



Mental Health Information Centre of South Africa (MHIC) & MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders Annual Newsletter



- New MHIC website and online database
- Brain Awareness Week: 15-21 March 2010
- International Anxiety Disorders Symposium: 1-2 May 2010
- Research at the MHIC / MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders
- New staff
- Awards

Welcome to our newsletter in which we give an overview of
2010 - activities!

As usual, we have been very busy with keeping the public informed about mental health issues, hosting mental health awareness campaigns and doing research this year.

New MHIC website and online database

There are many mental health challenges in South Africa, such as the continued stigmatization of mental illnesses and the lack of easy access to mental health information and service providers. To address these challenges, the MHIC website is currently being revamped. It will provide current and evidence-based mental health information. The public can access information on mental health topics on the new website, download brochures, link with Web 2.0 applications (e.g. Facebook) and ask mental health related questions online. The website also provides access to an online database of mental health service providers in South Africa. Service providers can add and update their own records online, which is subsequently verified by the MHIC. **The website will be launched later in 2011.**

The MHIC aims to address the mental health challenges in South Africa by building sustainable partnerships with mental health experts, service providers, volunteers, students, community organisations and institutional and corporate partners. In addition, the MHIC also integrates their service to the community of South Africa by updating this website with current mental health information, by verifying information from mental health service providers, by operating a call centre during office hours, by providing an online- and email- helpline with a 24 hour turn-around period and by facilitating service-learning for medical and nursing students. For more information, go to the website or call 021 – 938 9229.



The MHIC would like to acknowledge **Dr Stefanus Snyman** for his invaluable contribution towards this work. Thank you!

To be launched in 2011: The new website of the
Mental Health Information Centre (MHIC)
www.mentalhealthsa.org.za



International Anxiety Disorder Symposium

The IADS 2010, with Professors Dan Stein from South Africa and Damiaan Denys from the Netherlands as convenors, was held in Cape Town, South Africa from 1-2 May 2010. At this symposium, leaders in the field of anxiety and mood disorders have reviewed and discussed the most recent advances in the diagnosis, pathogenesis and treatment of anxiety disorders, and closely related conditions such as depression. It was held at the beautiful Spier Wine Estate, Stellenbosch, Western Cape. Attendees had the chance to enrich their professional and academic knowledge, to re-establish old acquaintances and to forge new friendships with others in the mental health profession, both from South Africa and abroad. The MHIC also disseminated information on mental illness and avenues for care at the symposium. The IADS 2011 will be held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands from 24-25 May 2011. For more information on IADS 2011, go to <http://www.adsymposia.org/>

Brain Awareness Week

Brain Awareness Week is an international DANA Alliance campaign dedicated to raising public awareness of the progress, promise and benefits of brain research. It is an opportunity to let people know what is being done to diagnose, treat and prevent disorders of the brain and provide information on the effects of substances on the brain. This is important in a country such as South Africa where there is a high prevalence of substance abuse/dependence which affects brain functioning.

As a Brain Awareness Week partner, the MHIC once again celebrated this event between 15 and 21 March 2010. These celebrations presented an opportunity for the general public to visit various exhibitions at public and university libraries. There were also competitions with prizes for the winning entries as advertised at the exhibitions. A radio interview, which covered the importance of BAW, as well as changes, rehabilitation, psychotherapy and the role of family and friends after brain injury, was followed by a web-based forum by experts on brain related disorders. Dr Pani Theron from Stikland Psychiatry Hospital and Dr Susan Malcolm-Smith from the ACSSENT Laboratory, Department of Psychology, UCT, answered questions from the public on this special guest expert forum. A huge thank you to those who funded and supported the BAW campaign: The Public Libraries of Bellville, Bellville South, Durbanville and Kraaifontein, and Health24, Radio Sonder Grense, Spur, Tygerberg Medical Library and the Dana Alliance.

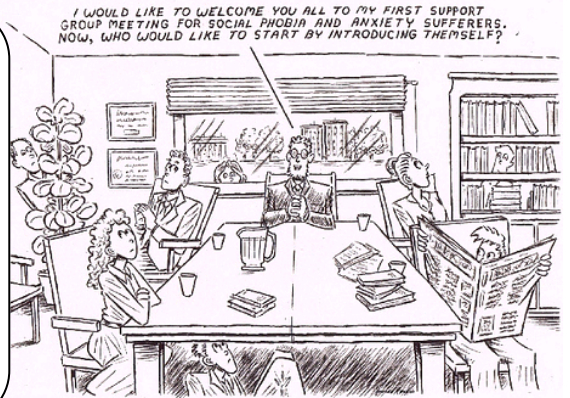


Visit the MHIC's website for more information:
www.mentalhealthsa.co.za

Call us on 021-938 9229.

For more information on the DANA Alliance, visit:
www.dana.org

Current Research Projects: Preliminary Findings



Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Trichotillomania and other Anxiety Disorders

This ongoing study is examining the *workings* of anxiety disorders, using clinical interviews, genetic analysis, and in the case of OCD and TTM, brain scanning techniques. We aim to shed light on the role that genes, the structure of the brain and specific processes of various brain regions each play in the make-up of these disorders. In addition to having clinical and genetics data for more than a 1000 patients with anxiety disorders, we have now done brain scans of 20 controls, 20 OCD patients, 12 TTM patients and 10 family members since the start of the project.

