

## **SRPP Catch-Up Task: Second Semester**

### **1 SRPP Point**

Dawn Opert

OPRNET001

PSY3011S: Clinical Psychology II

Katya Kee-Tui

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### Plagiarism Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism means to present substantial portions or elements of another's work, ideas or data as my own, even if the original author is cited occasionally.
2. I have used the American Psychological Association formatting for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this essay/project/report from the work or works of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced.
3. This essay/project/report is my own work.
4. **I have not allowed, and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as their own work.**

**Signed:** Dawn Opert

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## **Introduction**

Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health issues across the globe, and is responsible for an enormous amount of suffering caused by disability (Makhubela, 2021a; Makhubela, 2021b; Makhubela and Debusho, 2016; Mall et al., 2018; Mason, 2019; Rousseau et al., 2021). Over the last decade, there has also been robust evidence that both the rate of prevalence and the severity of depression has been rising rapidly (Makhubela, 2021b; Rousseau et al., 2021). Furthermore, university students represent a group that are uniquely vulnerable to depression and other mood disorders, and often do not have the emotional, financial, and social resources to deal it (Makhubela, 2021b; Mall et al., 2018; Mason, 2019; Rousseau et al., 2021).

Despite depression among university students being a serious concern in South Africa, much of the literature has been written by and about high income countries (Makhubela, 2021a; Makhubela, 2021b; Makhubela and Debusho, 2016; Rousseau et al., 2021). As will be discussed, there has been a recent number of papers published about the South African context, but such literature has generally been few and far between.

This paper will review the literature on depression in university students in South Africa. First, the details of the literature itself will be discussed. Next, there will be discussion of two themes in the literature: Causes of student depression, and gender and depression. Finally, the paper will conclude with a suggestion of directions for future research.

## **Literature Review**

Six papers in total were found to be acceptable. Ten papers were found on the UCT Libraries Primo database, by searching for "Depression in South African university students", "University students with depression in South Africa", and by searching the reference lists of papers that were already found. Of those ten papers, four did not refer to South Africa, rather talking about lower and middle-income countries generally, or referring to other southern African countries such as Botswana. Of these six, Makhubela (2021b) is not a research paper, but rather a background report. There are five (Makhubela, 2021a; Makhubela and Debusho, 2016; Mall et al.,

2018; Mason, 2019; Rousseau et al., 2021) research papers. All five were conducted in South African universities. There were vanishingly few useful papers, and four of the five research papers were published in the last four years.

One of the main reasons that university students are particularly vulnerable to depression is that they face many new stressors, such as strict academic requirements, intense financial pressures, and often new social pressures such as gender, sexuality, and identity exploration (Mall et al., 2018; Rousseau et al., 2021). While some of these can be ultimately positive, such as exploration of identity, most students are young (between 18-24) and often do not have the emotional experience to navigate many of these changes in their lives, nor are they given the support that they need to develop the necessary emotional skills (Mason, 2019; Rousseau et al., 2021). In South Africa this becomes precarious, as severe inequalities mean that most students will be coming from families that do not have stable financial situations, many will be the first university student in their families, and many will have experienced trauma (Mall et al., 2018; Rousseau et al., 2021). These factors add up to create a particularly vulnerable group who often are required to adapt fast or simply drop out (Rousseau et al., 2021).

With regards to gender, there is a literature consensus that men and women experience depression at different rates of prevalence, with women tending to experience higher rates of depression (Makhubela, 2021a; Makhubela and Debusho, 2016). Makhubela (2021a) finds that there does not seem to be any qualitative difference between the depression of women compared to the depression of men, with the only real difference being in prevalence rates. This lends further support to the notion that the cause of the higher prevalence rate is external, often living within a patriarchal system, and socialization which encourages negative self-evaluation and ruminative coping (Makhubela, 2021a; Makhubela and Debusho, 2016). It is, however, disappointing to see that gender was only discussed in these papers as far as a gender binary, and in regards only to prevalence rates rather than research of experiences. Mall et al. (2018) specifically note that a gender crisis is one of the many factors that increase a student's risk of depression, but there is no discussion of what this looks like or why this increases

risk. In fact, none of the six papers reviewed in this paper discuss any experiences at all.

### **Conclusion**

There is frightfully little written on depression as it manifests in university students in South Africa. Makhubela (2021a; Makhubela, 2021b) and Rousseau et al. (2021) were both published in the last two years, so there does seem to be a movement towards more research on this very unique population. However, what is written seems to be almost scattered, and there are a number of gaping blindspots. Firstly, future research should incorporate qualitative studies of students' experiences, both with depression and with university. By speaking directly with students, and by allowing students to be equal partners in studying the risks that the university environment subjects them to, we stand to learn more about the ways that depression actually and tangibly affect students. This allows universities to develop more responsive programs to help support students, and minimise that risk.

## References

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