



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



- SA's Mental Health Awareness Initiative
- Brain Awareness Week
- Research at the MHIC / MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders
- New staff
- Awards

**In this newsletter we aim to give an overview of our activities
in 2012**

The MHIC: SA's mental health awareness initiative

In 2012, the MHIC has again aimed to address the mental health challenges in South Africa by building sustainable partnerships with mental health experts, service providers, volunteers, students, community organizations and institutional and corporate partners.

Several activities such as Brain Awareness Week (March), Stellenbosch University (SU) Wellness Open Day (July), and the SU Community Interaction Symposium (September) were some of the highlights this year. October was mental health awareness month as always and was indeed one of the busiest months at the MHIC this year. Activities during this period included various talks on radio and the spreading of information via newspapers and magazines.

The MHIC also aims to integrate service to the community with regular updates on www.mentalhealthsa.org.za and posts on our Facebook-page. Our website now allows mental health professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, general practitioners, etc.) to register themselves cost-free on the database which is then available to the public. The mobile-friendly website also functions as an online- and email- helpline with a 24 hour turn-around period. The MHIC call centre can be contacted on 021 9389229 or mhic@sun.ac.za. We are pleased to say that the service provider database is working well.

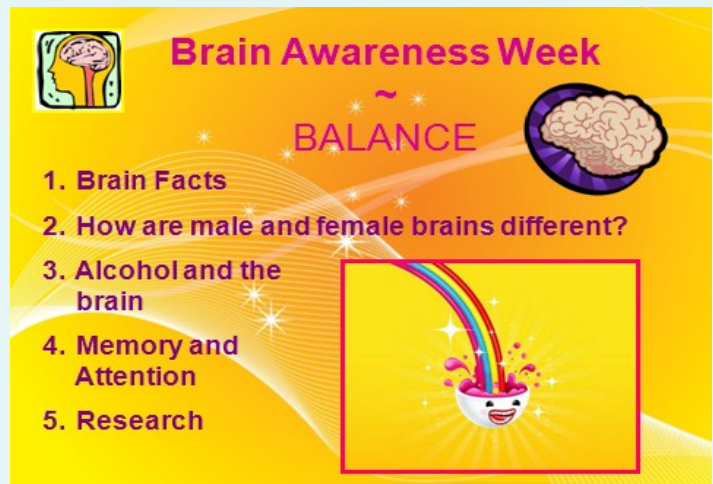
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2012 Activities: Brain Awareness Week

Brain Awareness Week (BAW) is an international DANA Alliance campaign dedicated to raising public awareness on brain research. The campaign was held worldwide between 12 and 18 March 2012. MHIC-staff visited 240 Grade 10 learners from Scottsdale Secondary and Excelsior High School. The learners were presented with talks about the effect of substance abuse on the brain, brain research and various research projects currently

underway at the MRC Unit on Anxiety and Stress Disorders. Each school library received books and brochures distributed by the DANA Alliance. The learners took part in quizzes, that were based on the information that were provided, and a number of prizes were up for grabs! It was a fun-filled way of communicating important information to young adults. The MHIC would like to thank Ms Jennifer Hsieh (UCT) for the informative talk on methamphetamine and the brain, and Ms Celine Fjeldheim (MRC Unit) for arranging the activities at the various schools and informing learners about research projects. Thank you also to Cipla Medpro for their involvement in BAW 2012.



Brain Awareness Week

BALANCE

1. Brain Facts
2. How are male and female brains different?
3. Alcohol and the brain
4. Memory and Attention
5. Research

The poster features a yellow background with a brain icon on the left and a brain illustration on the right. A rainbow is shown pouring into a smiling bowl. The text is in various colors and fonts.

