




# Behind the Wheel: Exploring the World of Public Transport Drivers and Perspectives of Passengers at Bosman Taxi Rank, Pretoria, South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to improve commuter safety in South Africa's minibus taxi industry. It is a vital component of the nation's transportation network that is plagued by road safety concerns due to driver behaviour. A quantitative research approach involving 150 respondents selected through probability sampling was utilised. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires at Bosman Taxi Rank in Pretoria, Gauteng province, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study's findings revealed severe safety issues faced by public transport passengers, including fatalities and injuries resulting from unsafe practices by minibus taxi drivers. It also highlighted systemic shortcomings in traffic law enforcement, particularly during weekends, which are exacerbated by drivers operating under the influence of alcohol. Recommendations include professionalising the minibus taxi sector, enhancing collaboration between traffic law enforcement agencies and the taxi industry, revising remuneration structures for National Traffic Police officers, establishing passenger-centric organisations, centralising traffic law enforcement mechanisms, improving driver employment conditions, and conducting public road safety awareness workshops. This study contributes to scholarship by providing empirical evidence on the safety challenges within the minibus taxi industry and proposing comprehensive measures to address these issues, ultimately striving for a safer transportation environment for all commuters in South Africa.

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## INTRODUCTION

The minibus taxi system in South Africa is perceived as a crucial mode of transportation that offers convenience, accessibility, and affordability to a significant portion of the population, particularly in areas where formalised public transportation options are limited.<sup>1</sup> Despite being relatively more expensive than buses and trains, minibus taxis remain popular among commuters due to their efficiency, especially for shorter routes, thereby fulfilling the essential transportation needs of the majority of passengers.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Siyabulela Christopher Fobosi, "Road Ahead: Setting The Basis For A Transformed Minibus Taxi Industry In South Africa," *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment* 261 (2023): 449–55.

<sup>2</sup> South African Government News Agency, "Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga: Re-Launch of National Taxi Relief Fund," 2023, <https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/minister-sindisiwe-chikunga-re-launch-national-taxi-relief-fund-14-mar-2024>.

prominence of minibus taxis in the South African transportation landscape is, however, juxtaposed with concerning road safety statistics. According to the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), South African roads witnessed 14,050 fatalities in the year 2022, with public transport drivers' irregular activities increasingly posing risks to passengers.<sup>3</sup> Human error, particularly driver behaviour, has been identified as a major contributing factor to road accidents, which further underscores the importance of addressing safety in the minibus taxi industry. The alarming increase in road fatalities necessitates urgent action, considering that victims often comprise active contributors to the economy, including breadwinners and youths.<sup>4</sup> Vegter argues that enhancing safety in the minibus taxi industry not only addresses immediate road safety concerns but also contributes to mitigating socio-economic challenges in the transportation system.<sup>5</sup>

Wakelin-Theron and Ukpere support the view that the intersection of public transport drivers' perceptions, road safety concerns, and the socio-economic implications of road fatalities underscores the pressing need for concerted efforts to improve safety in the minibus taxi industry.<sup>6</sup> The minibus taxi industry in South Africa is not only a fundamental component of the nation's transportation network but also serves as a lifeline for many commuters by providing accessible and affordable transportation. However, despite its indispensable role, the industry is plagued by persistent road safety concerns, with accidents and fatalities continuing to be a significant issue. According to a report by the RTMC, South Africa recorded 14,050 fatalities in 2022, with public transport drivers' behaviours identified as contributing factors.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, research by Fobosi highlights the urgent need for action to address escalating road fatalities, with emphasis on the socio-economic ramifications of these incidents.<sup>8</sup> The focus of the study revolves around understanding passenger perceptions of drivers and their impact on road safety in the minibus taxi industry. This study therefore explores the intricacies of driver-passenger interactions and the role they play in contributing to safety risks, particularly in Pretoria in the Gauteng province. By identifying and addressing these perceptions and behaviours, the aim is to formulate effective interventions to enhance safety in the minibus taxi industry and to mitigate the risks faced by passengers and road users alike.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For a research study such as this, a vital starting point is to explore existing literature. This is necessary to define and understand the problem at hand and refers to the existing paradigm and notions relating to the research hypothesis.

