THE STUDY OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that **The psychological health of first entering students at the University of Limpopo** submitted to the University of Limpopo as fulfilment for Master of Arts Degree in Psychology, has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university, that it is my own work in design and accomplishment, and that all the material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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Sakala Ruvimbo (Ms) DATE

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- My family and friends for their love, support and encouragement.

 May God bless and increase you all for your efforts, they were not in vain!

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my late father (Mr David Prince Sakala) who always wanted the best for me and encouraged me to follow principles that build my life.

ABSTRACT

Upon entering the university environment, first year students encounter what could be described as a “foreign culture”, and have to reconcile conflicting transitional spaces of their home and university identities. This adjustive demand can lead to some considerable levels of psychological distress. This study examined the level of psychological health in first year students. It also evaluated whether factors such as monetary background, residential area, race and the availability of bursaries affect students’ transition into “university life”. First year students (N = 300; male = 135; female = 165) completed the General Health Questionnaire-12 at the University of Limpopo.

A substantial percentage (that is, 30.33%) of the participants was found to have or is prone to psychological health problems. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies which have found that some students may be susceptible to mental health problems predating their entry into university. There was no significant difference between the levels of psychological health between males and females and bursary users and those that are funded by their parents or guardians. There was also no significant difference between those that live in the rural areas and those from the cities. However, the figures between those that are poor and rich were strikingly noteworthy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Over the past few years, the government of South Africa has put in place an educational support structure where students are encouraged to attain university education. Pursuant to this goal, various bursary structures have been created. For example, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been created by the National Higher Education Ministry to provide financial support to the needy (but deserving) students, particularly those coming from very poor and rural family backgrounds. As a result, a large number of students who previously would have been excluded have an opportunity to attain university education (Rural Education Access Programme [REAP], 2008). However, according to Sommer (2013), the academic performance and graduation of especially historically disadvantaged students has been less successful.

The socio-cultural backgrounds of disadvantaged, poor and rural students, in particular, do not prepare them for the considerably different higher education environment and, for them, the transition into higher education is relatively very challenging compared to those coming from privileged backgrounds. Khattri, Riley and Kane (1997) noted that limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantages put students at risk of educational failure. Therefore, opening of opportunities for more students, particularly those from poor and rural backgrounds, to enrol at universities presents several challenges, including the risk of substance abuse (Thompkins & Deloney, 1994; Dahlin, Joneborg & Runeso, 2005), depression, (Dahlin et al, 2005), isolation and alienation due to lack the necessary competencies required for tertiary study (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014), dropping out and peer pressure (REAP, 2008).

The above mentioned stressors contribute to poor mental health in students (Khattri et al, 1997). Students' mental health status directly influence their academic achievement as well as other important aspects of their lives. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the psychological health of first year students studying at University of Limpopo.

1.2 Research problem

Undergraduate students entering higher education institutions face a broad spectrum of challenges (Wangeri, Kimari & Mutweleli, 2012). It has been argued that disadvantaged students typically experience not only greater numbers of problems and challenges at any one time, but also more profound problems and challenges, especially in their first year of study (REAP, 2008). Czerniewicz and Brown (2014) point out that students from rural backgrounds face several challenges in dealing with the transition to university generally, having to adopt new technologies into their learning lives. Research has shown that students from rural backgrounds face even more challenges succeeding in higher education endeavours. According to Czerniewicz and Brown (2014), these challenges among others include unexpected emotional and social transition to tertiary level of study, lack of social and co-curricular involvement and exposure to diversity.

Upon entering the university environment, first entering students encounter what could be described as a “foreign culture” and have to reconcile conflicting transitional spaces of their home and university identities (MaCaskill, 2012). This adjusting demand can lead to some considerable levels of psychological distress (Karen, 2004; Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). It is, therefore, important for studies to be conducted on the psychological health of university students to determine their psychological health in the face of the adjusting demands. Given the paucity of research on the psychological adjustment of first entering students, particularly those from poor and rural areas, the present study is to determine the psychological health of students in a rurally-based South African University.

1.3 Purpose of study

1.3.1 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to assess the psychological health of first year students at the University of Limpopo using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12).

1.3.2 Objectives of the study

- To screen for psychological health problems faced by university first year students.
- To determine severity of the psychological health problems faced by the first year students.

1.4 Significance of the study

According to Kaistha et al (2013), knowledge about the presence of mental health problems is important in itself and if found, needs attention. By determining the psychological health of first entering students, the study hopes to provide useful data that can help the university student counselling unit to develop intervention programmes that will be informed by evidence-based campus health. Therefore, by measuring the mental health of students from poor and rural backgrounds at the University of Limpopo, this study will help in determining coping strategies, adjustments, help in promoting a positive mental wellbeing of students and prevent or alleviate psychological symptoms. Furthermore, the results of this study could contribute towards efforts aimed at developing a treatment plan that can be used to improve students' quality of life and reduce their risks of experiencing mental illness.

1.5 Outline of the chapters

Chapter one provides the background to the study including an outline of the research problem. The aim and objectives of the study, including the significance of the investigation, were also presented. In chapter two, relevant literature pertaining to the study is reviewed. In chapter three the methodology that was followed is outlined. This includes focusing on topics like research design, sampling, data collection and analysis. The issues of reliability and validity that were observed in conducting the study are highlighted. Chapter four presents the findings of the study. In chapter five, the findings of the study are discussed in the context of existing literature and a discussion of the findings is provided. Chapter six provides conclusion, limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In many developing societies in Africa, most adolescents are in school, unmarried and not economically engaged while in the rural communities, female adolescents are set for marriage and childbearing (Olukunle, 2007). A community cannot foster development without an educated population. While there is at present no single solution to rural poverty, education and training are critical elements. Growth needs to be achieved with equity and rural dwellers need to have the capacity to be participants in the labour market and in society (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003). Despite the shortcomings in the provision of basic education in rural areas today and the chronic shortfall in resources allocated for it, progress is being made as many countries continue their efforts to expand its coverage and improve its quality (Lakin & Gasperini, 2003).

2.2 Transition from high school to university

Over the years, student enrolment and registration of historically disadvantaged students in South African universities has continually and steadily increased (Sommer, 2013). Despite this fact, data on higher education trends in South Africa indicate that 50% of students enrolled in higher education institutions drop out in their first 3 years with about 30% dropping out in their first years (Letseka & Breier, 2008). The level of academic and social integration into a university environment can determine whether or not a student will withdraw (Mannan, 2007). Students are faced with a change from structured, interactive, student-focused teaching at secondary level, to more anonymous lectures without compulsory attendance along with the need for self-discipline and self-study at third level, and they have different levels of ability and aptitude to adapt to the change (Quinn et al, 2005). Cognition, or what people believe and emotion, or how they feel about events and ideas influences them (Baum, Perry & Tarbell, 2004). Each age group covers one or two major transitions in a child's life, such as school entrances or exits, biological maturation, possible cognitive changes, role changes, or some combination of these. According to Sunmola, Dipeolu, Babalola and Out (2002), the transition is characterised by an increase in personal control,

responsibilities and independence. These periods are characterized by relatively universal developmental challenges that require new modes of adaptation to biological, psychological, or social changes (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Most students are able to make the transition, whereas others struggle, and may not have the confidence to seek help when required. Students may choose to withdraw if they are struggling to adapt to the academic demands, even if they have not actually failed any exams (Eikeland & Manger, 1992).

Educational access is no longer a major problem in South Africa (Van Der Berg, 2002). South Africa allocates, by international standards, a large share of its national resources to education (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Recommendations for higher enrolment rates included the use of black students to recruit in rural and in township areas and increased funding for bursaries, (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Student home background influences not only how well students progress through school, but also the quality of how well they learn (Van Der Berg, 2002). The completion rate for black students is less than half of the completion rate of white students and the figures are particularly low where first generation students are involved; only one in five graduated in the required time (NPC, 2011). In part, this low throughput rate may be attributed to a difference in life experiences as a result of students' social, educational, cultural and economic backgrounds, which manifests in unequal levels of readiness for studies in higher education (Letseka & Breier, 2008).

Since 1994, the South African government has undertaken massive reforms aiming to address rural poverty and inequalities inherited from the past apartheid regime (Perret, Anseeuw, & Mathebula, 2005). According to Lakin and Gasperini, (2003) basic education must be offered on an equitable basis so that all learners have a fair opportunity to obtain a viable basic education and be able to continue learning throughout their lifetime. However rural development strategies in South Africa are not achieving their goals, namely, the reconstruction and restructuring of the living conditions of the majority of people located in rural areas. For example, the absence of a reading culture in rural communities is very worrying. Information in printed form is difficult to come by – there are very few books or magazines or newspapers in homes or elsewhere, and there are usually no libraries (Gardiner, 2008). Although different rural development strategies have been introduced by the African National Congress (ANC) government since it came to power in 1994, the state of provision of

education to rural learners remains abysmal (Seroto, 2012). The economic status of the household is a key determinant of the transition to higher education (UNESCO, 2015). Poverty may not just delay school entry but also protract the journey through school (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012).

Despite a rapidly growing middle class and the gradually decreasing levels of poverty since the end of apartheid, there are still regions in South Africa which seem untouched by the growth in South Africa's more affluent regions. In this respect, South Africa is not unique. Most developing countries have spatial concentrations of deprivation, often located in rural interiors (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). All of South Africa's provinces have rural areas, and all are different from each other. The poorest and least-developed rural communities are those that were located in the former homelands, particularly in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu- Natal and Limpopo (Forgey et al, 2000). The legacy of poverty and neglect in these places is far from being eliminated, partly because of the emphasis in South Africa on urban development (Gardiner, 2008). Rural schools are often in poor repair, poorly equipped and staffed with poorly prepared and poorly paid teachers. Programmes targeting rural adolescents and adults often are not well organized, nor well adapted to local learning needs and depend on untrained or poorly trained, low-paid personnel. Such programmes are difficult to expand or even sustain. Furthermore, rural learners of whatever age are generally at a disadvantage in comparison with their cousins in the city who have access to relatively better educational opportunities (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003). The National Enrolment Plan therefore levels the playing field for students entering higher education and provides more opportunities for students from impoverished rural areas to get a life changing higher education (UNESCO, 2015). The South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) conducted extensive research on policy implementation and the challenges involved in improving access to higher education for previously disadvantaged communities (Belyako et al, 2009).

