

Ithemba, founded in 2012, has supported the following studies since 2013, with the aim of improving the quality of life across race, age and income groups, from primary school isiXhosa learners having to learn in a second language, to students, to mothers in low-income communities:

2013: Depressed women's emotional experiences of the mother-child relationship: perspectives from a low-income South African community

(Clinical Psychology, Master's thesis, graduation March 2014, by Marleen Lourens)

<http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86346>

The study formed part of a larger longitudinal project concerned with low-income South African women's subjective experiences of depression. It specifically focused on how depressed women experienced their relationships with their children. While numerous researchers have examined and identified the important negative effects of depression in mothers on children during the past decade, a very limited number of studies have been focused on the opposite direction of the depressed mother-child relationship. Very few studies have explored how relationships with their children may influence the development and subjective experience of depression and emotional distress in mothers, as well as, on the other hand, may protect against depression and emotional distress. This study attempted to address this gap in the literature. Although the depressed women in this study did report child factors which contributed to their depression, they - to the contrary - also emphasised that their children are an important protective factor against their experience of depression. The participants also highlighted that they have the ability to be protective, supportive and caring towards their children, despite their depressive symptoms. The majority of depressed women also described a "very good" mother-child relationship. As such, the participants in the present study showed us a brighter picture of the depressed mother-child relationship.

2014, 2015, 2016, 2017: Longitudinal International Study on Student Health and Wellness

(ISSHW; Mental Health and Information Centre, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University)

Several findings of this study have already been presented at several conferences, one such being the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) congress in November 2016 in Cape Town. The conference took place for the first time in its history in Cape Town. Researchers working on the ISSHW presented findings. Prof Christine Lochner chaired the symposium and gave an overview of the rationale, aims and objectives of this International Study on Student Health and Wellness. She introduced the issue of, and the need for research on college/university student wellness and described this cross-continental four-year longitudinal study of student wellness. Also see "The WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project: Prevalence and Distribution of Mental Disorders" in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (April 2018), and

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-college-freshmen-worldwide-mental-health.html>.

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2015: Relationship between childhood trauma, neuropsychological deficits, neural circuitry, and anxiety proneness in high-anxiety prone and low-anxiety prone adolescents.

(Psychiatry, PhD, graduation Dec 2017, L Martin)

<http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/88477>

Individual trait characteristics such as anxiety sensitivity (AS) and trait anxiety have been found to be elevated in those with anxiety disorders, and both AS and trait anxiety have predictive potential for a number of anxiety disorders. Individuals with early trauma histories, such as childhood maltreatment, are also at a greater risk of developing anxiety disorders and other psychopathology. As such, high-anxiety prone adolescents with childhood maltreatment histories are particularly vulnerable to the development of a wide range of psychiatric disorders and in light of this, further investigation is warranted. Several studies have shown that anxiety-prone (AP) individuals (i.e. those with high levels of AS and trait anxiety) demonstrate greater threat-related neurocognitive biases, and fare more poorly on neurocognitive tests (i.e. memory, attention, and executive function) relative to anxiety-normative (AN) individuals. Similarly, individuals with childhood maltreatment histories, relative to those without, have poorer neurocognitive performance. Neuroimaging studies have demonstrated these neurocognitive deficits to be associated with neural deficits, with AP individuals demonstrating greater activation in amygdala and insula regions relative to AN individuals. This study is a two-tier study in a representative, nonclinical sample of adolescents attending secondary schools in Cape Town.

2016: Effectiveness of Prolonged Exposure for adolescents with PTSD, as administered by counselors: Comparative trial of supportive counselling

(PhD Psychiatry, graduated Dec 2017, J. Rossouw):

This study aimed to show that trauma-focused interventions can effectively be implemented in a South-African taskshifting, community based environment. The primary outcome measures are PTSD and depression severity measures. Previous research with adolescents indicate that effective treatment of PTSD lead to improvement in depression to subclinical levels. It is

suggested that this subgroup of depression sufferers will improve when their PTSD is treated effectively.

2017 (two bursaries):

Social cognition following pharmacological treatment in Social Anxiety Disorder: Clinical, cognitive and neuroimaging correlates.

(PhD Psychiatry, L Taljaard – ongoing)

Humans, as social creatures, have an innate desire to belong to a group and be accepted by our peers. There is an evolutionary need to be able understand and predict other people's thoughts and behaviour by ascribing meaning to their mental states, their desires and intentions. The ability to interpret these social cues is important in our everyday capacity to live among people, get along and fit in. Our survival in the world relies on effective social functioning, and is important during decision making in social contexts, social judgments, emotion and face recognition, and socio-emotional competencies. Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is a result of the fear that we will not be accepted by our peers, a fundamental, biological need to be liked. SAD in South Africa is a common psychiatric condition, with lifetime and 12-month prevalence rates of 2.8% and 1.9%³, respectively, making it the second most common anxiety disorder. It also contributes to a significant burden that results in lower quality of life, higher rates of unemployment or time off work, greater risk of comorbid depression and alcohol/substance use and suicide.

Self-efficacy and anxiety in a group of isiXhosa-learners receiving second language education in the Western Cape

(MA Clinical Psychology, J Botha – ongoing):

The effect of foreign language learning on self-esteem and anxiety has long been a topic of interest for language education researchers. Low self-esteem is correlated with higher levels of foreign language anxiety, in turn resulting in lower levels of language proficiency. Within the South African context, research has been conducted on how language mediates the psychosocial experiences of immigrant learners in South African schools, where the language of learning and teaching is different to their home language. Mahembe's (2016) study on foreign national children residing in and attending school in South Africa indicates that these children experienced increased social anxiety and a lower sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, partly due to language barriers that effect academic achievement and the ability to fit into a peer group. De Witt (2011) postulates that it is not only immigrant children that experience the difficulties mentioned above; in South Africa, many children attending school in a language that is not their first experience the same anxiety as immigrant children. However, outside of the foreign language and immigrant learner context, there is a paucity of research on whether non-mother tongue education affects learners' self-efficacy and anxiety levels. This study aims to address this knowledge gap by investigating whether non-mother tongue education has an influence on the self-efficacy and anxiety levels of a group of South African learners by comparing their self-efficacy and anxiety levels with those of their peers receiving mother-tongue education.

2018:

Pilot study of an e-intervention for symptoms of depression among university Students in South Africa

(MA Clinical Psychology, F Gericke, ongoing)

Depressive symptoms are common among university students, and are associated with significant problems including higher rates of dropout and suicidal behaviours. Despite viable psychotherapeutic and pharmacological options, the majority of depressed university students

do not pursue treatment, and internet based e-interventions may provide a suitable alternative form of effective treatment for some students. Identifying individuals with a high likelihood of responding to internet-based treatment would enable clinicians to target this inexpensive treatment. To date no attempts have been made to pilot the use of e-interventions for depression among university students in South Africa. The specific aims of the study are:

- (1) to determine the proportion of university students who will utilise the internet-based treatment (ICare);
- (2) to determine if ICare effectively reduces depressive symptoms among students;
- (3) to identify psychosocial and clinical characteristics that increase the likelihood of ICare utilisation; and
- (4) to investigate university students' experience and suggestions for how to make the intervention more culturally appropriate for use in SA.