

2019 SOCIAL RESPONSIVENESS AWARD

Citation: 'Mzantsi Wakho' – a study about youth health in South Africa

The '[Mzantsi Wakho](#)' study – translating as 'Youth South Africa', is a research collaboration on youth health, with its academic home at UCT's [AIDS and Society Research Unit](#).

In its participant population, the study is unique, both in South Africa and globally: constituted by over 1,000 HIV-positive adolescents and young adults, it represents the experiences of a group of South Africans whose lives span critical developments in politics, public health and social development. Because of the delayed provision of public antiretroviral treatment in the Eastern Cape, a concerted programme for the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV was publicly provided only from 2005.

The majority of the study's participants are 'vertically-infected' adolescents, who became HIV-positive via parent-to-child transmission, at a time in which antiretroviral treatment was publicly inaccessible. However, their ongoing survival and their wellbeing is premised on another key development in politics and public health in South Africa: the national rollout of HIV treatment and, subsequently, the establishment of South Africa's HIV treatment programme as one of the largest and most effective public health interventions in history.

The study is thus, in its broadest sense, about the lives and experiences of youth in democratic South Africa, and about the vast potentials and opportunities, coupled with the ongoing challenges and obstructions, of growing up in the post-apartheid present.

The bulk of our work is conducted, not in the relatively well-resourced province of the Western Cape and Gauteng, but in the Eastern Cape's Mdantsane, Gompo, Duncan Village, Zwelitsha, Ginsberg and Dimbaza. To explore the provision of health and social services, and the lived realities of teenagers and their families in the era that has come to be designated as 'post-apartheid', it was essential to locate the study in settings at the fulcrum of democratic development, in previous 'bantustans' in which service delivery in South Africa's transition to democracy has been targeted.

Mzantsi Wakho research is led by local researchers, in partnership with the South African Departments of Health, Social Development and Basic Education, and with civil society organisations, including Paediatric-Adolescent Treatment Africa.

In 2015, [Mzantsi Wakho researchers](#) lead-authored South Africa's National Adolescent and Youth Health Policy.