or evaluated, amongst other aspects. The research paradigms employed in this study were broadly descriptive and interpretive. Thus the study took, as its primary point of departure, the value of the individual subjective experience (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The study was intended to elaborate aspects of the lived experience of daily minibus taxi commuting as a young adult woman and relied on the subjective accounts of the participants to document and analyse their experiences. The possibility of accessing dimensions of subjective experience is where the value in interpretive research of this kind lies (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The intention of the project was both to describe and elaborate the phenomena of interest and to offer some interpretive commentary on what emerged in the interviews and accounts of the participants.

3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

3.4.1. Recruitment of participants

Initial recruitment of participants was through classmates who were aware of the study. Participants were initially approached by these classmates to see if they might be interested in taking part in the study and if so were thereafter contacted by the researcher directly. The participants were informed that a criteria for participation was that they had to use public transport, and more specifically, public minibus taxis, every day to get to and from university. An additional criterion was that the participants needed to commute from a township area that required negotiating transport via the Bree Street taxi rank, given that this area has seen previous incidents of violence and requires negotiation of space populated by a range of people, including potential criminals. A total of two participants were recruited through classmates. Following these initial contacts snowball sampling was implemented in order to expand the participant group. Through the first two participants, an additional three participants were obtained who were willing to be interviewed. When this method of sampling failed to produce the required number of potential participants, students attending a first year lecture in psychology were approached in order to invite participation in the proposed study. Through this approach, the final five participants were achieved to complete the sample of ten participants for the study. It was made explicit that only ten participants were required for the proposed research and that anyone volunteering to take part would be included on a ‘first-come first-serve’ basis if there were more volunteers than required. A

brief introduction to the research study and what it would entail was provided at the beginning of a lecture with the staff member's permission. Thereafter students were informed of the various criterion required in order for them to be eligible to participate in the study, such as the fact that should be "female students who are compelled to use taxis as a daily method of transport". A participant information sheet was handed out to those who were potentially interested in taking part in the study in which the main aims of the study and ethical protections, such as protection of identity in the write-up, were spelled out (see Appendix B). In the end ten participants were located who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to take part in the study.

For those who agreed to participate, data collection was conducted in formal interviews which were arranged with each participant individually. With their signed consent, which took place at the very beginning of the interaction between researcher and participant, the interviews were recorded. Before the interviews commenced, I introduced the study by briefly explaining the main aims of the research. Participants were also informed that after the interview, they would be asked to complete a brief questionnaire.

3.4.2. Description of Participants

The method of sampling which was used is purposive sampling because participants were selected if they met the criteria necessary to pursue the study's objectives. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within (Tongo, 2007), as was the case in this study in which the young women commuters were the experts on their kind of experience of daily taxi commuting.

A participant group of ten female students who were enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand, between first and third year, were used in this research. The age range of the ten participants was between the ages of 20 and 25. A short table is presented at the beginning of the following chapter conveying demographic aspects related to the participant group such as year of study and home location.

Creswell (1998), identified the minimum sample size required for qualitative research as being between six and nine participants, although this is clearly dependant to some extent on the nature of the study and how much information is gathered from each participant. This proposal is corroborated by Eagle (1998), who, based on reading of a range of texts, indicates that qualitative methodologies try to access rich, diverse information from fewer participants,

and thus that sample sizes of less than ten are often used. Although this was not evident at the outset it proved useful and important to interview ten participants for this study as the interviews were relatively short, never lasting longer than 30 minutes. It is possible that follow up interviews may have generated more information but relatively rich data emerged even in these fairly brief interviews and by the seventh interview it was apparent that very few new themes were being introduced and it was possible to pick up patterns across the data set as will be described later.

3.4.3. Data Collection

3.4.3.1. Procedure for Data Collection

For all of those who agreed to participate, data collection was conducted during formal interviews which were arranged with each participant individually to take place at a time and place suitable for them. The bulk of the interviews were conducted in the researcher's office on campus. Between the 3rd of June 2014 and the 19th of August 2014 the ten research participants were interviewed. With their signed consent, the interviews were recorded and then were later transcribed. Interviews generally lasted for approximately 20-30 minutes.

3.4.3.2. Data Collection Tools

The main data collection tool employed was that of in-depth semi-structured interviewing. In addition, as will be described further the interviews were complemented by the administration of a brief questionnaire with the purpose of tapping into participants' psychological responses to trauma.

3.4.3.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

The most significant information for the study emerged from the proceedings of the semi-structured interviews which were audio taped and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews provided the means to gain the necessary insight and knowledge to answer the research questions being investigated in this study. Semi structured interviews were conducted on the basis of a loose structure consisting of open ended questions that defined the area to be explored, at least initially. In keeping with Britten's (1995) directives, the interviewer or interviewee at times chose to deviate from the initial question or interview direction in order to explore an idea in more detail. During the course of semi structured interviews interviewers tend to introduce further questions as they become more familiar with the topic being discussed (Britten, 1995). This kind of combination of focus and flexibility

was appropriate to the aims of this study. Newton (2010) notes that face-to-face interviewing is appropriate when depth of meaning is important and the research is primarily focused on gaining insight and understanding, which was in-line with study objectives.

Threats to the validity of this kind of interview include the use of leading questions or the researcher's preconceived ideas influencing what is and is not worth discussing (Newton, 2010). When considering the complexity of language use during the interview it is not easy to avoid using leading questions due to the 'real time' nature of face-to-face interviewing (Newton, 2010). Nonetheless, the vulnerability and complexity of semi structured interviews is what produces a depth to data which makes it worth the aforementioned risks. However, it is through the employment of a participatory approach, in which the data (the transcribed interviews) is co-created (by interviewer and interviewee) and evaluated, that internal validity is essentially increased (Newton, 2010). As far as possible, interviews were conducted with these kinds of cautions and intentions in mind. In general good rapport was established and the conversation flowed relatively easily.

I introduced the study by briefly explaining the research interest in exploring female commuters' experience and management of stress related to their daily commutes. The interviews began in a relatively open ended manner, where I began the interviews by asking "What is your experience of using taxi's every day like?", before referring to the specific questions set out in the interview schedule, allowing interviewees to bring what they viewed as important and as the interviews progressed more specific probes, such as queries about coping, were introduced. The interview questions and probes are outlined in Appendix F. The Impact of Events Scale-Revisited was given to participants at the end of the interview for completion, with the purpose of obtaining data which might provide information about the presence and/or levels of posttraumatic stress symptomatology for each participant and is described briefly below. The questionnaire took an average of ten minutes to complete, which then brought the data collection process to an end.

3.4.3.4. Impact of Events Scale- Revised (IES-R)

The IES-R is a scale designed to assess posttraumatic stress related symptomatology at a descriptive level. Bell and Failla (2003) have validated the IES-R as a diagnostic tool for posttraumatic stress related symptoms due to the high internal consistency (alpha = 0.96) of the entire scale. There are three subscales: the Intrusion subscale, the Avoidance subscale, and the Hyperarousal subscale, each tapping into related sets of symptoms. The IES-R has

been used successfully on the South African population in studies which investigated the presence of PTSD symptoms in relation to the exposure to violent crime (Edwards, 2005; Norman, Schneider, Bradshaw, Jewkes, Abrahams, Matzopoulos, & Vos, 2010). Given that the proposed research was interested in tapping into participants' psychological responses to trauma, and that a South African population was used, this measure appeared to be appropriate for achieving this goal. In relation to the proposed research this measure was administered with the purpose of obtaining data which would enable a somewhat more formal assessment of posttraumatic symptomatology of the participants, specifically in relation to their commute. Based on the data produced this information was used in a descriptive manner in order to complement the interview content.

3.5. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. TA organizes and describes a data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and allows for interpretation of various aspects of the research material (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, in producing and identifying themes which emerged from the interview scripts, TA was used. TA involves searching across a data set, be this transcripts from a number of interviews (which were used in this study) or focus groups, or a range of texts, to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A theme is represented as information which is considered valuable in answering the research questions posed by a study, but it is important to note that the degree of importance of a theme is dependent upon those doing the interpretation, in this instance me and my supervisor, as there are no set guidelines to determine this (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes are largely derived from the observation of patterns within the data. TA involves five stages which lead to the formation of pertinent themes.

Stage one: The researcher is required to familiarize himself/herself with the data. This was achieved through immersion by reading the interview transcripts repeatedly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This repeated reading needs to be of an active nature where preliminary meanings, patterns and so on, are constantly being located within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three of the ten transcripts were initially sent to the supervisor to read independently. Any interesting or significant responses identified through reading the transcripts were noted by both researcher and supervisor. Thereafter, a discussion took place between the researcher and supervisor and themes were then listed and connections between themes were thought

out. Out of these original categories, more implicit themes were identified by both researcher and supervisor and used as organising categories.

Stage two: Consisted of formulating initial coding practices and these codes represented a portion of the data which both I and my supervisor found to be significant (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the process of coding the themes were given labels. Direct quotes were allocated to the appropriate categories at this stage of the analysis. Data was marked in different ways, such as writing notes on each transcript and highlighting in different colours. In the final stage of coding, I returned to the research questions and identified the most important aspects emerging from the themes, sub themes and context in order to make sure that themes corresponded with the research aims.

Stage three: In the third stage of the data analysis process, searching for actual or potential themes, entailing the analysis of the codes generated and a consideration of how these codes operate and relate to form predominant themes, took place (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The information that was initially grouped together was once again examined more closely in order to establish finer nuances and meanings which may have been overlooked or misunderstood in the initial coding process, this was then reviewed by the supervisor and input was given. This step of the analysis ensured a more recurrent examination of the data, going back and reinterpreting information that was grouped together and evaluating whether such grouping was indeed appropriate.

Stage four: The current themes were then revised and fleshed out to create clear, meaningful and identifiable divisions between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Stage five: The final stage of TA includes the official defining and labelling of the themes and any further sub themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Having produced what appeared to be appropriate headings or labels for themes, I then checked these with my supervisor to ensure that labels given to each theme were appropriate and fitted the information presented. Once the themes had been constructed they, hopefully, accurately describe the main ideas elicited from the data. My role as researcher in the data collection and formulation of interpretations was revisited at this point, including how subjective opinions or subtle social positioning may have influenced the responses of participants (See Chapter 4- process observations and reflexivity for a discussion of this aspect).

Thus TA was the chief method of data analysis utilised with the intention of answering the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that while TA is exceptionally useful, the presentation of themes should go beyond the level of pure description in order to enhance the findings. In this respect it will be evident that interpretive commentary is offered on aspects of the findings where relevant. In order to satisfy dependability criteria the data analysis aimed to show a clear picture of the information generated from the interviews by making extensive use of examples of the participants' responses.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, purely descriptive statistics were engaged to determine how high each participant scored on the IER-S measure and to offer a descriptive picture of levels of traumatic symptoms across the participant group.

3.6. CONSIDERATION OF METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR

With a qualitative study ensuring reliability and validity may be more difficult that in a quantitative study, nevertheless, it is an essential consideration. The collected data was transcribed and analysed according to recognised steps in thematic analysis. As indicated above, the supervisor of this study also looked through three of the interview transcripts independently and ideas and notes about the themes were discussed. Difference in observations were further discussed and contested. As far as possible, direct quotations were employed to substantiate analyses. I also tried to remain aware of ways in which my personal contributions may have influenced the data collection and analysis and indicate how I attempted to address this in a subsequent section. It is anticipated that the coherence of the themes will also become evident in the write up of the findings.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to requesting student participation in the study, permission to approach the first-year students was obtained from the relevant course coordinators. For all of the students who took part in the study irrespective of from which source they were recruited the researcher provided a detailed description of the following: firstly; the purpose of the research, secondly; the form and nature of the data collection procedures to be used, thirdly and any anticipated benefits and risks; the research requirements (e.g. the time it would take to conduct the interview and complete the questionnaire), fourthly; the purposes for which the results would be used, and finally; when, where and how participants would be able to access the results of the research upon completion. Informed consent was obtained from individuals who agreed

to participate through signed consent forms (consent to participate and to be recorded) (See Appendix C). The rights and responsibilities of the participant and researcher, the participant's acceptance of participation in the research and permission for the researcher to record the interview were discussed. Emphasis was placed on the fact that participation was voluntary and non-coercive and that participants could exercise the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Participants were also informed that use of verbatim quotations was likely when the final report was written up.

It was appreciated that there were some potential psychological risks that accompanied this study since interview questions required participants to talk about traumatic experiences and to engage with the sense of potential threat associated with daily commuting. It was made explicit before the interviews commenced that participation was completely voluntary and the subjects had the right to discontinue the interview at any point if they wished to do so. In addition, some debriefing was routinely offered at the end of each interview to explore whether interviewees had experienced any negative effects or were left with unfinished business. During the debriefing sessions which took place after the interview and completion of the IES-R questionnaire, the telephone number of the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) at WITS was provided if the participant indicated that they felt any need to discuss their experiences further and to seek some psychological support. However, it was also anticipated that the interviews might highlight coping capacities and resources in addition to examining any difficulties associated with operating in the public commuting environment, which turned out to be the case for most of the participants. Although, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the interviewees did appear to experience some anxiety in reflecting on their experiences, they also appeared to feel considerable relief in talking about stressors they had previously had to and were currently managing. It seemed that they viewed the interviews as validating the significance of difficulties that were generally 'taken for granted' by others in their environment. The more conscious attention to forms of coping and how these worked for them also appeared to provide some form of empowerment. From an ethical perspective it was apparent that it was the experiences to which they were subject in commuting rather than the interviews per se that were difficult to manage. Each individual demonstrated their own approach to engaging with the tensions associated with commuting and it seemed that some of the participants took the notion of seeking supportive counselling seriously, having identified their sense of stress as legitimate. At the end of the data collection all participants were informed that the results

of the study would be available to them in a summarised form at their request once the final write-up had taken place.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter four focuses on the main research findings and themes that were generated from the thematic analysis. A combination of the findings, analysis and discussion in one chapter seems appropriate as it is difficult to separate these out without repetition of information. Four key theme areas were identified and the chapter is structured around these four key aspects of interest. Embedded in the four themes are various sub-themes which are used to further expand on the overarching themes found within the data. Both descriptive material and deeper analysis and interpretation of the themes are discussed in this chapter. The chapter will begin by looking at demographic information which was obtained through a questionnaire which was given to each participant for completion (see Appendix E). A brief summary of this information follows the table presented (Table 1). Following this, descriptive statistics of the Impact of Events Scale-Revised for the total sample are presented (Table 2) and discussed in relation to the traumatic stress symptomatology reported more generally in the interviews.

The themes which were identified in the interview transcripts were; exposure to traumatic events, effects/impacts of events on the interviewees, apparent coping strategies and managing of experience, and gender related perceptions of the environment and context. Following the discussion of these themes, a more dedicated discussion of how the data might shed light on experiential dimensions of Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) will be offered, since the exploration of potential CTS in this chosen participant group was a central aim of the research study. In addition, the Conservation of Resources Theory (CRT) (Hobfoll, 1988) and Horowitz' (1988) Information Processing Model, will be drawn on to assist in understanding aspects of impact and coping as elucidated within this participant group.