In South Africa students gain university entrance based on their matriculation results which are assumed to be reliable indicators of their readiness for tertiary studies. These results cannot predict student success in higher education (Griffin & Allen 2006; Letseka & Breier, 2008). With their prior experiences as successful learners with acceptable matriculation scores, black students approach their university studies with the same expectations and academic behaviours which they exhibited in secondary

school. However, once they engage in their studies they often experience the transition from school to university as daunting since they are faced with increasing linguistic demands, more rigorous performance requirements and diverse cultural environments which may conflict with their personal values and beliefs (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Students of different abilities are mixed together in single classrooms without proper adaptation of teaching methods to improve learning and to induce school engagement. Such schooling circumstances, together with personal and family level factors of poverty, jeopardise meaningful access to education for many students. As a result, many students are registered in institutions but fail to attend, participate but fail to learn, are enrolled for several years but fail to progress and drop out from school (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt, 2010).

Poor quality schooling at the primary and secondary level in South Africa severely limit the youth's capacity to exploit further training opportunities. As a result, existing skills deficiencies among those who are the product of an underperforming school system (predominantly black youth) are likely to persist (Spaull, 2013). It is clear from the literature that rural schools continue to suffer poor, indeed worse, learning conditions on the whole compared with their urban counterparts (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). Motala, Dieltiens, Carrim, Kgobe, Moyo and Rembe (2007) note that despite improvements in funding equity, many learners, especially in the rural areas, continue to lack access to proper infrastructure and have to manage with limited text books, badly stocked school libraries and poorly trained educators. School readiness, or the child's ability to use and profit from school, has been recognized as playing a unique role in escape from poverty (Engle & Black, 2008). However, there is also evidence that students in rural schools achieve worse results than their urban counterparts (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). Few South African youths manage to successfully transition into employment or tertiary education and training once they have left the secondary schooling system (Spaull, 2013). School readiness is critical to later academic achievement because differences on school entry have long-term consequences (Engle & Black, 2008). Poverty and the related disadvantages involve many aspects of children's lives that affect both the educational opportunities that children will have and the educational outcomes that they will likely experience (Coley & Baker 2013). Given this strong association between educational success and economic disadvantage, one might expect education policy to focus on ways to

overcome the effects of poverty on students as a way to improve overall education outcomes. Yet, popular education policies focus on developing common curriculum standards, test-based accountability systems, using students' scores on standardized tests in teacher evaluations, and promoting competition among institutions. These efforts are not likely to contribute much to raise student achievement or close achievement gaps because they disregard the educational challenges that are faced in the daily lives of disadvantaged children (Ladd, 2012). Letseka and Breier (2008) conclude that the two major reasons for drop out are under preparedness and the anxiety by students who were struggling to sustain themselves from one month to the next.

Czerniewicz and Brown (2014) describe the challenges and adjustments students from rural backgrounds face, both dealing with the transition to university generally, and specifically adopting new technologies into their learning lives. Research from other countries has shown that students from rural backgrounds face challenges succeeding in higher education. In South Africa the system operates under certain constraints. For example, universities continue to receive applications from students who are ill-prepared for higher education, forcing the institutions to lower their standards/entry requirements or invest more money to train the students in computer literacy or basic academic disciplines (Belyako et al, 2009). A factor that was found to impact on students' premature departure or drop out from university and that has been the focus of a large number of studies internationally, is the level of social integration at the institution (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). The ease with which first-year students are able to become academically and socially integrated into the higher education environment significantly affects their chances of success (REAP, 2008). Because of the poorer quality of schooling they receive, disadvantaged students tend to lack the range of academic skills for example study skills, time management, demanded by higher education. They are also likely to struggle if their English is poor, especially since most of the work is carried out in English (Stephen, 2003).

Poverty disadvantages students from learning (Lee & Burkham, 2002). It is a reality that there are several discrepancies in higher education enrolment due to cultural factors such as the regional, urban/rural and family class backgrounds (UNESCO, 2015). Education enhances the earnings potential of the poor, research has shown the importance of education not only for earnings but also for labour force participation and employment. Educational attainment does matter for numeracy and literacy performance, but some other factors also have an influence, including race location, parent education, and economic status (Lee & Burkham, 2002). A study from Australia, identified students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds living in rural areas as a distinct group at greater risk of educational disadvantage (James, 2002).

The ease with which students become integrated into the academic environment is directly related to their success. It is apparent, however, that there is a degree of mismatch between disadvantaged students' backgrounds and experiences and the requirements of higher education that presents specific challenges to students' academic integration (REAP, 2008). Upon entering university students face a drastic change in their social circle where they are suddenly challenged to make new friendships (Paul & Brier, 2011). One study that examined the effects of peer groups (as measured by the socioeconomic status of students in a respondent's school) on teenage pregnancy and school dropout behaviour found that student body socioeconomic status seemed to be an important predictor of both dropout and teen pregnancy rates (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Peer characteristics may also directly affect student learning, (Jacob & Ludwig, 2009). Teenagers who have children are less likely to complete high school than their peers who do not have children (Hofferth, Reid, & Mott 2001). Bourn (2002) suggests that they can "easily lead to problems of achievement, by provoking anxiety and reducing the time available for study and socialising, which in turn might persuade the student to withdraw". In this way, financial hardship can impact on academic achievement and social integration and lead to feelings of isolation and alienation.

2.3 Social integration

Increase of access to higher education is essential for societies struggling to overcome socioeconomic inequalities. Higher education helps them break away from the poverty trap by addressing the structural issues of deprivation and inequality by offering social, occupational and economic upward mobility to everyone in society (UNESCO, 2015). In rural villages there are often well-matriculated youths who cannot afford to study further (Gardiner, 2008). The cost of a postsecondary education is a potential barrier to completing an undergraduate degree. Financial aid can help ease this burden. Financial aid includes assistance in the form of grants, loans, work-study, or any other type of aid (Aud et al, 2010). Once admitted to the university, students must make the transition from their home communities to life as a university student. This adjustment is challenging for most young people, but in particular for those who are members of a 'majority culture' and who need to become members of a more diverse, predominantly white culture with English and Afrikaans as the languages of instruction (Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss, 2003). During this time, the developmental challenge of transition to adulthood occurs.

The stresses associated with the transition to university add additional risk factors (Maunder, Gingham & Rogers, 2010; Montgomery & Côté, 2003). This frequently involves living away from home for the first time, having to make new friends, handle finances, adjusting to new learning regimes, and creating a new identity as a student (Adams & Moore, 2007; Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2010). The university induction and support systems tend to be less structured and less intense, the assumption being that students will have made friends and settled in during the first year. However, they may be studying different modules from the friends they made in first year or be in different seminar and tutorial groups. Their lecturers and support tutors are also likely to have changed. The compensatory exciting novelty value of university and independent living are likely to have dissipated by second year and student debt will have become a reality for many students. Student debt has been shown to be a significant stressor that impacts negatively on health in previous research (Spaull, 2013). In other words, there is a very strong correlation between educational attainment and standard of living. Some students develop personal behaviours and strategies that allow them to successfully complete their programmes in pursuit of personal and career goals (Davis et al, 2004). Others may be unable to cope with the

demands of university life and consequently depart from the institution. A number may change to another programme that is more in tune with their academic abilities, cultural preferences or financial means (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Depending on their home environment and setting, the physical and social environment of the university is new, overwhelming and intimidating to some students. More over the majority of students joining public universities have unexplained fears and expectations about university life and education. Remote rural populations are neglected or under-served by the school system in many low-income countries. In addition to the geographical factors that tend to isolate them, people living in remote rural areas may be further marginalized from the mainstream by ethnicity, culture, language, or religion, as well as their material poverty (Lakin & Gasperini, 2003). Furthermore, for some students, secondary schools' friends have gone different ways which makes the unfamiliar university community as well as schedules add to the first year students' anxieties (Wangari et al, 2012). In order to successfully deal with the challenges of first year, students are required to implement certain social and academic skills that they should have learnt prior to university (Moos, 2009). The academic, financial and social challenges associated with university can make this a very stressful time for students (Hussain, Guppy, Robertson & Temple, 2013).

Sennett et al (2003) identify some potential transitions facing many black students entering university for the first time, such as adaptations from a traditional African to a modern Western culture, from a rural to an urban environment, and from an identity as "the high achiever in a small community" to only one of many such students in a larger, more diverse setting. According to Van der Berg (2002) the pupils who have furthest to catch up are those in rural areas, where socio-economic status, including education of parents, is weakest, and where good teachers are hard to come by. Although resources matter, greater resource inputs alone cannot much improve this situation, without a fundamental reorganisation in how schools function.

Poverty also interacts with other points of social disadvantage, with the interaction of factors putting further pressure on vulnerable and marginalised children to drop out (Hunt, 2008). For example, orphans, migrants, lower caste/scheduled tribe children and children from minority language groups in many, but not all, contexts have disrupted access, and are more prone to drop out. Poor indigenous girls in Guatemala are far more likely to drop out than non-poor, non-indigenous girls (UNESCO, 2010).

