

CS2R

Centre for Social
Science Research

PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED
RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY



Centre for Social Science Research 2024 Annual Report

Director's letter

2024 was another busy year in the Centre for Social Science Research. Each unit has provided a detailed report, and here I give just some of the highlights.

In line with UCT's Vision 2030, our research work is contributing directly to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as to understanding the science of the most effective and cost effective ways these goals can be met.



Adolescent mothers enrolled in the AARHub's Helping Empower Youth Brought up in Adversity with their Babies and Young children (HEY BABY) study have improved health (SDG 3) and access to education (SDG 4); SaVI's parenting programmes are preventing violence (SDG 16) and improving gender equality (SDG 5); and SSU's work is contributing to a sustainable city (SDG 11) and promoting the sustainability of life on land (SDG 15).

We continue our fruitful relationship with the Institute for Democracy, Citizenship and Public Policy in Africa (focusing on SDG 1, ending poverty). In 2025, we look forward to welcoming the Social Interventions Research Unit under the leadership of colleagues from the Department of Social Work and Social Development to the CSSR and expanding these contributions to science and to impact the world.

In keeping with our mission to stimulate social science research in the Faculty of Humanities at UCT, we have continued our very active seminar programme (see [page 31](#) for details). Our publication output has also been impressive: 51 journal articles (plus 2 in press), and 3 book chapters. A complete list can be found from [page 35](#).

We have also employed a number of research assistants who have graduated from our academic departments, thus providing them with opportunities for employment in a social science setting, and often to study further. CSSR academic staff have also supervised a number of postgraduate students to

completion: 3 Doctoral students, 2 Masters students, and an Honours student and we have a number of supervisees whose degrees are in progress.

Postdoctoral Research fellows who previously left the CSSR have gone to full academic posts at Sol Plaatje University and the University of Fort Hare, thus extending our relationships within South Africa. We have also funded 5 Postdoctoral Research Fellows (a total of R1,616,819) and 6 postgraduate students (R467,779), providing R2,084,598 altogether in funding for early career and postgraduate scholars.

Our financial contribution to the University goes beyond this, however: our income in 2024 was R51,440,160, including R5,663,704 in research levies. We are grateful to the Faculty for granting us R498,250 for much-needed refurbishments to provide work facilities for our staff.

Beyond teaching, research, and finances, our staff also contribute to human resource, data management, ethics, and other research-relevant committees across the university. See [page 42](#) for details.

Finally, we thank our donors for their generous contributions that make all this possible, and the University for its support. Please enjoy reading about the details in the unit reports that follow.

Sincerely,

Catherine L. Ward

Director



The Adolescent Accelerators Research Hub (AARHub) unit of the Centre for Social Science Research focuses on evidence-based programmes and policies that support the development of Africa's young people. Working with adolescents in resource-limited settings in Africa, and with interdisciplinary research teams, policymakers, and NGOs from around the world, we identify cost-effective interventions to bring about positive outcomes for children, adolescents, and young people on the continent.



An Early Career Research dialogue session discussing career growth with members of our Oxford and UCT.

This unit began in 2019, with the establishment of the Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate) Hub research initiative, furthering a long-standing UCT-Oxford research collaboration. Funded by the UK Research and Innovation Global Challenges Research fund, this five-year project worked to generate evidence on which development accelerators – alone and in synergy with each other – could support adolescents in Africa to reach

multiple Sustainable Development Goals such as health, safety, schooling, nutrition, and employment.

While the Accelerate Hub formally ended in September 2024, the AARHub's longstanding partnership with researchers at the University of Oxford's Department for Social Policy and Intervention continues. Together, we have established the Accelerate Research Hub, which will continue to work on projects related to mixed methods observational studies, interventions and implementation science, and cost-effectiveness modelling and investment cases. To mark the end of the UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub and the transition to the

Accelerate Research Hub, our team gathered in Oxford for a week in September. The goal of the meeting was to bring together the teams involved in the Accelerate Research Hub's 2025+ agenda and facilitate the sharing of opportunities and capacity development. It was an invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas, tackle research topics and methodological issues such as fair AI use in research, and strengthen the team's collective vision for our shared work in the future.

Our current portfolio of research sits across several overlapping and interlinked domains within the field of adolescent health and well-being:

- Understanding the needs and support packages for adolescent mothers and their children,
- Education and return to school for young mothers,
- Adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights in the context of adversity (HIV and crises such as climate, conflict, and pandemics), and
- Emerging work on investment cases to advocate for resources and interventions furthering adolescent well-being nationally, regionally, and globally.



Team members try punting on the River Cherwell.

Adolescent Mothers and Their Children



The **HEY BABY (Helping Empower Youth Brought Up in Adversity with their Young children)** research project is a collaborative research study examining protective pathways to promote resilience amongst adolescent parents and their children in South Africa. In 2016-2017, through other research, it became clear that adolescent mothers living with HIV were struggling to disclose their status to our



Hosting a methodological workshop in Cape Town in May to review and refine on our referral processes.

research team, dropping out of HIV care, and more likely to be defaulting from ART. In response, we began HEY BABY as a sub-study of an existing project, including adolescent mothers and their children, independent of HIV status.

In 2024, Phase 3 of data collection began in Buffalo City Municipality, Eastern Cape, following up on 1,159 young mothers and their 1,543 children, celebrating a milestone 10 years of research with this cohort. Data collection will end in mid-2025, including following up with participants who have moved outside our study area and remote data collection using mobile phone methods the team has developed and tested during the COVID-19 pandemic. This final wave of data collection adds a significant contribution to our understanding of the sexual and reproductive health, parenting, and wellbeing needs of adolescent and young mothers, as well as the development of their children.

During 2024 the HEY BABY team pushed themselves to grow capacity and share information in Cape Town, East London, and beyond. This took shape as:

- Peer-reviewed publications and book chapters (see our Publications section later in the report).
- Hosting a methodological workshop in Cape Town in May to review and refine our referral processes, including research and programmatic partners from the Children's Institute (Dr Paula Proudlock & Mbonisi Nyathi), Stellenbosch University's Institute for Life Course Health Research and Shout-it-Now (Dr Ntombifikile Mtshali), a women-led, South African non-profit organisation that has provided SRHR programmes to more than 1.3 million South Africans in five districts since 2007.
- Nearly 30 researchers from the AARHub and our partners Oxford Research South Africa fieldwork teams attending Parenting for Lifelong Health for Parents and Teens facilitator training on parenting adolescents in June.
- UCT researchers collaborating with University of Fort Hare, with former CSSR colleague, Dr Hlengiwe Gwebu, and Desmond Tutu Health Foundation (Eastern Cape team led by



Hosting a workshop on conducting interviews and focus groups, attended by multiple researchers and students across the CSSR.

