

Title: Coping styles and defense mechanisms in adults vicariously exposed to violent crime: An explorative study.

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DECLARATION

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this research report is the result of my own work.

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## ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research was to initiate exploratory research into the coping styles and defense mechanisms of adults vicariously exposed to violent crime. This research focused on determining the presence, nature and complexity of symptoms in those vicariously exposed to violent crime. Gaining an understanding of the coping styles and defense mechanisms that individuals who are vicariously exposed to violent crime adopt was also a central focus of this study. A psychodynamic theoretical framework was employed. Situating this research within a broader theory of coping was also necessary. Zeidner and Endler's (1996) integrative conceptual framework was used to understand the coping styles that one adopts as being both dispositional and contextual. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with seven respondents (Wengraf, 2001). Ulin et al.'s (2002) method of qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze and interpret data. Emotion-focused coping was found to be the prominent form of coping used by the respondents. It appeared that when problem-focused coping fails to alleviate the individual's anxiety, they then engage in emotion focused coping. Two forms of emotion focused coping were identified: adaptive and pathological emotion focused coping. With regards to vicarious trauma symptoms, a variety of five symptoms were evident across the transcripts. It is also necessary to emphasize that respondents experienced variable combinations of symptoms and generally did not experience all of such symptoms. It was concluded that in the presence of the vicarious exposure to violent crime, participants utilized various defense mechanism (such as: splitting, rationalization, displacement, intellectualization and suppression) which inform their coping style and their experience of symptoms of vicarious trauma.

## INTRODUCTION

In more recent years, authors have been interested in and concerned about the psychological affects of violent crime on individuals, both those directly and indirectly affected by it. Research has indicated that such exposure to violent crime may be long lasting and detrimental to the individual's psychological well-being (Allen, 2005 & Powdthavee, 2004). An existing body of literature regarding vicarious trauma focuses on the psychological impact on the mental health worker when working with traumatized individuals. Vicarious trauma in the mental health worker is said to involve various symptoms and effects on the individual (Baird, 2006; Collins and Long, 2003; Moulden, 2007). Therefore as a result of this existing body of literature, the focus of this research entailed examining the effects of vicarious exposure to violent crime in the general South African population. Literature suggests that there exist two main coping styles that individuals employ, these being emotion-focused and problem-focused coping styles (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). The scope of this research dealt with identifying and exploring the coping styles and defense mechanisms that individuals adopt in response to being exposed vicariously to violent crime via images and stories of such events depicted in the media and from hearing first hand accounts from others. Literature suggests that vicarious symptoms may develop in response to a mental health care worker's exposure to traumatic material. Therefore, a key focus of this research centered on determining the psychological effects of vicarious exposure to violent crime in the general South African population and if these symptoms are similar to those in mental health care workers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1.1 Defining Violent Crime

Violent crime can be defined as “injury on persons or property in a manner proscribed by the criminal law.” (Marsh & Campbell, 1982, p.27). Jipguep and Sanders-Phillips (2003), define violence as, “immediate or chronic situations that result in injury to the psychological, social, or physical well-being of individuals or groups.” (p.379). American author, du Toit (2001), proposed that South Africa is characterized by a “culture of violence.” (p.81). This can be said to originate from the oppressive apartheid regime and the affects thereof, which were frequently violent in nature (du Toit, 2001). Hamber (1999) argues that since the 1990’s in South Africa the term ‘culture of violence’ has been appropriately employed to describe the state of South African society. There has been a shift in the type of violence in South African society from political, state authorized violence to the violent crime that exists today. During the apartheid era violence was primarily experienced between the state and various rival political and racial groups. Taking this into account, it can be seen how social problems frequently exist as a system of connected or interrelated problems (Best, 1999; Hamber, 1999). Currently, the scenario is somewhat different. The high levels of violent crime far outweigh levels of political violence (Hamber, 1999). South Africa is reported to have very high crime rates. From 1995 to 2005 approximately 50 000 rapes and 20 000 murders a year were recorded (Kynoch, 2005). The 2005 release of South Africa’s crime statistics indicated that crime in the majority of various categories has decreased. Although various official statistics are reporting decreased crime rates in South Africa in more recent years, public perception appears to not have changed. This is suggested to be evident via the public’s level of fear and risk of victimization still being disproportionately high (The Economist, 2005).

#### 1.2 Fear and Risk of Violent Crime

Hamber (1999) suggests that an indicator of the high crime rates in South Africa can be located in individual’s subjective sense of fear of victimization. This author emphasizes

Further evidence of the impact that violent crime has on the individual in South Africa is by the methods that South African's employ out of fear to protect themselves. Research conducted by Lemanski (2006) investigated the responses to fear of crime both emotionally and physically, in Cape Town suburbs. Such physical responses included making lifestyle choices and adaptations, such as gating suburbs to improve their sense of security. Making physical changes to one's environment in order to make one feel safer is a form of problem-focused coping. This is a way in which the individual attempts to gain control of a threatening situation and therefore does so by implementing physical protective barriers to their environment (Anderson, Litzenberger & Plecas, 2002).

### 1.3 Defining Trauma

Prior to discussing the effects of indirect exposure to violent crime on the individual, it is necessary to attempt to define trauma. A specific traumatic event can be defined as those events "involving violent encounters with nature, technology or the social environment." (Hoffmann, 2002, p.48). Traumatic events are usually typified by an "external and/or sudden force, involves an external agent and can arouse intense fear." (Hoffmann, 2002, p.48). A study conducted by Miller (1999) examined the relationship between exposure to community violence and the impact on young boys. This study found that antisocial behaviour was displayed by boys exposed to community violence (Miller, 1999). Lie and Lavik (2001) investigated the psychological effects of those exposed to traumatic experiences in the form of war in a population of Bosnian and Kosovo-Albanian refugees in Norway. Many of the psychological distress symptoms that these individuals presented with met the criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Such displays of psychological distress were documented in the form of hypervigilance, nightmares and irritability (Lie & Lavik, 2001). Minkowski (1999) studied the effects of exposure to traumas (specifically war and natural disasters) on children in Bosnia, Bangladesh and Cambodia. Psychological manifestations of exposure to traumatic personal experiences were identified in the form of sleep disturbances and indications of childhood depression, for example. Hoffmann (2002) conducted a study in South Africa consisting of a population of Pretoria University students. This population reported having being directly exposed to a variety of violent crimes, ranging from rape, forced removals and to witnessing others being injured or killed. In most of the categories of violent crimes that

this study investigated, symptoms involving nightmares and intrusive thoughts were reported by the students (Hoffmann, 2002). Much literature exists with regards to the psychological affects of direct exposure to violent crime, therefore it is an intriguing question to consider and explore the psychological affects of indirect or vicarious exposure to violent crime.

#### 1.4 The Role of the Media

A mediating factor in people's vicarious exposure to violence is that of the media, as this is the medium by which individuals frequently come into indirect contact with stories and images of trauma. Modern media refers to an array of mediums, such as; television, movies, real-life events (most frequently portrayed on the news), the Internet and various types of video games (Hogan, 2005). Media violence is commonly defined as, "any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings." (Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003, p.383). It is necessary to emphasize that the primary aim of the media, whether it is television or newspapers, is to sell stories and make profit. The media tends to dramatize stories of violence and trauma, the result of this is hype around reported events leading to a heightened sense of risk (Jewkes, 2004). Portrayal of violence in the media and the psychological consequences and effects on viewers have been extensively researched, investigated and commented on. A sufficient amount of focus in literature has been placed on the relationship between violence in the media and the prediction of aggressive and violent behaviour produced by those who view such images. Authors tend to emphasize that viewing violent media is associated with increased aggression in the viewer (Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003). Much concern has been placed on the impact of exposure of media violence in children and adolescents. It has been estimated that the average child in America spends approximately 5.5 hours using various forms of modern media – the majority of which is thought to involve watching television (Hogan, 2005). Concern centers on the issue of children modeling aggressive and violent behaviour that they view. This is suggested to be owing to such media images molding children's external behaviour and internal modes of thought (Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003).

Also, of concern is the psychologically traumatizing affects that violent crime depicted in the media may have on the individual. The area of experiencing psychological distress symptoms from viewing and hearing about violent incidents is the area that this research focused on. For instance, symptoms described as being similar to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), involving nightmares, fear and anxiety reactions were found in a study of high school students (Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003). Ten percent of the 702 individuals identified themselves as having such symptoms as a result of viewing violence on television, either depicting real or true-life events (such as on the news) or fiction (Jipguep & Sanders-Phillips, 2003).

Incidents depicted on news channels or programs, such as wars, natural disasters and terrorist related events are frequent and widespread. Such real life depictions are cited as effecting the individual or viewer. Hypervigilance, fear, anxiety and desensitization to violence have been described as some of the responses to witnessing violence in the media (Hogan, 2005). Dougall, Hayward and Baum (2005) investigated the relationship between media exposure to bioterrorism (specifically the anthrax bioterrorist attacks that occurred after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001) and psychological distress symptoms in individuals. The population consisted of 5 000 Pennsylvanian citizens who had been exposed only indirectly to bioterrorism through the media (including hearing about the incidences on the radio or on television). The results of this study indicated a positive correlation between media exposure to violent crime (bioterrorism) and various psychological distress symptoms (Dougall et al., 2005). If such media stories and images are said to psychologically affect the viewer, it can be postulated that the scenario of witnessing violent crime in the media and hearing about stories of violent crime victimization in South Africa should be no different. Therefore it is appropriate to ask if the same psychological distress symptoms and reactions exist in South African society as a result of the daily vicarious exposure to violent crime? Whether one hears or watches stories and images of violence on the news, reads it in the newspapers or hears first-hand accounts from others, if one lives in South Africa, one is perpetually exposed vicariously to stories of violent crime and suffering.



A thorough search of available literature reveals the fact that currently, relatively little is known about the psychological consequences, effects and symptoms in individuals vicariously exposed to violent crime in the general population. A substantial body of literature exists regarding the exposure to stories of violent crime in the population of mental health care workers. This literature focuses on the psychological consequences thereof which has been captured in the concept of vicarious trauma. The area of vicarious exposure to violent crime in the general population is just beginning to be explored in the literature. Hence, in this relatively new area of research a key aim is to query whether or not similarities can be drawn between the existing concept of vicarious trauma (as it is applied to the population of mental health care workers) and the general population who are vicariously exposed to violent crime?

### 1.5 Vicarious Traumatization

Vicarious traumatization is a fairly new concept, being only developed in 1990 by McCann and Pearlman (Rasmussen, 2005). The concept of vicarious trauma is situated within a constructivist self-developmental theory. This theory is a “developmental, interpersonal theory explicating the impact on an individual’s psychological development, adaptation and identity.” (Collins & Long, 2003, p.418). This theory is essentially a combination of both psychoanalytic and cognitive theories (Adams, Matto & Harrington, 2001 & Collins & Long, 2003). Various theorists have defined, described and explained vicarious trauma in numerous ways. This term is also interchangeably referred to as; secondary victimization and secondary traumatic stress (Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Lerias & Byrne, 2003; Way, VanDeusen, Martin, Appelgate & Jandle, 2004). A number of authors define or understand vicarious trauma as the impact or trauma that occurs in the clinician (such as therapist or social worker) from listening to the traumatic experiences of their clients (Collins & Long, 2003 & Moulden, 2007). Such trauma is thought to occur from the emotional demands that are placed on the mental health worker when exposed vicariously to individual’s personal experiences of trauma (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). It is pivotal to emphasize at this point that the focus of this study is not that of vicarious trauma in mental health workers, but rather to explore whether links can be made between the symptomatology found in such cases and individuals who have been vicariously exposed to violent crime. The focus of this research also entails looking at



the coping styles and defense mechanisms that individuals use as a means of coping with vicarious exposure to violent crime.

Vicarious traumatization is said to be a condition that goes largely unnoticed and “undetected in the general population.” (Byrne, Lerias & Sullivan, 2006). For the purpose of this research, I will use Lerias and Byrne’s (2003) definition of vicarious trauma, which allows for a broader understanding of the term. Vicarious trauma can be defined as, “The impact of the directly traumatized individual’s experiences, upon others who are exposed to the event through the victim’s explicit accounts of the experience.” (Lerias & Byrne, 2003, p.129). It is important to emphasize that although this definition informs this research, as it highlights the fact that vicarious trauma involves the psychological effect of a person’s experience on another individual, it does not fully account for what this research is attempting to account for. This research involves investigating the psychological impact of stories and images of violent crime (indirect exposure) on individuals. The account of the incident of violent crime does not necessarily have to be portrayed directly by the victims themselves.

There are said to exist various symptoms of vicarious trauma that various authors describe (Adams et al., 2003; Collins & Long, 2003; Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Such symptoms have been described by these authors as being similar to those of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM-IV) provides the diagnosis and classification of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for those directly or indirectly exposed to trauma. Indirect exposure to trauma according to the DSM-IV may entail for example, witnessing a traumatic event. However the diagnostic criteria of PTSD “provide little guidance about the potential mechanism through which indirect exposure may occur.” (Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum, North & Neas, 2002, p.306). PTSD must be precipitated by an event in which the individual perceives themselves or those close to them to be under great threat of death or injury. The event must instill a grave sense of fear or helplessness in the victim (Dussich, 2003). Pfefferbaum et al. (2002), in a study focusing on reactions to traumatic events (specifically the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre), found that various symptoms similar to PTSD were found in indirect victims who watched such

traumatic incidents on television. Posttraumatic stress symptoms that are identifiable in those indirectly exposed to trauma via the media, include anguish and distress (Pfefferbaum et al., 2002). It has been documented however, that the symptoms experienced by those vicariously affected by trauma are not as severe as the symptoms in individual directly affected by trauma who present with PTSD (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Symptoms of vicarious trauma are said to manifest emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally (Way et al., 2004). Such symptoms include:

- (1) Disturbing thoughts and images of the traumatizing event, even if the individual was not present (as is the case with vicarious trauma), the individual imagines what it was like to be there (Adams et al., 2003).
- (2) Feelings of personal vulnerability and other distressing emotions, such as anxiety, fear, shame or rage (Adams et al., 2003).
- (3) Somatic symptoms, including headaches, nausea, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction (Adams et al., 2003).
- (4) Dissociation as a “form of re-experiencing the trauma” in those vicariously traumatized (Lerias & Byrne, 2003, p.131).
- (5) Increased arousal related to feelings of unexplained anger, anxiety and a sense of irritability (Lerias & Byrne, 2003).
- (6) Numbing and avoidance of places or traumatic material (Collins & Long, 2003).

A substantial number of studies have been conducted both internationally and locally on various specific and specialized samples (specifically mental health care workers) with regards to vicarious trauma. A review of the available literature reveals that there seems to be a consensus with regards to the fact that working with traumatized individuals has a significant psychological impact on the mental health worker, potentially in the form of vicarious traumatization (Baird, 2006; Collins & Long, 2003; Moulden, 2007).

However, it is important to emphasize that not every mental health worker who is exposed to traumatic material will develop vicarious traumatization. Lerias and Byrne (2003) state that there are certain predictors and risk factors that may contribute to a person’s likelihood of experiencing symptoms of vicarious trauma. Adams et al. (2001) conducted a study using the Traumatic Stress Institute Belief Scale (TSI), a scale

measuring vicarious trauma to investigate the factors that contribute to whether or not social workers experience vicarious trauma. The results of this study indicated that a personal history of trauma did not significantly relate to the social worker's experiences of vicarious trauma. Level of perceived social support seemed to be an important mediating factor in whether or not this sample experienced symptoms of vicarious trauma and in the intensity of such symptoms. This study also revealed that younger social workers, who had less work experience presented with higher levels of vicarious trauma (Adams et al., 2001). Other studies have indicated that, contrary to the above, a personal history of trauma is a significant risk factor in vicarious trauma. Collins and Long (2003), for instance, found that a personal history of trauma or victimization and being a young and inexperienced clinician increased the risk of mental health care workers experiencing symptoms of vicarious traumatization. Collins and Long (2003) raise the point that clinicians are also able to experience positive responses to stories of violent crime. This sample focused on professionals specializing in sexual abuse or assault. Some of the sample reported that positive changes occurred with regards to changes in their identity and understandings about themselves and others.

Baird (2006) and Rasmussen (2005), like Collins and Long (2003) also recognized a personal history of trauma as being a major predictor or risk factor in developing symptoms of vicarious traumatization. In a mental health worker population, the effects of vicarious trauma have been said to diminish the therapist's effectiveness and empathy. Hence the therapist is said to have a decreased emotional availability and efficiency as a professional helper. Such changes in the therapist are said to be owing to the effects of vicarious trauma and the symptoms thereof, specifically feelings or emotions of vulnerability, hopelessness and a sense of being emotionally depleted. Such symptoms are evident in subtle changes in the therapist's facial expressions (Rasmussen, 2005). Byrne and Lerias (2003) also acknowledge the negative impact on one's level of optimal functioning in those vicariously traumatized.

Dunkley and Whelan (2006) conducted research on vicarious traumatization experienced by telephone counselors. This study concluded that on average, the rate of vicarious trauma was reasonably low in this population. The counselor's access to a social and

professional support system was identified as playing a key role in ameliorating the effects of vicarious traumatization. The manner in which the counselors coped with and managed the traumatic material that they were exposed to also mediated the positive or negative outcome of vicarious trauma (Dunkley & Whelan, 2006). Researchers concluded that counselors who adopted less productive coping styles (such as avoidance, disengagement, denial and substance abuse) had higher levels of distress. Those who adopted more productive and adaptive ways of coping (such as the use of humour, drawing on emotional and social support) had far less distress. This study also emphasized that the majority of participants had low levels of distress and hence employed more positive and adaptive coping styles (Dunkley & Whelan, 2006).

In a study of vicarious traumatization in police officers in Japan, Dussich (2003) highlights the notion of tragic or violent events taking a “psychological cumulative toll on each police officer in some way.” (p.6). Hyman (2004) investigated the secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma symptoms in a population of Israeli police forensic technicians. These forensic technicians dealt with human remains that had evidentially been victims of various types of violent crime (including torture and mutilation). Psychological distress was identified as existing amongst this population. Such distress particularly was found to manifest in the coping style of avoidance (Hyman, 2004).

It is possible that some of the above findings may be applicable to the general population of South Africa. If this is the case, exposure to images and stories in the media and from hearing people’s first-hand accounts of events over time may have a psychological impact on ways of coping and thinking.

### 1.6 Coping Styles

A coping style can be understood or defined “as the manner in which a person will use their intellectual and behavioral resources to respond to a stressful situation.” (Lerias & Byrne, 2003, p.134-135). Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996, as cited in Zeidner & Endler, 1996) emphasize that coping is a broad term that entails various cognitions, strategies and behaviours that are used by the individual to deal with various adversities. This definition or understanding of coping implies that both overt behaviours and internal

mechanisms, such as cognitions, are employed by the individual to cope (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996 as cited in Zeidner & Endler, 1996). According to Hentschel, Draguns, Ehlers and Smith (2004); "A person's efforts at coping may or may not succeed in bringing about their desired outcomes; nonetheless they are often concerned with the means of attaining a realistic goal." (p.15). Anderson, Litzenberger and Plecas (2002) understand coping strategies as those methods that the individual employs to reduce one's sense of stress, which may either involve cognitive or behavioural strategies. Cramer (1998 & 2000 as cited in Hentschel et al., 2004) states that coping is essentially a conscious process that centers one's plans, intentions and goals that one uses to manage stressful events.

Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996 as cited in Zeidner & Endler, 1996) emphasize that prior to the individual engaging in either cognitive or behavioural coping strategies, the individual has to make a cognitive appraisal of the situation. Thus, for example, if a particular scenario is appraised as being dangerous or threatening, coping may be initiated or triggered. The specific coping style that is triggered may take the form of the use of a particular defense mechanism or a way of thinking or acting so that the potentially dangerous situation can be dealt with. The particular defense mechanism or coping strategy that is utilized by the individual is said to determine the manner in which the scenario is reappraised as being potentially more or less dangerous or threatening. From this perspective, coping may modify the situation depending on the way in which it is perceived.

Another important distinction made in the literature on coping styles is the difference between coping resources and coping. Coping resources are static, in that they do not alter or change. Coping resources may include social support for example. Such resources are said to be antecedents to the process of coping. Coping itself, on the other hand, is a process and the manner in which one copes may be subject to change (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996 as cited in Zeidner & Endler, 1996). The fact that coping is subject to change and not always static, highlights Zeidner and Endler's (1996) position regarding the nature of coping: that it is both dispositional and contextual.

Zeidner and Endler (1996) offer an integrative conceptual framework for understanding coping. An integrative approach to the conceptualization of coping comprehends the individual's coping styles as being both dispositional and contextual. This position highlights that the way in which one copes depends on the individual's unique characteristics and the specific context in which they present (the situation with which they are attempting to cope). Therefore, from this position one will cope differently in different situations, however the manner in which one copes will always be influenced by the individual's unique characteristics, such as personality, resources, past experiences and habitual coping strategies (Zeidner & Endler, 1996).

The concept of coping strategies or styles has its roots in the social psychological tradition, whereas the concept of defense mechanisms has its origins in the psychoanalytic tradition. Contrary to more traditional views, recent theorists are conceptualizing the concepts of coping styles and defense mechanism as interrelated (Bouchard & Thériault, 2003). A coping strategy is thought to comprise of the behavioural component of one's coping style that is accompanied by various related cognitions, for example checking behaviours. It is important to emphasize that a coping style may involve a cognitive or behavioural component (therefore may involve the use of various defense mechanisms); however a coping strategy implies the use of a behavioural component to the cognitive coping. Numerous defense mechanisms are thought to contribute to one's overall coping style. Both defense mechanisms and coping styles act to deal with anxiety and conflict (APA, 2000; Jarvis, 2004). Defense mechanisms will be discussed more specifically in a later section.

Much of the recent literature on coping styles or strategies focuses on two forms of coping, problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused approaches to coping involve the confrontation of the source of the stress and controls and reduces one's stress by using various resources available to the individual. This form of coping is said to be empowering to the individual. The individual uses information about the source of their stress to comprehend the situation and to take control (Anderson et al., 2002). Problem-focused coping is said to be action-centered. Therefore an effort (whether successful or not) is made to change or alter the



adverse situation via actions. An example of problem-focused coping strategies include: checking behaviours (especially related to personal safety). Thus problem-focused coping styles focus on the actual stressors of the trauma (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Emotion-focused coping strategies or styles are often adopted by the individual when the individual feels overwhelmed by the stressor and the issue is beyond the individual's ability to instill control and change. Such emotion-focused coping styles include cognitive strategies, such as distancing one's self and avoidance of images or thoughts of the stressor. Emotion-focused coping strategies are identified as being maladaptive or unhealthy ways of dealing with stress and trauma (Anderson et al., 2002).

