

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' PERCEPTION OF DANGER IN DURBAN, JOHANNESBURG AND CAPE TOWN

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ABSTRACT

The safety and security of tourists has increasingly become a concern for the tourism industry. Since tourism is particularly sensitive to changing tastes and external dangers, violence - whether actual or potential - can seriously impede tourist activity through the creation of perceptions. Perceptions of risk and safety are of paramount importance in the decision-making process of tourists since perceived risk, whether exaggerated or realistic, impacts on intentions to travel. The purpose of this study is to determine how tourists perceive danger within the urban holiday environments of Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Furthermore, it aims to establish whether gender, group composition and time of day have an influence on the perception of danger. A questionnaire developed by Carr (2001) was used for this study. The author deconstructed "danger" into five separate but interrelated components, namely how safe, threatened, vulnerable, relaxed and at risk tourists feel. The data on which this paper is based was collected from a convenience sample of 197 international tourists interviewed at the international airports in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. This study found that the level of danger is perceived to be higher at night, and that similarities of perception exist between male and female respondents. Although group forming may act as a safety net, no significant differences were found in the perceptions of danger between the groups. Cape Town is perceived to be the safest city, followed by Durban. Although the three selected destinations are perceived to be relatively safe, the differences in perceived danger between the three destinations have a major impact on the willingness of international tourists to recommend these destinations to potential international tourists, thus illustrating the sensitivity and significance of perceptions of danger. Strategic planning is needed to improve safety and security in these urban settings. This will minimise the perceptions of danger as well as the negative impact of such perceptions.

Key words: Perceived danger; Safety and security; Urban destinations.

INTRODUCTION

Safety is an important criterion by which potential tourists judge the attractiveness of destinations (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996), and a perceived lack of safety can be a major constraint to the tourism industry (Lewis, 1999; Floyd *et al.*, 2003). Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) maintain that evidence shows beyond any doubt that acts of violence occurring at or *on route* to tourism destinations, and particularly violent acts aimed specifically at tourists, pose a threat to the continued existence and well-being of the tourism industry. The Southern California Tourism Safety and Security Association, in conjunction with the Anaheim/Orange

County Visitor and Convention Bureau, conducted a major field survey on tourism safety and security (Tarlow, 2004). More than 4 000 visitors at various tourism venues in Southern California were sampled. The questions focused on the role safety and security concerns play in destination selection and the impact of a visible police and security presence on visitors. A “1–10” perceptual rating scale was used to measure relevant issues. Domestic tourists reported safety and security as the most important factor considered in selecting their destination. Of those participating in the survey, 55% responded that safety and security was the most important factor, giving it the highest rating of 10. The average recorded rating was 8.9. International tourists rated safety and security even higher, with an average score of 9.3.

There is some evidence that South Africa’s reputation as a violent country scared away tourists in the late nineties (Kathrada *et al.*, 1999). The authors maintained that embassies were warning tourists of crime-related problems, particularly in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. However, contrasting views exist regarding the safety and security situation in South Africa. Joubert *et al.* (1999) suggest that these contrasting views may be due to the politicising of the crime issue, especially pertaining to the question of an increase in and the subsequent control of crime. For instance, Fedhasa suggests that the 11.5% increase in hotel occupancy during February and March 2002 may be attributed to four reasons, one being that South Africa was considered a safe place to visit at the time (*Sunday Times*, 2004: 39). In addition, the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Valli Moosa, indicated in May 2002 that South Africa is regarded as one of the safest destinations in the world (Pretorius *et al.*, 2002). This could probably be ascribed to the effect of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre (New York). In recent years, however, there has been a plethora of crime incidents at various tourist attractions in South Africa, which may have had a serious impact on tourists’ perception of safety in South Africa. For instance, the rape and murder of a British tourist in Mpumalanga early in November 2002 gave rise to a flood of inquiries regarding the safety of certain areas in South Africa (Zuzile, 2002). South Africa’s second national victim survey, conducted by The Institute for Security Studies in 2003, suggests that crime did, in fact, stabilise between 1998 and 2003, but that a sharp disparity exists between reality and the public’s negative perception of crime in South Africa (South Africa Info Reporter, 2004). This disparity may be due to the news industry’s awareness that violence does indeed “sell”, culminating in a perception of crime that is largely based on exaggeration and distortion. The fact is that literature suggests that perceptions of safety, whether exaggerated or realistic, impact on intentions to travel (Floyd *et al.*, 2003). Sönmez and Graefe (1998) found that perceptions of risk and safety are of paramount importance in the decision-making process of tourists, and that the perceived risk associated with a particular destination could, in fact, outweigh actual conditions at the destination in this regard.