Gendered social practices within households, communities and schools, influence differing patterns of access for girls and boys. In most contexts girls have less access and are more prone to dropping out, but increasingly, often in poor and urban environments, the pressure seems to be on boys to withdraw. Within gendered social practices, institute safety seems to be an important factor for retaining girls at school, whereas availability of income generating opportunities and flexible seasonal schooling could promote school retention for boys (Leach et al., 2003). It is also evident that children whose parents have received some sort of schooling are more likely themselves to attend school for longer. In particular, a mother's education level often influences length of access for girls. For example, in rural Pakistan, girls whose mothers have some sort of formal schooling are less likely to drop out from school (Lloyd, Mete & Grant, 2009).

Hundreds of studies have documented the association between family poverty and children's health, achievement, and behaviour (Lee & Burkham, 2002). The widening participation for previously disadvantaged groups provided access for students with lower educational qualifications and lower levels of academic literacy to university (Sommer, 2013). McGivney (2001) states that this might lead to a decrease in academic performance and those students will find it even more difficult to adjust to university when they are struggling academically. Lower-class pupils are seriously disadvantaged in the competition for educational credentials (Sullivan, 2002). A major factor in student drop-out, cited by students of all race groups almost equally, is their poor academic and social preparation for tertiary education in school, other major factors that disadvantaged students experience, that relate more to their background, are having to study in a second or third language, to which rural students in particular may have had little exposure (REAP, 2008).

REAP (2008) reports that majority of disadvantaged students sampled in a study (especially rural students) reported experiencing acute feelings of social alienation and homesickness, especially at the beginning of their first year, when not only the culture of the campus environment and its people, but also the city, were still new and strange. Students reported that peer pressure was a challenge for them in achieving this balance. Peer pressure to socialise seemed to be stronger in the student residences. Related to peer pressure, was the importance of choosing the right friends, and many

students spoke of initially falling in with groups of students who were not serious about their studies.

2.4 Academic integration

Several student background and personal characteristics have been implicated as putting students at risk of educational failure. Such characteristics include minority group status, living with a single-parent, limited English proficiency, low parental educational achievement, and disabled status (Thompkins & Deloney, 1994). According to Coley and Baker (2013) such substantial differences in the backgrounds of children who attend different U.S. schools pose unique challenges to improving the educational and economic opportunities available to these children. Concentrated poverty and large income disparities reduce the extent to which lower- and higher-income children interact in institutes and classrooms as peers, largely to the educational disadvantage of the lower-income students. Child outcomes links between poverty and outcomes can reasonably be attributed to income and other family characteristics such as maternal age at the child's birth, maternal education, marital status and ethnicity (Lee & Burkham, 2002).

Research suggests that an understanding of community context is important in comprehending how rural (and other) schools function, and in determining the causes of educational failure. Student outcomes can often be explained by differences in the composition of neighbourhoods, with poor neighbourhoods negatively affecting student outcomes (Khattri et al, 1997). Students from low-income homes often attend lower quality schools and are taught by poorer quality teachers with lower expectations for achievement, thereby perpetuating inequalities at the "starting gate" (Lee & Burkham, 2002). It has also been noted that students with psychological problems experience disruptions in their developmental and educational tasks. As a result, students may not be able to perform well or obtain good achievement in their academic pursuit (Zulkefly & Baharudin, 2010).

Formal education is seen as a part of all other important activities, and people understand very well how living conditions affect families, children and teachers. People that we have met through research projects have demonstrated a keen understanding of how learning and education are influenced by socio-economic conditions (Gardiner, 2008). Literature has shown that, poverty does correlate with

increases in disruption or behavioural disorders (Skiba & William, 2014). It is the connection between poverty and agency, a recognition that being marked out as ‘poor’ leaves you disempowered and unable to participate, that gives the concept of social exclusion its resonance. Poor learners are marginalised particularly in contexts of inequality where institutional and social processes work in concert to pathologise poverty. The experience of shame at failing to live up to the social and economic norm, on being dependent on those who are paying fees, may leave poor learners less secure in making claims on educational access (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012).

In all countries, poverty presents a chronic stress for children and families that may interfere with successful adjustment to developmental tasks, including school achievement. Children raised in low-income families are at risk for academic and social problems as well as poor health and well-being, which can in turn undermine educational achievement (Engle & Black, 2008). Study after study has documented the negative relationship between poverty and its associated conditions and a wide range of measures of educational achievement, educational attainment, and other important life outcomes. Adults who grew up in poverty are more likely to have low earnings and exhibit negative behaviours and health outcomes (Coley & Baker 2013). So children raised in poverty will also achieve less in school. Analyses show strong positive relationships between socioeconomic status and student achievement across countries, across age levels, and across academic areas of study (Engle and Black, 2008).

A study by Lakin and Gasperini (2003), pupils in urban schools generally develop better literacy, numeracy and ‘life skills’ than do pupils in rural schools. Poor households are also marked by a lower vocabulary attainment than is the case for non-poor households, which reflects differences in exposure to language that are carried into schools. While there are numerous studies about the transition to university of disadvantaged students (as defined economically), there appear to be few that focus specifically on those from rural areas, and those specifically from poor rural areas (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014). Kapp and Bangeni (2011) describe some of the challenges students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (many from rural areas) face in negotiating aspects of academic literacy at university. Hart and Risley (1995) show that there is substantial variation in the acquired vocabularies of children from different family backgrounds. In South Africa, this problem is further

exacerbated by the fact that the vast majority of students come from households where the language of instruction is not the language spoken at home (Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold, 2003). For students who attended schools in rural areas or predominantly black urban areas, English was a second or third additional language (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Van Wyk (2008) mentions in this regard that language and the acquisition of knowledge go hand in hand which puts black students at a definite disadvantage when receiving instruction in English. Providing equal educational opportunities to students who may not be proficient in English presents a growing challenge to institutions. Students who speak a language other than English at home and speak English with difficulty may be in need of special services (Aud et al, 2010).

Languages are not only about getting something done or for reaching a specific goal. They carry cultural loads and histories, and they shape how people think and understand the world. In South Africa, current language in- education policy is to maintain the home language (also referred to as the mother tongue) while providing access to the effective use of at least one additional language. Most South African children are taught in their mother tongue at the beginning of their formal schooling and then they switch to a different language of learning and teaching. That different language is usually English (Gardiner, 2008). The students interviewed frequently mentioned that black students are not adequately proficient in English which resulted in academic difficulties as well as a widening communication gap between black and white students (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Given the high levels of illiteracy among adults and the infrequent exposure to languages like English at fluent and competent levels, rural children have little opportunity to live, think and work in a language environment beyond that of their mother tongue (Gardiner, 2008).

Unequal educational attainment stems from differential predispositions to learning. These predispositions are, however, not entirely predetermined (through, for instance, genetic transfer), but can be augmented by the environment. In the field of sociology, for instance, there is a considerable body of research which shows that children from higher social classes are primed to succeed at school as a result of their parental interactions (Bernstein, 1975).

Clearly, differences in family background help explain a large share of the variation in academic achievement outcomes across children. Poor children have substantially

lower achievement test scores than non-poor children as young as ages three or four, before they even start school (Jacob & Ludwig, 2009). The socio-economic and demographic backgrounds of children are among the main factors behind disparities in school progress among population groups. African student's performance levels are lower than other racial groups in part because of their socioeconomic backgrounds (Timaeus, Simelane & Letsoalo, 2011) One of the best ways to avoid being poor as an adult is to obtain a good education. People who have higher levels of academic achievement and more years of schooling earn more than those with lower levels of human capital (Jacob & Ludwig, 2009).

The relationship between student behaviour problems and poor academic achievement has been well documented (Skiba & William, 2014). Poverty may bite hardest in relation to others – in that where children are equally poor they may be less likely to drop out as a result of poverty than those where there is a greater socio-economic mix it is this difference, however small, that is key (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert (2012) further explain that even small differences in household income or socio-economic status can leave learners open to being teased. Some learners living in the informal settlement in Phagameng were singled out by learners from low income households living in the formal township for being 'dirty' and 'poor'. In Letseka & Breier's study, (2008), several interviewees spoke of students who were so poor they often went hungry and because of the stigma associated with "food insecurity" they often tried to conceal the fact. Such an argument holds that students of colour, being exposed to greater family and community disadvantage, are less likely to learn socially appropriate strategies for self-control and interpersonal interaction students exposed to such disadvantage arrive at institutions, the reasoning holds, they will be more likely to engage in disruptive behaviour, unfortunately placing them at greater risk for a range of disciplinary consequences (Skiba & William, 2014).

The main concern of many university students around the world is related to finances. Considering the challenges, the bursaries were critical for providing the financial support needed for students to pursue tertiary studies because poverty poses a serious challenge to a child's ability to succeed in education (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Research has suggested that living in poverty in the early childhood years can lead to lower rates of school completion (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Further, growing up in poverty can negatively affect a child's physical health as well as his or her working

memory, due to the chronic psychological stress of living in poverty (Evans & Schamberg, 2009). Poverty has the potential to impact the academic achievement of any student living in impoverished circumstances in profoundly negative ways. Thus, poverty plays a role in the poor academic outcomes of the disproportionately high numbers of African American students who live in low income homes. There is evidence to suggest that poverty has an impact on school attendance patterns in South Africa. Studies undertaken in 2002 suggest that poverty may delay entry into school (Lee & Burkham, 2002). The study found that children who received the grant (in 2002) were significantly more likely to be enrolled in institutions for the first time in the years following receipt of the grant than equally poor children of the same age (Case, Hosegood & Lund, 2005).

2.5 Prevalence of mental health problems among students

The number of children enrolled in school has increased over time. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of them are not completing this cycle (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). It goes without saying that life in the university is stressful. Stress arises due to a variety of factors such as social adjustment to the environment, assignments, peer relationship, peer pressure to achieve high score in exams. The ability to adjust to stress depends on the individual coping strategies. Over exposure to stress can cause physical, emotional and mental health problems (Talwar & Rahman, 2015). Psychological health, is defined as a state of being in which a student is balanced both emotionally and intellectually. A psychologically healthy student can think clearly, developing socially and learning new skills with ease. However, as students are at a crucial stage of development, they are more prone to experience mental illness in the transition from being an adolescent to an adult (Montgomery & Cote, 2003).

