

**WellFam@SA: A multi-disciplinary programme to enhance family
well-being in different South African contexts: Phase one**

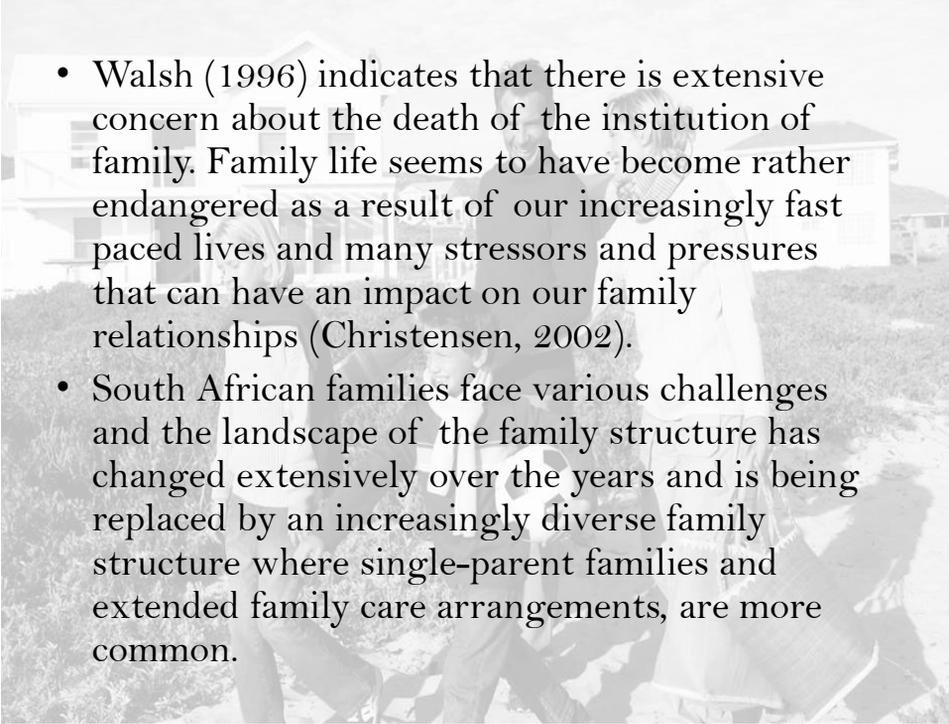
By Dr Vicki Koen

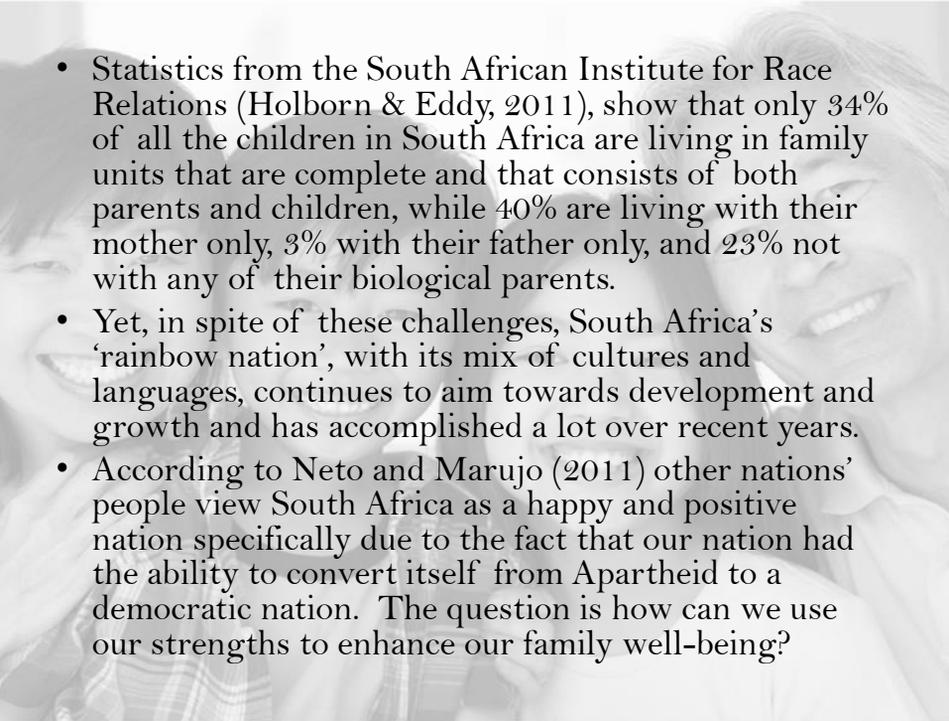
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Introduction and background

