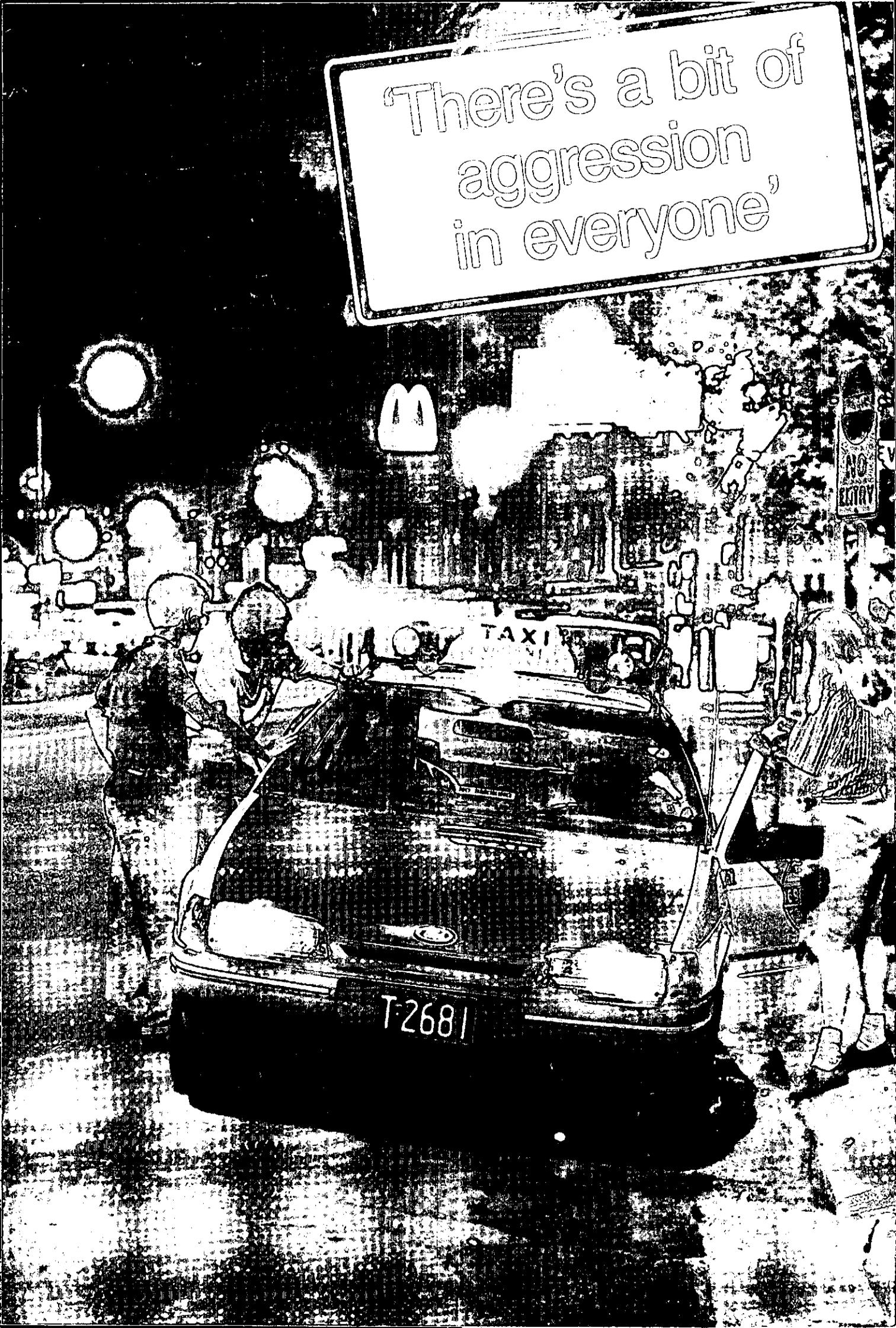


'There's a bit of aggression in everyone'



'There's a little bit of aggression in all of us':

Aggressive Behaviour by Taxi Passengers

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Preface

This study of passenger aggression in the taxi industry represents a fortunate combination of private enterprise and social research. In particular, it reflects the concern of taxi industry representatives to develop and enhance their industry. Betterment of the industry includes making taxi transportation a safer and more pleasant experience for passengers and drivers alike.

The study also represents the commitment of the Australian Institute of Criminology to the reduction of aggression inflicted upon public contact workers in particular and violence in the workplace generally.

Undertakings such as this do not reach fruition without the support and assistance of many people. It is a regrettable fact of life that many people who contribute to the pursuit of worthwhile causes do not always receive their just acknowledgement. However, it is possible to mention a number of persons who have variously helped, inspired and otherwise contributed positively to this project. John Bowe, President, Australian Taxi Industry Association and Robert Morrow, Chairman, New South Wales Taxi Industry Council, were both early supporters of the project. Ken Lambert, erstwhile Secretary, Australian Taxi Industry Association, was the industry's helpful liaison officer to the study. Pat Maguire, Aerial Taxi Co-operative, Canberra, went out of his way to help Anita Scandia, the Institute's field director, to acquire a close understanding of the social reality of a taxi driver's life. Jack Kagan, Executive Director, Victorian Taxi Association kindly critiqued an earlier version of this report. Similarly, in Newcastle, Noel Sanderson, training officer, Newcastle Taxi Co-operative, also went to great lengths to assist the project. Bruce Chisholm, Manager, Newcastle Taxi Co-operative, kindly made available the facilities of his office to the research, and made previously collected incident data available. Ivan Skaines, Research Officer with The Hunter Valley Research Foundation provided helpful background information on numerous aspects of Newcastle.

It is appropriate too, to recognise the pioneering work of researchers at London's Tavistock Institute in the area of client aggression. In particular, the efforts of Barry Poyner, Caroline Warne, Robin Meakins and Barry Webb deserve recognition.

The assistance of Francois Debaecker and John Walker, both of the Australian Institute of Criminology, with computing and charting is also

gratefully acknowledged by the authors. John Walker also undertook a pre-publication review of this report as part of the study's fault control process. The authors are most grateful to him for this service. Lavinia Hill's expertise with her word processor magically reduced apparently indecipherable drafts into ordered typescript. Her contribution to the final product is beyond measure.

Any errors or other deficiencies remaining in the wake of such abundant support are the responsibility of the authors.

Anita Scandia, a Research Officer and the study's field director, and Bruce Swanton, Criminologist, are both staff members of the Australian Institute of Criminology's Research Division.

1. Introduction

1.1 Parties to the study

The Australian Taxi Industry Association (ATIA) is an umbrella organisation representing the interests of the taxi industry throughout Australia. ATIA essentially comprises an Executive Committee of seven annually elected members which meets periodically. The Association represents all State and Territory Taxi Associations who between them look after the interests of some 13,500 licences.

Each State and Territory possesses its own Taxi Industry Council or Association which maintains day-to-day industry responsibility within its jurisdiction. Issues of a national or supra-State nature, though, fall within ATIA's province. As driver protection is a universal concern, ATIA was considered the appropriate body to be party to this undertaking.

The Association not only approved the study but selected the field research site as well as contributing \$2,080 to the cost of the undertaking.

The Australian Institute of Criminology is a Federal statutory body operating within the portfolio of the Attorney-General. General control of the Institute rests in the hands of a joint Federal/State board of management. Day-to-day affairs of the Institute are managed by its Director, Professor Duncan Chappell.

The Institute undertakes a wide range of criminal justice and crime prevention oriented research for both public and private sector clients as well as exercising a number of statutory responsibilities. One of its particular areas of involvement is the reduction of violence in the workplace generally, and security.

1.2 Importance of taxi industry to passenger transport and tourism

The taxi industry comprises an important element of the passenger transport industry. It moves millions of passengers each year in every State and Territory. Taxis, like buses, are primarily an urban based service but they operate 24 hours a day, often when other forms of public transport are unavailable, and they play an invaluable role in each State/Territory's tourist industry. Taxi drivers are among the first citizens to be encountered by foreign tourists on arrival as well as among

the last when they depart. The taxi industry plays a role in determining satisfaction levels of departing tourists and, by extension, whether they return.

It is important for these and other reasons that the taxi industry operates as effectively as possible. As the operational end of the industry essentially comprises taxi drivers, it follows that those drivers should be as competent, satisfied and physically secure in their work as possible. Even more importantly, it is critical that taxi passengers be as satisfied with the service provided them as possible. The two goals are clearly complementary.

1.3 Purposes of the study

Broad purposes of this study are to: (1) establish the nature of passenger aggression toward taxi drivers, and (2) identify possible aggression reduction strategies for further examination by interested parties.

1.4 Cautionary note to readers

The tentative recommendations presented in the course of this study are prompted by considerations of aggression reduction only. The authors appreciate there are many other perspectives operating within the industry. Therefore, it is for industry interests and governments to consider these tentative proposals within the framework of their respective responsibilities; and, if found to possess apparent merit, further develop them.

These tentative recommendations are connected by the common element of aggression reduction and as such possess a certain cohesiveness. Readers are advised against emphasising particular issues in contexts unrelated to aggression reduction.

2. Concepts

2.1 Definition of passenger aggression

In the present context passenger aggression is taken to include any of the following behaviours, singly or in combination, imposed on a taxi driver, by passengers or potential passengers, in excess of what the driver feels to be reasonable under the circumstances:

- * rude gestures;
- * raised voice;
- * hectoring manner;
- * offensive racial, sexual, ideological or other comment directed at a driver personally;
- * questioning of a driver's honesty;
- * questioning of a driver's competence;
- * threat to inflict personal physical harm;
- * threat to inflict physical harm on others;
- * threat to complain about driver to others;
- * non-sexual physical assault, ranging from spitting to hitting, including tearing of clothing;
- * sexual assault;
- * theft from driver or taxi;
- * robbery;
- * malicious damage to taxi;
- * throwing fare; and
- * refusing to pay fare.