Mental ill-health issues for the university student population can lead to negative outcomes such as risky health behaviour, poor academic performance and attrition, physical illness, antisocial behaviour, and suicide (Hussain et al, 2013). Burnout or stress-reactions are conceived of as reactions to a pressing environment, psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder, depression anxiety (Kaistha et al, 2013). Psychological distress can cause physical negative ailments on the human body which is why especially health psychologists promote psychological health. For example, most college students experience headaches and stomach-aches. These rarely

indicate cancer or other serious biological problems. Most of the time they are consequences of emotional reactions or stress which is psychological or problems with relationships which are social and cultural (Giugliano, 2004; Baum, Perry & Tarbell, 2004). While financial hardships on their own may not be sufficient cause for student withdrawal, and should not be viewed in isolation from academic and socio-cultural factors, it has been suggested by Bourn (2002) that they can “easily lead to problems of achievement, by provoking anxiety and reducing the time available for study and socialising, which in turn might persuade the student to withdraw” (REAP, 2008). The quality and effectiveness of schooling and other forms of basic education should translate into learning achievement and positive changes in behaviour (Lakin & Gasperini, 2003).

The poor are concentrated in the former homelands – Bophutatswana (north- West), Ciskei & Transkei (Eastern Cape), KwaZulu (KZN), Lebowa & Venda (Limpopo Province), the peri-urban areas and the townships. 74% of the poor live in rural areas, 15% live in small towns, 4% live in the secondary cities (e.g. Pietermaritzburg) and 7% live in the major metropolitan centres (namely Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria / Johannesburg). 62% of the rural population are poor, compared with 32% of those in small towns, 25% in the secondary cities and 13% in metropolitan areas (Woolard, 2002). The poverty rates of South Africa's nine provinces differ significantly, as do those of the urban and rural areas of the country (Armstrong, Lekezwa & Siebrits, 2008). In general terms, rural children and adults – most of whom are poor – have very limited opportunities to obtain a viable basic education that would help them break out of the poverty cycle (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003).

From an economic perspective, families with more income are better able to purchase inputs such as nutritious meals, houses in safer neighbourhoods, and better schools, thus positively influencing the development of their children. From a psychological or sociological perspective, the quality of family relationships and high-quality parental interactions with children that are associated with higher income aids in child development (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011). Children in chronically impoverished families have lower cognitive and academic performance and more behaviour problems than children who are not exposed to poverty, partially explained by a lack of stimulating behaviours and home experiences among low-income families (Engle & Black, 2008).

Previous studies have revealed the stark realities of racial inequalities in higher education (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Family income has selective but, in some instances, quite substantial effects on child and adolescent well-being (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997) At the same time, the fact that poor children are geographically concentrated in neighbourhoods that are segregated by race and social class presents special challenges for education policy (Jacob & Ludwig, 2009). Studies demonstrate that problematic emotional outcomes are associated with family poverty. These conditions have, in turn, been associated with reduced IQ and other measures of cognitive functioning and school dropout in older children and youths (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Household and community dynamics play an important role in determining the welfare status of children. The composition of households determines the early environment as well as the nature of opportunities a child will be exposed to, and will impact on the financial and non-financial investment in children (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). Many studies have found that a child's home environment—opportunities for learning, and the physical condition of the home—account for a substantial portion of the effects of family income on cognitive outcomes (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The causal relationship between finances and academic success cannot be underestimated. Most of the participants related a lack of finances to lower academic achievement (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Poverty exacts a heavy toll on children, poor children suffer higher incidences of adverse health, developmental, and other outcomes than nonpoor children (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Poverty has many dimensions, among which low consumption is only one, linked to others: malnutrition, illiteracy, low life expectancy, insecurity, powerlessness and low self-esteem (IFAD, 2001). Parents who are poor are likely to be less healthy, both emotionally and physically, than those who are not poor. And parental irritability and depressive symptoms are associated with more conflictual interactions with adolescents, leading to less satisfactory emotional, social, and cognitive development. Some studies have established that parental mental health accounts for some of the effect of economic circumstances on child health and behaviour (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Depression is a major mental health issue worldwide, and university students with heavy burdens of study are at a high risk for depression (Lei, Xiao, Liu & Li, 2016). Parents, practitioners, and policymakers are recognizing the importance of young

people's mental health. Youth with better mental health are physically healthier, demonstrate more socially positive behaviours and engage in fewer risky behaviours. Conversely, youth with mental health problems, such as depression, are more likely to engage in health risk behaviours (Knopf, Park & Mulye, 2008). Rural background was positively associated with depression, which was in turn associated with suicidal ideation. Evidence indicated that a person's rural background might be a marker for the experience of a range of socio-economic adversities as well as fewer social, economic and cultural benefits as compared to urban populations, which probably puts individuals with rural background at increased risk. Social factors such as socioeconomic status of the family were negatively associated with depression and anxiety symptoms (Meng, Li, Loerbroks Wu & Chen, 2013). Depression is one of the most widely studied mental health conditions because of its large burden on individuals, families, and society and its links to suicide. Depression is the most widely reported disorder, with over a quarter of adolescents affected by at least mild depressive symptoms (Knopf et al, 2008). University students with depressive symptoms also stated that negative life events had a great impact on their lives, suggesting that they not only experienced a high frequency of negative life events but also felt a great degree of stress resulting from these negative life events. Findings also suggested that negative life events, such as separation of parents and financial deficits, were direct source of stimulation inducing depression (Lei et al, 2016).

Family income determines access to a variety of important basics such as food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. When these necessities are inadequate, a child's health can be compromised with deleterious effects on a wide-ranging array of learning factors, including school attendance and cognitive development (Lee & Burkham, 2002). Homes where parents cannot provide financially for their children are characterized by high levels of stress and can create a context ripe for the emergence of behavioural and socio-emotional difficulties, which impede learning (McLoyd, 1990). The household that a child is born into dramatically affects the development and thus life outcomes of that individual. Poor households often present their children with a more disabling environment. It is therefore more likely that children born into poor households will not adequately develop the necessary socio-emotional and cognitive skills for success in later life (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). Poor children suffer from emotional and behavioural problems more frequently than non-poor children.

Emotional outcomes are often grouped along two dimensions: externalizing behaviours including aggression, fighting, and acting out, and internalizing behaviours such as anxiety, social withdrawal, and depression (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Social exclusion or social withdrawal means feeling disconnected from broader society and manifests as non-participation in the various activities which children from wealthier homes can partake in, including particular types of consumption, recreational and leisure activities and attending social or cultural events. This form of deprivation also extends to the development of stimulating relations among peers and other members of society who provide part of a child's 'informal education' (Ridge, 2006). Developing social relations requires investments of both time and money. Financially constrained parents are unable to support the activities their children. Also, single parents who have to perform multiple duties (at work and at home) may be incapable of adequately engaging their children at home, thereby depriving them of an important input into their socio-emotional development which, as discussed above, influences later life outcomes (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014).

Life transitions in general are times of risk for increased alcohol use and abuse (Ross & DeJong, 2008). The initial financial barriers to higher education, coupled with constraints caused by other working-class issues place additional stress on rural students who desire to attain a college degree. The correlation between family structure and drug-using students is also noteworthy (Yip et al, 2011). Depression, anxiety, chronic social isolation, substantial financial distress and social pressure elicit the use of alcohol and drugs (Ross & DeJong, 2008). Neighbourhoods influence the behavioural choices of individuals which then feed back into an emergent property of the neighbourhood (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). Students who use alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs such as marijuana are more likely than their peers to experience low academic achievement, truancy, and other discipline-related issues (Bryant et al. 2003; Bryant & Zimmerman 2002). A higher percentage of White and Black young adults ages 18 to 25 reported using marijuana (18% and 16%, respectively), (Aud et al, 2010). Some youth drug users regard drug use as an alternative way of life, being part of a social norm within the youth subculture (Yip et al, 2011). Teens in rural areas appear to prefer alcohol, while youth in larger communities display higher rates of drug use (Thompkins & Deloney, 1994).

Tertiary institutions in South Africa also experienced an impressive growth in student numbers and historically white universities experienced a dramatic shift in demographics. This widened access resulted in an increased enrolment of black students, however, the number of these students who successfully complete their courses is alarmingly low (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Sabates et al (2010) state that although there has been progress in improving school participation since the 1990 World Conference on Education for all in Jomtien, there are still large inequalities in dropout rates according to wealth, gender and location in many countries. Poverty is also often given as an important reason for why learners drop out of school in South Africa (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). In support, Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert (2012) state that data shows that poverty remains a driver of school drop out in the South African case. School dropout is a concern for many countries in Africa such as Botswana, Niger, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Benin, with other students dropping out in primary school due to poverty. For other countries initial enrolment rates are low, dropout rates are relatively high. This is due to the fact that for older children the opportunity cost of schooling increases significantly and with this a pressure to work or to get married (UNESCO, 2005). In Kenya in 2003, the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds without access to education was 9.1 percent. Of those who attended school, 16.1 percent dropped out without completing (Sabates et al, 2010).

South Africa shows high levels of school enrolment for long into the population age, and yet low levels of completion (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Poverty remains a factor in school drop-out despite pro-poor policies to address barriers to access. This is partly because poor learners continue to be faced with other access costs (Strassburg et al, 2010), close to 50% of undergraduates drop out (Macfarlane, 2006). In 2005 the Department of Education reported that of the 120 000 students who enrolled in higher education in 2000, 36 000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study in South Africa (Letseka & Maile, 2008). In 2007, a similar pattern was evident in America: a higher percentage of Hispanics were status dropouts (21 percent) than Blacks (8 percent), Asians/ Pacific Islanders (6 percent), and Whites (5 percent), and the percentages of Blacks and American Indians/ Alaska Natives (19 percent) who were status dropouts were higher than the percentages of Whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders who were status dropouts (Aud et al, 2010).

