

MEGA project

MEGA - Building Capacity by developing and implementing a mobile application for mental health assessment in children and adolescents, is a 3-year project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The purpose of the MEGA project is to scale up mobile services for screening mental disorders in children and adolescents in two SADC countries, South Africa and Zambia, and implement a mobile application targeted for use by primary health care workers who are dealing with depression in children and adolescents.



Data collection goes on

Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town obtained Provincial Government approval, to conduct the study at 7 clinics, in December 2018. Data collection began in February 2019. Despite experiencing problems with facility management (e.g., not responding to calls and e-mails), nurses (e.g., lack of interest) and incomplete questionnaires, data was obtained from 70 Primary Health Care nurses.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that PHC nurses would benefit from increased support with regard to managing mental health conditions as well as from increased knowledge and destigmatising initiatives, perhaps through training days and awareness campaigns.



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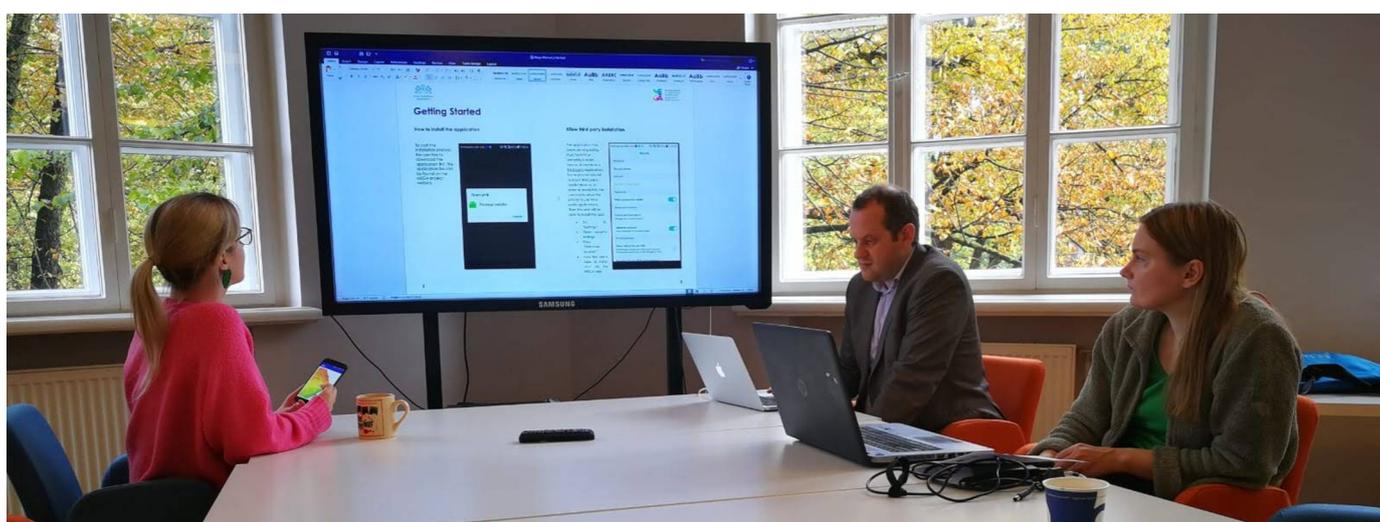
Development of the Mobile App – Overcoming Obstacles

Since the start of the MEGA project there have been heated discussions about the best content for the mobile app that would suit the needs of primary health care specialists both in Zambia and South Africa. The project consortium considered several validated tools to be used as the basis of the mobile app, however, most of them could not be used due to copyright infringement risks as well as differences between the primary healthcare settings in both countries. However, a common solution has finally been reached and a stable working version of the app has been created based on the questions agreed upon by the consortium members.

The mobile app has been developed for Android, the most commonly used operating system in South Africa and Zambia. Functionality of the mobile app has been tested on several different versions of the Android operating system to ensure the best personalized experience for the end users. The app was introduced to the MEGA consortium members during a partner meeting in Cape Town in September 2019 and Riga Technical University's (RTU) team of ICT specialists will continue testing the different features of the app and implement changes according to the feedback received from each member of the consortium.