4.1. PARTICIPANT GROUP

Identifiers, in the form of P1-P10 (participant one = P1), were used for each participant in order to ensure confidentiality and the protection of identity. The following table depicts the participant's age, year of study, race and area of residence. It is suggested that the information presented in the table be held in mind when reading the material

generated in the interviews as the characteristics of the group suggest aspects of the lens through which the accounts should be understood.

Table 1: Demographic information

Participant	Age	Year of Study	Race	Area of Residence
1.	23	4th	Black	Pimville (Soweto)
2.	21	2nd	Black	Katlegong
3.	22	2nd	Black	Protea North (Soweto)
4.	21	3rd	Black	North Riding
5.	20	2nd	Black	Mountainview
6.	22	2nd	Black	North Riding
7.	23	2nd	Black	Belgravia
8.	25	1st	Black	Roodeport
9.	20	2nd	Black	Diepkloof (Soweto)
10.	19	2nd	Black	Protea Glen (Soweto)

As seen in the table above, the ages of participants included in the study ranged from 19 to 25, with the majority of them being in their early 20's. Unsurprisingly, all of the interviewees were black African women. Additionally, four of the participants live in Soweto, with others commuting from other suburbs or townships around Johannesburg.

4.2. TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMATOLOGY

As seen in the literature presented in chapter 2, it is evident that levels of multiple exposures to traumatic events are high in South Africa (Bowley, Khavandi, Boffard, Macnab, Eales & Vellema, 2002; Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson, Moomal, 2007). This suggests that South Africans are a population vulnerable to trauma symptoms even if not to full blown PTSD. These traumatic stress related symptoms and responses can be debilitating (Edwards, 2005a, 2005b) as also discussed earlier in the report. Bearing the statistics

presented earlier in the literature review in mind, an analysis of the traumatic stress symptomatology of the population chosen for this study is offered below.

As a complement to the qualitative data and in order to provide a descriptive picture of possible posttraumatic stress related symptomatology amongst participants, reported traumatic stress symptoms were measured using the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R). The IES-R (22-item) has a possible total score range of 0 to 88, with a range of 0 to 4 for each item. On the IES-R test, scores that exceed 24 are viewed as meaningful. High scores have the following associations (Weiss, 2007):

24 or more	PTSD is a clinical concern.
33 and above	Those with scores this high who do not have full PTSD will have partial PTSD or at least some of the symptoms. This represents the best cut off for a probable diagnosis of PTSD.
37 or more	This is high enough to suppress your immune system's functioning (even 10 years after an event). Diagnosis of PTSD is warranted.

It is helpful to keep these interpretations in mind when examining the data presented. Descriptive statistics for the total sample on the IES-R are presented in table 2 below. The data generated from the IES-R represents the level of symptom presentation in each category of traumatic stress as well as overall scores. The posttraumatic symptomatology of the participants was assessed specifically in relation to their commute.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Total Sample: IES-R and Subscales

Raw scores for Subscales	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**	**P8**	**P9**	**P10**
Intrusion Subscale	6	2	15	10	16	0	28	11	3	13
Avoidance Subscale	14	5	17	10	16	0	22	6	3	22
Hyper-arousal Subscale	5	5	14	6	11	0	20	1	1	7
IES-R (total)	25	12	46	26	43	0	70	18	7	42

The interview transcripts as well as the scores obtained from the IES-R produced evidence that 9 out of 10 of the participants experience some level of traumatic stress in

relation to their commute. Looking at table 2, it is evident that three participants (P2, P8 and P9) reported very few trauma related symptoms, two (P1 and P4) presented with symptoms in the mild category according to the norms cited above, and four (P3, P5, P7 and P10) reported what might be understood to be rather severe levels of PTSD symptoms. Given that the participants were not approached as a 'clinical' sample and had not sought assistance for their stress it was of considerable concern that a majority of the group reported trauma related distress. The descriptive picture on the IES-R adds some weight to the initial proposition that daily taxi commuting might contribute to levels of disturbance in keeping with traumatic stress or CTS. It is difficult to observe any consistent pattern in relation to the three sub-scales of the IES-R across the group of ten participants, perhaps in part because this was a small population.

(*Note*: all participants were provided with details of resources for counselling services if they felt the need to make use of the services available, as discussed in the section on ethics).

The total scores for each participant in the table above can be corroborated by information revealed in the individual interview transcripts. For instance, participant 7 obtained a worryingly high score of 70 and strongly endorsed symptoms in all three categories. Participant 7 was involved in an accident on her way home on a taxi about a year before the interview; *"cause the other time we were involved in an accident. Yah, it's been like, almost a year now but I just can't get over it, like, yah…we were hospitalised…I still have a scar on my leg."*

During the interview, participant 7 revealed significant traumatic stress symptomatology, stating that she was having dreams about the accident over a month after it happened; *"It's just one of those dreams where you're in an accident but you don't die (laughs). It's one of those dreams, something happens but it just doesn't get to an end."* She also reported concentration difficulties due to the accident: *"it even got to a point where I – it was during exam time, a week before exams. I didn't come for maths cause like I was too scared and I – I didn't come to write my maths... My maths exam cause I was still a bit traumatized and I couldn't study after that."* The score she obtained on the IES-R (70) was considerably higher than those of other participants suggesting high levels of current trauma related distress. Her score was also much higher than the cut off for a possible diagnosis of PTSD indicating that this interviewee may well be suffering from diagnosable PTSD given that her symptoms have endured for well over the month period required to make a PTSD

diagnosis. It appeared that taking part in the interview and answering the questionnaire made this participant aware of quite how debilitating her responses still were and she seemed open to the idea of seeking counselling.

It was also clear from the transcripts that the participants find their own particular ways to cope with the continuous stress and possible trauma related to their commute, as evidenced in the somewhat surprising responses of participant 6, who obtained a total score of 0 on the IES-R. This means that she reported no traumatic stress symptomatology, and while this was unusual her rather phlegmatic response to questions in the interview indicated that she had little sense of anxiety. This participant expressed that she likes *"the way taxi drivers' drive, so I can't say I am scared or anything. They do break a lot of laws but I like their style of driving. It doesn't scare me… I enjoy fast driving"*. In addition to the fact that her perception and experience of the style of driving that most taxi drivers adopt contrasted with that of the rest of the participants, participant 6 also revealed that she is not affected by the stories she hears or reads regarding crime or violence related to taxis; *"I think I just, I mean, yes, things do happen, but I block it. I just block it out, so I'll just know that 'oh okay that happened' and then I just block it out… for instance with the possible rape or being mugged or hurt, I completely block that out of my mind. I never even think about it at all"*. Interestingly Participant 6's reference to 'blocking' things out suggests that she is very aware of actively suppressing anxiety and it is possible that she took a rather deliberate stance of non-endorsement of vulnerability in answering the IES-R. This type of response may be interpreted as a way of coping or managing the stress that she is faced with on a daily basis, as will be discussed further in theme four: 'Managing/Coping'.

4.3. THEME ONE: EXPOSURE TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS

What is striking about the findings is that all of the interviewees reported multiple exposures to traumatic events. Some of these experiences were indirect, i.e. through witnessing a traumatic event or learning about events which happened to people close to them, and some involved direct exposure to a traumatic event.

During the interviews, all of the participants offered at least one example of their exposure to traumatic events, even when these were not specifically solicited or probed for. The traumatic events reported were all related to their commute, occurring either during the taxi ride, at the taxi rank, on their journey to the taxi rank (e.g., walking across the Mandela Bridge), or walking home after being dropped off by the taxi. Based on a thematic content

analytic reading of the interview material the types of exposure were distinguishable into five categories; taxi driver aggression and taxi violence, motor vehicle accidents, crime and violence, xenophobia and gender related violence/trauma. Each of these types of exposure to traumatic stressors is elaborated below.

4.3.1. Taxi driver aggression/taxi violence

In South Africa, drivers of minibus taxis are often described as being unlawful, aggressive and sometimes dangerous drivers (Dula & Geller, 2003; Sinclair & Imaniranzi, 2015; Tasca, 2000). Individuals who use taxis as their primary method of transport are continuously exposed to the aggressive behaviours that many taxi drivers display.

Participants 1 and 3 give an account of their experiences of taxi drivers and queue marshals displaying aggression towards others:

P1: …the thing that is most agonizing about taxis is just that the taxi driver is just being so rude and the queue marshals are just terrible. They are the most obnoxious people you'll ever come across in the world… I don't know if that qualifies as a trauma suffered but it really affected me hey.

P3: …once I was in the taxi in the morning then the taxi broke down and then we got in another taxi and the other driver was forcing us to pay again, he was quite aggressive and one of the passengers was refusing to pay again because we had already paid, then he physically attacked her and she ended up having to get off in the middle of nowhere. So yeah, that incident was a bit scary for me and it was in my thoughts when I was trying to listen in class. It was just scary you know!

It is not uncommon for taxi drivers to lose their tempers with passengers and become violent towards them as described by Dula and Geller (2003). Having to deal with these behaviours on a daily basis appears to have quite a significant effect on passengers, even when the aggression is not directed towards them, but instead to a fellow passenger. Although P1 wonders whether exposure to this behaviour can be considered 'traumatic' she employs strong terminology such a "*most agonizing*" and "*just terrible*" to describe her experience of this aspect of her commute suggesting that levels of aggression from drivers are experienced as highly stressful. P3 seems to identify with the woman who was "*physically attacked*" and off-loaded "*in the middle of nowhere*" and it is apparent that her encounter with the aggression displayed by this particular taxi driver left her feeling unsafe and preoccupied

with what had happened. Her account also indicated a concern that any attempt to stand up to rudeness or aggression might entail damage to oneself. What was conveyed by a number of participants was that the propensity for aggression from those involved in the taxi industry formed part of their consciousness about potential risk during their commuting. Their experiences mirrored the descriptions of taxi driver aggression offered by Dula and Geller (2003) who indicate that physical and verbal abuse may be directed at passengers and fellow road users in addition to displays of aggression in actual driving behaviour, an aspect that will be returned to in a subsequent section.

In addition to the dangerous driving and aggressive behaviours being identified as characteristic of taxi drivers, the minibus taxi industry has also been characterised by violent conflicts or 'wars' after its rapid deregulation (Sekhonyane & Dugard, 2004). These taxi wars have a considerable impact on individuals who rely on taxis to travel to and from university, work, or school. Passengers are exposed to the violence associated with conflict between drivers and associations and are sometimes caught in the middle, as was described by several of the participants.

P8: …my husband doesn't have a car and he had to also use taxis last year, he was trying to beat the morning traffic and he left early …right when the driver stopped at the robot, the guy pulled out a gun and he shot at the driver but my husband didn't realise what was going on. He just heard a bang, he just heard a loud bang and they shot at the driver… We actually found out it boiled down to taxi violence.

P8 appeared to recollect this event that directly affected her husband with some distress and it was evident from her description of the event that his account included the kinds of strong sensory details associated with traumatic events – "*he just heard a bang, he just heard a loud bang*" – and that this imagery had also stayed with her as someone who was indirectly traumatized by his account.

Other participants were very aware of potential risks associated with being in the vicinity of drivers and operators in conflict.

P7: …there was a story about a shooting in Bree and I was just there that day. I just got there earlier; so when I got home there was a story about shooting and something. So I was scared cause that's usually the times I get to Bree but that day I just decided to just go home early, I was just lucky.

P7: Then they scream at each other, so you're sitting there and you're thinking: "Eish if this thing escalates, I'm the one who's stuck in here".

P9: I remember, I think it was two weeks ago there were taxi wars, so there were problems with transportation from the location to the city, so this one time like, okay taxis were really scarce at that time and I even heard that someone got shot!

Both P7 and P9 describe shootings that took place, confirming P8's description of an event in which a passenger's life was put at risk through being in the vicinity of a firearm being discharged. The anxiety associated with this dimension of commuting is quite palpable in the accounts as participants describe being *"scared"* and trapped in such contexts. There was a sense that they were perhaps fortunate to have escaped being directly involved in such situations thus far, but that the risk of this kind of exposure was very real for them. Again it is worth reiterating that such accounts were volunteered spontaneously rather than being actively solicited by the interviewer.

Thus it appears evident that people who travel by taxis are affected by taxi wars, whether or not they have experienced the violence related to these wars directly or vicariously.

4.3.2. Motor vehicle accidents

As discussed previously it is evident not only that many taxi drivers have a well-deserved reputation for driving dangerously (Chin & Huang, 2009; La, Lee, Meuleners & Van Duong, 2013) but also that commuters using public transport such as minibus taxis are at increased risk of being involved in accidents (Barrett, 2003). Concerns about vehicle road-worthiness, dangerous driving and risk of accidents were very prominent in accounts and were volunteered by almost all of the participants.

Participants 4 and 9 exclaimed how common they perceive taxi accidents to be.

P4: I've seen many taxi accidents, so many of them!

P9: …taxi accidents hey! They are so common! (laughs) I don't know why I laugh at these things hey.

These two comments convey that as commuters they are very aware of the frequency with which taxis are involved in accidents. Their observations resonate with research findings

that indicate that of types of vehicles on the road in South Africa, taxis are involved in a disproportionally higher number of accidents than other vehicles (Lomme, 2008).

All of the young women who participated in this study had heard of, seen, or experienced an accident involving a taxi.

P9: Like there was this lady who I travel with, I think she's still traumatised, she told me that her and her friend, they got into an accident or something, and both of them flew out the front window and they were severely hurt, so like till this day she refuses to sit in the front seat because of what happened that day, and you know taxis don't have seat belts so it is very dangerous.

P7: …the other time we were involved in an accident. Yah, it's been like, almost a year now but I just can't get over it… it was bad cause we got injured and stuff, we were hospitalised... the brakes failed cause the driver was like 'yoh there go the breaks', and he swerved and he crashed into another car and the other car was damaged. I still have a scar of it here on my leg…

As noted in the previous section (Traumatic Stress Symptomatology), participant 7 scored the highest on the IES-R and revealed the highest level of traumatic stress symptomatology. It is apparent that her direct experience of a serious taxi accident has had a powerful effect on her, leaving her with physical and psychological scars that she is evidently still struggling with. P9 also describes an incident in which someone known to her was "*severely hurt*" in an accident and goes on to elaborate that taxis continue to be unsafe as a mode of transport because of compromised safety measures, such as access to seat-belts.

Other participants conveyed direct if slightly less traumatic experiences of taxi accidents:

P1: I got hit by a taxi once… I was crossing the street into Bree… I got hit on my leg and my ankle still kind of hurts.

P4: … there was a time where we actually got bumped into by another taxi at Bree taxi rank actually… The taxi I was in was coming out of the taxi rank and the other one was coming in to the taxi rank and there's only just a small passage for incoming and outgoing so, then they bumped into each other!

In addition to the description of the incident at the Bree street taxi rank, Participant 4 voiced that nearly being involved in a further recent taxi accident was as anxiety provoking as actually experiencing one. Her anxiety was revealed in the exclamation in her voice as well as her tendency to laugh when describing an incident that was evidently frightening for her and which she recollected in some detail.

P4: …this morning the taxi driver, he wanted to jump the red robot (laughs). And then there was no one coming because they saw that it was green but the taxi was not moved, he just drove straight through the red robot and the other person actually had to brake so hard to stop before they hit each other!