2.2 Relationships between passengers and drivers

Although the actual acts of aggression inflicted upon taxi drivers by passengers or potential passengers may only last seconds, such encounters are usefully viewed as processes of interaction. That is to say, both parties bring to their interaction a series of antecedent experiences. Then, in the time immediately prior to making contact, the passenger or potential passenger is placed in a particular environment whether it be on a kerb hailing passing taxis, waiting at a rank or, waiting for a previously ordered taxi to arrive. Once contact is made, an intending passenger enters the driver's environment, the taxi cab, unless immediately rejected as an aggressor or potential aggressor. The parties then remain in interaction until their shared journey is completed or otherwise terminated. On rare occasions, passenger-driver interactions are such

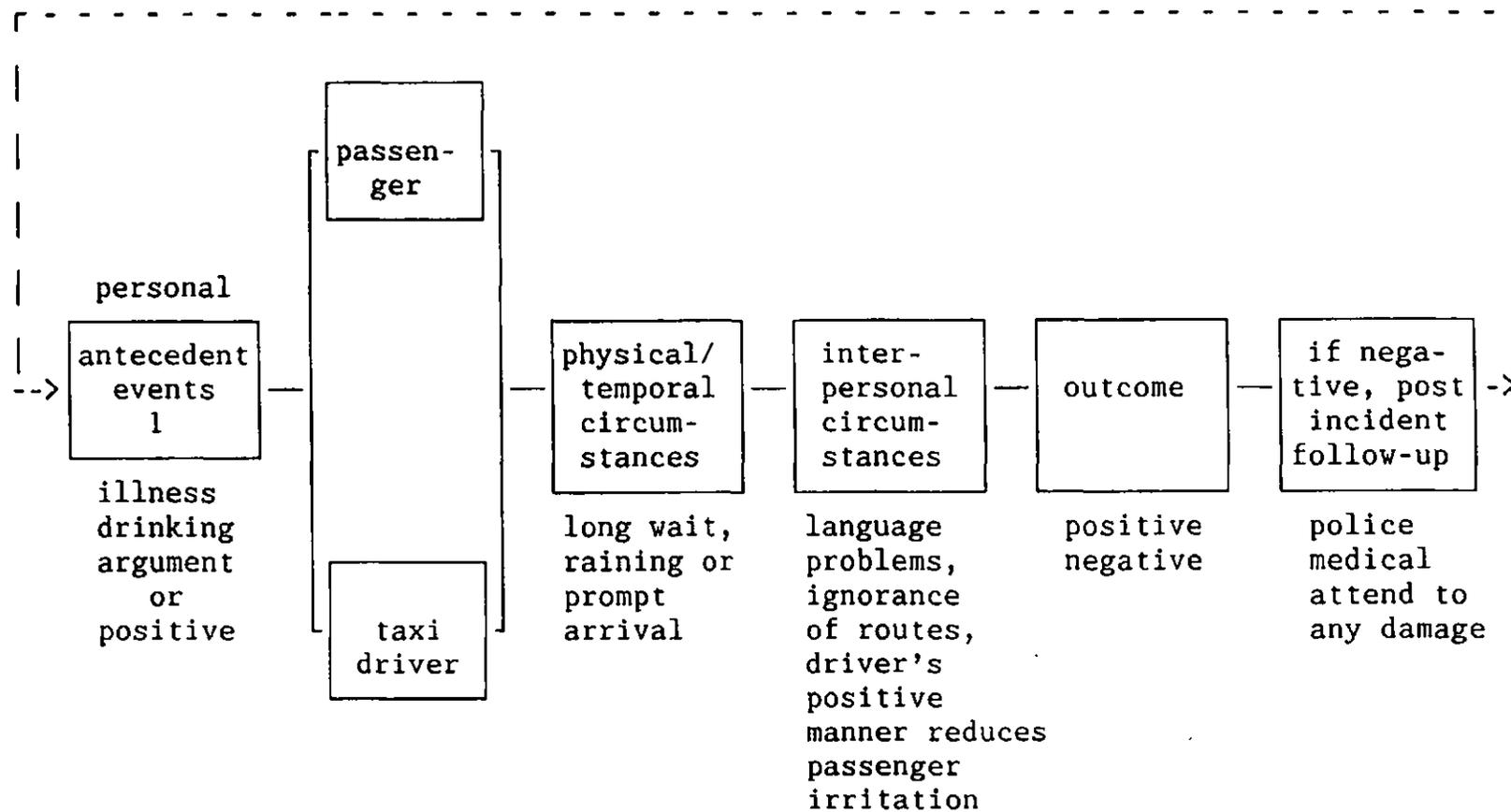
that they have consequences such as police involvement and the laying of criminal charges. In the vast majority of taxi hirings, though, no aggression is inflicted by passengers on drivers. **Only in a very small percentage of those relatively few cases in which aggression does occur, is serious violence inflicted on drivers.** However, serious violence, including murder, does not have to occur frequently in order to be viewed as a serious risk by drivers.

It needs to be understood that both passengers and drivers influence the quality of their interaction, not just passengers. Thus, discourteous or incompetent taxi drivers are capable of irritating their passengers to the extent they respond aggressively. Similarly, it is conceivable courteous and competent taxi drivers are capable of improving the temper of initially aggressive passengers. The influence taxi drivers exert in relation to their own victimisation warrants close attention because, in terms of remedial strategies, greatest scope for improving interpersonal skills clearly lies with them.

Each element of driver/passenger interaction warrants examination within an aggression reduction framework. The interactive process, graphically reproduced in the form of a flow chart at Figure 1, is helpful in this process. The approach has particular value in providing a framework for the systematic identification of possible reductive measures as well as for trainers faced with the task of explaining the nature of passenger aggression to student taxi drivers.

This study adopts a combination of micro (interviewing) and macro (surveying) methods to gain an understanding of the reality of relations between taxi drivers and their passengers. Tentative proposals for aggression reduction were identified in the course of this combination of approaches. They, in turn, need to be considered by interested parties and where thought to possess potential, carefully researched. The initiatives discussed at Chapter 6 appear to possess potential to positively influence passenger/driver conflict. **But, their validity needs to be considered in greater depth, within the policy contexts of interested parties and, also within the context of strategies already under way in particular States.**

Figure 1: Process Flow of Taxi Driver-Passenger Interaction



(After Poyner and Warne of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London.)

3. Location

Field research associated with this study was conducted in Newcastle, although some driver interviews were undertaken on an opportunity basis in Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, Canberra and Melbourne.

3.1 Newcastle

Newcastle is an industrial city situated 171 km north of Sydney, New South Wales, located in the sub-tropical climatic zone with maritime influences playing an important role in all aspects of climate. September to November is the driest part of the year. Newcastle experiences a cool, gusty winter due to the influence of strong westerly winds, which have their origins in the depression of the roaring 40s. Average rainfall for the year is 1076.8 mm (Hunter Valley Research Foundation 1989, p. 5).

Newcastle possesses an estimated urban population of 256,000 people. The city originated as a small garrison and prison settlement in the early 1800s. In 1823 Newcastle was declared a free town and the fledgling convict settlement was moved to a new outpost 240 km away. With the growth of agriculture and the discovery of high-grade coal in the area, and the building of rail links to Sydney and major port facilities, Newcastle has become a major industrial and commercial centre with one of the largest ports in Australia (*see* King 1963, and Hunter Valley Research Foundation 1989). The Port of Newcastle has an annual export coal loading capacity of about 38 million t. Overseas coal exports through the Port in 1987-88 amounted to 30.1 million t (Hunter Valley Research Foundation 1989, p. 23).

Newcastle is much more than a commercial centre for heavy industry, business and agriculture. With spectacular coastline and beautiful beaches within minutes of the city centre and its close proximity to the Hunter Valley, one of Australia's major wine producing areas, Newcastle is a popular tourist destination.

3.2 Taxi Services Co-Operative Limited

The ATIA chose Newcastle for two reasons: Newcastle has only one taxi service, a co-operative, which would make access to drivers that much easier instead of having to liaise with several private taxi companies; and equally importantly, Taxi Services Co-Operative (Co-op) management keep records, including incident reports of fare evasion, assaults, robbery

and damage to taxis. ATIA believed the information would provide a suitable base on which to conduct the study.

The Co-op was incorporated as a co-operative in December 1964. In 1965 107 taxis were associated with the Co-op. As at 14 November 1989 the Co-op had 130 members and 151 associated taxis. Included in the fleet of 151 taxis were four special purpose taxis, owned by the Co-op, designed for the transport of passengers in wheelchairs. The affairs of the Co-op are controlled by a Board of Directors comprising seven members who meet monthly. The Co-op is administered by a Manager who is responsible to the Board.

All taxis are fitted with two-way radios incorporating a vehicle identification and driver alarm system. The equipment which was purchased in 1980 utilises three frequencies. The co-op's radio room operates 24 hours a day seven days a week. During the year ended 30 June 1989, radio room staff 'issued' 1,505,373 taxi hirings, an average 28,949 hirings per week, and 197 hirings per car per week (excluding special purpose taxis). Taxis complete on average 50 hirings a day each. The average passenger load per hiring is 1.3 persons. An estimated 9,800 passengers are transported by taxis in the Newcastle transport district each 24-hours totalling some 3,582,475 per year. The co-op therefore provides a significant contribution to the public transport system in the Newcastle region.

3.3 Public transport in Newcastle

Other modes of public transport in the Newcastle region are bus, train and ferry. The Newcastle bus system (State Transit) for the year ending 30 June 1988 had 15,353,000 passenger journeys. The Newcastle to Stockton ferry (also State Transit) for the same period had 564,000 passenger journeys. Stockton is also accessible by private car and taxi. Trains (State Rail) within the Newcastle transport district carry on average 58,000 passengers a week or 3,016,000 per year. A recent study by the Department of Planning revealed that less than 10 per cent of all week-day trips in Newcastle were made on public transport. Like most parts of Australia the area is strongly car-oriented as a means of transport (New South Wales Department of Planning 1989, p. 34).

4. Research Design

4.1 Timeframe

The study commenced 18 April 1989 and terminated 2 December 1989. Apportionment of time during that period was approximately: (1) eight weeks orientation, instrument design and piloting, (2) 16 weeks data collection, and (3) eight weeks analysis and write up. Real life is never quite that simple, of course, and some variation became necessary.

4.2 Data collection

A variety of means were utilised to obtain required data. They included:

- * retrospective questionnaires submitted by taxi drivers (Annex A);
- * focused interviews with taxi drivers (Annex B); and
- * consumer comment (Annex C).

Retrospective questionnaires and consumer comment were obtained exclusively from Newcastle sources. However, 16 of the 68 focused interviews with taxi drivers occurred outside Newcastle, that is, five each in Adelaide and Perth, three in Tasmania, two in Melbourne and one in Canberra.

4.3 Questionnaires

Six hundred and fifty retrospective questionnaires were distributed, one to each Newcastle taxi driver working at the time of the study. To ensure confidentiality, an addressed envelope accompanied each instrument. Two hundred completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 31 per cent.

The retrospective questionnaire was intended to obtain a broad picture of the reality of a taxi driver's life from an aggression perspective. It was to be completed by all drivers, whether or not they experienced aggression as defined. In this way it was proposed to determine not only the incidence of aggression experienced overall by the taxi driver population of Newcastle but also identify pertinent demographic and social variables.