In terms of OCD: **We have found new evidence** to support previous thinking that OCD is actually a heterogeneous disorder – composed of harming, hoarding, contamination, certainty and obsessional subtypes. It is thought that these subtypes have different underlying physiological underpinnings which may influence treatment responses. The existence of subtypes may also explain why research findings in OCD literature have at times been contradictory.

In terms of TTM: **Collaborative work** is currently in progress between our research unit and the Trichotillomania Learning Centre (TLC) in the USA. Researchers from our unit have independently conducted a formal research study to assess and document the impressions and experiences of attendees of one of the TLC Retreats, as well as the subsequent impact of attendance on their functioning. With feedback from this investigation, the TLC hopes to improve their standards and services.

In terms of social phobia/social anxiety disorder (SAD) and panic disorder (PD): **One analysis found** that SAD patients reported higher rates of childhood emotional abuse compared to those with PD, and there was a trend for emotional abuse in childhood to play a predictive role in the manifestation of SAD/PD in adulthood. This could mean that certain forms of childhood abuse may contribute specific vulnerability to different types of mental illnesses.



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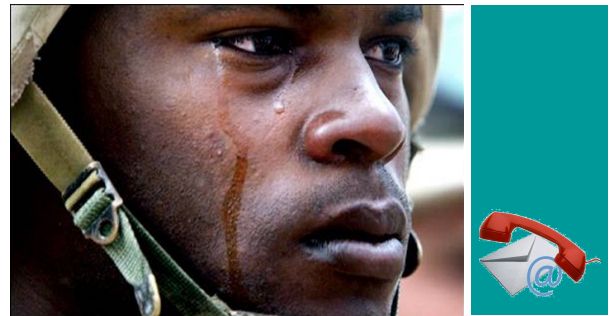
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

In terms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) there are a number of projects investigating the impact of trauma and the appropriate management of PTSD symptoms in adults and children.

Treatment for PTSD

Drugs and other Therapies Under Investigation for PTSD: An International Database: Sharain Suliman and Soraya Seedat conducted an audit of PTSD trials listed on ClinicalTrials.gov, a database established by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). 358 intervention trials (medication and behavioral) were listed on the database. The majority of these (96.1%) were conducted in high income countries with USA being dominant. More than half (56.1%) of the trials used behavioral therapies, 34.4% used medication only and 6.7% used a combination of the two. A small number of trials (2.8%) tested other interventions, including Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation. 35.0% of medication trials used a novel treatment with only 15.8% of the medications having FDA approval for the treatment of PTSD. 87.4% were controlled trials (active control=50.6%; placebo control=36.9%) and 88.8% were primary treatment of PTSD. 19.9% of trials addressed comorbid physical or psychiatric disorders. Estimated sample sizes ranged from 3 to 6500 participants and trial duration ranged from a single treatment session up to one year, with follow-up ranging

from zero to four years. 91.0% of trials were in adults and the remainder in children or adolescents. 84.8% of trials were acute treatment trials. They concluded that although this audit is limited by missing information it gives an overview of the types of treatments and populations currently under investigation for PTSD. It particularly highlights that trials in low and middle income countries and in children and adolescents are lacking.



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Peri-traumatic dissociative experiences in women who have been raped

Kees Lammers was a clinical psychology elective student on the Unit in 2009. He conducted a study for his Master's dissertation on peri-traumatic dissociative experiences in women who have been raped. The study investigated the effects of trauma-related dissociation on PTSD and depression in rape survivors. Preliminary analyses in 60 adolescent and adult rape survivors, recruited

over a 20-month period from the Karl Bremer and Thuthuzela rape centres in Cape Town, who had been raped within 2 weeks of the first assessment, showed that rape survivors who experienced dissociation prior to the recent trauma had a higher tendency to dissociate soon after the recent trauma and also 1 and 2 months post-trauma. Dissociation soon after the rape was a significant predictor of

PTSD symptom severity at 1 and 2 months follow-up. In addition, having experienced multiple previous traumas was associated with a higher tendency to dissociate soon after the recent rape and also at 2 months post-trauma. Furthermore, resilience was a protective (buffering) factor for dissociation as well as PTSD outcomes. This study is ongoing and includes an assessment of genetic markers of dissociation.