Coping styles or strategies are located as playing an important role in those exposed to violent crime and other traumatic events. In a study of police officers and the coping styles that they adopted, it was found that emotion-focused, maladaptive coping strategies were frequently adopted in response to the exposure to direct trauma. For example, this sample was found to physically isolate themselves from others and to abuse substances (Anderson et al., 2002).

### 1.7 Coping with Vicarious Exposure to Trauma

Differing coping styles are evident in those exposed vicariously to violent crime. The coping style that is employed is suggested to play a determining role in whether or not the individual experiences psychological distress symptoms, and to what intensity symptoms are experienced when one is exposed vicariously to traumatic material. Baird (2006) located perceived coping style as a relatively important predictor of vicarious trauma. The specific coping style or strategy adopted by the therapist was also recognized by Moulden (2007) as being strongly associated with vicarious traumatization. Those who adopted positive coping styles or strategies (problem-focused coping styles) to deal with the traumatic material that they confronted had less chance of experiencing various symptoms. Lerias and Byrne (2003) state that the coping styles or strategies of "avoidance and the numbing of feelings and sensations" (p.131) is a common response to the exposure of violent crime. Negative coping styles or responses, such as avoidance or numbing, are said to essentially increase distress and increase the likelihood of vicarious traumatization. An example of a negative coping response in the vicariously traumatized

would be an increased concern for their personal safety and feelings of fear without taking any proactive steps to improve their safety. Such coping strategies are argued to rather enhance anxiety than to relieve it (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). It is also important to emphasize that emotion-focused coping styles can be adaptive to certain situations and can act to protect the self. For example, avoiding situations that are similar to the experienced trauma may be protective and diminish distress. Dussich (2003) sites that the scale of the traumatic event and availability of resources to those traumatized are key determinants in whether one's personal style or strategy of coping is positive or negative. Dussich (2003) therefore concludes that the coping styles that one adopts in response to adverse experiences can have either positive or negative effects on the self.

Perceived sense of social support has been suggested to mediate the issue of whether one copes in a positive or negative manner with the vicarious exposure to trauma. Adams et al. (2001) found that amongst clinical social workers, a lack of perceived or actual social support correlated to high levels of vicarious trauma. Lerias and Byrne (2003) also highlighted the issue of social support as mediating the experience of vicarious trauma. In their words:

“Social support helps to decrease the amount of distress felt by the person. Those with less social support tend to have more severe distress symptoms.” (Lerias & Byrne, 2003, p.134).

Lerias and Byrne (2003) also emphasized that social support affects the ability of individuals to adjust after exposure to trauma.

### 1.8 Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are pivotal to psychodynamic theories. The concept of defense mechanisms originated out of classical psychoanalytic theory with their function being understood as essentially to deal with intrapsychic conflict and anxiety (Craib, 2001; Hentschel, Draguns, Ehlers & Smith, 2004). A defense mechanism is defined as “A strategy which protects the ego or self-concept from real or imaginary threat.” (Stratton & Hayes, 1999, p.72). More contemporarily, psychodynamic theory comprehends defenses



from a perspective that blends both traditional psychoanalytic and modern social psychological insights. From this contemporary perspective, defenses “do not have to be provoked by an internal conflict; they may be aroused by whatever is perceived as dangerous to the person’s survival, acceptance, and security in the social world.” (Hentschel et al., 2004, p.6). It is also important to highlight that defense mechanisms may have both pathogenic and adaptive or positive effects (Hentschel et al., 2004). Developing Freud’s idea of compromise formation, Brenner (2006) argues that defense mechanisms contribute to the formation of compromises in the psyche that help the individual cope with conflict. From this point of view, defenses and resulting compromise formations are both an attempt to manage conflict and an attempt to protect the self or ‘turn away’ from conflict. In this way defense mechanisms can be seen as contributing to both adaptive and maladaptive responses to conflict.

Valliant (1977, 1992, 1993) proposed a hierarchy for classifying the various defense mechanisms according to their level of maturity. This system presents with four levels of defensive functioning and is the system that the DSM IV-TR (APA, 2000) has employed. The first level of defensive functioning involves the psychotic mechanisms which include defenses such as delusional projection and denial. The second level involves the immature mechanisms which entail defenses such as projection, acting out and dissociation. The third level involves the neurotic defenses which include isolation, intellectualization, repression and displacement for example. The final level entails the mature mechanisms which include suppression, anticipation and humor. Valliant (1977, 1992, 1993). According to Valliant (1977, 1992, 1993) at the first or lowest level the various defense mechanisms ultimately act to distort reality whereas at the fourth or highest level the mechanisms integrate feelings and interpersonal relationships. The defenses at the intermediate levels act to rather alter the experience of distress and therefore transform one’s experience of feelings. This author’s conceptualization of defenses in a hierarchical fashion allows for defenses to be both pathological and adaptive, depending on the maturity of the defense.

There are numerous defense mechanisms, which are more contemporarily being viewed as related to coping styles. Defenses are the psychological mechanisms which influence

the ways in which the individual copes with stressful events. It is contemporarily understood that multiple defenses contribute to one's coping style (Jarvis, 2004). The difference between defense mechanisms and coping styles can be located in the nature of the psychological process. Coping works at a conscious level whereas defense mechanisms operate at an unconscious level (Cramer, 1998 & 2000 as cited in Hentschel et al., 2004). Examples of such psychodynamic defense mechanism are repression, denial and projection (Craib, 2001; Jarvis, 2004). The American Psychological Association (2000) makes reference to various defense mechanisms in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Text Revision (DSM IV-TR). The defense mechanisms here are also premised on psychodynamic theory and are categorized according to their level of adaptive functioning (APA, 2000). This list of defenses as it appears in the DSM IV-TR will be used during the analysis phase.

### 1.9 Theoretical Framework: An Integrative Theory of Coping and Defense

A Psychodynamic theoretical framework is an appropriate theory to guide this research as it permits the exploration into how individuals deal or cope with anxiety at a conscious and unconscious level. Psychodynamic schools of thought place emphasis on the experience of emotion and subjective experience, both of which are pertinent to this research. Psychodynamic theories originate from Freud's classical psychoanalytic theory (Jarvis, 2004; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Contemporary psychodynamic theories and approaches aim to explain "psychological phenomena with reference to unconscious mental processes, both intrapersonal and interpersonal." (Jarvis, 2004, p.2). The psychodynamic perspective places emphasis on four core notions. These being:

- (1) Emphasis on unconscious mental life.
- (2) The fact that one's internal conflicts drive and perpetuate symptoms.
- (3) The importance of the impact of the symptoms on the individual's adaptation and the significance of the symptoms to the individual.
- (4) The idea that insight is core to change (Summers, 2003).

Psychodynamic theories posit that we are influenced by unconscious mental processes that influence our thoughts, behaviours and ways of coping. Therefore this broad

theoretical framework understands defense mechanism as playing a central role in warding off anxiety and defining the individual's particular coping style (Jarvis, 2004). Therefore, the psychodynamic theoretical framework accommodates for the explanation of and use of the concepts of defense mechanisms and theories of coping.

It is necessary to situate this research within a broader theory of coping. An integrative conceptual framework will be used to understand the coping styles that one adopts as being both dispositional and contextual. Dispositional coping styles entail the individuals personally preferred manners of coping that can be generalized to many contexts and situations. The coping styles are argued to "transcend particular situational influences." (Zeidner & Endler, 1996, p.26). Contextual coping styles refer to those ways of coping that are subject to change and hence are unique to various situations. These contextual coping styles are more specific than those of the dispositional type. The integrative framework for coping emphasizes that "both enduring personal and more changeable situational factors shape coping efforts." (Zeidner & Endler, 1996, p.26).

#### 1.10 Rationale

There is little available research on the psychological effects of vicarious traumatization, especially with regards to mediating factors like coping styles and defense mechanisms in the general population. Most of the available literature has focused on specialized populations, such as mental health workers and police officers, with regards to exposure to violent crime and the possible development of symptoms related to vicarious traumatization. Hence there is a gap in the literature with regards to the vicarious exposure to violent crime and trauma in the general population. Past literature has only just begun to assess and explore particular psychological effects of vicarious exposure to violent crime specifically with regards to individuals living in South Africa. This is an important population to focus on as these individuals have to cope and develop various strategies and styles of dealing with vicarious exposure to violent crime on a daily basis (Kynoch, 2005). This study will explore individual coping styles and defense mechanisms in a context of high levels of violent crime. Exploratory research attempts to "look for new insights into phenomena." (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002, p.39). The primary aim of this research was to understand whether the concept of vicarious

traumatization can be utilized to comprehend the effects and psychological consequences of exposure to trauma through exposure to the media and via everyday story-telling.

### 1.11 Research Aims

1. To determine the presence, nature and complexity of symptoms in those vicariously exposed to violent crime.
2. To gain an understanding of the specific coping styles and defense mechanisms that those vicariously exposed to violence crime adopt.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2 METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Exploratory Research

Exploratory research is an inductive approach to research in that it is employed when relatively little is known about a phenomenon or if it is a relatively new area of research. This research is inductive in that it attempts to build a model or way of understanding the psychological impact of the vicarious exposure to violent crime. As a result of there being no existing established theory or model in this area, the research is exploratory in nature. This research also compared the symptoms of those vicariously exposed to violent crime to vicariously traumatized mental health care. Exploratory research involves preliminary research or investigations into a phenomenon. Owing to the fact that the aim is to provide insight into a phenomenon, exploratory research is essentially flexible, open and inductive in nature (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002).

#### 2.2 Respondents

Seven research participants comprised the sample of this study. There was one exclusion criteria that was used to select this sample. This criteria being that the adults chosen to participate in this study did not have any personal, first-hand encounters of violent crime. This was an important exclusion criteria for the participants as the objective of this exploratory investigation was to determine whether the symptoms experienced by those vicariously and indirectly exposed to violent crime are similar to those experienced by mental health care workers who experience vicarious traumatization (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). An effort was made to achieve some racial and gender diversity within the sample. It is important to re-emphasize that the aim was not to generalize the findings of this study to the general population, but rather to initiate exploratory research into a relatively new and unexplored area.

The method by which the sample was attained involved a combination of quota and snowballing sampling. Quota sampling involves the identification of the categories to be selected, in this case in the form of identifying individuals who had not been personally and directly affected by violent crime. The exact number of participants was also pre-determined (7). It was felt that six interviews would be sufficient for exploratory

research and the seventh interview comprised of a pilot interview. Quota sampling results in there being some basic differences amongst the participants, although it is similar to convenience sampling, more effort is made to ensure some degree of diversity (Neuman, 2006). Snowballing was also employed as a sampling technique. This method was used so that participants were able to refer me to other potential participants so that the researcher was able to achieve a sample of 7 people that she did not directly know and that fulfilled the pre-determined characteristics or criteria.

### 2.3 Table of Demographic Details of Participants

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Religion</b>
1	Female	37	Indian	Jehovah Witness
2	Female	31	White	Roman Catholic
3	Female	46	White	Roman Catholic
4	Male	33	White	Roman Catholic
5	Male	22	African	Christian
6	Female	59	Indian	Hindu
7	Male	60	Indian	Hindu

### 2.4 Data Collection Technique

Data was collected by the method of interviewing. Interviewing allowed the researcher to gain insightful information into the individual's thoughts and feelings regarding their vicarious exposure to violent crime. This was an appropriate method for this topic as the researcher was able to gain a sufficient understanding and interpretation of the participant's subjective understandings and experiences of vicarious exposure to violent crime, the effects thereof, thinking strategies and coping styles. Thus the information that the researcher gained was subjective to the participant (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeill, 2002). This data collection technique was employed with the intention of gaining an ideographic understanding of their opinions of the relevant issues and themes of this topic (Ulin et al., 2002). The researcher followed Wengraf's (2001) method of semi-structured, open-ended interviewing. He refers to this method as 'fairly-fully

structured interviews' (FFSDI). This data collection method allows for questions and topics to be predetermined. Wengraf (2001) suggests that a receptive strategy works best when conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. The receptive strategy "empowers the informant, enabling them to have a large measure of control in the way in which they answer the relatively few and relatively open questions they are asked." (Wengraf, 2001, p.154). Wengraf (2001) also suggests that it is best not to inform the interviewees of the specific research or theoretical questions as this may impact on the authenticity of the responses in that interviewees will be aware of what types of responses the researcher is looking for.

Kvale (1996 as Cited in Wengraf, 2001) provides a structure for semi-structured interviewing. Kvale (1996) offers the researcher a guide to the order of specific types of questioning to use in such interviews. Kvale's method was used as a structural guide for the interviews in the present study. The first phase of Kvale's approach is that of asking *introducing questions*. These questions allow for the interviewee to provide rich, descriptive responses, often involving descriptions of their own experiences. During this phase a 'prompting article' was used to initiate discussion about the participants' thoughts, feelings and behaviours in response to violent crime in South Africa. *Follow-up questions* involve the interviewer asking questions relating to the responses provided by the introducing questions. Hence, clarifying and further probing took place at this phase. These questions can be more directive and close-ended. *Probing questions* essentially encourage the respondent to elaborate more about something that they have already said. *Specifying questions* particularly revolve around the interviewer asking more directive questions to elicit more specific information. *Direct questions* refer to introducing specific issues and topics to discuss. It is suggested that direct questioning should be withheld until the end parts of the interview, or until the respondent has had an opportunity to describe and discuss their experiences in a much undirected manner (Wengraf, 2001). *Indirect questions* typically centre on asking the respondent about other people's or group responses, attitudes, experiences or beliefs. Hence indirect questioning is often projective in nature – this refers to the respondent projecting themselves into somebody else's position. *Structuring questioning* entails the interviewer taking the initiative to control the direction of the interview and moving on to the next



informed participants that they would be recording for the duration of the interview (Ulin et al., 2002). Owing to there being no minors in this research, no informed consent from parents or guardians was necessary (Neuman, 1997).

If any of the participants had experienced any emotional or psychological stress as a result of issues, experiences or emotions that arose during the course of the interview, the researcher would have acted in a sensitive and responsible manner. This would have entailed the discontinuation of the interview and the assessment of whether it would have been beneficial for the participant to seek professional counselling (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). If the participant had required professional counselling, the researcher would have engaged in the steps necessary to assist the participant in accessing such a service.

Validity in qualitative research refers to the authenticity of the research. Thus, by giving truthful, undistorted accounts of the participants' opinions, experiences and understandings, validity was maintained (Neuman, 2006). Therefore, by closely relating to the data during the data analysis phase (inductive thematic analysis), validity of the research was upheld.

Reliability refers to how dependable and consistent the research is. In qualitative research reliability more appropriately refers to the veracity of the research. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, consistent and accurate data collection (in the form of an accurate transcription process) was of central importance (Neuman, 2006).



## CHAPTER THREE

### 3 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The paradigm that guided this research was one of interpretivism. In hermeneutic or interpretive research, the researcher adds to the participant's ideas, experiences, and emotions by trying to 'make meaning' or sense out of the participant's experiences and understandings. Thus the researcher contributes to the research in the form of insight into the subject matter at hand (Ulin et al., 2002). The method of data analysis took the form of a qualitative thematic analysis, following Ulin et al.'s (2002) method. Ulin et al. (2002) state that, "Qualitative analysis emphasizes how data fit together as a whole, bringing together context and meaning." (p.139).

Ulin et al.'s (2002) approach to thematic analysis involves a step by step process. This method involved firstly 'data immersion'. This stage entailed reading and re-reading the transcripts until the researcher was familiar with their content. This stage began immediately after data collection. Initially, being aware of emerging themes, patterns and potential or tentative explanations is important. Coding the data was done next; this involved assigning codes to the key themes of the text. Ulin et al.'s (2002) method states that codes should be labeled in the margins of transcripts. Words or parts of words could be used to form codes. Codes are used to remind one's self what theme sections of data are fitting into. The function of coding is to organize data, bringing distinct or disparate pieces of text to the fore (Ulin et al., 2002). The next stage or phase was to allow for the codes to begin to cluster together, while others were discarded as the process of coding continued. Thus the coding system was constantly refined and altered. Flexibility was key to this stage, as the coding scheme or system continued to evolve.

It is important to emphasize that themes were allowed to emerge via numerous readings of the transcripts. Owing to the literature that the researcher was attempting to draw links with (regarding coping styles and vicarious trauma symptoms), if evidence of such coping styles or vicarious trauma symptoms were present in the transcripts, a theme was formed around the specific coping style or symptom. Therefore, at times owing to the nature of the research, themes were imposed on the data primarily owing to the existing

presence of themes in the transcripts. Hence it was appropriate to form themes and sub-themes around this existing data. Coding for this research involved the development of three primary themes and numerous sub-themes. Data was coded firstly according to the primary theme and then according to the relevant sub-theme. Sub-themes were written adjacent to the primary themes.

### 3.1 Table of Codes Formed

(See appendix IV and V for examples)

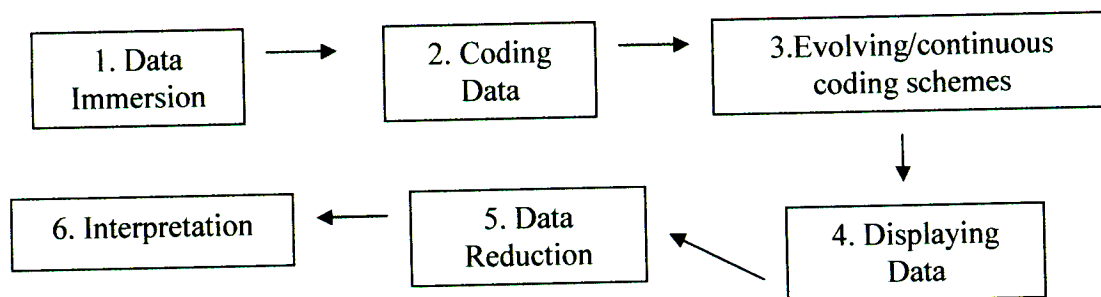
<b>Codes for Primary Themes</b>	<b>Data incorporated into Theme.</b>
V.T.S	Vicarious Trauma Symptoms
Coping Styles: E.F.C P.F.C	Emotion-focused Coping Problem-focused Coping
D.M	Defense Mechanisms

Firstly, displaying data refers to “laying out or taking an inventory of what you know related to a theme.” (Ulin et al., 2002, p.156). The aim of this stage was to identify and capture the variation and essence of each theme. It is first necessary to identify all core themes and sub-themes. Next the researcher is required to locate ‘evidence’ in the data that functions to support or ‘back-up’ your choice of each theme and sub-theme (see Chapter Four, Findings). It was necessary to look at aspects such as the participant’s vocabulary or language use for this purpose. It was also essential to remember to interpret and understand what is not said by the participant as there could be reasons for this. The next stage was that of data reduction. The primary goal of this stage was to gain an overall sense of the data and to be able to differentiate between primary themes and sub-themes. Ulin et al. (2002) suggest the use of visual representations of data (such as diagrams).

The final stage of interpretation involves using insight to explain the central meanings of the data (see Chapter Five, Discussion). Interpretation functions to communicate or express the researcher’s understandings and explanations of the findings. An essential function of interpretation is to explain and expand on how the various parts of the

research can be linked together to form one coherent understanding or interpretation of a phenomenon. It is important to emphasize that the process of interpretation is subjective and hence the data can be interpreted and understood differently by different researchers (Ulin et al., 2002). The core aim of analyzing the content of the interviews of this study was to explore and to understand the coping style and defenses that people adopt in the presence of frequent indirect exposure to violent crime. During this final stage the researcher attempted to superimpose a theoretical understanding of coping styles and defense mechanism that the participants adopt using the DSM-IV-TR list of defense mechanisms (APA, 2000).

### 3.2. Graphical Representation of Steps to thematic analysis

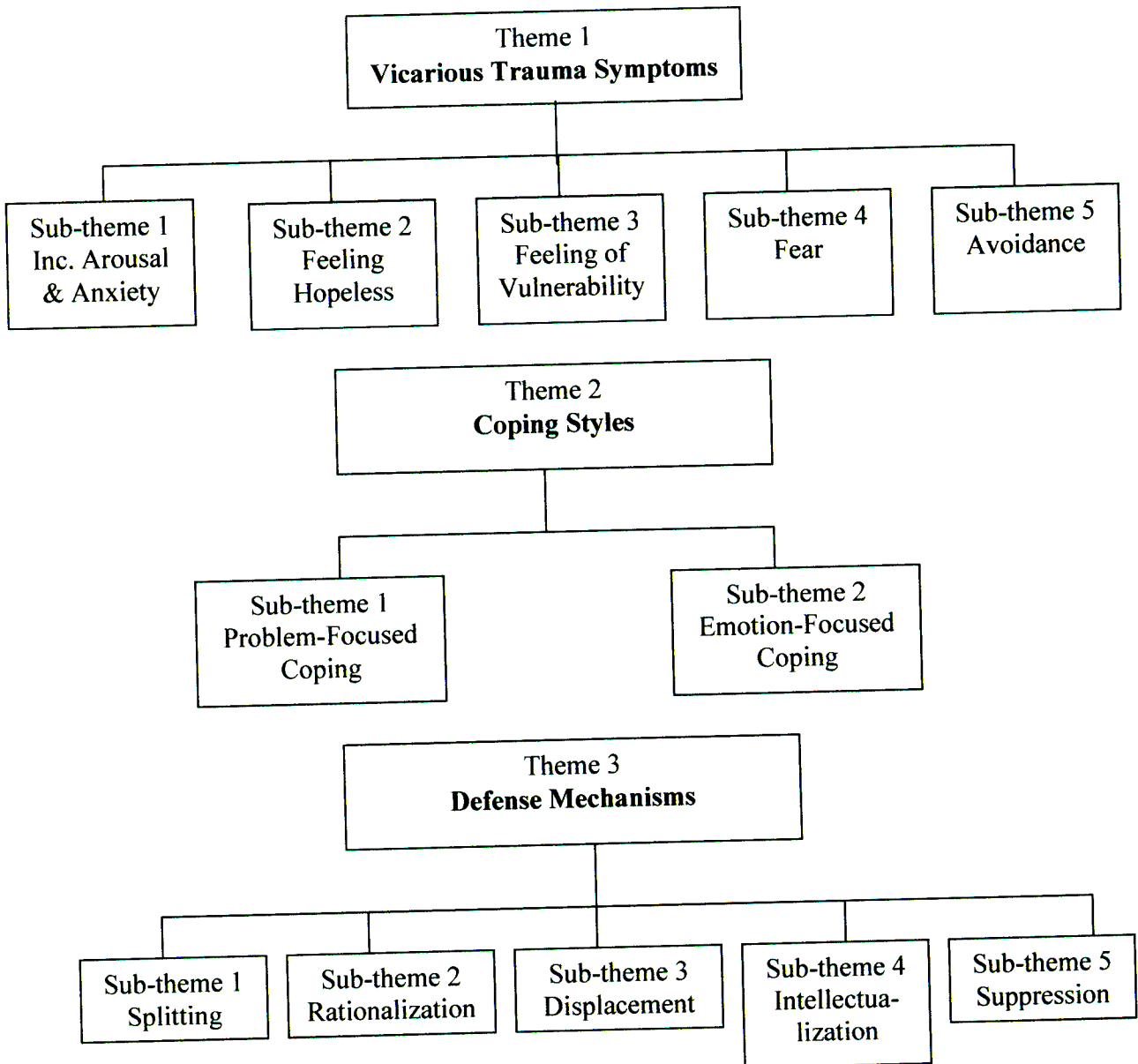


## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4 FINDINGS

Findings consisted of locating three primary themes and various sub-themes across the seven transcripts. Patterns of variation and of similarity became evident when analyzing the data with regards to the participant's understandings and beliefs of criminal violence that they drew on. These three themes and sub-themes granted insight into the participant's underlying coping styles and defense mechanisms used in relation to the vicarious exposure to violent crime. These themes also allowed the researcher to identify potential symptoms of vicarious trauma which essentially allowed me to draw links between the concept of vicarious traumatization in the population of mental health care workers and in those exposed vicariously to violent crime on a frequent basis. Each theme and sub-theme will be addressed individually.

