

## Taxi ‘sugar daddies’ and taxi queens: Male taxi driver attitudes regarding transactional relationships in the Western Cape, South Africa

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### Abstract

Media reports are emerging on the phenomenon of young girls who travel with older mini-bus taxi drivers, and who are thought to have sex with the drivers in exchange for gifts and money. The extent to which such relationships might facilitate unsafe sexual practices and increased risks for both the men and the young women, often referred to as taxi queens, remains an important question in the light of the current challenges of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. However, very little research has been undertaken on this issue, especially regarding the perceptions and experiences of taxi drivers. Thus this paper aims to provide some preliminary findings on taxi drivers’ attitudes and beliefs about taxi queens and their relationships with taxi drivers. A 22-item questionnaire was administered to 223 male taxi drivers in two regions in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. Taxi drivers in this study largely saw the relationship between taxi drivers and the young girls who ride with them as providing status for both the girls and drivers, and there seemed to be recognition of the transactional nature of the relationship between taxi drivers and taxi queens. The stigmatisation of young girls who ride with taxi drivers was evident. Drivers had knowledge and awareness of the risks of unsafe sex and supported condom use, although there appeared to be some uncertainty and confusion about the likelihood of HIV infection between drivers and girls. While taxi drivers recognised the role of alcohol in relationships with young girls, they seemed to deny that the abuse of drugs was common. The study highlights a number of key areas that need to be explored with men in the taxi industry, in order to address risk behaviours for both taxi drivers and the girls who ride with them.

**Keywords:** taxi drivers, taxi queens, intergenerational sex, transactional sex, HIV/AIDS risk

### Résumé

Les rapports des médias font leur apparition sur le phénomène des jeunes filles qui voyagent avec les chauffeurs âgés de taxi mini-bus, et qui sont soupçonnés d’avoir des rapports sexuels avec ces derniers en échange des cadeaux et de l’argent. Le degré auquel de telles relations pourraient faciliter les pratiques sexuelles non protégées et les risques accrus pour les deux: les hommes et les jeunes femmes, souvent désignées comme les ‘taxi queens’, reste une question importante à la lumière des défis actuels du VIH/SIDA en Afrique Sub-saharienne. Cependant, très peu de recherches ont été menées sur cette question, en particulier en ce qui concerne les perceptions et les expériences des chauffeurs de taxi. Ainsi, ce document vise à fournir quelques conclusions préliminaires sur les attitudes des chauffeurs de taxi et les croyances au sujet des ‘taxi queens’ et leurs relations avec les chauffeurs de taxi. Un questionnaire de 22 points a été administré à 223 chauffeurs de taxi de sexe masculin dans deux régions de la province de Western Cape, Afrique du Sud. Dans cette étude, les chauffeurs de taxi en grande partie ont vu que la relation entre les chauffeurs de taxi et les jeunes filles qui se promènent avec ces derniers fournit un statut tant aux filles qu’aux chauffeurs, et il semblait y avoir reconnaissance de la nature transactionnelle de la relation entre les chauffeurs de taxi et les ‘taxi queens’. La stigmatisation des jeunes filles qui se promènent avec les chauffeurs de taxi était évidente. Les chauffeurs avaient la connaissance et étaient conscients des risques des rapports sexuels non protégés et soutenaient l’utilisation des préservatifs même s’il semble y avoir une certaine incertitude et la confusion quant à la probabilité d’infection par le VIH entre les chauffeurs et les filles. Alors que les chauffeurs de taxi ont reconnu le rôle de l’alcool dans les relations avec les jeunes filles, ils semblaient nier que l’abus de drogues étaient chose courante. L’étude met en évidence un certain nombre de domaines clés qui doivent être explorés avec les hommes dans l’industrie du taxi, afin de faire face aux comportements à risque pour les chauffeurs de taxi et les filles qui se promènent avec eux.

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## Introduction

Some information has begun to emerge, mainly anecdotal and in the media, about young women who travel with older mini-bus taxi drivers, and are thought to have sex with them in exchange for gifts and money. The mini-bus taxi industry is an industry which the government struggles to regulate, is extremely patriarchal, and has a history of violence between different taxi organisations.

