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## **Mothers transmit trauma to children, suggests UCT research**

University of Cape Town PhD student Bruce Christopher Bradfield's thesis, *A relational psychoanalytic exploration of the intergenerational transmission of trauma from mothers to their adult children*, suggests that trauma is not limited to the person experiencing it. Instead, Bradfield suggests, it can be transmitted from mother to child.

Bradfield's thesis explores mothers' childhood experiences of interpersonal trauma and its impact on their relationships with their adult children. The thesis examines how mothers' traumatic pasts play out in repetition in their relationships with their children.

Using a combination of qualitative research techniques and psychoanalytic case studies, the research identified the existence of a relationship between mothers' traumatic histories, their particular narratives of these histories, and their children's integration of traumatic themes into their own internal worlds. The role of attachment, and the disruptive impact of trauma on attachment between mother and child, was central to his exploration.

Patterns of avoidant attachment in mother-child relationships and dissociation, in which both mothers and their children have been found to disconnect from awareness of a painful history through conscious and unconscious defence mechanisms, was found to be central to the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Bradfield has a BA, BA(Hons), MA in Psychology (by dissertation) and MA in Clinical Psychology from Rhodes University. While studying at UCT since 2007, he has worked part-time as a psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapist in independent practice in Cape Town. He was supervised by Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela of the Department of Psychology. Bradfield's PhD is in Psychology.

**ENDS**

**Please note:** Information in this release is based on the supervisor's citation for the PhD thesis. UCT advises journalists to obtain a copy of the thesis and/or interview the PhD graduate to verify and expand on this information.

*Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department*

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