#### 4.1 Diagram of Themes and Sub-themes



#### 4.2 Vicarious Trauma Symptoms

The theme of *Vicarious Trauma Symptoms* was identified as a result of various symptomatology emerging in the transcripts that are described in literature that focuses on symptoms that mental health care workers develop in response to being vicariously traumatized by the nature of their work (Collins & Long, 2003 & Moulden, 2007). Symptoms of vicarious trauma are said to resemble those of post-traumatic stress (Adams, Matto & Harrington, 2001 & Collins & Long, 2003). The symptoms that were

evident in the transcripts formed the five sub-themes of this primary theme, these being: increased arousal and anxiety, feeling hopeless, a personal sense of vulnerability, fear and avoidance. Each sub-theme will be addressed individually.

The sub-theme of *increased arousal and anxiety* was evident in some of the transcripts. Although it did not prove to be a prominent theme; it captured the idea of individuals having increased or a heightened sense of vigilance and alertness. The following quotes illustrate this:

“I think I am very, very aware of what’s going on around me all the time. You, you, I don’t trust people. I don’t trust people walking along the road.”  
(Respondent 3, Pg.2, line 49 – pg.3, line 1-2)

“...that unfortunately becomes almost a paranoid reaction and you worry about worrying, that if I let my guard down for one single moment, then that’s the moment it’s going to happen.” (Respondent 4, Pg.5, line 19-22)

“Like constantly, you’re always looking over your shoulder.”  
(Respondent 5, Pg.6, line 1-2)

The above quotes emphasize a sense of being hyper-alert and having an increased sense of arousal and hypervigilance. Increased arousal can be linked to an anxiety reaction, as illustrated in the second quote which refers to ‘a paranoid feeling’ and extensive worrying. Although anxiety presents as a separate symptom of vicarious trauma, in the transcripts when increased arousal was identified, a general underlying tone of anxiety was also evident. This sense of anxiety and worry was highlighted by respondents referring to themselves as feeling paranoid at times.

The second sub-theme that emerged as a component of theme one (Vicarious Trauma Symptoms) is that of *feeling hopeless*. This was a prominent sub-theme that emerged frequently in all transcripts. The following quotes are examples of the sample’s sense of hopelessness.

“...it’s an aged old story, people [criminals] are going and coming out and they’re causing the same problem again.”  
(Respondent 7, Pg.3, line 12-13)

“...the crime rate in this country has increased, and it’s never, ever, I believe that it’s never going to get better, and people are always going to be killing and robbing and, you know.”  
(Respondent 1, Pg.1-2, line 49-2)

“But you actually feel as though you can’t make a difference.”  
(Pilot, Pg. 2, line 48-49)

The feeling of hopelessness tended to be related to pessimism regarding the justice system in South Africa. This feeling of hopelessness focused on the perceived inefficiency of the government and justice system. This was linked to a sense that violent crime continues to prevail as even when criminals are detained they are released and continue to perpetrate the same crimes (see quote 1 of above quotes). This sense of hopelessness (as evident in the second of the above quotes) also seems to be embedded in the idea that South Africa is an inherently violent place and that the perpetrators of violent crime are unstoppable.

Another element of this theme focused on the individual’s personal sense of hopelessness. This was linked to the fact that they felt that they personally could not do anything to change or alter the high level of violent crime in South Africa. This feeling of hopelessness tended to relate to a subjective sense of helplessness and frustration regarding a lack of ability to make a difference or initiate change.

The next sub-theme identified was that of the *feeling of vulnerability*. This sub-theme incorporated ideas that the participants expressed regarding the inevitable nature of becoming a victim of violent crime in South Africa. This sub-theme captured the perception that being victimized is an unavoidable and inescapable reality of living in this country.

“ It’s like, like you feel like its inevitable...When is my turn?  
Ja, it’s bound to be somebody that, or somebody close to you.  
Something’s going to happen to somebody close to you.”  
(Respondent 2, Pg.7, line 7-8)

“You fear that you’re going to be the next one to be attacked. If it can happen and it’s so prevalent, and it is becoming more and more and more prevalent, that it’s literally, you’re anticipating, it’s a fear,

you're living in fear that it's going to be you. You're constantly living in fear that it's going to happen to me, it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when." (Respondent 4, Pg.2, line 32-36)

Although this sub-theme of a *feeling of vulnerability* did not present as a particularly prevalent theme, it appears important because it could be reasoned that various other vicarious symptoms and sub-themes would not exist if the individual did not feel some degree of personal vulnerability. Hence, this sub-theme can be seen as somewhat core to various others, such as: fear and avoidance. The second of the above quotes highlights how a feeling of vulnerability is connected to a feeling of fear.

The sub-theme of *fear* presented as a prominent sub-theme that was evident amongst the majority of the transcripts. Fear emerged as a constant and perpetual state that individual's find themselves in as a result of the rife nature of violent crime. A feeling of fear seemed to also be closely associated with the perception that one is vulnerable to becoming a victim and that essentially becoming a victim of violent crime is inevitable.

"And, so it was something that is like so, I mean, it's such a small thing to be shot for, for a car or for possessions, it, yes it does make you very, very angry, and it makes you afraid. I haven't been in that situation myself, thank goodness, but ja, I can imagine, I can only begin to imagine that, that it must have been awful and, ja, scary." (Respondent 2, Pg.2, line 3-7).

"So it's just, it's always, ja, constant fear...Ja, it is, ja, it is a sense of fear. I don't know, I think, because I to feel like, that maybe I have lived a little bit too much of a secluded life, compared to other people." (Respondent 2, Pg.6, line 41-45).

"So I'm scared to even stay in my own house. So my feelings are very, I'm very scared living the way I'm living." (Respondent 1, Pg.2, line 38-39)

"They, they're scared. They, it's, it's fear. You can tell that they're feeling fear, they, everybody seems to know somebody that it's happened to....And I think that's always just fear that it's, that they're going to be next." (Respondent 3, Pg.3, line 33-34 & 37-38).

The above quotes suggest that individuals experience a somewhat permanent and constant feeling of fear. This sense of fear presents as a key symptom of vicarious



trauma. The primary reason for fear in this context as being understood as symptomatic of vicarious trauma is the fact that individuals expressed that they always feel this way and there is nowhere where one does not feel fearful. This highlights the perpetual and inescapable sense of fear that people experience. For example, as the above individual mentions, even in one's own home, one feels fear (See above quotes: Respondent 1)

*Avoidance* proved to be a particularly prominent sub-theme. In the context of these interviews, the avoidance that participants expressed entailed avoiding thinking and talking about violent crime, a form of numbing that the participants employ as a coping mechanism. The following quotes reveal this:

“To be honest with you we just try not to talk about it... You know, when we're having dinner or something, Ja. So we avoid it. We actually avoid talking about it... But in, in a nice setting like that, we don't like to spoil the mood.”  
(Respondent 1, Pg.4, line 27-28; 30-31; 33-34; 37-78)

“You feel that there's nothing that can be done and there's nothing that is being done. So consequently, you're just biding your time, waiting until the inevitable. So ya, I try to avoid it, I try to avoid talking about it with people.” (Respondent 4, Pg.4, line 46-50)

“I don't, I don't want to dwell on bit or, or think about it, because ja then it does, does make it a little bit too real... I don't want to, to dwell on it or to think about it, or to imagine myself, that happening to myself... I don't want to think about it now. I'll deal with it when it happens. So, because it's, it's too, maybe just too frightening to.”  
(Respondent 2, Pg.4, line 21-22, 49 & Pg.5, line 1-4).

“I think at my age now, I feel nobody will do that to me, I think, maybe, wishful thinking. But I actually don't think about it.”  
(Respondent 6, Pg.2, line 11-12)

“They almost just like pretend it's not as bad and then, until it happens to them.” (Respondent 5, Pg.5, line 1-2)

The above quotes reveal the use of avoidance as a means of avoiding thinking about the harsh reality of violent crime in South Africa. Many of the participants seemed to try to avoid thinking and talking about violent crime as much as possible. Some individuals avoid the issue of violent crime as a means of controlling their fear and personal sense of

vulnerability which tends to escalate if one is consciously engaged in thought and talk about incidences and stories of violent crime (See above quote: Respondent 2).

#### 4.3 Coping Styles

The second theme that was identified was that of *Coping Styles*. A coping style involves various intellectual and behavioural responses that the individual engages in to deal with a difficult or stressful situation or adversities (Lerias & Byrne, 2003). This research was consistent with the literature in identifying two primary forms of coping: problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles (Anderson et al., 2002; Lerias & Byrne, 2003).

The first sub-theme of *problem-focused coping* incorporated various coping styles that individuals adopt when they confront the source of the problem, take control and use various resources available to them to try to achieve some form of action (Anderson et al., 2002). In this type of problem-focused coping, the individual attempts to modify the outcome of the situation, by either gaining knowledge about how to avoid becoming a victim or preparing for the scenario of being victimized in order to take control of the situation. The transcripts revealed that although the majority of participants used some form of problem-focused coping, the use of emotion-focused coping style tended to be far more prevalent. Popular forms of problem-focused coping where: (1) staying away from dangerous areas, (2) making sure one is secure and not in danger, and (3) attempting to control one's fate in terms of becoming a victim of violent crime as much as possible and (4) empowering one's self with knowledge and awareness.

“I have read articles about what to do in those situations...”  
(Respondent 2, Pg.2, line 21-22)

“There's certain place like maybe you'd say 'hot spots', possibly where the events occurred. So if they happen in like a series then you know that something is up at a certain place, could be a bar or it could be just a local neighbourhood...lets' not go into the places that you want to because things could possibly happen.”  
(Respondent 5, Pg.4-5, line 46-49 & 1-4)

“I'm careful, if I drive when I'm by myself I don't park in potentially dangerous places...being very aware, trying to be very aware of what's .

going on around me. You know, do I, if I have to drive at night, I would not go too close to a robot, for example.”.  
(Respondent 2, Pg.9, line 12-13 & 15-17)

“So, I try not to go to places where there are going to be violence, like a night club for instance...I’d rather go to a nice place to eat with my family And be safe there, in a mall...because sometimes it’s the places we choose as well, where we go to, there’s a lot of violence.”.  
(Respondent 1, Pg.3, line 2-7)

The four primary modes of problem-focused coping strategies as used by the participants can be seen in the above quotes. The first quote reveals how some individuals attempt to take control, whether effective or not, and try to empower themselves in terms of knowledge and awareness. The following quotes further illustrate the use of problem-focused coping, as discussed above:

“To make sure that doors are locked, windows are locked, security is on, the alarms are on...”.  
(Respondent 4, Pg.13-14, line 49 & 1)

“Although you’ve got ADT, Blue or whoever there, you see, you don’t run outside there and try and chase that fellow off or something, never ever.”. (Respondent 7, Pg.12, line 20-22)

“I have started wearing my remote around my neck though, most of the time, a panic alarm.”. (Respondent 3, Pg.4, line 48-49)

“Just the toll of itself, like look around, there’s burglar bars everywhere, electric fencing, you know.”.  
(Respondent 5, Pg.5, line 48-49)

It can be seen by the above quotes that individuals attempt to gain control of this situation by implementing various precautions in their lives.

The second sub-theme is that of *emotion-focused coping*. This theme was utilized by all respondents and was the most frequently employed way of coping. Emotion-focused coping refers to various methods that individual’s use when they feel overwhelmed and are unable to bring about change (Anderson et al., 2002). Anger, talking about violent crime and the use of religion presented as core emotion-focused coping strategies that the participants engaged in.

The feeling of *anger* was a prominent emotion-focused coping style that was evident in all the transcripts. It is clear that individual's feel frustrated and angry about the level of violent crime in South Africa. The following quotes reveal this:

"I'm angry, that these people, that we're getting in to an environment now where you can do bad things, and you can do nasty things to people, and you would be able to get away with it. But, it's, it's anger."  
(Pilot, Pg.2, line 35-37)

"Anger that, that this has happened, and a lot of it, I feel unnecessary happened. Well, all of it is unnecessary, but anger at, at the way things are. Anger that you can't do anything about it. Anger that we, we're living in a society where you have to accept this as being the norm. When it shouldn't be like that. And I think you, you blame everything. You blame everybody. You blame the government. You blame the situation that you are in. That you have to just accept this, because there's nothing that you can do."  
(Respondent 3, Pg.6 line 36-43)

As evident in the first of the above quotes, much anger stems out of frustration at the incompetent justice system and government, specifically that perpetrators and criminals are not held accountable for their actions. Anger also seemed to stem from the loss of control that individuals are experiencing. This loss of control seemed to be related to the individual's sense of hopelessness. The following quote illustrates this:

"More than sad, hurt angry, ja, and also when nothing is being done. We can prevent that much of crime that's going on, that's a big issue that comes up in mind, that it can be prevented."  
(Respondent 6, Pg.4, line 46-47)

Anger was also evident in individual's desire for revenge and harsh punishment for the perpetrators of violent crime. This sense of anger was evident in many of the transcripts and was expressed via the participant's insistence that punishment needs to be made harsher in order to fit the crime. The underlying assumption of this is that if punishment implemented by the justice system is made more severe, this would act as a deterrent to the perpetrators of violent crime. The following quote demonstrates a participant's anger related to the desire for harsher punishment for the perpetrators of violent crime:

“...what I find disturbing is that I’m rejoicing in it, in the sense that if you start culling these people, great, it may be having some effect there.”. (Respondent 4, Pg.11, line 18-20).

Anger was also expressed in the manner of frustration and sadness that the level of crime as altered and increased over the years. Most of the older participants evidentially felt anger at this change from the way things used to be. The following quotes illustrate this:

“I don’t know, now we cannot walk in there because of crime, and the beach is one of the places that we would often walk. Because, ja, there was a time when we were growing up – I mean, I don’t know about my kids now, how they see it, because they grew up with violence all their lives. Like in my age now, we never had violence or we didn’t know about violence when we were growing up.”.  
(Respondent 6, Pg.8, line 16-17 & 19-23)

“I think because I’ve lived in two completely different eras, I’ve lived when there was much, much, much less crime, when it was safe to walk out on the road in the evening, and I’ve lived now, when there is high crime.”. (Respondent 3, Pg.5, line29-31)

The above two quotes seems to suggest that the older generations who live in South Africa and who have experienced two completely different lifestyles of government (one being the apartheid government, where minimal violent crime and the other post-apartheid with high levels of violent crime) are more likely to illustrate this form of emotion-focused coping. This specific form of emotion-focused coping entails reminiscing about the past with underlying tones of anger because of the change in South African society that has occurred. It may be suggested that the reason why the older South African generation is experiencing this anger is that during the Apartheid government (pre 1994), less violent crime existed. Crime existed predominantly in the political context of the country. Owing to media restrictions on reporting of this, the general public was often not aware of the extent of this political crime; therefore it can be suggested that their personal sense of safety and security was less threatened (Kynoch, 2005).

*Talking* was another form of emotion-focused coping that the participants engaged in. Talking is considered to be an emotion-focused coping style as usually no change in the

actual stressor (violent crime) occurs. Talking is often considered to be cathartic and is most likely to be used by individuals when they feel overwhelmed and unable to bring about change: this is a feeling that was expressed by the participants. The following are quotes that demonstrate how participants used talking as a coping style:

“I actually feel it’s better to talk about it and to as many people as you can, you know, especially like people that you can always approach when you’ve got problems...”.(Respondent 5, Pg.3, lines 18-20)

“If anybody reads something and it’s disturbing, if it comes to mind we would bring it up and talk about it.”.(Respondent 6, Pg.1, lines 43-44)

“The commonality that I find is, firstly, that people do sensationalize it themselves, that they will elaborate and clearly exaggerate certain details for sensational benefit in the social context in which they find themselves for very obvious reasons.”.  
(Respondent 4 , Pg.7, lines 10-13)

The second of the above quotes demonstrates how talking about violent crime is used as a way of coping with the content of stories and incidences that one hears about. Although, no change in the stressor occurs, it is a method that participants employ in order to cope with daily exposure to violent crime. The last of the above quotes highlights how it is perceived that people have a tendency to exaggerate their stories of violent crime.

*Religion* presented as another form of emotion-focused coping that many of the participants engaged in. Religion presented as an important means by which some participants feel they keep themselves and loved one’s out of danger. It was also used as an attempt to comprehend the nature of violent crime in South Africa. The following quotes are examples of participants turning to the use of religion to cope in times of stress and worry.

“Like now a way like we cope, well, like we’re Christians, so we pray a lot too, so, we know that when you’re feeling paranoid and there’s something itching at you, you know, and you’ve just got to take your own private time and pray about it.”.  
(Respondent 5, Pg.8, line 46-48)

“I have faith in, I have faith in a higher power, in, in God, and I



believe that that nothing, there's this huge plan for us, and we're not going to change it by worrying about it. So, I pray.”  
(Respondent 3, Pg.10, line 26-28)

“We believe that the end would come, because the Bible says this, everything that's happened today, it, it's in the Bible. And it's going to end very shortly. So we're waiting for this new world, that's what we're taught to believe.”  
(Respondent 1, Pg.1, line 31-34)

“I'm not religious religious but when I'm in crisis I will pray, I know that, and I've done it and I've done it with my kids as well.”  
(Respondent 6, Pg.6, line 45-47)

The key element that runs through all of the above quotes is that faith, in some form of existential power, provides relief and comfort in times of anxiety. Although all of the above participants are of differing religions, the function of the religions is the same, and used by the individual to cope. Prayer and faith in a higher power seems to also provide hope for the future for some participants. For example, in the third of the above quotes (Respondent 1, Pg.1, line 31-34), the religion of Jehovah Witness believes in the coming of a new, better world as well as everlasting life.

#### 4.4 Defense Mechanisms

The third theme is that of *Defense Mechanisms*. This theme captures the various defense mechanisms that the participants use as a way of coping with the vicarious exposure to violent crime. Defenses are the various unconscious psychological mechanisms that one engages in so that one is able to cope with stressful events (Craib, 2001; Jarvis, 2004). As discussed in the literature review, there are numerous defense mechanisms which are more contemporarily being viewed as related to coping styles. It is understood that multiple defenses contribute to one's coping style (Jarvis, 2004). The five core defense mechanisms that were evident in the transcripts were: splitting, rationalization, displacement, intellectualization and suppression. Each one of these will be addressed individually and reference made to the level of maturity of each respective defense mechanism.

The defense mechanism of *splitting* refers to the manner in which the individual deals with emotional conflict or stressors via “compartmentalizing opposite affect states and

failing to integrate the positive and negative qualities of the self or others into cohesive images.” (APA, 2000, pg.813). Therefore, when one engages in the defense mechanism of splitting, one may experience self or others as exclusively bad or exclusively good (APA, 2000). Splitting is considered to be at the major image-distorting level of defense mechanisms, hence an immature defense mechanism. Defenses at this level are typically characterized by gross distortion or misattribution of one’s self or others (APA, 2000). The following quotes display the use of the defense mechanism of splitting as used by the participants:

“The baddies, such wicked people, I don’t look at them as being sons or daughters, or mothers or fathers or anything like that. If you do, if you do wrong, you are a bad, horrible person, and you should be taken out of society.”. (Pilot, Pg.4, line 10-13)

“When you see certain black people, and you know that he must be a criminal. He looks like a criminal. And the obviously more with them than, than anybody else.”. (Respondent 2, Pg. 10, line 12-15)

Although splitting was not a particularly common defense mechanism used, it appears to be an important defense to take note of and consider. The first of the above quotes highlights the defense of splitting as having a stereotyping function in terms of comprehending criminals and the perpetrators of violent crime as being exclusively bad, evil people who essentially have no other positive characteristics or roles in society. The second of the above quotes reveals splitting as serving a ‘racializing’ and stereotyping function. This stems from conceptualizing the Black man as all bad, constituting of no positive qualities and therefore capable of performing ‘bad’ acts, such as violent crime.