However, very little is known about the dynamics of such relationships, and in particular the perceptions and experiences of taxi drivers regarding their relationships with these girls, commonly referred to as taxi queens. The extent to which such relationships might facilitate unsafe sexual practices and increased risks for both the men and the young women also remains an important question in the light of the current challenges of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

Transactional sexual relationships, especially where age and material difference are marked, are increasingly an area of concern in addressing HIV as well as gender-based violence in southern Africa. Transactional sex that is not sex work in the traditional sense, nor only an outcome of poverty, but is also fuelled by consumerist pressures to acquire goods and social status, as well as linked with culturally-based notions of gender, love and exchange (see Bhana & Pattman 2011; Hunter 2002, 2010), has also been shown to be common. Studies have indicated that transactional sexual relationships, especially when they involve a number of power dynamics including age and access to resources, play a significant role in unsafe, unequal and coercive sexual practices, and as a result are receiving increased attention in Africa (Clowes, Shefer, Fouten, Vergnani & Jacobs 2009; Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow 2004; Dunkle, Jewkes, Nduna, Jama, Levin, Sikweyiya, *et al.* 2007; Hallman 2004; Kaufman & Stavros 2004; Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Maganja, Maman, Groves & Mbwambo 2007; Masvawure 2010; Ulin 1992).

It is notable that the most recent National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey conducted by the South African Human Sciences Research Council (Shisana, Rehle, Simbayi, Zuma, Jooste, Pillay-van Wyk, *et al.* 2009) specifically identified intergenerational sex between young women and older men (popularly known as 'sugar daddies') as a significant risk factor for young women with respect to their vulnerability to HIV infection. Moreover, the percentage of women with sexual partners who are more than 5 years older than them was found to have increased from 18.5% in 2005 to 27.6% in 2008. This significant increase may be reflective of a growing popularity of transactional relationships between poor and young women with older and better resourced men. In this respect it is notable that Bhana and Pattman's recent study (2011) with a group of poor young women in a township in KwaZulu-Natal found that ideals of love amongst participants were bound up with their aspirations for material goods.

Much of the literature on intergenerational and transactional sex highlights the increased risk for young women in these relationships of HIV infection, and coercive and unsafe sexual practices. For example, a study in Kenya found that age and economic asymmetries in non-marital relationships were relatively common, and were associated with non-use of condoms; indeed sugar daddy partnerships and the largest age and economic asymmetries were associated with decreased odds of condom use (Luke 2005). A study in Mozambique (Machel 2001) also found that working class young women were more accepting of gender power differentials, were less assertive and tended to be dependent on their partners for material needs more often, which weakened their bargaining power in relation to safe sex and rendered them more vulnerable than middle-class girls.

While much of the early research on transactional sex, including that of more formalised sex work, has focused on women's experiences and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Abdool Karim, Abdool Karim, Soldan & Zondi 1995; Campbell 1991; Varga 1997), there have been more recent calls to acknowledge the complexity of transactional sex and avoid a woman-as-victim discourse (Leclerc-Madlala 2008). A number of studies show how young women are also invested in transactional relationships with more resourced and older men for both status and access to material goods, and may be active participants in these partnerships (Jones 2006; Nkosasana & Rosenthal 2007; Silberschmidt & Rasch 2000).

There has also been a call to focus more on the perspectives of men, since there has been little research looking at men's motivations and experiences of such practices. In this respect there is a growing body of work on men, boys and masculinities in southern Africa, reflecting global trends (special edition of the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 2010; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005; Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala & Buikema 2007); and much work on male sexuality has illuminated the pressures on men to prove their sexual prowess as a key component of masculine identity (Anderson 2010; Lindegger & Maxwell 2007; MacPhail & Campbell 2001; Pattman & Chege 2003; Ratele 2006; Shefer & Foster 2009).

Acknowledging the pressures on men to take multiple partners in proving sexual prowess, such practices have received increasing attention in the larger HIV/AIDS literature (Do & Meekers 2009; Luke 2005). While research findings are ambiguous in this respect, with some showing that multiple partner practices do not necessarily increase vulnerability to HIV (Luke 2008), the pressure on men to be sexually active, coupled with other forms of risk taking, such as resistance to condom use, as discussed above, and the use of alcohol and other substances, are of concern within the context of the high rates of HIV infection in southern Africa.

