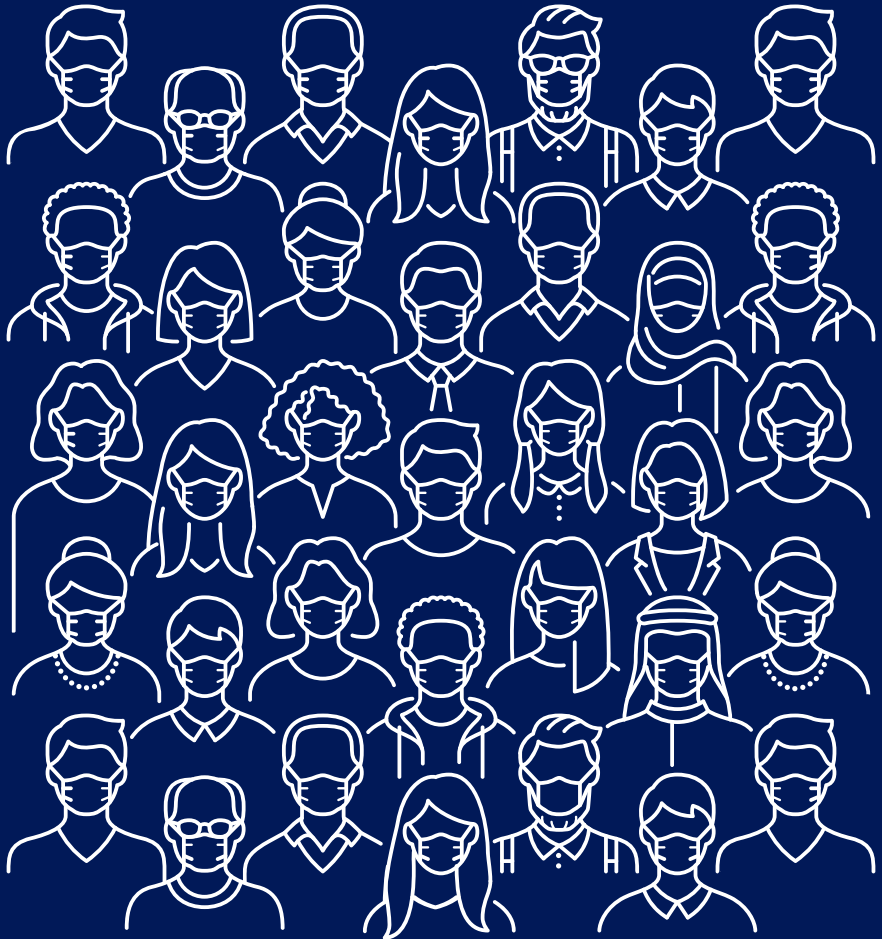


CHSR&D

News Report 2020



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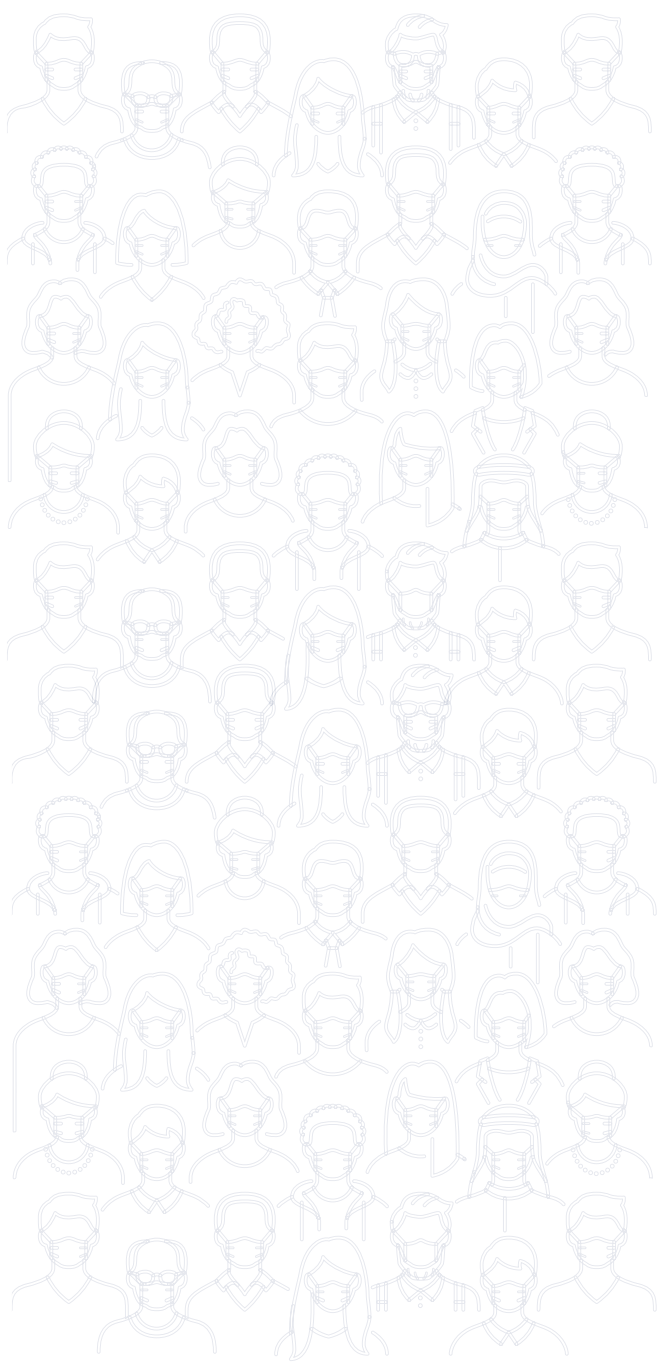
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News Report 2020