Participant 8 appeared to share similar sentiments as participant 4:

P8: …it's so many times you're sitting in a taxi and you nearly hit someone or – especially when you're sitting in front… it is very scary

In South Africa, factors which have been observed to be common amongst taxi drivers as road users and are implicated in accident rates include driving over the prescribed speed limit, disregard for traffic signals and violation of traffic signs, ignoring rights of other road users, overloading passengers, night time driving without adequate lighting, and using vehicles that are not road worthy (Govender & Allopi, 2007; Ribbens, Botha & Khumalo, 2000).

Content from the participants' interviews suggest that the factors identified above were observed in their everyday experiences. For example, P4 describes the near accident as being caused by the driver's failure to observe road traffic regulations and to stop at a red traffic light. The participants complained generally of reckless driving and of the poor condition of many taxis in terms of roadworthiness and safety:

P3: … the driver can be reckless then he puts us all at risk for being in an accident you know?

P9: … I've been in the worst kind of taxis, like they are usually in such bad condition! Sometimes the taxis don't have windows, and other ones you can literally see the tar underneath you as the taxi is driving!

P6: … I have heard a story about the brakes of the taxi failing…

As with other aspects of exposure to potential trauma during commuting participants were relatively matter of fact in describing risks of being involved in motor vehicle accidents (MVA's). It is quite striking that out of the ten students interviewed two (P 1 and P7) had sustained direct injuries in taxi accidents, one had been in an accident in which no-one was actually injured (P4), and two could recount instances in which they had been involved in near misses in terms of accidents (P4 and P8). It is evident that the unsafe and often frustrating driving behaviours of minibus taxis drivers (as well as the often poor quality of their vehicles) were realistically appreciated to be one of the most prevalent risk factors in commuting, contributing to the potential trauma that the population in this study were regularly exposed to.

4.3.3. Crime, violence

Unsurprisingly, crime and violence came up as a prominent theme in the interviews. All of the participants relayed some sort of exposure to crime and violence related to their commute, and some even revealed some traumatic experiences of crime and violence outside of their commuting experience. As discussed previously crime rates in South Africa, and more particularly violent crime, are high compared to global norms (SAPS, 2005). There is thus objective evidence that South African citizens are vulnerable to violent crime, although incidences clearly vary across the country and the population (Williams, Williams, Stein, Seedat, Jackson & Moomal, 2007).

The focus of this study was on crime and violence related to taxi commuting in particular. Looking at the examples given by participants during the interviews, it can be observed that it is both the use of taxis and the walking to and from taxi ranks that leaves one vulnerable to crime. Such crime was committed both with or without the use of force or weapons.

Three out of the ten participants (P3, P7 and P10) who were interviewed revealed that they had been directly exposed to crime. Two of the three (P3 and P7) stated that their perpetrators had weapons, specifically knives and the other indicated that she had been mugged but didn't elaborate on what force had been used (P10).

P3: Then these two guys came, I think with a knife and they were pointing it at me asking for my phone, and yeah.

P7: I've been mugged, like they took my phone… but it wasn't that bad, they had knives... It was bad but at least I'm still alive (laughs)

P10: I was mugged last year… I was walking from school to Bree and I got mugged at the Mandela Bridge.

Considering the crime statistics presented previously, it was not unexpected that almost a third of the participants report direct exposure to crime.

Given the widespread crime and violence in South Africa, the country is viewed as one of the most stressful societies in the world in which to live (Masuku, 2002). As a result, the general public is thought to be at high risk for developing trauma-related mental health problems (Masuku, 2002). Regarding this high risk, it is worth re-visiting the data revealed by the IES-R for the three participants who described direct exposure to crime. It was evident that they all reported relatively high levels of traumatic stress symptomatology with scores of 46, 70 and 42, all of which suggest clinical distress. Although based on a small group the findings are suggestive of the fact that direct victimization through crime is associated with higher levels of trauma related symptoms.

In addition to reports of direct exposure, other participants shared some incidents of crime that were experienced indirectly:

P2: …there's a friend I know. She also walks from Mandela bridge, she's been robbed before but then they didn't harm her. They just took the things from her bag without her seeing… It's crazy! You get to school and you're like, 'shit, my things are missing'.

P9: My one friend Mpho (pseudonym) was right across Bree taxi rank and these guys came from nowhere and politely said "hi sister, I like your bag and I'd like to have it", and I think they had like a Taser on them… she hasn't gotten over it till this day.

P4: …so many friends of mine have been mugged on Mandela Bridge, near Braamfontein on the way to Bree, at Bree, or wherever they get off the taxi… You're just like 'oh I hope that doesn't happen to me.'

Participants 2, 4 and 9 reported on the experiences of people they know personally. They described their friends' experiences of crime as they were walking to, and from, the taxi rank to the university and the almost ever present threat of muggings or robberies. Even though these participants were not directly exposed to crime, in the quotations cited one can

see that they have been affected by their friends' experiences. This is observable in the way P2 exclaims how "*crazy!"* she thinks her friend's experience was, or how P4 indicates that she hopes she never shares the experience of so many of her friends, "*oh, I hope that doesn't happen to me*".

In total, six out of the ten participants who were interviewed have been exposed to crime and violence, whether the exposure was direct or indirect, in relation to their commute. Thus exposure to crime and violence can be considered a significant traumatic experience which the users of mini bus taxis are confronted with on a daily basis.

4.3.4. Xenophobic attacks

Violence against foreigners and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but appear to be rather normalised in interaction in South African society (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008). Foreign women in South Africa arguably face a double risk being at the intersection of two groups that are very vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008). Migrant women in South Africa have been experiencing subtle and insidious forms of xenophobia on a daily basis for as long as they have been in the country. These forms include not only physical violence, but verbal and psychological abuse, structural and institutional violence, as well as cultural and ethnic discrimination (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008).

While only two of the women participants in this study fitted the profile of being foreign citizens, the accounts they gave of their experiences was sufficient to consider this a noteworthy subtheme as their experiences possibly represent those of a larger population in the South African context. It was also evident that these two women experienced the commuting space as one in which their 'foreign' identity put them at risk of particular forms of harassment and scrutiny and that this added to the burden of other forms of potential trauma that had to be managed in this space.

P4: … but there's also... I don't know if I can say the fear of xenophobia…

In South Africa, exhibiting cultural, language and ethnic differences can leave a migrant woman (and man) vulnerable to xenophobic attitudes and behaviour (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008). Again, as bearers of culture, women migrants often face the dilemma of retaining their cultural markers, thereby exposing themselves to various forms of

xenophobic violence, or blending in with the South African population, thereby losing their identity (Sigsworth, NgNgwane & Pino, 2008).

Language was found to be a major marker of difference: knowing or not-knowing a language was a crucial element in shaping migrants' experiences of South Africa (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008), as confirmed in the participants' descriptions of interactions. Language is used by South Africans to impose silence on foreigners as a measure of power and containment. Learning to speak certain indigenous languages (other than English) can be used as a survival strategy for some migrants (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008).

One the participants confirmed that language based discrimination was operative in the taxi commuting environment, expressing that she thinks it is necessary to greet the taxi driver in an indigenous language in order to be received positively;

P6: …I don't think they would respond well to English… So I greet them in Zulu, I say 'Sawubona' which is all I know (laughs).

Her laughter suggests that she is either anxious about discussing the issue of xenophobia or that she may have been embarrassed to admit that she has only learnt one word of Zulu in order to try and blend in and avoid being easily identified as a foreigner.

Sigsworth, Ngwane and Pino (2008), also propose that public spaces, particularly in connection with accessing public transport, have been identified as one of the worst sites of xenophobic abuse towards women migrants. The women in their study reported being threatened on all forms of public transport (buses, trains and taxis) and while walking on the streets, as well as being exposed to sexual harassment by both taxi drivers and men on the street. Taxis are particularly fraught places for foreign women – they can easily be identified as foreign, mostly through the markers of difference such as speech and dress (Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008).

P4: … but there's also... I don't know if I can say the fear of xenophobia… I know Zulu right and I can speak it, but then there's a word I don't know, then I just decide, Ag, let me just speak English. Then you get this attitude. It makes me dread talking to people in the taxi.

Participant 4 reveals that she has made an effort to learn Zulu, however she is not fluent in the language and still struggles to fully express herself in Zulu, and because of this she experiences negative attitudes from people in the taxi space. This can be construed as a

more subtle covert experience of xenophobia. It is interesting that she uses the term "*dread"'* in relation to potential exposure, suggesting quite powerful anxiety about how this aspect of her identity might place her at risk in some way, even if it is to be exposed to forms of hostility and rejection.

Participant 4 goes on to report verbal abuse that she experienced during her commute because she revealed her 'marker of difference' through speech;

P4: It was scary and I didn't understand most of the language it was so traumatic, he spoke a totally different language that I don't understand and then he said something else and I said: 'Excuse me?' And the guy got very angry and started shouting and I didn't understand why he was shouting and so I was just standing there... And then he was being very violent and angry so I just said sorry and left because now I didn't know what to say (laughs).

One can see from this account that P4 recollected this particular exchange with a taxi driver as very frightening and that she was very aware of the aggression being directed towards her in this instance. The recollection has something of the vividness that one anticipates from an event that is experienced as traumatic and stays with the individual over time. Although she was able to extricate herself from the situation and to laugh (even if uneasily) about it in the present, this account probably explains why she dreads talking to people on taxis.

Strangely, and in contradiction to participant 4's experience, participant 6 uses her inability to understand indigenous languages like a protective shield; she is able to operate as if whatever is being said does not concern her, whether or not the taxi driver is speaking to her directly or not.

P6: … But it's also- I'm not South African- so it's also that I don't understand much, like when they're shouting or screaming at each other or passengers I don't understand what they're saying. So I'm normally just relaxed and carry on with life. I assume it's not me they're shouting about so it doesn't concern me (laughs).

These two participants clearly have very different experiences of being a foreigner in the taxi space. However, it is evident that whether or not they can speak an indigenous language has a considerable impact on how they experience their commute, particularly with regards to how taxi drivers and fellow passengers respond to and treat them. The references to "*shouting*" and "*screaming*" by both interviewees reinforces the observations discussed

under the theme on driver aggression as there is a suggestion that aggressive and violent behaviour is commonplace amongst drivers.

4.3.5. Gender related trauma

While gender related trauma is introduced and discussed under the exposure theme, broader references to gender dynamics came up as significant in the data and it was therefore considered appropriate to dedicate a specific thematic category to this dimension of the research findings as is elaborated later.

Almost all of the participants in the study made reference at some point to issues of sexual violence and/or harassment. Participant 5 communicated that she is aware of the dangers and restrictions that accompany being a female in the taxi space, and that how a female decides to dress may affect the way in which male figures in the taxi space respond to/treat her. Her comment also points towards the on-going concern that women are highly objectified and sexualized in the taxi space as noted by Gqola (2007) and others.

P5: I've heard quite a few stories from people. Like I heard incidents of girls being harassed if they wear skirts that are too short or any clothes that are too revealing and stuff, so I've heard that they get abused and stuff for dressing like that.

Participant 2 articulated that she often experiences the objectification and sexualisation of her body by the males she encounters in the taxi space, and that this has a substantial negative impact on the experience of her commute:

P2: You know when you're a girl and there are men around they just throw these comments. These irritating comments about your body, you know... how you look, how they'd like for you to get into their cars, you know. Yah, and how your arse is so nice, it's disturbing.

In South Africa, being female is identified as one of the 'main risk factors' in relation to violence in society (Perry & Jaggernath, 2012). For instance, women have to avoid traveling alone at night and should be extra careful at traffic intersections. Likewise women who use public transport are warned not to dress or behave in ways that may attract violent attention. This still emphasises the message that women should be careful of how they behave and dress and about the places they frequent during certain hours of the day (Ndlovu, 2014).

P1: I know someone who got raped by a taxi driver. Umm... that made me more aware of the taxis I got into, it's just scary being a woman in that space…

In the example above Participant 1 expresses how hearing about another woman's trauma made her more vigilant and fearful of the taxi space. Even though she did not directly experience the trauma, it had affected the way she perceives and interacts with male figures in this space.

Thus it is apparent that women in the taxi space are at risk for various forms of gender related trauma, which include physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, as well as threats of such acts, intimidation and/or denial of freedom, and that because such threats occur in the public arena there is often an added sense of shame or helplessness when others do not intervene to assist. Participants 5 and 9 reveal experiences where they were personally seriously sexually harassed by males within the taxi space along their commute.

P5: This one day I was just walking through (the taxi rank) *and then this guy approaches me, so naturally I try to stand aside to let him pass. Then this guy goes to the side that I've moved to. I go to the other side and he moves to that side as well… Then he comes straight at me and he just grabs my boob…I was scared, it was very nasty… It made me feel so angry and violated, and I was mad for the rest of the day.*

P9: …this one instance where I was the last one on the taxi, and usually I am, so I start freaking out and thinking 'okay what if this guy decides to just kidnap me and run off with me in this taxi now', so this driver, because I have big breasts, he puts his hand on my chest and then he laughs about it!

Both participants were physically violated, but failed to report what happened to them to any authority. Both participants did not even consider going to the police as an appropriate reaction. This can be perhaps be seen as an indication of how common such incidents are in this particular space and how unlikely they are to be taken seriously as assaults of some kind.

In addition to descriptions of verbal and visual harassment and the kind of gratuitous touching described thus far, a number of the interviewees also mentioned the very real fear of rape. There is a common understanding that women and particularly young women should avoid being the last passenger in a taxi if at all possible because of the threat of rape and several students referred to this caution.

P1: I was told not to get on to a cab with just men or not to get onto a cab if I'm the only passenger.

P2: I prefer getting in a taxi where there are mixed – like there's mixed people. Like there is women and men. But I'm uncomfortable with taxis where they are just men…. I will never climb a taxi whereby I see that there are just men and just me, no.

P3: I've heard so many stories where umm, taxi drivers, like if you are maybe the last person in the taxi and then when you tell them you are getting off they don't stop they just drive off with you.

P6: …normally when I catch a taxi after school just outside Wits I'm the only person there, with the taxi driver and chances are; he might rape me…

Participant 4 also indicated that she has had experiences of men attempting to coerce her into their car as she has walked home from her taxi stop, with the strong sense that their intention was some sort of sexual assault.

P4: …this one time I was walking home, it's a ten minute walk. It was 18:45 at the time and then this Nigerian guy was in a car and he stopped his car for me and he's like: 'Come in, come in' and I just said no thank you. And I had to lie that I'm going there and not in the direction I was actually going…

Thus it was apparent that in addition to the kinds of experiences which male taxi commuters might be subject to, such as risk of accidents and mugging or robbery, women commuters are exposed to a further serious layer of potential traumatization at the level of actual or threatened gender violence of various forms. Again, the language used to describe these experiences - "*scared*", "*very nasty*", "*freaking out*", "*violated*" – is indicative of strong negative emotional reactions to these experiences. It was interesting to note that there was anger in some instances but that this tended to be expressed in the aftermath rather than during events, probably because of fear of escalating violence.