Notably, alcohol and other substances have been viewed as implicated in unsafe risk factors internationally and locally. Thus

Pithey and Parry (2009), in a systematic review of studies on the association between alcohol use and HIV infection, found that users of alcohol were more likely to be HIV positive, and that the use of alcohol in sexual contexts was significantly associated with an increased risk of HIV acquisition and prevalence. In addition, Townsend, Rosenthal, Parry, Zembe, Mathews and Flisher (2010), who investigated the associations between alcohol misuse and risks of HIV infection among men who have multiple female partners in Cape Town, found that problem drinkers were more likely to have symptoms of an STI, not to use condoms due to drinking, and to have inconsistent condom use with all partner types. More specifically, local reports on taxi queens also highlight the role of alcohol and drugs, especially methamphetamine ('tik') in the Western Cape, in taxi driver-taxi queen relationships (Jooste 2008; Skoch 2010; Van Wieling 2004).

Few studies have looked specifically at the subjective experiences and motivations of men who engage in transactional relationships. One study that investigated the motivation of young men in transactional sexual relationships in Tanzania showed that young men explain these relationships as primarily sexually motivated for themselves (Maganja *et al.* 2007). Participants were, however, aware of the material expectations of their partners, and shared some distrust of their partner's motivations and commitment in the relationship, believing that their ability to provide was related to the success and longevity of their relationship. This study further found that the women's financial dependence on their partners impacted negatively on their ability to negotiate safe sex.

There has also been limited work focused on men who engage in transactional sex in the transport sector in particular. Some media reports on taxi queens have highlighted how taxi drivers regard the exchange of sex for material benefits as central to these relationships (Jooste 2008; Mufweba 2001; Skoch 2010). Van Breda (1998) found that taxi drivers were reportedly aware of the fact that sleeping with underage girls was a crime. In this report drivers described these girls as 'throwing' themselves at them, and that they could have sex with as many as five in a day. In the same report drivers made it clear that these relations were principally about sex. As one of the drivers maintained, 'but if they don't want to have sex with me, that's the end of them. No meat, beat it. And I move on to the next one. I have three to five a week'.

Reports further point to taxi drivers allegedly acting as 'middle men' between sex buyers and young girls. These reports reveal how tourists get taxi drivers (connected with the sex trade) to organise girls as young as 13 years brought to their hotel rooms. Even though researchers in South Africa have expressed the difficulty in getting taxi drivers to talk about this (Mohamed 2005), the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation is becoming a well established network composed of gangs, adults and taxi drivers as major players (Molo Songololo 2000).

Drawing on a larger study on the phenomenon of 'taxi queens', this paper provides some preliminary findings on taxi drivers' attitudes and beliefs about taxi queens, which may play a role in

the continued and increasingly normative practices of unequal transactional relationships, and which may place these young women in particularly vulnerable positions with respect to their safety and well-being.

It should also be noted that this study, while focussing on issues related to transactional sex and its consequences, is played out in an area where young women are dependent on public transport. Potgieter, Pillay and Rama (2006) and Rama (1999) have highlighted that transport needs and experiences are gendered. The 'taxi queen' phenomenon, therefore, should be considered within the context of the gendered nature of transport and mobility needs.

## Methods

The paper is based on a quantitative survey conducted with taxi drivers in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The aim of this component of the research was to identify responses of taxi drivers in relation to young women who use public transport (mini-bus taxis). More specifically it intended to explore a number of issues related to the relationship between taxi drivers and taxi queens.

A structured questionnaire, based on information obtained from formative focus groups held with local youth, and individual interviews with girls identified as taxi queens, both conducted in the same geographic areas as those outlined below, was developed. It elicited initial demographic information, followed by 22 statements regarding taxi drivers and taxi queens, for which respondents had five possible response options, ranging from 'strongly disagree' through to 'strongly agree'. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into both Afrikaans and Xhosa (constituting the three official languages of this province). The questionnaire was piloted on three taxi drivers, in each of the languages, and based on this, language and/or content were modified where necessary. The questionnaires were administered via an interview.