One of the main challenges that still remains is ensuring safe data export from the app to a shared database. Each country has specific rules and regulations regarding storage and management of data. The MEGA project deals with especially sensitive data, therefore, it is crucial to make sure it is stored and managed appropriately.

The MEGA consortium is delighted that most of the challenges have been successfully addressed. Nevertheless, all partners are also aware of the relatively short time left before completion of the project and the amount of work still ahead. Making the app useful for primary healthcare specialists has been and still continues to be the priority of the project, and that will be the main focus of the consortium during the app piloting phase.



Piloting training material in Germany, South Africa and Zambia

As the MEGA app is continuing development, the training materials for nurses on mental health and health care are ready for testing and implementation. The training was carried out by UFS and UNZA teams in actual settings, and by HAW with a class of German nursing sciences students.

The overall positive evaluation of the students and the trainers provided constructive feedback for a further revision of the training. In July the revised material was piloted again by project partners at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein in a local clinic, where we received further valuable feedback.

Lessons learned from the pilot exercise in the Free State included that it may prove challenging to recruit nurses for the eventual formal training, and to get their buy-in. Furthermore, the University of Free State MEGA team will have to be flexible and adapt to individual clinic circumstances. Nurses at some clinics might prefer to be trained on site while others may prefer a central location. On the other hand, some may want the training to be broken up over a number of sessions while others may prefer that it is completed in a day.



MEGA project presented at the SA ACAPAP 2019 Congress

The 20th Congress of the South African Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (SA-ACAPAP) has taken place from 23-25 May 2019 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Congress theme was Sustaining Development: Investing in Child and Adolescent Mental Health in the 21st Century.

Dr. Gerhard Grobler and Tumisang Chiloane, from the University of Pretoria, presented a poster and were awarded first prize for best poster in the open category.



MEGA project presented at the Biological Psychiatry Congress

Joonas Korhonen, from Turku University of Applied Sciences, made a presentation on the content validation of an instrument measuring mental health literacy.



Partner meeting in Riga

MEGA partner meeting in Riga in November 2018 marked the end of the first year of the project.

During the meeting, the first data-collection results from South Africa were presented by the University of the Free State, marking a new stage in the MEGA project. Numerous important steps were taken in terms of dissemination of the project activities. Informative videos were made with each partner explaining a topic relevant to the project and the first project newsletter was completed and published on the MEGA project website as well as on social media.

The most significant part of the meeting was the development of the MEGA mobile application. RTU presented the status of the app at the time, and discussions were held on the necessary adjustments and improvements that need be made.

Project partners also had an opportunity to listen to the presentation and discussion about the current situation and challenges in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry in Latvia, delivered by Dr. Nikita Bezborodov, one of the leading child psychiatrists in Latvia.

Partner meeting in Turku

In an icy week in February, a very dramatic and interesting meeting of MEGA project took place in Turku, Finland. Events included: a pilot fainting, a broken shoulder, a twisted ankle, lost luggage, and project partners getting lost all over the city. Despite this challenging start, a successful and productive meeting was held.

The educational material is on schedule. An exciting interactive platform was created which includes free downloads of further reading materials, assessment of mental health disorders, epidemiology of mental health disorders, mental health promotion and services, and concept of mental health.

Looking at the findings from Zambia, the research team realized that there are no screening tools for primary health care workers. In addition, we realized that mental health literacy in primary health care is not adequate.



Meet the teams

This chapter will introduce you to the people behind the project. MEGA project has 9 partners from Finland, Germany, Latvia, South Africa and Zambia.

Riga Technical University

The International Projects Unit (IPU) of RTU is involved in numerous international projects. In this project, IPU team is responsible for developing a mobile application for primary healthcare specialists in South Africa and Zambia.

RTU team has five experts: Timo Turunen, Karlis Valtins, Ieva Kudina, Anete Beinarovica and Vera Lipsta.



University of Zambia

The University of Zambia (UNZA) is a public Higher Education Institution located in Lusaka Zambia. The University offers both undergraduate and postgraduate education in different fields in 13 different schools.