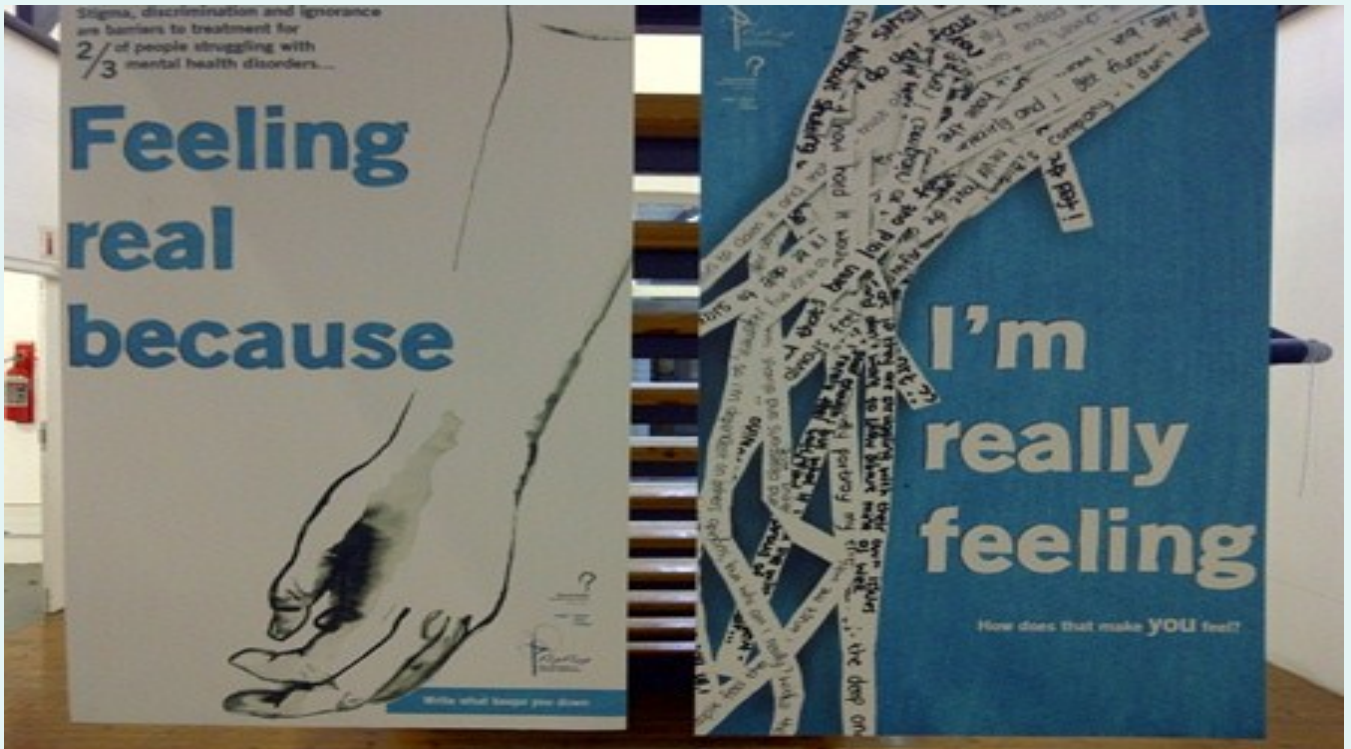
The MHIC furthermore collaborated with the Drama Department of Stellenbosch University to engage first year students in interactive sessions to learn more about brain-health and where to go if they need help with regards to mental health matters. This was well-received.

Also during BAW 2012, the MHIC organised radio talks and sent out various press releases to create awareness about the importance of new developments within the field of brain research.



MHIC and Visual Arts project

The Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University and the MHIC combined forces and launched a project on Mental Health Awareness. The project engaged Stellenbosch residents and students.



MHIC Brochures

The MHIC is proud to announce that our information brochures (in English) have now been updated. We would like to thank Cipla Medpro who funded the printing.



During August 2012 the MHIC attended the **Khayelitsha Women's Dialogue** to create awareness of our work and to distribute brochures on mental disorders.



Stellenbosch University Community Interaction

The MHIC is also a registered community interaction project of Stellenbosch University.

Two posters were presented at the **SU Community Interaction Symposium** on 6 September 2012 :

1) Mental Health Information With The Click Of A Button

2) www.mentalhealthsa.org.za : Easy access to mental health information and service providers.



