

Accelerate cutting-edge research on youth and families

The HSRC has a long history of work focusing on young people, families and diversity. In this article we showcase four projects currently funded by a DST-NRF* Centre of Excellence in Human Development (CoE-HUMAN) that are playing a catalytic role in driving this agenda.

PROJECT 1: A CONSORTIUM OF GLOBAL SOUTH YOUTH SCHOLARS

Do the youth living in the Global South cope differently with adversity than their counterparts in the Global North? Sharlene Swartz, in an attempt to uncover some answers, is working with a Consortium of Global South Youth Scholars.

The study investigates whether youth living in the Global South in adverse environments deal in different ways to their Global North counterparts with issues such as poverty, educational quality, unemployment, food security and violence. Do their

paths to independent living differ in matters of citizenship, mobility, disability, sexual and reproductive health, digital divides, social solidarity, school to work transitions, and home? We are trying to establish to what extent the magnitude, impact and engagement with these challenges varies between youth in the Global North and those in the Global South.

In my experience as a Global South scholar who spent a considerable amount of time in the Global North, scholars in the Global South have for too long relied on Global North representations, theories, policies and methodologies that do not address the pressing concerns of young people growing up in the Global South.



Youth in Langa.

These include US-driven positive youth development that focuses on dynamic systems, risks and protective factors; UK-led sociocultural approaches centring on youth agency, sub-cultures, resistance and cultural reproduction; politically-driven programmes of youth policy development, citizenship studies and human rights approaches; and religious programmes targeted at youth by Christian and Islamic youth workers.

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To study these observations, we will be working with a Consortium of Global South Youth Scholars.

Areas of focus include determining empirical differences between youth in the Global North and South; commissioning new studies to obtain a better and fuller picture of the challenges these youth – and those who engage with them – face; and ultimately developing new theories to accelerate and establish southern scholarship on youth.

As part of this grant from the CoE-HUMAN, a brief survey of South African youth agencies is planned that will ask respondents to identify challenges faced by the youth with which they work, and to differentiate these challenges by the youths' level of adversity.

The consortium will involve a series of roundtable discussions with invited academics around the world – added on to existing conferences and study visits where possible. Two of these have already taken place: one at the University of Cambridge in March 2015 and another at the City University of New York in June 2015.

Two further events are planned, a panel discussion session at the World Social Sciences Forum, which takes place in Durban, South Africa, from 13 to 16 September 2015, and a second discussion session at the Association for Moral Education's annual conference, taking place in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in November 2015.

The consortium will be used as a basis for a future, long-term and large-scale programme of research, for which further funding will be sought from the CoE-HUMAN and from the Jacobs Foundation, Switzerland.

Journal articles currently in progress include 'Approaches to the study of youth: A southern perspective'; 'What does it mean to be in the Global South?'; 'Navigational capacities: A conceptual metaphor for youth development in adversity and representations of youth in global and social media'.

Author: Professor Sharleen Swartz, acting director, Human and Social Development (HSD) programme, HSRC. This project is funded by an Accelerator Award from the CoE-HUMAN. Two post-doctoral fellows, both recipients of CoE bursaries, are also working on the project: Dr Adam Cooper, City University of New York, (scheduled to return to South Africa soon), and Dr Alude Mahali, HSRC.

**Department of Science and Technology-National Research Foundation*

PROJECT 2: POLYAMORY – MORE THAN JUST MULTIPLE PARTNERS

In this project, Stanley Molefi addresses a potentially novel way of enhancing HIV prevention programmes in South Africa by investigating polyamory – a concurrent partnership in which it is possible and valid to have 'openly' sexual and/or romantic partnerships with multiple people.

Background research indicates that scholars from different fields, including psychology, sociology and anthropology, have identified the co-existence of monogamy and non-monogamous relationships in many societies. In fact, 'alternative' sexual practices are more commonplace than is generally believed.

