
INVITED TO CONDUCT SUBSTANCE ABUSE WORKSHOP IN HAWAII



Mr December Mpanza.

Mr December Mpanza will conduct a workshop on substance abuse based on his local research at the upcoming 41st Annual National Association for Rural Mental Health Conference in Hawaii, USA.

Funded by the College of Health Sciences and supported by his supervisor, Mrs Pragashni Naidoo. The Senior Tutor of Occupational Therapy said he was honoured and humbled to be attending the conference and being given more “talk time” than he had initially expected.

‘I’m truly seeing the grace of God in my career,’ said Mpanza. ‘The one thing I enjoy about my job is to see that I am contributing to knowledge production. It feels like I’m at the right place at UKZN.’

Mpanza recently obtained his Masters in Occupational Therapy at UKZN after completing a study entitled: “Substance Abuse Rural Realities, Experiences of Service Providers, South Africa”.

The study highlighted the incidence and consequences of substance abuse in KwaZulu-Natal’s uMkhanyakude District where the lives of many youngsters and the people around them remain affected by stress, peer pressure, unregulated substances, poverty and unemployment. These pressures result in a number of mental illnesses.

This places a huge burden on health care providers when the problem could be prevented at its roots,’ Mpanza said.

Mpanza acknowledged that there were hard-working service providers of substance abuse rehabilitation who fought against all odds to improve the quality of life for communities in outlying areas.

However mental health was still neglected, Mpanza observed, and was not being integrated into primary health care. He believed this needed urgent attention from the relevant government departments.

His study suggested that KwaZulu-Natal had limited drug rehabilitation centres that were available to the general public. The majority of those in existence were privatised, meaning that people living in rural communities had limited funds which discouraged drug abusers from using the facilities. There was also a poor aftercare program.

'This calls for a turnaround of substance abuse services to a community based intervention strategy which can reach many people,' Mpanza concluded.

Mpanza was applauded when he presented the study earlier this year to the Medical Research Council's South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU), which provides information on the nature and pattern of alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) use, as well as emerging trends, risk factors associated with ATOD use, characteristics of vulnerable populations, and consequences of ATOD use in South Africa.

Mpanza is a member of Rural Rehab South Africa and said aside from working on articles to be published from his research, he is in the process of developing a community-based substance abuse intervention model which has attracted the attention of the provincial Departments of Health and Social Development.

Mpanza said he was lucky to have been made aware of the OT profession in grade eight and looks forward to pursuing his PhD in the same line of work.