The defense mechanism of *rationalization* refers to the defense in which the individual deals with stressors “by concealing the true motivations for his or her own thoughts, actions, or feelings through the elaboration of reassuring or self-serving but incorrect explanations.” (APA, 2000, pg.812). Rationalization is also considered to be a somewhat immature defense mechanism, however not as immature as that of splitting. Rationalization is said to belong to the disavowal level and essentially functions to keep threatening impulses out of awareness “with or without misattribution of these to external causes.” (APA, 2000, pg 809). Rationalization proved to be a rather popular defense that



was employed by the participants. The following quotes are examples of the defense of rationalization:

“I get very, very violent but then I begin to think that these are people who are really sick who are doing these things. Then I begin to think how come, why are we getting so many sick people now? Is it becoming a real disease or are we coming to the end of our lives, that people are getting more and more dementia and that are causing these things and that we’re getting more sick people?”. (Respondent 7, Pg.2, line 43-48).

“I think, ja, I think possibly that’s why these kind of things are happening, it seems people are a lot more evil or like it’s getting a lot worse.”. (Respondent 5, Pg.9, line 23-24)

“And then you think, it depends on the situation, you either think oh they were stupid. I mean, this is in the news all the time. We’re warned. We’re, we’re aware that this is going to happen. Why didn’t they take more precaution themselves.”. (Respondent 3, Pg.4, line 29-32)

The above quotes reveal that the defense of rationalization has different functions. The first of the above quotes highlights how individuals may use the defense mechanism of rationalization to try to make sense of and understand why high levels of violent crime currently exist. The second of the above quotes also illustrates how the participant makes use of incorrect explanations (that people are possibly becoming more evil) to explain and to try to understand the prevalence of violent crime. The third of the above quotes demonstrates another form of rationalization that was expressed by two participants: blaming the victims of violent crime.

*Displacement* is the defense mechanism in which individuals deal with conflict or stress by “transferring a feeling about, or a response to, one object onto another (usually less threatening) substitute object.” (APA, 2000, pg.811). Displacement is said to be a rather mature defense mechanism and is part of the mental inhibitions (compromise formation) level of defense mechanisms. This level of defensive functioning functions primarily to keep threatening thoughts, feelings, impulses or fears out of awareness (APA, 2000, pg.808). Displacement was only utilized by one participant. The following quotes

illustrate displacement as a defense mechanism in relation to vicarious exposure to violent crime:

“If something’s wrong, something is terribly wrong and I can’t get it right, I tend to sometimes get upset with my family, because they’re the closest, you know.”. (Respondent 1, Pg.6, line 11-13)

“You tend to put all that anger on your family...and it does happen to me.”. (Respondent 1, Pg.6, line 35-36)

The above quotes demonstrate how in the context of violent crime, one may displace one’s anger, frustration or various other emotions onto those who are not the cause of such feelings. When one engages in the defense mechanism of displacement, one usually displaces one’s feelings that are caused by the stressor (in this case the perpetrators of violent crime) on a less threatening object (in this case one’s family members).

*Intellectualization* was a particularly common defense that was identified across most transcripts. The defense mechanism of intellectualization involves the individual dealing or coping with conflict or stressors by “the excessive use of abstract thinking or the making of generalizations to control or minimize disturbing feelings.” (APA, 2000, pg.812). This defense is also a mature defense mechanism and is part of the mental inhibitions level. The following are examples of the defense mechanism of intellectualization as used by the participants:

“Surely, there’s something going on in their own lives, and I feel that, without that, children need to be educated from a very young age that these things are wrong. And, and it all boils down to not enough love. That’s it. That these kids are not getting enough love, and then they get bored and they do silly things, and looking for attention.”. (Respondent 3, Pg.8, line 15-19)

“The reality of it is that there isn’t a huge amount of crime if you take a look at the population. We’ve got a population of over 40-million people, crime is happening to only, probably, not even five per cent of that population at any one point in time. It’s happening in specific areas and I obviously understand crime is more prevalent in areas where there isn’t security measures, there isn’t lighting, there isn’t adequate facilities.”.

(Respondent 4, Pg.3, line 39-44)

“When you see certain black people, and you know that he must be a criminal. He looks like a criminal. And obviously more with them, than, than with anybody else. Because of the, the amount, obviously in this country, and the amount of, of people that are the criminals will be them.”

(Respondent 2, Pg.10, line 13-16)

The first of the above quotes illustrates how the participant employs abstract thinking to try and make sense of the existence of violent crime. She hypothesizes about the potential causes of violent crime. The second of the above quotes highlights how the participant uses the defense of intellectualization to try to minimize the impact of violent crime and perhaps make himself feel safer in terms of the likelihood of him becoming a victim. In the last of the above quotes it can be seen how the respondent uses generalizations about race related to who the perpetrators of violent crime are.

*Suppression* was another defense mechanism identified in the transcripts. The defense mechanism of suppression involves the individual dealing with stressors or conflict by “intentionally avoiding thinking about disturbing problems, wishes, feelings, or experiences.” (APA, 2000, pg 813). Suppression is a particularly mature defense mechanism and forms part of the ‘high adaptive’ level of defense mechanisms. This level of defensive functioning “results in optimal adaptation in the handling of stressors.” (APA, 2000, pg 808). This defense mechanism allows those thoughts, feelings and ideas to remain conscious yet the individual chooses to avoid thinking about the threatening stressor. Suppression can be seen to be functioning when the individual chooses to avoid talking about violent crime. The following quotes are examples of this:

“So ya, I try to avoid it, I try to avoid talking about it with people.”  
(Respondent 4, Pg.4, line 49-50)

“I don’t, I don’t want to dwell on it or, or think about it, because ja then it does, does make it a little bit too real...”  
(Respondent 2, Pg.4, line 21-22).

It can be seen that the function of the defense mechanism of suppression functions similarly to the vicarious trauma symptom of avoidance. In both cases, participants make a conscious choice to avoid talking and thinking about violent crime.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5 INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on interpreting the findings of this study. Exploring the meaning of the findings, as well as unexpected results will also be of focus in this chapter. A reflexive analysis of the findings will also be discussed. Attempt has also been made in the later part of this chapter to explore the assumed psychological impact that vicarious exposure to violent crime may have on the self. The relationship between coping styles and defense mechanisms and the nature thereof (whether adaptive or pathological) has also been highlighted.

The core focus of this research project was to determine the presence, nature and complexity of symptoms in those vicariously exposed to violent crime. The researcher was particularly interested in the similarity between these symptoms (of vicarious exposure to violent crime) and those found in the literature regarding vicarious trauma in the population of mental health care workers (Collins & Long, 2003 & Moulden, 2007). A further aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the specific coping styles and defense mechanisms adopted by those who are vicariously exposed to violent crime.

In summary, with regards to the findings of this research, it was found that individuals engage in a variety of defense mechanisms when exposed vicariously to violent crime. Most individuals were also found to use a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles and not exclusively one or the other. Although a combination of coping styles were used by most individuals, emotion-focused coping strongly dominated the manner in which the participants coped with the vicarious exposure to violent crime. It appears that this research specifically highlights the adaptive and protective nature of emotion-focused coping. With regards to vicarious trauma symptoms, a variety of five symptoms were evident across the transcripts. It is also necessary to emphasize that participants experienced variable combinations of symptoms and generally did not experience all of such symptoms.

### 5.1 Vicarious Trauma Symptoms

Research conducted looking at vicarious traumatization in mental health care workers, indicate that symptoms manifest emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally (Way et al., 2004). Such research identifies various symptoms of vicarious trauma, such as: disturbing thoughts and images of the traumatizing event (even if the individual was not present), feelings of personal vulnerability, anxiety, fear, shame or rage, somatic symptoms, increased arousal and avoidance (Adams et al., 2001; Collins, 2003, Hyman, 2004 & Lerias & Byrne, 2003). Findings from this research identified similar vicarious trauma symptoms, including: increased arousal, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of personal vulnerability, fear and avoidance. No somatic symptoms were evident in this research however this could be as a result of the indirect nature of questioning and the fact that it was left up to respondents to describe and express their experience of the vicarious exposure to violent crime. It is also possible that the experience of somatic symptoms would not generally be linked to one's exposure to violent crime by the lay person and hence participants were also not expected to make this connection. Furthermore, literature tends to emphasize the experience of somatic symptoms in more direct forms of exposure to trauma, often in the form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Dussich, 2003)

Each theme will now be addressed with regards to interpretative relevance and importance. Theme one, *Vicarious Trauma Symptoms*, presented with various interesting aspects that warrant further attention. An important point to emphasize with regards to the sub-theme of *Increased Arousal & Anxiety* is that although this presents as a symptom of vicarious trauma, which automatically has negative connotations, this symptom may also be seen to a certain extent as rather adaptive. In the context of pervasive reports of violent crime, one needs to be alert and vigilant in order to avoid becoming a victim. Hence, instead of seeing individuals who have increased arousal and anxiety as suffering from the consequences of violent crime, one can also see them as adapting and to a certain extent, being resourceful in their use of emotion. If this is the case, it would be useful to distinguish between those individuals who are positively affected by increased arousal and anxiety and those who are negatively affected by it. From the interviews it was evident that individuals who experienced the negative consequences of anxiety

seemed to perpetually exist in such states. There did not seem to be a 'balance', that being a group of individuals who experienced increased arousal and anxiety only when confronted with a threatening situation. However, it can be hypothesized that this group of individuals may have not reported their anxiety symptoms as they perhaps perceived them as a 'normal' and expected reaction to a direct threat. This form of increased arousal and anxiety can possibly be seen as more adaptive as it functions to alert one's self to potentially dangerous situations. In the latter, pervasive anxiety states can be suggested to have more detrimental affects on the individual.

This highlights a crucial finding of this research, this being that there appears to be two forms of emotion-focused coping: adaptive and pathological. Furthermore particular defenses were linked to the particular forms of emotion-focused coping. Adaptive emotion-focused coping was associated with the higher level defenses of suppression and displacement. In this case these defenses the anxiety is managed productively and is not exacerbated. However in the case of maladaptive emotion- focused coping, the defense of splitting (an immature defense) tended to be utilized by the respondents. This can be said to be maladaptive, as the more one splits off, anxiety is exacerbated and does not dissipate. Therefore, adaptive emotion-focused coping has the function of the individual managing their anxiety via the more mature defenses that are utilized. On the other hand, maladaptive emotion-focused coping exacerbates and perpetuates anxiety.

The sub-theme of *Feeling Hopeless* essentially was linked to a feeling or perception that violent crime in South Africa is out of control and unstoppable. The second component of this sub-theme related to the fact that individuals felt that both as citizens and as police officials, no difference was being made with regards to the fighting of violent crime. This was linked to a sense of being overwhelmed and powerless. It can be further postulated that perhaps individuals perceive themselves as being powerless victims (even if they have not actually been a victim of violent crime). In addition it appears that the perpetrators are perceived to currently hold the significant majority of power in this country, particularly with regards to who becomes a victim and who does not. It is important to refer to literature that identifies hopelessness as having a key link to depression. Hopelessness can be defined as "The expectation that negative events will



occur or that positive events will not occur, coupled with the expectation that one can do nothing to change this.” (Abela, Gagnon & Auerbach, p.402). The theory surrounding the role of feelings of hopelessness in depression does not discount other etiological causes (either biological or cognitive) of depression. Rather, it proposes that when hopelessness causes depression, a different symptom presentation occurs. Such unique symptoms of depression caused by hopelessness include: decreased motivation, decreased self-esteem, apathy, brooding-worrying and increased dependency (Abela et al., ). It can therefore be seen that a feeling or sense of hopelessness as evident in the transcripts may have significant consequences for the individual, particularly if the sense of hopelessness is perpetual and long-lasting.

The sub-theme of *Feeling of Vulnerability* was implicitly linked and inseparable from the feeling of fear that participants experienced. This is a somewhat logical and expectable association between these two sub-themes, as if one is in a dangerous or threatening situation, or feels that their victimization is inevitable, one is likely to experience a feeling of fear. Therefore, although this theme did not present explicitly in the majority of transcripts, it can perhaps be argued that it is a more implicit theme that underlies various other feelings, such as fear and avoidance.

It is not clear why this theme was not more prominent in the transcripts. It could be suggested that as a result of a feeling of vulnerability being intimately linked to that of the feeling of fear, that perhaps the respondents were avoiding thinking about their sense of vulnerability and fear. There appears to be some evidence of this in the respondents’ use of defense mechanisms such as intellectualization and suppression as well as problem-focused coping styles (For example: Respondent 2, Pg.4 line 21-22 & Pg.3 line1-4). This perhaps functions to avoid focusing on emotion (such as fear) which may be more threatening to the individual. Therefore, if one focuses on trying to understand the problem and rationalize it (as in the defense of intellectualization) as well as employing problem-focused coping styles and strategies, one may feel less overwhelmed by their feelings of fear, hopelessness and vulnerability. Therefore in a sense, it can be suggested that this pattern leads to respondents creating a false sense of control, stability and hope that is ultimately cathartic. This highlights the essential function of such



defense mechanisms: that being to protect one's self from thoughts or impulses that are threatening.

As mentioned above, the sub-theme of *Fear* is strongly interlinked with other vicarious trauma symptoms and is related to the perceived sense of violent crime being rife and perhaps to the notion that there are no safe spaces left in South Africa, hence one is perpetually and unavoidably vulnerable and at risk. It can be suggested that owing to the presence of other vicarious trauma symptoms, specifically the feeling of vulnerability and hopelessness, that every time we hear stories of violent crime we start to believe that our own victimization is inevitable. Therefore, the sense of fear that one experiences may be suggested to be a way that one prepares for the inevitable. It is important to highlight that when one is in a state of fear, one is unlikely to be in a state of control and able to think rationally. Therefore, it can be suggested that individuals who are in states of fear may employ more emotion-focused coping styles.

The sub-theme of *Avoidance* that was evident in the transcripts can be likened to a form of numbing and desensitization that occurs. Owing to the fact that respondents report being constantly bombarded with images and stories of violent crime, it may be argued that they avoid thinking and talking about such incidences as far as possible. If one was to dwell on each horrific incident, one may become overwhelmed and have difficulty coping in such a society. Thus, although avoidance exists in literature as a symptom of vicarious trauma, *in the context of vicarious exposure to violent crime, it can also be understood as having a somewhat protective function*. It may be suggested that from the transcripts, when one is consciously avoiding talking about the topic of violent crime or has made a decision not to dwell on it, this may perhaps have a function of protecting the self. However, it can perhaps be hypothesized that when the individual is not aware that they avoid this topic, it may be less protective and essentially become more 'pathological'. The reason for this is possibly that if avoidance of an issue is so unconscious it may entail the use of the defense mechanism of repression. Repression is classified as a neurotic defense mechanism that essentially acts to expel emotions or ideas from consciousness (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993).

## 5.2 Coping Styles

Bouchard and Thériault, (2003) conceptualize the concepts of coping styles and defense mechanism as interrelated. It can be suggested that this research also reinforces this position as from the findings one can see that the general coping style (whether emotion or problem-focused) tends to inform the particular defense mechanisms that one unconsciously makes use of. Therefore, one's coping style and defense mechanism can be understood as being interrelated. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles were evidentially employed by the respondents of this research. However, emotion-focused coping far outweighed the use of problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping tends to be utilized when one feels overwhelmed by the stressor and that the issue is beyond the individual's ability to instill control and change (Anderson et al., 2002). It can be suggested that the participants and possibly numerous other South African's feel overwhelmed by the problem of violent crime and feel that they are unable to instill any form of change. Owing to the fact that emotion-focused coping strategies are associated with maladaptive or unhealthy ways of dealing with stress and trauma, it can be suggested that because primarily emotion-focused coping styles were employed by the participants, that more negative consequences on their psychological well being can be expected (Anderson et al., 2002). It is useful to look at an example from the transcripts to highlight this point. Respondent 4 (33 year old male) seemed to adopt many emotion-focused coping styles, which entailed: avoidance and anger with a strong emphasis on punishment and revenge. His sense of hopelessness was extremely prominent throughout the interview. He expressed a highly pessimistic view of the future and viewed his victimization at some point as inevitable. It can be suggested that the respondent experiences fear and anxiety as a permanent state of existence to the point that he describes himself as almost becoming 'paranoid'. It may be hypothesized that the manner in which the respondent is dealing with the vicarious exposure to violent crime is unhealthy and maladaptive.

It can be furthermore suggested that although one's coping style is essentially dispositional, it is also contextual, as proposed by Zeidner and Endler (1996). This can be seen in that every participant experienced unique aspects to their coping, yet generally most participants seemed to cope by focusing on emotion. Therefore it could be argued

that emotion-focused coping can be seen to occur as result of the context of violent crime and the dynamic that makes people's experience of this phenomenon similar in some respects (Zeidner & Endler, 1996).

Anderson et. al. (2002) emphasizes that emotion-focused coping styles are often adopted by the individual when the individual feels overwhelmed by the stressor and that the issue is beyond their control and ability to bring about change. The use of primarily emotion-focused coping styles appears to be related to the vicarious trauma symptom of *feeling hopeless*. It can be hypothesized that if individuals feel hopeless, they may also feel that they are unable to instill change and therefore may feel overwhelmed by the situation because they have no control over the situation of violent crime. Therefore it seems that *there exists a crucial link between the vicarious trauma symptom of feeling hopeless and the use of emotion-focused coping styles*. This appears to be strongly associated with the observation that many of the participants' perceptions of violent crime in South Africa were about it being out of control, unstoppable, and that future victimization is inevitable. Given this, they are likely to feel a sense of being overwhelmed and emotionally hypersensitive. In summary, as a result of respondent's perceptions and understandings of the nature of violent crime in South Africa, they may make use of predominantly emotion-focused coping.

It was evident from the transcripts that *Anger* was a dominant form of emotion-focused coping. The anger that individuals expressed seems to stem from various other feelings and vicarious trauma symptoms, such as a feeling of hopelessness. For example: in the case of respondent 2 (31 year old female), she experienced strong feelings of anger at the loss of control and freedom that she perceived to have occurred. Older participants, who had lived through a different era, where far less violent crime existed, expressed anger regarding change in the society that had occurred. Anger, generally was related to the perception that the government is not protecting civilians and was also related to a sense of loss of control and powerlessness. These are core features of emotion-focused coping as it is utilized when one feels overwhelmed and is unable to bring about change in the stressor (Anderson et al., 2002). It is also important to emphasize that anger may also have a protective function and may function to make the self feel more in control at

times. Anger in the transcripts was evident in relation to the expression of revenge and harsh punishment for the perpetrators of violent crime. It may be proposed that this anger remediates a sense of hopelessness as it provides a sense of control for the individual and a sense that they are taking action in the form of having a strong opinion about the deserved fate of the perpetrators of violent crime.

*Religion* emerged as a particularly unexpected emotion-focused coping style that some of the participants engaged in. Owing to the strong sense of hopelessness and anger evident in the transcripts, it had not been anticipated that religion would be a commonly used coping style. It can be suggested that people utilize religion as a means of maintaining hope and comfort in difficult and uncertain times. Religion is also a more personal and private means of coping, that people do not tend to share as readily with others. There were a range of religions (for e.g.: Roman Catholic, Hinduism, Jehovah Witness) represented in this research, which further enhances the importance that religion holds for many individuals. The respondents emphasized that the use of religion acts as a means of maintaining hope for them. It can perhaps be hypothesized that religion may present as a somewhat positive attempt to create a safe and secure space outside the 'real world'. If one accepts that vicarious exposure to violent crime on a regular basis creates feelings of vulnerability, fear and hopelessness about external reality, it is understandable that some individual's cope by attempting to create an alternative, safe space to this via the use of religion. It is important to stress that if religion resulted in individuals seeking out social support via going to church for example, this would be problem-focused coping. However, religion was used by the respondents as primarily a private way of coping and is therefore an emotion-focused coping style. It is significant to emphasize that emotion-focused coping in this context may be somewhat adaptive and creates a 'protective' way of coping. In other words, findings in this study indicate that emotion-focused strategies should not necessarily be categorized as a poorer way of coping when compared to problem-focused strategies.

*Talking* was employed as another emotion-focused coping style. The function of talking is an interesting one and is essentially two-fold. Firstly, it was highlighted in the findings that when individuals talk about stories of violent crime, they tend to be exaggerated.

This highlights the first apparent function of talking: adding to the hysteria of violent crime. On the other hand, it can be suggested that those who feel more vulnerable use talking as a form of self-catharsis. Therefore talking possibly holds two rather contrary effects, one that adds to hysteria and one that is cathartic. It may be suggested that people talk about violent crime and share their stories which ultimately adds to a sense of hysteria. It can be suggested that talking to others perhaps functions to make the individual feel that others are also affected as much as they are, as well as suffering equally. This perhaps has a uniting affect and draws a sense of commonality amongst South Africans. Furthermore, if one believes that everyone is in the same situation, perhaps they are less likely to feel as vulnerable as they would if they had not talked to other people. Baker (2007) proposes that the function of talking as having a cathartic affect is essentially embedded in the notion that if one talks about their problems, conflicts or distress has a restorative and healing effect on the self. Here, talking holds the function of providing relief from distress through discharging distressing affect. In addition, talking or verbally expressing one's emotion is said to have the effect of decreasing psychological arousal and negative emotional experience (Baker, 2007). It seems as if these two contradictory functions (hysteria and catharsis) perhaps occur simultaneously. It can be seen for the present research that the manner in which the respondents make use of talking is not constructive or problem-focused therefore it is passive in nature. Although, the 'talking' is not problem-focused and offers no resolution to the problem at hand, perhaps it can be suggested that as a form of emotion-focused coping it may also have an adaptive function as it does seem have a cathartic effect too.

Although not as prevalent, *problem-focused coping* was evident in the safety precautions that individuals seem to adopt in the presence of high levels of violent crime. This form of coping essentially involved physically adapting one's environment to make it more safe and secure. Making physical changes (e.g.: the use of burglar guards, electric fencing and having alarm systems) may be suggested to have the effect of decreasing one's sense of vulnerability (a symptom of vicarious trauma) and helplessness. This form of coping attempts to control the situation and ultimately avoid becoming a victim of violent crime.

### 5.3 Defense Mechanisms

The third theme of Defense mechanisms also presented with interesting aspects that warrant further attention as this allows for further insight into the manner in which individuals cope. The sub-theme of *Splitting* highlighted a strong element of dichotomous thinking and stereotyping. Splitting presented with the function of understanding African people as having more negative characteristics than other races, and specifically the characteristic of being the primary source of violent crime. By understanding such perpetrators as essentially bad, it may possibly serve the function of alleviating guilt that may exist regarding having harsh conceptualizations of just and appropriate punishment. This may serve the function of making the participant think that an acceptable manner of dealing with perpetrators of violent crime is to simply remove them from society (split them off). Splitting also has a protective function regarding the self. Because participants felt they could not keep the perpetrators away physically, they attempted to do this mentally (through splitting) to make them feel safer and less threatened.