To sum up the thematic material related to exposure to traumatic stressors as reported in the interviews, it can be concluded that the sample who volunteered to participate in this study has been exposed to multiple trauma's in relation to their commute, whether it was taxi driver aggression and taxi violence, motor vehicle accidents, crime, xenophobia or gender related violence/trauma. All of the participants reported being exposed to at least one but in

general several of these types of trauma. The spontaneous reference to direct and indirect exposure to a variety of what could generally be understood to constitute traumatic stressors, as well as appraisal of potential threat in this regard, tends to support the premise that female university students who are compelled to use taxis as a primary method of transport are a population vulnerable to continuous exposure to traumatic events. This formulation of their experience will be returned to in subsequent sections of the discussion. Having discussed what kinds of experiences interviewees reported exposure to, the subsequent sections turn to how they appeared to be affected by this and how they attempt to manage in this context. The element of gender will be expanded upon in a subsequent theme as this appeared warranted in terms of the content that emerged from the interviews.

4.4. THEME TWO: EFFECTS/ IMPACTS

Given that all the participants who were interviewed for this study had experienced some form of trauma related to their commute (whether it was direct or vicarious), it was anticipated that these experiences would have evident psychological impacts and/or effects on the participants. It was through the analysis of the participants' interviews, that common effects were identified. These effects were distinguishable into three sub-themes: anxiety, fear and preoccupation with danger, numbing and suppression, and resignation/helplessness.

These common psychological effects that were identified within the data can also be viewed as 'psychological symptoms' that the participants developed as a result of being regularly exposed to traumatic events during their commute. Based on the American Psychiatric Association's (2000), DSM-IV-TR clinical criteria, the development of characteristic symptoms of PTSD includes evidence of intense fear, helplessness or horror following exposure to a traumatic event (Criterion A). Two of the aforementioned PTSD characteristics resonated with the psychological effects that the participants in this study reported to be part of their experience; fear and helplessness. Such responses are also conceivably consistent with the lived experience of CTS, which is the main focus of this study. A discussion of the particular psychological impacts that the participants' circumstances appear to have had on them is offered below.

4.4.1. Anxiety, Fear and Preoccupation with Danger

During most of the interviews, the anxiety that the topic of using mini bus taxis brought up was tangible in the room. The participants displayed anxiety in various ways, for example, laughing at times that seemed discordant with this response (as has been illustrated

in some previous quotations), explicitly expressing what about their commute provokes anxiety, and using repetitive phrases that related to strong experiences. Thus in addition to using content language that explicitly referenced feelings of anxiety, such as scared, nervous, stressed and freaked out, there were also non-verbal and stylistic aspects of expression that conveyed anxiety.

In the excerpts below P2, P3 and P4 expressed being anxious about being involved in an accident and getting seriously injured, while P9 expressed that she fears getting mugged on her way to the taxi rank.

P2: I'm more concerned – you know taxi drivers, their aim is to make money; get you from A to B in a shorter space of time. You get me? So what I worry about each and every morning is am I going to make it today? The way this person is driving, am I going to make it today!

The anxiety in P2's extract is quite evident in how she exclaims *"am I going to make it today?"* This is also evident in the way in which she uses repetition of this rhetorical question to emphasis her fear that travelling by taxi poses a risk to her safety. Moreover, she reveals how anxiety provoking it is for her traveling by taxi because of the driving behaviours that taxi drivers are infamous for. This fear has a realistic basis as it is evident that the unsafe driving behaviours of minibus taxis drivers (as well as the often poor quality of their vehicles) have been identified to be one of the most prevalent risk factors in using this method of transport (Govender & Allopi, 2007; Ribbens, Botha & Khumalo, 2000), as discussed previously.

P3: I get really scared of accidents because really anything can happen…think it's just my fears of being involved in an accident. I mean anything can happen hey, I just have to hope that I can get home safe or get to school safe.

P3 also uses repetition in her account of how anxious she gets when she gets onto a taxi, repeating the phrase *"anything can happen"*. She too feels that this compromises her safety, specifically in relation to being involved in an accident which could result in serious injury. Much like P2, P3's fears originate from her knowledge of the reckless driving behaviours that taxi drivers are often guilty of. P3 expresses this after being asked to elaborate on what she means by "*anything can happen*; she responds "*…the driver can be reckless then he puts us all at risk for being in an accident you know?"*

P4: …the way the taxi drivers drive is just not safe and there's always a risk of accidents anytime…it's just stressful travelling with taxis.

It can be seen in the extract above, that P4 reports feeling anxious when travelling by taxi for the same reasons that P2 and P3 expressed. She too believes that the way that taxi drivers behave on the road puts her and other passengers in danger. P4 reveals that she feels that there is *"always a risk of accidents anytime";* conveying that she never feels safe when travelling by taxi, which illustrates how perpetually anxious this mode of transport makes her.

P9 expressed feeling anxious when walking across the Mandela Bridge, her anxiety also emanates from her knowledge of the possible harm or danger that accompanies using this bridge to get to the taxi rank. Even though she has not personally experienced crime on the bridge, hearing of others' experiences of crime on the bridge appears to have had a considerable effect on her.

P9: I've heard a lot of stories from people I know who have gotten mugged along Mandela bridge. So I guess sometimes I do freak out and get really nervous.

P8: I feel more anxiety walking from Park Station to Bree, that stretch to get to the… Just to walk from there to there, anything can happen.

What is very evident in the extracts just cited is how much unpredictability the participants relate to their commute as evidenced in expressions such as *"am I going to make it today?"* and *"anything can happen"*, as well as, *"I do freak out and get really nervous"*. They all reveal that these young women commuters have fantasies of what might happen to them. Based on personal and/or indirect experience the participants perceive that the probability of being faced with danger or harm is significantly high in their commuting environment. It is also evident that a common response to this awareness is to feel highly anxious and that participants carry both situational and anticipatory anxiety.

In addition to how anxious the participants felt when using mini bus taxis due to the possibility of imminent danger, a few of the participants also expressed how this anxiety tends to linger and affect them even after their commute. There were a few participants who indicated that events went on preoccupying them or interfered with their concentration:

P3: Well yeah, my concentration in class sometimes, like when something drastic has happened in the taxi then it affects me throughout the day until I get a chance to sleep it off.

P3 described how she occasionally gets distracted during class after something extreme happens during her commute. An example she reflected on (cited previously) was when a taxi driver became violent towards one of her fellow passengers. This remained in her thoughts up until she went to bed that night.

P4 expressed how she was distracted, while attempting to study, by fantasies of what could have happened during her commute. She described nearly being in an accident one day when she was on a taxi and how her fantasies of how bad it could have been stayed with her long after she had arrived at her destination.

P4: At night when I get home and I need to study and start thinking: 'oh, what could have happened?' And then 'oh no, focus', And then I go back to studying. There are times when it's like that, like: 'Oh, that was bad'

Although P10 did not report any interference in relation to her concentration specifically, she does describe being preoccupied with thoughts of the time that she was mugged a week after it occurred;

P10: I used to think about it after it happened, like I would think about it a week later.

As reported previously, P7 was involved in an accident along her commute and obtained a worryingly high score of 70 on the IES-R. Therefore is it not unexpected that she reported experiencing prominent levels of anxiety in different ways related to her commute which affected various areas of her life.

P7: It's just one of those dreams where you're in an accident but you don't die (laughs). It's one of those dreams, something happens but it just doesn't get to an end. It just happens… It even got to a point where I – it was during exam time, a week before exams. I didn't come for maths cause like I was too scared and I– I didn't come to write my maths... My maths exam cause I was still a bit traumatized and I couldn't study after that.

Thus, without any psychological intervention, it is evident that anxiety has become part of the participants' everyday lived experience of using mini bus taxis as their primary mode of transport. In addition to anxiety which was relatively pervasive, the participants also described real fear in some of the situations they had encountered.

As noted in earlier sections, as users of mini bus taxis the individuals who partook in the proposed study are exposed to a context in which danger and threat are largely unpredictable, yet inescapable and substantive. During the interviews it became clear very early on in the data collection process that fear and the apprehension of danger was a prominent and pervasive effect or impact that the participants experienced in relation to their commute.

In the ensuing discussion, it is not only fear in the moment as described by participants that will be addressed, but also their fantasies of what might happen, their apprehension of danger.

P1: Knowing... no airbags, no seatbelts especially when you're sitting in front with the driver. There's literally like this much metal between you and the next car, it's scary… the biggest fear would be getting into some accident with a taxi, cause I mean chances of survival there are slim!

P1 indicated that she literally fears for her life when traveling by taxi *"I mean the chances of survival are slim"* and her fear appears to arise from the state of the taxis she has travelled on. P1 also reveals how aware she is of her surroundings, as she notices that the vehicle she is travelling in has no air bags or seatbelts, equipment which would most likely protect her if the taxi was to get involved in an accident. As much as this fear may be viewed as a fantasy, it is not unrealistic given the statistics in relation to the frequency of taxi accidents, which many passengers of mini bus taxis are aware of. P1's fear is real in the moment as she imagines how detrimental the accident would be if it were to occur. While P1 described her vivid fantasy of the potential of an accident, other participants expressed fear about other forms of potential traumatization, such as fears of abduction or sexual violation.

P2: Getting kidnapped on the way to Bree, cause there are a lot of cars. Having an accident on my way here, ya, those are the kind of things that I'm like... 'please don't happen, please don't happen.'

P3:… like if you are maybe the last person in the taxi and then when you tell them you are getting off they don't stop they just drive off with you... Yeah... I think that's one of my bigger fears.

In the extracts above, P2 and P3 express that one of their biggest fears concerning their commute is getting kidnapped by the taxi driver or by a stranger on the way to Bree.

P2's fear is almost palpable in the room as she thinks about being in an accident or getting kidnapped, her fantasies bring her fear into the interview as she utters "*please don't happen, please don't happen*", at a volume lower than the volume she was using previously. P3 describes her fear of being kidnapped. During her description it was evident that she too was visualising this happening to her; *"…they just drive off with you… yeah…"*, she paused for a while as her fear became real in that moment in the room. In both instances it was evident from both the verbal content offered and nature of how the speech was offered, whispering, pausing and repeating of material, that the fear of potential traumatization was very powerful.

After P2 described her fear of being in an accident or being kidnapped, she went on to speak about what other fears or fantasies she experiences during her commute.

P2: …very scary, you must always be on the lookout, in Joburg. Especially when you're travelling, you'll never know who's looking at you. Even a guy wearing a suit is dangerous in Joburg.

She reveals how vigilant she has to be when traveling, saying how *"you must always be on the lookout"*. This seems like an appropriate reaction when one is in a context where the apprehension of danger is constant. However there is a slight element of paranoia in her statement as she declares *"you'll never know who's looking at you"*. She elaborates on her fantasy of the need to be watchful almost as if to warn the interviewer that she might similarly be at risk by voicing that she believes anyone can be a threat, even individuals who appear to be wearing apparel that is deemed respectable. There is a sense that P2 feels that all men she encounters in her commute are potentially untrustworthy or harmful.

P4 also exhibits slight hints of paranoia when expressing her fears, stating how she imagines that her potential perpetrator has been watching her and noting the times she usually travels in order to catch her at any time;

P4: … the fear of dying any minute or getting hurt, there's also that fear of, when you get off maybe someone will be waiting there for you because they know your timetable now.

She also infers that as a user of mini bus taxis, one's life is always in danger, suggesting that she believes that her commute entails imminent and inescapable threat to her safety and her life, "*fear of dying any minute*".

The majority of the participants indicated that the constant fear of attack or harm and danger was prominent during their commute and also influenced their thinking about future commuting and risk. They also revealed that they felt the need to be alert at all times. It becomes difficult to know who to trust. Several participants reported that due to their fear and anxiety their concentration was affected at times. Based on the interviews, anxiety and fear, and associated vigilance and preoccupation with danger, is/are part of the lived experience of these participants in relation to everyday commuting. In contrast to the anxious spectrum responses several participants also indicated evidence of more dampening down kinds of responses to awareness of potential danger.

4.4.2. Numbing and suppression

As discussed in the literature review, Horowitz's (1999) Information Processing Model serves as a useful perspective when formulating and understanding some of the psychological effects of traumatic experiences. Although his model on trauma is based on the effects of a traumatic event that has occurred in the past, it is still useful to draw on his hypotheses in understanding the effect of numbing, which a third of the participants reported as a result or effect of potentially being continuously exposed to traumatic experiences.

Participants 4, 6 and 10, conveyed how they are forced to numb the psychological and emotional effects of their commute, whether it is anxiety, fear or any other uncomfortable emotion that accompanies their experience of being in constant danger. They achieve this by consciously avoiding thoughts of real or perceived danger from their minds and suppressing material that might evoke anxiety.

P4: There are times when I'm walking home and I think I'm just tired of this – looking behind, who's following me, then I just go. Then I just start singing and walk, and try to block it all out until I'm home safely.

P4 expresses how exhausting it has become for her to be in a constant state of vigilance on her way home *"I'm just tired of this - looking behind, who's following me…"* Having to relentlessly be aware of one's environment due to fear and/or anxiety can have considerable effects on functioning and emotional well-being, thus suppression appears to be a beneficial defence that has been adopted by P4, 6 and 10. This numbing and suppression of affect and fear generating thoughts can be observed in how they explicitly communicate that; *"I just start singing and walk, and try to block it all out"* and *"I completely block that out of*

my mind" as well as *"I try not think of myself being the next victim, I try by all means to avoid that."*

P6: I mean, yes, things do happen, but I block it. I just block it out, so I'll just know that 'oh okay that happened' and then I just block it out… for instance with the possible rape or being mugged or hurt, I completely block that out of my mind. I never even think about it at all.

P6 discloses that she is aware that when using taxis, especially as a female, one is realistically exposed to potential rape, being mugged or hurt, however she tries by all means not to think about these things happening to her. P10 also communicates that she is aware of the danger of sexual assault along her commute, but she too makes an effort not to let these thoughts linger in her mind;

P10: I try not to think about it as a possibility even though I know that the rape culture in South Africa is pretty like, it's huge. I try not think of myself being the next victim, I try by all means to avoid that.

Horowitz (1999) proposed that intrusive thoughts and uncomfortable emotions are the result of repeated representations of the event bombarding the mind. It is evident that some of the participants experience intrusive thoughts and uncomfortable emotions informed by imagery derived from prior and immediate exposure of either an indirect or direct nature (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). In order to prevent becoming emotionally overwhelmed, emotional numbing is used to defend against this ambush of unwanted emotions and thoughts (Horowitz, 1999).

4.4.3. Resignation/hopelessness

Usually, towards the end of the interview, once the fear and anxiety evoked by the content of the discussion which took place between participant and researcher had settled, in several instances a sense of resignation and/or hopelessness rose to the foreground of the participants' narrative of their experiences related to their commute. In keeping with some of the literature reviewed earlier on in this paper, their hopelessness and resignation may be attributed to a sense of impotence or loss of control over their own safety, and survival chances (Eagle and Kaminer, 2013). In assessing the participants' experiences of their commute, it is evident that 'bad' experiences are predominant in the taxi space. Acceptance of this reality may manifest in passivity and hopelessness, and a sense of impotence or hopelessness, as further elaborated below.

After describing the incident where she was hit by a taxi right outside Bree Taxi rank, P1 divulged how she felt she had to react, or what was, to her, the only appropriate form of response to the situation *"Yeah, I mean, these things happen hey… You just have to get up and keep moving, there's nothing you can do."* It is evident that this participant feels, not only that there is nothing that she personally can do about what happened to her, but also that she believes that there is nothing anyone else can do to protect her from such incidents occurring in the future.