A prospective questionnaire designed to report aggression experienced by drivers over a three-month period during the study was also distributed. Data from this second instrument would have provided an opportunity to

determine current rates of passenger aggression. Unfortunately, the response rate to the second questionnaire was so poor the resulting data could not be utilised. The poor response was not predicated on low levels of aggression experienced by drivers but, according to sources, a combination of apathy and a reluctance to reveal information which might subject respondents to criticism or risk their income being questioned. Clearly, with respect to the prospective instrument, which was more detailed than the retrospective questionnaire, promises of confidentiality by the researchers were not accepted. This experience should be noted by other researchers operating in the workplace violence field. These comments should in no way be seen as a reflection against the staff of the Newcastle Taxi Co-operative who encouraged drivers to participate in the study.

Consumer views were difficult to obtain and after some trial and error involving participant observation and kerbside interviews, it was decided to invite comment through the media. Accordingly, a brief item explaining the nature of the study and including a questionnaire was published in the *Newcastle Star* on two days one week apart. The authors acknowledge with gratitude the support provided by the *Newcastle Star* in this regard. A total of 62 completed questionnaires were returned from a total newspaper distribution of 106,215, plus a number of supporting letters. A *Star* journalist noted that the response was 'average' for that newspaper.

5. Nature and Incidence of Passenger Aggression

5.1 Driver sample profile

Males comprised 85.5 per cent ($n = 171$) of respondents to the retrospective taxi driver survey, 13 per cent ($n = 26$) were female. There were three cases of unknown gender.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Persons	Age											
	20-24		25-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		Over 60	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Males	4	2.3	13	7.6	38	22.2	47	27.5	52	30.4	17	9.9
Females	1	3.8	1	3.8	4	15.4	17	65.4	3	11.5	-	-
Persons	5	2.5	14	7.1	42	21.3	64	32.5	55	27.9	17	8.6

Owner-drivers made up 46 per cent ($n = 92$) of respondents. That is to say, they were part or sole owners of the taxis they drove, and 54 per cent ($n = 108$) were non-owner drivers. Non-owner drivers generally work full-time on fixed shifts, permanent part-time or on a casual basis.

Ages of respondents ranged from early 20s to over 60 years. Of respondents, 2.5 per cent ($n = 5$) were in the 20-24 year age group, 7 per cent ($n = 14$) of drivers were aged between 25 and 29 years, and 21 per cent ($n = 42$) of drivers fell into the 30 to 39 year age group. The largest group, comprising 32 per cent ($n = 64$) of the achieved sample, represented drivers in their 40s. And, a further 27.5 per cent ($n = 55$) were in their 50s. Drivers aged 60 years or more made up 8.5 per cent ($n = 17$) of the sample, while the ages of 1.5 per cent ($n = 3$) are unknown.

Rather more than one-half of the drivers, 63.5 per cent ($n = 127$), worked full-time and the remainder operated part-time. Total hours worked each week by drivers varied enormously. A few, 2.5 per cent ($n = 5$), reported they drove in excess of 80 hours a week; 16.5 per cent ($n = 33$) worked between 60 and 80 hours a week, and 40.5 per cent ($n = 81$) of drivers worked the most common hours of between 40 and 60 a week. Many of these drivers worked five 12-hour shifts a week, a common

condition in the industry. A further 40.5 per cent (n = 81) of drivers drove fewer than 40 hours a week.

Table 2: Driver Sample Profile

Persons	Age											
	20-24		25-29		30-39		40-49		50-59		Over 60	
	No.	%	No.	%								
Own or part own taxi:												
Yes	2	40.0	3	21.4	16	38.1	36	56.3	31	56.4	3	17.6
No	3	60.0	11	78.6	26	61.9	28	43.8	24	43.6	14	82.4
Work full or part-time:												
Full-time	2	40.0	8	57.1	26	61.9	43	67.2	39	70.9	6	35.3
Part-time	3	60.0	6	42.9	16	38.1	21	32.8	16	29.1	11	64.7
Hours worked per week:												
Under 20 hours	1	20.0	4	28.6	5	11.9	13	20.3	9	16.4	5	29.4
20-40 hours	2	40.0	4	28.6	9	21.4	10	15.6	14	25.5	5	29.4
40-60 hours	2	40.0	2	14.3	20	47.6	27	42.2	23	41.8	6	35.3
60-80 hours	-	-	4	28.6	6	14.3	12	18.8	8	14.5	1	5.9
Over 80 hours	-	-	-	-	2	4.8	2	3.1	1	1.8	-	-
Years as a driver												
Under 12 months	-	-	-	-	3	7.1	1	1.6	1	1.8	-	-
1-2 years	4	80.0	3	21.4	6	14.3	7	10.9	1	1.8	-	-
2-5 years	1	20.0	9	64.3	6	14.3	7	10.9	6	10.9	3	17.6
6-10 years	-	-	1	7.1	7	16.7	17	26.6	7	12.7	3	17.6
11-20 years	-	-	-	-	17	40.5	23	35.9	18	32.7	5	29.4
21-30 years	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	12.5	16	29.1	2	11.8
31-40 years	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	9.1	2	11.8
41 years & over	-	-	1	7.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5.9
No answer	-	-	-	-	3	7.1	1	1.6	1	1.8	1	5.9

Note: The sample was obtained from 200 persons (171 males, 26 females). For this Table, three persons have been excluded as neither gender nor age were specified.

Of respondents, 13.5 per cent (n = 27) possessed fewer than two years experience. Another 16.5 per cent (n = 33) of drivers had between two and five years experience. Of the remaining drivers, 18 per cent (n = 36) had driven taxis for between six and 10 years, 31.5 per cent (n = 63) from 11 to 20 years and 17.5 per cent (n = 35) for more than 20 years. The experience of 3 per cent (n = 6) of drivers was unknown.

5.2 Robbery/assault

A total of 123 assaults were reported by 26.5 per cent ($n = 53$) of respondents, that is, actual strikings, in the course of their taxi driving careers, 12 per cent of which reported being assaulted more than once, whereas 72.5 per cent ($n = 145$) of drivers had not been assaulted. The experience of 1 per cent ($n = 2$) of drivers is not known.

Further, 14.5 per cent ($n = 29$) of the achieved sample reported a total of 65 robberies during the course of their taxi driving careers, seven per cent of which reported being robbed more than once. Of the sample, 85 per cent ($n = 171$) had not been robbed.

As measured in this survey, the assault rate inflicted on taxi drivers for the year 1987-1988 was 10382.5 per 100,000. The equivalent assault rate in relation to the resident population of Newcastle for the same year was 365.76 per 100,000 and for the resident population of New South Wales was 368.99 per 100,000 population (New South Wales Police *Annual Report* 1987/88). These data suggest that in relation to the year in question, at least, respondent taxi drivers (comprising mostly males over the age of 19 years) collectively experienced 28 times the risk of non-sexual assault suffered by the community generally (comprising males and females of all ages).

The robbery rate inflicted on members of the achieved sample for that same year, 1987-88, was approximately 5464.5 per 100,000 taxi drivers. The robbery rate, based on cases reported or known to police, for the resident population of New South Wales for the same year was 81.91 per 100,000. That is to say, the robbery rate experienced by the respondent taxi drivers qua taxi drivers, was roughly 66.7 times that prevailing in the community at large as measured by police records. Robberies committed on taxi drivers throughout New South Wales in 1985-86, in fact, amounted to 2 per cent of all reported robberies (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1986).

A number of the assaults and robberies discussed here were not reported to police because it was variously thought police would take no action in the case of a report being made to them and/or earning time would be lost. A similar attitude is also held by many taxi drivers with regard to fare evasions.

The sorts of victimisations discussed here are not peculiar to taxi drivers. There is a number of occupations in which workers who interact with the

public are subjected to violence. Occupationally-specific violence of this type is a matter of concern for all affected (Swanton 1989).

5.3 Relevance of experience

The received wisdom of the taxi industry posits that experience is an important factor in reducing drivers' vulnerability to robbery and assault. This study supports that view although some caution is necessary inasmuch as an unknown proportion of drivers graduate over the years from more hazardous evening shifts to generally less hazardous day shifts.

The incidence of assaults on respondent drivers is graphed at Figure 2 against years of experience. The declining curve revealed by the graph clearly supports the hypothesis that assaults on taxi drivers reduce in aggregate with experience. The curve in question suggests a 2 per cent decline per year of experience. That the correlation is not statistically greater is due to the fact that assaults are random events, many of which are not influenced by factors such as experience, and that part of the graph is based on relatively small numbers of incidents. Correct interpretation of the trend is also complicated by the retrospective nature of the data, which relate only to *current* drivers. It can be assumed that drivers who are assaulted or robbed are less likely to continue as taxi drivers, so that the most experienced drivers in our sample will be those *less* likely than average to have been victimised in their careers. The graph therefore cannot be interpreted as showing that an individual driver will necessarily be 2 per cent safer each year he continues to drive. Apart from the effects of the dropout rate caused by assault/robbery trauma, the trend may be influenced by overall trends in recent years in the frequency of these types of incidents. Unfortunately, the additional data required to identify the relative strengths of each of these three interpretations of Figure 2 were impossible to obtain.

A somewhat similar pattern was observed with regard to robbery. The data are graphed at Figure 3. The ratio of robberies to experience suggests there may be an average 4.9 per cent decline in robberies inflicted per year of experience, but the same problems of interpretation apply.