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Background, Mission, Aims and Focus Areas

Background

Established at the University of the Free State (UFS) in 1993, the Centre for Health Systems Research & Development (CHSR&D) stems from a rich tradition of research and training in medical sociology and sociology of health and healthcare. The Centre was founded specifically to address the need for bio-social scientific enquiry, operational research, and the development of research skills in the field of health systems studies. It has also accumulated commendable experience and expertise in key methodological approaches: quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, and monitoring and evaluation.

Mission

To generate and disseminate scientific knowledge on health and health systems at the local, provincial, and national levels, and to use this knowledge to improve and inform new and existing policies, strategies, and practices. The Centre is also committed to developing health systems capacity via implementation science and postgraduate research training.

Aims

- To meet the need for multidisciplinary research and development in the domain of health, health systems, and healthcare.
- To generate and disseminate research findings and information on health and health systems and promote the translation of research findings into policy and practice.
- To inform the strengthening of health systems with a view to greater equity, effectiveness, and efficiency.
- To provide postgraduate training and capacity building that contributes to expanding expertise in health, health systems, and healthcare research and development.

Focus areas

- Health systems.
- Public health in South Africa (includes engagement with health policy and strategy, operational functioning, and specialist areas such as occupational health).

Priority health programmes

- Tuberculosis (TB) prevention and control.
- HIV & AIDS.
- TB-HIV co-epidemic.
- Sexual and reproductive health.
- Mental health.
- COVID-19.

The Year in Retrospect

2020

“Unprecedented” is a word that has been used repeatedly to describe 2020. The world has not been confronted with a global pandemic of similar nature since the 1918 Spanish Flu. The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected all aspects of life, causing economic and social disruptions, and posing immense challenges to public health, food systems and employment/working conditions. In order to adapt to these changes, the CHSR&D changed our research methods, from face-to-face data collection to the use of online digital methods. In itself, this was a steep learning curve as we navigated data-free websites and recruited participants for online surveys and telephonic interviews.

This disruption was particularly felt in our three-year project on TB and mental health. Face-to-face data gathering was paused in line with lockdown regulations and a shift was made to interview patients telephonically. This was done in conjunction with primary healthcare nurses who, despite already facing enormous challenges, agreed to assist with the recruitment of patients. Never more so than now, are we aware of the precarious position of nurses. As frontline healthcare workers, nurses care for infected patients amidst an ailing health system, while facing stigma, separation from families, pain from losing patients and colleagues, as well as their own risk of infection. With this in mind, the Centre embarked on its first online survey to determine the psychosocial well-being and coping strategies of nurses during the COVID-19 outbreak. Nurses from both the public and private sectors participated in this study, which was conducted in close collaboration with the Free State Department of Health. The findings will be used to inform strategies to support nurses during times of crisis.

2020 was also the year that the Centre had its first Advisory Board meeting, which has encouraged us to pursue new activities, such as the development of a short learning programme, Introduction to Health Systems Research: Design, Practice and Proposal Development. Research findings were disseminated in eleven peer-reviewed articles in accredited journals. A successful collaboration with the Department of Sociology, UFS resulted in a NRF grant to explore the experiences of community healthcare workers during COVID-19.

A word of gratitude to all CHSR&D staff, research associates, collaborators and funders for their support during the year. Most importantly, we acknowledge the crucial role of nurses and all other healthcare workers in the fight against COVID-19.