P9: Why should we have to worry about how we dress just because we have to use public transport? It's not something that should happen, but the truth is it does, and we have to be careful and just live with it… like what else can we do you know?

P9, in the quote presented above, also alludes to the fact that as a user of mini bus taxis, and as a female, one is constantly exposed to threat and danger, more importantly one cannot be protected from or avoid this danger. She also expressed that she is aware that the danger she is faced with every day is not supposed to be a norm, but unfortunately it is; *"It's not something that should happen, but the truth is it does."* It can be perceived that P1 and P9 are eventually swept with a sense of hopelessness; they cannot change their circumstances and they do not seem to believe that seeking help from authorities (policemen or security personnel) will change anything or help them in any way. Predictably, this develops into quite strong resignation, as illustrated in phrases such as; *"You just have to get up and keep moving, there's nothing you can do"* and *"we have to be careful and just live with it."*

P2 communicates that she too has resorted to resignation as a result of the unpredictability that her commute poses. Earlier this participant revealed that getting involved in an accident is one of her biggest fears related to using this method of public transport. This is evident in how powerless she feels when thinking about arriving at her destination safely.

P2: You don't have control over today; you don't have control over whether an accident is going to happen or not.

P8 echoes what P9, P1 and P2 have conveyed above; *…what can you do? You still need to get to work, you still need to get to school. You still gonna get into a taxi no matter how scared you are of what might happen…* This links to the reality that all participants who

took part in this study have no other choice but to use mini bus taxis to travel to and from university as will be further addressed in the discussion on CTS later on in this chapter.

It is evident that the participants' responses to the context include both more intrusion related elements in the form of anxieties and preoccupations and more avoidance related elements in the form of numbing, suppression and resignation. The latter two sets of responses described appear designed to manage anxiety that is experienced as largely enduring and inescapable, and therefore as depleting of psychological energy or resources.

4.5. THEME THREE: MANAGING/ COPING

It is suggested that individuals who are in contexts of on-going exposure to trauma experience concerns about loss of control in respect of the realistic likelihood of facing future violation and may devote their energies predominantly to managing the anxiety associated with this possibility or prospect (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013).

The students interviewed have to deal with the continuous anxiety that accompanies direct traumatic experiences in addition to the indirect experiences of those around them and anecdotal accounts of trauma related events. Eagle and Kaminer (2010) propose that people who are afraid of being exposed to violent and non-violent crime and other forms of traumatization may change their perceptions and behaviour, particularly in contexts where they feel greater levels of risk or exposure to danger. Within the trauma and stress literature ''coping'' is seen as playing a central part in the process of pressure management. Coping reflects how individuals gain awareness of and respond to pressures, including responses to danger or threats, which act either to reduce the pressure altogether, or involve attempts to reduce or avoid dealing with the impacts of pressure (Belal et al., 2009). Coping strategies represent the means through which an individual, group, or organization seeks to minimize the effects of stress (Belal et al., 2009). In the following section, a number of methods and techniques the participants described that they had adopted to cope with stressors which accompany their commute, are addressed. Prayer and observation and management of the environment, are the two central types of managing or coping strategies which were identified as being adopted by the participants to face the danger that they perceive is operating in their environment. Under the sub theme of observation and management of environment, further sub themes were identified including noting physical characteristics of the taxi and the driver, remaining aware of potential interpersonal support, and conducting one's self in a particular way in the taxi commuting space.

4.5.1. Prayer

Religious functioning, which involves both internal (spirituality) and external (religious activities) components, is a potentially important area of functioning with implications for the reduction of distress after exposure to severe stressors (Harris, Schoneman, & Carrera, 2002, 2005).

Three out of the ten participants revealed that they use prayer to assist them in managing their anxieties along their commute. These participants expressed that using prayer serves as a way to calm them down or reduce their distress. Participant 2 reports that she says a prayer every day before she leaves the house and others indicated that they employed similar practices *"I just pray. The only thing that calms me down is just, before I leave home I pray. Like: 'Father please protect me today.'"*

P8: I wake up in the morning, before I leave I pray: 'God, please let me travel safe.' Because I'm telling you, you'll never know what could happen.

P4: I'm someone who has strong faith in God so I can't live in fear so I'm just going to say: 'Lord, my safety is in your hands.' It makes me feel better, because, especially when it's at night the taxi drivers drive like they own the road, everyone has to stop from them to move, so it's not safe really. I just put on my earphones and say a little prayer which helps.

P8 and P4 call on a deity to protect them along their commute: *"God, please let me travel safe"* P2 voiced the same request *"Father please protect me today"* and talk as if they experience their God or Father as an overarching protective force or parent. P4 is aware of renouncing her control over what might happen to her along her commute; *"Lord, my safety is in your hands"*. It is evident that P2, P4 and P8 believe that, due to the volatility of their experiences as users of taxis and the traumatic stories that they have encountered, as well as the lack of direct protection in the taxi space, the only reliable protection they can call on lies within their religious beliefs.

P4 goes on to elaborate that after she says a prayer, the result is calming for her *"it makes me feel better"*. Praying reduces the uncomfortable emotions that she experiences when travelling by mini bus taxis. This participant also implies that if she did not have strong religious beliefs, she would most likely be in a constant state of fear, specifically in relation to her commuting experience.

The literature supports these three participants' experiences as it states that active coping strategies, such as using prayer to accept the situation, asking for help with problem solving, or reducing arousal are associated with better adjustment (Harris, Schoneman, & Carrera, 2002, 2005). Thus within this framework praying is viewed as an active means of engaging with stress and anxiety and it is evident in the way that the interviewees mentioned this form of coping that they view praying as an active discipline that requires conscious adherence. According to Abi-Hashem (2007), the most effective method of coping with life's problems is religiosity because it helps people better with their mental well-being than many other forms of coping. Furthermore, religiosity as a coping strategy is more important and useful with stressful events that an individual cannot control. As seen in the section 'Resignation and Hopelessness', most of the students who took part in this study feel that they have no control over the traumatic experiences that they are faced with on a regular basis, hence the adoption of prayer as a means of coping appears appropriate and adaptive in this context and appears to alleviate some of their fears and anxieties.

4.5.2. Observation and management of environment

When individuals exist in environments where there is on-going threat of harm, or danger to the self, one of the coping strategies they may adopt, as suggested by the data generated in this research and by others (Belal et al., 2009; Eagle & Kaminer, 2010, 2013; Edwards, 2005a, 2005b; Masuku, 2002; Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer, & Higson-Smith, 2013), is becoming more attentive to and aware of their environment. Becoming vigilant can be considered an effect of living under such circumstances, but can also be viewed as a way of coping. The observation and management of one's environment has been identified as a significant way of coping with the stressors that come with using taxis as a primary mode of transport. The participants reported having to learn about how to adapt to the context through observation of others and their environment, as well as by modifying their behaviour in order to survive or avoid putting themselves in the face of danger. These can be viewed as external or active coping skills which these individuals have had to adopt. Under this subtheme – observation and management of environment - three further sub themes were distinguishable; noting of physical characteristics of the taxi and the taxi driver, awareness of potential interpersonal support, and conducting one's self in a particular way in the taxi commuting space.

4.5.2.1. Noting physical characteristics of the taxi and the taxi driver

When people are in a position where they have little power over what may happen to them, it is not surprising that they will try to make decisions which will make them feel as if they have even the slightest degree of control. In an attempt to gain some control over their dire circumstances, participants endeavour to observe and learn what features may put them in more danger than necessary. When asked during the interview how they tend to determine whether or not it is relatively safe to get on a taxi most of the participants said that they either look at the condition of the vehicle or at characteristics of the taxi driver.

P1: …by looking at it from the outside to see whether or not it looks road worthy

Under ordinary conditions, it is not likely that one would be able to determine the road-worthiness of a vehicle just by looking at its body, however some of the mini bus taxis that are used to transport passengers can be observed to be objectively unsafe. For example, some of these vehicles do not have doors that operate effectively, or their lights are not functional. P9 explains her subjective experience of the 'worst' taxis she has been in; *"Sometimes the taxis don't have windows, and other ones you can literally see the tar underneath you as the taxi is driving!"* Additionally, research conducted has confirmed that many of the taxis on South African roads have been denounced as not road worthy (Govender & Allopi, 2007; Ribbens, Botha & Khumalo, 2000). Thus is seems logical that many users of taxis become aware of the condition of the taxi and distinguish which ones appear more or less safe than others.

P3 and P7 disclose that after using taxis for a significant amount of time they have also assumed the practice of selecting which taxis to get into based on physical condition.

P7: There are certain taxis neh - taxis that I don't get into (laughs). You can just see them from the outside that, this taxi eish, it looks like the brakes can fail again.

It appears that participant 7 not only relies on her ability to discern which taxi looks road worthy or not based on how it looks on the outside, but she also draws on past experience, remembering that the accident she was involved in previously was caused by the failure of the brakes; *"looks like the brakes can fail again"*.

P3: I look at the physical condition of the taxi and if it's not in good shape then I don't get in…only sometimes like if I have time.

P3 reports that she too discriminates which taxi might be safer than another by looking at the external state of the vehicle, yet she also confesses that sometimes this discrimination is too time consuming and not possible for her. This acknowledgement that realistically she is not able to wait all day for a taxi that appears safe to come since she has to be at university at a certain time, seems hard for this participant to express, as she paused for a moment before stating that she can be selective about which taxi to get on "*only sometimes like if I have time"*. P3's difficulty in expressing this reality could be attributed to the recognition of her powerlessness when trying to keep herself safe in a situation where she has occasionally, if not frequently, had no other choice but to place herself in an unsafe environment.

Three of the participants reported that they look at the taxi driver himself;

P2: Sometimes when you're in a taxi, like the previous day we're in a taxi and the driver was just driving kak, you know. The next day I'm gonna look – I'm gonna look carefully at the number plate. Next day I see a red taxi with the same number plate, you'll never see me in there again

P7: …since I use like the same taxis almost daily, there are some other drivers that I can identify. I just know that this one, he doesn't stop at red robots, he just speeds off so I just stay away from him.

Participants 2 and 7 disclose that if they have a bad experience with a certain taxi driver they make an effort to either remember his face: *"there are some other drivers that I can identify"* or the number plate: *"I'm gonna look carefully at the number plate"*, of the taxi that he drives so that they can avoid travelling in the same vehicle with the same driver again. This seems to make these participants feel less impotent, as they are able to decide not to put their lives in danger by avoiding taxi drivers that have exhibited reckless driving in the past. However, much like P3, it can be anticipated that these participants do not always have the luxury of allowing the taxi to pass based on recognition of the taxi driver, possibly because they may be in a rush and have no other choice. However, it is interesting to note how participants attempted to exercise a modicum of control over those aspects they could in the environment.

4.5.2.2. Awareness of potential interpersonal support

In addition to looking at the condition of the taxi and the taxi driver, a few participants, when asked what they look out for as a potential risk before getting into a taxi, said that they look at what kinds of fellow passengers are in the vehicle;

P2: With me when it comes to taxis, it's funny but I prefer getting in a taxi where there are mixed – like there's mixed people. Like there is women and men. But I'm uncomfortable with taxis where they are just men… in the world that we live in, men have proven to be dangerous.

P2 expresses how she will only feel safe if there are both males and females in the taxi, elaborating that, to her knowledge, males are considered as a threat as they encompass the power to take advantage of females, whether it be through sexual assault or violent crime, "*men have proven to be dangerous*". She also reports that she feels safer getting into a taxi in which there are elderly men and women passengers, expressing that she feels that they may be able to protect her from whatever intentions younger males on the taxi may have; *"I want a taxi where there are women, especially old women… you keep calm when you see there's an older person. Even like elder men, like your grandpas… You almost feel like they will intervene if anything happens"*, she goes on to express that *"Those are the people you can actually rely on. Not these young men. No"*.

P3: …or like if there's no one else besides the driver then I don't get on, I just let the taxi pass.

P4: I first check how many males, and if they are too many males and no women I'm like: 'Oh, never mind.' Let it go.

Participants 3 and 4, as seen in the two extracts above, also take part in the practice of assessing risk based on the gender of people who are in the taxi. P3 states that she will not get into a taxi if there are no other passengers besides her because it is not safe. This was a common observation amongst the participants and P1 reported that she knows someone, personally, who was sexually assaulted by a taxi driver: *"I know someone who got raped by a taxi driver"*. P3 related that she's heard of numerous incidents where girls were kidnapped by the driver because they got onto a taxi with no other passengers:

P3: I've heard so many stories where umm, taxi drivers, like if you are maybe the last person in the taxi and then when you tell them you are getting off they don't stop they just drive off with you.

As evidenced by the data presented above, participants believe that being aware of who is in the taxi before deciding to get in can serve a protective factor. Having other passengers, particularly other female passengers present, appears to be a way of seeking interpersonal support and protection for these participants. They feel that the presence of another female may possibly reduce the chances of being sexually violated or kidnapped by the taxi driver or other male passengers who may be his accomplices. They also have some sense that older people and women may be more likely to become involved on their behalf should there be some kind of threat.

4.5.2.3. Conducting one's self in a particular way in the taxi commuting space

Acquiring knowledge, largely through observation, on how to conduct oneself suitably in the commuting space appeared to be a form of self-surveillance which assisted in providing some sense of protection for the participants. Half of the participants articulated that making oneself appear assured in the taxi space is a useful and protective way of conducting ones-self in this context. They communicated that when you appear confused, lost or timid, it makes you look vulnerable which makes you susceptible to becoming a target of crime, violence or harassment. In addition to making ones-self appear assured, the participants also reported that making oneself less visible can also serve as a protective factor in the taxi space. Thus there is an art to conducting oneself in a way that is not too weak appearing nor too attention drawing.

P6 exclaims that even if you are faced with confusion when in the taxi rank, you should try by all means not to show it*: "should never be confused! Or even look confused…it makes you vulnerable"*.

P5: You have to walk in a certain way. You just don't walk timidly. You just have to walk like 'I know what I'm doing, I know where I'm going and I won't take no nonsense'. You know like you just have to project this confidence, like just make people know that they mustn't mess with you.

P5 appears to support P6's recommendation, saying that even if you are unsure of which direction you should be going in, you have to give the impression that you know

exactly where you are going, she adds that one needs to exude buoyancy in the way one walks in the taxi space. These ways of conducting oneself are believed by the participants to make one less vulnerable to any form of attack in the taxi space.

P4:…you know when you get to the taxi rank, if you're not firm about it, they might grab at you and stuff…but it has never happened to me because you have to be firm about it and I learnt that quite early on, and also I don't stand close to them… put a distance between yourself and them and when you ask don't ask...okay... ask in a friendly way but not too friendly, and if you feel like they are coming close to you, move back and ask someone else.

Participant 4 reports that she has learnt that when she is in the taxi rank, she has to *"be firm about it"*. In saying this it is plausible to assume that she is referring to the manner in which one should interact with individuals in the taxi rank, most likely particularly the taxi drivers and queue marshals. She continues by warning that it is crucial to ensure that there is a safe distance between you and the other person and that if you feel that the other person is closing the distance, you should remove yourself from him/her as this compromises your safety. P4 also explains that when you need to communicate with someone in the taxi rank, you should be *"be firm"* in the tone you use but not overly friendly as this may portray weakness or vulnerability or draw unwanted interest.