The particular form of *Rationalization* that was utilized by some participants was rather unexpected. Rationalization was evident in the misattribution regarding the cause of why individuals become victims of violent crime. Blaming victims for not being more vigilant and cautious in terms of taking steps to preventing themselves from being vulnerable and becoming a victim of violent crime seems to be important. It is possible that this may make violent crime seem more avoidable and preventable. It may be suggested that this rationale may be premised on the individual making use of projection that enables and benefits the individual from 'seeing themselves in the other'. In doing this they may then be psychologically preparing themselves for potential victimization. Rationalization may be said to therefore have a comforting function for the individual, as this defense mechanism acts to make one feel less vulnerable and at risk of becoming a victim. In other words, it appears that such a rationalization works to help prevent feelings of victimization by being more vigilant and cautious and taking precautions that victims did not.



psychopathology as they 'tame' or decrease emotional distress. He insists that when defenses or compromise formations allow for the individual to function without the expression of psychopathology (e.g. either in the form of anxiety or depression), the compromise formation is adaptive in that it enables the individual to cope with the stressors that they are exposed to. The essential argument that Brenner (2006) makes is that defenses or compromise formations may be the most adaptive solution in the given situation. This can be directly linked to the consequences of vicarious exposure to violent crime in which various compromise formations may be said to occur. There were various examples of compromise formations in this research. The fact that anxiety may have an adaptive function indicates that anxiety presents as a compromise formation. Although anxiety is essentially a symptom of vicarious trauma, as a result of it being fear inducing – it alerts one's self to potential dangers and threats. Therefore, one also uses anxiety to protect the self. Likewise, fear and avoidance also present as compromise formations as they may have potentially pathological effects on the individual, however they also may be seen as adaptive in that they also protect the self from potential danger and victimization.

The above is also related to the maturity and nature of the specific defense mechanisms that one engages in. According to Valliant (1977, 1992, 1993), the immature defenses (such as delusional projection and denial) at the lowest level of defensive functioning involve psychotic mechanisms which distort reality. Thus implicit in Valliant's (1977, 1992, 1993) theory is that the lower the level of defensive functioning, the more pathological and less adaptive is the individual's coping style. In the case of the daily exposure to violent crime, one could assume that such coping styles and defense mechanisms are likely to become fairly entrenched and part of a way of life. Therefore, it follows that these ways of coping have psychological consequences in terms of the way individuals think about themselves and their daily context. Powdthavee (2004) proposed that exposure to violent crime may have long lasting and detrimental affects on one's psychological well-being. Based on interviews there is agreement here in that the results of this research indicate that people use different coping styles and defense mechanisms to manage conflict. However, in the context of the vicarious exposure to violent crime, it appears that one's coping styles and defenses become particularly entrenched and

'chronic' ways of living as a result of the persisting nature of the conflict and stressor. The fact that respondents spoke frequently about a strong sense of hopelessness regarding the future and that they perceive the level of violent crime in South Africa as not changing and unremitting, but in fact deteriorating – supports the idea that a sense of hopelessness may in fact entrench one's coping style and defenses. Therefore, it can be suggested that the detrimental affects on an individual's psychological well-being are likely to occur as a result of the particular coping styles and defense mechanisms that one uses. Furthermore, it can be suggested that defenses are so entrenched into the individual's way of life as a result of the constant exposure to violent crime. This elicits the idea that perhaps there is an unremitting or 'chronic' fit between defense and the situation. This implies that the specific situation (in this case the vicarious exposure to violent crime) elicits certain defenses. As outlined previously, certain coping styles elicit the use of certain types of defenses. More specifically, in the case of vicarious exposure to violent crime - emotion-focused appears to be linked to the defenses of suppression and displacement (adaptive) and splitting (maladaptive). This research also highlighted that in the case of vicarious exposure to violent crime, problem-focused coping appears to be linked to the defenses of intellectualization and rationalization.

Psychodynamic theory proposes that when conflicts are suppressed and avoided the threatening impulse, thought or feeling, does not merely 'disappear' but is expressed or manifested in another form (Sadock & Sadock, 2000). In this way, defense mechanisms act to keep the threatening impulse at bay and out of the individual's consciousness. Yet the conflict is often expressed in another form, hence individuals may experience psychopathological disorders that are depressive or somatoform in nature. An example of this, would be in the case of Pain Disorder, psychodynamic explanations regarding the etiology of this disorder attribute intrapsychic conflicts that are avoided, suppressed or repressed, to the manifestation of physical pain symptoms (Sadock & Sadock, 2000).

Based on the present research, it would be difficult to generalize findings to the experience of all South Africans in terms of proposing that they experience more psychological disorder or distress owing to the vicarious exposure to violent crime. However, it may be argued that vicarious exposure to violent crime and consequent ways



of thinking may place the individual at greater risk for developing some forms of psychopathology. In other words, although individuals are adapting to a stressful and anxiety-provoking environment, it can be hypothesized that there are also negative consequences to one's mental health as a result of the ways in which individuals think and react to the vicarious exposure to violent crime.

It has been argued that vicarious trauma symptoms, coping styles and defense mechanisms are interlinked and each impact on the experience and expression of vicarious exposure to trauma. Coping styles and defense mechanism are closely linked concepts and both entail manners in which one attempts to cope with the environment. Both concepts have more adaptive or mature ways of coping. For example with regards to coping styles, problem-focused coping is said to be more adaptive than emotion-focused coping, which is used more when individuals feel that they have no control over a situation or feel overwhelmed (Anderson et al., 2002). With regards to defense mechanisms, the more mature defenses are argued to be more adaptive (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993). As a result of the manner in which one copes with the exposure to violent crime, one experiences more or less vicarious trauma symptoms. The nature of the symptoms of vicarious trauma that one experiences is also likely to be informed by the manner in which one copes. How the above formulations impact on individuals will be explored below.

#### 5.4 Constriction of the Self: Consequences of Vicarious Exposure to Violent Crime

It is pertinent and relevant to this research to explore the assumed impact on the self in the context of the vicarious exposure to violent crime. In other words, what are the assumed consequences of vicarious exposure to violent crime? As a result of the findings of this research, it can be suggested that owing to the multiple defense mechanisms that are at play in order to help the individual cope in an environment of vicarious exposure to violent crime; that the expression of thoughts, emotions and behaviours become constricted. If this is the case, this would contribute to a sense of the self becoming impoverished. The following quote highlights impoverishment of the self that was evident in the respondents:

“I think I’m very sad that, that I can’t do the things now. I think because I’ve lived in two completely different eras, I’ve lived when there was much, much, much less crime, when it was safe to walk out on the road in the evening, and I’ve live now, when there is high crime...I mean you can go to a place like the Pavilion, and walk around, in the evening. But it’s not the same. It’s, it’s, you don’t have the freedom. You still have to get back to your car thinking, you know, is it going to be safe for me to drive home. So, you tend to rather stay home than put yourself through the possibility of something going wrong.”  
(Respondent 3, Pg.5 line 28-31, 46-48 & Pg.6 line 1)

The above is an example of how the self as it should be in its authentic form is not permitted to be expressed owing to the constriction that results from the multiple defenses that are at work. It can be suggested that when defenses become too expansive, the effect is the constriction of the self. As a result of the expansive, pervasive and perceived permanent nature of violent crime in South Africa, it can be assumed that the defenses too have to similarly be expansive and pervasive in order for the individual to cope.

The extent of this negative impact on the self can be hypothesized to be linked to the type of coping and defenses that the individual adopts. Following Valliant’s (1977, 1992, 1993) theory of the hierarchy of defenses; the more primitive the defense, the more pathological the consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the maturity of the defenses adopted by the participants. The majority of defenses (intellectualization, rationalization, displacement) employed by participants in this research can be classified at the neurotic level of defensive functioning. At this level of defensive functioning, one’s experience of distress or feelings is altered or transformed (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993). According to the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000), such defenses keep the threatening impulse out of awareness. There were instances of defenses used at the immature level (splitting). At this level, major distortion “or misattribution of the image of self or others” occurs (APA, 2000, p. 809). One defense (suppression) at the mature level was evident in the transcripts. This level of defensive functioning allows the individual to integrate feelings and interpersonal relationships (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993) and therefore results “in optimal adaptation in the handling of stressors.” (APA, 2000, p.808).

It has been found in the present research that it is predominantly neurotic defenses that lead to the constriction and impoverishment of the self. As a result of the individual's feelings being transformed at this level of defensive functioning (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993), the self is directly impacted on. When such defenses are the individual's primary way of coping, the specific neurotic defense essentially mediates their feelings, behaviours and thoughts in order to cope with unremitting reports of violent crime. For example, respondent 4 (Page 3, line 39-44) employs the neurotic defense of intellectualization frequently via drawing on population data, statistics etc. to determine the likelihood of himself becoming a victim. This leads to the respondent feeling less at risk and less threatening and therefore, functions to decrease his anxiety. It can also be seen how intellectualization as a way of coping mediates his feelings, thoughts and behaviours in order to cope.

It can be suggested that individuals who adopt defenses at the more immature levels (for e.g. splitting) suffer more pathological and severe consequences to the self. According to literature (APA, 2000; Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993) the only adaptive defense that was employed by participants, that has little negative consequences for the self is that of suppression. For example, both respondents 2 and respondent 4 used the defense mechanism of suppression to consciously choose not to talk about or avoid thinking about violent crime. For them this was adaptive in that the use of more mature defenses resulted in less distress, fear and anxiety than those respondents (for e.g. respondent 4) who employed neurotic defenses, or less mature defenses.

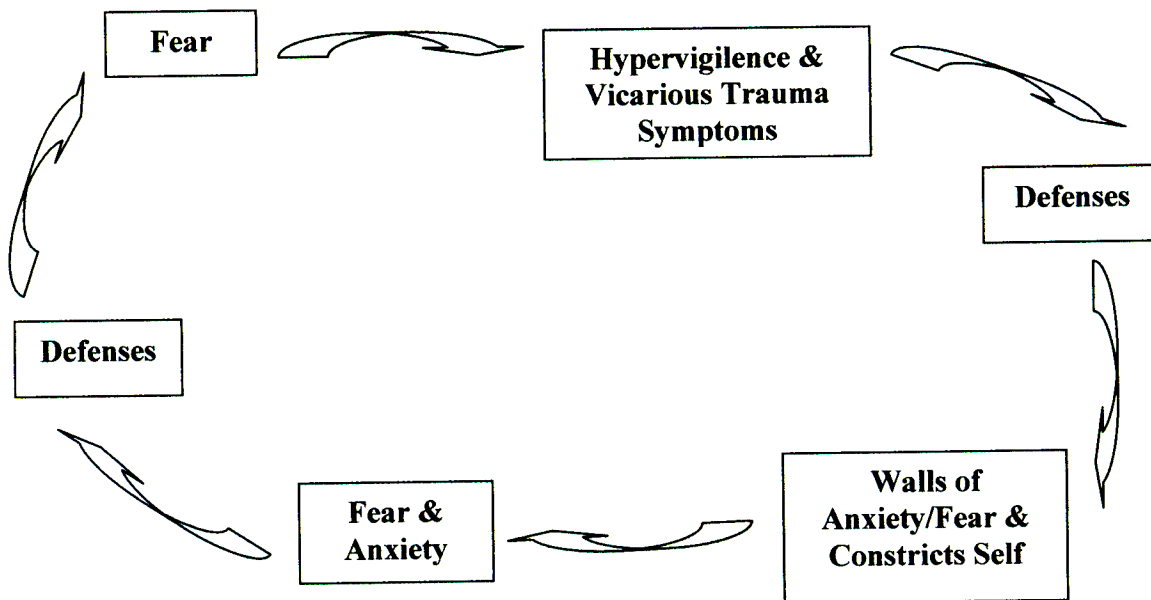
It is of relevance to explore the possible 'mechanism' through which people become vicariously traumatized as a result of vicarious exposure to violent crime. This research revealed that individuals employ primarily emotion-focused coping when vicariously exposed to violent crime. This form of coping is considered to be an unhealthy and more unproductive way of coping that is usually employed when one feels overwhelmed and unable to instill change in the stressor (Anderson et al., 2002). It can therefore be assumed then that in the presence of vicarious exposure to violent crime, individuals cope poorly. As mentioned previously in the discussion of compromise formation, although emotion-focused coping is generally considered to be a 'poor' way of coping; it may also

be understood as an attempt to adapt to the context of vicarious exposure to violent crime. Because this is a relatively poor way of coping one is more distressed and experiences more anxiety. This is evident in the above discussion with regards to the type of defenses utilized resulting in less or more distressed. The experience of high levels of distress and anxiety may possibly result in the experience of vicarious trauma symptoms and the excessive use defense mechanisms in order to cope. As mentioned previously, the more expansive the defenses become, the more the self is constricted and impacted on negatively.

Therefore, it can be seen that the coping style that one uses, whether emotion-focused or problem-focused, has an important impact on the likelihood of the experience of vicarious trauma symptoms, as well as the specific defense mechanisms that one is likely to draw on. From this research, it was evident that certain defense mechanisms were associated with specific coping styles. Emotion-focused coping (the dominant coping style) was linked to the defense of splitting, displacement and suppression. Problem-focused coping on the other hand was linked to the defense mechanisms of rationalization and intellectualization.

It is useful to look at the vicious cycle that seems to exist, resulting in the constriction of the self. The constriction of the self via the exposure to violent crime initiates a cycle which precipitates and perpetuates further constriction of the self. The fear that is induced by hearing stories of violent crime (vicarious exposure) activates defenses to wall off the fear and anxiety. This, in turn, activates hypervigilance and other vicarious trauma symptoms which then activates the use of more defenses to protect the self. The effect is further constriction of the self thereby creating further fear and anxiety; which ends up activating more defenses (see diagram below).

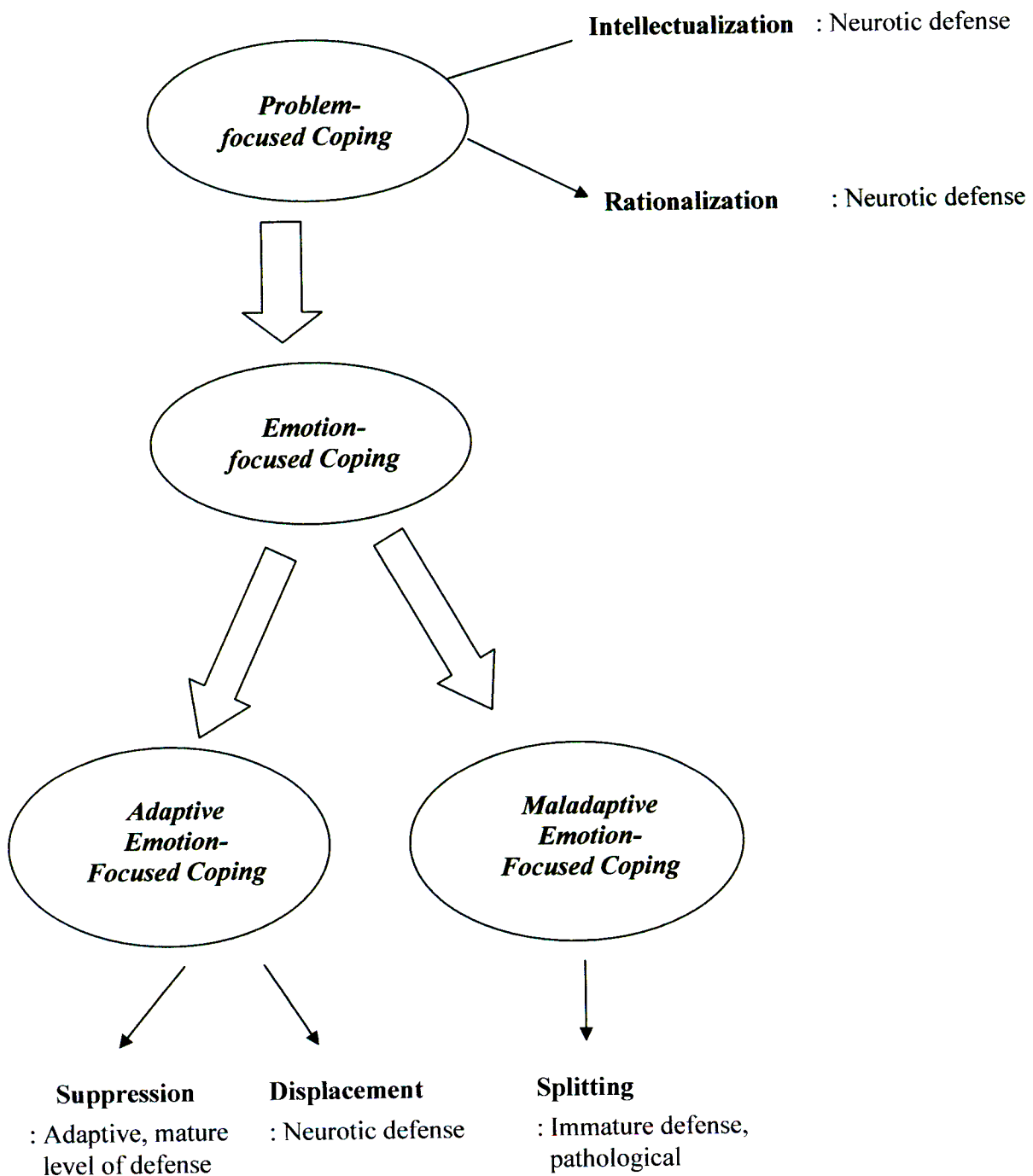
### 5.5 Diagram of Vicious Cycle of the Constriction of the Self



Literature suggests (Anderson et al., 2002) that emotion-focused coping is usually non-adaptive and therefore, associated with more primitive defenses. However, it is imperative to emphasize that the findings of this research indicate that in the case of vicarious exposure to violent crime, emotion-focused coping may have a protective function and act as a 'compromise formation'. From the diagram 5.6 it can be seen that emotion-focused coping has been linked to the use of primarily mature or higher level defenses. This in itself would suggest that this form of coping is having a protective function of the self. Although this would seem contrary to literature surrounding the 'unhealthiness' of emotion-focused coping (Anderson et al., 2002); it can perhaps be suggested that when one is exposed to pervasive stressors (as in the case of the vicarious exposure to violent crime) that this form of coping may have a protective function rather than an adaptive one. Furthermore, it can be hypothesized that when there is no specific goal that is attainable or seems changeable as in the case with perceptions of violent crime in South Africa, emotion-focused coping becomes more useful and protective than problem-focused coping. Therefore, in the presence of the vicarious exposure to violent crime, emotion-focused coping may be said to provide the function of coping and the protection of the self. Most respondents of this study did use some form of problem-focused coping. However, it was evident in the transcripts that this did not relieve their

fear and anxiety sufficiently and therefore, as a result of them being inevitably unable to control or instill change in the situation - they turned to emotion-focused coping as a means of protecting the self and coping.

5.6 Diagram of Coping Styles related to Defenses



### 5.7 Case Illustrations

In order to illustrate the above diagram, the case of respondent 6 (a 59 year old Indian female) will be briefly discussed. This respondent made use of primarily emotion-focused coping throughout the interview. She made reference to the fact that she often talks to others about horrific incidences of violent crime that she has heard about or read about. She also usually only discusses the stories that really 'disturb' her. Furthermore, she draws strongly on her religion (Hinduism) to privately cope with the fear and anxiety that she experiences at times in relation to the phenomenon of violent crime. However, it was evident from the interview that she makes use of the defense mechanism of suppression. As she also consciously attempts to avoid thinking about violent crime as she finds it so distressing. It can therefore be seen as an example of how individuals make use of emotion-focused coping and the defense of suppression to protect the self and cope with the vicarious exposure to violent crime. This is an example of adaptive emotion-focused coping, as the individual uses defenses so that anxiety is controlled and does not overwhelm the self. The defense of suppression allow for some of the anxiety to be 'filtered' and therefore the anxiety does not linger as long as it would in the case of maladaptive emotion focused coping.

The case of respondent 2 (a 31 year old White female) will be briefly outlined to highlight maladaptive or 'unhealthy' emotion-focused coping. This respondent made use of the defense mechanism of splitting. She used this defense to understand and conceptualize all African people as potential criminals and therefore as potential threats. However, this defense and coping style can be said to be maladaptive in that it does not dissipate or manage her anxiety, on the contrary it acts to exacerbate it. As a result of this defense she experiences extremely high anxiety as every time she comes into contact with an African person she feels threatened and fearful. One can therefore see how this is maladaptive and leads to the possible constriction of the self.

The case of respondent 3 (a 46 year old White female) illustrates how when problem-focused coping fails, individuals tend to then engage in the use of emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping acts to manage the individual's anxiety at a very superficial level for a short while. This is most likely as a result of the nature of the

stressor of violent crime. It can be said that as a result of violent crime being an ongoing phenomenon in South Africa that once the individual has dealt with this problem to the best of their ability, they turn to emotion-focused coping styles. This may be related to the fact that the individual is unlikely to be able to solely instill any foreseeable change in this problem. Respondent 3 talked about various problem-focused coping styles that she engaged in. These included: being alert when driving and wearing a panic alarm around her neck at home for example. It was evident that as a result of problem-focused coping not sufficiently working to manage her anxiety that she then engaged in emotion-focused coping. Her use of emotion-focused coping specifically involved much expression of anger and the use of religion. It is therefore evident that when problem-focused coping does not adequately function to manage one's anxiety in the context of the vicarious exposure to violent crime; that one then uses emotion-focused coping in attempt to better manage this.



## CHAPTER SIX

### 6 CONCLUSION

As a result of the findings and discussion of this study, it can be hypothesized that in the presence of the vicarious exposure to violent crime, South African's utilize various coping styles which inform the specific defense mechanisms that they adopt and hence, their possible experience of symptoms of vicarious trauma.