### Perceptions of Public Transport Drivers

This section highlights prominent studies that have investigated public transport passengers' perceptions of public transport drivers. Research undertaken to date shows that public transport passengers hold diverse views, many of which are unfavourable towards drivers. These studies indicate a negative perception of public transport drivers, which suggests that the behaviour of some drivers is a significant concern.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that all the reviewed studies involved participants who used public transport modes operating within restricted areas, such as city bus drivers or minibus taxi drivers who worked exclusively within urban settings. These studies reveal that public transport passengers perceive drivers as mainly uncivil, disagreeable, inconsiderate, irresponsible, and unpleasant.<sup>10</sup> Common perceptions include that drivers abuse their power, exhibit bullying behaviour, and display hostility towards

<sup>3</sup> Fobosi, "Road Ahead: Setting The Basis For A Transformed Minibus Taxi Industry In South Africa."

<sup>4</sup> Fobosi, "Road Ahead: Setting The Basis For A Transformed Minibus Taxi Industry In South Africa."

<sup>5</sup> I Vegter, "South Africa's Minibus Taxi Industry: Resistance to Formalisation and Innovation," *South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg*, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> N., Wakelin-Theron and W. I. Ukpere, "Sustainable Transportation in the Taxi Industry in Johannesburg: The Opportunities, Challenges, and Solutions towards Achieving Sustainable Transport," *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series* 22, no. 4 (2022): 353–80.

<sup>7</sup> Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)., *Annual Report* (Pretoria: RTMC, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Fobosi, "Road Ahead: Setting The Basis For A Transformed Minibus Taxi Industry In South Africa."

<sup>9</sup> Abbas Sheykhfar et al., "How Do Driving Behavior and Attitudes toward Road Safety Vary between Developed and Developing Countries? Evidence from Iran and the Netherlands," *Journal of Safety Research* 85 (2023): 210–21.

<sup>10</sup> Kari Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It—Phase 1," 2024.

commuters. Passengers believe drivers have a disregard for the law, are impatient and aggressive, exacerbate travel problems during commutes, and possess driving skills that fall short of safety concerns. Additional concerns include selfish tendencies, operating vehicles under the influence of alcohol or narcotics, and taking advantage of unsuspecting passengers.<sup>11</sup>

### **Comparative Insights from International Studies**

Comparative insights from international studies provide a broader context for understanding the perceptions of public transport drivers. In countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and the United States, similar studies have been conducted to gauge passenger perceptions of public transport drivers.

In the UK, research indicates that passengers often perceive bus drivers as polite but stressed, with concerns primarily revolving around punctuality and route knowledge rather than aggressive behaviour.<sup>12</sup> Australian studies reveal that while bus drivers are generally viewed positively, issues arise concerning safety and reliability, particularly in less urbanised areas.<sup>13</sup> In the United States, perceptions of public transport drivers vary significantly between cities. For instance, in New York City, passengers express concerns about driver rudeness and disregard for traffic rules, whereas in smaller cities, drivers are often seen as friendly and helpful but occasionally unreliable.<sup>14</sup>

### **Synthesis of Findings**

The synthesis of the findings underscores the widespread nature of concerns related to public transport drivers across different regions. Despite geographical and cultural differences, common themes emerge, such as perceptions of drivers as aggressive, inconsiderate, and sometimes operating under unsafe conditions. These studies collectively highlight the critical need for addressing driver behaviour to improve the overall safety and experience for public transport passengers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this study adhered to established research principles and drew on authoritative sources to comprehensively investigate public transport passengers' perceptions of drivers and their impact on road safety in the minibus taxi industry, focusing specifically on Bosman Taxi Rank in Pretoria, Gauteng province. Building on the research framework outlined by Bless and Higson-Smith, which emphasises the importance of formulating testable hypotheses, this study formulated several hypotheses to guide the research process.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the methodological approach aligned with the principles of mixed-methods research advocated by Creswell and Plano-Clark, which combined quantitative data collection with qualitative insights to provide a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> A quantitative research approach was adopted to systematically collect empirical data in alignment with the study's hypotheses.