Figure 2: Average Number of Assaults per Year per 100 Drivers by Years of Driving Career

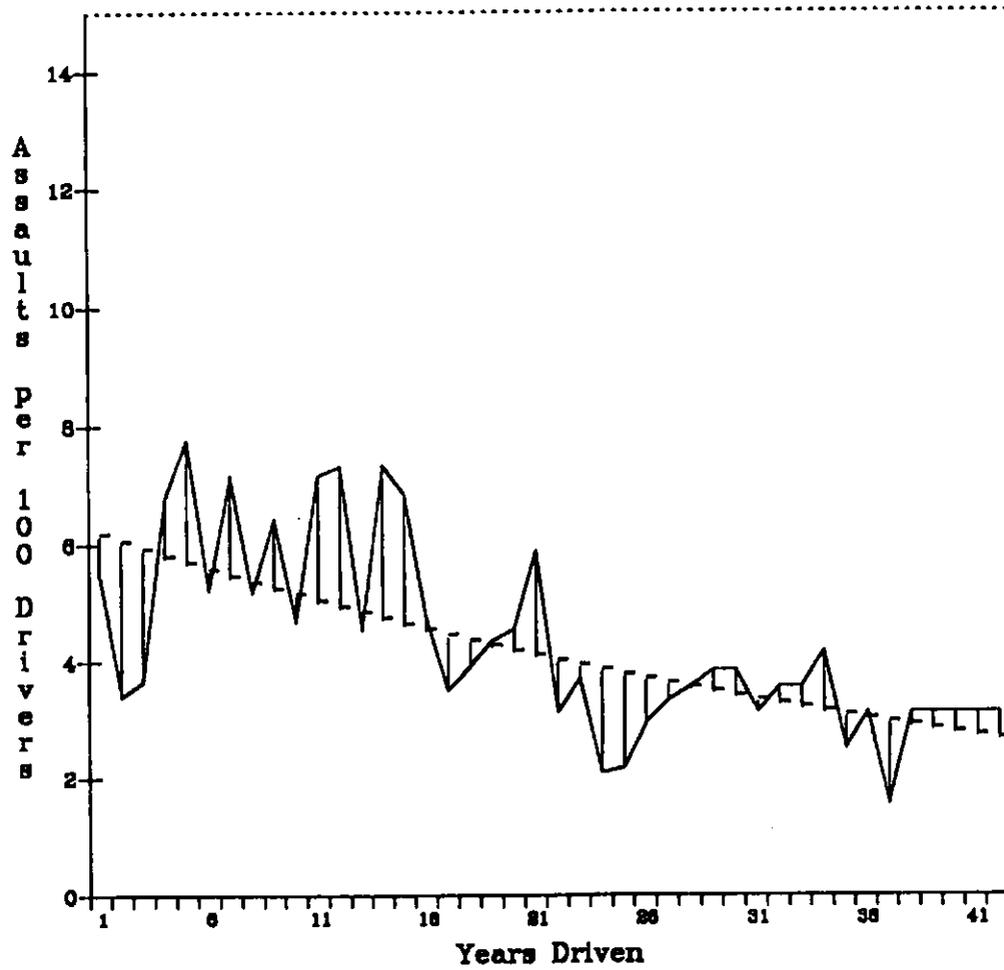
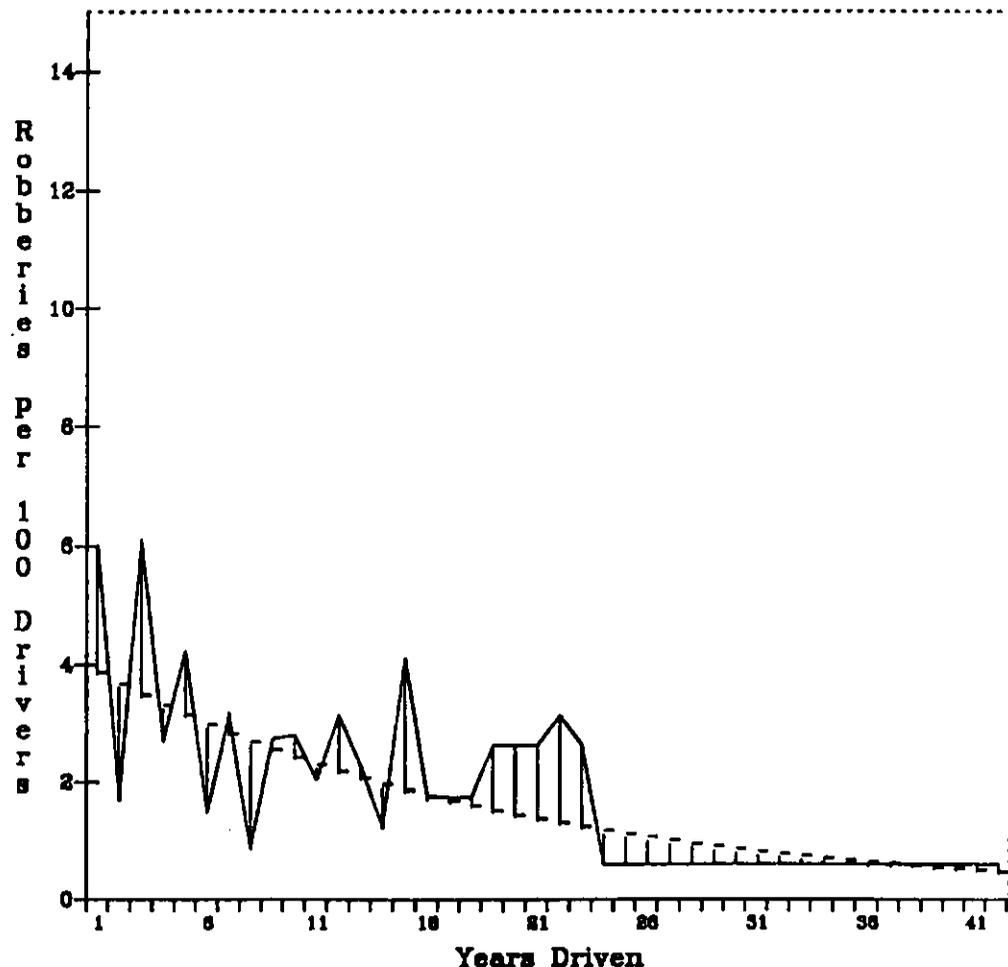


Figure 3: Average Number of Robberies per Year per 100 Drivers by Years of Driving Career



5.4 Grounds for caution

Ninety per cent ($n = 180$) of respondents acknowledged they exercised caution in respect of certain types of passengers and intending passengers. Passengers considered most likely to prove dangerous were said to be those under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, according to 72.5 per cent ($n = 145$) drivers. Only 11.8 per cent ($n = 8$) respondents identified young people in particular as being aggressive.

Of the sample of drivers interviewed, 55.9 per cent ($n = 38$) considered Friday and Saturday nights produced greater numbers of aggressive passengers. These two nights are commonly associated with greater alcohol consumption in the community generally and it was clear most

drivers assume a close association between intoxication and aggression. Only 16.2 per cent (n = 11) of interviewed drivers considered events such as Christmas and New Year's Eve, football games, rock concerts and race meetings, occasions popularly assumed to involve higher than normal levels of alcoholic indulgence, as producing greater than normal passenger aggression.

Of taxi drivers interviewed in Newcastle, 32.4 per cent (n = 22) identified the west end of Hunter Street as the prime source of aggressive passengers. The problem was said to occur mostly in the early hours of Saturday and Sunday mornings, as the various licensed premises in the neighbourhood close.

Last buses depart the area at 3.00 a.m. and those patrons who do not catch a bus or have their own transport are largely reliant on taxi transportation. Another 25 per cent (n = 17) of Newcastle-interviewed drivers nominated hotels and nightclubs generally as prime sources of aggressive passengers. In fact, a considerable number of Newcastle's licensed premises are located at the west end of Hunter Street. Thus, in excess of one-half of the interviewed drivers were of the view that drinking and, by implication, drinking for sustained periods, is strongly associated with violence. Persons engaging in such behaviour are mostly aged under 35 years. It is observed that a substantial proportion of owner drivers confine themselves to driving day shifts and thus do not encounter the sorts of conditions outlined here. Were it not for this fact, the proportion of drivers holding this view would probably be far higher.

The study's field director accompanied a Newcastle taxi driver one Friday night shift. Participant observation is particularly difficult to implement in vehicles as small as taxis as it is impossible for an observer (other than a driver) to be unobtrusive. In such circumstances it would be reasonable to expect the presence of an additional female in a taxi to have a calming influence but within minutes of arriving in the west end district the taxi driver in question was twice abused by intending passengers whilst searching for his telephone booked fare. Persons requiring transportation were not tolerant of the taxi booking system, aggressively demanding they be permitted to engage already ordered taxis. A majority of passengers or potential passengers encountered during the field director's four-hour tour were affected by alcohol, aggressive in their manner and unreasonable in their demands. Failure on the part of the driver to ignore regulations, such as accepting more than the prescribed number of passengers, was rewarded with abuse.

The driver exercised caution the entire time he was in the west end area but was still the recipient of abuse. One particular problem was posed by persons desperate to hail a taxi, jumping in front of the moving vehicle, arms flailing. When the taxi did not stop or did so only in order to avoid an accident, the driver was abused by the disappointed intending passengers.

The driver in question possessed nine years experience and informed the researcher that he rarely encountered 'problems' with passengers, regardless of their degree of inebriation. He operated on a basis of a pleasant and conciliatory manner. The point is an interesting one because the driver in question quite clearly experienced a good deal of lower level aggression, such as oral abuse and threatening gestures, but elected to ignore it. It was thus not perceived by him as a 'problem' or, even, as low level aggression. His social skills were sufficient, at least to date, to have protected him from more serious aggression. Many taxi drivers, like other public contact workers, develop an emotional shell which protects them from irritations associated with lower level aggression as defined at Section 2. This policy of personal desensitisation makes it difficult to assess the full measure of aggression inflicted upon taxi drivers.

There was a widely held perception (62 per cent, n = 124) among respondent drivers that aggression in their workplace is increasing. Owner drivers were well represented in this number with 67.7 per cent (n = 63) of their number believing passenger aggression was on the increase. Even so, a trifle over one-third (34.5 per cent, n = 69) of respondent drivers felt the level of violence was static. Only 1.5 per cent (n = 3) thought a decrease had occurred. Violence reports held by the taxi co-operative suggest a fairly constant level of aggression by passengers but these data refer to the more serious instances and do not closely reflect the situation with regard to lower levels of aggression.

While owner-drivers generally work less violent shifts than non-owner drivers their predominant view that violence in the workplace was increasing is nevertheless very similar to those who work the more violent shifts. This is attributed to the fact that it is their taxis which are constantly put at risk and also that the casual drivers who drive for them share their day-to-day experiences with them and they are thus kept well informed with the realities of the workplace.

Table 3: Violence Reports Submitted to the Newcastle Taxi Co-Operative Limited

	Assault	Robbery
1982	3	0
1984	3	1
1985	2	0
1986	7	0
1987	3	0
1988	4	2
1989	2	1
Total	24	4

It was stated by 39 per cent (n = 78) of respondent drivers that the commonest form of passenger aggression was violent shouting/swearing/offensive gestures. Assault and threatening behaviour was seen as the next most common form of aggression according to 15 per cent (n = 30) of drivers. Damage to taxis (5 per cent, n = 10), fare evasion (4 per cent, n = 8) and robbery (3.5 per cent, n = 7) were among the least frequently inflicted aggressive behaviours.

Of the personally interviewed drivers, 75 per cent (n = 51) expressed concern with passenger aggression. Of that number a little under one-quarter (22.1 per cent) expressed high concern, about one-third (32.4 per cent) experienced medium concern and 20.6 per cent ranked their concern as low.

Physical attacks, whether or not accompanied by robbery, were the most feared form of passenger aggression according to interviewed drivers (27.7 per cent, n = 18). However, instances of violent swearing, shouting and gesticulation also ranked high in terms of unpleasantness.