Staff



From left to right: Bridget Smit (Administrative Officer), Dr Gladys Kigozi (Senior Researcher), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (Director), Belinda Jacobs (Senior Administrative Officer) and Prof. Christo Heunis (Associate Professor)

Staff Achievements

- Dr Gladys Kigozi continued with the Future Generation Professoriate Programme.
- Bridget Smith received her Postgraduate Diploma in Public Administration at the UFS.

Staff Development

- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht, Prof. Christo Heunis and Dr Gladys Kigozi attended a course on Good Clinical Practice hosted by FARMOVS on 12 June.
- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht and Dr Gladys Kigozi started to attend statistical training on Python.

Research Associates

- Dr Niresh Bhagwandin (South African Medical Research Council).
- Dr Asta Rau (CHSR&D).
- Prof. Francois Steyn (Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, South Africa).
- Dr Kerry Uebel (School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales, Australia).
- Prof. Dr Edwin Wouters (Research Centre for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies [CELLO], Department of Sociology, University of Antwerp, Belgium).
- Dr André Janse van Rensburg (Senior Researcher: Centre for Rural Health, Durban, South Africa).

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board met on 3 March 2020. The members include:

- Prof. Corli Witthuhn (Vice-Rector: Research, UFS, and Chairperson of the Advisory Board).
- Prof. Heidi Hudson (Dean of The Humanities, UFS).
- CHSR&D researchers (UFS).
- Dr Ellen Blekie (retired, formerly a member of the Young Women Christian Association and South African National Tuberculosis Association).
- Dr Niresh Bhagwandin (Executive Manager: Strategic Research Initiatives, South African Medical Research Council).
- Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Director: Information Management and Research, Free State Department of Health).
- Prof. René English (Head of the Division of Health Systems and Public Health, Stellenbosch University, South Africa).

Ongoing Research Projects



Experiences of drug-susceptible tuberculosis patients with symptoms of depression and anxiety: a cohort study of new patients in the Free State

Principal investigator: Dr Gladys Kigozi (CHSR&D)

CHSR&D team: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht and Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D)

Collaborators: Dr André Janse van Rensburg (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Dr Perpetual Chikobvu (Free State Department of Health)

The project experienced some challenges due to the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. Firstly, data gathering was halted in line with national COVID-19 lockdown regulations. While it was possible to conduct interviews remotely with tuberculosis (TB) patients, this process necessitated the facilitation by already overburdened health workers, and movement of the fieldwork team to the primary healthcare facilities for patient recruitment was limited. Patient recruitment resumed in September 2020, with the subsequent easing of the national COVID-19 lockdown regulations. Secondly, the national lockdown meant that the data gathering approach had to be amended. To this end, to minimise COVID-19 transmission, face-to-face contact was mostly utilised during patient recruitment and patients were primarily interviewed telephonically. Data from the pilot data gathering exercise were analysed successfully. A peer-reviewed article has been published on the construct validity of a fieldworker-administered and Sesotho-translated Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) in the Southern African Journal of Infectious Diseases .

Funder: National Research Foundation.

Ongoing Research Projects (cont.)



A Collaborative Study on Depression and Anxiety among new TB patients within HIV programmes in South Africa (CoDATE study)

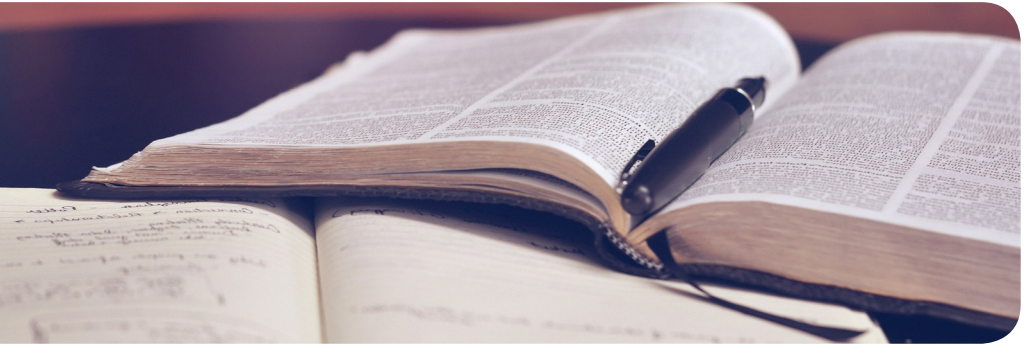
Principal investigator: Dr Gladys Kigozi (CHSR&D)

Co-investigator: Dr Raymond Tweheyo (Makerere University, Uganda)

This subproject (of the Experiences of drug-susceptible tuberculosis patients with symptoms of depression and anxiety: a cohort study of new patients in the Free State) specifically focuses on HIV co-infected TB patients and seeks to explore their unique experiences of depression and anxiety based on the social-ecological and health systems thinking models. Some aspects of this study are being replicated in Uganda. As with the umbrella project, challenges were experienced due to the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak and concomitant national lockdown in both South Africa and Uganda. Approval for the project in Uganda is still pending due to disruptions at public institutions.