The constriction of the self as a result of the multiple defense mechanisms that are at play when the individual is exposed on a daily basis to stories of violent crime can be said to be one of the consequences of such vicarious exposure. A vicious cycle may also be evident in that the fear that is provoked causes defenses to be activated which in turn results in the constriction of the self, more defenses and therefore further constriction of the self. Therefore, the constriction of the self via the vicarious exposure to violent crime initiates a cycle which precipitates and perpetuates further constriction of the self. It can therefore be concluded, that the range of the individuals thoughts, emotions and behaviours become restricted as a result of the defensive functioning and hence, the impoverishment of the self.

The dominant form of coping utilized by the respondents of this study was emotion-focused coping. The defenses that were associated with this coping style, primarily involved neurotic defense – somewhat mature defenses (Valliant, 1977, 1992, 1993). Therefore, it can be concluded that the compromise formations or defenses utilized, as well as emotion-focused coping may have a protective function of the self (Brenner, 2006). It was evident from the findings and discussion, that when problem-focused coping fails to alleviate and manage one's anxiety, that one then engages in emotion-focused coping. In the context of vicarious exposure to violent crime, problem-focused coping is not able to sufficiently or significantly assist the individual in alleviating their anxiety as a result of the pervasive and uncontrollable nature of the stressor. Two forms of emotion-focused coping were evident amongst the respondents, these being: adaptive and maladaptive. Adaptive emotion-focused coping acts to alleviate and manage the

anxiety, this being as a result of the particular defenses that this coping style is associated with (suppression and displacement). On the other hand, maladaptive emotion-focused coping does not act to dissipate the anxiety, but rather acts to exacerbate it. Maladaptive emotion-focused coping can be linked to the defense of splitting.

As evident in the Chapter Five (Interpretation of Findings), links can be drawn between the existing body of literature on vicarious traumatization in mental health care workers and individuals vicariously exposed to violent crime. Hence, it can be said that one of the core focuses of this research project was achieved. One of the primary aims of this research was to determine the presence, nature and complexity of symptoms in those vicariously exposed to violent crime. The second aim of this research was to determine if these symptoms are similar to those found in the existing body of literature regarding vicarious trauma; which essentially focuses on the secondary trauma in mental health care workers. This aim too can be said to have been accomplished.

This research entailed initial exploratory research therefore future research in this area should perhaps entail a more racially representative sample and a larger sample, so that generalizations to the general South African population could be made. If future research on a larger scale also indicates the presence of vicarious trauma symptoms in those vicariously exposed to violent crime, it would be interesting to try and establish a link between the presence of vicarious trauma and the presence and incidence of psychopathology in the general population. This would be of interest as it would give insight into the etiology of psychopathology in the South African context. Therefore comparative research of the incidence of psychopathology in South Africa and other countries with high violent crime rates, as well as those countries with low violent crime rates, would be of interest.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix I: Prompting Article**

WEDNESDAY TRIBUNE: JUNE 17/07

# Baby, mom, gran shot in robbery

**DOREEN PREMDEV**

**A** NORTHIDENE mother held on tightly to her 16-month-old baby, trying to shield him from two gun-wielding men who attacked the family after their car broke down near Bellair, in south Durban.

Jacoba McPherson, 42, her daughter Nicholene McPherson, 22, and her baby Jordan, were returning home from a party in Umbilo at 9pm on Thursday when their car stalled on Bellair Road.

Nicholene said her mother managed to drive to the side of the road.

"The road was lonely and the street lights were not working," Nicholene said. "We had been there for only a few minutes when my mother noticed two men walking towards the car."

"She said, 'Lock your doors, here they come,' and the next thing I heard was a gun shot."

"They had fired into the car and one of the windows had shattered. One man opened the door and demanded cellphones and other valuables. I gave them my cellphone. The men took the phone and walked away. But they turned around a few feet away and walked back to the car."

"Thinking they were going to be killed, Nicholene wrapped her arms around her son, trying desperately to protect him, while her mother tried to start the car. They came back and pointed the gun at my head. My mother was hysterical. She thought they were going to shoot me. I calmed her down."

"The men demanded her cellphone, which she gave to them. Before leaving they fired two shots, one at my mother's head and the other entered my right hand. The same bullet entered Jordan's back, exiting through his stomach."

"I hadn't realised he was shot, because I was still in shock. I only



NICHOLENE McPherson, shot in the arm, holds a picture of her baby, Jordan, who was also shot

Picture: JOHN HLONGWA

realised what had happened when I felt warm liquid run down my stomach. I looked down at Jordan and he was bleeding," Nicholene said.

Still holding her baby, she got out of the car and tried to stop passers-by, but nobody would stop. Eventually she stood in the middle of the road, forcing a driver to stop; he was a doctor.

Jordan and his grandmother were taken to Albert Luthuli Memorial Hospital. Jacoba was expected to be discharged yesterday. However baby Jordan continues to fight for his life.

Insp Sivan Naidoo, who was with the McPherson family last night, said the baby was still in a critical condition. "He is sedated 90% of the time. The doctors tried taking him off the ventilator, but he was battling to breathe. They have tied his hands to prevent him pulling out the ventilator pipes."

Anyone with information that might lead to the arrest of the two men, believed to be in their early 20s, should call Naidoo, at 031 451 2819 or 083 519 0356.

Additional reporting: Aulza Hlongwane



POLICE identikits of the robbers

## Appendix II: Interview Schedule

- 1) (Show probing article) What are some of your initial thoughts that come to mind when you read this article?
- 2) What does this article make you feel?
- 3) How do you cope when you read or hear about incidents such as this one?
- 4) What is the medium (either television/word of mouth) by which you come to hear about stories of violent crime the most?
- 5) If you were to take the scenario of a dinner party and if the topic of violent crime in South Africa comes up...
  - (a) What do you notice about the way in which people talk about stories or incidents of violent crime?
  - (b) What do you think about when you hear these stories?
  - (c) What are the sorts of feelings that you experience in these scenarios?
- 6) Are there any thoughts or feelings that you frequently 'catch' yourself thinking about in relation to violent crime?
- 7) What strategies, if any, do you employ to try to avoid becoming a direct victim of violent crime?
- 8) What affects do you personally believe that living in a society with a high crime rate has taken on you?

Appendix III: Informed Consent Form

Title of research study: Coping styles and defense mechanisms in adults  
vicariously exposed to violent crime: An explorative study.

The focus of this research is on the affects of exposure to violent crime in the general population in a society with high crime rates, South Africa. The scope of this research will deal with the coping styles and defense mechanisms that individuals adopt in response to being exposed vicariously to violent crime via images and stories of such events depicted in the media and from hearing first hand accounts from others.

All information provided by participants will be recorded, stored and disseminated in the most appropriate manner to ensure the anonymity (names or identifying information will be excluded from research reports/results) and confidentiality of participants is upheld. Participants will be provided with a copy of the final project if they so wish.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to participate in the abovementioned study. I acknowledge that my participation is of a voluntary nature. I declare that all information provided is valid and true. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from this research at any time as I may wish.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## Appendix IV: Pilot Interview

Demographics: White, 54 years old, Christian

INTERVIEWER: The title of my research project at this stage, is an exploration into coping styles and defence mechanisms of adults vicariously exposed to violent crime. Okay, it's quite a mouthful, but what I am basically interested in is secondary exposure to violence, as opposed to direct exposure, and the experiences of violence. Secondary exposure to violence entails hearing stories of criminal violence, seeing violence on TV, reading about it in the newspaper. Those kinds of things. But being exposed to on a daily basis.

INTERVIEWEE: But not being directly involved?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: To a degree, because everybody's had house breakings, but not where your life has been in immediate, sort of threat.

INTERVIEWEE: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, ja, and the defence mechanisms and coping styles, are just the way you deal with it and the way you, sort of, don't become emotionally affected by it. Or carry on by coping.

INTERVIEWEE: And the difference and definition for you between coping ...

INTERVIEWER: Styles and defence mechanism. Okay, well, a defence mechanism is actually a form of coping. It is a coping style. And defence mechanisms are basically psychological versions of that. So while a coping style could be more practical on nature, like talking about a problem, or avoiding it, or whatever, or employing strategies to protect yourself from crime.

A defence mechanism is a far more unconscious thing, and sub-conscious thing, and it's far more intricate in terms of the psychological mechanisms that are at work. So it is more like, well a simple defence mechanism, for example, would be using humour to not become effected by, or emotionally upset by a story of violent crime that you hear. So you joke about it.

INTERVIEWEE: Or choose to be silent.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, or deny if there's a problem, or you rationalise it or intellectualise it. While these all seem like normal things that we do, it's very, it's at a very unconscious level that we're doing it, to protect yourself from being hurt by the reality of what is actually happening, and be emotionally disturbed, basically, by it. So it's a very, it's a protective shield that you use, okay. I hope that's clearer.

INTERVIEWEE: Which can differ from situation to situation?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, definitely. Okay. So, I've gone through that. And basically I'll just be looking at, ja, the scope of this is going to looking at how you deal with it in your life, and how you talk about it and think about crime and feel about it, and being exposed to it on a daily basis. So it's, it's very, ja.

INTERVIEWEE: And are we talking, are we talking in general terms, or are we talking in specifics? If we, if there was a hold up at Kloof First National Bank, and I was there five minutes later, and I'd had a rough three days before that, I would probably deal with that situation differently to another one. Or are we talking, we talking general?

INTERVIEWER: I think more generally, but also you can, if there's specific instances that you want to use examples, while we're talking, that's also fine. But just generally like, obviously some encounters that you have had are going to affect you more. Like, for example, if you're sleeping in the house and somebody breaks in, that is obviously going to worry you, make you more upset than just reading about an article that didn't affect you personally. So, it's, ja, more generally, I think. Okay.

I just thought I'd show this article. You've probably seen it. It was quite a publicised story. It's a story about the mom and the baby and the gran. who were shot. I don't know if you saw that?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I haven't seen that one.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, and I just thought I'd ask you, sort of, what are your initial thought and, when you read an article like this? It's obviously quite emotionally provoking, when you ...

INTERVIEWEE: It's dreadful. It's absolutely dreadful. But I think my first, my first thought there is for the victims, and the distress that they, they must have been under at the time that the baddies came and did it. This was the one with their car broken down, ja. And then the eternal, and I don't wish to be pessimistic, but, will they catch these guys, and what will happen.

Hopeless  
ness V.T.S

Justice &  
pessimism

INTERVIEWER: Okay, how's (inaudible) you said what it makes you think about. But, and your feelings about that?

INTERVIEWEE: I suppress them. I feel with my head, but I don't allow my heart to feel.

Avoidance:  
V.T.S  
T1, S6

INTERVIEWER: Because that's the distinction is, you say you feel this and that. But you actually think, the feelings....

INTERVIEWEE: I feel, I put myself in their position, and I think their life will never be the same again, and it's a dreadful situation for anybody to be in, and it could have happened to us. But it, but it is a, it's a definite conscious thinking.

INTERVIEWER: Thinking instead of trying to feel.

INTERVIEWEE: It's not a feeling.

INTERVIEWER: Because a feeling is probably more upsetting.

INTERVIEWEE: And if you keep on probing me and probing me, it will be I'm angry, that these people, that we're getting in to an environment now where you can do bad things, and you can do nasty things to people, and you would be able to get away with it. But it's, it's anger.

Anger:  
E.F.C

INTERVIEWER: Ja. And the way you cope, when you read things like this, or hear about such shocking stories in the news, or hear stories from a friends or the kind of stories that friends have been through? How do you feel, do you cope within yourself, do you deal with that?

Personal  
vulnerabil-  
ity – VTS

INTERVIEWEE: I don't think I cope well. I don't think I cope well at all, and I think it's, it's not indifference, but it's a feeling of helplessness, and when you're helpless, when you are in a helpless situation, it's not a coping situation. You're not in control.

Helpless-  
ness:  
E.F.C

INTERVIEWER: Is that the concern you, that you think you're not in control?

INTERVIEWEE: But you actually feel as though you can't make a difference. What can I do for, for that mother, with the baby? I actually can't do anything. And what can I do for the police to be more vigilant, and all of those good and wonderful things? I can do nothing.

Helpless-  
ness:  
E.F.C

Hopeless  
-ness

INTERVIEWER: And, with regards to the media in terms of television, word of mouth or whatever, by which you hear or encounter these kind of stories on a more frequent basis. What would you say is the most for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Radio.

INTERVIEWER: Radio.

INTERVIEWEE: Radio, because of my lifestyle. I read, I would say, probably, I read the newspapers up until about a month ago, on a daily basis. But I've got the radio on and the, the local regional radio station with the updates every hour. But I'm not a television person, so I can't really. I don't know what, what is shown on TV.

INTERVIEWER: And if you were to take the scenario of a dinner party. A typical evening out or something, that I'm sure most of you, most of us are in. And the topic of violent crime comes up. Which is occasionally may at dinner time conversation. What do you notice about the way in which people talk about stories or, or instances of violent crime? The manner in which they actually talk about it. If they do.

INTERVIEWEE: It always crops up. It's at, it's at every social interaction that I have with my friends, family and friends, over more than two hours. There will always be some kind of crime cropping up, and I think it also depends on, on the location of where you're having it. If it's in the home, and if everybody's pretty relaxed, it can be a discussion, but people do tend to become more – I wouldn't say aggressive – but they become more assertive. So the whole, the whole mood of the evening changes from a social, happy ...

Sharing,  
talking -  
E.F.C

INTERVIEWER: Relaxed.

INTERVIEWEE: ... relaxed type of thing, and when it crops up, everybody will become, everybody will want to put in their story. But it definitely does change ...

INTERVIEWER: The atmosphere.

INTERVIEWEE: ... changes the atmosphere.

INTERVIEWER: In the, in the same scenario that we're talking about, what do you think about, where other people are telling their stories? In that scenario.

Feeling  
hopeless  
- VTS

INTERVIEWEE: Me personally?

INTERVIEWER: Mmm.

INTERVIEWEE: I think it's that hopelessness, on the one side, but I also think that I'm relieved that there are near and dear ones to us that have chosen to move out of the country. So it's, it's not conflicting emotions, but it's, I'm glad they're out of it, and I'm glad that, for argument's sake, Kylie – my granddaughter – can go out jolling in a Brisbane night club, and not worry about when she's coming home. Whereas I worry about other people not being able to do the same thing. And you know, please SMS when you're leaving the place, and which route are you going to take.

Hopeless  
-ness:  
E.F.C

INTERVIEWER: And, I know those things are also hard for you to think about. What the sorts of feelings now, as opposed to the thinking that you experience in these scenarios.

INTERVIEWEE: Are we, are we still in the diner, dinner parties?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: Anger. Anger and, don't know. It's deep, deep down.

Anger:  
E.F.C



INTERVIEWER: Ja, okay. Are there any sort of thoughts or feelings that you frequently, sort of, catch yourself thinking about, in relation to violent crime?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, absolutely. I have horrible, ugly thoughts.

INTERVIEWER: Such as?

INTERVIEWEE: The baddies, such wicked people, I don't look at them as being sons or daughters, or mothers or fathers, or anything like that. If you do, if you do wrong, you are a bad, horrible person, and you should be taken out of society. And I, and I feel strongly about that. I don't look that the poor guy hasn't had a job, and he's unemployed, and he's got sixteen dependants. I don't consider that at all.

D.M –  
Splitting

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and what do you feel the affects are on you personally, or how it affects you personally, those, of like living in a society with high crime? What is the, what do you think the toll is taken on you?

VTS – Inc.  
Arousal

INTERVIEWEE: Oh, I think the, the awareness, the constant awareness that there, there is so much crime, and I think the you are vigilant weather, and I'm fortunate having, having been oversees, the difference between going in an unlocked car, and driving with your windows down, and not worrying about your handbag and not being worried that, ja, it's just. I think we change as people here. It's not a very good answer, but I can't really explain myself properly.

V.T.S:  
hypervig  
-alence

INTERVIEWER: No.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, we're very vigilant and we're very conscious, I think you're conscious all the time.

V.T.S:  
hypervig  
-alence

INTERVIEWER: Related to that, what sort of strategies, if any, do you feel like you, feel like that you, sorry, feel that you employ, or take on or use, to try and avoid becoming a direct victim of violent crime, as opposed to, theft and that that sort of thing ...

VTS –  
Inc.  
Arousal  
T1, S1

INTERVIEWEE: Being exposed to, or being part of crime?

INTERVIEWER: Being a victim of violent crime.

INTERVIEWEE: Being a victim. I pre-plan the route that I travel, avoiding high crime zones. I will never get out of the car if there's a cash collection going on, or there's a Fidelity van near a bank or a shopping centre. I will wait until that's gone before I carry on my day. And I think twice about being in a situation, being on my own, in, in an unknown, unfamiliar area.

P.F.C:  
Planning,  
action-  
orientated

Westville, and I'll give you instructions," and I didn't know where to go, I would be very reluctant to go.

INTERVIEWER: I think those are the issues I wanted to cover.

INTERVIEWEE: I think it's wonderful.

INTERVIEWER: Any suggestions (inaudible).

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, I think it's very (inaudible). I don't, I don't know from my answers how much you're going to be able to gain from it, because I don't think we realise how much the crime does play a part in, in our daily lives.

INTERVIEWER: And that's what's I'm concerned about, is everyone, and I'm not saying you gave me wrong or bad answers, your answers were actually good, but I'm saying you think you're quite a, you thought deeply about things and you gave me responses. But I'm worried about people who give me, who think about it less, what kind of answers I'm going to get. Do you know what I mean?

INTERVIEWEE: No, because I think, I think that the big part

there is probing people, realising the crime now has become part of our life in South Africa, and Durban specifically. And highway area and, wherever it may be. That is a given throughout this whole research. You are not going to, if you were to conduct this interview with somebody who had landed yesterday from England, you'd get a totally different response.

INTERVIEWER: And your thoughts about the questions like coping, and that kind of thing. I don't know if people are going to be able to, you know what I mean? I'm worried that like, (inaudible) what do you mean and I'm reluctant to give people examples, because they, they tend to, when you give people examples in interviews like this, they tend to pick ...

INTERVIEWEE: Draw back on that.

INTERVIEWER: And you say, for example, joking or humour, as a defense mechanism and they say oh, they'll pick one of those, without actually understanding how they personally cope. That's what I'm concerned about it. If I need to give you and actually define some of these words so they understand it, I don't know. I don't mean like patronising define coping, but just to get on a bit of a platform to ...

INTERVIEWEE: No, but, but how do you react consciously? Coping is how do you react consciously to it.

INTERVIEWER: So you think it's, they battle with how, because I need alternatives to where the answer, because you know, when people say what do you mean? Or a lot of people battle and you can see that they're battling, to think of it. So then you've got to like probe and say, well, given it, word it in different ways so that it's more ...colloquial

INTERVIEWEE: Couldn't you use another situation, and totally off the wall, and just say, "let me give you an example. There was a young mother, who's in a supermarket, and she's got, and her baby has an absolute tantrum and is screaming the place down, and kicking all of the things off the shelves." The way she copes with that is that she gets all flustered. She gets into a spin and she smacks the child. Her, the way she reacts, defensively or whatever your wording is, is that she will turn around to the people around her and saying, "Ag, it's a bad day today." If, if you need to give an example, but give it totally out of the crime ...

INTERVIEWER: Out of the context.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Now, do I, I'm not even sure, I'm a bit concerned about even mentioning the defence thing at the beginning.

INTERVIEWEE: I don't think you, I don't think defence is the right thing.

INTERVIEWER: I think, for what I'm actually doing with this information, as that when I analyse the data at the end, using the, the, an existing list as a way of analysing defence mechanisms that exists when people talk and the way they speak, to see underlying defence mechanisms - so it's not actually, like you aren't aware that you're been, and something that (inaudible) you can name your own defence mechanisms. Do you know what I mean?

I'll be able to pick up a defence mechanism that you're using, little, it's not like, do you know what I mean? So, you actually don't name your own defence mechanisms. That's why defence mechanisms, the word defence mechanisms, and coping styles, we use quite synonymously, because of the defence mechanisms being used at a more unconscious level. And that's because it's unconscious,



you don't name it yourself. I will, as a third, a second or third, or whatever, objective party, be able to see from their transcripts, okay, you could see this person's doing this, because they're doing this.

INTERVIEWEE: But to, to a layman, defence mechanism has almost got negative qualities.

INTERVIEWER: I know, and that's why I'm concerned about talking about it.

INTERVIEWEE: But is it, is it not a question of how do you react, how do you act and, and what do you think? And the defence mechanism is exactly as you did with me. How did you feel? Deep inside you ...

INTERVIEWER: So I actually don't have to talk about that. Do you think that's almost going to, also make it too psychological ...

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And because they don't, you don't know what it is, so then I try and explain, and then it becomes confusing. Because it's actually quite hard for me to explain, without actually going all, through all the different types, which we would be here, doing the whole DSM until tomorrow, if you went into that. So, and I just think it's going to become too complicated and it becomes a, sort of lesson then we try and teach them what it is, instead of just a conversation. So I can sort of leave that out.

INTERVIEWEE: I think, I think you need to, and even with me, okay, it's in my character that I, that I do suppress, and I think that you need to probe deeper. Now, when you say angry, what do you mean angry?

INTERVIEWER: What do you, ja, I know what you mean.

INTERVIEWEE: And don't just, and it's almost, don't, don't allow me just to say, "I get angry and I don't think of him as a son or a daughter."

INTERVIEWER: How would you suggest I probe like this? People do this, they anger and they stop and then I move onto the next question.

INTERVIEWEE: When you say angry, what do you mean? Do you, do you explain to me how you, how do you feel when you're angry.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm.

INTERVIEWER: And they'll say I'm, I get scared. How do you feel when you get scared?

INTERVIEWER: So that more description will come out of it here, ja.

INTERVIEWEE: You know, there's some people that when they're scared, they actually laugh. How do you ...

INTERVIEWER: React.

INTERVIEWEE: How do you, ja. And, and just try and get deeper and deeper.

INTERVIEWER: I think that's also, ja, you answer question, okay, you've answered this, let's move onto the next one. But I think that's also part of trying to learn an interviewing technique, because I don't want to push, but you also, like,, the interviews going to be ten minutes if I don't. Do you know what I mean?

INTERVIEWEE: But surely throughout this whole research, is it not hugely important for you, the coping and the defence mechanism, what the inside world, what's happening inside and what's seen outside? That's hugely important to you at the end of the research.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, because coping styles can be internal, in terms of the way you think and feel, but also external behaviour, and then your coping style could be becoming paranoid, and locking all the doors all the time, and checking behaviours, and things like that.