Two geographic areas were identified in which to conduct the study, namely the Cape Town Metropole and the southern Cape region. The selection of these two areas was based on anecdotal evidence as well as media reports (Booi 2011; Skoch 2010) suggesting that the taxi queen phenomenon is particularly rife here. In order to arrange access to taxi drivers in both Cape Town and George and Knysna, a series of meetings and conversations with various taxi bosses and taxi associations were held, including representatives from a number of local taxi associations. Without any exceptions, all of them agreed to provide access to taxi drivers for the research, provided a 'small donation' was made for their efforts, and that they be given copies of the final report. Where necessary, they also provided the researchers with dedicated contact persons to ensure that the interviews happened as scheduled and with as few hindrances as possible.

Most of the interviews happened at taxi ranks across Cape Town and in George, Knysna and Thembalethu. Four male fieldworkers were recruited, two in Cape Town and two in the southern Cape; between the fieldworkers in each of the teams questionnaires could be administered in Xhosa, English and Afrikaans. In line

with literature that suggests matching demographic characteristics of fieldworkers and research participants for hard-to-reach populations and sensitive topics (Alexander & Richman 2008), male fieldworkers were chosen on the premise that the taxi drivers would feel more comfortable engaging with other men about the topic of taxi queens. Also, given the environment and the reported history of taxi drivers' attitudes to women (e.g. women being assaulted for wearing mini skirts) (Molatlhwa 2012) it would not have been advisable from a safety perspective to use female fieldworkers. Training sessions were held for the fieldworkers to familiarise them with the questionnaire and the data collection procedure. Identification cards were provided for each fieldworker with relevant contact numbers, as well as airtime and travel money to assist them in their work. A total of 225 questionnaires were completed by participants, who were informed of the nature of the study, and assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Completed questionnaires were checked for quality by a fieldwork manager.

After capturing the questionnaire data in Microsoft Excel, the cleaned data were imported into Stata version 10, and prepared for analysis. Analyses took the form of generating descriptive statistics for the biographical information and responses to statements.

Of the 225 participants who completed the questionnaire, 223 were men. A total of 170 were completed in English and 55 in Afrikaans; 116 questionnaires were completed in Cape Town and 109 in the southern Cape. The majority of the taxi drivers (119) were married or co-habiting. More participants were African<sup>1</sup> (121) than coloured (95). The average age of participants was 34 years and the majority of drivers (148) were aged 26–45 years. The average length of years working in the taxi industry was 7.7 years and the average number of hours worked per day was 11.9 h. The great majority of respondents drove for somebody else (175) while only 48 had their own taxis.

## Results

The questionnaire provided results relating to taxi driver perceptions of a range of issues relating to the taxi queen phenomenon, as described above. These have been grouped into broad themes, relating to the status of driving with a taxi queen, the transactional nature of the relationship, the stigmatisation associated with this behaviour, issues of HIV and AIDS, the role of alcohol and drugs, and family reactions. They are presented below.

### Status

Taxi drivers in this study saw the relationship between taxi drivers and the young girls who ride with them as providing status for both the girls and drivers. Thus, a large majority (Table 1) agreed<sup>2</sup> that '*Young girls like to ride with taxi drivers*'. In addition, many agreed that '*Girls think it is cool to have a taxi driver boyfriend*'. Likewise, notably more respondents agreed with the statement that '*Taxi drivers who have young girlfriends are admired by other men*'. In the same vein, more respondents agreed than disagreed that '*Girls who have relationships with taxi drivers are admired by their friends*'. Slightly more than half of the respondents disagreed with the statement that '*It is not wise for young girls to have relationships with taxi drivers*'.

### Transactional relationship

There seemed to be general recognition of the transactional nature of the relationship between taxi drivers and taxi queens. Thus, the majority of the respondents in this study (Table 2) agreed that '*Girls who ride with taxi drivers do it for the gifts*'. The sexual dimension of these relationships was evident in that more respondents agreed than disagreed that '*Taxi drivers give the girls who drive with them gifts to have sex with them*'. Moreover, although more respondents disagreed than agreed, as many as 88 (39%) agreed that '*If a girl gets gifts from taxi drivers, she can't refuse to have sex with him*'. However, regarding the possibilities of violence in such relationships, an

**Table 1. Status.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
Young girls like to ride with taxi drivers	172	76.4	29	12.9	24	10.7
Girls think it is cool to have a taxi driver boyfriend	162	72	17	7.6	45	20
Taxi drivers who have young girlfriends are admired by other men	132	58.7	60	26.7	33	14.7
Girls who have relationships with taxi drivers are admired by their friends	108	48	37	16.4	80	35.6
It is not wise for young girls to have relationships with taxi drivers	78	34.7	116	51.6	30	13.3

