

The marital status of the students was almost similar in both the groups with 61% single, 32% married (customary and legal marriages), 3% divorced, 3% cohabitating and 1% widowed. Forty-seven per cent (47%) of the students were employed, thus they had additional family and career responsibilities.

STUDENTS' DESCRIPTION OF THE CONCEPT OF TRAUMA

This section focuses on what the participants regarded as the core distinguishing features of a traumatic experience. They shared what had happened to them personally in order to explain the concept. In subsequent research with the same group, it was determined that every one of the students had experienced a traumatic event. Furthermore, uniquely South African experiences were mentioned, like those involving "kangaroo courts",⁷ taxi violence, "necklacing"⁸ and dealing with ancestors. The transcribed responses are quoted verbatim and the themes that were identified are discussed below, supplemented with support from the literature.

• **Theme 1: Trauma invades one's life and affects the whole person**

One of the main themes the students mentioned was that the traumatic experience invades one's whole life, way of being and in particular the self of the person. This was deduced from the following quotations:

"It is an incident that invades your private space and has an impact on your life in such a manner that it influences your normal day-to-day life. It leaves you feeling helpless without control."

"Trauma is an experience that creates a wound in someone's soul and it affects them emotionally, psychologically and physically."

"It hijacks your emotions and your feelings at that time of the incident."

"Trauma is a very destructive disease. It takes over the entire being and breaks you as a person bit by bit."

To confirm their description of trauma as wounding the person, the participants indicated the difference between stress and trauma. Stress was described as coming from outside, while trauma came from the inside. The person's experience that trauma is "wounding the inside" was expressed as follows by a participant:

"Trauma is a personal violation – physically and psychologically."

These descriptions link with the PCA (Prop. 3), which refers to the fact that people react holistically to experiences. All dimensions of a person – feelings, thoughts, values, emotions, behaviour and physical attributes – form an organised whole (Grobler & Schenck, 2010; Rogers, 1951). It also refers to the core of the PCA (Prop. 8), which relates to the forming of the self of the person and the fact that the incident threatens or wounds the self of the person – it affects the way one thinks about oneself (Grobler & Schenck, 2010; Moore, 1994; Rogers, 1951; Wade, 2009) as emerged in theme 2.

⁷ A kangaroo court is a self-appointed or mob-operated court.

⁸ Necklacing is the practice of summary execution carried out by forcing a rubber tyre, filled with petrol, around a victim's chest and arms, and setting it on fire. The victim may take up to 20 minutes to die, suffering severe burns in the process.