A/Prof Andrew Medina-Marino), to attend two training events on Systematic Review methods and NIH Grant Writing.

- Presenting our work in Mdantsane as part of a June 16th Youth Day initiative organized by the Department of Health.
- Dr Hlokomla Mangqalaza (Postdoctoral Fellow) presenting on “Service Integration for Pregnant and Mothering Adolescents and Children” at the University of Fort Hare research week.
- Cultivating a strong collaborative relationship with the South African National Department of Social Development to enhance our referrals protocol.
- Hosting a workshop on conducting interviews and focus groups, attended by multiple researchers and students across the CSSR.



Researchers from AARHub and Oxford Research South Africa attend Parenting for Lifelong Health facilitator training on parenting adolescents.



Presenting our work in Mdantsane as part of a June 16th Youth Day initiative organized by the Department of Health.



The **Masana Young Moms Project**, funded by Dr Christina Laurenzi's (Stellenbosch University and longtime collaborator of the AARHub) International AIDS Society's CIPHER fellowship, focuses on responding to barriers in HIV and SRH care for young adolescent mothers and their children in South

Africa.

In 2024, we held 3 workshops in Nyandeni Municipality, Eastern Cape. These included one pilot session with young moms (ages 16-18) in April 2024, and two consecutive sessions with adult stakeholders (community members, faith-based

leaders, educators, and social healthcare workers, including traditional healers) in June-July 2024.

Participating young moms, who were either pregnant or had given birth and were 18 years of age or younger, were recruited via our site-based partner, One to One Africa Children's Fund. Participants engaged in large group discussions, and two arts-based activities in three small groups. Extending from this work, we are currently engaged in individual qualitative interviews with young moms in Nyandeni Municipality, as well as a quantitative data analysis from the HEY BABY dataset. We look forward to shifting our efforts to our second site, Buffalo City Municipality, in 2025.



Research Assistant Chuma Busakhwe leads a session with young parents.



Masana arts-based activities with young parents and adult stakeholders in June & July.

Supporting Education And Return To School For Young Mothers



Khanyisa Ngemfundo
BE THE LIGHT THROUGH EDUCATION

The **Khanyisa Ngemfundo** (KN; “Be the Light through Education” in IsiXhosa) study aims to explore and understand mechanisms of support for school continuation and return among pregnant and mothering adolescents. It is a collaborative project with

the South African Department of Basic Education that uses participatory, arts-based, and qualitative research methods and is currently based in the Eastern Cape. 2024 was an exciting year for KN, with the launch of a training toolkit on learner pregnancy, directly informed by participatory data gathered from educators, service providers, and learner groups.

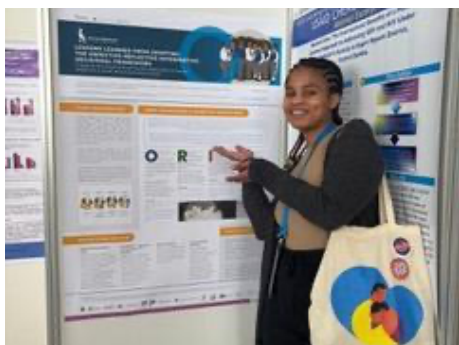
The toolkit provides educators with skills needed to support pregnant and mothering learners in school settings. It includes case studies, interactive scenarios, and activities, and encourages self-reflection and the generation of context-specific solutions.



Toolkit launch event in July 2024.

The toolkit was launched in July 2024 in partnership with the Eastern Cape Department of Education (and featured on [National South African News!](#)). Plans are underway for it to be used alongside the Learner Pregnancy Policy's Implementation Guidelines.

Two Masters students – Ms. Melisa Zulu and Mr. Itumeleng Senetla – both made excellent progress with their respective projects and are well on their way to submitting their final dissertations in the new year. Their research was shared through poster presentations at the International Workshop on HIV, SRHR, and Adolescence Conference in Nairobi this year.



Yanga Dipa with her poster stigma and young mothers in Nairobi.



Dr. Hlokoma Mangqalaza shared insights on supporting young mothers at UNICEF's Bold Ideas Conference and Fort Hare's Research Week.



Melisa Zulu shares her research at the International Workshop on HIV, SRHR, and Adolescence Conference in Nairobi.

Several other team members' research was shared in Nairobi, including that of Dr Shehani Perera (who presented on the impact of intersecting stigmas on sexual and reproductive health outcomes), Ms. Yanga Dipa (presenting on overcoming stigma to support adolescent mothers return to school), and Ms Yusra Price (presenting on lessons learnt from adapting the Objective-Reflection-Interpretive-Decisional facilitation framework for engagements with school and community stakeholders on learner pregnancy).

Dr Hlokoma Mangqalaza shared an oral presentation at the UNICEF Bold Ideas for Brighter Futures Conference in Stockholm, where she shared insights on the role of psychosocial support services in curbing pregnancy-related dropouts, as well as at the University of Fort Hare's Research Week of Excellence in November where she spoke about service integration for pregnant and mothering adolescents and their children.

Adolescent Well-Being And Sexual And Reproductive Health And Rights: Research, Interventions, And Engagement



HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) research, and associated advocacy and policy engagement remain a primary focus of the AARHub team's work. The research aspects are largely housed within the **Mzantsi Wakho** (MW) and **UPLIFT** studies.

The Mzantsi Wakho Adolescent Adherence Study was a mixed-methods, longitudinal, community-traced study examining youth health, with a focus on long-term medication, contraception, and sexual and reproductive health.



Using data from Mzantsi Wakho, the UPLIFT (Understanding Predictors of Lifelong Initiation and Follow-up Treatment for adolescents and youth living with HIV) study aims to establish a lifelong social science cohort for adolescents and youth living with HIV and identify what childhood and adolescent experiences shape later health outcomes in adolescents and youth living with HIV.

The team made significant contributions to global conferences and academic initiatives showcasing impactful work on HIV, SRHR and adolescent health in 2024, including engagements at the 26th International Workshop on HIV and Hepatitis Observational Databases (IWHOD) in



Zea Leon with her poster on viral load monitoring.

Portugal, where Elona Toska presented recent findings on the effects of COVID-19 on HIV viral load monitoring, while research assistant Zea Leon presented emerging work on the prevalence and outcomes of low-level viremia in the same

population, and Oxford colleague Janke Tolmay presented work on adolescent mothers' engagement in HIV prevention services using dyadic data linkage.

The Accelerate Research Hub team had a phenomenal showing at AIDS 2024 in Munich, with 11 team attendees (9 of whom are early career researchers), 10 team members selected for orals and/or posters, and 12 sessions led by Accelerate Research Hub researchers. Siyanai Zhou presented his PhD findings on longitudinal ART adherence trajectories, and work on the impact of COVID-19 on HIV viral load monitoring among adolescents and young people living with HIV in South Africa. In May, Dr Katherine Morse presented a paper at the 9th African Population conference in Malawi. Her paper was titled "Parenting Whilst Growing Up - Understanding parenting stress among adolescent mothers with young children". It explored risk and protective factors for parenting stress and how these findings can inform an adolescent parent, parenting intervention. In October, Tetelo Maakamedi presented an oral at the International Workshop on HIV, SRHR and Adolescence Conference in Kenya, presenting her work on the associations between HIV status disclosure, knowing one's partner's HIV status, and condom use among adolescent and young mothers in a high HIV burden district, in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Postdoctoral fellow Dr Julius Baruwa presented a poster on "Accelerating HIV Prevention in Cameroon: Factors Associated with Early Sexual Risks among 15-19 Adolescent Girls and Young Women, Including Adolescent Mothers".



Dr. Siyanai Zhou and Dr. Jane Kelly presenting their research in Munich—Dr. Zhou on his PhD findings and Dr. Kelly on healthcare workers.

Senior Research Officer Jane Kelly shared research on healthcare providers' experiences of adolescent engagement in HIV and SRH healthcare. These findings were also published in a special issue of the *Health Education Journal*. It was a big year for Jane, who also received a Y rating from the South African National Research Foundation and was the recipient of a UCT Vision 2030 Grand Challenges planning grant.



Chelsea Coakley presented in a plenary on strategies and systems to support skills and career trajectories for youth-driven social impact at the 7th Youth Connekt Africa Summit in Kigali, Rwanda.



Jane Kelly presented on supporting young mothers' education at African Union 1st Pan-African Conference on Girls and Women's Education, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Universities South Africa has also selected a piece of work based on the Mzantsi Wakho data, an impact case study titled Supporting adolescents living with HIV in Eastern and Southern Africa to survive and thrive, was selected as a piece showcasing the work done by South African universities in response to social challenges and an example of the impact of research.

This year, we extended our collaboration with Paediatric-Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA) to formalise a new project, KULEA, co-led by Dr Laurenzi and CSSR researcher Chuma Busakhwe. A Hilton Foundation-funded project, KULEA aims to empower adolescent girls and young women, including those who have become mothers, to engage with health systems, support skills development, and enable them to provide optimal care for their children. The research component for this multi-layered, multi-stakeholder approach will focus on KULEA's Tanzanian site, Mbeya.

The study adopts a stigma focus, aiming to explore diverse forms of stigma faced by KULEA clients to develop and implement strategies to optimize their access to respectful and stigma-free healthcare services. Data collection will begin in early 2025.

Turning to advocacy and policy engagement, in early 2024 we began a new evidence-to-implementation phase of work with the UNICEF East and Southern Africa Regional Office (2024-2027). It is focused on (1) generating new evidence through analysis of data from multiple sources in the East and Southern Africa Region, exploring research questions that inform multisectoral programming; (2) influencing positive action at regional and country level for improved adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and wellbeing from existing evidence and new evidence generated in this partnership; and (3) empowering individuals and institutions to undertake multi-sectoral analyses and programming, including developing young researchers from the East and Southern African region.

In 2024, we have;

- Prepared and submitted 3 peer-reviewed publications (more details in the Publications section).
- Led engagements with 4 UNICEF/UNFPA regional “steering groups” focused on adolescents, gender, and social and behaviour change, sharing our preliminary evidence for feedback and technical experts and advisors.
- Led two consultations with the UNITED! Movement of young sexual and reproductive health advocates to invite feedback on our preliminary research on social norms programming for adolescent SRH.
- Presented at 3 evidence-into-programming events this year in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Rwanda, reaching policy-makers, researchers, young advocates and funders interested in supporting children, adolescents and young people’s health and wellbeing.
- 2024 also launched new work partnerships that will go into 2025 and beyond. Our team has partnered with Shout-it-Now. Together, we have co-designed a collaborative project on supporting safer and quality access to HIV prevention for adolescent girls and young women.



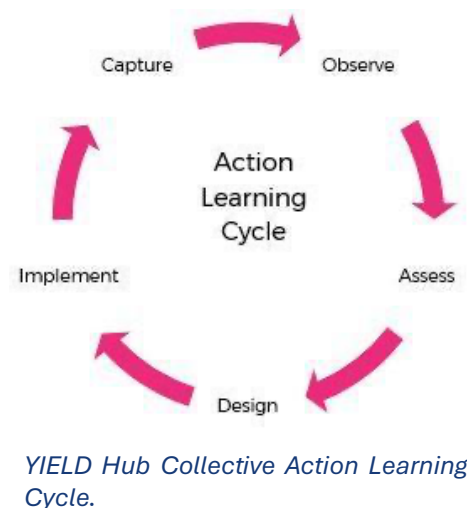
Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu and Pertina Nyamukondiwa presented at a Regional Learning Workshop for AGYW SRH and HIV Programmes.

In 2024, the AARHub team contributed to several strategic, policy, and advocacy opportunities to advocate for and accelerate adolescent health and well-being in South Africa. The team's research contributed to the National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children (NSAAC), with a focus on measurement and indicators of adolescent health and well-being, especially identity and belonging. The strategy, expected to be launched in 2025, is coupled with an investment case co-led by the South African Presidency and by the WHO's PMNCH programme, which will be informed by the Accelerate Research Hub's work on adolescent accelerators (more on this below).



Members of the AARHub have also been invited to join the leadership body of the 'Hold My Hand' campaign in support of the South African National Strategy to Accelerate Action for Children. Working together with other research centres, non-profit organisations, and associated groups, this group is working together to create lasting, positive change for children, teens, and families across South Africa in the domains of safety, food security, health, and development.

After nearly two decades of adolescent engagement in South Africa, the AARHub concluded the process of reflection and closure with the Eastern Cape Teen Advisory Group (TAG). Started in 2008, these groups aimed to engage with adolescents as co-creators of social science research, and to develop adolescent and youth-informed policy and programming recommendations. At their largest, TAGs were active in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. The Eastern Cape TAG closeout, the last of the TAG groups to conclude, culminated in an edited collection called "*Anti-Colonial Research Praxis: Methods for Knowledge Justice*" (Baartman et al., in press). We were invited to present our work with TAG and beyond in a session on adolescent participation and engagement in research as part of UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences' short course on "Adolescent Health: Taking Evidence to Implementation". Aiming to build on what we have learned from more than a decade of adolescent participation and engagement in our research, we applied for and were accepted into a regional "Collective Action-Learning Cycle", facilitated by [YIELD Hub](#).



YIELD Hub uses action learning, a problem-solving method to generate new and creative ways to partner with adolescent and young people in adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming and research.

Over a period of six months, we joined a diverse set of adolescent and youth SRHR stakeholders focused on the theme of “compensating youth work”, to reflect on our work and what we would like to change about our research practices which have historically invited active youth participation and equitable partnership throughout the research process. This process will conclude in the development of internal guidance focused on ethical and practical considerations related to youth compensation, as well as an academic output.

Accelerating Adolescent Health and Well-being through Investment Cases

Over the past five years, the Accelerate Hub team has worked to identify accelerator interventions – those that improve multiple outcomes – which can be combined to support multiple health and well-being outcomes of adolescent girls and young women in Eastern and Southern Africa. While the UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub ended this year, the newly established Accelerate Research Hub will continue this work through our “investment case approach,” involving mathematical modelling to provide input to strategic decisions on which ‘accelerator’ intervention scenarios provide the highest social, health and economic returns led by Dr William Rudgard (Oxford; UCT Honorary Research Associate) and Prof Lucie Cluver (Oxford; UCT Honorary Professor of Psychiatry).



Research brief summarizing the investment case approach and how it was applied to identify a package of interventions for promoting adolescent girls' health and wellbeing.

With Gates Foundation funding, the team showed that investing in cash transfers, parenting support, and adolescent-responsive SRHR services in Kenya can significantly improve adolescent girls' health and wellbeing. With additional support from the Gates Foundation and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, the team is now expanding modelling in Kenya to the sub-district level and beginning work

in Northern Nigeria, focusing on which services yield the highest return on investment for preventing child marriage and its related risks.

In parallel, A/Prof Elona Toska has provided technical expertise to the WHO's Programme for Maternal and Child Health and was appointed to the Expert Group on Adolescent Well-being Investment Case by the South African Presidency to support a National Adolescent Health and Well-being Forum, develop an investment toolkit, and inform a national Investment Case on Adolescents. Elona and Will have also advised the Guttmacher Institute and partners on modelling the impact of adolescent access to family planning services in sub-Saharan Africa, through the FP-Impact Consortium's Technical Advisory Group. We look forward to deepening this work and expanding beyond Kenya and Nigeria in 2025.



Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI)



The Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI) continues to focus primarily on the

prevention of violence against children, which we are pursuing chiefly through the **Global Parenting Initiative (GPI)**. The overarching goal

of the GPI is to take the established, evidence-based Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) programmes and develop and test digital versions since in-person programmes will always be limited in the number of families they reach. Three of the main GPI studies are based in SaVI:

- ParentApp for Teens, which digitises PLH for Parents and Teens in a simple app that can be used off- and online;
- ParentText, which has incorporated the PLH content from both PLH for Young Children and PLH for Parents and Teens into a chatbot;
- The Strengthening Wellness through Integrating Family Training (SWIFT) study, which seeks to embed ParentText in routine services, those provided by community clinics, with a view to making it sustainable.

An enormous amount of work has been done this year to optimise and test these programmes, with more on the slate for 2025.

A number of GPI core staff are based in SaVI: the communications staff, and those supporting shared learning and development of future leaders (early career researchers). We thus serve as the global headquarters for the GPI's science translation and career development in the area of preventing violence against children.

In addition, we have several related studies that are well underway, including SUPER (the Scale-Up of Parenting Evaluation Research) and a project testing a universal parenting programme for parents of children starting school in Zimbabwe.

ParentApp for Teens 2024

The ParentApp for Teens team has made considerable progress in their fieldwork and analysis activities. The randomised controlled trial (RCT) finished implementation last year, and two follow-up studies were completed this year: the RCT 1-month follow-up and the pilot 12-month follow-up; retention rates for both studies were strong, ranging from 92-97% for both caregivers and teens. The team also successfully completed qualitative (n=67) interviews with caregivers, teens and implementing staff.



The RCT 12-month follow-up and exploratory sibling study (assessing whether siblings also benefit from the intervention) were delayed by unforeseen fieldwork and data challenges. Data collection has now resumed and will continue into mid-2025. Interim pre-post RCT analysis, completed mid-year, showed significant impact across nearly all primary, secondary, and exploratory outcomes. Costing for large-scale delivery is ongoing. The RCT also shows higher retention and engagement compared to similar programmes. A WhatsApp community was launched for announcements and year-round engagement through creative booster activities.

The team presented at six major conferences: UNICEF Brighter Futures, Sweden (May); the International Association of Child Psychiatry and Allied Professions, Brazil (May); the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, Portugal (June); the Regional



NIMR team

Learning & Linking Forum, South Africa (June); the annual Joint Scientific Conference, Tanzania (May); the Department of Social Development Roundtable on Linking Social Protection Beneficiaries to Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in South Africa (June); and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, South Africa (Oct). Additionally, our Principal Investigators (PIs) have led several dissemination activities to key stakeholders, including UNICEF and WHO.

ParentText Optimisation Trial



The ParentText Optimisation Trial focused on evaluating and refining the effectiveness of the ParentText, a chatbot-led parenting intervention. Conducted in collaboration with partner organisations including Clowns Without Borders South Africa, this mixed-methods study aimed to understand how two engagement boosters – WhatsApp and in-person support groups – impacted engagement with ParentText among

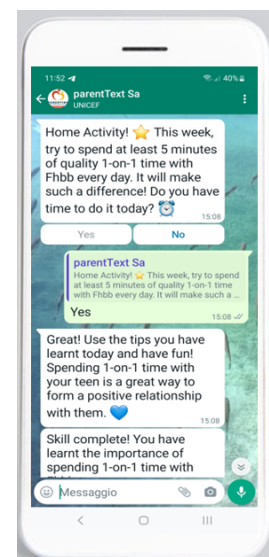
1,034 caregivers of 936 adolescent girls aged 10-17 in rural and peri-urban communities in Mpumalanga, aiming to improve parenting practices, enhance child wellbeing and prevent violence against children (VAC).

Preliminary results

Overall results revealed that participants who received enhanced support – via WhatsApp sessions or additional in-person interactions – demonstrated higher engagement, completed more modules, and showed improved outcomes compared to those with fewer support interactions.

Among 646 participants who engaged in the chatbot, 33.34% of modules and 33.74% of goals were completed, with *higher completion rates in WhatsApp-supported groups*. Engagement was influenced by dropout rates, digital literacy, and network issues.

Caregivers in WhatsApp-supported groups showed stronger gains in positive parenting, parent- child communication, and reduced support for corporal punishment. Four-session in-person groups versus a single session saw additional reductions in physical and emotional maltreatment and improved educational support for children, highlighting the value of sustained support.



Qualitative insights from focus groups and individual interviews with caregivers and implementers highlighted *improvements in family dynamics, parental confidence, and mental health*, though logistical challenges affected in-person session attendance.

The team presented preliminary quantitative findings at the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) conference in Sweden in August, as well as integrated results at the Sexual Violence Research Initiative forum in October, underscoring the intervention's positive impact on outcomes such as parenting behaviours, mental health, and adolescent well-being.

Next steps include further synthesising quantitative and qualitative findings. We are also currently working on a policy brief that we will disseminate to our stakeholders. Additionally, members of our study team are preparing papers for publication to inform the academic community about the use of digital delivery platforms such as chatbots to scale up parenting interventions. This work lays the foundation for optimising future iterations of ParentText and has informed the larger-scale 5-Day RCT.

5-Day Chatbot RTC

The 5-Day ParentText randomised controlled trial is a major expansion of the ParentText initiative, testing a scalable, digital-only parenting intervention over a short, intensive period within South Africa. It arose because parent engagement is highest in the first 5 days of chatbot use, and so we wanted to test whether this could achieve sustainable increases in non-violent parenting. Delivered via WhatsApp using UNICEF's RapidPro platform, the trial aims to evaluate the effectiveness of ParentText as a self-guided digital tool. Participants have been randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) ParentText, (2) ParentText-Plus (with an additional module), or (3) WASHText, an active control group that provides content on water, sanitation and hygiene. Upcoming qualitative interviews with a subset of participants will provide in-depth insights into user experience, usability, and perceived benefits.

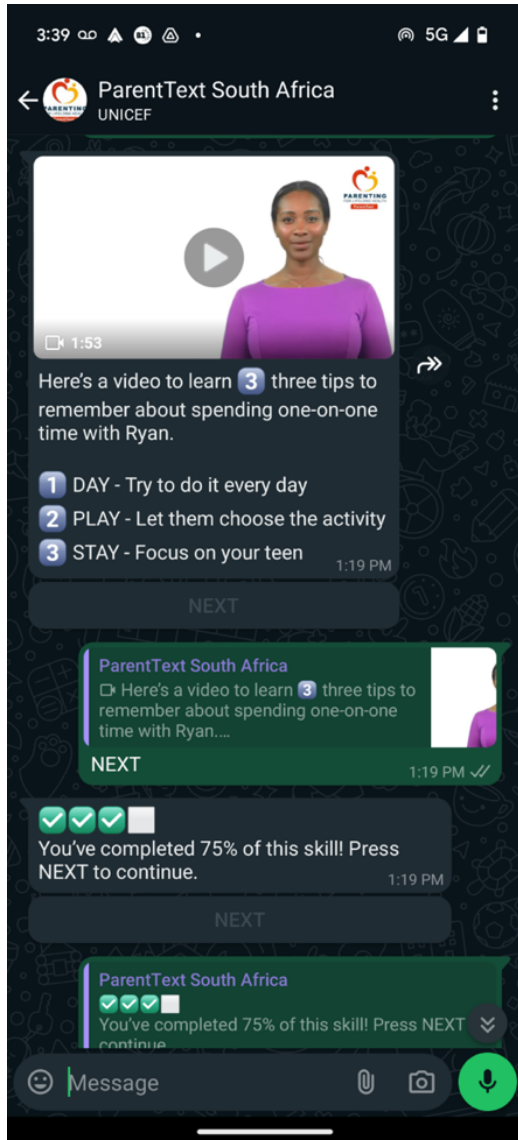
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Key milestones and achievements included:

- Successful large-scale recruitment: Originally targeting 15,000 participants, the trial exceeded expectations, with over 24,000 caregivers enrolled following a recruitment campaign on Facebook.



- High initial engagement: Within the first 16 hours of launch, over 12,000 participants signed up, indicating strong interest and engagement. Payment incentives played a role in this response, although alternatives for engagement sustainability are being explored and the SWIFT study will provide a counterfactual, in that participants in SWIFT will not be incentivised for participating in the programme.
- Implementation and data collection progress: Baseline assessments were completed by nearly 24,000 participants, with 17,000 of these participants completing the 1-month follow-up assessment. The 3-month assessments are currently underway.
- Safeguarding and participant support: The study incorporated rigorous safeguarding mechanisms, including a “HELP” feature within the chatbot for immediate support, along with dedicated email and WhatsApp lines to address participant queries and needs.
- By the end of 2024, the 5-Day ParentText RCT will have established a solid evidence base around the effectiveness of chatbot-led parenting interventions and contributed to the broader conversation on digital support mechanisms for caregivers.



Supporting Wellness Through Integrated Family Training (SWIFT) Study

The first phase of the SWIFT study, spanning from 2023 into 2024, has yielded strong stakeholder relationships and a study design for the next phase of the study, based on insight gathered about the systems and structures in which we wish to embed ParentText. This version of ParentText has two modules: the 5-day module tested in the earlier ParentText RCT, and a child safety module. The study will use an RCT (of the child safety module) embedded in a test of randomised encouragement: Nurses will randomly encourage parents and caregivers to join ParentText. The 5-day module, based on improving the parent/child relationship, is offered to all, while a randomly selected sample of programme users will be able to access the Child Safety module, while others will remain in a waitlist control group.