P2: You even have to hold your bag a certain way since you hear these things like you're going to get robbed, so you have to hold your bag real tight. Even when you're walking you don't smile a lot, you just walk to get where you wanna go to.

By the same token, P2 advised that when in the taxi space, smiling too much is not a suitable way to conduct oneself. It would appear that she shares the same sentiments as P4 that being overly friendly is not desirable in this space, instead one needs to communicate a certain reserve and try to avoid overly engaged contact with others. P2 also suggests that you should hold onto your possessions tightly in case an unexpected observer attempts to mug you, as she voiced: *"you hear these things like you're going to get robbed"*. P10 admits that due to hearing accounts of people getting mugged in the taxi space she has had to become more vigilant in her environment: *"I have noticed that my, I would say caution levels have been heightened. I'm very attentive at where I walk and Yeah… I have to look around all the time."*

Adjusting the way in which they conduct themselves in the taxi space, seems to be an effective way of managing their environment for these participants. Through observation, personal experience, and noting of advice from other taxi users, the participants seem to have procured the 'A, B, Cs' of how to essentially 'perform' in order to avoid negative attention in the commuting space and to reduce threat of harm.

From their accounts it is evident that the young women interviewed adopt quite conscious and active strategies both to attempt to minimize potential harm and to manage anxiety accompanying aspects of their commute. While their descriptions make reference to the limits of their efficacy in this regard in certain respects they appear to be quite 'street wise' and to have cultivated optimal vigilance and non-victim ways of being in the space.

4.6. THEME FOUR: GENDER RELATED ELEMENTS OF EXPOSURE, RESPONSE AND COPING

The fourth and final theme which was identified based on a thematic content analytic reading of the interview material is that of gender and how this related to particular patterns of exposure and experience. While this theme overlaps in some areas with the sub theme of "Gender related trauma", discussed earlier on in this chapter, there was substantial difference in the broader aspects of gendered experiences that the participants described which was sufficient to consider this a noteworthy theme on its own. Experiences of being female in the commuting context included aspects beyond what might be construed as trauma exposure. This theme was further sorted into three sub-categories: Being exploited, Being subject to sexual harassment, and Fear of rape/sexual violation.

4.6.1. Being Exploited

Five out of the ten participants who were interviewed for this study expressed how, as female passengers in the commuting context, they are prone to exploitation, more so than the male passengers.

In the two extracts below, participants 1 and 7 use rather powerful phrases, such as *"second class citizen"* and *"women as inferior"* to illustrate how females are viewed and treated in the taxi commuting context.

P1: You are treated as a second class citizen as a woman. And they think they can just order you around, you know…I found that drivers are usually less just – they're less rude and abrasive towards other male passengers that could be a challenge to them…

P7: They do target women more than males because they think, ah these ones, when they see a knife they'll just give us what we want. When they see a gun, even if it's a toy gun, they don't know the difference... (laughs). They'll just give us everything, anything we want so, yah. So they see women as... Inferior

P1 and P7 propose that women are treated differently in the taxi space because of the patriarchal perception that women are easy targets. Women are seen as 'subjects' who are not given the same respect as men in general, as illustrated by P1's comment that taxi drivers are *"less rude and abrasive towards other male passengers"*, whereas the very same taxi drivers do not seem to hesitate to display this maltreatment towards woman passengers. These two participants also point out that that males are able to command more respect due to their physical strength and ability to fight back, where males believe that women will *"just give us everything, anything we want"*, and are more reluctant to target *"other male passengers that could be a challenge to them"*.

P2: I think females are more vulnerable to these things, you know. And I think men target women more than men… with women, men have more power over us. That's a fact…with women, it's so much hey…You can take my phone but what that will do to me emotionally; I mean that scar. Yah, that's you taking a lot from me. How I'm going to feel after that, you've taken lot. Me having fear to walk down that bridge, you've taken my confidence already as a girl, you know

P3:…being a girl is a disadvantage…people who mug us are mostly males so they think that we can't fight for ourselves and we have a whole lot of things at our disposal. Like your phone, you've got your jewellery, laptop, earphones and watches, like girls just carry so much with them so there's more they can take from us.

In the two extracts above, it is evident that these two participants, P2 and P3, are of the belief, or perhaps rather have the realistic awareness, that being female means that you are the weaker sex*; "females are more vulnerable", "being a girl is a disadvantage"*. This makes them more susceptible to attacks and violation by males at taxi ranks and on taxi routes. P5, expressed how she also holds this belief; *"we've always been seen as the weaker sex and stuff so I think people just take advantage of that. Like I think women are exposed to much more danger."*

What was also striking and unanticipated, is how P2 and P3 shared the perception that when women are mugged or robbed the level at which they feel exploited is greater than that of how a man would feel after experiencing the same thing, as observed in phrases such as *"with women, it's so much hey"* and *"we have a whole lot of things at our disposal"*. They express that women have more resources to lose, and although these participants are not necessarily referring to the same type of "resources", they both believe that women have more to lose be this in material or psychological respects.

P2 communicates that she feels even when something material such as a phone is taken from her it represents much more than a loss of a tangible item, she feels emotionally infringed upon and is left with a psychological and emotional scar that will leave her feeling insecure and affect her behaviour for a significant amount time after the traumatic event occurs; *"that's you taking a lot from me. How I'm going to feel after that, you've taken lot…you've taken my confidence already as a girl"*. As noted above, P3 also feels that women have more to lose than men; however this participant is referring to the number of items that women carry on their person. P3 speaks of the number of different valuable items which women may lose when they are mugged/robbed. Granted P3 is referring to tangible items which women lose, but there is a sense that she too is alluding to the fact that she would feel more emotional impingement if she were to be mugged than would a male counterpart The words she uses reveal how having personal items taken from her bag or purse can be likened to having something less tangible and possibly more valuable taken from her: *"like girls just carry so much with them so there's more they can take from us."*

Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), as discussed in the review of literature, views both social and personal characteristics as resources. The COR theory postulates that resource loss is the central feature in the stress process. Resources are defined as the objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual (Hobfoll, 1989). This can be linked to the experiences of the participants as just elaborated, where their levels of stress in the commuting space are heightened due to their perception of risk of serious loss of resources. As females these participants communicate that the resources which are lost when they are attacked or mugged in this male dominated space are aligned with what Hobfoll (1989) defines as significant resources, including objects, personal characteristics, psychological states or conditions and energies, all of which are conceivably valued by the participants who partook in this research study.

It is striking how being in the commuting space appears to put these young women in touch with gender discrimination and a sense of being easily open to exploitation. Their awareness of their second class citizen status and physical weakness relative to men is resonant of descriptions of gender oppression highlighted in early feminist literature. However, it is evident that this kind of gender exploitative experience is very real for them in the present and this seems to be connected to having to operate in a public space that is recognized to be male dominated and patriarchal in many respects.

4.6.2. Being Subject to Sexual Harassment

There is evidence that shows that almost all females living in the South African context are subject to sexual harassment (Gilbert, 1996; Rasool, 2002; Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino, 2008). In particular, females who use public transport, and specifically mini bus taxis, are especially subject to experiences of sexual harassment (Dlamini, 2012; Fobosi, 2013; Gqola, 1997; Molatlhwa, 2012).

In the extracts below, participants 2, 4, 5, 9 and 10 report on incidents where they personally experienced forms of sexual harassment. Whether it was verbal or physical, half of the sample who volunteered for this study have been directly exposed to sexual harassment in the commuting context.

P9: …so this driver, because I have big breasts, he puts his hand on my chest and then he laughs about it! ...Then like I was offended…

P5: Then he comes straight at me and he just grabs my boob…I was scared, it was very nasty… It made me feel so angry and violated, and I was mad for the rest of the day.

Participants 9 and 5 experienced physical sexual harassment where their personal space was violated as they both experienced unwanted touching of their breasts. P9 reports being violated by a taxi driver and P5 was touched by a male stranger when she was in the taxi rank. It is seems as if experiences such as these are not unusual for females who use mini bus taxis. The adverse emotional effects are clear in the words they chose to describe how they felt after being physically harassed, where P5 uses words such as *"scared", "nasty", "angry" and "violated",* and P9 expresses that she felt *"offended"* after what happened to her.

In the three excerpts below, participants recollect instances where they experienced sexual harassments verbally from various males in the taxi commuting space. They refer to

being *"catcalled"* or having *"irritating comments about your body"* directed towards them, as well as taxi drivers offering to drive them directly to their houses in a manner that felt predatory rather than helpful. Being subject to such overt and covert harassment appears to have prominent negative effects on these participants, observed in how they comment that these experiences are *"disturbing"* and *"dodgy"* and feel that they *"get treated badly"* by males in this space.

P2: You know when you're a girl and there are men around they just throw these comments. These irritating comments about your body, you know... how you look, how they'd like for you to get into their cars, you know. Yah, and how your arse is so nice, it's disturbing.

P4: …this one time, I was the last person in the taxi and this taxi driver was offering to take me home but the way he was doing it was dodgy (laughs). I don't think he would have done that if it were a guy… there's always that thing if you're a girl, cause men take advantage of that, I feel like when you're a guy it's easier and you can fight off people.

P10: …because of the patriarchal culture, you know, men just perceiving women as just being vulnerable. Being second class citizens… you get treated badly, you get catcalled and all those kind of stuff.

The experiences of these five participants support the notion that women are subject to being taken advantage of, being viewed as 'objects' rather than human beings in the commuting space, and are often exposed to being sexualised and frequently experience various forms of sexual harassment. Again one has the sense of these young women having to operate in a male dominated space that is disturbing both at the level of dealing with the unwanted sexualized attentions of men and at the more sinister level of potential sexual attack, as elaborated in the next sub-section.

4.6.3. The Fear of Rape/Sexual Violation

Acts of violence against women in South Africa inadvertently instil fear and insecurity in the women living in this country. Perry and Jaggernath (2012) identified being female as one of the 'main risk factors' in relation to violence in society, both in private and public spaces. Eight out of the ten female participants who took part in this study expressed that they fear being sexually assaulted or violated. The participants express that they are aware of many incidences where women have been raped, particularly in relation to the taxi

commuting context (to avoid repetition, please refer also to some of the material presented under "Gender related trauma" in theme one).

The participants cited below (P2, P7 and P1) express quite explicitly that they fear rape as a realistic possibility when they are in the taxi environment.

P2: Yah, you know nowadays there's rape, so you're thinking anything can happen.

P7: …more things can happen to you when you're female. You can get raped, they can kill you.

P1: I know someone who got raped by a taxi driver. Umm... that made me more aware of the taxis I got into, it's just scary being a woman in that space…

Emitting phrases such as *"anything can happen"* and *"more things can happen"* to females illustrate, once again, how uncertain these participants are of their fate when traveling by taxi. It becomes more and more difficult to trust male figures in this context and participants end up having to live with this constant and very real fear of rape or sexual violation. P1 shares how she learnt of someone who was raped by a taxi driver and how hearing this heightened her fears of being sexually violated along her commute; *"it's just scary being a woman in that space"*.

Participants 9 and 5, cited below, do not overtly communicate that they have the fear of being raped. However they imply that they are both aware of the risks that a female may face if she is either the last passenger in the taxi, or dressed in a manner which is considered 'inappropriate' and may attract negative male attention. The thought of being kidnapped by the taxi driver when she is the last passenger seems to carry fears of being raped or sexually violated. This results in participant 9 starting to *"freak out"* and question her safety in that situation.

P9: …this one instance where I was the last one on the taxi, and usually I am, so I start freaking out and thinking 'okay what if this guy decides to just kidnap me and run off with me in this taxi now'

Participant 5 reveals that she abides by the patriarchal policing of what women can and cannot wear in this kind of public space. She is forced to adhere to these rules and regulations implemented by the males in the taxi industry because of her fear of *"abuse and stuff"* from male figures in this context.

P5: …that I dress a certain way in order to avoid drawing that kind of attention to myself, and to avoid abuse and stuff, so yah, I do think of what I'm going to wear when I have to use public transport.

What was prevalent in drawing out participants' responses in relation to their gendered experience is how women in the taxi space are frequently treated as 'subjects' of the men who control the territory, subjects whose behaviour in public requires regulation. These regulations, or 'parameters' for female behaviour appear to be a consequence of patriarchal authority, exerted by taxi drivers, queue marshals, and other males in the commuting space, these men exercising the power to implement policing of women's forms of dress, their manner of being, and their interactional style. Women are also highly objectified and sexualized in this space, where engagement with them often ranges from appropriation of their bodies to predation. Despite the feminist consciousness, academic status and independence of most of these participants, they are still required to modify themselves and their behaviour within the male typified and dominated taxi commuter context in order to minimize risk of harm. It is evident that they carry feelings of resentment and indignation about this but that they feel that the risks associated with non-accommodation are too high to challenge the status quo. While it might be interesting to compare whether male commuters share the perspective that female commuters are subject to greater harm in the commuting space by virtue of their gender, the consistency of observations across all ten participants suggests that their sense of added vulnerability is well substantiated.

4.7. CONTINUOUS TRAUMATIC STRESS (CTS)

Although thematic aspects relating to CTS have been woven into the discussion throughout the elaboration of themes it was considered important to offer specific commentary on the degree to which the participants' experiences appear to conform to and elucidate the construct of CTS. (Similarly the subsequent section also looks specifically at the theoretical models of Hobfoll and Horowitz in terms of how the data articulates with this theory more particularly)

CTS is a concept that offers one promising way of describing the psychological impact of living in conditions in which there is a realistic threat of present and future danger, rather than only experiences of past traumatic events, and foregrounds the difficulties of addressing past exposure in the context of an accurate appraisal of the potential for current

and future harm (Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer & Higson-Smith, 2013). As part of the condition of CTS, Stevens et al., (2013) suggest that a sense of lack of choice, where one has little or no option of escaping and has to survive in an environment which poses constant threat, is part and parcel of the lived experience of CTS.

Eight out of the ten participants in this study confirmed that they were compelled to use mini bus taxis as their primary mode of transport for reasons of accessibility and/or financial constraint. Below are the responses offered by participants when the question: *"Do you feel you have a choice regarding the use of taxis?"* was presented to them.

P1: Umm… I have to use public transport.

P2: For me there's no other option.

P3: Well, umm, I don't think I do because… it is really costly living this side and my parents probably can't afford it

P3 communicates that moving closer to university would be a safer and more efficient option for her, however, for financial reasons accommodation in Braamfontein is not accessible for her.

P4: No, I don't, because I'm forced to take taxis because there is no other option for me.

P6: For now, there isn't any other option really.

P7: No. I don't have a choice. The only thing I can use is a taxi.

P8: No, not really, like there are some – yah, there's one or two people I know that stay in my area but they also use taxis… Yah, I don't have a choice

P9: Well I could take ReaVaya bus but then it's really far from where my house is.

Even though P9 appears to have a choice to use a different method of public transport- the ReaVaya bus - she indicates that taxis are *"very convenient"* for her and that using the bus would involve walking long distances which also might compromise safety.