There are many factors associated with drop out, some of which belong to the individual, and others emerge from student's household situations such as poverty (Sabates et al, 2010). The most common reasons for leaving school, affecting just over 50% of children and youths included: general financial pressures at home (leading to a decision to leave school and seek work); family responsibilities in the context of low household income (such as having to look after siblings); as well as the vulnerability of poor households to financial and other shocks, such as when family members die or become ill (Strassburg et al, 2010). In general, the dropout rate without completing education for students living in rural areas is higher than for those living in urban areas (Sabates et al, 2010). The drop out phenomenon does therefore not bode well for efforts to break the vicious cycle of poverty and is the major cause of the unacceptable low throughput rates in the higher education system (Letseka & Breier, 2008).

2.6 Black African context in South African universities

The vicious cycle of financial disadvantage and academic under-performance which originated under apartheid still prevails at some of South Africa's high education institutes (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Poverty has recently re-emerged as the focus of development efforts at the international level, governments in many developing countries are trying to shape the evolution of rural life through economic development policy (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003). As a result, black students account for over 72% of enrolments in higher education in South Africa, however, the number of these students who successfully complete their courses is alarmingly low (Steyn, Harris & Hartell, 2014). Despite massive resource shifts to black schools, overall results actually deteriorated in the post-apartheid period, thus the school system contributes little to supporting the upward mobility of poor children (Van der Berg, 2002). Relationship between income and schooling appears to be related to a number of confounding factors such as parental education, family structure, and neighbourhood characteristics (Brooke-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Living standards are closely correlated with race in South Africa. While poverty is not confined to any one racial group in South Africa, it is concentrated among blacks, particularly Africans (Woolard, 2002). The lack of basic learning opportunities is both a contributing cause and an effect of rural poverty in the low-income countries. Even

where schools exist, various economic and social obstacles prevent some children, especially girls, from enrolling. The opportunity cost of schooling is one of the main obstacles for poor families (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003). But education has been envisioned as the great equalizer, able to mitigate the effects of poverty on children by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to lead successful and productive lives. Unfortunately, this promise has been more of a myth than reality. Despite some periods of progress, the achievement gap between White and Black students remains substantial (Barton & Coley, 2010). Woolard (2002) stressed the dominance of race, gender and location as deep markers of poverty and inequality in South Africa. Since 1995, the average number of years of educational attainment among 18-24-year-olds in South Africa has increased by about 0,83 years. However, while there has been a significant increase in the absolute number of youths enrolling at tertiary training institutions between 1995 and 2010, particularly for the black population (Spaull, 2013).

The study of education has formed an integral part of the discourse around poverty-traps and social mobility. Many researchers have argued that education is one of the principal mechanisms for promoting social mobility as well as dismantling poverty traps (OECD, 2010). Family income appears to be more strongly related to children's ability and achievement, (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The quality of education still varies considerably. This is again not unique to South Africa (Van Der Berg, 2002). Much of the observed relationship between income and schooling appears to be related to a number of confounding factors such as parental education, family structure, and neighbourhood characteristics (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The persistence of former racial inequalities is reflected in extremely poor pass rates in mainly black schools (the majority of schools) data show that racial composition of schools remains a major explanatory factor besides socio-economic background (as measured by school fees set by school governing bodies) and educational inputs (Van Der Berg, 2002). Poor parents are constrained in their choice of neighbourhoods and schools. Low income may lead to residence in extremely poor neighbourhoods characterized by social disorganization (crime, many unemployed adults, neighbours not monitoring the behaviour of adolescents) and few resources for child development (playgrounds, child care, health care facilities, parks, after-school programs). The affluence of neighbourhoods is associated with child and adolescent outcomes (intelligence test

scores at ages 3 and 5 and high school graduation rates by age 20) over and above family poverty (Brook-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). For example, in America education is provided through a mixed system of public and private institutions, involving vastly disparate access to resources across and within sectors and characterized by substantial degrees of student segregation across and within schooling sectors by race, ethnicity, language proficiency, economic status, and disability (Coley & Baker 2013).

Although universities in South Africa went to great lengths structurally to accommodate and include black students in terms of access to higher education, there remains evidence that these changes were insufficient to address educational disadvantages (Hannaway, 2012). Although many black students receive NSFAS or other loans or bursaries, a number of factors make is insufficient to cover all their needs. Even the fullest loan/bursary is unlikely to cover more than accommodation and food. The extra student needs (as toiletries and transport) must come from alternative sources of income (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Sedlacek (1999) maintains that in addition to the usual institutional pressures to adapt successfully to academic life, a black student must typically cope with cultural biases and consequently learn how to link his or her black culture to the prevailing one at the historically white university. Performance in black schools cannot be explained by differences in resources, and only to a limited extent by differences in socio-economic status. Moreover, the greatest improvement in educational chances for black children probably arise for those who can afford to send their children to historically white institutions or to private institutions, where pass rates are far greater (Van Der Berg, 2002). The government has decided that the costs of getting working-class children to university are too high. Relatively low levels of public funding for tertiary education translate into higher fees, effectively shutting out the poor and reducing the ability of universities to contribute to social and economic development (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

Since 1994, South Africa has experienced a huge increase in the proportion of black students in higher education. The government also provided an incentive by giving more funding to institutions that admitted more students from disadvantaged groups (Belyako et al, 2009). However black Africans and coloureds, sections of society that bore the brunt of exclusion by apartheid education policies and legislation, continue to lag behind in education success rates (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Twenty years into

South Africa's democracy, race is still a powerful predictor of deprivation and, consequently, future deprivation for today's children (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). Although the country is no longer segregated according to race, the effects of apartheid's race-based systems remain. Most of the poor people in the country are not white, and most of middle and upper-class people are. This means that the effects of poverty are felt by particular race groups, especially black people (Youth Group Fact, 2011). Affluent institutions like the University of Pretoria have invested huge amounts to attract black students, especially into previously white majors such as veterinary science, climatology, and engineering. Special budgets and sponsorships are available for these students. However, other institutions do not have similar resources. (Belyako et al, 2009).

Steep university fees contribute to the continued under-representation of black students, which threatens to replicate racial inequality in higher education well into the future. In 2005, 30% of all university students were white, compared with 37% in 1995. Government tried to help by setting up the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). In real terms, NSFAS loans to students increased fivefold between 1995 and 2005. But each award averaged only R10 000 in 2005 — a fraction of the cost of a university degree (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Some of these students will have passed their senior certificate with endorsement, merit or distinction. Many of these students come from poverty-stricken families and are indebted to the NSFAS and other education funding agencies which support their studies (Letseka & Breier, 2008). "Quality institutions" are faced with the task of increasing the number of previously disadvantaged students they accept, making better use of available resources, and enhancing the quality of outputs, particularly graduates' knowledge and skills, and their ability to create new knowledge. However, students from impoverished families are less likely to pursue postgraduate studies because of pressure on them to become income earners (Belyako et al, 2009). Poverty in blacks is also more widespread in rural areas and households that are headed by women are twice as likely to be poor than male-headed households (Youth Group Fact, 2011). One important factor is the number of parents in the home. Children growing up in single-parent families are more likely, on average, to experience a range of negative outcomes in school and later in life (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004). Their 'privileged' counterparts are defined as being in the top income quintile, having both biological parents living in the household

with at least one parent having completed high school or achieved a higher education (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014).

Since the transition to independence in South Africa, considerable resources have been marshalled towards increasing access to education, which has translated into high enrolment rates. This was not accompanied by improved performance, however, and the quality gap between former white and former black schools remains (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). There are wide disparities in the graduation rates of black and white students and that evidence suggests that the average graduation rate for white students tended to be more than double that of black students (Letseka & Breier, 2008). South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world, according to the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) compiled by the Department of Education in 2001. Higher education institutions produce an insufficient number of graduates, particularly black graduates (Letseka & Maile, 2008). A variety of variables typically associated with poverty, including presence of mother or father in the home, number of siblings, and quality of home resources (Skiba & WIliams, 2014). Only 47% of black male students graduated on time from U.S. high schools in 2008, compared to 78% of White male students (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Black male students are often comparatively less prepared than are others for the rigors of college level academic work (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). Black undergraduate men, like some other racial minority students at predominantly white institutions, routinely encounter racist stereotypes and racial micro aggressions that undermine their achievement and sense of belonging (Bonner II, 2010).

Racial composition of schools remains a major explanatory factor besides socio-economic background and educational inputs (Van der Berg, 2002). The average graduation rate for white students is more than double that of black students (Letseka & Breier, 2008). Student home background influences not only how well students progress through school, but also the quality of how well they learn and race still appears to be the principal factor determining differential pass rates, followed by economic status (Van der Berg, 2002). According to the Student Pathways study black families are particularly poor (with parents and guardians earning R1 600 or less a month in some cases) and the majority of black parents fell into the categories "no formal education and some secondary education". Yet many of the students coming from these families depended on their parents for financial support to pay fees and /

or supplement what they got from NSFAS in order to provide for essential living expenses. Many of the students indicated that they engaged in full-time, part-time or odd-jobs to augment their meagre financial resources, no doubt adding to their stress levels and distracting them from their studies (Letseka & Breier, 2008). In part this low throughput rate may be attributed to a difference in life experiences as a result of students' social, educational, cultural and economic backgrounds, which manifests in unequal levels of readiness for studies in higher education (Steyn et al, 2014).