**Table 2. Transactional relationship.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
Girls who ride with taxi drivers do it for the gifts	134	59.6	49	21.8	42	18.7
Taxi drivers give the girls who drive with them gifts to have sex with them	106	47.1	75	33.3	44	19.6
If a girl gets gifts from a taxi driver, she can't refuse to have sex with him	88	39.1	104	46.2	33	14.7
Girls who accept gifts from taxi drivers, but refuse to have sex with them, deserve to get beaten	18	8.0	196	87.1	11	4.9

**Table 3. Stigmatisation.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
Girls who sleep with taxi drivers are loose	136	60.4	56	24.9	33	14.7
Girls who have sex with taxi drivers for gifts go on to become prostitutes	94	41.8	77	34.2	54	24

**Table 4. HIV/AIDS.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
It is not necessary to use a condom when having sex with a girl who rides in taxis	22	9.8	194	86.2	9	4
There is less risk of getting HIV/AIDS from sex with young girls	51	22.7	135	60	39	17.3
Girls who have sex with taxi drivers are likely to be HIV positive	74	32.9	70	31.1	81	36
Girls who have sex with taxi drivers are likely to get infected with HIV/AIDS	106	47.1	62	27.6	57	25.3

**Table 5. Alcohol and drugs.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
Taxi drivers often have had something to drink when they have sex with girls	111	49.3	65	28.9	49	21.8
Girls who sleep with taxi drivers often take drugs	88	39.1	94	41.8	43	19.1
Taxi drivers often take drugs with the girls with whom they have sex	79	35.1	92	40.9	53	23.6
Girls who sleep with taxi drivers are expected to sell drugs as well	18	8	156	69.3	51	22.7
Girls have sex with taxi drivers to pay for their drugs	83	36.9	101	44.9	41	18.2

**Table 6. Family reactions.**

Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Uncertain	%
Family and friends encourage girls to have relationships with taxi drivers	48	21.3	120	53.3	57	25.3
Parents of girls who have relationships with taxi drivers are afraid to intervene	102	45.3	75	33.3	47	20.9

overwhelming majority of respondents disagreed that 'Girls who accept gifts from taxi drivers, but refuse to have sex with them, deserve to get beaten'.

### Stigmatisation

The stigmatisation of young girls who ride with taxi drivers was evident in that the majority of respondents (Table 3) agreed that 'Girls who sleep with taxi drivers are loose'. In addition, somewhat more agreed than disagreed that 'Girls who have sex with taxi drivers for gifts go on to become prostitutes'.

### HIV/AIDS

Knowledge and awareness of the risks of unsafe sex and support of condom use emerged in the findings, although there appeared to be some uncertainty and confusion about the likelihood of infection between drivers and girls. An overwhelming majority disagreed with the statement that 'It is not necessary to use a condom when having sex with a girl who rides in taxi'. The majority also disagreed that 'There is less risk of getting HIV/AIDS from young girls'. While roughly equal numbers agreed

and disagreed with the statement that 'Girls who have sex with taxi drivers are likely to be HIV positive', slightly more drivers were uncertain. Less than half of the respondents agreed with the statement that 'Girls who have sex with taxi drivers are likely to get infected with HIV/AIDS'. Almost the same number disagreed or were uncertain about this statement (Table 4).

### Alcohol and drugs

While taxi drivers recognised the role of alcohol in relationships with young girls, they seemed to deny that the abuse of drugs was common. Thus, half of the respondents (Table 5) agreed with the statement that 'Taxi drivers often have had something to drink when they have sex with girls'. Slightly more respondents disagreed with the statement that 'Girls who sleep with taxi drivers often take drugs' than agreed with the statement. Similarly, slightly more disagreed than agreed that 'Taxi drivers often take drugs with the girls with whom they have sex'. A notable majority of participants disagreed that 'Girls who sleep with taxi drivers are expected to sell drugs'. However, more than half of the respondents agreed that 'Girls have sex with taxi drivers to pay for drugs'.

### Family reactions

There was evidence that taxi drivers were aware of family concerns about young girls being involved with drivers. Slightly more than half of the respondents (Table 6) disagreed that 'Family and friends encourage girls to have relationships with taxi drivers'. More respondents agreed than disagreed with the statement that 'Parents of girls who have relationships with taxi drivers are afraid to intervene'.