5.5 Reduction of aggression

When asked to recommend measures for reducing passenger aggression, some respondent drivers implicitly recognised the difficulty of modifying passenger behaviour directly. Thus, 20.5 per cent (n = 41) of respondent drivers felt driver attitudes played the most important role in shaping passenger aggression. Stiffer fines and other court imposed penalties were thought to be the most effective approach by 12.5 per cent (n = 25)

of drivers. Another 12 per cent ($n = 24$) of respondents considered the solution to passenger aggression lies through physical modification of taxis, including screen partitions, internal locking devices and a steel plate inserted in the backrest of drivers' seats.

A relatively small proportion of respondent drivers thought indirect approaches to passenger aggression reduction possessed greatest potential. The implementation of publicity campaigns aimed at informing the public of the rights of taxi drivers and explaining the difficulties of a taxi driver's professional life was assumed by only 9 per cent ($n = 18$) of drivers to be a useful move. Some 4.5 per cent ($n = 9$) of drivers considered increasing the minimum drinking age might be helpful. Another 4.5 per cent thought prepayment of fares would contribute to a solution, while 3 per cent ($n = 6$) wanted a greater police presence as a deterrent to aggressive passengers generally. It was suggested by 4 per cent ($n = 8$) of drivers that drivers not pick up obviously drunk or otherwise drug affected persons.

Rather higher percentages of interviewed drivers supported some of the remedies raised by drivers responding to the questionnaire discussed above. For example, 32.4 per cent ($n = 22$) of interviewed drivers thought change of attitudes by drivers was central to passenger aggression reduction. Similarly, 20.6 per cent ($n = 14$) of interviewed drivers felt physical modification of taxis was an important protection measure. These few discrepancies suggest the interactive nature of interviewing stimulates subjects and encourages them to be more forthcoming.

Informal discussions with taxi drivers indicate that a central area of driver dissatisfaction is fare evasion and that they believed mandatory prepayment of fares was the only remedial approach likely to bear significant fruit. This behaviour appears to be perceived by drivers as a serious form of passenger aggression but, is not strongly reflected in their formal responses. Perhaps an element of embarrassment acts as an inhibitor in cases where subjects are required to indicate their responses in writing as opposed to simply verbalising them.

Rumours exist within the taxi driver community and the print media of drivers carrying weapons for their own protection. Weapons favoured, if the rumours are to be believed, range from shotguns to clubs. Some late-shift taxi drivers in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra informally told one of the researchers of the weapons carried by themselves and colleagues. Weapon carrying practices provide a clear index of taxi drivers' fear of physical danger when on the road. Of the drivers formally interviewed in

the course of this study, 79.4 per cent (n = 54) claimed to carry no form of personal protection. One driver did not volunteer a response and 19.1 per cent (n = 13) of drivers admitted to carrying a weapon. All but one of the admitted weapon carriers claimed to keep a club-like device close to them; the exception stated he carried a knife. The proportion of weapon carriers suggests fear of assault and/or robbery was not high among the sample but, when one takes into account a natural reluctance to admit to such practices, maybe the carriage of weapons and fear of assault is higher in practice than reported.

5.6 Training and development

Interviewed drivers were asked their views concerning driver training and development. Almost one-half of drivers (42.6 per cent, n = 29) replied that they thought training tools should be updated and training time increased. The inclusion in training programs of advice on dealing with difficult and aggressive passengers was thought desirable by 19.1 per cent (n = 13) of drivers. Taxi driver training varies considerably from location to location and thus care should be exercised in generalising from this finding. The only mandatory element at the present time in New South Wales is the viewing of an instructional videotape produced for the Taxi Council of New South Wales.

5.7 Newspaper questionnaire

The questionnaire inserted on two occasions in a Newcastle newspaper apparently elicited responses from a narrow range of taxi users. Comments appended to returns indicate many respondents were age pensioners, persons dependent on taxi transport and frequent users thereof during daylight hours rather than those used to desperately hailing taxis at 3.00 am at the west end of Hunter Street. Of the respondents, 91.9 per cent (n = 57) used taxis more than five times a year and were well acquainted with the Newcastle Taxi Co-op's performance. In short, the questionnaire attracted respondents who were basically satisfied with the service provided.

Comment was almost uniformly positive, reporting that drivers were variously: helpful; friendly; polite; considerate; tidy and drove satisfactorily. A phone-in conducted by radio station 2KO during the course of the study's data collection produced similar results. The only negative note sounded was with respect to punctuality, in which 24.6 per cent (n = 14) of newspaper questionnaire respondents identified lateness

of telephone booked taxis as a negative factor. However, no suggestions were forthcoming concerning possible remedies for this perceived defect.

5.8 Summary

The various issues touched upon above are summarised as follows:

- * approximately one-quarter of respondents to the retrospective questionnaire reported having been assaulted during the course of their driving careers (*see p. 12*);
- * approximately 12 per cent of respondents had been assaulted more than once (*see p. 12*);
- * approximately 14.5 per cent of responding drivers had been robbed during the course of their driving careers (*see p. 12*);
- * approximately 7 per cent of responding drivers had been robbed more than once during their driving careers (*see p. 12*);
- * responding taxi drivers were assaulted at a rate considerably higher than that obtaining in both Newcastle and the general population of New South Wales (*see p. 12*);
- * responding taxi drivers were robbed at a considerably higher rate than that obtaining in both Newcastle and the general population of New South Wales (*see p. 12*);
- * some assaults, robberies and fare evasions were not reported to police in the expectation that little would be achieved and that earning time would be lost to no purpose (*see p. 12*);
- * the more experienced of the responding taxi drivers had suffered relatively fewer assaults than the less experienced (*see p. 13*);
- * most responding taxi drivers exercised caution with regard to certain types of passengers and intending passengers (*see p. 16*);
- * the category of passenger considered most likely to cause trouble was young, intoxicated males (*see p. 16*);
- * Friday and Saturday nights were considered the most dangerous shifts to work (*see p. 16*);

- * a majority of respondent drivers considered passenger aggression to be increasing, although this finding was not supported by incident reports submitted to management (*see p. 17*);
- * the commonest form of passenger aggression experienced was that of shouting/swearing/offensive gestures (*see p. 18*);
- * three-quarters of interviewed drivers professed concern with the problem of passenger aggression (*see p. 18*);
- * physical attacks were the most feared form of passenger aggression (*see p. 18*);
- * opinion was divided concerning measures likely to reduce passenger aggression, the most favoured measure was a conciliatory manner (*see p. 19*);
- * physical modification of taxis was thought to be important by a minority of drivers (*see p. 19*);
- * authority to demand pre-payment of fare from passengers suspected of being likely to not pay the fare at their destination was widely considered essential as a counter to fare evasion (*see p. 19*);
- * approximately one-fifth of interviewed drivers acknowledged carrying a weapon for self defence (*see p. 20*);
- * almost one-half of interviewed drivers considered they would benefit from increased training (*see p. 20*); and
- * consumer respondents rated the Newcastle Taxi Co-operative very highly (*see p. 20*).

6. Prevention

6.1 Issues relative to prevention

Issues relative to the prevention or reduction of taxi passenger aggression fall into a number of discrete categories. These categories in turn divide into three classes. The first class covers those matters pertaining to the industry itself: (1) image, (2) effectiveness, and (3) taxi ranks. The second class concerns issues associated directly with drivers: (1) driver development, (2) quality control, and (3) English comprehension. The third class of recommendations is confined to protective measures in the form of: (1) hardware/technology, (2) driver discretion, and (3) external approaches.

These various issues are discussed in the following text and reduced to explicit but tentative proposals. Although some proposals are phrased in general terms and others are expressed specifically, and despite the fact that some proposals are direct while others are indirect, they are all intended to contribute to the reduction of passenger aggression. It is recognised, of course, that some of the following tentative proposals are already in place in some jurisdictions.

A factor borne constantly in mind during the formulation of these various proposals was that of cost. Taxi owners, like most other small business owners, are already faced with high overheads and any increase in those costs not only cuts into already slim margins but may deter others from entering the industry. On the other hand, the taxi industry, along with all others, has to develop in order not to decline. There are no steady state options realistically available in today's marketplace. Thus, the authors have opted for a long-term, developmental mind set in framing the following tentative proposals. **It is a matter for the industry itself and its regulating bodies to determine financial and other limits to safety within the broader frameworks of industry economics and driver development generally.**

These proposals mostly either originated with taxi drivers or are modifications of ideas raised by passengers. That is to say, they are essentially products of the taxi industry itself and of its consumers.

The various tentative proposals presented below are necessarily expressed in undetailed terms. The aim of this study has been to identify aggression reduction possibilities **not** to research them in detail. It is for

the various interests involved in the taxi industry to engage in further research in areas considered acceptable and then operationalise those proposals considered worthy of implementation.

Responsibility for rejection, modification or acceptance of these proposals rests with several interests: Federal/State taxi industry councils, government regulating bodies and taxi owners. One option will be to publish and distribute this report to all interested parties and let events take their course. Those attracted by particular proposals in such a case would be left to their own devices as to how they pursue them. Alternatively, State taxi industry councils might wish to appoint committees to review the tentative proposals presented here, identify those considered feasible and develop strategies for their development and possible implementation.

6.2 Industry

Although passengers and drivers are obviously the prime elements of passenger on driver aggression, the industry as a whole also bears some responsibility. Three aspects of industry involvement are discussed below.

6.2.1 Industry image

An industry's image is thought to be determined for the most part by two principal factors: (1) quality of product, and (2) public perception of product quality. Ideally, advertising is employed to enhance consumers' perceptions of an already sound product or service. Advertising of a flawed product is unlikely to be successful in the long term, although it can be successful in the short term during which time remedial efforts can be attempted.

It is thought improved public attitudes to the taxi industry generally would flow over into improved attitudes to taxi drivers. The relationship would clearly not be one to one as some passengers who behave aggressively toward taxi drivers are intoxicated at the time and are therefore less than fully rational.

Improved public attitudes toward the taxi industry can be promoted in two ways. First, at the State/Territory level, advertising could promote the view that taxis provide flexible and efficient passenger transport, and that they are driven by caring, helpful people. A variant of this approach favoured by some

drivers is public promotion of the rights of taxi drivers in order to increase their credibility in the travelling public's eyes. The possibility exists that the variant, if implemented simultaneously with promotion of the industry as a positive enterprise, might be inconsistent in tenor and thus self defeating. Research would be necessary to establish the point. The option exists to promote drivers' rights independent of industry promotion, of course.

A supporting activity might be an annual function, perhaps a formal dinner, to promote the taxi industry in a particular jurisdiction. The Premier and relevant Minister could be invited and awards made to prime movers in the industry, including that of taxi driver of the year. Media attention to such an event could be considerable.

