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## Disability benefits may help protect people with schizophrenia against the economic costs of the disorder

People living with schizophrenia are at risk of suffering from extreme economic hardships. However, recent research found that disability benefits may protect against some of the economic costs associated with the disorder. The findings are published in the [Journal of Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology](#).

Titled "Disability benefits protect against lost income for South Africans living with Schizophrenia", the research was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Columbia University. This is the first large study to investigate the predictors of household and personal wealth for people living with schizophrenia in South Africa.

Despite having a relatively low prevalence, schizophrenia is a leading cause of disability worldwide. People living with schizophrenia and their relatives often deal with economic costs related to the disorder, including those associated with unemployment and healthcare.

"In South Africa, where resources for mental health care are relatively limited, understanding the role of disability grants and the broader economic context for people living with schizophrenia is important," said Olivia Wootton, the study's lead author and PhD candidate in the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health at UCT.

The study used data collected during The Genomics of Schizophrenia in the South African Xhosa People (SAX) study, a large genomics study led by Professor Dan Stein from UCT. While the study's main aim was to better understand the genetic basis of schizophrenia in the Xhosa people, it also collected data relevant to the social determinants of health. The study enrolled almost 3 000 people from Western Cape and Eastern Cape healthcare facilities. Of these, the current research included 1 154 people diagnosed with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder from the SAX study.

The research showed that in addition to disability benefits, level of education, current employment, number of household members, and area of residence are other important contributors to household wealth in the SAX study sample.

"The findings from this research provide insight into mechanisms that may mitigate the economic costs associated with schizophrenia in South Africa. This research may serve as a

resource for policymakers, healthcare practitioners, and mental health advocates seeking to improve the well-being of people with schizophrenia,” said Wootton.

***ENDS***

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