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Rape Study

Reported rapes at a hospital rape centre: Demographic and clinical profiles:

Lindi Martin, Kees Lammers, Donovan Andrews, and Soraya Seedat conducted a retrospective review of patient records for all rape survivors who presented to the Karl Bremer Hospital Rape Centre in the Western Cape, in order from 1 August 2007 to 31 July 2008. Data collected from patient records included age of rape survivors, day of the week that the rape was reported, alcohol and drug use of the rape survivor, number of perpetrators involved, whether the perpetrator was known/unknown to the rape survivor, injuries sustained dur-

ing the rape, HIV-status of the rape survivor, and the type of rape committed. A total of 1132 confirmed rape cases were identified. There was clinical evidence of alcohol use in 20.7% of rape survivors, and of drug use in 3.0%. In 10% of cases, there were 2 or more



perpetrators. In 67.8% of cases, the perpetrator was known to the survivor. In 18.5% of all cases, physical injuries were documented. 10.9% of female survivors tested HIV positive. Among females, vaginal rape was reported in 93.7% of cases and anal rape was reported in 2% of cases. This study provides useful comparison between male and female rape survivors. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of providing survivors of sexual assault with comprehensive, gender-sensitive health services that are supportive of both the physical and psychological consequences of the ordeal.



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Emotional Regulation in Pregnancy

Annerine Roos and colleagues (F Robertson, C Lochner, B Vythilingum, DJ Stein) recently presented findings on the association between brain activation of pregnant women to affective stimuli and hormones. The aim of their investigation was to determine if an association exists between hormone levels and activation in the frontal control areas of the brain in response to affective stimuli in pregnant women.

Pregnant women underwent brain imaging at each trimester of their pregnancy while viewing dynamic emotional facial expressions of fear and anger. Bloods and saliva samples were collected to determine levels of cortisol; estrogen, progesterone and testosterone, at each trimester. Statistical

imaging software was used to investigate associations between hormones and frontal brain activation.



Higher cortisol, progesterone and testosterone levels were significantly associated with greater frontal brain activation to fearful faces and higher progesterone levels were significantly associated with greater frontal brain activation to angry faces. There were no significant differences by trimester. These findings suggest associations between some hormones and emotional regulation by the frontal control areas of the brain during pregnancy, indicating possible underlying psychobiological mechanisms by which emotional responses are mediated. This may provide further insight into emotional regulation and cognitive-affective processing during pregnancy.



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New Studies

Methamphetamine ("tik-") use in Pregnancy



The aims of this study are to determine (1) the prevalence of methamphetamine use during pregnancy in a South African sample; (2) characteristics of women who use methamphetamine during pregnancy and (3) fetal and infant effects of methamphetamine use. In addition to measures of substance and alcohol use, women will be assessed for neuropsychiatric disorders, such as the depressive and anxiety disorders.



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Neuropsychological Predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

The purpose of this study is to see who develops Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and PTSD after experiencing a traumatic event, such as a car accident. Clinical, neuropsychological and biological assessments will be done to determine if any of these can predict who will develop PTSD. Participants will be adults who have been involved in a car accident as a driver, passenger or pedestrian in the last 2 weeks.



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MHIC Publications

The following publications can be purchased from the MHIC:

Handboek vir Psigiatrie/

Textbook of Psychiatry.

Afrikaans/ English psychiatric textbook

for undergraduate students.

R368.00 incl. VAT

+ R25 Secure Postage

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MHIC Website: www.mentalhealthsa.org.za
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TEXTBOOK OF PSYCHIATRY

Department of Psychiatry: Stellenbosch University

RA Emsley
WP Pienaar

HANDBOEK VIR PSIGIATRIE

Departement Psigiatrie: Universiteit Stellenbosch

RA Emsley
WP Pienaar

MHIC/MRC Team

New Staff

Bryony Fell joined us as research assistant to Prof Lochner and Dr Vythilingum from January to December 2010. She is a Psychology Honours graduate from Stellenbosch University and is registered with the HPCSA as a trauma counsellor. Bryony leaves to further her studies in clinical psychology.

Derine Louw is a registered clinical psychologist and was the director of the MHIC from January until the end of July 2010. She now works at Stikland Hospital in Bellville.

Janine Roos has a BCUR Honors-degree in Nursing (Lecturing, Community Nursing) and has taken over directorship of the MHIC from November 2010.

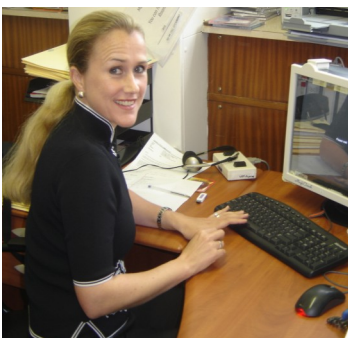
Nicola Webster is a registered clinical psychologist who has recently joined the MRC on a part-time basis. She trained at WITS in Johannesburg and completed her community service in the Cape Winelands district. She is conducting diagnostic and neuropsychological assessments for a number of different studies including the Bathuthuzele adolescent PTSD project. She also does part-time corporate research and group facilitation.

Awards



Sharain Suliman recently received both the *Faculty of Health Sciences Clinical research Grant* and the *Hendrik Vrouwes Scholarship* to complete work on her PhD project. Well done!

Dan Stein received the *Alan Pfifer Research Award* in March 2010 and the *CINP Ethics Award for Psychopharmacology* in June 2010. Well done!



Christine Lochner and her team received funding from the Trichotillomania Learning Centre, as well as a NRF grant for 2011-2012 (Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers). Well done!

Annerine Roos was invited to attend the neuroscience school on the dopamine system in Durban in October 2010. She was selected as president of this school group. Well done!