P10: I don't really have another choice…

In comparison to the other nine participants who conveyed that they do not have any other option but to use taxis to commute, P5's response was rather unanticipated: *Yah, I do*

have an option, umm, I suppose I could drive to school or my mom could drop me off but I prefer public transport…

In enquiring why participant 5 prefers the use of mini bus taxis she revealed a traumatic hijacking that she experienced in 2006: *"I was in grade eight. I think it was in 2006, when we were coming home from celebrating my birthday and we were hijacked and my dad was killed. So that day I saw my dad die in front of me, I saw my dad literally being killed. And this all happened in our own car, so I feel like there are less chances of being hijacked if I'm on a taxi"*

Although it is evident that P5's case is atypical, as she has been exposed to a severe traumatic incident when driving in a private car, what was nevertheless evident was that she reported similar fears, anxieties and traumatic experiences to those of other participants in relation to the use of mini bus taxis. Thus, even though she has a choice regarding the use of taxis, she would rather endure the risks and dangers that accompany this to avoid being in an environment associated with witnessing the murder of her father.

In keeping with the notion of CTS, it is important to note the types of phrases and general terminology that was employed by the participants during the interviews. In noting their choice of words, one can observe how they convey how pervasive and enduring their sense of risk and vulnerability is. It has been recognised (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013) that those living in contexts of on-going threat have often experienced prior exposure to traumatic events, and often multiple prior exposures. This is true for all of the females, who participated in this study, be this at the level of indirect or direct exposure, and it is also evident that there were a number of different types of risk or danger they had faced or were aware of being potentially exposed to. The primary preoccupation in CTS is with current and future safety, rather than with past events and there was some evidence of this kind of stance amongst the interviewees. In view of their established multiple or poly-exposures to trauma (as discussed in the first theme) the participants' feel that they need to be hypervigilant and constant monitoring of their environment for threat is also evident in their descriptions.

P2: Always be on the lookout… it can happen anytime.

During P3's interview she used the phrase *"anything can happen"* numerous times. P4 states that there is *"always a risk of accidents"* and that she is *"always scared"* since she has observed that these things *"happen a lot, almost every day"*. P6 confirms this kind of

sense of enduring risk as she says that *"they happen all the time"*, when thinking about taxi accidents. P7 reveals that *"every day you're thinking something might happen"* and that *"you can't predict these things…you just never know"* P8 uses the same type of language when expressing *"you'll never know what could happen, you never know"* and when reflecting on taxi driver behaviour she reports that they are *"always fighting"*. P9 states that *"something always happens…every single day"* and P10 reveals that in the commuting context you *"have to always look around"*.

The participants' use of words and phrases like *"always"*, *"every day"*, *"all the time"*, and *"never know"* gives one a clear indication of how inescapable their expectations of on-going danger appear to be. It is evident that there are realistic expectations of on-going threat and danger, often combined with an absence of safe spaces in which to find protection and experience "recovery", although for these interviewees it may be that their homes or their time on campus may provide some respite. Nevertheless commuting is something they are obliged to do pretty much on a daily basis. It therefore seems that many aspects of the very common experience of daily taxi commuting by young women in South Africa are resonant with experiences of CTS.

In responding to the circumstances that their commute exposes them to most of the participants appear to display both externalizing responses such as high levels of anxiety, fear and preoccupation with danger, and more internalizing kinds of responses such as resignation to or minimization of what the daily stress entails. In addition, in respect of coping with the environment they have engaged in ways of managing their fears and anxieties which involve active steps such as observing, managing and adapting to their environment, and a more 'internal' form of active coping in the form of prayer. These are the experiences and ways of coping that were adopted by participants who took part in the study and they reflect some of the polarities that living in CTS environments appears to produce.

4.8. HOBFOLL/ HOROWITZ' MODELS OF UNDERSTANDING TRAUMATIC STRESS

As highlighted in some of the preceding sections, the COR theory proposes that the principal characteristic in the stress process is the loss of resources, including objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual (Hobfoll, 1989). It is evident that the participants perceive their potential exposure to trauma as a loss of resources, not only in the form of tangible items, but also in relation to personal

characteristics such as a sense of ease, calm, assurance and self-confidence, *P2:Me having fear to walk down that bridge, you've taken my confidence.* In particular, their experience of being female appears to influence how the participants perceive the magnitude of resources that they have at their disposal that they stand to lose, and how the current and potential loss of these resources has serious consequences for their physical, emotional and psychological well-being.

Participant 2 expresses that as a woman, her experience of being mugged not only entailed the loss of her phone, but also of her emotional well-being; *"You can take my phone but what that will do to me emotionally; I mean that scar. Yah, that's you taking a lot from me…"*

It can be discerned that P2 and 3 concur about the risk of potential depletion of material and psychological 'resources': *"We have a whole lot of things at our disposal"* and *"…there's more they can take from us"*

The COR theory posits that individuals strive to develop resource surpluses in the face of stressful contexts, and that they use these, as well as existing resources, to attempt to prevent further resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001). In this instance, participants use strategies such as learning appropriate ways to conduct one's self in the commuting space, through observation and noting of advice from others, entrusting their welfare to a higher power, acquiring knowledge on how to assess risk and consequently to adopt behavioural mechanisms to try by all means to avoid it. These strategies can be viewed as constituting their endeavours to develop new resources and to deploy the existing resources that they have at their disposal. COR explicates that at each stage of the stress process people are increasingly vulnerable to negative stress residue that, if on-going, may result in rapid and impactful loss patterns. As the participants in this study appear to experience on-going threat, it is a concern that they may be exposed to such loss patterns. However, the students who participated in this study seem to have established ways of attaining and retaining resources in attempting to cope with their circumstances.

Drawing on a different theory which lends a differently useful perspective to understanding the way in which individuals respond to traumatic stress, Horowitz's (1999) Information Processing Model has been useful in understanding the coping mechanisms which were employed by participants. This model is useful in drawing on the understandings

offered regarding the effect of numbing, which the participants deployed as a consequence or effect of potentially being continuously exposed to traumatic experiences.

Participant 4 expresses that she tries *"to block it all out until I'm home safely."* P6 affirms how she numbs her anxiety and fear during her commute; *"I just block it out, so I'll just know that 'oh okay that happened' and then I just block it out"*. P10 employs the same method of coping as she proclaims: *"I try not think of myself being the next victim, I try by all means to avoid that."*

The Information Processing Model informs us that the result of repeated representations of a traumatic event in one's mind are intrusive thoughts and uncomfortable emotions. These uncomfortable emotions include experiences such as anxiety, fear and feelings of hopelessness. Thus in order to avoid the potential of being emotionally overwhelmed, traumatized persons, and the participants in this instance, are compelled to avoid thoughts of potential danger and thus are quite consciously aware of numbing themselves emotionally as a defence against unwanted and uncomfortable emotions. While Horowitz (1999) views both experiences of extreme intrusion and extreme avoidance as problematic in constricting and impairing functioning, it may be that in contexts of inescapable potential threat psychological avoidance strategies such as minimization and numbing may be more beneficial than in other contexts. This appears to be an important area for future study. What constitutes optimal awareness versus numbing in these kind of contexts?

4.9. PROCESS OBSERVATIONS AND REFLEXIVITY

In the ensuing discussion presented under the subsections below an attempt is made to look back on the study and to critically evaluate the possible impact that I as the researcher may have had on the responses of the participants and analysis and outcomes of the study. A crucial consideration in the context of this research is the fact that I am a young black African female who was once compelled to use mini bus taxis to commute to and from university, and how this may have influenced the interviews. A reflection on the inevitable joining and identification (including perhaps over-identification) that took place between me and the participants will be offered. In addition deliberation on the use of humour is included as both I and my supervisor felt that this was an interesting spontaneous response or behaviour that all of the participants displayed during the interviews.

4.9.1. Reflexive Considerations including joining and identification with participants

It is often argued that within qualitative research subjectivity cannot be evaded. Regardless of the attempt made in this section to reflect upon and consider my own conceptual and personal deductions as researcher, the establishment of the results and the analysis of the interviews cannot be considered as objective or conclusive. The role of the researcher has to be taken into consideration, particularly when human experience is the focus of the study. In this study, the researcher was both the instrument for collecting and analysing the data as is often the case in qualitative research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

In interpreting the data, I was aware of my role in constructing the 'truth' presented in this study. My own and my supervisor's collaborative interpretations of the data construct the reality presented in this study, with the assistance of data which was provided by the participants (Eichelberger, 1989). I therefore acknowledge that these results and the interpretations offered represent a particular but not the sole possible depiction of the material that was generated for analysis.

The way in which the data was organised and presented also accentuates particular nuances of the material whilst overlooking other aspects. As mentioned in the methods chapter, the supervisor's contribution was viewed as crucial in confirming what was emphasised in the analysis of the data. Throughout the data analysis process, it was recognised that my own experiential assumptions could potentially overly influence certain interpretations of the data. An attempt was made to limit any biases associated with this unavoidable subjectivity by presenting consistent reinforcement for interpretations and using numerous direct quotes from the interviews (Stevenson & Cooper, 1997).

As indicated previously my demographic characteristics and experiences are undeniably parallel to those of the participants and in part it was the resonance with my own prior experiences that led me to take an interest in conducting the study at the outset. These features of my presentation may have influenced the contributions of the participants during the interviews as this information was not concealed from them but instead was proffered early on in the interviews with the intention of establishing good rapport and possibly making the participants feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences. The fact that this information was offered to the participants may have also created the sense of having their experiences 'understood' better. However, there were points in the interviews where my own

experiences led me to venture certain observations and ask particular kinds of questions which may have led participants to emphasize those aspects of their experience that appeared to align most closely with my own. In addition, in analysing the data I became strongly aware of the kind of 'suffering' I had endured for years during commuting and while I was somewhat surprised at how readily participants shared their own distressing thoughts and experiences, I was aware that their narratives validated many of my own observations. In the main the joining and identification that took place between me and the participants appears to have been helpful to the research in contributing to deeper levels of disclosure and elaboration. However, I was grateful to have the oversight of my supervisor and also a richness of quotable material so that the voices of the participants could come through clearly.

4.9.2. The Use of Humour

During the interviews, the participants deployed humour rather frequently (as illustrated in some of the quotations presented in prior sections of the discussion) apparently for a variety of reasons. Both I and my supervisor observed that there was often some disjuncture between the content of what was being said and the accompanying laughter.

P2: You just come to school, if you made it, it's grace. Thank God, and if I didn't make it then haai, its bad (laughs). Like, I have no control over it. I have no control over it (laughs).

P4: …it is very stressful or that it is not safe (laughs)… You're always so scared (laughs)

P6: Depending on the taxi driver. Because some taxi drivers are just, they seem angry. They shout for no reason (laughs).

When P7 was reflecting on the time she got mugged on Mandela Bridge by two men who had knives: *"(laughs) It was bad but at least I'm still alive (laughs)"*.

P9: …(laughs) taxi accidents hey! They are so common! (laughs)

P10: …it was cause it was the first time I was being mugged but you know... stuff happens (laughs)

These are just a few examples of how humour was ubiquitously used in the interviews. In my joining with the participants I was aware of quite often sharing in this humour despite my own sense that it represented something defensive.

It was evident that at times the laughter would represent anxiety, associated perhaps with coming too close to real concerns in reflecting on what their commuting experience felt like for the participants. The laughter was often used by the participants, and at times the researcher, to disguise discomfort in the room related to naming and articulating the nature and degree of threat in the environment. The shared laughter I think allowed me to ally with the interviewees in relation to the shared need to distance from the uncomfortable emotions that the discussion would ignite and particularly the sense of having little or no control over outcomes. It was apparent that the participants would laugh at times which would typically be considered inappropriate often as a means of expressing just how 'absurd' or 'unbelievable' some of their experiences or observations in the taxi commuting environment have been, as illustrated in a further few (of many) examples below.

P1: I mean, taxis are just a dangerous thing hey... (laughs)

P2: What I know is you can never tell him how to drive, what you are is a passenger and that's all. That's it. Just sit back and brace yourself (laughs)… Interviewer: (laughs) and hope for the best.

In the moment of P2's describing of how, as a passenger, one has no control over the driving behaviours of the taxi driver, I was pulled into this image and recollected personal experiences where I had identical perceptions and fears, as seen in the response and almost completion of P2's description *"and hope for the best"*, followed by joining the participant in laughter.

It is evident that the participants deployed humour for a variety of different reasons, including perhaps dealing with the discomfort of being in an interview situation. However, it can be discerned that the most prominent use of humour was to express and manage or minimize anxiety.

The observation of how frequently humour was evidenced in the interviews alerted me to some ethical concerns about the interview process. I was aware of the discomfort that the topic created within participants and that in some regard the interviews may have resulted in heightened levels of anxiety and increased apprehension of danger in the future. Although I had some appreciation that this might be the case at the outset, I did not anticipate quite such strong responses and high levels of exposure as actually emerged within the interviews and nor perhaps did the participants themselves until they started talking about the topic. As

noted in the ethical considerations section, issues such as these were addressed through provision of counselling resources which the participants could access if they felt it was needed. It appeared most likely that participants 3 and 7 might take this option up as they were the two participants who enquired further about the counselling after their interviews. I was also aware of attempting to close the interviews on more solid ground and of reinforcing the coping mechanisms that all of the participants volunteered were already in place. As indicated previously, while the interviews may have raised awareness of threat and difficulty to more conscious levels, there also appeared to be considerable relief in having experiences validated rather than treated as mundane. Humour is viewed as a higher order defence and should perhaps be viewed as having been deployed in an adaptive sense in the course of the interview discussions and in these young women's commuting lives in general.

4.10. In Conclusion

The key findings which have been presented in this chapter are briefly summarised here to conclude the discussion section of the research report.

Traumatic Stress Symptomatology

In addition to the semi structured interviews that were conducted for data collection, the IES-R questionnaire was included for the participants to complete in order to complement the qualitative data and provide a descriptive picture of possible posttraumatic stress related symptomatology amongst participants. It is evident that 9 out of the 10 participants who were interviewed for the proposed study presented with symptoms of traumatic stress in response to their experiences in the taxi commuting context. It was observed that three participants (P2, P8 and P9) reported very few trauma related symptoms, two (P1 and P4) presented with symptoms in the mild category according to the norms (Weiss, 2007), and four of the participants (P3, P5, P7 and P10) reported what might be understood to be rather severe levels of PTSD symptoms. Participant 6 reported no traumatic stress symptomatology, however this could be attributed to her rather phlegmatic response to the stressors that are encountered along her commute. The pattern of responses observed on the IES-R was in many respects verified in the qualitative interview material in that many of the participants described feelings of high anxiety in relation to commuting and spontaneously mentioned some impacts that were in keeping with what would be considered symptomatic responses in relation to traumatic stress related conditions, such as hypervigilance, concentration problems and some intrusive recollections. Overall the picture of response sets in this context suggests

that many of the participants suffer from, or are close to suffering from traumatic stress 'symptoms' that are at levels of clinical concern. However, they manage these effects on an on-going basis and none of them indicated that they had thought of accessing professional help or believed this to be necessary.