Carr (2001) thus argues that the study of perceived danger is important; not only in its own right, but also in view of the influence it may have on the use of leisure spaces and times. The author further suggests that limited research has been conducted to assess how tourists perceive danger and what it constitutes at their holiday destinations in general, and urban ones in particular. Danger gives rise to risk and people, as well as their surroundings, can be a source of danger. Priest and Gass (2005) define risk as the potential to lose something of value. This loss may be physical (fractured bones), mental (psychological fear), social (peer embarrassment) or financial (theft of luggage).

In a preliminary study in 2005, a convenience sample of visitors (N=217) to the International Sub-Aqua and Water Sports Show at Birmingham in the United Kingdom, were asked by the researcher how they perceive the safety of tourists visiting South Africa. The respondents were asked to rank their perception of safety in South Africa on a 10-point Likert scale, with one being very unsafe and 10 very safe. The result of this survey is indicated in Figure 1.

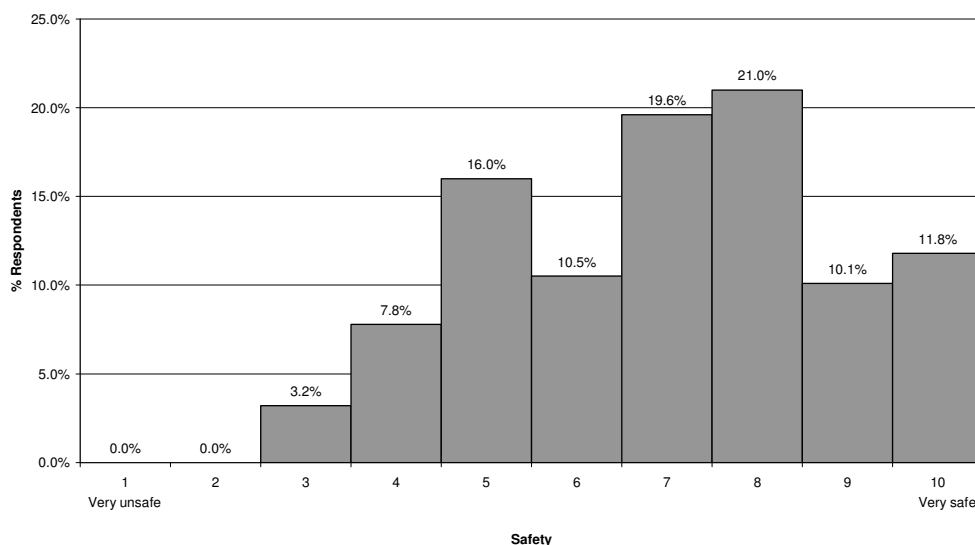


FIGURE 1: PERCEIVED SAFETY IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE INTERNATIONAL SUB-AQUA AND WATERSPORT SHOW, DIVE 2004

Figure 1 illustrates that, while none of the respondents felt that South Africa is a very unsafe destination, only 11.8% regarded South Africa as a very safe destination (i.e. free from danger). The average score was seven. The preliminary study thus indicates that, although South Africa is considered to be a relatively safe tourism destination, a perception of danger does exist. Perception of danger varies considerably amongst tourists, and the relationship between specific dangers and their impact on the actual travel propensity is not always straightforward (World Tourism Organization, 1997). However, Sönmez *et al.* (1999) maintain that travel statistics from around the world clearly suggest that tourism demand decreases as the perception of danger associated with a destination increases. The perception of danger can be directed at certain regions (Salayedwa, 2003) and certain cities (Kathrada *et al.*, 1999).