Despite massive resource shifts to black schools, overall matriculation results in South Africa have deteriorated in the post-apartheid period (Van Der Berg, 2002). Letseka and Breier (2008) comment that the average graduation rate for white students is more than double that of black students. Thus race (or what lies behind this variable) still appears to be the principal factor determining differential matriculation pass rates, followed by economic status (school fees). There is clear poverty dominance, with more education of the household head always being associated with less household level poverty. But at higher education levels (matric or more), where poverty is far less prevalent, other factors (e.g. race, location, household size and composition, or education of other household members) intervene to reduce the role of educational attainment (Van Der Berg, 2002). There has been a substantial amount of research exploring connections between race, poverty and student behaviour (Skiba & WIliams 2014). Amongst blacks, educational inequality largely follows the lines of income: more affluent households are better able to support their children through school, implying increasing stratification within black society. Children from the top two black deciles progress considerably better through the school system than their poorer counterparts (Van Der Berg, 2002).

Poor South African children, who are for the most part black or coloured and located in the historically disadvantaged part of the basic education system, are at risk of perpetuating the poverty cycle into which they were born (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014). In South Africa a small group of privileged learners attend well-resourced and previously advantaged state schools or private schools where they receive good to excellent education (Steyn et al, 2014). The pupils who have furthest to catch up are those in rural areas, where socio-economic status, including education of parents, is weakest, and where good teachers are hard to come by (Van der Berg, 2002). Despite the desegregation of the South African education system and the more equitable

allocation of resources, traditional black schools are still to a great extent disadvantaged and are therefore failing in preparing students sufficiently for tertiary demands (Griffin & Allen, 2006). Black students once they engage in their studies they often experience the transition from school to university as daunting since they are faced with increasing linguistic demands, more rigorous performance requirements and diverse cultural environments which may conflict with their personal values and beliefs (Steyn et al, 2014).

2.7 Role of theory in the study: The developmental task theory by Robert Havighurst

Robert Havighurst and a group of researchers recognised the need to combine the drive toward growth of the individual with the demands, constraints, and opportunities provided by the social environment such as the family, school, peer group and community. The research group began to talk about a series of problems or life-adjustment tasks to be achieved by the growing person in relation to his environment. Eventually the phrase developmental task came into use (Havighurst, 1973). The term developmental task refers to tasks which arise in a social context during an individual's lifetime. It is a task which an individual has to and wants to solve in a particular life-period (Uhlendorff, 2004).

Havighurst makes use of Erikson's psychosocial tasks as central to his various age periods, but looks also for two principal sources of developmental tasks. These are a) the biological changes of the body, that present the individual with new opportunities, needs, and problems of adjustment; and, b) the expectations of the society, that present the individual with a number of changing social roles that change with age and are expected of him by the society and by himself. Thus, Havighurst's theory is primarily based on biological development and social expectations which change through the life span and give direction, force, and substance to the development of personality (Havighurst, 1973). However, there are developmental tasks which can only be solved under certain social circumstances. A successful socialisation depends on whether one can successfully cope with the general developmental task (Uhlendorff, 2004).

2.8 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, the literature pertaining to transition from high school to university was reviewed. In this regard, it was noted that the new student experiences some developmental challenges of adolescence coupled with the adjustive demands of the new environment. The social and academic integration that is associated with being a new student were also highlighted. Literature pertaining to the prevalence of mental health problems among university students, including the peculiarities of being a Black student in the South African university context was reviewed. Finally, the chapter also touched on Robert Havinghurst's Developmental Task Theory which formed the theoretical framework for the present study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The current chapter draws attention to the research methodology. The chapter highlights the research design that was utilised, techniques followed and how data was collected and analysed.

3.2 Research design

This is a quantitative study that made use of the cross-sectional sample survey research design. In a cross-sectional sample survey, information is collected from subjects who are a subset of a population at a point in time. Quantitative researchers seek explanations and predictions that will generate to other persons and places. The intent is to establish, confirm, or validate relationships and to develop generalizations that contribute to theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The findings from quantitative research can be predictive, explanatory, and confirming (Williams, 2007). According to Sukamolson (2007) survey research uses scientific sampling and questionnaire design to measure characteristics of the population with statistical precision. It seeks to provide answers to such questions as "How many people feel a certain way?", and "How often do they do certain behaviour?" It provides estimates from a sample that can be related to the entire population with a degree of certainty.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling frame, which is the list or procedure defining the population from which the sample will be drawn, was the list of all first year entering students registered at the University of Limpopo in all the four faculties. Convenient sampling was used in this study to draw a sample from the list of students.

The following equation was used to calculate the number of participants needed for the sample (Cochran,1963):

$$no = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

z=1.96 (95% confidence),

p=expected proportion or prevalence of distressed students

$\frac{43+47,1+36}{3}$= 42%

q=1-p,

e= 0.05

therefore no= $\frac{(1.96)^2(0.42)(1-0.42)}{(0.05)^2}$

=374

Adjust for the population size (Israel, 1992):

n=$\frac{no}{1+\frac{(no-1)}{N}}$ = $\frac{350}{1+\frac{(374-1)}{2100}}$ = 318

Rounded off to the nearest 100 = 300

Based on the above sampling technique the researcher put up station to fill in the forms, outside the University of Limpopo library where most students go to study. First entering students were invited to fill in the forms after a brief explanation of what the study was about. Every student was to present their student card before filling in the forms to ensure that they were indeed first year. Both males (n= 135) and females (n= 165) were utilised in this study. The study sample consisted of 300 first year students, who were drawn from the University of Limpopo. In the year 2017, the University of Limpopo had enrolled 4 683 first year students.

3.4 Data collection tool

For the purpose of the present study, the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was chosen as the tool for data collection for psychological problems faced by university students at the University of Limpopo (See Appendix 1 for the GHQ-12). The GHQ-12 is a measure of current mental health (Montazeri et al, 2003). The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) has been used widely for measuring and detecting psychological morbidity in different settings and cultures (Normala et al, 2014). The scale asks

whether the respondent has experienced a particular symptom or behaviour recently. The GHQ-12 is a brief, simple, self-administered, easy to complete screening tool (Montazeri et al, 2003). To collect demographic data, a self-developed form tapping into aspects such as gender, age, socioeconomic status was used (see Appendix 2 for a Demographic Data form). The General Health Questionnaire was administered to 300 students outside the university library where the researcher was stationed. It took generally about 10 minutes for each student to fill in the questionnaire. The researcher ensured that the students answer all the questions on the questionnaire.

3.5 Procedure

After the aim and objectives were thoroughly explained to each participant, before participating, 300 students signed the consent forms and filled in the questionnaire. No force or coercion was used on the participants, every participant understood that they were free to discontinue if they felt uncomfortable. Participants were also assured of their confidentiality and to follow through participants are identified by numbers on the questionnaires.

One hundred and twenty four were males and one hundred and seventy six were females. The individuals were encouraged to be truthful and not to copy each other. The questionnaires were collected soon after one was done filling it in. Completion of the questionnaire by the participants took an average of 10 minutes. No information was released in any way to link the participants to specific responses.

3.6 Data analysis

In the view that this study is of a quantitative nature, the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software 24.0 version was used to analyse data. A bimodal scale of 0-0-1-1 was used for scoring. A descriptive analysis was performed to determine the distributional characteristics of all the variables studied, including the students' level of psychological health. The totals, means, standard deviation, p-value along with the minimum and maximum scores on the GHQ, were calculated. Chi-square test and a *t*-test were carried out to measure the difference between two variables on the prevalence or mean of psychological distress according to the various participants' gender and source of fees. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to highlight the differences in means of psychological distress according to socio-economic

background and type of community one's high school was, in cases where there were more than two factors.

3.7 Reliability and validity

Joppe (2000) defines reliability as the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is reliable. Golafshani (2003) adds on that reliability measures the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same which is the stability of a measurement over time; and the similarity of measurements within a given time period. Reliability for quantitative research focuses mainly on stability and consistency (Polit & Beck 2010). In this study reliability was observed to obtain accurate results by conducting a pilot study before data collection.

Joppe (2000) states that validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. Therefore, the validity was maximized to make the research produce credible results. To ensure that the questionnaire adequately addresses all aspects of the issues being studied a pilot study was conducted.

3.8 Ethical considerations

3.8.1 Permission to conduct the study

Prior to commencement of data collection, the researcher obtained permission from the ethics committee of the University of Limpopo (see Appendix 5).

3.8.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

The researcher assured the participants that confidentiality and anonymity would be observed. In this regard, participants were assured that information obtained will not be used for other reasons other than for the purpose of the study. Identities of the participants were not disclosed and any information leading to their recognition was withheld and participants were represented by numbers instead.

3.8.3 Informed consent

Before the questionnaire could be completed, the participants were informed about the nature of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were given an informed consent letter to read and sign (See Appendix 3), and it was explained to them the nature and purpose of the study, including the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.8.4 Debriefing of participants

Given the nature of the investigation, it is possible that some participants would have showed some adverse emotional reactions during the study. Such participants were referred to the university student counselling centre for psychological assistance.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the methods in which the research was conducted and analysed have been discussed. The next chapter will focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, results of the study are presented. The data has been presented in a sequential and interpretable form in relation to the study objectives. This chapter shows the prevalence of psychological distress among the participants and the demographical data of the participants and its influence on psychological distress.

4.2 Characteristics of the sample and test of independence

Three hundred participants, all first year students, took part in this study. The sample consisted of 175 females and 125 males. These participants ranged from 16 years of age to above 23 years. Most of the participants were aged between 18 and 20 and the clear mode being 19 years as shown in the table below (Table 4.1). All the students who participated in the study are Black South African (n=300).

To answer the questions on economic status, the participants had to provide information on their source of university fees, monetary family background and the location of their high school. Table 4.1 shows that 72.3% of the participants indicated that their source of university funding is from a bursary (n=217). Half of the participants (n=150), considered themselves to be from middle income backgrounds, followed by those that considered themselves to be poor (n=108). A small proportion of the students perceived themselves as rich or very rich (4.4%). According to the results most students attended high schools that were in the village or a rural community (n=223), followed by small town (n=52) then city (n=13) and the least are those in a large city (n=11).