Exposure to traumatic events

All of the participants reported multiple exposures to traumatic events in relation to their commute. Some of these experiences were indirect or vicarious, i.e. through witnessing a traumatic event or learning about events which happened to people close to them, and some involved direct exposure to a traumatic event. It was quite striking that out of the ten young women interviewed one had been involved in a serious taxi accident and another in a more minor collision, one's husband had been inside a taxi in which shots were fired, two had been mugged, two had had their breasts touched and one had been 'stalked' on the way home, suggesting that exposure to trauma in this context is common. The traumatic events reported were all related to minibus taxi commuting, occurring either during the taxi ride, at the taxi rank, on the journey to or from the taxi rank (e.g., walking across the Mandela Bridge), or during the walk home after being dropped off by the taxi. The most prevalent traumatic experiences which were identified by participants were taxi driver aggression, motor vehicle accidents, crime and violence, xenophobic attacks, and gender related trauma. It was apparent that most of the participants anticipated the possibility of future threat in relation to several of these categories and that their experiences of trauma exposure were consistent with what might be viewed as poly-victimization. Most of the participants spontaneously mentioned more than one actual or potential type of trauma exposure related to commuting.

Effects and/or Impacts

There were some common effects that were identified when analysis of the data took place. These effects were discernible for the participants in that they themselves reported observing particular kinds of affective, cognitive and behavioural responses. The main impacts that were drawn out and discussed in the chapter were firstly anxiety, fear and preoccupation with danger, and secondly, numbing and resignation/hopelessness. Some of these identified effects of constantly being exposed to threat and danger are consistent with the lived experience of CTS as understood in the literature and other related contexts, which was a central focus of this study.

Managing/Coping

It is evident, from the data presented throughout the chapter that participants are forced to deal with the continuous anxiety that accompanies direct traumatic experiences in addition to the indirect experiences of those around them and anecdotal accounts of trauma related events. Several methods and techniques which the participants described as adopting in order to cope with stressors that accompany their commute were identified. Two of the main ways of managing or coping with their circumstances were firstly, prayer, and secondly, observation and management of the environment. In addition to these two central types of managing or coping which were identified as being adopted by the participants to face the danger that they perceive is operating in their environment, more specific 'survival' tactics were identified such as noting physical characteristics of the taxi and the driver, being mindful of accessing potential interpersonal support, and conducting one's self in a particular way in the taxi commuting space. These ways of managing stress and anxiety were employed by participants and appear to assist them in tolerating and enduring the reality of being compelled to use this method of transport.

Gender related aspects

It became clear that the significance of being female in the taxi commuting context encompassed more than the traumas that they are exposed to as users of mini bus taxis. Gender related experiences in this context involved being exploited, being subject to sexual harassment, and the fear of rape/sexual violation. What was prevalent in drawing out participants' responses in relation to their gendered experience is how women in the taxi space are frequently treated as 'subjects' whose behaviour in public requires and is open to regulation by men. Women are also highly objectified and sexualized in this space where engagement with them often ranges from appropriation of their bodies to perceptions of females as 'prey' to be predated.

CTS and resource depletion

It was also evident that almost all of the participants experienced little choice about whether they used this form of transport and were compelled to operate in the taxi environment despite the anxiety and discomfort they experienced. It appeared that they felt that depletion of their resources was on-going in that they needed to manage anxiety on a daily basis over years and that they attempted to regulate their anxiety and shore up their

resources in a variety of ways, including employing a kind of minimizing humour. Their resilience in the context was very evident in the interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this research report is comprised of three sections: a synthesis of the central findings, discussion of limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

One of the prominent features of the South African context is the level of endemic community, criminal, domestic and sexual violence which frames the everyday experiences of many citizens (Stevents, Eagle, Kaminer & Higson-Smith, 2013). Individuals who are not only living with past traumas, but who do so under circumstances that are characterised by a lack of safety and potential exposure to perpetual threat, may usefully need to be understood as operating under conditions of continuous traumatic stress (Stevens et al., 2013).

Straker (2013) suggests that continuous traumatic stress should perhaps be conceived of as an overarching concept that encompasses a range of complicated traumas that may be present in specific contexts. She confirms the importance of an evolving theoretical conceptualization that can do justice to, and encompass, the experience of millions of people facing complicated, multiple, enduring and continuous life threats.

5.1. CENTRAL FINDINGS

The female participants who volunteered to partake in this study have not only encountered multiple exposures to traumatic events in the past, but continue to exist in a high stress environment, (the taxi commuting space in this instance), where the possibility of further traumatisation is a reality for them. Participants described various types of traumas that they have been, and continue to be exposed to. All of the participants reported some sort of exposure to taxi accidents and conceived these as being a consequence of taxi drivers' aggressive and reckless driving behaviours as well as the poor condition of the vehicles they use to transport passengers on a daily basis. It was also revealed that crime, violence and gender related trauma is prevalent in the participants' daily experience of using mini bus taxis to commute to and from university. It should be noted that participants offered their traumatic experiences in relation to their commute with little need for probing, and some went on to reveal other forms of trauma that they have been exposed to in other aspects of their lives. Although these accounts were of interest, traumatic experiences outside of the commuting context were not a focus of this study.

In accordance with the aims of the study it appears that in many respects the female students who participated in this study can be considered to adequately represent a population who are living under conditions of CTS, even if this is perhaps at not quite the same level of severity of people exposed to rocket fire, for example. The impacts reported by the participants are congruent with the kinds of responses that are anticipated to emerge amongst those living under conditions of CTS including fairly pervasive and often intense anxiety, constant fear, apprehension of danger, difficulties in distinguishing between real or perceived threat, as well as an inclination to heightened vigilance (Eagle & Kaminer, 2010, 2013; Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer & Higson-Smith, 2013; Straker, 2013). As illustrated in the discussion, participants employed a large volume of language that referred to feelings of anxiety and fear (scary, freaked out, afraid) and commonly referred to having to operate in a state of high vigilance on a daily basis, employing terms like always, everywhere and every day in their conversation. Thus the subjective experience of being in this context seemed to be one of relentless pressure. In managing the impacts and effects that the commuting experience has on the participants they appear to have derived and employed ways of coping which seem to be effective for them. It was very striking how they attempted to negotiate remaining alert to threat and danger, whilst at the same time attempting to remain phlegmatic about operating in the space. Through close observation and attempts to adapt to and manage their environment, in conjunction with accepting their lack of control over aspects their safety in this context, and by repudiating the outcome of being placed in such a risk ridden environment and in many instances handing over responsibility to a higher power, participants are able to tolerate their fears and anxieties during their commute. It was also remarkable to note how they managed to find a balance between operating in a street-wise or confident manner whilst at the same time avoiding standing out or commanding too much attention as young women in the taxi environment. Thus while they displayed many of the more disabling features associated with continuous traumatic stress they did not evidence the kinds of helplessness, pessimism and hopelessness that one might find in more severely traumatized and constrained populations. This may be in part because of their youthful energy and their status as university students which may give them a greater sense of agency in the world. Nevertheless the study findings leave one with considerable disquiet about what daily commuting requires of these young women and in all probability many other young women using public transport in South Africa.

When discussing the findings of this study, my supervisor and I thought it pertinent to contact the head of school and share our findings with him/her, we further considered presenting a suggestion that the university creates a system where students can assemble outside the university at specified times in order to walk across the Mandela Bridge in groups. Our hope, based on findings and data presented, is that traveling in groups would provide students with a feeling of safety and decrease the chances of being exposed to crime when walking across the Mandela Bridge to the Bree Street Taxi Rank.

5.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although it is possible that a larger sample would have generated more information which may have produced richer data; resource and time constraints served as a hindrance to obtaining information from a larger sample. Nonetheless, the descriptive and critical analysis and interpretations of transcripts derived from interviews conducted with a small number of participants allowed for access to rather rich and diverse information. The ten participants interviewed were all from a specific geographical area (Johannesburg) which compromises the generalizability of the findings of this study. Additionally, the range of responses also suggests that saturation may not have been reached and that more possible interpretations of the lived experiences of individuals existing under conditions of on-going threat and danger might be elicited with extended research. However, this being said there was also a considerable degree of overlap in the material that emerged across the interviews. It should be noted that the aim of this particular research study was not to produce generalisable information, but instead to explore subjective experiences of students who are compelled to use mini but taxis as their primary mode of transport, admittedly with the assumption that this environment might produce conditions that would be associated with CTS and therefore would hopefully contribute to further understanding what the lived experience of CTS might entail. The study used a purposive sample with the hope that identifying individuals who were presumed to be continuously exposed to traumatic experiences would generate fertile data. However, it is recognized that researching populations who are living in contexts of immediate and extreme danger is very difficult and that these young women's experiences may approximate CTS without perhaps illustrating the extremity of responses that might occur in very high threat CTS environments.

A further limitation of the study has been addressed already in the discussion on reflexivity. It is evident that my personal alignment with the participants' experiences may have shaped the data collected in particular ways. However, as discussed, it appeared that the

points of identification between researcher and participants may have allowed for richer data generation and that benefits probably outweighed costs in this instance.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although there is existing research that attempts to address the description of characteristic features of the impact of living under conditions of continuous traumatic stress, this concept requires more systematic investigation and refinement (Straker, 2013). It appears that even optimal adjustment to such environments is liable to carry costs to mental health and psychological wellbeing, as is explored in considerable depth in the preceding chapter. There is evidence that violence related to on-going armed conflict is commonly associated with fear, anxiety and sleep disturbances. In the proposed study the use of case examples, acquired from the interviews, aided in illustrating how responses to situations of on-going traumatic stress may in fact be normative and adaptive, as opposed to pathological, but nevertheless may warrant psychological support to optimize coping under such conditions. Further research into what may constitute adaptive as opposed to maladaptive coping and adjustment in these kinds of contexts appears warranted.

In respect of the gender related aspects of the current study it seems that it might be useful to explore whether men and women are differently vulnerable to CTS in different contexts and a comparative study of male taxi commuters might prove very interesting.

As the study was focused on gaining insight into the subjective experiences of individuals assumed to be living under conditions of CTS, psychological interventions and possible therapeutic techniques which could be implemented to assist such individuals in coping under such conditions was not addressed in this research report. However, it would seem that this is an important direction for future research.

To conclude, the body of literature surrounding the concept of CTS is limited and this construct still requires extended research. The term CTS has considerable relevance in the contemporary South African context, despite the fact that it was originally devised in the context of political violence and social conflict and not in the context of criminal violence and other forms of instability and threat (Straker, 2013). In general, further research concerning the occurrence of CTS in various contexts, along with suggestions for interventions which could assist individuals and communities where CTS is prevalent, will be important.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Impact of Event Scale-Revisited

The following is a list of difficulties people sometimes have in relation to stressful events they have experienced. Please read each item, and then indicate how distressing each difficulty has been for you during the past 7 days, with respect to the most recent or significant stressful experience in relation to taxi commuting.

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
1. Any reminder brought back feelings about it.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I had trouble staying asleep.	0		2	3	4
3. Other things kept making me think about it.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I felt irritable and angry.	0	1	2	3	4
5. I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it.	0	1	2	3	4
6. I thought about it when I didn't mean to.	0	1	2	3	4
7. I felt as if it hadn't happened or wasn't real.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I stayed away from reminders of it.	0	1	2	3	4
9. Pictures about it popped into my mind.	0	1	2	3	4
10. I was jumpy and easily startled.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I tried not to think about it.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn't deal with them.	0	1	2	3	4
13. My feelings about it were kind of numb.	0	1	2	3	4
14. I found myself acting or feeling like I was back at that time.	0	1	2	3	4
15. I had trouble falling asleep.	0	1	2	3	
16. I had waves of strong feelings about it.	0	1	2	3	
17. I tried to remove it from my memory.	0	1	2	3	
18. I had trouble concentrating.	0	1	2	3	4
19. Reminders of it caused me to have physical reactions, such as sweating, trouble breathing, nausea, or a pounding heart.	0	1	2	3	
20. I had dreams about it.	0	1	2	3	4
21. I felt watchful and on-guard.	0	1	2	3	
22. I tried not to talk about it.	0	1	2	3	4

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



Dear Student

I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. My area of focus includes exploring the subjective experiences of a high risk (to violence/harm) population, and what it is like to have to regularly function in a vigilant way. The study also aims to tap into the psychological experiences of individuals who belong to a high risk population/community.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study whereby your participation will entail participating in an interview which will take about 40-50 minutes, and you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which will take about 10 minutes. Please respond as carefully and honestly as possible. No one other than my supervisor and myself will have access to the completed questionnaires and the interview content. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not to participate in this research. If you do choose to participate, you are entitled to refrain from answering certain questions, if you wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. The raw research data (transcriptions and questionnaire data) will be destroyed following the completion and examination of my Master's degree. Until that time, all physical data will be stored either on a password protected computer or in a locked cabinet. The end results will be reported in a research report for my Master's degree and potentially in a journal article or similar publication. As noted above, there are no benefits to participation; however, because of the nature of questions being asked, there is minimal risk for distress or discomfort. In the event that you experience discomfort or distress after the interview or after completing the questionnaire, please contact either Lifeline on 0861 322 322 (24-hour service), the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) at the University of the Witwatersrand on (011) 717 9140/32, or Wits Trauma Clinic on (011) 403 5102/3. All these services are free of charge.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on trauma, and Continuous Traumatic Stress.

Kind Regards

Kgomotso Kwele

Supervised by Professor Gillian Eagle

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

I understand the aim, procedures, risks and benefits of participating in this project and I

_____ (name and surname) agree to participate voluntarily.

Signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Consent for Recording



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

The interviews conducted with participants will be audio recorded. The recordings will help the researcher to transcribe what was said during the interview, the raw research data (transcriptions and questionnaire data) will be destroyed following the completion and examination of the Master's degree. Please note that no participant will be identified in the recordings or in the final report.

Your signature below is an indication that you understand the above conditions and agree to have your responses in the interview audio recorded.

I understand that my responses will be audio recorded and I

_____ (name and surname) agree to participate voluntarily.

Signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire



Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559



DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Surname:

Student Number:

Age:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Home Language:

Year of Study:

Faculty Registered Under:

Current home address:

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

1. *General descriptive information about commute*
   1.1. What time do you usually travel to and from university?
   1.2. Which route do you use when traveling to university by taxi?
   1.3. How far do you have to walk in order to reach the taxi drop off/ pick up point?
   1.4. Do you travel on your own? Or do you know people who take the same route as you?
   1.5. Do you feel you have a choice regarding the use of public transport?
   1.6. How long have you been using this method of transport?
2. *Exposure to risk/trauma*
   2.1. Have you ever directly experienced violence/harm during your commute to and from university?
   2.2. Do you know someone who has experienced this?
   2.3. Have you witnessed an incident of violence/harm during your commute?
   2.4. Have you heard of any incidents where people have been exposed to violence/harm at a taxi rank, or anywhere else along your commute?
3. *Gender related experience*
   3.1. Do you think that being female influences your experience of your commute?
   3.2. What is it about being female that makes the experience of your commute different?
   3.3. How different do you believe it would be if you were male?
4. *Subjective/psychological experience of stress related to commute*
   4.1. What anxieties do you experience when travelling via taxis?
   4.2. Tell me about your biggest fear regarding your commute?
   4.3. How do you decide whether or not it is safe to get into a taxi?
   4.4. Have you ever had any dreams about your experiences along your commute?
   4.5. In what way have your experiences affected your sleep/concentration?
5. *Coping and managing stress related to commute*
   5.1. How do you assess the possibility of risk when using taxis?
   5.2. How do you tell whether you are being paranoid or if there is a presence of real danger/threat?
   5.3. Has anyone ever given you advice about what to do when using taxis?
   5.4. If you had to give someone advice regarding the use of taxis, what would you say?