
MEDIA STATEMENT

The Professional Board for Psychology's statement on the Study on Coloured Women by Nieuwoudt and Colleagues (2019)

30 May 2019

For immediate release

The Professional Board for Psychology under the auspices of the Health Professions Council of South Africa HPCSA is concerned about the use and reporting on of psychological measures. This comes after the findings of an article by Nieuwoudt and Colleagues (2019) and the effects of its findings not only on the sample but on the broader public. The history of development and use of psychometric measuring devices, instruments, methods and techniques in South Africa has been tainted by the legacy of segregation which influenced certain stereotypical attitudes and culturally insensitive and inappropriate interventions. As a result, limited tests are available that have been developed and applied with the necessary appreciation of cultural, contextual and other diversity concerns.

Following on the mandate of the HPCSA of protecting the public and guiding the professions, it is important that psychological research and the use of psychometric tests not be used to perpetuate racist stereotypes in our democratic South Africa. It is important that, tests, measures, questionnaires, instruments, etc. that tap psychological constructs be used, interpreted, and controlled by Psychologists. This is in view of possible harm and management implications of persons who may be adversely affected by test outcomes and therefore require appropriate professional intervention.

Psychological professionals including other trained professionals, should note that the onus rests on them to use tests in a fair and ethical way. According to Annexure 12 of the Ethical Rules of Conduct, ethical assessment practice includes ensuring that the tests used are appropriate for the purpose that they are applied, are psychometrically sound, and that their content, construct coverage, and norms are both appropriate for the target population and are up to date (i.e., the tests are not obsolete).

There is therefore danger in using psychological tests that are not normed for the South African context and its diverse population and there is risk of misdiagnosis and incorrect classification as was the case with the Nieuwoudt et.al. (2019) Journal article.

The Professional Board for Psychology would like to remind Research Ethics Committees of institutions to observe these regulations when granting Ethical Approval for research activities. Transgression could result in registered professionals being charged with unprofessional conduct.

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About the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) also known as Council is a statutory body established under the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974. The HPCSA is committed to protecting the public and guiding the professions. The mission of the HPCSA is quality and equitable healthcare for all.

The HPCSA is mandated to regulate the health professions in the country in aspects pertaining to education, training and registration, professional conduct and ethical behaviour, ensuring Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and fostering compliance with healthcare standards.

In order to safeguard the public and guiding the professions, registration in terms of the Act is a prerequisite for practising any of the health professions registrable with Council.

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