INTERVIEWEE: And people would, would ...

INTERVIEWER: So, that's external too, and it's how you portray it too.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, they would, they would volunteer, they would be more comfortable, expressing ...

INTERVIEWER: External ...

INTERVIEWEE: External, like I take it in groups, I do this, I do that, ja, I lock my doors, as opposed to what you really feel. The feeling I think you're going to have to probe, a lot deeper.

INTERVIEWER: People battle, I think, to distinguishing between feeling and thinking. Because you say how I think, and that's the other way around. You don't say how do I feel, and they actually just paraphrase the thinking.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: And it's very common. It's just, you say, "Oh I feel this," but it's actually not a feeling, it's just paraphrasing cognitions and thoughts. So, so it's not ...

INTERVIEWEE: And it's almost, it's almost as if I'm not allowed to feel ...

INTERVIEWER: Well it's easier not to feel. Because feelings are when you start ...

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, but, but, is it easier not to feel, or do you just say no, don't let me feel, because then we'll move to a dark territory. So it's better to put it to one side and say, "okay, I think."

INTERVIEWER: Ja, I think it's also easier because thinking is more rational, too. So people will be happier to talk about how they think and what they do and everything. But when you're feeling it, feelings are very more honest, in the sense of they can be irrational and, you know. And some people try to hide those more often, more often.

INTERVIEWEE: I don't think that you need to change any of your questioning. I think it's just going to be harder, depending, and you, and you know the outcome you're wanting as well. I think it's going to be up to you to go back to, and even if people stumble, and you find that it's, its okay to go through certain things, can we just go back to ...

INTERVIEWER: At the end.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja.

INTERVIEWER: And then, I'm also concerned about. Like the dinner party scenario. I don't, you see I can't use that scenario, although originally I though I could. But I can't use it for everyone I'm interviewing.

INTERVIEWEE: No, socially.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so I could ...

INTERVIEWEE: When you are ...

INTERVIEWER: ...with friends or something.

INTERVIEWEE: When you are interacting with people you know, with friends.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, because some people I interview definitely won't have diner parties.

INTERVIEWEE: No, but that's fine. Around the braai.

INTERVIEWER: Ja.

INTERVIEWEE: And adapt it.

INTERVIEWER: Just adapt the situation.

INTERVIEWEE: Adapt to the situation.

INTERVIEWER: Without changing the context of the question, because they've got to be quite standardised, you know what I mean. Obviously I do change it, but, that's why you have interviews to get your (inaudible) so you come up with the same kind of information. But you can adapt the scenario, because that's, as long as it's still in the same context and same questions.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, but I think again there, what, what is your end result? Are you saying when you are with a group of friends, let's say around the braai or at a dinner party.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, or just talking.

INTERVIEWEE: Or just talking, or is it a dinner party with business people.

INTERVIEWER: No, I'd say a socially, because it's different.

INTERVIEWEE: Because that's ...

INTERVIEWER: Socialise ...

INTERVIEWEE: That's when the thing comes out.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, because you're not going to maybe want to show your colleagues that you're actually peeved about, you know what I mean, you're going, you're going try like ...

INTERVIEWEE: You've got to put on your business front.

INTERVIEWER: You have to be careful about what you say and all that.

INTERVIEWEE: And it depends on the audience and you don't know them, and it's the whole political racial thing.

INTERVIEWER: Ja.

INTERVIEWEE: Right, with, when you are with a group of friends.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know how long I took. I just want to, I don't know if I probe, it'll obviously be longer.

INTERVIEWEE: (Inaudible), it's not stress related. I don't even know if you should have ...

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't even half an hour, I don't think. It should be thirty minutes to forty-five minutes.

INTERVIEWEE: You can go back.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, no, that's fine. I'm just worried that it's going to be too short. I must just learn to elaborate.

INTERVIEWEE: What's your, what's your sample?

INTERVIEWER: How many of?

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, how many interviews?

INTERVIEWER: Six, it's six. Excluding you. I, the thing it's exploratory research. It's not like I'm trying to, because interviews, the topic is vicarious trauma. I'm trying to draw links between the topic that exists in reasarch related to

vicarious trauma in mental health workers, like psychologists. Because a body of literature exists on that on that. Like how the therapists become traumatised and effected emotionally, from listening to their client's stories. So there's a lot of literature that exists. But now, what this is, you're trying to build up validity for the topic of vicarious trauma being applicable to people who are exposed on a daily basis to violent crime.

Because the concept of vicarious trauma comes up along, with a whole bunch of symptoms and symptomology also is like having flashbacks of things, over-thinking, and to have avoided defences and all that. That's where it all comes in. So I'm trying to see if there's links between them and that this concept can be broadened to be applicable to this ...

INTERVIEWEE: Area, ja?

INTERVIEWER: Just exploratory research that there is no existing research on this topic. Therefore there's no right or wrong answers that I'm trying to get also. But also why, that's why my sample is so small, it can be small. Because I'm not trying to generalise to the population. All it is, is a starting area, and starting to question in the area, you know what I mean? As opposed to a, when there's a well researched area, then you've got to have a huge sample and ...

INTERVIEWEE: And go in depth.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, and then you've got to have all age groups represented, and all the races, and then you can generalise findings and try and prove it. I'm not trying to prove it, I'm just starting it.

INTERVIEWEE: You're feeling.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, to see, because this concept must be able to apply to other areas. So, and also, and do you think it's a good idea, I suppose you have to tell people the title of your research.

INTERVIEWEE: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: You have to ...

INTERVIEWEE: Absolutely and I think ...

INTERVIEWER: Just, do I need to explain it to them?

INTERVIEWEE: ... and I think that the way. No, I think that the way that you did it to me, was absolutely perfect. I mean vicarious, when, when you hear vicarious in your interview, and you automatically think Eish, I don't even know what that means.

INTERVIEWER: So, I've given the topic, and then go into detail about what the research is about, and then go.

INTERVIEWEE: It's a fancy title.

INTERVIEWER: But what it really means, is (inaudible) to the source of it. Because I was worried about that, because it is a very long title, and it's quite a complicated, not complicated, but the words, you like think what the hell.

INTERVIEWEE: It's, it's intellectual. And it's quite academic, keep it. But as I say, just, I think, as you do it, as you did it with me ...

INTERVIEWER: Don't go into it.

INTERVIEWEE: You say it, but you don't write it off, and then you just say what it means, simply. Okay. And I don't think that there needs to be any further, I think if you do, if you do interview, and you're worried about the timing, don't you talk. Get the person to go back.

INTERVIEW ENDS

## Appendix V: Example of Coded Transcript

Interview 4:

Demographics: White, Male, 33 years old, Roman Catholic

INTERVIEWER: The title of my research project at this stage – it may be subject to change but at this stage it's, "An Exploration into Coping Styles and Defence Mechanisms of Adults Vicariously Exposed to Violent Crime." It's a very long title but what it basically, it's going to be focusing on, is people who are exposed to secondary trauma and violence, so, it's like having not directly, not direct experiences in that kind of thing. So, it's reading about it in the newspaper, hearing about stories on the radio, so, it's just what's ...

INTERVIEWEE: Okay, as in that it hasn't happened to me?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, ja, but we are constantly, obviously, bombarded with all these stories all the time, what horrific things happen. So, I'm interested in how people cope with being, sort of, constantly exposed to that kind of level of story, where it's quite violent in nature, but on a daily basis, but it becomes part of their life, that how they sort of cope with that and just deal with having that as part of their life, that kind of violence and the violence around them, and knowing that you could be a victim.

So, I'm interested in that and also how and what people think about and, well, in this case, what you think about and feel when you read stories of incidents and things like that, just focusing mainly on your reactions to, your coping styles, and that kind of thing, to secondary trauma. Well, trauma, I'm not really saying you're traumatised, but just the exposure of sort of horrific things that we are sort of exposed to. I just wanted to start off by showing this article.

I don't know if you read the newspaper, I believe you do. I'm sure you would have seen that article, it was ...

INTERVIEWEE: Mmm.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know if you remember that, that's about a month ago.

INTERVIEWEE: Mmm, ja, I remember reading the story.

INTERVIEWER: You remember that, ja.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja.

INTERVIEWEE: Okay, so, for instance, like that's quite obviously an emotionally provoking story because there's a baby and a mom, all that kind of thing, but an article like that isn't out of the ordinary because we read them all the time. But when you read or hear about a story such as that one, what would you say are your initial thoughts, what do you think about when you read stories like that or hear about stories like that?

INTERVIEWEE: My wife mostly, my greatest fear is being away from her or from him and something happened to them. Actually, I mean, this is an odd reaction but my first concern is really her more than him because, as a baby, unless it's an attack on the child itself, and there's very rarely that sort of attack on a three year old unless it's for something horrific like kidnapping or baby-snatching or something like that, the first person that they're going to attack in a violent manner is going to be my wife as the adult, and that's going to be directed. And my greatest - living where we are



and living more potentially where we're going to be moving to, reading any story like that, my first thought is, whether it's an emotionally-charged one like that or even just the ordinary one of a hijacking, someone pulled out of a car, shot twice, left to die while the gunman speeds off, really, as I said, makes me worry about my wife more than anything else, her driving alone, her being the car, her being in a situation where she can't handle it and God forbid anything happens to her.

That's always my first reaction in that regard, I very rarely every think of how I would, oh, well, you know, how would it be if I was involved in a situation like that. I just, I don't. I happened to be present when there was a robbery committed once and it was a completely surreal experience. It was very different to what we pictured and it wasn't as traumatic in the sense as it could have been, certainly. I mean, there was no violence perpetrated at the time other than a few people roughed around. Someone could have been shot or killed, but it wasn't as bad as I anticipated. I think it's the fear of what's going to happen and potentially what could happen which blows it out of all possible proportion and you sit there and your fears are to such a high degree that the reality of the situation probably is vastly different. You'll be involved in the situation but it'll be ten or fifteen seconds or a minute and you don't even know that you're involved in it and it's happened so damn quickly that it'll be over before you actually even know it's started. But, you know, my first fear is always my wife.

V.T.S -  
fear

The other fear that I always have is being an unwitting victim of crime, where you're not participating in the scenario or the scene but you happen to be caught in the crossfire. And that's something that does bug me because you could literally be safe and sound in your own home or safe and sound in your own car and some other idiot a hundred metres down the road is speeding off and chasing and there's a hail of bullets and then you just happen to catch it in the crossfire, which is, I think, one of the stories that was in the newspapers and in the television news in Johannesburg. A woman was, literally, walking along the road, the next minute she saw blood pouring out of her baby's back. Ja, that's always my first reaction.

INTERVIEWER: And now you talked about what you think about and what you worry about, which is obviously your wife, but what sort of feelings do you have, what do you feel when you hear about stories like this or ...

INTERVIEWEE: You fear that you're going to be the next one to be attacked. If it can happen and it's so prevalent, and it is becoming more and more and more prevalent, that it's literally, you're anticipating, it's a fear, you're living in fear that it's going to be you. You're constantly living in fear that's it's going to happen to me, it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. And that, really, I think, is my biggest fear, it's literally pictured as when. I don't, strangely enough, ever fear a situation of it happening as a result of work, albeit that from what I do and what I'm involved in it can potentially flare up at any point in time there. But the biggest thing that bugs me about it is that it's pervasive, it never goes away, it's always there. And no matter what you do, no matter you try to do to dispel it - and I presume you're obviously going to get on to ways and means of how you sort of block it out or deal with it - but it's always there, and the constant reminder of it in the newspapers and on media simply draws it more and more to your attention. I don't know, really, how to describe it more than that. In terms of, I mean, emotionally ...

V.T.S -  
fear

E.F.C -  
loss of  
control/  
hopeless-  
ness

INTERVIEWER: Like, for instance, if you take that story, what would your first feeling reaction be, instead of thinking, like, how would you feel?

INTERVIEWEE: First of all, thank God it wasn't me. I know that sounds terrible but actually that story particularly is that it's coming more and more closer to home.

INTERVIEWER: Especially the family context in that.

INTERVIEWEE: Not so much in the family context, the area. Once upon a time, I mean, you heard it was a hijacking and it was in Jo'burg or the back end of nowhere or on the Esplanade or somewhere in town where there was a shootout, someone running away, grabbed a car and ran like hell. What I get worried about is that I'm feeling much more – claustrophobic is not the right description, it's becoming more intrusive because it's coming closer and closer to home. Once upon a time it was distant and you knew someone who knew someone who knew someone. These days it's either you know someone who was directly involved or you yourself are directly involved.

E.F.C –  
loss of  
control/  
restriction

And here, what worried me about this one particularly is that what you considered relatively safe areas, like my mother-in-law's place, which I've always considered to be a relatively safe area, this was on the doorstep. Really, this particular story, the biggest thing that sort of stuck in my mind is that, A, it is becoming so much more closer to home and, B, just in future make damn certain that nothing happens to your car because, God forbid, if you break down, you're going to be next. It's not a question of if, it is definite, and that, as I said, I think is my biggest concern, that now I tend to be cautious to the point of being paranoid, just so that it is not you. If you're driving a car, you make sure that the petrol is always there because, God forbid, if you break down, you break down in any sort of -- and it's not even in a dodgy area any more, if you break down anywhere you're going to be the victim of crime.

V.T.S –  
hyper-  
vigilance

INTERVIEWER: That was actually...

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, that's what I find to be the most disturbing about all these stories, is that it's now, it's become so pervasive that you can't escape it anywhere, there is no escaping it. Umhlanga, La Lucia, Umlazi, Gateway, Pavilion, Westville, Ballito, Durban North, wherever it is that you go, Escombe, Malvern, you're going to be the victim of a crime if you don't – well, actually, no, you're going to be the victim of a crime, it's just a question of when. And that's the thing that disturbs me the most about these sorts of stories particularly. The reality of it, I think, is vastly different. I think the reality of it and the way – I don't know if you want me to go onto this right now.

V.T.S –  
hopeless-  
ness,  
loss of  
control

INTERVIEWER: No, it's all right.

INTERVIEWEE: The reality of what I do sometimes to consciously cope with it or to deal with it is, to realise that if you look at it on a population basis, crime is actually a very, very small percentage. The reality of it is that there isn't a huge amount of crime if you take a look at the population. We've got a population of over 40-million people, crime is happening to only, probably, not even five per cent of that population at any one point in time. It's happening in specific areas and I obviously understand crime is more prevalent in areas where there isn't security measures, there isn't lighting, there isn't adequate facilities. But the reality, I think, or at least I try to convince myself, is that don't blow it out of proportion, consciously think about it in a logical way. Yes, the papers will report it because it is sensationalist, the media will make a play out of it because it is a newsworthy article, but in the greater scheme of things, one robbery among a population of 50 000 or 5-million or 50-million isn't really a big thing.

D.M –  
rationa-  
lization,  
intellctu-  
-alization

But the thing that worries me is when you hear



the alleged statistics, that the percentage of crimes is not actually on the decrease, it's that there is now a much greater percentage of crimes and whereas, once upon a time, certain areas were regarded as relatively unscathed or relatively safe, no longer - Westville, house robberies. And being the victim of a carjacking or something like that isn't as worrying to me as being the victim of a prolonged attack, where someone will break in, take their time, torture, stab, do whatever they want to on a prolonged basis, and then are very likely to do more than just rob. And that worries me because, you know, how much security is enough? Is burglar guards enough, is it enough to have a security guard? Is the security guard going to be adequate, is he not going to potentially leak information and himself be a party to the robbery itself?

But ja, the only mechanism I try to cope with it is to, A, block it out and not to think about it because to think about it just causes me to get very, very depressed, but to try and rationalise it, to say, well, in so far as statistically concerned, statistically you probably aren't going to get robbed. Ja, that's the only way I tend to try and cope with it or deal with it in some way. I don't really ever discuss it with my wife, I try to sort of shield her from stuff like that. Every now and again we do talk about it but, from my own perspective, that's the way I try and deal with it. What worries me, and I suppose it's a trite or clichéd thing to say, is what kind of world my son is going to live in when he's growing older, that to shield him now is one thing, but there comes a time when you can't shield him any longer and he lives in a world where I would hope it would be a far better one than we have right now though. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other ways – I mean, you said don't really talk about these kind of things much but would you say that's just sort of avoiding it and blocking it out? When you read stories like this, do you tend to think about it again or do you feel like you just sort of will read it or hear about it and that will just, you'll try and just ...

INTERVIEWEE:

I try to block it out.

INTERVIEWER:

... block it out so it doesn't bother you.

INTERVIEWEE:

I find the more you talk about it, the more and more and more you hear stories. It feeds upon itself, the moment you talk about it is the moment – “Oh, well, you know, actually my friend was robbed in their home the other day and oh, oh, by the way, you know, my friend had a violent attack”, and then consequently it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The moment you raise the subject of crime and you discuss a story like that, more than in just passing, you find that, A, it becomes a negative thing about crime, and then it becomes a negative thing about South Africa, and then a negative thing about living here, and then, “Oh, well, I need to go overseas.” So, ja, I'd say I don't discuss it, I try not to. If I read in the newspaper article I will generally try to find something else to focus my attention on or try to distract my attention from it.

Once upon a time I would dwell on it a much longer basis, you know, to think about it now. I try not to because thinking about it just causes me to get very, very morbid and morose about the situation that there is, or hopeless situation. You feel that there's nothing that can be done and there's nothing that is being done. So, consequently, you're just biding your time, waiting until the inevitable. So, ja, I try to avoid it, I try to avoid talking about it with people. I do find also that people tend to blow their own experiences out of rational proportion, but also that, I suppose as in any subject of conversation, the moment a subject is discussed, you will bring out every story that you know or have ever heard about it, whether it be

E.F.C -  
avoidance

V.T.S -  
hopeless  
-ness

E.F.C -  
avoidance

accurate, true or some embellishment along the way.

Some people, I find that I can discuss things with, my wife sometimes, and inevitably we'll commiserate with each other about, oh, very sad, it was a very tragic attack and very sad that it happened to a specific person, in this case, very sad that it happened to a mother and her grandmother and to her child. But I find there are very specific people that I know that I will avoid talking about that kind of subject with in any event, because it degenerates very quickly into a pity party, they feel sorry for themselves and now they have to make sure that everyone else feels sorry for themselves and find everything bad. And then it just becomes a downward spiral, then it becomes focussing on everything negative. I find, personally, I try to focus on the positive if at all possible, that there is good in South Africa, that there is good in our area, but just to be cautious, don't be foolish.

I think part of the reason a lot of crime happens is that people, I don't say take the attitude that it can't happen to me, that are just simply not vigilant. But that again comes back to my earlier point, that unfortunately becomes almost a paranoid reaction and you worry about worrying, that if I let my guard down for one single moment, then that's the moment it's going to happen. But no, I try not to focus on it, I distract myself with something else, watch a movie, sometimes very pointedly distract myself, other times, depending on the level of the story. And at some point, I find that it's kind of routine almost, oh, well, you know, another person in Chatsworth attacked for the hundredth time, oh, well, you know, that's that area.

P.F.C –  
vigilant/  
hypervigilance

E.F.C –  
avoidance

E.F.C –  
desensitized/norm-  
alized

INTERVIEWER:

It's normalised, ja.

INTERVIEWEE:

Ja, it's almost prosaic in the sense that, oh, well, another hijacking, oh, well. What worries me is really, as I said earlier, that when you hear the prevalence of it and what you believe in your own mind and the way you rationalise or how you rationalise it is to say, well, there aren't as many as people, I think people are just blowing it out of proportion. Then when he hears alleged accurate statistics, even in a newspaper article or stories that people have told, like a friend of mine who got – well, I suppose I'm doing it myself – smashed and grabbed on the Esplanade. She reported it, and it happened to be the 175<sup>th</sup> reported smash and grab or hijacking that day at that police station. And when you think about it, the Durban Police Station doesn't cover a very wide area and 175 smash and grabs in one day represents a lot. So, that's mainly how I try to deal with it.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned feeling a bit of a sense of hopelessness.

INTERVIEWEE:

Whenever the subject comes up, that I would say is probably where my feelings lead to. It may be one of a range of reactions, often when I read a story where someone is criticised for having failed to act particularly or having acting in an improper manner, particularly where it is, as is prevalent these days, corruption, that it's that which led to something worse. Ja, I do, I feel very angry to begin with and then just eventually it degenerates into hopelessness, oh, well, what are we going to do? There is nothing you can do, it doesn't seem like that anyone is paying the slightest attention to it. Lip service is paid to it and everyone is talking about it but no-one ever focuses on the actual issue itself. Something that just drives me insane at the moment is crime is such a prevalent thing, we're talking about, crime seems to be the topic of conversation at the moment, but what I find frustrating, as in anything with politics or political connotations, that you just want to shake someone out of their reverie or their sense of apathy.

E.F.C –  
anger  
V.T.S –  
hopeless-  
ness

The problem with it is that the same feeling I have, I think, is the same feeling everyone has, is that nothing can be done, and as a result of which, people are just not merely apathetic, they go out of their way not to do anything. But where it ultimately ends up is that you see efforts that have been undertaken before thwarted, you see efforts that are undertaken being thwarted, and as much as it's great to talk about crime, it's not enough. It's not enough to talk about, oh, well, yes, it's a very serious issue, yes, it is. Everyone knows it's a serious issue. No-one ever seems to ever take the next step, even reporters to that degree, to then follow up, unless it's a sensational story like this that, well, the guys who were involved in this robbery happened to have been shot and killed in a follow up. In fact, I think it was – no, not this one, the St Tropez restaurant, they've done a follow up in that regard to ...

INTERVIEWER: Yes, the outcome of the perpetrators, yes.

INTERVIEWEE: ... the outcome of the perpetrators now. But that is a very limited and isolated incident.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, and it was also a very publicised event too.

INTERVIEWEE: And what I find disturbing is the reaction that I find myself feeling and that other people are feeling is, good, which is not a healthy one, not from my perspective and certainly not from what I understand to be a normal reaction. That's not something I think people should be feeling but I think people are – I shouldn't talk, sorry, in generalisation, I know you want to obviously discuss me personally. But I feel that, ja, it is, it's a sense of hopelessness that I end up feeling when I read these stories and that, really, is what I try to avoid because I don't want to focus on that. The longer and longer I dwell on it, the more and more depressed and more and more upset I end up becoming because no matter what you seem to do, no matter what steps seem to be taken, they're just ignored. Not that they don't work, it's that they're never implemented, no-one seems to be doing anything about it.