In establishing the association between gender and psychological distress a chi-square test was used. Table 4.1 shows that n=53 of females were found to be psychologically distressed, meaning 30.11% of the female sample had a total score that was above 5 and n=38 of males (30.65%) were found to be psychologically distressed. Male students were found to be at a slightly higher risk of psychological distress than females in this sample. However, with a p-value of 0.92 (p-value>0.05) there is insignificant difference between the prevalence of psychological distress two

groups. On age, 17 year olds were all found to be negative for psychological distress and 22 year olds had the highest psychological distress prevalence of 40%. Furthermore, there was no significant difference found in the other contributing factors, namely source of fees (*p-value*=0.45), economic status (*p-value*=0.14) and the type of community the high school was located (*p-value*= 0.86). But it is of interest to note the ascending order in those psychologically distressed according to economic status. The very poor have the highest percentage and the rich and very rich have the lowest percentage. The very poor are found to be more psychologically distressed (42.9%).

Table 4.1: Characteristics of the sample and test of independence using the Chi-square test

		Total	***Psychologically Distressed***	***Statistic***
Characteristics	**Category**	**N (%)**	**N (%)**	**p-value**
Gender	All	300	91(30.33%)	
	Female	165(55%)	53 (30.1%)	0.92
	Male	135(45%)	38 (30.6%)	
Age	Below 17	3 (1.0%)	1 (33.3%)	
	17	9 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
	18	70 (23.6%)	19 (27.1%)	
	19	102(34.5%)	35 (34.3%)	0.55
	20	64 (21.6%)	18 (28.1%)	
	21	21 (7.1%)	8 (39.1%)	
	22	15 (5.1%)	6 (40.0%)	
	23	8 (2.7%)	2 (25.0%)	
	Above 23	4 (1.4%)	1 (25.0%)	
Source of fees	Bursary	217 (72.3%)	62 (28.6%)	0.45
	Parent/Guardian	79 (26.3%)	27 (34.2)	
Do you consider yourself?	Very Poor	28 (9.3%)	12 (42.9%)	
	Poor	108 (36.0%)	39 (36.1%)	
	Middle Income	150 (50.0%)	38 (25.3%)	0.14
	Rich/ Very Rich	13(4.4%)	2 (15.9%)	
What type of community was your high school located	Village/Rural community	223 (74.3%)	71 (31.8%)	
	Small town community	52 (17.3%)	14 (26.9%)	0.86
	Large town	11 (4.0%)	3 (27.3%)	
	City	13 (4.4%)	3 (23.1%)	

4.3 Prevalence of psychological health problems

The General Health Questionnaire-12 was used to screen for psychological distress and the GHQ scoring method (0-0-1-1). After summing up the General Health Questionnaire 12 items, the total score range is from 0-10. Table 4.2 shows the distribution of the total scores. The total score of 4 has the highest frequency with n=72 and the lowest being n=1 on the total scores 9 and 10. The positive items were from 0 (better than usual) to 1 (much less than usual) and the negative ones were corrected to 1 (better than usual) to 0 (much less than usual).

Table 4.2: Psychological health problems distribution frequency and percentages

Total Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	4	1.3
2	26	8.7
3	40	13.3
4	72	24.0
5	67	22.3
6	46	15.3
7	29	9.7
8	14	4.7
9	1	0.3
10	1	0.3

A mean GHQ-12 score of 4.70 was obtained in the sample (Table 4.3). The standard deviation obtained was 1.67. The total sums ranged from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10. The mode was 4, meaning most participants obtained a total score of 4, as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and mode of the psychological health problems total score

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Psychological Distress Total Score	4.70	1.67	1	10	4

Based on the mean GHQ score for this sample, the cut-off point 5 was used to determine the respondents' level of psychological distress. This approach is based on the procedure outlined and implemented by Zulkefly and Baharudin (2010). Cornelius et al (2011) also recommends the adoption of cut-off points derived in this way to allow for comparison with other studies. Therefore, based on the recommendations by Zulkefly and Baharudin (2010), any participant with a total score of more than 5 was considered to be psychologically distressed. The prevalence of those with psychological distress versus those without psychological distress showed a noteworthy difference where those with a score of greater than 5 were n=91 which is 30.33% and those with a score of less than 5 were n=209 which is 69.67%, as shown in Table 4.4. The p-value value obtained from the t-test for the difference between the two means was was 0.000 implying there is a significant difference in the levels of distress between those psychologically and not psychologically distressed.

Table 4.4: Prevalence of psychological health problems

General prevalence	N (%)	Mean	SD	P-value
Psychologically Distressed (>5)	91 (30.33%)	6.70	1.08	0.000
Not Psychologically Distressed (<5)	209(69.67%)	3.82	0.85	

As shown in Table 4.5, females obtained a mean of 4.67 and males 4.72, showing very little difference, supporting the notion of a minor difference between those psychologically distressed according to gender. What is of interest on the demographical factors is the very high mean for those who consider themselves poor

compared to rest of the sample population. The mean for those who consider themselves poor is 5.21 and the lowest is obtained in the rich/very rich which is 4.15. The standard deviation for rich/very rich is also considerably very high (SD=2.27). The differences between the highest (22 years = 5.00) and the lowest (17 years = 3.67) in means according to age is also worth observing. The factor 'type of community your high school was located' showed no significant influence on psychological distress with inconsequential differences in mean.

Table 4.5: Mean, standard deviation and p-value for the demographical factors

Demographic Factor	Mean	SD	P-value
Prevalence by gender			
Females	4.67	1.61	0.81
Males	4.72	1.71	
Age			
Below 17	4.00	3.00	0.67
17	3.67	1.00	
18	4.50	1.72	
19	4.84	1.64	
20	4.75	1.67	
21	4.71	1.62	
22	5.00	1.41	
23	4.88	2.48	
Above 23	4.50	1.29	
Source of university fees			
Bursary	4.61	1.63	0.32
Parents/Guardians	4.91	1.76	
Do you consider yourself:			
Very Poor	5.21	1.55	0.21
Poor	4.95	1.64	
Middle Income	4.46	1.62	
Rich/Very Rich	4.15	2.27	
What type of community was your high school located?			
Village/Rural Community	4.78	1.66	0.68
Small Town Community	4.44	1.66	
Large Town	4.36	1.80	
City	4.69	1.43	

4.4 Conclusion

The levels of psychological distress were found to be relatively high among the first entering students in this study. However, there seemed to be no correlation between psychological distress levels and demographic factors such as gender, source of income, age and the area one's high school was located in. Nevertheless, considerations can be placed on monetary status as its figures in relation to psychological distress were substantial, even although they may not be statistically significant.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to literature review and other interrelated information. It also evaluates the contribution of the study in terms of aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The findings will be discussed to highlight the level and severity of psychological health problems. Information generated from this study has the potential to shape the foundation of planning and employing intervention programmes to address the problem of psychological health problems among students as they enter university therefore making their transition smoother.

Literature review has shown that there are difficulties among students when it comes to transitioning from high school to university life. This is mainly due to the change of environment and the shift in cultures. This affects mostly students from rural and poor backgrounds who are confounded with the change to technology uses and language, among others, which others might call “the fast life.” Also, the age at which most students enter university affects the way they will cope as most of them will be at their adolescent stage, a stage characterised by several developments.

5.2 Prevalence of psychological health problems

The first objective of this study was to screen the psychological health problems faced by university first entering students at the University of Limpopo, hence the use of the GHQ-12. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) is a self-administered screening questionnaire designed for use in consulting settings aimed at detecting individuals with a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. The GHQ-12 is the most intensively used screening instrument for common mental disorders, in addition to being a more general measure of psychiatric well-being (Sanchez-Lopez & Dresch, 2008). University students are at a stage where they are no longer under direct parental supervision and are faced with new social and academic pressures (Prendergast, 1994). When the pressures present themselves the normal routines of life may be disturbed and psychological health problems become evident hence the GHQ-12

questions such as “have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you’re doing?” and “have you recently lost much sleep over worry?”

After screening for psychological health problems using the GHQ-12, it is of great interest that 30.33% of the sample population was found to be psychologically distressed and 69.67% not psychologically distressed. This is consistent with studies done before though slightly lower. For example, a study done by Ani, Kinanee and Ola (2011) on psychological distress among trainee teachers in Nigeria, 36% of the trainees found relatively high levels of psychological distress. A study done by Kaistha et al (2013) on students at a medical college in rural North-West India revealed that 43% turned out to be positive for psychological distress. Using the cut-off point of 6, a study of Malaysian students revealed that 52.9% of the respondents were found to be not psychologically distressed, and that 47.1% were found to be psychologically distressed (Zulkefly & Baharudin, 2010). Being under pressure to pass the national exams, entering into a new environment, living far away from family and therefore lack of emotional support and undesirable dormitory conditions were found to be factors that increase the GHQ score at the beginning of the student life (Lotfi, Aminian, Ghomizadea & Noorani, 2009). The slight differences in the statistics in the various countries can be attributed to stressors such as poverty, wars and natural disasters especially in developing countries which are not directly related to academic work (Ovunga, Boardman & Wasserman, 2006).

Zulkefly and Baharudin (2010) state that the GHQ-12 is a useful instrument for assessing the overall psychological well-being of university students. The age frequency also plays a major role in the results of this study. Kessler et al (2007) state that age is undoubtedly an important factor in explaining the increase in students with severe mental health problems attending university, the peak onset for mental health problems is before the age of 24 years. At the time this study was conducted the age of the students was concentrated on 18, 19 and 20. In a study done by Ani et al (2011), in Nigeria, the ages were distributed and ranged from 18 to 37. The study revealed that 36% of the students were psychologically distressed. Zulkefly and Baharudin (2010) also did a research on students from a college in Malaysia. The age of the students ranged from 18 to 32 years and 47,1% were found of the college students were found to be psychologically distressed. Macaskill (2012) states that this age group is known to be at high risk for the onset of mental health problems, with the

additional risk factor being the transition to university co-occurring with the transition to adulthood.