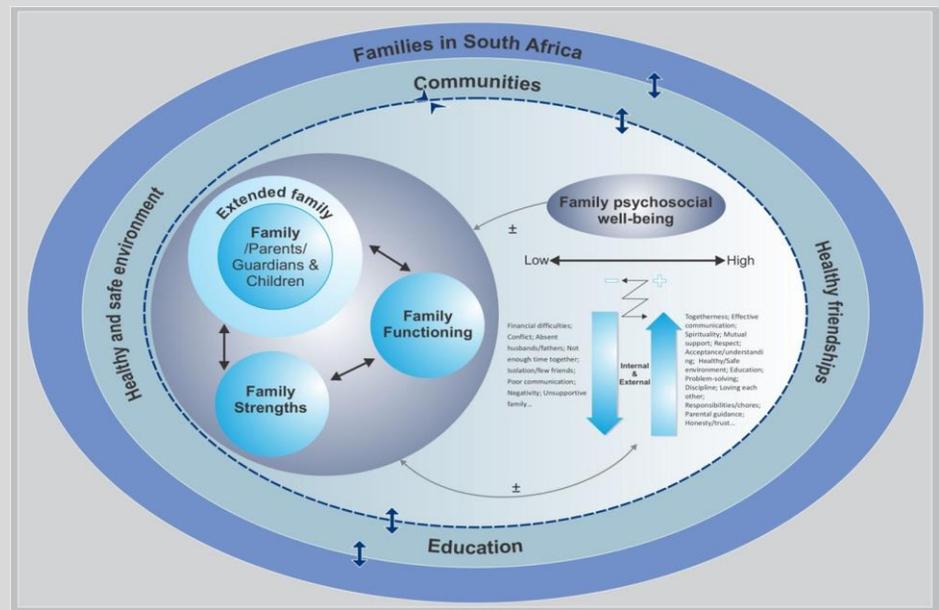
- Margaret Thatcher (1988) said: “The family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure centre, a place of refuge and rest. It encompasses the whole of society. It fashions our beliefs; it is the preparation for the rest of our life”
- The term ‘family’ is one that humanity holds dear; often it is emphasized as an important aspect in life and seen as a factor that contributes to our happiness. Individuals often speak of how important their family is to them and the impact that their family has on their lives.

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- Walsh (1996) indicates that there is extensive concern about the death of the institution of family. Family life seems to have become rather endangered as a result of our increasingly fast paced lives and many stressors and pressures that can have an impact on our family relationships (Christensen, 2002).
 - South African families face various challenges and the landscape of the family structure has changed extensively over the years and is being replaced by an increasingly diverse family structure where single-parent families and extended family care arrangements, are more common.

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- Statistics from the South African Institute for Race Relations (Holborn & Eddy, 2011), show that only 34% of all the children in South Africa are living in family units that are complete and that consists of both parents and children, while 40% are living with their mother only, 3% with their father only, and 23% not with any of their biological parents.
 - Yet, in spite of these challenges, South Africa's 'rainbow nation', with its mix of cultures and languages, continues to aim towards development and growth and has accomplished a lot over recent years.
 - According to Neto and Marujo (2011) other nations' people view South Africa as a happy and positive nation specifically due to the fact that our nation had the ability to convert itself from Apartheid to a democratic nation. The question is how can we use our strengths to enhance our family well-being?

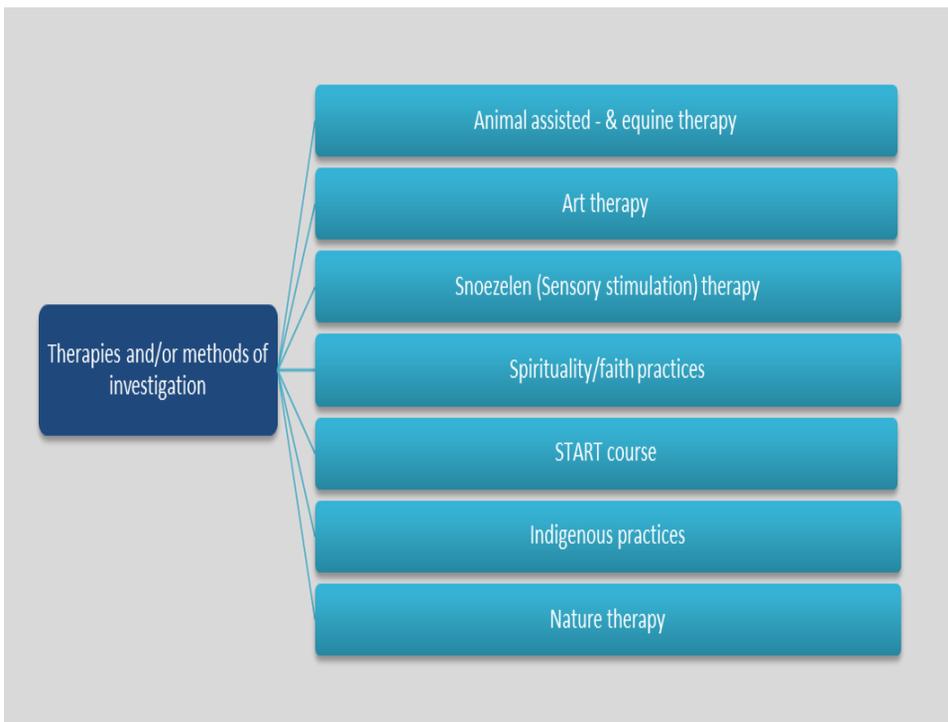
- The emerging field of Positive Psychology has changed the focus of practice and research regarding family dynamics and -functioning from family deficits, dysfunction or weakness to that of a strength-based collaboration with families to discover positive family functioning, well-being and strengths (Carr, 2011; Laursen, 2000; Seligman, 2002). In South Africa, this is still a relatively young approach that allows researchers to investigate and explore families and family aspects from a new perspective.
- As part of her doctoral thesis, which focused on the psychosocial well-being of South African families from diverse cultures, the researcher developed a model for the psychosocial well-being of South African families from diverse cultures (see following Figure) (Koen, 2012; Koen, Van Eeden, & Rothmann, 2013).