A sample size of 150 respondents was determined through probability sampling techniques, which ensured the representation of public transport drivers operating at Bosman Taxi Rank, passengers, and National Traffic Police (NTP) officers. Data acquisition was facilitated through the dissemination of self-administered questionnaires to drivers, overseen by the researchers and designated field workers stationed at Bosman Taxi Rank. These questionnaires were meticulously crafted to elicit drivers' perceptions of passengers and their behaviours, while also capturing their perspectives of prevailing road safety concerns in the industry. The collected data underwent meticulous analysis by employing statistical methodologies and utilised the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to discern patterns, trends, and

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<sup>11</sup> Francisco Alonso et al., "Driving under the Influence of Alcohol: Frequency, Reasons, Perceived Risk and Punishment," *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 10 (2015): 1–9; Discovery, "Discovery Aims to Save South Africa's Roads," 2018, [www.discovery.co.za/corporate/good-driving-discovery-saving-south-african-roads](http://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/good-driving-discovery-saving-south-african-roads).

<sup>12</sup> Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It—Phase 1."

<sup>13</sup> Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It—Phase 1."

<sup>14</sup> Sheykhsard et al., "How Do Driving Behavior and Attitudes toward Road Safety Vary between Developed and Developing Countries? Evidence from Iran and the Netherlands."

<sup>15</sup> C. Bless, C. Higson-Smith, and A. Kagee, *Fundamentals of Social Research Methods: An African Perspective*, 6th ed. (Kenwyn: Juta and Co, Ltd., 2013).

<sup>16</sup> John W Creswell and Vicki L Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Sage publications, 2017).

correlations among the variables. This analytical process yielded valuable insight into the nuanced dynamics between public transport drivers, passengers, and road safety risks in the minibus taxi milieu. By integrating the findings from the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study offers a comprehensive insight into the perceptions and behaviours behind road safety challenges in the minibus taxi industry. The findings generated from this study are poised to serve as a foundational resource for the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at bolstering safety in the minibus taxi industry. By addressing identified challenges and implementing targeted measures, the overarching objective was to mitigate risks for passengers and road users, thereby enhancing the overall transportation experience and fostering a safer operating environment in South Africa. The study adhered strictly to ethical principles to ensure research integrity and compliance.

The questionnaire was designed omitting personal details such as full names, identity document numbers, dates of birth, and residential addresses to maintain respondent anonymity. Confidentiality was prioritized, with data used solely for the intended study. Respondents were informed of the study’s purpose via a cover letter. The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) Research Ethics Committee (REC) reviewed and approved the research, monitoring ethical implementation throughout. Adhering to TUT’s policy on research ethics, the study ensured protection from harm by indemnifying participants against physical and emotional harm. Informed consent was obtained from institutions and participants, who were fully informed about the study. The researcher avoided deception, maintained participant privacy and anonymity, and respected participants, treating them as individuals rather than objects or numbers. Compliance with the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act and adherence to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) ethical principles were strictly followed during data collection.

**PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

The public transportation sector in South Africa serves as a cornerstone of mobility for countless commuters by facilitating essential travel across diverse regions. The conduct and safety practices of public transport drivers are pivotal factors in safeguarding the welfare of passengers and fellow road users. This section explores the pivotal findings gleaned from a comprehensive survey conducted among passengers. The aim was to scrutinise the behaviours of public transport drivers and to delineate their ramifications for overall road safety.

**Table 1: Passenger responses**

Passenger responses											
No.	Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%	No. of respondents	%
1	Public transport drivers drive in the yellow lane when transporting passengers	6	20	5	17	3	10	11	36	5	17
2	Taxi drivers overtake on the barrier line	6	20	11	37	2	7	7	23	4	13
3	Taxi drivers commit irregular activities during peak times of the day	5	17	15	50	2	7	5	17	3	10
4	Public transport drivers exceed the speed limit when transporting passengers	5	17	8	27	6	20	9	30	2	7
5	Public transport drivers drive in oncoming lanes	2	7	8	27	5	17	14	47	1	3
6	Public transport drivers use cell phones while driving	8	27	10	33	3	10	7	23	2	7
7	Public transport drivers drive while under the influence of alcohol	1	3	1	3	5	17	13	43	10	33
8	Public transport drivers tell their passengers to wear seatbelts	9	30	6	20	3	10	9	30	3	10

**Statement 1:** Public transport drivers’ use of the yellow lane, 53% of the respondents disagreed that drivers used the yellow lane, attributing this to long-distance drivers’ avoidance of competing for passengers on highways compared to city drivers.

**Statement 2:** Taxi drivers overtaking on barrier lines, 57% of the respondents agreed that taxi drivers overtook on barrier lines, which highlights a prevalent unsafe behaviour among drivers.

**Statement 3:** Taxi drivers' irregular activities during peak times, a concerning 67% of the respondents noted having observed taxi drivers committing irregular activities during peak times, which indicates a potential increase in risky behaviour during busy periods on the roads.

**Statement 4:** Public transport drivers exceeding speed limits, 44% of the respondents agreed that drivers exceeded speed limits, which suggests a significant concern for passenger safety due to speeding.

**Statement 5:** Public transport drivers drive in the oncoming lane, 46% of the respondents disagreed with the notion of drivers using oncoming lanes, which indicates a lower prevalence of this behaviour among drivers.

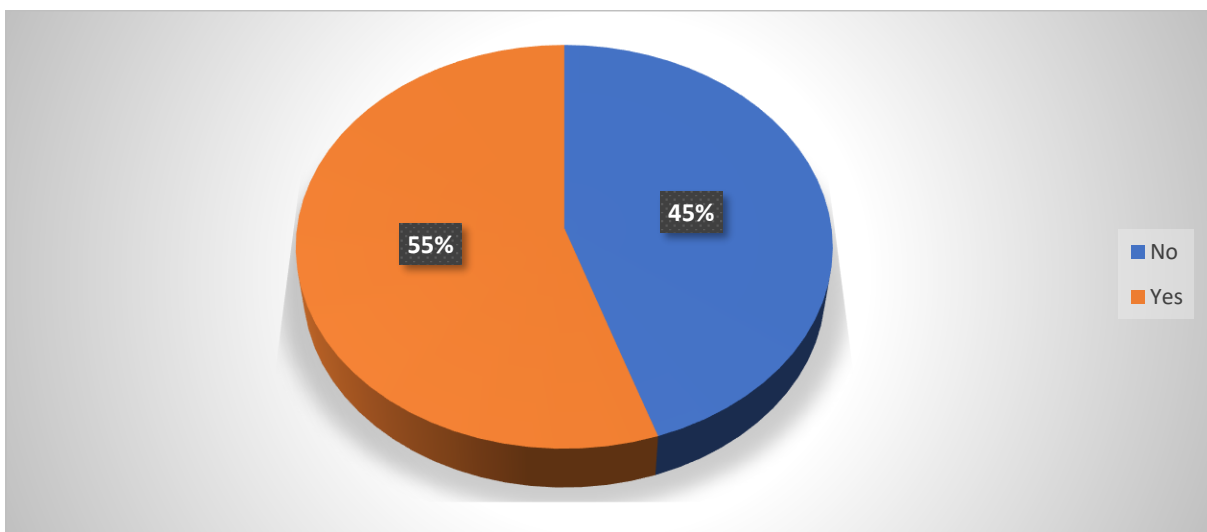
**Statement 6:** Public transport drivers use cell phones while driving, a worrying 60% of the respondents believed that drivers used their cell phones while driving, which highlights potential distractions and safety risks.

**Statement 7:** Public transport drivers drive under the influence of alcohol, a substantial 77% of the respondents disagreed that drivers drove under the influence of alcohol, which suggests a positive perception of drivers' awareness of the dangers of alcohol consumption while driving.

**Statement 8:** Public transport drivers encourage seatbelt use, half of the respondents (50%) agreed that drivers encouraged seatbelt use, which indicates some efforts by drivers to promote passenger safety, although a notable 30% disagreed with this notion.

The findings reflect a mix of perceptions among passengers regarding various aspects of driver behaviour and road safety practices in the minibus taxi industry. While some positive behaviours, such as seatbelt encouragement, were noted, concerns regarding speeding, distracted driving, and irregular activities during peak times underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance safety for passengers and road users.

The responses provided are consistent with the hypotheses proposed in the study and offer insight into the perceptions and actions of public transport drivers as outlined in the research hypotheses.



*Figure 1: Hypothesis 1: The daily checking implemented by taxi operators or owners influences public transport drivers' driving behaviours*

From Figure 1 it is evident that 55% of the respondents acknowledged that their driving behaviours were influenced by the daily checking target set by the taxi operator or owner. Conversely, 45% of the respondents held the view that this checking did not affect their driving behaviour.

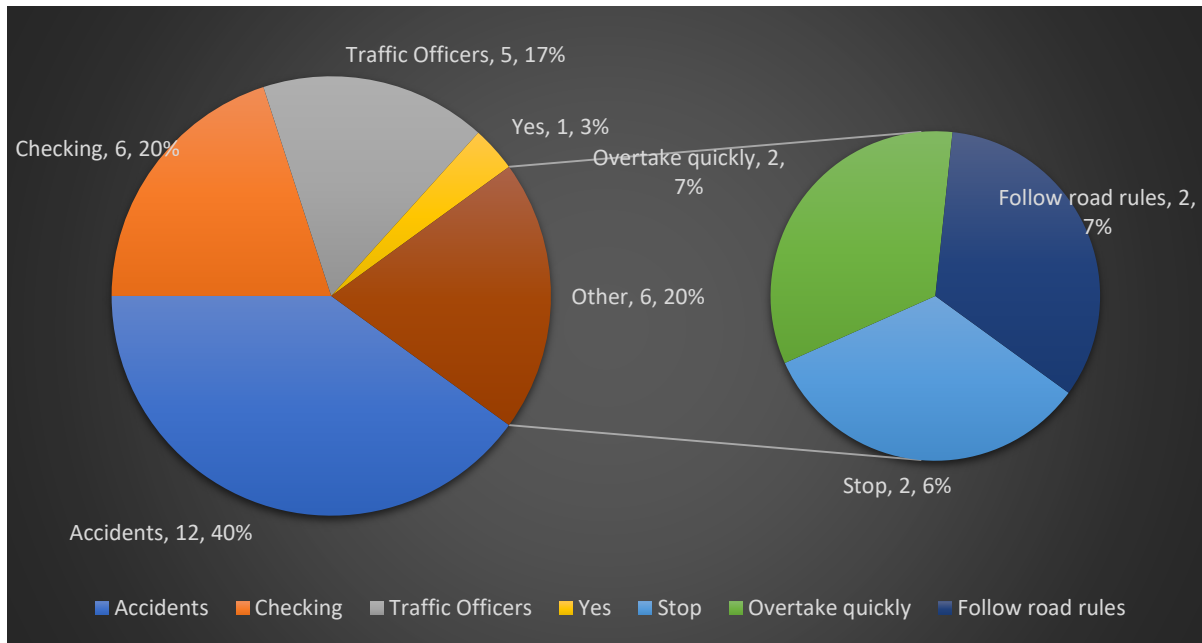


Figure 2: Hypothesis 2: When public transport drivers engage in irregular activities, their initial thoughts predominantly focus on factors that influence their decision-making process

Based on the data depicted in Figure 2, the study aimed to determine whether minibus taxi drivers anticipated the potential consequences of their actions before acting. The findings revealed that 40% of drivers considered causing an accident, while 20% contemplated checking. Additionally, 17% thought about traffic law enforcement officers on the road. Interestingly, 7% experienced conflicting thoughts between following the rules and overtaking quickly / committing irregular activities. Moreover, 6% of the drivers opted to refrain from committing irregular activities. Overall, the majority of minibus taxi drivers demonstrated awareness of potential undesirable consequences, yet habitual behaviours often prevailed over considerations of safe driving practices.

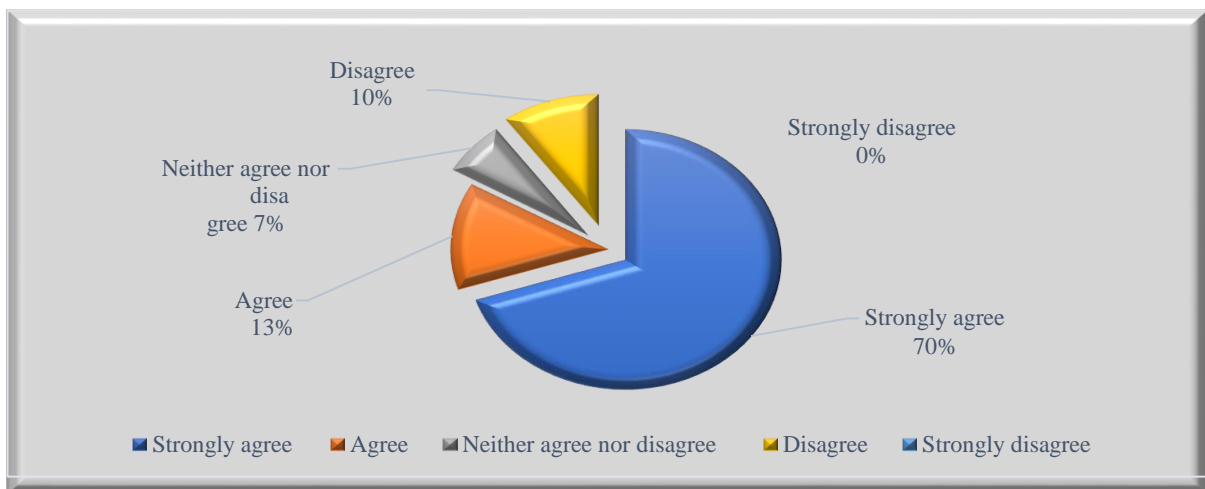


Figure 3: Hypothesis 3: The National Traffic Police (NTP) actively promotes road safety through its enforcement and regulatory efforts

Figure 3 illustrates the data on whether NTP officers promoted road safety. Seventy per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that the NTP promoted road safety, while 13% agreed. Conversely, 10% disagreed, and 7% neither agreed nor disagreed. The substantial agreement among 70% of the respondents indicated a positive perception of the NTP’s efforts towards road safety. Additionally, it is noteworthy that 77% of NTP officers acknowledged the consequences of their inability to perform law enforcement duties, which may lead to fatalities on the road. However, 10% disagreed with this notion, which highlights a disparity in opinion among the respondents.

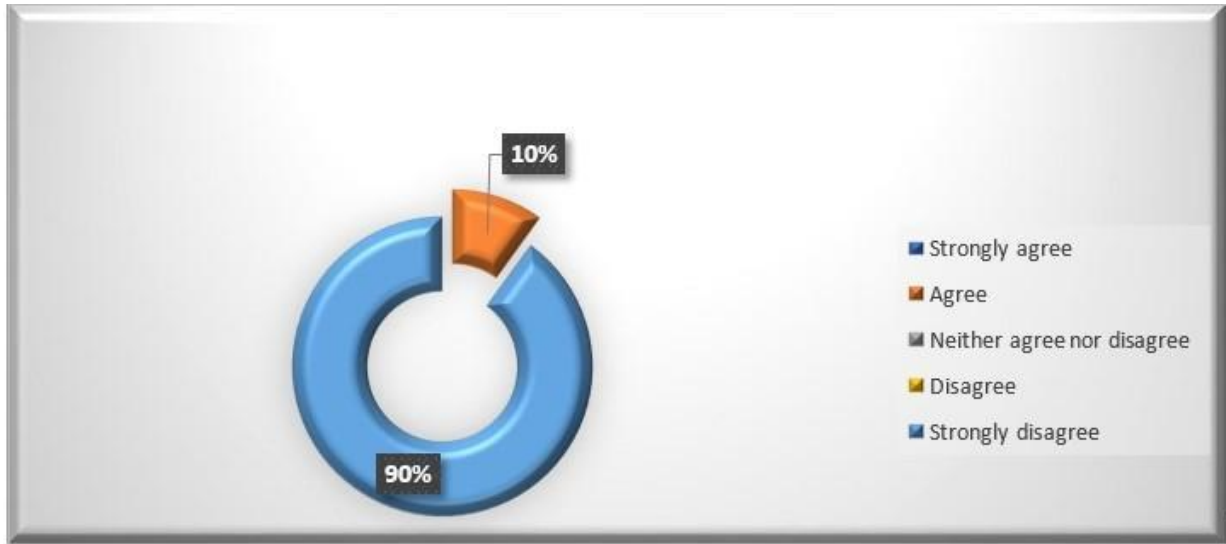


Figure 4: Hypothesis 4: Public transport drivers occasionally halt their trips to purchase alcohol during their journeys

It is evident from Figure 4 that the majority (90%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that public transport drivers stopped to purchase alcohol during trips. Conversely, a minority (10%) of the respondents agreed with this assertion.

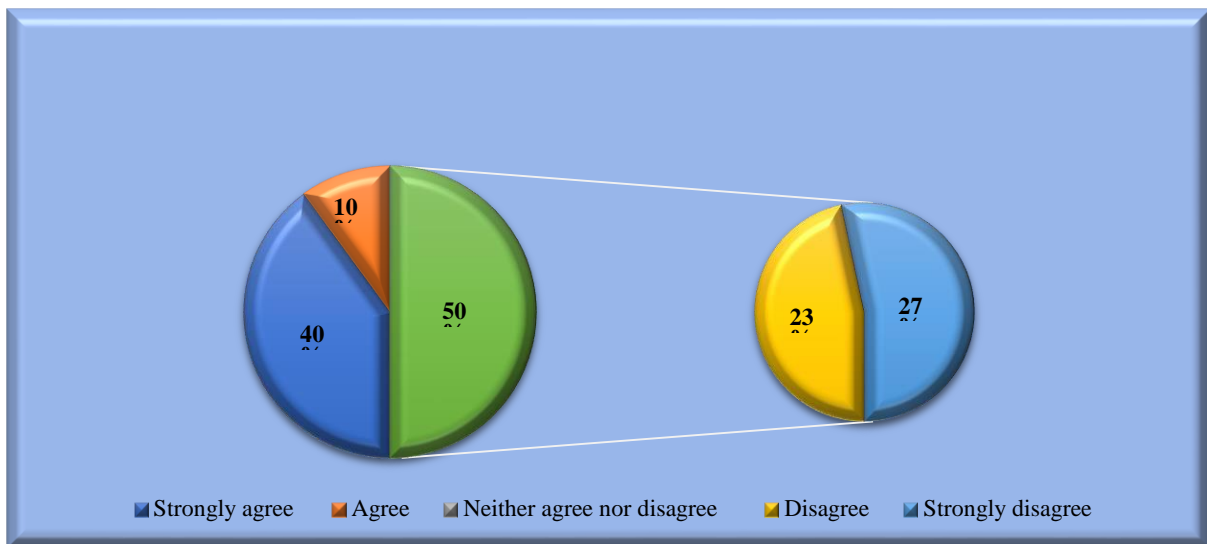


Figure 5: Hypothesis 5: Some individuals have experienced involvement in multiple road accidents within the past five years

The findings underscore the significant impact of irregular activities committed by minibus taxi drivers on public transport passengers, which lead to fatalities and serious injuries. Moreover, the study highlights the shortcomings in the effectiveness of traffic law enforcement officers in fulfilling their

official duties, which exacerbates road safety concerns. Furthermore, the study found that female passengers utilised public transport more frequently than men, which rendered them more vulnerable to road accidents. This highlights the need to raise passengers' awareness of the risks posed by public transport drivers' behaviour. Additionally, the research indicates that public transport drivers are cognisant of the consequences of their irregular activities; however, the pressure of meeting daily targets often conflicts with adherence to road rules and regulations. The findings emphasise the urgency of addressing these gaps in awareness and enhancing enforcement measures to improve road safety in the public transport sector.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study provide a detailed examination of public transport passengers' perceptions of drivers, confirming and contrasting the conclusions drawn in the existing literature. This study confirmed several findings from previous research. Passengers often perceive drivers as uncivil, disagreeable, inconsiderate, and irresponsible, aligning with the findings of Fobosi.<sup>17</sup> The perception of drivers as aggressive and impatient also aligns with the conclusions of Finley et al. and Alonso et al.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the data collected confirmed that passengers are concerned about drivers' disregard for traffic laws and aggressive driving behaviour, which exacerbate travel problems and contribute to road safety risks. These findings are consistent with international studies by Finley et al., which also reported concerns about driver behaviour impacting safety and reliability.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the study corroborated the concern about some drivers who operate vehicles under the influence of alcohol or narcotics, a significant safety risk highlighted in earlier studies. While many findings aligned with existing literature, there were some contrasts. Unlike Finley et al., who found that UK passengers perceive bus drivers as polite but stressed primarily due to punctuality pressures, the respondents in Pretoria did not cite stress as a significant factor influencing driver behaviour.<sup>20</sup> This discrepancy may be attributed to differences in urban transport dynamics and operational pressures between the regions. Additionally, in smaller cities in the US, drivers were often seen as friendly and helpful, whereas the respondents in this study primarily reported negative interactions.<sup>21</sup>

This contrast underscores the unique socio-economic and operational challenges faced by minibus taxi drivers in South Africa compared to their counterparts in smaller US cities. The synthesis of findings underscores the widespread nature of concerns related to public transport drivers across different regions. Despite geographical and cultural differences, common themes, such as perceptions of drivers as aggressive, inconsiderate, and sometimes operating under unsafe conditions emerge. These studies collectively highlight the critical need for addressing driver behaviour to improve the overall safety and experience for public transport passengers. Understanding passenger perceptions of drivers and their impact on road safety within the minibus taxi industry in Pretoria, Gauteng province, is essential. By exploring the intricacies of driver-passenger interactions and the role they play in contributing to safety risks, this study aims to formulate effective interventions to enhance safety in the minibus taxi industry. Addressing these perceptions and behaviours is crucial to mitigating the risks faced by passengers and road users alike, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of improving road safety and reducing fatalities in South Africa.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The South African transportation landscape, particularly the minibus taxi industry, faces significant challenges that impact both passenger safety and overall service quality. In light of these challenges, this study presents the following recommendations aimed at addressing key issues and enhancing efficiency, safety, and welfare in the public transportation sector:

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<sup>17</sup> Fobosi, "Road Ahead: Setting The Basis For A Transformed Minibus Taxi Industry In South Africa."

<sup>18</sup> Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It-Phase 1"; Alonso et al., "Driving under the Influence of Alcohol: Frequency, Reasons, Perceived Risk and Punishment."

<sup>19</sup> Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It-Phase 1."

<sup>20</sup> Finley et al., "Understanding Aggressive Driving and Ways to Reduce It-Phase 1."

<sup>21</sup> Sheykhfar et al., "How Do Driving Behavior and Attitudes toward Road Safety Vary between Developed and Developing Countries? Evidence from Iran and the Netherlands."

- Professionalising the minibus taxi industry by implementing a star-rated certificate of competence for taxi drivers that verifies their training in customer service.
- Awareness campaigns should be conducted to underscore the importance of quality service provision in the taxi industry.
- A review of the remuneration strategy for NTP law enforcement officers. Enhancing employee remuneration systems to support organisational objectives will ensure a skilled and motivated workforce and effective reward practices can foster employee loyalty and performance.
- Establish an organisation dedicated to passenger interests in the taxi industry. This entity would advocate for and defend passengers' rights, address issues of abuse, and ensure passenger welfare. Pilot projects should be initiated by relevant authorities and stakeholders to assess feasibility and effectiveness.
- Implement an upskilling programme to centralise traffic law enforcement nationwide. Develop and implement an upskilling programme aimed at standardising training across provinces and municipal traffic departments. Introduce a curriculum aligned with National Qualifications Framework standards to ensure consistency.
- Review employment conditions to boost minibus taxi driver morale. The Department of Employment and Labour, in collaboration with the Department of Transport, should address the working conditions at minibus taxi ranks and ensure that fair labour practices are implemented.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and formal workshops targeting minibus taxi drivers. Beyond traditional driver education, training programmes should be tailored to address specific issues identified in the study to improve driver behaviour and road safety. These initiatives should be informed by data gathered during the study to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insight into challenges that stem from public transport passengers' perceptions of drivers, particularly within the context of the minibus taxi industry in South Africa. The findings underscore the serious consequences of irregular activities committed by minibus taxi drivers, which lead to road fatalities and pose significant risks to passenger safety. These challenges are compounded by various factors, including working conditions and oversight issues faced by minibus taxi drivers. A notable aspect highlighted by this study is the imbalance in representation between passengers and taxi drivers, with passengers lacking a vocal advocate to address their concerns. Additionally, the absence of structured training in customer service for taxi drivers contributes to suboptimal interactions with passengers. Moving forward, addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from stakeholders across the transportation sector. Implementing measures to professionalise the minibus taxi industry, such as introducing training programmes for drivers and establishing advocacy organisations for passengers, can help to improve road safety and enhance passenger welfare. By addressing the root causes identified in this study, the various stakeholders can work towards creating a safer and more efficient public transportation system in South Africa.

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