Funders: Department of Science and Technology (DST) Africa Health Research Development and Innovation Programme in partnership with the South African Medical Research Council.

New Research Projects



Psychological Well-being of Nurses in the Free State during COVID-19

Principal investigator: Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D)

Co-investigators: Dr Gladys Kigozi and Prof. Christo Heunis (CHSR&D)

Nurses are at the frontline of responses to epidemics as they care for infected patients and also face exhaustion, difficult triage decisions, separation from families, stigma, and the pain of losing patients and colleagues, in addition to their own risk of infection. Limited research, mainly confined to China, has been conducted on the psychosocial well-being of nurses during COVID-19. It was noted that nurses caring for COVID-19 patients experienced considerable mental stress that led to high levels of anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorders, with nurses exhibiting fear, anxiety, sadness and anger. While there is clearly a range of priorities for the COVID-19 response, it is also critically important to pay concerted attention to nurse safety and psychosocial well-being. Before effective approaches to support nurses can be devised, it is important to understand their sources of anxiety and fear, levels of psychological distress, as well as their current coping mechanisms and support needs. This study aims to determine the psychosocial well-being and coping strategies of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, nurses were invited to complete an online survey that was made available via a data-free link from 5 December 2020. Adverts were placed on multiple platforms, including mainstream media (radio) and social medium platforms (Facebook) as well as on the official communication channels of the Free State Department of Health.

Funder: CHSR&D.

New Research Projects (cont.)

Community health workers: foot soldiers in pandemic times

Principal investigator: Dr Katinka De Wet (Department of Sociology)

Co-investigators: Prof. Edwin Wouters (University of Antwerp), Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht (CHSR&D), Dr Gladys Kigozi (CHSR&D) and Dr Raymond Tweheyo (Makerere University Kampala-Uganda)

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are yet again invoked to lead the front in the process of tracing potential cases of COVID-19 infections in communities in South Africa. It is estimated that approximately 27 000 CHWs are involved in this activity. These “foot soldiers”, who form part of the formal healthcare response to fight the current COVID-19 outbreak are crucial to analyse the manner in which responses to the pandemic materialise within wider communities. Provided their closeness to ordinary people, they offer an opportunity to observe the social, political and economic dynamics that shape the South African health system, especially during exceptional times. Their experiences and practices during the exceptional outbreak of the HIV and AIDS pandemic have been widely documented and commented on. We are yet again facing an unprecedented pandemic outbreak with the emergence of COVID-19. However, the political context within which COVID-19 unfolds is radically different. This study will critically examine the deployment of CHWs in the current context of framing COVID-19 as a matter of “high politics”. Using a mixed-methods approach (in-depth qualitative research followed by a survey in three districts in the Free State Province), the inquiry’s objectives will focus on everyday life experiences and practices of CHWs and to map how these relate to 1) Practical Issues (training, access to resources, remuneration, job security); 2) Contextual Issues (the socio-political context of disease manifestation); and 3) Legitimising Issues (how are they accepted in the formal healthcare hierarchy and within communities).

Funder: National Research Foundation.

Publications – Articles



- Engelbrecht M, Rau A, Kigozi G, Uebel K, Sommerland N, Masquillier C, Wouters E. 2020. Factors associated with healthcare workers' fear of occupationally acquired HIV. *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, 26(3): 117-121.
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- Kigozi G, Heunis C, Engelbrecht M. 2020. Community health worker motivation to perform systematic household contact tuberculosis investigation in a high burden metropolitan district in South Africa. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20:882.
<https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12913-020-05612-9>

Publications – Articles (cont.)

