VILJOEN, Monet (Physiological Sciences)

Correlations between stress-associated anxiety and physiological determinants of health in adolescents

Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent of psychiatric disorders, with onset typically in childhood or early adolescence. Furthermore, risk for development of anxiety disorders increases with exposure to trauma/childhood maltreatment. Little is known about biomarkers of resilience/vulnerability in relation to subclinical anxiety, especially in trauma-exposed adolescents. Central and peripheral neuroendocrine and immunological profiles were elucidated in adolescents, in association with anxiety proneness and childhood trauma. Results indicated a relatively larger causative association of neurophysiological maladaptation, with anxiety proneness, compared to childhood trauma. Potential clinical outcome modulators, and thus therapeutic targets, were identified and included resilience and self-esteem.

Supervisor: Prof C Smith

Co-supervisor: Prof S Seedat