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Even though the visibility of some of these (e.g. same-sex practices) have increased in recent years, for the most part, 'other' sexualities continue to be practiced under a veil of secrecy, hidden from society where they are frequently stigmatised and demonised.



These patterns of 'other' sexualities, including non-monogamy, are observed in the Global South, including in Africa. However, in South Africa and the broader region of southern Africa, non-monogamous, concurrent sexual partnerships are linked to risks for HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted infections. For this reason, the prevention policy framework and scholarly mindset that advocates for the reduction of all forms of concurrent sexual partnerships as a potential behavioural HIV prevention strategy, is well-established in the region, even though it poses empirical challenges.

The idea that some forms of concurrency and other forms of multiple partnering are driving HIV infection is disputed by some scholars in the field of HIV/AIDS. Thus, dissenting scholars (e.g. Allais & Venter, 2012; Lurie & Rosenthal, 2010) raise the question of whether all forms of concurrent relationships pose the same risk to HIV infection.

Some research points to a lack of substantial evidence, inconsistent definition, and difficulty in measuring concurrent partnerships as indicating that not all forms of concurrency is related to HIV-infection risk. Indeed, it is necessary to distinguish between concurrency that carries the risk of HIV and others that do not pose the same risk. My investigation centres on the contention that the practice of polyamory (a relationship where someone has sexual and/or romantic partnerships with multiple people simultaneously) is a form of responsible concurrency that might have the potential to lower the risk of HIV infection.

The study involves individuals in polyamorist relationships who reside in Gauteng, and utilises in-depth individual interviews. I use the social cognitive theory as a framework to explain the structuring of concurrency in South Africa. The theory is useful in fleshing out how a cognitive tool like language is employed in the ordering of concurrent partnerships, as well as how government policies in South Africa, such as the OneLove campaign, shape the practice of concurrency.

In analysing the information I hope to learn how relationship issues such as contraception and/safer sex practices are discussed and negotiated in this open 'doing' or 'practice' of multiple partners. Extrapolating such

idiosyncratic knowledge within this form of concurrency may enhance the current formulation of HIV prevention programmes in South Africa.

This work was presented at the 2015 Academic Organization for Advancement of Strategic and International Studies International Multidisciplinary Conference in Paris. The paper is under consideration for a peer-reviewed publication.

Author: Stanley Molefi, HSRC trainee and CoE-HUMAN doctoral candidate.

PROJECT 3: CHILDREN IN FAMILIES

Twenty years since political emancipation, children in South Africa have experienced transformation at many levels. But transformation has different forms and not all are positive. Monde Makiwane and Ernest Khalema share information about a book project on whether South African families are in crises, or whether they have adjusted to change and found novel ways to perform in the new dispensation.

In 2014 there were almost 19 million children in a population of 53 million. There is wide diversity among these children. Some struggle with lack of shelter, food, clothing, proper education, support, neglect, poverty, crime and abuse. Their lives are in a constant state of uncertainty, with little time for fun and enjoyment. For others, childhood is carefree; they lead fulfilled lives and experience positive growth.





The book focuses on the everyday socialisation of children in South Africa, particularly black children. We are looking at a knowledge gap in the understanding of children's lives and their positions within families in South Africa to better understand the processes in both families and society that promote child competence and resilience.

Why the emphasis of children's positions within families? The family represents a key social unit into which children are born. The composition of South African families is a kaleidoscope of nuclear, extended and reconstituted families.

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A historical overview of families reveals significant changes in traditional families over the years, brought about by colonisation, apartheid, modernisation and globalisation. Unlike earlier predictions, nuclear families with two adults (recently legally extended beyond heterosexual partnerships) who maintain a legally recognised partnership, with or without children who are either their biological or adopted children, form only a small section of society. The majority of families are multi-generational and extended, with children being reared by a single rather than both parents.