Mental Health Awareness Month

October 2012

Theme: Depression, a global crisis

FREE MOVIES

Free movies for all registered US students on 8-14 October 2012

**World Mental Health Day
10 October 2012**

Commemorate *World Mental Health Day* with the
Centre for Student Counselling and Development
(CSCD) & PULP Film Society:

Enjoy free movies and free up your thinking about
Mental Health issues

	7:30pm	3:00pm	8:00pm	8:00pm	midnight
MON	TED	A Beautiful Mind	As Good As It Gets	Lars and the Real Girl	
TUE	TED	When a man loves a woman	Life as a House	Girl Interrupted	
WED	TED	Lars and the Real Girl	A Beautiful Mind	As Good As It Gets	Cheech & Chong
THU	TED	Girl Interrupted	When a man loves a woman	Life as a House	
FRI		A Beautiful Mind	As Good As It Gets	Cheech & Chong: Up in Smoke	
SAT		Private Practice	Life as a House	When a man loves a woman	
SUN		Life as a House	Girl Interrupted	Lars and the Real Girl	

Tuesday's TED Elyn Saks: A tale of mental illness, from the inside.

Wednesday's TED Tamara Grandin: The world needs all kinds of minds.

Thursday's TED Aliah da Bottom: A kinder, gentler philosophy of success.

Go to www.facebook.com/Pulp.Cinema.Neelsie for more information on the Pulp Film Society and the movies of the week
For more information on CSCD services visit www.sun.ac.za/cscd

10 October is World Mental Day and this year the MHIC and the Pulp Film Society at Stellenbosch University organised films with mental health themes for students on campus to create awareness and stimulate conversation about different mental health issues. Films included A Beautiful Mind, As Good As It Gets, Lars and the Real Girl, When a man loves a Woman, Life as a House and Girl Interrupted.

Commemorate *World Mental Health Day* with the
Centre for Student Counselling and Development
(CSCD) & PULP Film Society

Enjoy free movies and free up your thinking about
mental health issues 8-14 October

Contact the CSCD or the PULP Film
Society for information



MENTAL HEALTH
INFORMATION CENTRE
Southern Africa

The MHIC wants to thank the psychiatrists and psychologists who took part in radio talks to create awareness about the different aspects of mental illness/health during 2012, especially during Mental Health Awareness Month.

Right: Martelize Brink (RSG),
Janine Roos and Dr Belinda Bruwer in the RSG studio.



MRC Unit on Anxiety & Stress Disorders: Research activities in 2012

Social anxiety disorder is a common and distressing condition in which people experience intense fear and anxiety in situations that garner social interaction. These include speaking in public, eating in public, participating in small groups, using public bathroom facilities, etc. The disorder often manifests in early adolescence and is protracted, worsening with age. This study aims to investigate the neurobiological basis of social anxiety disorder. A better understanding of the neurobiology of the disorder will provide more profound insights that may lead to safer and more effective treatments. The main tool the study utilizes to conduct these investigations is the high field strength 3Tesla MRI scanner located at the cape universities brain imaging centre. However, other methods are also utilized to gain an even broader understanding.

People involved:

Prof Dan Stein: HOD and project overseer

Prof Christine Lochner: Clinical psychologist responsible for all clinical assessments in the study

Dr Supriya Syal: Postdoctoral fellow in the department, heads the behavioural leg of the study and the functional part of the neuroimaging

Mr Coenie Hattingh: Neuroanatomist and doctoral candidate in clinical neuroscience in the department, heads the structural neuroimaging leg of the study.



White matter integrity in trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder, or HPD)

Dr Annerine Roos has lead the investigation of white matter integrity in trichotillomania HPD using MRI, in 16 HPD patients and 17 healthy controls. Diffusion tensor imaging techniques were applied to measure different aspects of diffusivity in white matter tracts. Data were also gathered on demographic variables, HPD duration, HPD severity, subclinical depressive and anxiety symptoms. The main findings were of widespread alterations in white matter integrity in HPD patients compared to controls, which was associated with HPD duration and severity. The molecular basis of these putative white matter tract abnormalities in HPD deserves further exploration.

**For more information, contact
Annerine Roos on 021 9389756
or aroos@sun.ac.za**



New studies

Brain imaging in infants

There is growing evidence that maternal stressors (e.g. exposure to interpersonal violence) are associated with adverse early life behavioural outcomes in offspring. Although various neurotransmitter systems (e.g. glutamate system) have been implicated, the underlying mechanisms accounting for these associations remain poorly understood. Advances in brain imaging techniques, such as magnetic resonance spectroscopy, allow for assessment of the integrity of neuronal function, as well as brain glutamate/glutamine concentrations, in early life. This study aims to assess the effects of maternal stressors on infant's brains (neural integrity) and glutamatergic function, as assessed by magnetic resonance spectroscopy.



Two new imaging studies have commenced this year, looking at the effects of **prenatal methamphetamine (TIK)** exposure on development in infants and six-year old children.

Infants:

There is growing evidence that prenatal exposure to alcohol and TIK are associated with adverse developmental outcomes in offspring. The aim of the study is to scan 120 infants including those who had prenatal exposure to alcohol and/or TIK, and unexposed controls. The objectives are to determine the effects of alcohol and methamphetamine on infant glutamatergic function and neuronal integrity, as assessed by magnetic resonance spectroscopy and structural imaging (including diffusion tensor imaging), and measures of infant development. To date, we have seen 20 infants. There were initial struggles to attain usable brain images as an infant brain is much smaller and different to an older brain. Having a dedicated and expert research team the scans are now working and of good quality. This study is part of the Drakenstein Infant Lung Health Project that has recently been funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation. We wish to acknowledge the Department of Adolescent and Child Health (UCT) and the Foundation for Alcohol Research (USA) for funding for the imaging study.

Children:

Methamphetamine (TIK) use by pregnant women has increased markedly in recent years. However, its effects on brain structure and function are understudied in prenatally exposed children. The aims of this study are to obtain structural images and metabolite profiles on brain changes of children with prenatal TIK exposure, compared to normal controls. Associations between imaging findings and function including neuro-developmental and behavioural findings will also be examined. We aim to scan 20 TIK-exposed and 20 unexposed children. The first scans will happen during November 2012.

The work is a collaboration of Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town and the University of California (USA).

New research assistant: Ms Gaby Jones

Gaby assists Annerine Roos with the study on the effects of prenatal TIK-exposure in children. Ms Jones has a background in the Education sector and special skills in working with younger children.

The imaging study in children studies is funded by grants from NRF Thuthuka and the Harry Crossley Foundation



Contact **Annerine Roos** aroos@sun.ac.za
or 021 938 9756



Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Ms Sharain Suliman presented data from a study on **Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Memory** at the American Psychiatric Association Conference in Philadelphia in May and at the CINP Congress in Stockholm in June.

BDNF is a neurotrophin that helps to support the survival and encourage the growth and differentiation of neurons in both the central and peripheral nervous systems. BDNF has been associated with mood disorders and with trauma exposure, but there is less information regarding its association with PTSD. The first aim of this paper was to compare BDNF levels in trauma-exposed adults with and without Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) within 2 weeks of the trauma (baseline visit) and PTSD 3 months later. As BDNF levels have also been associated with memory, a second aim of this paper was to correlate BDNF levels with memory. We collected blood samples from 37 participants who had been involved in a motor vehicle accident in the previous 2 weeks (59.5% male; mean age: 33.35 ± 11.54 years). Plasma BDNF levels were determined using a standard ELISA protocol. We used clinical and self-report measures to assess for ASD at the time of blood collection and PTSD 3 months later. Neuropsychological measures were used to assess for disturbances in auditory, visual and working memory at the baseline visit. We did not find any significant differences in BDNF levels between those with and without ASD at the baseline visit, or in those with and without PTSD at the 3 month follow-up. Additionally, baseline BDNF levels and memory did not correlate. Our findings suggest that in our sample, alterations in BDNF level might be a marker of trauma exposure, rather than psychiatric diagnosis. These findings are, however, limited by the small sample size.