Studies such as those by Sanchez-Lopez and Dresch (2008) have revealed that there is a higher prevalence of mental health in women than man. Therefore, it is useful to differentiate data between males and females. The present study revealed that there was no significant difference between the psychological health problems of males and females. This is consistent with a study done in Malaysia (Zulkefly & Baharudin, 2010) which found the mean for male students being 4.97 when compared to 4.79 in the case of female students. The results showed that males (30.6%, mean=4.72) had a slightly higher prevalence than females (30.1%, mean = 4.67). According to a study done in Northwest India, 57.5% of the male participants were found to be more psychologically distressed as compared to 25.2% females (Kaistha et al, 2013). In Spain, women obtained a mean score of 9.30 and men 7.34 (Sanchez-Lopez & Dresch, 2008). The high significant figures in these areas might be due to factors that might have been influential in their areas. Lotfi et al (2009) indicate that studies have classified sources of psychological health problems into three main sources: academic pressure, social issues and financial problems. These factors affect students from various geographical areas differently.

5.3 Severity of psychological health problems

After screening for psychological health problems, the second objective was to determine the severity of the psychological problems faced by the first entering students. Psychological status of university freshman has an important role in their learning ability and academic performance. Fierce competition in general entrance exams and an obligation to succeed along with family expectation may continuously affect the psychological status of high school students before and after admission to universities (Lotfi et al, 2009). Findings from the present study seem to indicate that the proportion of the first entering students who are psychologically healthy (69.67%) is double that of those who are vulnerable to develop and experience psychological problems (30,67%). The percentage of those who have the potential to develop and experience psychological health problems is a substantial portion. While the incidence is not as high as reported in other countries (Kaistha et al, 2013), it is however noteworthy. To successfully deal with the challenges of the first year, students are

required to develop and use social and academic skills. The academic, financial and social challenges associated with university can make this a very stressful time for students.

The demographic profile of the University of Limpopo students shows that most of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds and depend on bursaries. Brooke-Gunn and Duncan (1997) emphasize the relationship between income and schooling with family structure and neighbourhood characteristics. Poverty is still concentrated among blacks in South Africa, but bursaries have managed to bridge this gap for university students (Woolard, 2002). However, these bursaries cover a portion of the expenses which results in a student looking for alternative sources. Van Der Berg (2002) stipulates that racial composition of institutions remains a major explanatory factor in psychological distress, besides the socio-economic background and educational inputs. The achievement gap between white and black students remains substantial with white students having a better chance of making it in life. This adds on to the pressures of being stereotyped as black, to adapt successfully and achieve. These pressures result in depression, loneliness and anxiety which can result in a case of psychological health problems (Tassie & Whelan, 2007; Dahlin et al, 2005; Czerniewicz & Brown, 2014).

A factor that seemed to contribute to the severity of psychological health problems was the poor financial background. There was a difference in the means between those that considered themselves as rich or very rich (4.15) and the poor (5.21). The mean for the poor is above the cut-off point meaning a significant number of the poor is above the cut-off point. Studies have indicated that financial hardships can impact on academic achievement and social integration, resulting in feelings of isolation, alienation and depression (Bourn 2002, Lei et al., 2016).

According to the results of this study a large proportion of the students has managed to cope with “university life”. Montgomery and Cote (2003) state that the notion of stress related growth suggests that students can learn and grow from stressful events. Yates, James and Aston (2008) suggest that some students may be vulnerable to psychological distress predating their entry into college or university. In other words, upon entry into university, some students may adopt ways to cope in the new environment. A larger number of students from high schools from rural areas and

poorer backgrounds might have found ways to cope in the new university environment through the influence of peers. In addition, some facilities such as free counselling services may be playing a positive role in reducing the students' psychological problems. Furthermore, it can be suggested that the provision of funds from bursaries such as make the university life of students smoother for those from poor backgrounds.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of findings

Firstly, this study revealed that one third of the sample population is prone to or are already experiencing psychological health problems. This is consistent with other studies (Ani et al 2011, Zulkefly & Baharudin, 2010). As the results were consistent with other studies, it can be suggested that the General Health Questionnaire is a valid measure to assess the level of psychological health in a population, and it is a useful instrument for assessing the overall psychological well-being of university students. Secondly there was no significant difference in psychological health problems between males and females. However, in some studies done in other countries, gender was found to be a contributing factor. Thirdly, there was an insignificant difference in monetary background, but the figures were outstanding. Therefore, one's economic background can be regarded as a contributing factor on psychological health. Lastly over half of the first entering students were found to be coping with the university environment, and were not prone to psychological health problems. This may be because the students have adjusted to the new environment, and that they have learnt ways to cope with and grow from the stressors (Yates et al., 2008; Goldberg & Williams, 1991).

6.2 Implications of the study

As noted in the earlier section, the GHQ-12 is only a screening tool. The findings of the present study should be a cause for concern to various parties including parents, lecturers, researchers and policy makers. It is important to recognise the proportion of students with high scores in the GHQ and its relevant correlating factors such as depression, stress and loneliness. This will be useful for the university and the nation to prepare prevention and intervention strategies to ensure that the psychological state of South Africa's young intellects does not decline.

6.3 Limitations of the study

The following are the limitations that are associated with a study of this nature:

- This study relied on a self-report method of data collection which may be subject to distortion. Participants could have filled in the answers on the questionnaire in a way that will give a different impression of their real experiences.
- The sample of the study was 300 Black South African students. This means that the results of this study are limited to Black students only.
- Ani et al (2011) state that stressors may be related to students' particular course of study. This study did not specify programmes being studied on demographic characteristics of the sample used.

6.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

- This study suggests that serious efforts be made by student counselling centres to screen for psychological distress as students enter university, more especially in their first year to treat those who are prone to psychological distress early. This will help to avail treatment to help prevent severity of the condition.
- Psychological health information should be incorporated into universities as part of the menu of services provided to students.
- There is need to conduct a study of this nature at universities that comprise students from various racial backgrounds to determine if there are differences based on these factors.

6.5 Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that psychological distress is indeed present and is related to various demographical factors. These findings are consistent with previous studies which have suggested that transition from high school to university can negatively affect the functioning of a student. The above findings should be considered when universities plan for the intake of university students and put in place preventive and treatment measures for students going through psychological distress.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: General Health Questionnaire (Sanchez-Lopez &Dresch, 2008)

	A	B	C	D
1. Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
2. Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?	Not at all	No more than usual	More than usual	Much more than usual
3. Have you recently felt that you were playing a useful part in things?	More than usual	Same as usual	Less useful than usual	Much less useful
4. Have you recently felt capable of making decisions about things?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
5. Have you recently felt constantly under strain?	Not at all	No more than usual	More than usual	Much less than usual
6. Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?	Not at all	No more than usual	More than usual	Much more than usual
7. Have you recently been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
8. Have you recently been able to face up to problems?	More so than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual
9. Have you recently been feeling unhappy or depressed?	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much more than usual
10. Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much more than usual
11. Have you recently been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?	Better than usual	Same as usual	Less than usual	Much more than usual
12. Have you recently been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?	More so than usual	About same as usual	Less than usual	Much less than usual

Appendix 2: Demographic Form

Please do not write your name on this form. This information will help us provide description of the sample.

Number: ☐

Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐ Other ☐

Age: 17 to 24 years ☐ 25+ ☐

Race/Ethnicity: Black ☐ White ☐ Indian ☐ Coloured ☐

Other (specify) ……..

Do you consider yourself?

Very poor ☐ Poor ☐ Middle income ☐ Rich ☐ Very rich ☐

Residential status

On-campus residence ☐ Off-campus residence (staying alone) ☐

Off-campus (staying with family / guardian) ☐

Other (Please specify)……..

Appendix 3: Letter for gatekeeper permission

Department of Psychology
University of Limpopo
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727
Date

The Registrar
University of Limpopo
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727

Dear Sir/ Madam

I hereby request to be granted gatekeeper permission to conduct a study at the University of Limpopo. The study investigates psychological health of first entering students at the University of Limpopo. Participation by the students will be voluntary and can be terminated when one does not feel comfortable anymore. The responses by the participants will be strictly confidential.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

…… ……

Sakala.R Date

Masters Student

…… ……

Prof T. Sodi (Supervisor) Date

Appendix 4: Participant consent letter and form

Department of Psychology
University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727
Date

Dear Participant,

Thank you for showing interest in this study that investigates the psychological health of first year entering students at the University of Limpopo.

Your response to this questionnaire will remain strictly confidential. The researcher will not identify you with the responses in the questionnaire or disclose your name as a participant in the study. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary and that you have the right to terminate your participation at any given time.

Please answer all the questions as honestly as possible. Your participation in this research is important. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Yours Truly

…… ……

Sakala. R Date

Masters Student

…… ……

Prof T. Sodi (Supervisor) Date

Consent form to be signed by participant

I _____ hereby agree to participate in a Masters research project that investigates the psychological health of first year entering students at the University of Limpopo

The purpose of the study has been fully explained to me. I furthermore understand that I participate willingly and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can withdraw my participation in this study at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project, whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally. I understand that my details as they appear in this consent form will not be linked to the interview schedule, and that my answers will remain confidential.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Research Ethics Committee Clearance Certificate

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2212, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:noko.monene@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING:	03 March 2017
PROJECT NUMBER:	TREC/23/2017: PG
PROJECT:	
Title:	The psychological health of first entering students at the University of Limpopo using the General Health Questionnaire
Researchers:	Ms R Sakala
Supervisor:	Prof T Sodi
Co-Supervisor:	Mr S Nkoana Mr Darikwa
School:	Social Sciences
Degree:	Masters in Psychology

PROF TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:
i) **Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.**
ii) **The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.**
PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa