



S.E.T. for socio-economic growth

National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)

media release

SA embraces 'mental health as a universal human right' on World Mental Health Day 2023 with NGO Award winner Community Keepers

SA's widespread mental health challenges: A study published in 2022 reveals widespread mental health challenges in South Africa (SA), influenced by factors like adverse childhood experiences (ACE), socio-economic status, geography, age, marital status, and education levels. This study was done by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) Development Pathways for Health Research Unit (DPHRU) and is titled: *The prevalence of probable depression and probable anxiety, and the associations with adverse childhood experiences and socio-demographics: A National Survey in South Africa*. The study was [published](#) in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health*.

Almost 20% of adults said that they suffered from impaired mental health, but less than a quarter of this population ever sought treatment. The country's rates of mental illness are also more than double those in Brazil, which is also classified as a low- and middle-income country with high levels of inequality. Despite its rich cultural diversity and historical resilience, SA grapples with complex mental health challenges driven by poverty, inequality, and historical trauma.

Persistent stigma and unequal access to mental health care remain hurdles. The authors concluded that "adult mental health services are urgently needed [in SA] to identify groups of the population vulnerable to mental health problems for better targeting of interventions. Given the range of probable depression prevalence across the country, provincial level plans and resources should also reflect the burden of mental health problems in that province."

World Mental Health Day 10 October: In order to promote improvements in our mental well-being, [World Mental Health Day](#) is observed annually on 10 October. The theme for 2023, set by the World Foundation of Mental Health, is 'Mental health is a universal human right'. The day is about raising awareness of mental health and driving positive change for everyone's mental health.

Community Keepers promotes mental health amongst youth: Amidst the above challenges, grassroots organisations and government initiatives are working to foster understanding and support. Community Keepers (CK) is a Stellenbosch based non-profit organisation (NPO) concerned about the mental health of young people and seeks to build a culture of wellbeing. The NPO does outreach programmes with over 30 000 schools in the

Western Cape to create safe spaces for troubled youths, mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds, to voice their fears and concerns freely.

As the CEO of CK, Mr Gerrit Laning believes that the anxious, withdrawn, or disruptive learners are often reacting from not being able to cope well with personal struggles from home and built-up traumas that they do not vocalise. These difficulties can leave them in a fight-or-flight mode that hinders their learning at school. He contends: “And sadly, that’s where we get the narrative that says kids from underserved communities or from low-income communities are stupid or that they are slow or that they are lazy – all of those are untrue.” CK received the prestigious [2023 NSTF-South32 Non-Governmental Organisation Award](#). They received the award for their project to enhance resilience and promote mental health and well-being amongst SA learners, their parents, teachers and community through socio-emotional learning opportunities, therapeutic counselling, referrals, support groups and resilience-building workshops free of charge.



About the NSTF ([National Science and Technology Forum](#)): NSTF is an independent non-profit [stakeholder body and network](#) – a civil-society forum of [organisations involved in science, engineering, technology \(SET\) and innovation in SA](#).

The NSTF acknowledges the vital importance of mental health for SA’s population.

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References/Sources

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/world-mental-health-day#:~:text=Every%20year%20we%20celebrate%20World,is%20a%20universal%20human%20right'>

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF proSET membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF proSET)

For more information

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