Besides designing and continuing to strengthen stakeholder relationships in 2024, the SWIFT study has been working hard with a team of experts to ensure both modules have been appropriately adapted and translated for the South African context. More specifically for the Western Cape, where besides English, the chatbot modules will now be offered in Afrikaans and isiXhosa. A small pilot will be conducted in Wolsey in early 2025 followed by the main study rollout in Delft and Ceres.



Cindee Bruyns (second from the right) and Carly Katzef (right) at a Ceres Child Protection and Families Forum hosted by the Western Cape Department of Social Development. Pictured with Clint Jacobs (center), the Safety Promotion Coordinator responsible for the Witzenberg Area Based Team, and a local social worker (left).



Cindee Bruyns (second from the left) at a Delft Child Protection and Families Forum hosted by the Western Cape Department of Social Development. Pictured with Cheryl Morilly (right), provincial deputy director of Childline NGO and representatives (center) from ConnectNetwork NGO.

Scale-Up Of Parenting Evaluation Research (SUPER) Study

The main aim of the SUPER study was to explore programme implementation processes, uptake, quality of delivery and intervention outcomes when going to scale. This study commenced in 2019 and was concluded at the end of 2024. The team are finalising the papers coming from this large project, which collected data on routine implementation of in-person parenting programmes across ten African countries.



Quantitative findings showed that the parenting programme retained its effectiveness when going to scale through consistent associations with reduced violence against children, and improved parenting and mental health, in standard service delivery by NGOs and governments.

In addition, qualitative findings identified some of the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of parenting programmes as well as considerations for scaling.

In terms of enablers of programme delivery, stakeholders identified cultural acceptability, stakeholder engagement and involvement, as well as design of the programme, which includes how the content of the programme is delivered, e.g. role-play, local stories and local songs are incorporated as key, while barriers included the COVID-19 pandemic (research was conducted largely at the time of the pandemic), lack of male participation, poor administrative support, and costs of implementation. In terms of scale-up considerations, participants highlighted that it was important to gain stakeholder buy-in, to consider a mix of in-person and digital approaches, and finally to maintain flexibility in the programme delivery.

These findings suggest that it is important to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the parenting programmes, through system of support (from the involvement of key stakeholders and key organisations) and key stakeholder involvement (i.e. government and other civil organisations).

These findings were presented at the Sexual Violence Research Initiative Forum in Cape Town, South Africa (October).

Adaptation Of The PLH For Young Children And Book-Sharing Programmes For Schools In Zimbabwe

This project forms Noreen Wini Dari's PhD, and contributes to the work of SaVI particularly by exploring whether schools might provide a delivery vehicle for parenting programmes. Stakeholder engagement identified the first year of school entry in Zimbabwe, when children are 4 or 5, as a suitable moment for a light-touch, universal programme to be presented to parents. The adapted programme delivers content that includes parts of the [Mikhulu Trust's](#) book-sharing programme, integrated with positive discipline content from PLH for Young Children. Currently the Zimbabwean team is finalising an RCT, where some parents received the parenting programme, and the control group received nutrition advice. Data analysis should take place early next year.

Male Engagement in Parenting

The Global Parenting Initiative is actively developing a comprehensive strategy to mainstream male engagement and gender transformative practices within its parenting programmes. This initiative aims to deepen the involvement of fathers and male caregivers, recognising their unique contribution to children's development.

We have developed a comprehensive framework to systematically measure and enhance male engagement within GPI programmes. This framework encompasses both quantitative and qualitative metrics designed to assess the effectiveness of our interventions and continuously track the involvement of male caregivers. These metrics range from detailed multi-item scales for thorough evaluation to streamlined tools for quick assessments, complemented by qualitative interview protocols. Our strategy is being implemented in phases.

We have also established the Gender Transformative Playful Learning Group within the GPI. This group is envisioned as a dynamic platform for promoting the significant roles fathers play, discussing barriers to their engagement, and exploring innovative strategies for their inclusion in parenting programmes. The learning group is part of our broader effort to integrate gender-transformative practices into our programmes, aiming to advance gender equality and reduce familial violence, thereby enhancing outcomes for all family members.

As these efforts are evolving, our goal is to refine and integrate these frameworks and learning opportunities iteratively into new GPI programmes. By doing so, we hope to set a precedent for gender-inclusive parenting support that acknowledges the vital role of male caregivers and actively involves them in creating nurturing environments for children. This ongoing process reflects our commitment to building more equitable and effective family support systems within the GPI.

Dissemination

In 2024, the communications team significantly expanded GPI's reach and engagement through strategic content creation, advocacy, and digital media efforts. The GPI website saw 44,609 page views with an average engagement rate of 41.73%, while social media platforms gained 1,351 new followers and generated over 126,000 impressions.

Communications efforts also supported major advocacy initiatives, such as the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, where GPI's work was showcased to global policymakers. Additionally, the team enhanced

digital accessibility by migrating the GPI website to WordPress and expanding the resource library with publications, research tools, and policy materials.



Dr. Amanda Sim presenting a film-based intervention supporting refugee parents along the Thailand-Myanmar border.

GPI also gained visibility at key global events, including the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) Conference and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Conference, where the team facilitated knowledge-sharing and engagement with researchers, policymakers, and advocates.

Capacity building

In 2024, the GPI supported 91 GPI Future Leaders, offering development opportunities, tailored training, and platforms to showcase their work and grow as leaders. In addition to the monthly training sessions we added adhoc training sessions which included the NVIVO training offered by Faadiel Latief from the UCT library. We also had a group -based mentoring focusing on Writing for publication , led by Dr Abigail Ornellas.

Future Leaders were given an opportunity to audit postgraduate lectures on evidence-based social interventions at the University of Oxford. Mentorship relationships have been embedded, with nine one-on-one mentorships and two group mentoring programmes ongoing. To address the need for individualised support, a six-month leadership coaching pilot in partnership with the LeadMe Academy will begin to work with 15 Future Leaders in February, with plans to expand this initiative later in 2025.



GPI Researchers presenting their work at the SVRI forum.

Future Leaders (FLs) have grasped these opportunities with both hands, with 19 FLs presenting at international conferences. We had a good Global Parenting–University of Cape Town Future Leaders representation at the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Conference in Cape Town.