The second approach is to encourage a strong brand image. It is thought probable increased brand loyalty would not only increase business but also conduce to generally improved passenger attitudes to taxi drivers.

The first approach is clearly the responsibility of State taxi bodies or, even, the national body. The second lies in the hands of individual companies and co-operatives.

The assumption that improved industry and brand images will result in generally improved passenger attitudes to drivers is untested and given the high cost of advertising would need to be first ascertained. It is recognised advertising possesses benefits for the industry in addition to those posited here and may be undertaken for those other reasons alone.

With these various caveats in mind it is tentatively proposed that:

State taxi industry councils investigate the possibility of pilot advertising campaigns aimed at promoting an image of taxis as providing flexible and efficient public transport, the taxis being driven by caring, responsible and positive men and women; and

metropolitan taxi companies/co-operatives investigate the possibility of pilot advertising campaigns aimed at creating strong brand images.

Comment: Careful assessment of pilot programs would provide necessary guidance as to whether such strategies are likely to be cost effective, and so justify the expenditure full-scale campaigning would incur. The countering of fare evasion could also be subtly addressed in such promotions.

6.2.2 Effectiveness

A criticism not infrequently made in metropolitan areas is that some taxi drivers lack comprehensive local knowledge of routes and locations. From time to time unlicensed drivers are detected and it is safe to assume there are a number who are not detected. It seems probable this element contributes substantially to such criticisms.

Area knowledge tests at some locations are inadequate inasmuch as they fail to exhaustively test applicants' knowledge of the area in respect of which they are expected to operate. Such testing should be rigorous, including components for: (1) streets, (2) suburbs, (3) locations of tourist and other interest, (4) traffic flows, and (5) taxi ranks.

In light of these observations, it is tentatively proposed that:

comprehensive area knowledge testing be made mandatory in respect of all applicants for taxi drivers' licences; and

Comment: While implementation of such a proposal lies with the various State/Territory governments, it also possess implications for the various industry bodies in terms of the content and structure of introductory training courses for intending taxi drivers.

It is not unusual for a radio-tasked taxi to arrive at a passenger pick up point but not know the intending hirer's name or other identifying information. While this lack of information poses few problems at private dwellings and hotels, it does sometimes create difficulty at entrances to large buildings and/or offices where more than one intending passenger is waiting. Sometimes several waiting persons will claim the same cab or someone will take someone else's taxi. It can be irritating to hirers on asking a driver, 'Are you for Jones?', for example, to be told, 'I don't know,

I was told to pick up at the Jolimont Centre.' Inasmuch as irritation contributes directly to much of the aggression exercised against taxi drivers, it should be avoided at all costs.

The most common reason for radio-tasked drivers not knowing their intending hirer's identity is that some despatchers transmit information rapidly and accuracy checking or querying by drivers is not encouraged. It is desirable this practice be modified where occurring, so that drivers can clearly grasp information directed to them.

It is thus tentatively proposed that:

taxi taskings by voice be despatched at a pace consistent with driver comprehension.

Comment: It is recognised the industry is inevitably moving toward computer-aided despatch, a condition which will eventually eliminate the problem of poor despatching.

However, there is an interim period in an industry which possesses a high proportion of workers for whom English is a second language. Companies/co-operatives still utilising voice despatchers need to assist modification of despatcher styles where problems exist. Change will not be easy to effect and may require the assistance of industrial psychologists.

Taxis, like police, are said by some consumers to never be available when needed. This assertion is, of course, a gross exaggeration. Nevertheless, it does flag a continuing problem facing the industry. That is, matching the number of taxis on the road to fluctuating passenger demand.

There are few experiences more irritating than to be in the middle of a strange city with limited time to get to the airport, for example, and with not a taxi to be found. It is difficult for individual taxi companies to marshal their resources so as to provide a close match with consumer demand. Demand has short-term peaks and troughs while drivers work 10 and 12 hour shifts. Peaks occur not only in the course of a day but also over the course of a week. For instance, there is a considerably greater

kerbside demand for taxis in some metropolitan areas on Friday and Saturday evenings than, say, on Monday or Tuesday evenings. It is appreciated that certain experiences, such as sudden rainstorm, will always throw the best laid plans into chaos.

One reason contributing to shortage of taxis on the road may be due to downtime of taxis from either accident or maintenance. This disability could be avoided by State taxi regulatory bodies permitting owners of such vehicles to place alternative vehicles on the road for hire.

It seems desirable that government bodies regulating the taxi industry accept part of the responsibility for matching resources to demand. This is particularly important in the various metropolitan areas where at times substantial inconvenience to passengers (many of whom are tourists) occurs in this respect. The problem is complex, involving numbers of taxi licences, numbers of licensed drivers and rostering.

Greater taxi availability associates with shorter journey times. Shorter journey times are possible in those urban areas possessing dedicated bus lanes by authorising taxis to use such lanes. Bus lanes are massively underutilised by buses and there is no rational argument against their use by taxis.

It is also possible that difficulties experienced in obtaining taxis derive in part at least from the inexperience of intending passengers.

It is therefore tentatively proposed that:

government bodies responsible for regulating taxi transportation investigate the problem of matching taxis on the road to consumer demand and develop solutions;

relevant government bodies authorise the use of bus lanes by taxis; and

taxi industry bodies undertake public education programs instructing citizens as to the best means of obtaining taxi transportation in particular areas.

Comment: Close co-operation between government bodies responsible for regulating the taxi industry and the industry itself will be necessary to achieve closer matching of taxi numbers on the road to consumer demand. By placing responsibility on government, of course, potential for intra-industry conflict should be reduced.

It should be noted the problem is not solely one of issuing a 'sufficient' number of taxi plates whatever that number might be. It also involves ensuring sufficient vehicles are on the road at all times, thus the proposal concerning utilisation of alternative vehicles. Some casual drivers suggest higher rates of pay would rapidly solve the problem.

Modified taxi licences might involve modification of driver entry requirements.

6.2.3 Taxi ranks

Taxi ranks are an integral part of the taxi industry. They are the industry's equivalent to a bus stop. Quite often, intending hirers wait at taxi ranks at times when other forms of transportation are not available. A long wait at a taxi rank on a cold, wet night, and with no means of informing a taxi company of one's presence, is calculated to intensely annoy the mildest of patrons.

Some taxi ranks are placed on the kerbs of city streets and need little embellishment other than a sign indicating their presence. However, some major taxi ranks are in need of development. Major taxi ranks are defined as those ranks catering to more than 100 passengers a day through at least 12 of the 24 hours.

There are times, too, when taxi rank patrons can be unruly, such as when night clubs turn out in the early hours of the morning. In such cases, it is probably wise to reduce the concentration of intoxicated hirers by providing more than one rank.

The question of electronic surveillance by means of CCTV might be considered in respect of ranks known for unruly client behaviour, architecture permitting. Monitoring might be undertaken at a local security company control room and disturbances advised to police.

Thus, in the interests of customer comfort and equanimity it is tentatively proposed that:

joint consideration be given by taxi industry bodies, government regulatory bodies, local governments and other concerned parties, to upgrading selected major taxi ranks. Improvements to include, where not already existing:

- * *seats,*
 - * *overhead cover,*
 - * *line forming rails,*
 - * *lighting,*
 - * *direct telephone line to a taxi company where appropriate,*
 - * *where necessary, marshals/inspectors to ensure order.*
 - * *where necessary and possible, surveillance cameras.*
- and;

in the vicinities of clustered hotels and night clubs, at least two taxi ranks (preferably not in view of each other) be established so as to decrease the concentration of intoxicated intending passengers at any one rank immediately following closing times.

Comment: It is recognised considerable costs are involved in the kind of taxi rank upgrading proposed here. However, local governments and commercial bodies should be able to make land available in some cases. Tourist promotion funds and service clubs might well contribute to construction costs. A regulatory presence at such facilities should be encouraged at peak times. A sign reading 'rank under surveillance at all times' might also be usefully employed at some taxi ranks.

A major point to be borne in mind is that the taxi industry is a vital element of the public transportation industry. In particular, it makes an important contribution to the tourist industry. Upgraded taxi ranks are part and parcel of the community's total effort to support the tourist industry.

Objections might be raised to the notion of having a direct telephone line to a taxi company at selected ranks, including: the difficulty of ensuring callers use only the booked taxi and not other vehicles that might arrive ahead of the ordered vehicle; the

difficulty of ensuring other consumers do not take a taxi ordered by someone else; the difficulty of charging a hiring surcharge from a taxi rank. However none of these protests provide compelling grounds for not providing direct telephone lines. Should local rules be necessary, a sign detailing them could be displayed.

Not only does having two taxi ranks in the vicinity of hotels and night clubs divide the numbers of taxi patrons at any one rank but, in those cases where median strips are located, there is the added convenience of having taxis capable of travelling in either direction without the need for U turns. Experience at some locations possessing taxi ranks in close proximity are best placed out of line of sight in order to avoid trouble-makers switching between the two immediately following hotel and night club closing times.

A regrettable added cost to rank up-grading might be that of vandalism.

6.3 Drivers

Drivers are the essence of the taxi industry, its most valuable resource. The success or failure of the industry largely rests upon their shoulders. It makes sound sense, therefore, to develop those drivers so as to ensure optimal performance. Sound performance equals better satisfied consumers. Better satisfied passengers must surely conduce to lower levels of aggression imposed on taxi drivers.

6.3.1 Driver development

Driver development possesses two principal facets: (1) those initiatives aimed at enabling drivers to improve their personal performance, and (2) those aimed at enforcing standards.

Driver training is an important aspect of staff development and the emphasis placed on the subject varies from company to company and, jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is recognised, too, that training places a personal load on full-time drivers most of whom work long hours. It reduces the attractiveness of the industry to some prospective recruits as well as increasing costs. Further, a considerable proportion of the industry's drivers are part-timers. Additional training possesses even less attractiveness to them.

Thus, it is easier for governments to consider some aspects of taxi driver training than the industry itself. Needs of the taxi industry generally and the tourist industry in particular suggest government regulatory agencies reconsider their minimum standards for taxi driver training. In particular, it is tentatively proposed that:

taxi driver introductory training consist of not less than 70 hours full-time approved instruction comprising:

- * *legislation,*
- * *locality knowledge,*
- * *rates/meter operation,*
- * *area knowledge,*
- * *customer service skills,*
- * *psychology,*
- * *role of taxi industry,*
- * *on-job training,*
- * *small business management,*
- * *special needs passengers;*

approved driver refresher training be undertaken at least twice in each five year period and that completion be endorsed on attendees' licences; and that renewal of taxi drivers' licences be made dependent upon possession of those endorsements; and

both portal and refresher training be conducted at government accredited institutions wherever possible.