It is problematic that there are contrasting views among role players regarding the safety and security situation in South Africa. The question thus arises what the perception of tourists is regarding the safety and security situation in South Africa. George (2003) did a study on tourists' perception of safety and security while visiting Cape Town. However, no studies were done in South Africa to determine international tourists' perception of danger in selected urban settings. The purpose of this study is to determine how tourists perceive danger within the urban holiday environments of Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Furthermore, it aims to establish whether gender, group composition and time of day have an influence on the

perception of danger. The results may increase our understanding of tourists' behaviour, which is central to the development and management of the tourism industry.

METHODOLOGY

Instrumentation

The questionnaire developed by Carr (2001) was used for this study. The author deconstructed "danger" into five separate but interrelated components, namely how safe, threatened, vulnerable, relaxed and at risk tourists feel. The respondents were asked to rank each of the deconstructed components on a 10-point Likert scale. A score of one represents a very unsafe, tense, vulnerable, threatened and at-risk environment. A score of 10 represents a sense of being very safe, relaxed, not vulnerable at all, not threatened at all and at no risk. By reconstructing the five components it was possible to indicate tourists' overall perception of danger in the three cities. A score of five thus represents an individual who perceives a very high level of danger, as opposed to a score of 50, which represents an individual who perceives virtually no danger. The reconstructed values for perception of danger have been divided into five groups, which are identified as "very dangerous" (5–10), "dangerous" (11–20), "slightly dangerous" (21–30), "low danger level" (31–40), and "virtually no danger" (41–50). General questions concerning the respondents' origin, gender, age, group composition and willingness to recommend the three cities as tourism destinations upon returning to the country of origin, were included. Each questionnaire contained questions that assessed all three urban destinations.

Data collection

The data on which this paper is based was collected from a convenience sample of international tourists. The survey was conducted by the researcher at face-to-face level at the international airports in Johannesburg (7–14 January 2006), Durban (15–23 January 2006) and Cape Town (24–23 January 2006). The questionnaire was completed by 197 tourists with an average age of 32.1 years. There were 113 male respondents (57.4%) and 84 female respondents (42.6%). Seventy-eight questionnaires were completed at Johannesburg, 57 at Durban and 62 at Cape Town. Respondents were requested to comment on the relevant cities that they had visited, irrespective of the place of distribution. Fifty-seven comma four percent of the respondents had visited Johannesburg, 52.3% Cape Town and 46.2% Durban. Twenty-eight comma four percent of the respondents were visiting South Africa on their own, 23.4% as part of a single-sex group, and 48.2% as part of a mixed-sex group.

Analysis of data

The SPSS statistical programme was used to analyse data. The Wilcoxon Test was done and mean scores and standard deviations were calculated. The single (*) and double (**) asterisks indicate the usual convention for significant findings at the 5% and 10% levels of significance respectively.

RESULTS

The perceptions of personal danger in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town during the day and at night are indicated in Figures 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

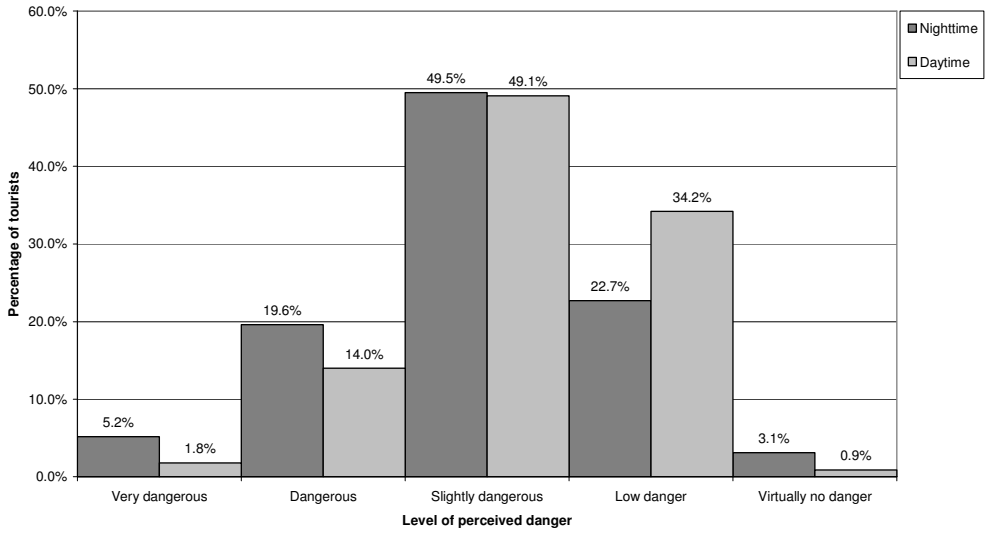


FIGURE 2: PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL DANGER IN JOHANNESBURG (TIME OF DAY)

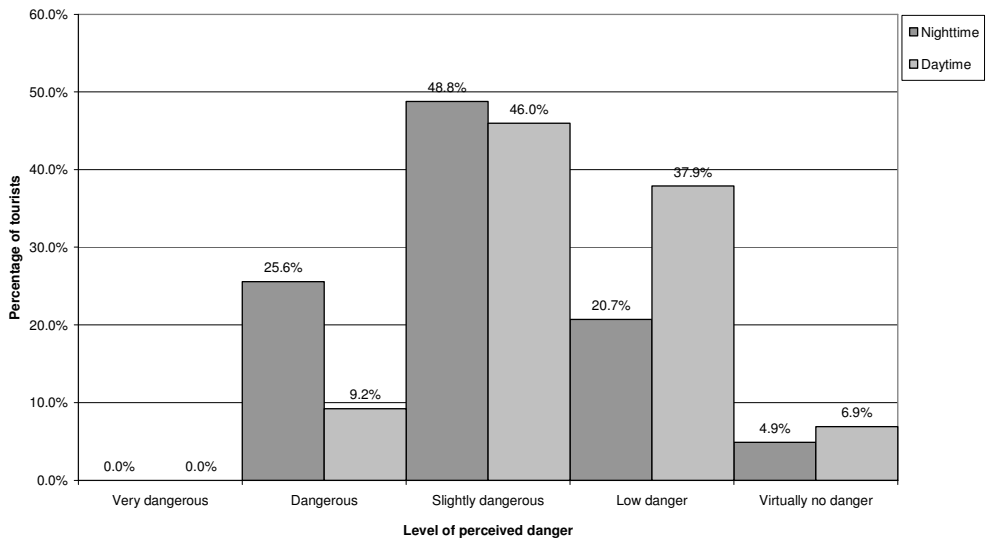


FIGURE 3: PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL DANGER IN DURBAN (TIME OF DAY)

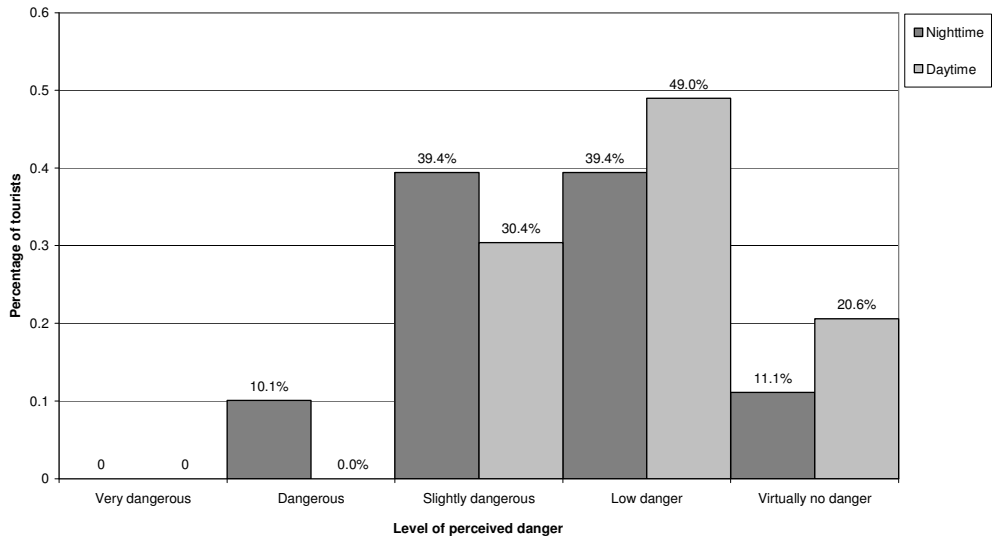


FIGURE 4: PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL DANGER IN CAPE TOWN (TIME OF DAY)

Figures 2, 3 and 4 illustrate that there is a higher level of perceived personal danger at night than during the day, irrespective of the city. Figures 5 and 6 compare the levels of perceived danger in the different cities at night and during the day respectively.

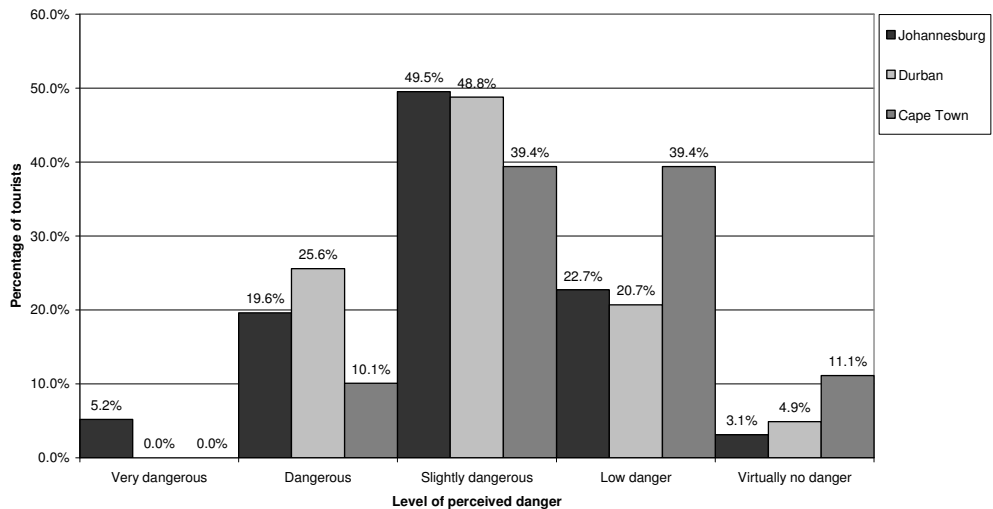


FIGURE 5: PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL DANGER IN JOHANNESBURG, CAPE TOWN AND DURBAN (NIGHTTIME)

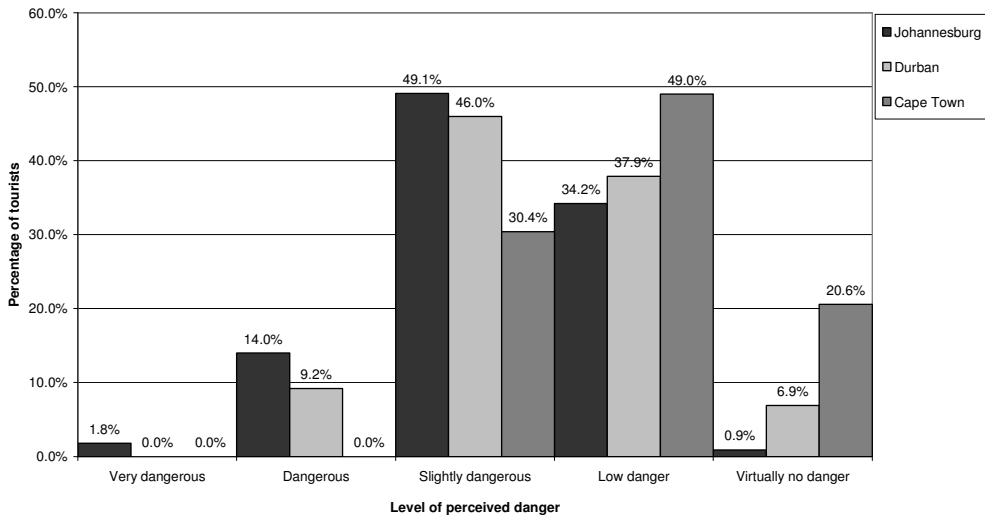


FIGURE 6: PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL DANGER IN JOHANNESBURG, CAPE TOWN AND DURBAN (DAYTIME)

These figures illustrate that Durban is considered to be less dangerous than Johannesburg, both at night and during the day. Cape Town is perceived to be less dangerous than Durban, both at night and during the day. According to the grouping of the reconstructed values, for both genders together and for men alone, only Johannesburg at night falls into the “slightly dangerous” category (21-30). All other categories (gender and time of day) fall into the “low danger level” category (31-40). Table 1 presents the mean scores for men and women at night and during the day in the three cities.

TABLE 1: MEANS SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS: GENDER AND TIME OF DAY

GENDER AND TIME OF DAY	Johannesburg			Durban			Cape Town		
	N	X	SD	N	X	SD	N	X	SD
Day (both genders)	114	31.842	7.4745	87	34.253	7.5686	102	39.020	7.1074
Night (both genders)	97	29.897	8.7196	82	30.488	8.1502	99	35.152	8.2516
Men (day)	63	31.746	7.5219	49	34.286	7.0711	63	38.413	6.5270
Men (night)	51	29.608	8.7088	45	30.444	7.6739	60	34.333	8.1025
Women (day)	51	31.961	7.4886	38	34.211	8.2631	39	40.000	7.9472
Women (night)	46	30.217	8.8164	37	30.541	8.8021	39	36.410	8.4253

The higher score (lower level of perceived danger) during the day is consistent irrespective of gender or city. It is evident that Durban is perceived to be a less dangerous city than Johannesburg, and that Cape Town is considered less dangerous than Durban. This is applicable to both genders, as well as to time of day. A T-test for equality of means was

conducted for gender as well as time of day. No significant differences were found. Table 2 presents the findings of a Wilcoxon test on gender, cities and time of day.

TABLE 2: WILCOXEN TEST: GENDER, CITIES AND TIME OF DAY (P - VALUES)

Johannesburg Nighttime - Daytime			Durban Nighttime - Daytime			Cape Town Nighttime - Daytime		
Male and Female	Male	Female	Male and Female	Male	Female	Male and Female	Male	Female
0.008**	0.003**	0.008**	0.000**	0.007**	0.002**	0.000**	0.000**	0.004**
Durban - Johannesburg			Cape Town - Johannesburg			Cape Town - Durban		
Male and Female	Male	Female	Male and Female	Male	Female	Male and Female	Male	Female
0.082	0.335	0.129	0.003**	0.013*	0.009**	0.000**	0.000**	0.004**

* $p < 0.05$ - significant

** $p < 0.01$ - highly significant

The results illustrated in Table 2 indicate that a highly significant difference ($p < 0.01$) exists between the levels of danger perceived by men, women and both genders together at night and during the day. This is applicable to all three cities. No significant difference was found in the perceived levels of danger between Durban and Johannesburg. A comparison of the scores for Johannesburg and Cape Town yielded highly significant differences ($p < 0.01$) for both genders together, as well as for women. Men demonstrated a significant ($p < 0.05$) difference. A comparison of the scores for Cape Town and Durban resulted in highly significant differences ($p < 0.01$) for men, women and both genders together. However, a T-test for equality of means indicated that no significant differences exist between men and women regarding the perception of danger.

The mean scores for the different group compositions at night and during the day in the three cities are indicated in Table 3.

TABLE 3: MEANS SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS: GROUP COMPOSITION AND TIME OF DAY

Group Composition	Time of Day	Johannesburg			Durban			Cape Town		
		N	X	SD	N	X	SD	N	X	SD
By self	Day	30	32.33	7.28	24	34.17	8.30	30	37.67	6.79
	Night	29	30.35	6.26	21	31.91	8.14	28	34.29	8.79
Single sex group	Day	24	33.75	5.76	19	35.79	8.38	25	38.40	7.46
	Night	21	32.81	6.69	19	33.16	9.46	25	36.00	7.64
Mixed sex group	Day	60	30.83	8.09	44	33.64	6.85	47	40.21	7.07
	Night	47	27.87	10.20	42	28.57	7.18	46	35.22	8.36

Lower scores (higher level of perceived danger) at night compared to daytime are evident for the three group compositions in the three cities. Table 3 also indicates that the perceived danger for the three group compositions escalates from Johannesburg to Durban to Cape Town. A T-test for equality of means was conducted with regard to group composition. No significant difference was found in the perception of danger between the different group compositions. Table 4 reflects the Wilcoxon test for group composition and time of day in the three cities.

TABLE 4: WILCOXEN TEST: GROUP COMPOSITION, CITIES AND TIME OF DAY (P - VALUES)

Cities and time of day	Group Composition		
	By self	Single sex	Mixed sex
N Jhb - D Jhb	0.052	0.480	0.065
N Dbn - D Dbn	0.317	0.096	0.000 **
N CT - D CT	0.020 *	0.058	0.000 **
Night - day	0.014 *	0.002 **	0.000 **
Durban - Johannesburg	0.317	1.000	0.053
Cape Town - Johannesburg	0.180	1.000	0.007 **
Cape Town - Durban	0.013 *	0.026 **	0.000 **

* $p < 0.05$ - significant

** $p < 0.01$ - highly significant

Highly significant differences exist ($p < 0.01$) in the scores of mixed-sex groups with regard to night time and daytime in Durban, night time and daytime in Cape Town, night and day (irrespective of the city), Cape Town and Johannesburg, and Cape Town and Durban.

Respondents travelling on their own demonstrated significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in the scores between night time and daytime in Cape Town, night and day in general, and between Cape Town and Durban. Single-sex groups demonstrated a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in perceived levels of danger between night and day, as well as between Cape Town and Durban. Table 5 illustrates the willingness of respondents to recommend the respective cities as tourism destinations upon returning to their country of origin.

TABLE 5: RECOMMENDED AS TOURISM DESTINATION BY GENDER

City	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Johannesburg	32	55.2	24	52.2	56	53.9
Durban	37	66.1	28	65.1	65	65.7
Cape Town	72	100	45	97.8	117	99.1

The similarity between men and women regarding their willingness to recommend the three cities is evident. In addition, there is an escalation in this regard from Johannesburg to Durban to Cape Town.

DISCUSSION

Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town

This survey indicates that the perception exists among the respondents that Johannesburg is the more dangerous urban tourism destination compared to Durban and Cape Town. Of the three cities, Cape Town is judged the safest holiday environment. This perception exists among both male and female respondents, and is applicable to both night time and daytime. It is also evident that the perception of danger regarding the three cities exists irrespective of the group composition (single sex, on own or mixed sex.). It should be noted that high security risk concerns have a ripple effect throughout the industry in the sense that security risks in one city (Johannesburg) may be perceived to affect the wider region (Gauteng), or - during major security concerns - the entire tourism system (Hall *et al.*, 2003; Sönmez, 1998).

Gendered differences

The similarity of the perceptions of male and female respondents is clearly illustrated in Table 2. The differences between perceived levels of personal danger during the day and at night in the cities are highly significant ($p < 0.01$) for both genders. In addition, no significant difference was found in the perception of danger between men and women. This disputes the claim by Roundtree and Land (1996) that men are significantly less likely than women to feel unsafe in public spaces. Credence is given to the study of George (2003), who found that gender did not appear to be a significant factor affecting visitors' perception of Cape Town's safety. Carr (2001) also found similarities between the perceived safety of men and women. This "blurring" of gender boundaries may be attributed to an increasing determination amongst women not to be controlled by men or their perceived fears (Carr, 2001:569). In

addition women's increased workforce participation has heightened calls for gender equality and for autonomy and financial interdependence from men (Hammond, 2004).

Time of day

The lower levels of perceived danger during the day in comparison to night time are evident irrespective of the city, gender, or group composition. The implication is that law enforcement agencies and the tourism industry in general should co-ordinate efforts to implement crime prevention measures, especially at night. Any limitation of the utilisation of time or leisure spaces will impact negatively on tourism demand.

Group composition

While group forming - acting as a safety net - may enable tourists to perceive lower levels of danger, this survey found no significant differences between the different groups in terms of how they perceive danger. This is applicable during the day or at night, irrespective of the city. Although social groups group together based on a shared attribute, this finding confirms the suggestion by Carr (2001) that perception of danger may be influenced by group composition; however, the personalities of the individual group members also play a role in determining the level of danger perceived by each person. This suggestion is supported by Plog's (1974) cognitive-normative model for tourist typology. According to this model, the allocentric tourist is characterised by a considerable sense of adventure and a willingness to reach out and experiment with life. The psychocentric tourist on the opposite side of the continuum is generally insecure, uncertain and less adventurous. The possibility exists that perceptions of danger may be higher among psychocentric tourists, as opposed to allocentric tourists. This may explain why respondents travelling on their own (allocentric) displayed significant ($p < 0.05$) differences between the scores for night time and daytime, as opposed to mixed and single-sex groups (psychocentric), which demonstrated highly significant ($p < 0.01$) differences in score. In addition, the increasingly hedonistic and risk-oriented behaviour linked to the young tourist, irrespective of gender (Wilkinson, 1994), may also be a contributing factor with regard to the low levels of perceived danger among respondents travelling on their own. Floyd *et al.* (2003) found that experienced travellers appear to be less affected by safety and security concerns, which may also contribute to the lack of significant differences between the respective groups in terms of how they perceive danger.

Recommendation as tourist destination

The impact of the perception of danger at a tourism destination is clearly illustrated by the willingness of respondents to recommend the respective cities as tourism destinations. Although all three cities fall into the "low danger level" category, the willingness to recommend Johannesburg (the city with the highest perception of danger) was substantially lower (55.2% and 52.2%) for male and female respondents respectively, than Cape Town (100% for male and 97.8% for female respondents). Tourism organisations rely on tourists informing potential tourists about the nature and quality of the tourism offering (word of mouth advertising). Word of mouth advertising in tourism is judged by George (2004: 32) to be "more powerful than advertising or any other form of promotion", and to be "imperative to most successful tourism organizations". The unwillingness of tourists to recommend destinations due to the perception of danger and the resultant potential negative effect on the sustainability of tourism organisations and destinations, is thus clearly illustrated.

CONCLUSION

The problem of tourism safety and security cannot be labelled a novel social challenge of the post-modern era, since travellers - whether travelling by horse, by mail coach or by car - have always faced danger (Michalkó, 2003). However, security in tourism issues has recently become a complex notion. Crime against tourists has become big business for the media (Muehsam & Tarlow, 1995) and a complaint often heard from travel destination marketers is that the media, through sensationalist reporting, are creating an overreaction out of proportion to the real level of risk (Schiebler *et al.*, 1996). The resultant perception of danger, whether realistic or exaggerated, has an impact on destination selection. This study found that the perceived level of danger is higher at night, and that similarities of perception exist between male and female respondents. Although group forming may act as a safety net, no significant differences were found in the perceptions of danger between the groups. Cape Town is perceived to be the safest city, followed by Durban. Although the three selected destinations are perceived to be relatively safe, the differences in perceived danger between the three destinations have a major impact on the willingness to recommend these destinations to potential international tourists, thus illustrating the sensitivity and importance of perceptions of danger. A high priority must therefore be given to marketing strategies to counter the losses associated with perceptions of risk. Future research using a bigger sample size should monitor the perceptions of both national and international tourists regarding danger at tourism destinations in South Africa.

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