Model for family psychosocial well-being in a South African context



Further operationalization & validation of the model

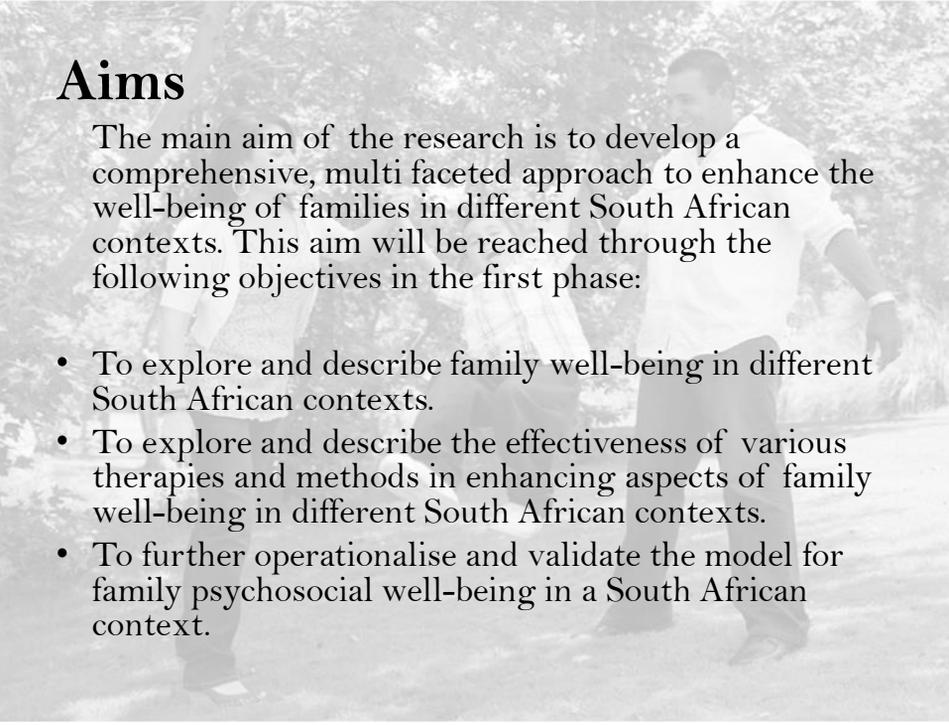
- In order to further operationalise and validate the model for family psychosocial well-being in a South African context, future research under this programme will aim to explore and describe the effectiveness of various therapies and/or methods to enhance family well-being and the contributing factors that are identified in the model. Possible therapies and/or methods to be investigated are presented visually in the following Figure.





Problem statement & research question

- The need to research and promote the well-being of South African families is becoming increasingly necessary (Sheridan, Eagle, & Dowd, 2006). The researcher is also in a position where she has access to various therapies and/or methods or individuals or groups who are experts therein that can be utilized in family research and although the advantages of these different therapies or methods have been investigated and researched regarding their effectiveness, it is context specific to therapy-related settings and the effectiveness and advantages of the therapies and/or methods respectively in those specific settings, and does not illuminate how these therapies and or/methods can be implemented in order to contribute to and enhance aspects of family well-being. Literature and research is limited regarding the well-being of South African families and about how the well-being of South African families overall can be enhanced.
- Based on the above, the following research question is posed: How can the well-being of families in different South African contexts be enhanced?



Aims

The main aim of the research is to develop a comprehensive, multi faceted approach to enhance the well-being of families in different South African contexts. This aim will be reached through the following objectives in the first phase:

- To explore and describe family well-being in different South African contexts.
- To explore and describe the effectiveness of various therapies and methods in enhancing aspects of family well-being in different South African contexts.
- To further operationalise and validate the model for family psychosocial well-being in a South African context.