Comment: It is widely recognised among taxi drivers that the single greatest protective measure they can take is to be pleasant to passengers and alert to the cues they provide. There are important fields of customer service skills and passenger psychology to be mastered by drivers and which are critical to reduction of passenger aggression toward drivers.

Procedures and technology peculiar to individual companies/co-operatives are naturally addressed when a new driver commences employment with an organisation. In addition to formal TAFE-provided induction and refresher training it is desirable individual companies/co-operatives encourage development of their regular

drivers. This is not easily undertaken. Many regular drivers are part-timers and might not welcome the prospect of having to invest further time in upgrading their skills. Full-timers, mostly working very long hours, have little time to invest in such development anyway. Time and inclination to assume additional work-related tasks are likely to be in short supply. Nevertheless, it is both desirable and possible to provide driver development material without being intrusive. It is therefore tentatively proposed that:

individual taxi companies encourage driver development through provision of:

- * *videotapes.*
- * *audiotapes (which can be played in taxis).*
- * *pamphlets. and*
- * *items placed in company magazines.*

6.3.2 Quality control

There have been a few instances in recent years in which taxi drivers have behaved in unacceptable, even criminal, ways. Some form of screening, in addition to a criminal history check, is thought desirable to ensure that persons accepted for portal training are suited to the industry. As a minimum, referees should be checked and an interview conducted. The proactive exclusion of undesirable types will contribute to the industry's image and should contribute to the reduction of passenger aggression. These measures should be undertaken by taxi industry regulatory bodies.

Clear powers need to be provided for the de-licensing of taxi drivers who offend in ways inconsistent with the safety and dignity of passengers.

Although the competence of taxi drivers is vital to the image of the taxi and tourist industries, as well as the reduction of passenger aggression, appearances are no less critical.

One person's understanding of what is acceptable in terms of cab hygiene is not necessarily another's. It is desirable minimum standards of driver grooming and taxi hygiene be established by State taxi industry regulatory bodies. Dirty taxis, in particular, are

liable to irritate passengers to the point of aggression. Thus, it is tentatively proposed that:

State government taxi industry regulatory bodies undertake covert inspections aimed at detecting undesirable behaviour by drivers;

State government taxi industry regulatory bodies review screening procedures and entry criteria for prospective taxi drivers, including implementation of mandatory selection interviews;

State government taxi industry regulatory bodies provide legislative authority for the de-licensing of taxi drivers who seriously offend against the dignity and safety of passengers;

State government taxi industry regulatory bodies establish grooming codes for taxi drivers, with respect to both appearance and apparel and, hygiene standards for taxis;
and

State government taxi industry regulatory bodies undertake both overt and covert inspections of drivers and their taxis with regard to grooming and hygiene standards. Taxi driver licences, which are required to be displayed in most jurisdictions, should be inspected at the same time in order to detect unlicensed drivers.

Comment: One industry suggestion is that screening bodies might usefully comprise selected company/co-operative training officers but there are, obviously, other options. Provision would be necessary in some States to provide such bodies with information concerning the criminal history or otherwise of applicants.

Vigorous testing programs of drivers and taxis in respect of both hygiene and grooming are essential to the well-being of the industry. Many drivers advocate a uniform and, indeed, some companies/co-operatives do have uniforms for optional wear. Well-designed company livery, preferably neat but casual, can contribute positively to a company's/co-operative's brand image. It is for that reason a State-wide livery is not advocated. However, State-wide standards are desirable in respect of hygiene and grooming generally and for that reason company/co-operative

compliance officers are contra-indicated. A clear policy of prosecuting repeated infringement of hygiene and grooming codes is highly desirable.

6.3.3 English comprehension

Some passenger aggression inflicted on taxi drivers stems from poor communications. An unknown proportion of the total of poor communications is associated with drivers not possessing sufficient English comprehension to understand directions given them by passengers. As a result, passengers cannot make themselves understood and/or are taken to places other than their required destination.

Care must be taken to ensure migrants are not unfairly discriminated against in our society but, the ability to speak and understand basic English is essential in an industry such as the taxi industry.

Thus, it is tentatively proposed that:

a condition of being granted a taxi driver's licence is that the holder possesses sufficient knowledge of the English language to be able to perform his or her duties satisfactorily.

Comment: This proposal clearly implies the introduction of an oral English comprehension test by taxi driver licence testing authorities.

6.4 Protection

Protection of drivers falls into three categories: (1) hardware/technology, (2) discretion to behave in certain ways, and (3) external approaches.

6.4.1 Hardware/technology

Driver attitudes to protection, either by separate compartment or by means of a polycarbonate screen, are divided. The ideal, at least in physical terms, is for taxi drivers to be placed in a separate compartment. A number of London-style taxis, which separate driver from passenger, are said to be operating in Sydney although

it is recognised they are employed as multiple purpose vehicles. In terms of passenger aggression reduction, this might be the way to go, although there is a social price to be paid. Both local and international experience indicates safety screens are not popular with many drivers and that even when installed do not remain in place for long. To be effective, of course, the installation of full-width screens requires that front seat passengers be excluded unless the screen is of a wrap-around design.

As a broad principle, it is desirable owners and drivers be permitted to exercise their discretion in matters affecting their well-being. But, given the particular nature of violence and, despite its low incidence overall, its unpredictability, thought could usefully be given to establishing industry minimum standards concerning taxi drivers' safety in each State/Territory.

There is an economic price attached to importing purpose-built vehicles. The eight year taxi life limit presently applying in New South Wales makes that economic price even more costly. In the interests of driver protection, consideration might be given to removing import duty/sales tax on purpose-built taxis.

The question of security screens and associated driver protection measures is a vexed one. Quite clearly not all the answers are yet in. In particular, further and more rigorous research is necessary into the economics of screens/purpose-built vehicles, etc. as well as the social and physiological needs of drivers in a variety of climatic and geographic conditions. Such matters are clearly beyond the scope of this paper.

Another important aspect of safety is the signalling of alarms. At present, most taxis are normally in radio contact with their base and alarms can be given via the radio. However, such alarms do not guarantee a rapid response as a taxi's precise location is not always known. One desirable additional safety factor is to provide for a coloured external domelight (not flashing) to be activated at the same time a radio or digital alarm is signalled. Such a light would be sighted (particularly at night) by other taxis and police vehicles in the vicinity. Such an alarm would be silent and should not disturb an offender or a suspected offender. Associated technologies that will become commercially available in at least some areas in the near future are vehicle location devices and miniature surveillance cameras suitable for in-taxi operation.

The problem of some taxi drivers lacking adequate area knowledge has already been touched upon. Technology can be utilised to reduce the problem and therefore the irritation experienced by passengers in respect of unknowledgeable drivers. The technology in question is computerised maps. Such maps will eventually become available by means of computer-aided despatch.

For all these reasons it is tentatively proposed that:

State taxi industry councils investigate the possibility of establishing minimum driver safety standards, including fleet purchase of purpose-built vehicles and/or installation of polycarbonate screens; and

consideration be given by taxi companies/co-operatives and taxi owners to fitting their vehicles with dome lights to be activated simultaneously with transmission of radio or digital alarms;

Comment: These proposed refinements all involve additional cost to taxi industry groups. Co-operative structures makes fleet discounts difficult to achieve, although there is potential for the industry generally to explore a variety of industry options with major vehicle manufacturers.

The installation of alarm lights could be in the form of a minor modification to taxis' 'for hire' signs.

6.4.2 Driver discretion

A fastened seat belt can place taxi drivers at extreme disadvantage if they are attacked or otherwise need to exit their vehicle in a hurry. Thus, a discretion not to wear seat belts should be accorded taxi drivers in those jurisdictions which do not already exclude taxi drivers from the provisions of their seat belt laws.

A rather different perspective is placed on protection when considering non-payment of taxi fares. It is not an uncommon experience for taxi drivers to have passengers decamp at their destination without paying the fare. It would be reasonable in all jurisdictions to make formal provision authorising taxi drivers to

demand pre-payment in those cases in which they have reason to suspect a passenger either has no money or will refuse to pay at the end of the journey.

It is thus tentatively proposed that:

State/Territory governments make formal provision (where not already existing) to permit taxi drivers to exercise their discretion whether to fasten their safety belt when driving with a passenger; and

State/Territory governments make formal provision (where not already existing) for taxi drivers to demand pre-payment when they have reason to suspect their passenger either has insufficient money to pay his or her fare or will decline payment at destination.

Comment: Few jurisdictions exclude taxi drivers operating in the course of their business from seat belt laws. Where such is the case, care needs to be taken that the law is not altered to require compliance. Many taxi drivers religiously fasten their seat belts at all times. It is desirable, though, that they be permitted the discretion not to do so. In so doing, of course, they make their own decisions concerning the competing risks of possible injury resulting from unfastened seat belts in the event of an accident.

6.4.3 External approaches

A widespread complaint among east coast taxi drivers is that police do not take seriously their complaints of fare evasion or aggressive behaviour by passengers. Police officers, they claim, generally do not understand the relevant law and, in any case, almost invariably try to pass such complaints off as purely civil matters. Taxi drivers feel that if their complaints were taken more seriously by police, fewer persons would evade fares and/or be unnecessarily aggressive toward them. Thus, it is proposed that:

State taxi industry councils approach police authorities within their respective jurisdictions, encouraging police officers generally to take formal action when presented with complaints made to them by taxi drivers.

Comment: One aspect of the liaison recommended here would be to suggest to police authorities that recruit and patrol officers' courses be modified to take note of aggression inflicted on taxi drivers and the problem of fare evasion. Local initiatives aimed at strengthening rapport between street police officers and taxi drivers might prove beneficial. For example, community police officers could be invited to visit company garages at shift change times, taxi industry officials could liaise with police officials at the district level and, using credit facilities, community police officers could be encouraged to occasionally travel by taxi in the course of their duties.

The problem of passenger aggression, as well as other safety considerations, has to be addressed in an ongoing fashion, not episodically. Drivers generally can be expected to take better care of themselves and their vehicles, and provide improved service in the process, when they see managements, industry councils and governments are sincerely interested in and actively concerned with such matters.

Mechanisms can be designed and implemented within the various jurisdictions to inter alia monitor acts of aggression inflicted on taxi drivers, collate incident data and, even, actively promote safety consciousness and customer service skills by means of publications distributed throughout the industry.

It is therefore tentatively proposed that:

State taxi industry councils consider the possibility of creating (where not already in place), safety committees. Such committees to -

- * *monitor passenger aggression toward drivers generally,*
- * *arrange incident data collection systems,*
- * *collate such data,*
- * *provide periodic reports to owners and drivers on safety issues, including aggression, and*
- * *prepare advisory printed materials concerning safety and customer service.*

Comment: Measures such as these create additional administrative loads for the industry but are justified on the grounds of improved customer service and the opportunity created to identify negative trends at an early stage. Safety committees might even undertake the exploration of trends or the investigation of particular occurrences where it is thought benefits will result. Cases in which police inexplicably fail to take action or in which prosecution fails to attract an acceptable penalty are cases in point and which safety committees might profitably investigate.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the number of physical assaults on taxi drivers do not appear to be high in an absolute sense. However, some assaults are extremely serious and firm steps need to be taken to reduce their incidence. An important principle of crime prevention is to make criminal behaviours as unattractive to offenders as possible. Rewards are generally considered an ineffective means of identifying offenders but, on occasion they prove successful. Thus, in respect of particular assaults or fare evasions which are not quickly cleared by police, thought might be paid to offering rewards for information leading to the identification and/or conviction of offenders.

Thus, it is tentatively proposed that:

State taxi industry councils/individual taxi companies/co-operatives consider the posting of rewards in respect of particular offences committed on taxi drivers.

Comment: Rewards require publicity if they are to be successful and publicity can result in 'copycat' behaviour. Therefore, careful consideration of possible advantages and disadvantages is necessary in all such instances. However, an aggressive but well-promoted policy aimed at bringing offenders against taxi drivers to justice could provide a disincentive to some offenders.

There is a view held by some taxi drivers that low penalties imposed on assailants and fare evaders, on the relatively few occasions such matters reach the courts, fail to provide a

disincentive. Such drivers argue stiffer penalties are necessary if the incidence of offending against taxi drivers is to be reduced. The relationship between offending behaviour and punishment is tenuous at best but, nevertheless, cannot be ignored entirely. Certainly the taxi industry has the right to put its view on such matters publicly as well as comment on what it perceives to be inadequate sanctions. Due regard needs to be paid, of course, to the possibility of adverse consequences of such strategies.

The certainty of apprehension is probably the greatest disincentive to offending against taxi drivers and, industry and company officials, as appropriate, might consider periodic operations targeting certain types of offenders, such as fare evaders. Well managed publicity associated with such operations, especially when accompanied by salutary penalties, could prove effective crime reducing stratagems in metropolitan and larger urban areas.

It is therefore proposed that:

State taxi industry councils consider their position with regard to penalties imposed on offenders against taxi drivers and making public their concern when such penalties are considered too lenient; and

State taxi industry councils/larger taxi companies/co-operatives consider the possibility of undertaking periodic high intensity offender-catching operations.

Comment: Any program of publicly expressed concern over court imposed penalties would almost certainly need to be incorporated within State-wide public relations policies. Offender-catching programs should ideally be discussed with police authorities in the first instance.

7. Conclusion

This study has concentrated on two principal elements. First, it considered the nature of aggression in the day-to-day life of taxi drivers. Second, and largely based upon the understanding gained during that earlier exercise, consideration was given to stratagems designed to reduce passenger aggression levels. The measures decided upon vary between the general and the specific, and between the direct and the indirect.

To the best extent possible, care was taken to avoid issues associated with industry economics and the regulation/deregulation debate. Inevitably, of course, various proposals may have the effect of inadvertently supporting or opposing different positions operating within the industry. To the extent such effects may have occurred they are coincidental.

In terms of the total load of aggression inflicted upon taxi drivers by their passengers, some caution requires to be exercised. Variation undoubtedly occurs between different locations. Indeed, it varies between day and night shifts. On the basis of the sample of Newcastle, New South Wales taxi drivers achieved in this study, it seems passenger aggression is commonplace late on Friday and Saturday nights. The main offenders being young, intoxicated males. At other times, aggression is a relatively uncommon event.

The commonest form of passenger aggression experienced is that of shouting, swearing and threatening. Many taxi drivers adopt a conciliatory manner designed to minimise such aggression and, when it occurs, maintain an equable manner. So expert do some drivers become in adopting this behavioural and emotional tolerance that they tend not to register low level passenger aggression when it occurs.

Even so, many taxi drivers are very sensitive to passenger abuse and dislike it intensely. Understandably, the more dangerous physical assaults are most feared.

Drivers gain experience over time and most become adept at avoiding unpleasant experiences, including passenger aggression. Generally speaking, passenger aggression peaks during the first one or two years of a taxi driver's working life. The apparent decrease in both assaults and robberies shown at Chapter 6 over drivers' careers is partly due to the fact that some of the more aggression-prone drivers decide to discontinue driving taxis for a living. Some drivers, of course, gravitate to less

hazardous day-time driving. Many do improve their customer service skills to the extent they experience less passenger aggression.

Approximately 2 per cent of all armed robberies committed in New South Wales are inflicted on taxi drivers. Members of the achieved sample collectively experienced considerably higher robbery and assault rates than occurred in the community generally.

An admittedly skewed sample of taxi service consumers reported very favourably on the level of service provided in Newcastle. This perception perhaps plays a role in the low levels of aggression experienced by drivers generally.

Many taxi drivers agree that a good deal of passenger aggression is precipitated by inept driver behaviour and there is widespread support, at least notionally, for measures designed to improve drivers' passenger handling skills.

A review of measures designed to reduce passenger imposed aggression covered a number of categories. A basic dichotomy encountered in this consideration was the distinction between aggression which is avoidable and that which is not.

With regard to unavoidable forms of passenger aggression, the most effective approach was clearly that of target hardening taxis. Possible measures considered included separate driver compartments, as with London taxi cabs, additional alarms and polycarbonate screens.

With regard to those acts of aggression which are notionally avoidable, a very wide range of remedial measures was identified. These measures fell into a number of categories, including industry image and effectiveness, driver development and quality control, and driver discretion. A further category, labelled 'external approaches', refers to measures such as the offering of rewards and offender catching operations, including the apprehension of unlicensed drivers.

Among major tentative proposals made in the long term cause of passenger aggression reduction are:

- * the necessity for drivers to be literate in English;
- * the necessity for drivers to have a good knowledge of their areas of operation;
- * the necessity for drivers to develop good inter-personal skills; and

* the necessity for both drivers and taxis to be clean and well groomed.

Probably, the most important tentative proposals are those which relate to the necessity of having sufficient taxis on the road at all times to meet demand. It is significant that the only flaw mentioned by Newcastle taxi service consumers was that of lateness, a product, one suspects, of there not always being sufficient vehicles available to meet demand.

Twenty-eight passenger aggression reduction proposals were formulated for consideration and further research by industry interests.

Finally, it is pertinent to reflect once again on the importance of the taxi industry in all States to the transportation industry as a whole and to the tourist industry in particular. The research offered in this report provides us with a better understanding of the problems faced by taxi drivers and the means by which not only passenger aggression can be reduced but also how the taxi industry can be enhanced.

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Annex A

TAXI-DRIVER SAFETY STUDY
RETROSPECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE, DRIVERS

1. How many years have you been a taxi-driver?
2. Do you drive mostly full-time or part-time? (please tick appropriate box)

 mostly full-time mostly part-time
3. Approximately how many hours do you usually work as a taxi-driver per week? (please tick appropriate box)

 under 20 hours
 20 - 40 hours
 40 - 60 hours
 60 - 80 hours
 over 80 hours
4. Do you own or part-own the taxi you drive? (please tick appropriate box)

 Yes No
5. Has anyone ever tried to rob you while driving a taxi? (please tick appropriate box)

 Yes No (go to question 6)
- 5a. Approximately how long ago was it when this **FIRST** happened?
.....
- 5b. How many times has it happened to you altogether?
.....
- 5c. When was the most **RECENT** time this happened?
.....

6. Apart from the incidents mentioned above has anyone ever assaulted you while driving a taxi? (please tick appropriate box)

Yes No (go to question 7)

6a. Approximately how long ago was it when this **FIRST** happened?

.....

6b. How many times has it happened to you altogether?

.....

6c. When was the most **RECENT** time this happened?

.....

7. Are you apprehensive in picking up certain type(s) of passenger? (please tick appropriate box)

Yes No (go to question 8)

7a. Briefly outline those types and your reasons for being apprehensive.

.....

.....

.....

8. What, in your experience, are the predominant forms of serious passenger aggression? (In this context, aggression should be taken to include robbery, assaults and other threatening behaviour you consider extreme, such as violent swearing or gestures.)

.....

.....

.....

9. Strictly in your experience, is passenger aggression on the increase, decrease or about the same? (please tick appropriate box)

increase
 decrease
 no change

10. Have you any recommendations how to best reduce passenger aggression?
If so, briefly outline below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Finally, we would like to know just a little about you so we can see how different types of drivers feel about the issues we have been examining.

11. Are you: (please tick appropriate box)

male female

12. How old are you? (please tick appropriate box)

under 20 years
 20 - 24 years
 25 - 29 years
 30 - 39 years
 40 - 49 years
 50 - 59 years
 over 60 years

13. How old were you when you first started driving?

.....

Many thanks for your co-operation. When you have completed the questionnaire could you please place it in the envelope provided, seal, and return to the Chaucer Street office.

**TAXI-DRIVER SAFETY STUDY
DRIVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

Male Female Age (approx) _____ Loc: _____

1. Has wearing a seat belt ever made it difficult for you to defend yourself or get away from an aggressive passenger?

Yes No

↓
If yes, in what way _____

2. Do you believe the law should be changed to allow taxi drivers, when carrying a passenger, the discretion to not fasten their seat belt, or not?

Yes No no opinion

3. Does the thought of passenger aggression concern you or not?

Concern Not concerned

↓
If yes, how would you rank your concern?

High Medium Low

4. What concerns you most?

5. In your opinion, do some pick-up spots (including suburbs) produce more aggressive passengers than others?

Yes No No opinion

↓
If yes, what are these destinations _____

6. In your opinion, are particular groups more aggressive than others?

Yes No No opinion

↓
If yes, which _____

Prompt if nec:

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| - Male | - Young/old | - Disco/club/bar patrons |
| - Female | - Young/old | - Ethnic groupings |
| - Drunks | - Male/female | - Football crowds |
| - Druggies | | |

7. Do you carry any form of protection whilst driving your taxi?

Yes No

↓
If yes, what _____

Prompt if nec:
-Tyre Lever, hunk of wood, base ball bat.

8. In the course of your taxi driving year do any times, periods or events stand out in terms of producing more passenger aggression?

Yes No

↓
If yes, specify _____

Prompt if nec:
-ie., Football finals, New Year, dole week, weekends.

9. Do you have any advice concerning improving the safety of taxi drivers and reducing the level of passenger aggression?

10. Do you have any views on taxi-driver training, preparation and development?

Thank you for your co-operation.
Results of the study will be available from the Institute in mid
December 1989.

Australian Taxi Industry Association

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