V.T.S –  
hopeless  
-ness

And it's that next level of action or conduct that needs to be taken, that just doesn't seem to be, not even to the point of where people are following up and saying, "Well, great, you've talked about it. Now, what are you planning on doing?", and following up and chasing up and pushing people to actually make a commitment to say, "Right, this is what we're going to do", and then get feedback on that. But like in all the stories, and that's, I suppose, also one of the reasons why I try to rationalise in the sense that that's not what the reporter is interested in and I'm not certain what the articles are there for. They're just there to report a publicised or highly publicised and highly sensational news story and to then, oh, to evoke a huge amount of emotion but not do anything further about that. And I find that very, very frustrating, which is also one of the reasons I try to avoid reading that kind of article and focusing on other things.

INTERVIEWER: And if you were to take a scenario of, a social scenario, so, if you were to get together with your friends or, I don't know, a braai or a dinner party or something like that, not a work scenario, so, a social scenario, when everyone's guards are let down and people try to show their true colours more, and if the topic of criminal violence comes up, or violence in South Africa, or how, you know - and at some stage it may come up because people will tell a story ...

INTERVIEWEE: Very likely.

INTERVIEWER: Ja, what do you notice about the manner in which or the way in which people talk about those stories or crime of any kind when you're sort of being ...

INTERVIEWEE:

The commonality that I find is, firstly, that people do sensationalise it themselves, that they will elaborate and clearly exaggerate certain details for sensational benefit in the social context in which they find themselves for very obvious reasons. It's like, "Oh, no, really, ah, that's a shock!" That's the first thing I find among that sort of – at a social gathering of any form. The other common factor is the negativity that it induces because the one story will lead to another story, will lead to another story, and then, literally, it grows and it swells very, very quickly to suddenly finding, as you did five, six, seven, ten years ago, one person in a group who knew someone, who knew someone, who knew someone who had crime.

E.F.C –  
exagger-  
-ation

What I find happening very often these days is that it's so much closer to home. In that group the common manner in which they will deal with it is one, really, of an inner sense of helplessness, "Look, it's inevitable, it's negative, it's South Africa, it's going to happen to you, this country, this government!" That's the one commonality I find is that it induces a camaraderie, as it were, of negativity, if I can call it that. But it feeds upon itself, it literally does, it swells to the point of where you actually feel uncomfortable because it's making you feel afraid, it's making you feel helpless, and I think it's a combination of the two that really just frustrates me, feeling that you are afraid to do anything, that you're afraid to take a decision, afraid to do anything, to go certain places, which you shouldn't be, but at the same time, knowing that the fear is somehow prudent but not being able to do anything about it.

E.F.C -  
negativity

V.T.C –  
fear  
E.F.C – loss  
of control,  
helplessness

So, ja, I'd say the commonalities I find is that it just feeds upon itself, it becomes sensational and eventually you find everyone in a very morose and upset mood until the subject is changed. But the disturbing factor, I find, is that far too many people now, personalised, and have a personalised experience now of some form of crime, and not just petty crime, violent crime. And stories, I mean, one in particular – sorry, today it just feeds on something like this and what I find, as I said, the reaction to it is more of anger than frustration, is where you find a story like the cops not being able to control the ammunition stores around South Africa and that the weapons are, in fact, eligible to anyone. And yet the petty crime of television licences is cracked down with such hard and ruthless force, but someone can steal a box of bullets and can take an R1 assault rifle without any difficulties whatsoever. It's a focus, it's a focus that I find is frustrating, where people focus on the petty rather than on the serious, but that's politics for you.

INTERVIEWER:

And if you take the same sort of scenario, social setting and a group of friends, and there's something about the manner in which they talk about it and how it becomes sensationalised, but what do you find yourself – and it may be a similar response to reading an article but it may not be, because now these are people that you know, who know somebody or have been a victim themselves - so, what do you notice yourself thinking about where other people are around you in a social setting of talking about all these stories like this?

INTERVIEWEE:

Really thinking, my God, I can't believe that it's actually this close now. That, I have to say, is the predominant factor. Look, I do think that to some degree people take other stories that they've read in the paper or they've heard and try to personalise it and make it their own. But, ja, that's the one thing I do find myself feeling, is that, Jesus, I mean, we've got ten of us here and it used to be one in that group might have known someone. Now it's, you know, John and Jack and John and Alex and his wife and, oh, my God, you know, and like really wide, I mean. In fact,



it strangely happened, not so much in a social context but in a work situation where people from work were sitting around outside court one day and they were talking about friends and weekend activities and the next thing was, "Oh, by the way, did you hear that the new method of attack now seems to be just driving a car through a front gate, a security gate, jumping out, grabbing everything you can at gunpoint, violently beating someone up, and then running away." Then you just think the next thing is like, oh, my God, well, this can happen to me, what do I do to avoid it?" Until you focus your mind somewhere else. But, ja, that's the one thing I find myself feeling.

INTERVIEWER: And I was actually going to ask that, because that, perhaps I'm wrong but to me that was like describing what you're thinking because now you're thinking about all that, and it could be me and everything, but what do you find yourself feeling as opposed to ...

INTERVIEWEE: Morbid.

INTERVIEWER: ... thinking in those situations?

INTERVIEWEE: Morbid, morbid and hopelessness.

INTERVIEWER: So, it's a common theme across everything for you.

INTERVIEWEE: That it's – morose, I think is probably the best and accurate description. There seems to be no upside no matter how hard you try, no matter what you do to secure yourself. As you hear these stories, oh, well, you know, this one's been hijacked now and that's the new terror tactic. Oh, well, you know, they've now thought of some other method. Oh, you're going to go withdraw money from an ATM? Oh, well, you're going to lose a leg, or an eye, or an arm, or die when they blow you up. So, ja, it's morbid. I find myself feeling very morbid after hearing these sorts of things, to the point of, like, well, isn't it worthwhile now to consider the option of emigrating. I know it's a horrible theme and it's probably one that I'm sure other people have discussed with you too, but I've never been one to do that. I've never wanted to run away, I've never, ever wanted to, but you almost are forced into a situation of considering, well, you know, I'll give up my life here simply because I don't want to die in a hail of bullets, I don't want my family killed in a hail of bullets, I don't want my wife raped, I don't want my child stabbed. Oddly enough, I find school violence and things like that, anything out of the ordinary I often just trivialise to try and deal with it, to say, "Well, ag, it's a school environment, it's unlikely in the extreme, I mean, the probabilities of it happening again in this context are so slim as being ..."

INTERVIEWER: Again, is it rationalising, falling back on ...

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, to try and, somehow, manage to get your mind around the idea that it very likely could be, but I find the same thing with anything. If you had to contemplate the probabilities of what it would be, that you could die in a mangled wreck of crushed and crumpled metal, you'd never drive again. So, certain factors of life you have to – but violent crime, from the news reports at least, anyway, seems to be on the increase, no matter what people say. And I suppose the other feeling that you feel – I don't know if you can describe it as a feeling more than sort of an understanding – is that from hearing about it from so many different sources, and if it is just stories that are getting embellished and being elaborated upon and now they've been personalised to make it someone's own, it's almost, your senses are, you know – whatever you read in the fact that it's getting better is actually just a complete lie because your personal experience now is showing you that it's the complete opposite, that so many more people are talking about it, about the activities and the incidents that they've

V.T.S –  
hopeless-  
ness

D.M –  
rationali-  
zation

Apathy –  
rel. to  
hopeless-  
ness (VTS)?

been involved in. And yet no-one seems interested at all to cure the problem or to try and fix the problem.

On the one hand I hear stories, probably not likely that very many people – and I happen to be privy to certain conversations that I’m not at liberty to repeat under certain circumstances. It’s not this one, I mean, this was a friend of mine discussing it, where there are measures in place. I find that one of the biggest problems in South Africa is we are on the whole apathetic to situations, white people in particular, unfortunately, that we just couldn’t give a damn. If it doesn’t affect us beneficially then we couldn’t give a monkey’s toss. And no-one seems to be taking a positive attitude towards anything, even to the point of saying, “Look, don’t focus on dealing with it, just actually focus on, hey, they caught the guy”, or, “Oh, today, you know.” And the problem is it wouldn’t sell newspapers, it wouldn’t make the news, it wouldn’t make media attention. There you’re talking about societal attitudes, so, there’s not much that you’re going to be able to do to change that.

Pessimism  
– hopelessness (VTS)

Pessimism  
Hopelessness  
(VTS)

INTERVIEWER: Just explain to me what you mean by people taking on stories in the newspapers as their own. Have you found that?

INTERVIEWEE: I find to some degree, when you’re in any form of social context, if you’re discussing things, and I mean that can be in any one of a range of things. You’re either sitting at a party, at a bus stop, waiting for a matter to come on in court, and the subject comes up in any form of interaction. I find that what you get is people not necessarily making it their own but in the sense of, “Oh, ja, well, I saw a news report the other night and it was on crime”, and this is what happened, “oh, and you know, this ...” In other words, it almost becomes a focal point that they’ll channel everything that they know about crime, and you are finding to some degree that people are more and more victims but I have, to some degree, also found that it’s the same stories that are doing the rounds, limited stories, where it’s, “Oh, my God, you know, a guy was shot fifteen times the other day. It’s the same story, it’s not different people, it’s not different stories, it’s the same story but it’s now been turned into this whole big hullabaloo that it’s now actually, oh, a whole, you know, two hijackings and two robberies and two this and two that.

Exaggeration –  
D.M?

And just in the context of having something to gripe about, people will latch onto stories like, “Oh, you know, that story in the newspaper, in Umbilo, you know, the grandmother, I can’t believe it. And I saw crime, you know, on ‘Special Assignment’ the other night and on ‘3<sup>rd</sup> Degree’”, and, oh, this and this and this. It becomes a focal point where you’ll channel everything you know or have ever heard about crime to just focus somehow on the negative aspect of it and it becomes a sort of self-fulfilling reality. The more you’re negative, the more crime becomes a problem. The more crime becomes a problem, the more negative you become. So, it’s not just crime itself, it’s the attitude people have to crime, and that’s what I’ve found, I’ve found people are not just content to just say, “Ja, well, you know, my friend...”, they go one beyond, trying to sensationalise it somehow for their own personal means, to show exactly how horrible the country is, to try and convince people now that this is in fact a terrible country, you know, bleak future, that we have no prospects, et cetera, et cetera, but that’s just my experience.

Pessimism –  
rel. to  
apathy &  
hopelessness

Exaggeration – D.M

INTERVIEWER: Are there any, sort of, thoughts that you catch yourself thinking about, that you don’t really want to be thinking, that you’re almost stop yourself to think, “Oh, my gosh, I can’t believe I’m having that thought, that it’s so horrible”, about anything to do with violent crime, whether it’s the people who are

committing it or what's happening about it ...

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, the first thing that ...

INTERVIEWER: ... or anything that you catch yourself thinking about, that you ...

INTERVIEWEE: Well, no, what I have found myself thinking is something I just mentioned a little earlier, is feeling almost jubilant at the fact that someone who perpetrated the offence wasn't just caught and locked up, it's that he was shot and killed, and find myself rejoicing in the fact, "Yea, good, good for him", you know, "Excellent, well done", where it's not something that I think anyone particularly should be taking any form of joy or response in. It's just a relief mechanism, "It's great, fantastic, wonderful", so, he doesn't end up becoming or committing greater crimes.

Revenge/  
punishment

Something I find myself feeling, and maybe because of the nature of the job that I'm in, is that often what you'll find people talking about is a very ill informed level of crime, "Is crime real, can prisons really work?" And from personal experience, I know that there is no prospect of prison system we have right now, working in any degree. Something that does disturb me is the feeling that...and this requires a slightly longer answer to the question.

INTERVIEWER: No, that's fine.

INTERVIEWEE: I once always held the view and notion that capital punishment was, in fact, some form of deterrent measure. I don't really ever consider and rationalising it in my own mind and in my own philosophy of life, I have come to believe that I don't believe we as a society have the right to dispose of a life, no matter what that life happens to have perpetrated. What I find myself, however, feeling more and more recently is an amazing sense of retribution and saying, "No, actually, I want to exterminate that life", not because of any form of punishment or, ummm.. deterrent, I want to do it because I just they deserve it. And that I find disturbing, I mean, I don't chastise myself about it but I find that disturbing in myself.

Revenge/  
punishment

INTERVIEWER: If you think about what you're thinking about, it. You think, "Well, why do I have to think that way?"

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, ja, you almost feel glad, yea, excellent, he got his comeuppance, you know, sort of thing. But in the level of that being the only way that anything is going to end up happening, that's all that's going to happen. And what I have said to my wife and I've said to a number of people, from now on, mark my words, you will see more and more reports of situations where you will not find gangs or violent criminals arrested and run through the court system, there will be frequent exchanges in a gun battle and they will die, because they will ...

INTERVIEWER: The perpetrators?

INTERVIEWEE: The perpetrators, they are going to - well, the police in their investigations. I have never doubted for one single moment in my life that the police know exactly who these perpetrators are. They have informant networks, better in this country than, I think, in most well-developed or so-called first world countries. They know who the perpetrators are, they know where they are, they know who they are, they know what they've done, they know what particular method and means that they utilise to do it. The problem being is that there's nothing that can be done about it and the justice system, I'm sorry to say, being a participant in it, has hopelessly failed the individual in society. But what I find disturbing is that that seems to be the only method that has any effect because it's final. You kill the guy, he's not going to perpetrate any further crimes, you exterminate him.



INTERVIEWER:

It's the only definite way.

INTERVIEWEE:

It's the only definite way and I find it disturbing that in the past four weeks - and this is also when you sit there and you think about it, you know, but again, at the same time, what I find disturbing is that I'm rejoicing in it, in the sense that if you start culling these people, great, it may be having some effect there. I don't believe poverty has anything to do with it, I don't believe being previously disadvantaged has anything to do with it. I think people just do it because it's easy, they do it because it's easy to do, to perpetrate, and there's no retribution for it. When you say, things that I think of, that I find myself thinking of ...

Revenge/  
punishment

D.M -  
rationaliza-  
tion

INTERVIEWER:

Just like things - I think you've answered that - things like that you don't really want to think, you don't want to have thoughts that ...

INTERVIEWEE:

No.

INTERVIEWER: ... you think a person should die or that you're happy that they died or whatever. But you kind of catch yourself thinking that or you do feel that and as long when you're honest to yourself. And it's those kind of things, but we don't necessarily go around telling everyone but you do find yourself thinking that it's actually not a bad plan.

INTERVIEWEE:

Ja, I do, I find that that seems to be, as I said, the only sure-fire method of dealing with the problem, it will be the final solution, as it were. Because I tend not to try and dwell on the method or methodology of crime or what the statistics show or what all that does, because really, to be perfectly frank, I've proved to myself and I've known statistics are and can be moulded and manipulated to show exactly what you want to show. And anyway, for every statistic that shows you crime is on the increase, someone will show you crime is on a decrease. So, the statistics that show you violent crime is up somehow show you violent crime is down. What concerns me is that there are no positive steps taken. We as a society - something that I find very frustrating is that the focus, not only in this country but in the world at large, is so much on the rights and the individual that someone and everyone has lost sight of the obligations of the individual, the ancillary of that.

And we live in a world where government bows to every political pressure and every peer group you can find, but to the one that I believe requires some form of - I don't actually quite know how to describe it, but that requires a voice, no voice is given to them at all, and that's the victim, and the problem being, is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The victim is the one that has no rights or are treated as if they have no rights. Their rights are subjugated to the rights of the perpetrator. There's no balancing act any longer, it's just one right riding roughshod over the other, and that I find - and I suppose it's just because it's the nature of the job I do and I encounter it a lot more than most other people would - that I find myself feeling very, very frustrated about the fact that just nothing is done.

And that's where, I suppose, the sort of underlying sense of helplessness come in, that you can't really fight it because the moment you do you're treated as the outcast, you're criticised and then they'll come down hard against you for trying to do anything about it, but they're not doing it themselves, so, you can't do anything about it and they're not doing anything about it. Well, then, nothing is going to get done and this is going to get worse. And that's what I also find becomes the spiral, when people talk or you engage in this kind of discussion at all, it just spirals, it spirals into negativity, it spirals into hopelessness, it spirals into, well, nothing is going to get done, it's just going to get worse. And then it becomes a self-

Hopelessne  
ss - VTS

Pessimism -  
hopeless-  
ness  
VTS

fulfilling prophecy, the moment you think it's going to get worse, of course it's going to get worse.

INTERVIEWER: What, just generally, and overall do you think has been the toll on you personally or the effects on you personally on living, being surrounded by all these stories and images on TV, do you think, of criminal violence?

INTERVIEWEE: Now I've become afraid, I've noticed it very, very pointedly in the last year and a half. I was never terrified or petrified of doing things, I was never particularly fearful. I now find myself being very fearful, I find myself being afraid for, I'll be honest, for my wife, for myself, I'm terrified for my family be going into places like Umlazi for work or end up being the victim of a violent hijacking and robbery and I thank God that it wasn't and that it was never a fulfilment of that fear or concern. But the personal effect I have found is that I am fearful and I have noticed others who were not fearful before are now fearful, my in-laws for one. Five years ago, six years ago, they didn't have a security system, they didn't have any form of security locks and they had open doors and security gates that didn't – and generally were never, ever shut or locked. Now, it's security gates are shut and there's an alarm system and you check it every time you come in and you check it when you go out. And seeing others live like that and seeing others who are now more fearful adds to my feelings of insecurity and fear, because it's like, Oh, they're worried, and they're worried, and they're worried, and they're worried ...

Fear -  
VTS

Fear -  
VTS

Fear  
Anxiety -  
VTS

INTERVIEWER:

And you should be too.

INTERVIEWEE:

I should be much more worried than I am, why am I not? And then you worry about worrying again. But, ja, that's the one personal factor, I think, the most predominant factor, I find. I find myself just feeling very bleak, feeling very fearful - I suppose I can't really describe it in any other way than that - which I never was before. I knew that there was violent crime, I've always known that there's violent crime, and it has been a reality of life for at least the last fifteen or twenty years of my life, but not to the point of where it's now. I know fatherhood and parenthood sort of brings on its own worries and concerns as a natural reaction, but I find it's becoming much more deeply embedded than it was before. It's not just, ah, well, something at the back of your mind, it's he was attacked and he was attacked, it's going to happen to me. And so now you're sort of almost waiting in anticipation for the day that it happens.

Anxiety -  
VTS

INTERVIEWER: You were talking about alarm systems and all those kind of things. Why would you say are those strategies, whether they are behavioural or physical walls or whatever, that you feel you are sort of starting to employ or use, owing to your fear and your concern of being a victim ...

INTERVIEWEE: Fear of black people, I'll tell you one. Something I never found in myself, I always saw in others and people used to joke about it, but if you see a black man walking on the side of this road, you pick up automatically, "Well, he's going to rob me." It entrenches racial stereotypes, it entrenches victim mentality, but thoughts of what I found myself to be, is I found myself to be more untrusting, I don't trust people as much as I did once upon a time. I'm far less likely to place any reliance on anyone to do anything. I have a greater degree of scepticism that anything will be done because no-one has done anything. I tend to be less, I wouldn't say less gullible, but less confident that the forces of law and order are actually able to do anything, because I don't believe that they're even remotely equipped to deal with it.

Fear -  
VTS

Mistrust

So, what I find myself doing personally is being much more vigilant in a personal context. If I'm driving down the road I will not drive in the same way as I did before. If there are three lanes I will not be in the side lane, I'll be in the middle lane, no matter what people behind me do, and I don't really give a fig any more. If a black person approaches you at the robot for anything, whether it be a beggar or just someone walking, ambling on the side of the road, I feel an immediate sense of trepidation. A prime example - and it's happened to me three times in the last month and a half - on attending a court case in Bloemfontein in May, travelling back to the airport and being dropped by the attorney, two black men approached the vehicle that we were travelling in, which was a minibus kombi, in a very odd way, and the immediate fear I had was this overwhelming sense of trepidation and fear, this sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach that we're now going to be robbed because these guys are coming up to rob us of the car. In driving, I find myself much more concerned about people on the side of the road, which I find, if I try to think about it or rationalise it, it's probably a more vigilant attitude, it's better to be more vigilant in that regard.

Hyper-  
vigilance  
- VTS

Fear -  
VTS

Hyper-  
vigilance  
- VTS

INTERVIEWER: Yes, it's more adaptive.

INTERVIEWEE: It's more adaptive, but you've adapted to the situation or there shouldn't be people on the side of the road, and if they're there they're there for an illicit purpose. But that's exactly, it's the same thing.

INTERVIEWER: Trying adapt to an unhealthy situation.

INTERVIEWEE: Ja, but by the same token, you are now treating the person who is innocently walking down the side of the road in the same notion, that they're actually there as well, but he's a black man, he must be a robber. And that I find, I think, is probably the biggest reaction in terms of what I've found. In terms of how I've modified my conduct, I find myself being paranoid to the point, or obsessive to the point of being paranoid, or paranoid to the point of being obsessive, whichever is the correct classification.

Generaliza-  
tion/  
exaggera-  
tion

Anxiety -  
VTS

INTERVIEWER: I think they both work.

INTERVIEWEE: But it literally is, it's feeding upon itself, that I will have to check things four or five times over, to make sure that doors are locked, windows are locked, security is on, the alarms are on, and then actually feeling uncomfortable or somehow unsettled if I haven't checked fifteen times over. And even if you do check fifteen times over, you're still feeling unsettled, no matter what. And I find, oddly, that it's reacting to the slightest bump, noise, backfire of a car. I react in a much more - I wouldn't even say react, I think I overreact to that in the sense that, oh, it's a hijacking. And you automatically and unconsciously, I think, switch into that survivalist mode of, you know, hell, I've got to get out of here. I used to have that feeling rarely and only in very specific situations. I have that much more often. Driving in areas I do, I find that I have that feeling often. I think it's a survival tactic in one instance, but in another instance it's unhealthy because it's just overly obsessive, it's overly paranoid, it is overly cautious, but by the same token, if you don't take it, your fear is that it's then going to open you to some form of attack.

Anxiety  
Fear  
Hypervig-  
ilance  
VTS

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you would like to add?

INTERVIEWEE: No..

INTERVIEWER: Okay, thank you very much, I really appreciate it.

INTERVIEW ENDS