Data from a **study on the predictors of Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) Severity** were presented at Stellenbosch University Medicine and Health Sciences Academic Year Day, the South African Society of Psychiatrist meeting in September, and at the MRC Research Day in October.

The diagnosis of ASD describes a posttraumatic reaction that occurs two days to four weeks following a trauma and involves symptoms of intrusion, avoidance, hyperarousal and dissociation. ASD may be associated with poorer working memory and negative appraisals post-trauma. Several studies have also demonstrated that sleep can be severely disrupted following exposure to a traumatic event. We assessed these in a sample of 125 adult motor vehicle accident survivors (Age = 32.26 ± 9.99 ; Gender: 56.6% male) within 2 weeks of the accident. 19.8% of the sample presented with clinically determined ASD. Although no significant differences in subjective sleep quality were found between those with and without ASD there was a highly significant correlation between negative appraisals of the trauma and sleep ($p \leq 0.001$). Thus, while the development of ASD after trauma does not appear to have early effects on working memory, trauma appraisal or sleep, in traumatised individuals' negative cognitions relating to the event is associated with poorer sleep quality. These findings suggest that negative appraisals of the traumatic event and its sequelae contribute to reduced sleep quality and should, therefore, be assessed for in acute trauma survivors.

Sharain received a NRF Thuthuka grant, Hendrik Vrouwes Research Scholarship and Harry Crossley funding for her PhD.



For more information contact Sharain Suliman 021 9389020 or sharain@sun.ac.za.

DSM-5 trials

The ongoing revision of APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) began in 1999 and the 5th edition (DSM-5) has a projected completion date of 2013. We are now taking the lead in a multi-site field survey to examine the DSM-IV-TR criteria, the proposed DSM-5 diagnostic criteria, as well as a number of possible additional criteria, in patients with trichotillomania (hair-pulling disorder or HPD), in order to incorporate the increasing body of knowledge about HPD in the latest edition of DSM and to encourage more accurate and precise identification of this condition. Five sites (here and in the USA) are involved in the field survey. Another 2-site field survey - to examine the DSM-IV-TR criteria, the proposed DSM-5 diagnostic criteria, as well as a number of possible additional criteria, in patients with skin-picking disorder - also took place in 2011 and was lead by researchers from the MRC Unit. Subjects older than 10 years of age, male or female, with a diagnosis of trichotillomania or serious skin-picking, with or without psychiatric comorbidity, were included. Anyone with these symptoms who have not been interviewed for this survey and who would still like to participate, can contact Prof Christine Lochner or Ms Elsie Breet for more information (tel. 021 9389179 / 9654; cl2@sun.ac.za; elsie@sun.ac.za).

Congratulations!

The Humboldt Research Award honours the academic achievements of internationally recognised scientists and scholars from abroad. The award is granted in recognition of a researcher's entire achievements to date and whose fundamental discoveries, new theories, or insights have had a significant impact on their own discipline and who are expected to continue producing cutting-edge achievements in the future. The recipient is expected to conduct research in collaboration with colleagues in Germany. Prof Soraya Seedat, who not only heads the Department of Psychiatry at SU but also holds the South African Research Chair in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder from the Department of Science and Technology and National Research Foundation, and co-directs the Medical Research Council Unit on Anxiety and Stress Disorders, received the award, which was named after the later Dr Neville Alexander, from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany. Prof Seedat has been the recipient of several awards including a World Federation of the Society of Biological Psychiatry Fellowship, a Lundbeck Institute Fellowship Award in Psychiatry, an MRC mid-career award, and an Anxiety Disorders Association of America Career Development Award. She has co-authored more than 200 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and has extensive research experience in the assessment and treatment of anxiety disorders, with a special interest in clinical and translational work in childhood and adult posttraumatic stress disorder.

