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**08 June 2011**

# UCT research looks at issues critical to family life and women

Five PhD candidates selected issues of special interest to women and family life for their research: declining marriage trends in South Africa since 1995; the development and evaluation of a smoking cessation programme for disadvantaged pregnant women; how men cope when their female intimate partners are raped; how health workers who provide abortion services deal with the social challenges and moral complexities of their work; and the opportunities and challenges for comprehensive primary and secondary prevention of cervical cancer, which is a major killer of women in developing countries. All these graduands will receive their PhDs on Thursday, 9 June 2011, at 15h00.

**Grace Kumchulesi's** PhD thesis, *An economic analysis of declining marriages in post-apartheid South Africa: 1995-2006*, investigates declining marriages among African women in post-apartheid South Africa. She confirms that the marriage decline is a real phenomenon, and not just driven by change in the sampling design of the surveys. She finds empirical support for the women's economic independence hypothesis in explaining this decline. According to this hypothesis, high levels of education and increases in labour force participation for African women imply that they can now compete with their male counterparts for jobs. Labour force participation and education each have a negative effect on women's likelihood of marriage, driving non-marriage behaviour as the financial gains from marriage are diminished.

Empirical findings also support the "man shortage" hypothesis, indicating that a shortage of potential spouses reduces the likelihood of marriage. However, since the availability of economically attractive men increased over the period under review, it is not surprising that the shortage of potential spouses did not contribute to the marriage decline.

Kumchulesi obtained a B (Soc) (Sci) and an MA from the University of Malawi. She has been studying in the School of Economics at UCT since 2005. She will receive her PhD in Economics. Her supervisor is Associate Professor Martin Wittenberg of the School of Economics at UCT.

**Katherine Murphy's** PhD thesis, *The development and evaluation of a smoking cessation programme for disadvantaged pregnant women in South Africa*, presents the findings of her formative research with health care providers; the process of developing a smoking cessation intervention based on best practice models, but tailored to the unique characteristics of the target group and local setting; and the evaluation of the intervention in four typical public sector antenatal clinics in Cape Town.

There is strong evidence that smoking cessation interventions for pregnant women can be effective in increasing quit rates, as well as in reducing the incidence of premature birth and low birth weight. However, these interventions have only been studied in developed countries and it was unknown whether such programmes could be successfully applied to a South African setting. Murphy reports on the development and evaluation of a smoking cessation intervention for disadvantaged, pregnant women attending public sector antenatal clinics.

The intervention was effective in significantly improving quit rates and was well accepted by clinic staff. Pregnant women rated the provision of social support from peer counsellors as the most helpful aspect of the programme. The impact of these types of interventions in primary care settings can translate into significant clinical benefits if they are institutionalised and systematically applied to a large proportion of women at risk. The value of such interventions would be further enhanced if they were extended to also address psychosocial stress and drug and alcohol abuse, as these behaviours are often closely associated with smoking.

Murphy has a BA and HDE from UCT and a PG (Dip) in Health Promotion from the University of Galway in Ireland. She undertook her PhD studies while working at the Medical Research Council (MRC) in the Chronic Disease of Lifestyle Unit. She is now working as a researcher for the Chronic Diseases Initiative in Africa in the Department of Medicine at UCT. Her supervisor is Dr Catherine Mathews in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine and the MRC. Murphy will receive her PhD in Public Health.

**Evalina van Wijk** is an advanced mental health nurse practitioner who works with rape survivors and their families. The needs of the secondary victims of sexual assault became the focus of Van Wijk's PhD thesis, *The lived experience of male intimate partners of female rape victims in Cape Town, South Africa*. As she explored the lived experiences of the intimate partners of female rape victims over the first six months following the incidence of rape, she uncovered evidence of profound psychological traumatisation. Intimate partners had to deal not only with the effects of the traumatic incident on their partners, but also had to process the incident themselves. Clear stages of recovery were identified by Van Wijk and she has developed a conceptual framework, which will guide the development of intervention programmes for intimate partners of victims of rape.

Van Wijk has a BA (Cur) from UCT and an M (Cur) from the University of the Western Cape. She embarked on doctoral studies in the Division of Nursing and Midwifery, School of Health

and Rehabilitation Sciences at UCT in 2007, while working as a full-time lecturer in Mental Health Nursing at the Western Cape College of Nursing in Cape Town. Her supervisor is Associate Professor Sinegugu Duma in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Van Wijk will receive her PhD in Nursing.

**Jane Harries'** PhD thesis, *Abortion services in South Africa: challenges and barriers to safe abortion care: health care providers' perspectives*, describes a healthcare service that is significantly marginalised and stigmatized. She describes how those who provide abortion services make sense of their decisions, derive professional and political satisfaction, and manage the social challenges as well as the moral complexities involved.

She examines health care providers' perspectives on abortion service provision in the public sector in the Western Cape Province, employing a qualitative methodology to examine attitudes, experiences and practices of a wide range of abortion and health care providers. Her findings are divided into individual/conceptual, institutional/health systems and social/political levels of analysis, with a separate chapter on second trimester abortions, as this topic emerged as an issue of particular salience.

Harries has a BA (Hons), an M (Phil) and an MPH from the University of Cape Town. Since 2002 she has held positions as a senior researcher in UCT's School of Public Health and Family Medicine, where she is currently the Associate Director of the Women's Health Research Unit. She has been a principal investigator on a number of reproductive health research projects. She will receive her PhD in Public Health. Her supervisor is Dr Christopher Colvin of the Public Health and Family Medicine Department.

**Jennifer Moodley's** PhD thesis, *Prevention of cervical cancer in South Africa: opportunities and challenges*, examines the scope for comprehensive primary and secondary prevention of cervical cancer, which is an important cause of morbidity and mortality in developing countries. She explores four questions:

1. Can a cytology-based based screening program be effectively implemented in South Africa?
2. What are the potential challenges to and opportunities for implementing a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination program in South Africa?
3. What is the association between human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the human papillomavirus (HPV), cervical cancer precursors and cervical cancer in South Africa?
4. What is the prevalence of HPV and cervical cancer precursors, HPV types and HPV viral load in women that are initiating highly active antiretroviral therapy?

These questions have local relevance: the findings will help to shape public health efforts to prevent cervical cancer in South Africa. The findings are also of relevance to other middle-income countries contemplating implementing a cervical cancer prevention programme.

Moodley obtained her MBChB from the University of Kwazulu-Natal and her M (Med) in Public Health from UCT. She is an associate of the South African College of Public Health Medicine, a senior public health specialist at the Department of Health in the Provincial

Government of the Western Cape, and a senior researcher at the Women's Health Research Unit in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at UCT. She is involved in research, teaching, technical health service support, policy development, and advocacy in the area of women's health. Her supervisor is Professor Jonny Myers of the School of Public Health and Family Medicine. Moodley is receiving her PhD in Public Health.

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***Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department***

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