The chapters in the book recognise and affirm these complexities and diversity of South African family systems. In most South African cultures, as is on other parts of the continent, the family is extended to aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and other relatives. In these complex family forms, obligations to wider kin might not be static, complicating family structure even more. These families might be distributed over large geographical spaces, resulting in large numbers of children who live with one or both biological parents for varying lengths of time, if at all.

This book also examines whether the South African family is in crisis, whether it is unable to perform its obligations to children, or whether it has adjusted to change and found novel ways to perform its duties.

While the chapters adhere to academically rigorous research, we aim for accessible language to foster a wide readership. The target audience for the book is post-graduate students and researchers in social sciences, humanities and health; NGOs; and government officials working with policies and interventions for children and families. The book will demonstrate insider knowledge of the African family, including positive African traditional practices. The editors are on track for publication in early 2016.

Authors: Drs Monde Makiwane and Ernest Khalema, Economic Performance and Development programme, HSRC. Co-authors: Professor Mzikazi Nduna and Munyane Mophosho, University of the Witwatersrand. The project is funded by the CoE-HUMAN to produce a book, Lives and Times: Children in South African families, to be published by Cambridge Scholar Publishers.

PROJECT 4: NON-CONVENTIONAL FAMILIES

There is a gap in scholarship on sexuality in relation to families and parenthood in the many different family forms in South Africa. Tracy Morison, Ingrid Lynch and Vasu Reddy aim to close this gap with a book project entitled Queer Kinship: Perspectives on sexuality, families and reproduction in South Africa.

While the nuclear family is represented by media and popular culture as the 'norm', significant legislative reforms of the recent past in South Africa, as well as advances in reproductive technologies, have created the possibility for even greater family diversity, including family formation among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons and other sexual minorities.

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Family diversity is explicitly recognised by South African policy. The White Paper on Families stresses the need not only to acknowledge, but also to 'respect the diverse family types and values in the country'. The National Development Plan explicitly calls for the eradication of discrimination in relation to family composition and sexual and gender identities. Nevertheless, families parented by people from sexual minority groups continue to occupy a socially marginal position despite the strides made towards legal recognition of and protection of queer families.

To combat this discrimination and to address the diverse needs of queer families, we need to understand how the particular South African sociocultural space shapes the reproductive intentions, decisions and transitions to parenthood, and the experiences of family among people in these groups. At present, there is a strong heterosexual bias in sexual and reproductive health services; psycho-social support services, including counselling and screening in fostering and adoption services; social security practices; schooling practices and so on.

The book *Queer Kinship* focuses on generating knowledge on this topic, as well as stimulating research networks around this budding area of scholarship on South Africa. It addresses three main themes:

- Forming families, a theme that deals with reproductive choices, desires and intentions;
- Seeing and being families, a theme focused on representations and constructions of queer families; and
- Doing family, a theme addressing people's experiences within queer families.

Notable contributors include Professor Carien Lubbe de Beer, who produced the South African landmark text on the subject with John Marnell, Home Affairs, published in 2013; Liesl Theron and Ronald Addinall, who have worked extensively around transgender persons and reproductive health; and Professor Desiree Lewis, who has written extensively on the topics of gender and sexuality.

Among these outstanding scholars are also some emerging voices, for instance Katlego Disemelo, whose chapter reports on his master's research around representations of queer families, and Jessica Scott, whose contribution considers lesbian women's family formation and the law. Also notable are two photo essays, one by artist and activist Germain de Larche and the other by Dr Zethu Matebeni and Nikki Carter. To encourage collaboration and innovation, the editors are hosting an author workshop on the topic of queer families that builds on and expands existing scholarship. The book is expected to be published in late 2016. ■

Authors: Drs Tracy Morison and Ingrid Lynch, Human and Social Development (HSD) programme, HSRC, and Professor Vasu Reddy, HSRC/University of Pretoria. The authors received a CoE-HUMAN Opportunities Grant for the book, Queer Kinship: Perspectives on sexuality, families and reproduction in South Africa.