- Malakoane B, Heunis JC, Chikobvu P, Kigozi NG, Kruger WH. 2020. Public health system challenges in the Free State, South Africa: a situation appraisal to inform health system strengthening. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20:58.
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- Palmer E, Rau A, Engelbrecht M. 2020. Changing cultural practices: A case study of male circumcision in South Africa. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 14:4.
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- Rau A. 2020. Dealing with feeling: emotion, affect, and the qualitative research encounter. *Quality Sociology Review*, 16(1):94-108.
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- Sommerland N, Masquillier C, Rau, AHM, Engelbrecht MC, Kigozi G, Pliakas T, Janse van Rensburg A, Wouters A. 2020. Reducing HIV- and TB-Stigma among healthcare workers in South Africa: Results of a cluster randomised trial. *Social Science & Medicine*, 266:113450.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5588/ijtld.17.0030>
- Wouters E, Sommerland N, Masquillier C, Rau A, Engelbrecht M, Janse Van Rensburg A, Kigozi G, Ponnet K & Van Damme W. 2020. Unpacking the dynamics of compound stigma: How the HIV-TB co-epidemic alters HIV and TB stigma and its management. *BMC Infectious Diseases*, 20:106.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12879-020-4816-3>

Conference Presentations

Heunis C & Ncube A. 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS epidemic control programmes in South Africa. First Global Mountain Sustainability Forum. Sustainability Governance, Sexten, Italy, 5-6 October (virtual).

Postgraduate Supervision – Completed

Master's students

Nzima I. Master of Development Studies. Determinants of livelihood strategies for HIV/AIDS affected communities in Zambezia, Mozambique. Supervised by Prof. Christo Heunis

Tapera L. Master of Development Studies. Experiences of accessing maternal healthcare services in a rural community of South Africa. Supervised by Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht.

Community Engagement

- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht served as Chairperson of the Scientific Committee for the Social Sciences, UFS.
- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht served as reviewer for the General/Human Research Ethics Committee (GHREC), UFS.
- Prof. Michelle Engelbrecht served as facilitator at the Translating Research to Policy and Guidelines Workshop, Free State Department of Health, 19 November.
- Prof. Christo Heunis served on the National Research Foundation Advisory Panel for Research Chair Evaluation.
- Prof. Christo Heunis served as Vice-Chairperson of the Free State Provincial Health Research Committee.
- Prof. Christo Heunis served as a member of the National Health Research Committee.
- Prof. Christo Heunis served on the Board of Mosamaria NPO Aids Ministry.
- Prof. Christo Heunis served as member of the organising team and co-facilitator of the Translating Research to Policy and Guidelines Workshop, Free State Department of Health, 19 November.
- Dr Gladys Kigozi represented the Faculty of the Humanities on the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Health Sciences.
- Dr Gladys Kigozi served as facilitator at the Free State Translating Research to Policy and Guidelines Workshop, Free State Department of Health, 19 November.

Study with us: Master of Health Systems Studies (MHSysStud)

This specialist degree integrates theory with in-depth knowledge of health systems. Students will identify a health/health systems issue and address it via research. Where feasible, students will have the opportunity to base their master's research on our Centre's ongoing research projects. Studying side by side with experienced health systems researchers on a 'real-life' research project is a very valuable form of mentorship and should have a positive impact on students' dissertations/articles, as well as their practical research skills and experience. This specialist degree integrates theory with in-depth knowledge of health systems.

Two curriculum options:

1. Full dissertation.
2. At least two interrelated manuscripts that are publishable or published in accredited journals.

There is no coursework option, but throughout their study, students attend non-credit-bearing Master Classes in health systems and research methodology. Selection takes place in November and December of the year prior to registration. Prospective students must apply before 31 August (international students) or 31 October (South African students) of the year preceding registration.

See our website for more info about us, our projects, and the MHSysStud Programme:

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/humanities/departments-and-divisions/centre-for-healthsystems-research-development-home>

Gratitude

We would like to express our gratitude to all those funders who so generously supported the work of the CHSR&D in 2020 and previous years:

- African Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship (ADDRF)
- Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC USA, South Africa)
- Department of Community Health, UFS
- Desmond Tutu TB Centre (DTTC), Stellenbosch University
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) via Health Focus
- Department of Science and Technology, South Africa
- Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI)
- Directorate Research Development, UFS
- Flanders International Cooperation Agency (FICA)
- Free State Department of Health (FSDoH)
- Health Systems Trust (HST)
- HIVCare (an operating division of Medicross Healthcare Group)
- Medical Research Council of South Africa (MRC)
- National Research Foundation (NRF)
- South African-Flemish Bilateral Scientific and Technological Cooperation Programme
- Strategic Academic Cluster for New Frontiers in Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development, UFS
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- University of the Free State (UFS)
- VLIR-UOS (Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad / Flemish Interuniversity Council)

Centre for Health Systems Research & Development

Faculty of Humanities

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