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UCT academic honoured for lifesaving research on African adolescents

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Professor Lucie Cluver

Photo: supplied

Professor Lucie Cluver, honorary professor in the Department of [Psychiatry and Mental Health](#) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and professor of Child and Family Social Work at the University of Oxford, has been appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours List. The award recognises her exceptional contributions to children's wellbeing and global public health.

Professor Cluver has co-led groundbreaking interdisciplinary research for over 14 years across UCT and Oxford. Working closely with Associate Professor Elona Toska, director of UCT's [Accelerate Research Hub](#), and Professor Cathy Ward, director of UCT's [Safety and Violence Initiative and the Centre for Social Science Research](#), Cluver has advanced research that directly improves the lives of children and adolescents across sub-Saharan Africa.

"I am honoured and amazed at being given this award. Every impact that we have had is because of an incredible team of PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and colleagues – across South Africa and the UK – who are dedicated to improving the lives of children. Being at the University of Oxford and University of Cape Town gives us an incredible privilege: the academic freedom to pursue research that can directly help the most vulnerable," said Cluver.

From 2019 to 2024, Cluver led the [UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub](#), a £20 million research initiative based at Oxford and co-led with Toska at UCT. The hub brought together researchers, practitioners and policymakers to identify effective and scalable strategies to improve outcomes for young people.

In 2022, in collaboration with Professor Ward, she became co-principal investigator of the [Global Parenting Initiative](#), which provides free, evidence-based support to parents worldwide to prevent child sexual abuse, exploitation and family violence. The initiative spans leading universities, foundations and charities, aiming to reach the world's most vulnerable families with accessible and effective parenting tools.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cluver played a pivotal role in the COVID-19 [Emergency Parenting Response](#), developed in partnership with UCT's [Centre for Social Science Research](#) and led alongside UCT Honorary Professor Jamie Lachman. With backing from global agencies including WHO, UNICEF and PEPFAR, the emergency resources created under this initiative reached over 210 million people across 198 countries and territories, and were adopted by 34 national governments.

"In 2002, I was a social worker in Nyanga, trying to help mothers and children who were dying of HIV/AIDS. I asked local charities what they needed, and to my astonishment they said 'research': they wanted to know what would be most effective and affordable ways to protect children. Now we work with governments, UN agencies and donors, to answer the same question, and find solutions for millions of children who deserve the most effective support," added Cluver.

The UCT-Oxford partnership led by Cluver, Toska, Ward and Lachman has been globally recognised for its impact. Awards include the UCT 2019 Social Responsiveness Award, a 2024 national Impact Case recognition by Universities South Africa, the European Research Council Public Engagement Award (2024), Fellowship of the Academy of Social Sciences (2023), Oxford Vice Chancellor's Innovation Award (2022), the IAS Excellence in Research with Children Award (2022), and both UKRI (2021) and EU Horizon 2020 Impact Awards.

Cluver's career is driven by a clear mission: to use science to support the world's most vulnerable children. At UCT, she and her colleagues continue influencing national and international policies, strengthening families and protecting children's futures worldwide.

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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