## Discussion

Most taxi drivers in this study regarded the relationship between taxi drivers and the young girls who travel with them as providing status for both the girls and drivers. Thus the investments of both partners in this relationship mirror the findings and arguments of others on the exchange value of transactional relationships for both men and women. As elaborated earlier, the pressures on men to be sexually active and prove their sexual prowess through multiple partners have been increasingly documented. For example, a recent South African study among urban men found that having concurrent sexual relationships was regarded as increasing their status as a man (Ragnarsson, Townsend, Thorson, Chopra & Ekström 2009). This perception has also been documented in studies with local youth (Anderson 2010; Lindegger & Maxwell 2007; Ratele, Fouten, Shefer, Strebel, Shabalala & Buikema 2007). Moreover, girls who ride with taxi drivers refer to the status they derive from the relationship (Potgieter, Strebel & Wagner 2009; Van Weiling 2004). For taxi drivers then the benefits of a taxi queen may not only relate to access to sex with an available casual partner, but also benefit with respect to male status in proving their sexual prowess.

There seemed to be general recognition of the transactional nature of the relationship between taxi drivers and taxi queens as involving the exchange of material items and status for sex. It is of concern that a large number of the participants (nearly 40%) agreed that if a girl received a gift from a taxi driver then she could not refuse to have sex with him. Thus while participants appeared to have internalised some of the current human rights discourse, and were aware of women's rights and the need for men to resist a violent identity, the terms of the transaction were not questioned. The large support for the sentiment that a gift equals sex is illustrative of the widespread acceptance of unequal transactional relationships in the transport industry, as found in some local reports (Jooste 2008; Skoch 2010; Van Wieling 2004). This normative expectation of the role of gifts may serve to facilitate and legitimise unwanted, unsafe and coercive sexual practices. It is interesting that the majority of participants did, however, reject the use of overt violence by a taxi driver if the taxi queen did not want to have sex with him, although this was contradicted by the experiences of taxi queens themselves (Potgieter *et al.* 2009). Yet the acceptance of the equation of a gift with sex belies this belief – since it inadvertently sets up the expectation of a proprietorial right to the receiver's body, which if resisted may legitimise a punitive and/or coercive response.

In this light the finding that nearly half the participants believed that parents were afraid to intervene with the relationship, as was also found in an earlier local study among taxi queens

(Van Wieling 2004), may be further illustrative of the power that the taxi driver commands, not only in relation to his taxi queen, but also within the broader community. Thus the construction of the taxi driver as someone to be feared in the community appears to be salient and something of which the taxi drivers themselves were aware. Such power is complex, and linked to a range of other factors, such as the power that a taxi owner/driver may have in poor communities through access to larger income and assets, or even links to larger systems of power such as organised crime (Molo Songololo 2000), but no doubt also reflects the normative terms of the transactional relationship.

While participants acknowledged the benefits of the relationship for both, and the taxi driver seemed also to benefit from social capital with respect to status and power in the community on the one hand, the taxi queen on the other hand emerged as a stigmatised identity. The stigmatisation of girls who ride with taxi drivers was evident in the assumption that taxi queens were promiscuous, illustrative of little appreciation of their personal and economic circumstances. The taxi queen was clearly negatively viewed by the taxi driver community and more generally. While a majority of participants thought that taxi drivers with taxi queens were admired, a much lower percentage thought that it was wise for young women to be taxi queens, and the majority believed that they were 'loose' women. In this way the taxi driver participants appeared to support the popular stigmatisation of the taxi queen, inadvertently depicting the young woman as the problematic one in the partnership, even though she was the younger and less powerful partner. This finding echoes that of other writing on taxi drivers, for example Mohamed (2005:3) suggests that 'taxi queen' is a 'derisory label frequently mentioned with pity, amused contempt or scandalised disdain by the people who work at the ranks', as well as in the reports of Jooste (2008) and Skoch (2010). In addition, in focus group discussions among local youth it was reported that drivers were regarded as less stigmatised than the girls (Potgieter *et al.* 2009).