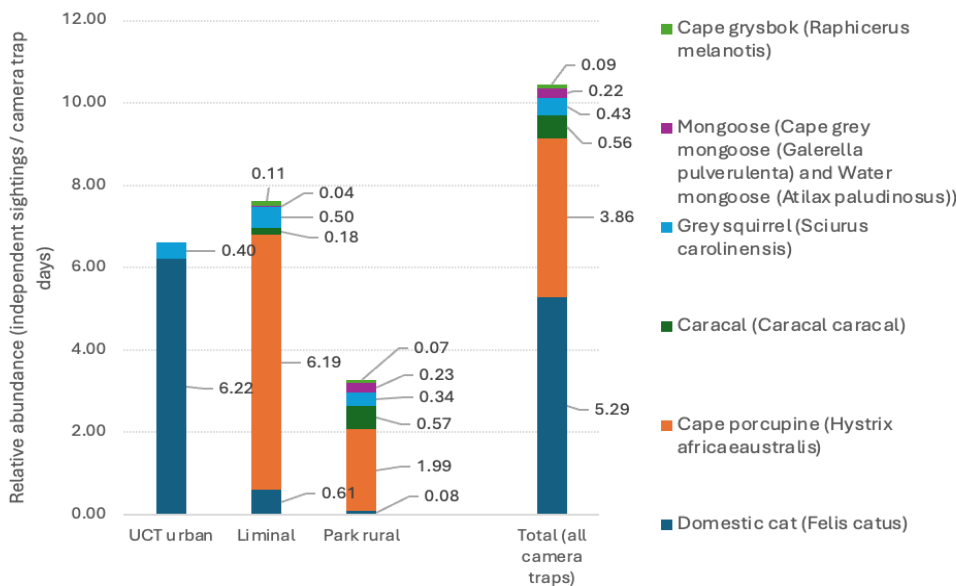
Twelve Future Leaders sharing their research through GPI's Open Webinar Series, and nine (four of whom are from the Global South) publishing first-authored articles in peer-reviewed journals.



Sustainable Societies Unit (SSU)

The SSU in 2024 involved work by Nicoli Nattrass, Jeremy Seekings, Marine Drouilly, and Benjamin Wittenberg.

Nicoli's core work focussed on SSU's collaboration with the UCT Institute for Communities and Wildlife in Africa (iCWild) regarding campus wildlife. With the assistance of funding from UCT's Khusela Ikamva initiative (designed to bring academics, students, and support staff together to co-create solutions to promote environmental sustainability), the SSU supported iCWild's camera trap of UCT and surrounding SANParks lands – as well as ongoing engagements with stakeholders. This work revealed that domestic cats were the most abundant species and that some strayed into the natural areas above UCT, including within the national park.



Animals in and around UCT



Honey badger coming out of a culvert on UCT's upper campus

The key issue on campus was whether the two small colonies of campus cats posed a danger to wildlife in the area. Given other evidence of cats hunting deep into Table Mountain National Park, biologists were concerned that UCT's cats were posing a danger. Cat advocates, however, stressed UCT's

welfare obligations to the stray cats.

The SSU provided a scholarship to Benjamin Wittenberg to run the third year of the camera trap survey, and to write up the results as part of his dissertation.

Ben was able to draw on three years of data to show that the recovery of vegetation after the 2021 fire had encouraged caracals to come closer to campus over time – and that this in turn discouraged cats from straying too far from the campus itself.

This was positive news for the conflict over cats because it seems that they were increasingly discouraged from hunting in the national park by an apex predator. We wrote this up as a paper which is forthcoming as a full journal article in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. The 2024 camera trap survey made an additional exciting discovery: that honey badgers were present on Table Mountain.



Ben with a camera trap above UCT (photo Shaun Welman)



A caracal near UCT

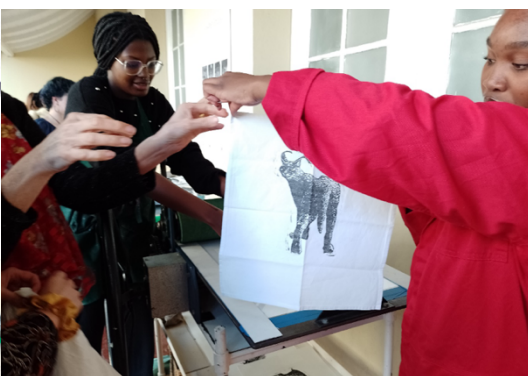


A UCT campus cat

This was picked up by UCT News and then the broader [media](#). This prompted us to add a honey badger project to our work. We collected information about other sightings in the area and wrote an article for Koedoe (which has been accepted).



Students making prints of Prof Fritha Langerman's engravings of UCT animal images



Students made prints of these animals for the public at a recent art exhibition. Marine Drouilly, whose current work focuses on Senegal, contributed work in the area of human-wildlife conflict in that region. She co-authored three papers on feline predators and a paper on the rediscovery of endangered giant pangolins in Senegal.

Khusela Ikamva funding, which SSU manages, also supports various art-related activities at the Michaelis School of Fine Art. As part of the ongoing focus on animals on campus, Prof Fritha Langerman made lino cuts of some of the photographs of animals from the camera trap



**institute for democracy,
citizenship and public policy in
Africa**

Institute for Democracy, Citizenship and Public Policy in Africa

Jeremy Seekings continues to run projects through the Institute for Democracy, Citizenship and Public Policy in Africa, which has a close relationship with the CSSR but is formally independent.

The two largest projects in the Institute focus on parties and elections (especially in Botswana and Zambia) and social protection policy (across East and Southern Africa).

A smaller project focuses on perceptions of wealth inequality in South Africa and Botswana. Full details of the work of the Institute are available on the Institute's [website](#) and in its [reports](#).