Drivers in this study appeared to have knowledge and awareness of the risks of unsafe sex and the need to use condoms, although there was evidence of some confusion about the likelihood of HIV infection between drivers and girls. On the one hand the vast majority of drivers thought that it was necessary to use a condom when having sex with a taxi queen, and most rejected the myth of sleeping with young girls to avoid infection, disagreeing with the statement that there was 'less risk of getting HIV/AIDS from sex with young girls'. On the other hand, while almost half of the sample agreed that girls could be infected by taxi drivers, there was uncertainty as to whether taxi queens were likely to be HIV positive. However, these beliefs are not supported by other studies, which reported that condom use was not consistent, that girls did not always feel able to negotiate the use of condoms, and that pregnancy was common among taxi queens (Jooste 2008; Potgieter *et al.* 2009; Van Wieling 2004). Moreover, Do and Meekers (2009) reported that men in Zambia were more likely to have multiple partners than women, but less likely to see themselves as at risk of HIV than women; Luke (2005) found lower odds of condom use in Kenya among partners where the age and economic differences were greatest; and Steffenson, Pettifor, Seage, Rees and Cleary (2011), in a study among South

African youth, found that men were more likely to have concurrent partners, and less likely to have consistent condom use with concurrent partners, while female concurrents were more likely to report transactional sex and problems negotiating condoms and refusing intercourse.

While taxi drivers recognised the role of alcohol in relationships with young girls, they seemed to deny that the abuse of drugs was common. In urban areas, and especially in Cape Town, substance abuse has been identified as a major social problem (Pludemann, Myers & Parry 2008), and its links with risk of HIV/AIDS have also been documented (Pithey & Parry 2009; Townsend *et al.* 2010). More specifically, regarding taxi drivers and taxi queens, media reports have highlighted that the girls persuade the taxi driver to give them drugs or money for drugs, especially 'tik' (Jooste 2008), and that the drivers get the girls hooked on 'tik' (Skoch 2010), while interviews with taxi queens suggested that the drivers were usually under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they had sex with the girls (Potgieter *et al.* 2009; Van Wiering 2004).

## Conclusion

A number of valuable findings emerged from the study, which to some extent overlap with the perceptions and experiences of taxi queens themselves, but also point to significant divergences of opinion, which would suggest the need for further in-depth investigation of the particular narratives of taxi drivers themselves, with a view to addressing possible problems arising from these relationships.

One of the more important findings from this study relates to the value of the taxi queen relationship for taxi drivers. While few studies investigate the motivation of men in transactional relationships, possibly because it is assumed that they are simply engaged in the transaction for the sex, this study presents a perception that there are other benefits for male taxi drivers as well. A key benefit relates to the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and the assumption that men need to prove their masculinity by illustrating their attractiveness to women, thus proving their sexual prowess. Achieving a taxi queen to drive with him is a marker of successful masculinity, whether or not he actually has sex with her. There is little indication that such men are viewed negatively or stigmatised in any way. Rather there is strong support for the perception that such men are admired by others. Importantly, this study suggests that we should not subscribe to the essentialised understanding of men as centred around sex and driven by uncontrollable sexual desires (as assumed in popular discourse); rather it is this very social construction that appears to play a key role in the investment of taxi drivers in such transactional relationships. It is the image of the taxi driver with his taxi queen driving beside him, made even more powerful by a multiple number of such queens, that is arguably the reward for the taxi driver in this popular trope.

This finding points to the importance of understanding the gendered investments for both men and women in transactional sex. Any work with men in the transport industry towards the promulgation of safe and equitable sexual practices needs to take

into account the complexity of the dynamic of interaction and the gains for such men which extend beyond access to casual sex. While the provision of information remains important, especially in the light of some confusion identified in this study, raising consciousness around the ways in which dominant forms of masculinity create problems for men as well as women is required. In this respect key areas that need to be explored and raised with men include: the association of risk-taking including alcohol and substance abuse with masculinity; the salience of 'provider' masculinity and its attractiveness to young poor women; and the way in which successful masculinity hinges around sexual prowess, thus facilitating unsafe and inequitable sexual practices.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>These are the categories currently used by the South African Department of Labour for the purpose of equity and redress. We use these categories in this report since historical divisions of apartheid are still salient in contemporary South Africa.

<sup>2</sup>For the purposes of reporting we have combined the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' as well as 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' categories, unless otherwise stated.

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