Formal collaborations

- 1.** African Population Health Research Centre (Kenya)
- 2.** Ateneo de Manila University, The Philippines
- 3.** Catholic Relief Services
- 4.** Childline South Africa
- 5.** City of Cape Town
- 6.** Clowns Without Borders South Africa
- 7.** Global Initiative to Support Parents
- 8.** IDEMS UK
- 9.** Lego Foundation
- 10.** Makerere University, Uganda
- 11.** McMaster University, Canada
- 12.** Mikhulu Trust, South Africa
- 13.** Mothers2Mothers, South Africa
- 14.** National Institute for Medical Research (Tanzania)
- 15.** National Research Foundation, South Africa
- 16.** Oak Foundation
- 17.** Oxford Research South Africa
- 18.** Paediatric-Adolescent Treatment Africa
- 19.** Parenting for Lifelong Health
- 20.** Peace Culture Foundation, Thailand
- 21.** South African Parenting Programmes Implementers Network (SAPPIN)
- 22.** Sol Plaatje University
- 23.** Stellenbosch University
- 24.** Stepping Stones International, Botswana
- 25.** Tal Y Foel, Wales
- 26.** The Human Safety Net
- 27.** UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund
- 28.** UNICEF
- 29.** University of Fort Hare
- 30.** University of Oxford
- 31.** University of Witwatersrand
- 32.** Universiti Putra Malaysia
- 33.** Western Cape Provincial Government
- 34.** World Childhood Foundation, Sweden

Seminars

- 23 January** Success and Failure in (Twentieth Century) Botswana: Diamonds, state-building and the threats of South(ern) African Politics and Business by Jorich Loubser (UCT)
- 30 January** Grants and development? Child support grant access and its effects on child development for children of adolescent and young mothers in South Africa by Claire Tatham (UCT)
- 06 February** Assessing feasibility & acceptability of the "Loveland" mobile app: supporting young people to safely transition into adulthood through comprehensive sexuality education by Waseem Omar, Erin Hector, Alicia Howe, Josi Beare (UCT Hons Psych graduates)
- 13 February** Life after Plastic Bodies: Covid, the State and the Crisis of Social Reproduction in South Africa by Leslie Bank (HSRC)
- 20 February** Applications of economics and behavioural science to HIV prevention and treatment by Harsha Thirumurthy (University of Pennsylvania)
- 27 February** Civil Society Participation in Conflict Early Warning & Response Systems of the AU, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC by Michael Aeby (University of Basel)
- 05 March** Rethinking malnutrition: exploring conceptualisations of motherhood and responsibility across childhood nutrition interventions in rural South Africa by Ingrid Froneman
- 12 March** Measuring mobility and social interactions to improve pandemic prediction by Mark Lurie (Brown University)

- 02 April** The Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Altruistic Behavior in a South African Sample of Emerging Adults by Leon Holtzhausen (UCT)
- 09 April** Work, welfare and poverty policy in crisis: lessons from the re-engineering of Botswana's public works program by Winnie Arthur (UCT)
- 10 April** Stepping aside, or away? A micro-level study of commitment in cross-sector social partnerships by Sarita Sehgal (UCT)
- 16 April** The (Im)Possibility of the Atlantis Special Economic Zone: How Changing Ideas about "The Market" Shaped the State in South Africa, 1940 to 2020 by Julia Hampton (Oxford)
- 23 April** Improving caregiver mental health in LMICs: Pilot Findings and RCT protocol of a digital Parenting for Lifelong Health programme by Nicole Chetty (UCT)
- 30 April** New research on the magistrates courts: The Under Pressure-The Magistracy After COVID-19 and Isidima - Magistrates Court User Survey reports by Zikhona Ndlebe (UCT) & Mbekezeli Benjamin (Wits)
- 07 May** Assisted partner notification for HIV: A qualitative study in Cape Town, South Africa by Shani Perera (UCT)
- 14 May** Digital Citizenship in Africa: Technologies of Agency and Repression by Tanja Bosch (UCT)
- 21 May** Lessons from a parenting programme to reduce violence against women and violence against children by Natalie Davidson (UCT)

- 04 June** Enhancing Disability Inclusivity in Parenting Interventions by Margie Schneider (UCT) and Zuyi Fang (Beijing Normal University)
- 11 June** Sleep in Southern Africans by Gosia Lipinska (UCT)
- 18 June** Design, implementation and results of a “Basic Package of Support for NEET youth in South Africa by Ariane de Lannoy (UCT)
- 30 July** Household living arrangements among Black/African women of reproductive age in post-apartheid South Africa by Tatenda Mugwendere (UCT)
- 13 August** Insights about the Motherload: Recognising care realities and creating caring economies by Ameeta Jaga (UCT)
- 20 August** Effective prevention of violence against children for \$6 per family: interim RTC findings by Abi Ornellas (UCT)
- 27 August** Making a difference in schools by Nadeen Moolla (Marang Educational Trust)
- 10 September** Promoting Positive Parenting Through a 5-Day Chatbot User Experience in South Africa by Zamakhanya Makhanya (UCT)
- 17 September** How is peer support linked to sexual risk behaviours among AGYW who married early or mothering? by Martina Mchenga (UCT)
- 01 October** Recognition of Prior Learning and Identity Transformation: Experiences of Social Work graduates in the Western Cape by Fatima Williams (UCT)

- 15 October** Taking Parenting Programmes to Scale: Findings from the Scale-up of Parenting Evaluations Research Studies (SUPER study) by Genevieve Haupt Ronnie (UCT)
- 22 October** Understanding the Lived Experiences of Informality and Social Protection in Urban Cape Town and Rural Limpopo by Justin Verity (UCT)
- 29 October** Exploring the Role of School Climate in Shaping Adolescent Mental Health by Tatenda Mawoyo (Stellenbosch)
- 05 November** The Outcomes of Mathematical Education Between 2000 and 2022 Along With Evidence for an Alternative Model for Change by Eric Schollar (UCT)
- 12 November** Of Cats, Caracals and Honey Badgers: Wildlife on UCT's Urban Edge by Nicoli Nattrass (UCT) and Benjamin Wittenberg (UCT)
- 19 November** Filmmaking in Participatory Research and Knowledge Translation by Sarah van Borek (UCT)

Publications

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2. **Baerecke, L., Ornellas, A.**, Wamoyi, J., Wambura, M., Klapwijk, J., **Chetty, A. N.**, Simpson, A., Janowski, R., De Graaf, K., Stern, D., Clements, L., Te Winkel, E., Christine, L., Mbosoli, G., Nyalali, K., Onduru, O. G., Booij, A., Mjwara, S. N., Tsoanyane, S., ... Cluver, L. D. (2024). A hybrid digital parenting programme to prevent abuse of adolescents in Tanzania: Study protocol for a pragmatic cluster-randomised controlled trial. *Trials*, 25(1), 119. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13063-023-07893-x>
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Book chapters

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