The UNZA team consists of five experts: Dr. Lonia Mwape, Dr. Patricia Katowa-Mukwato, Fabian Chapima, Ruth Wahila and Peterson Mumbuluma.



University of Cape Town

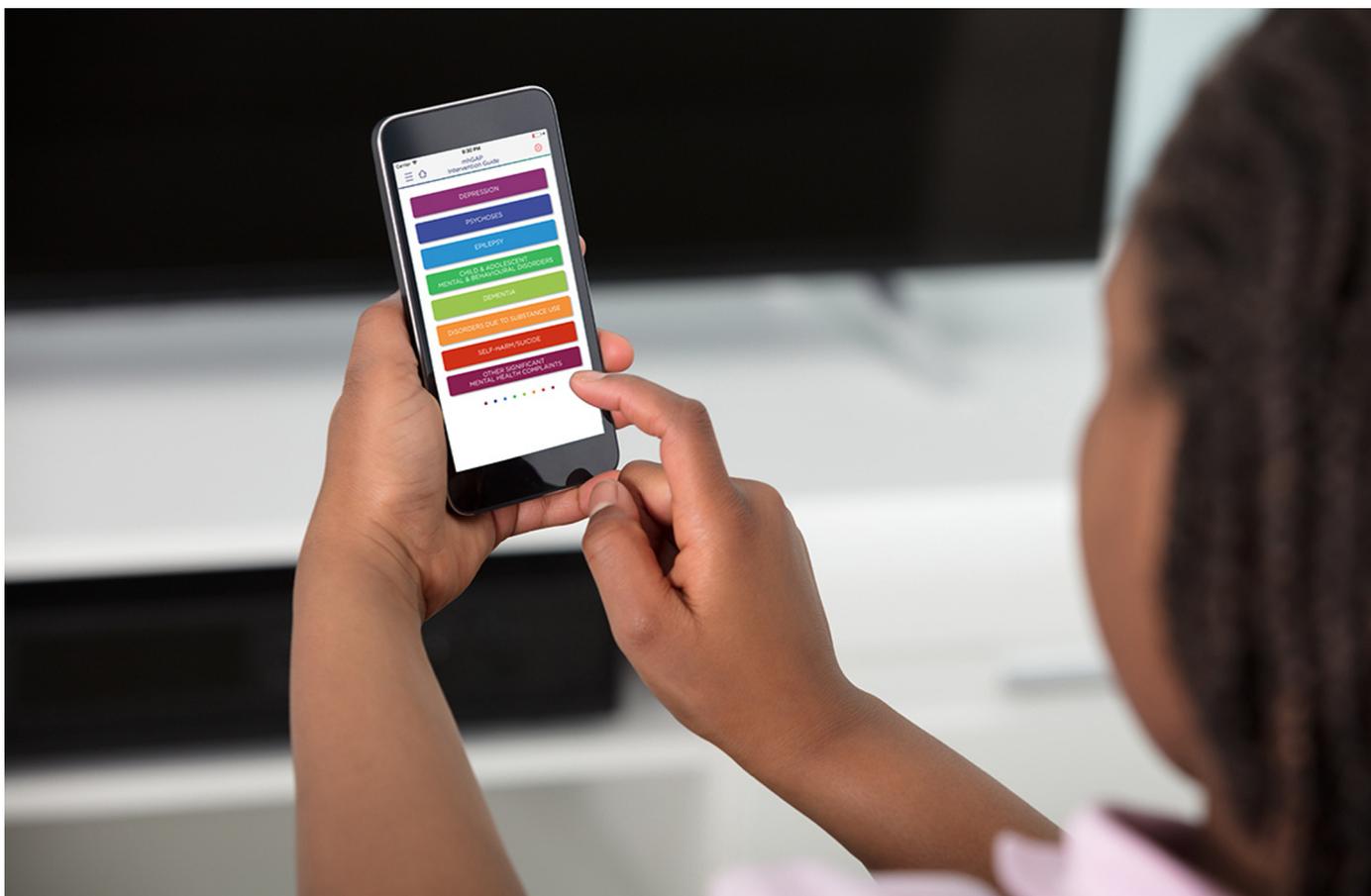
UCT aspires to be a world-class African institution. The Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health endeavours to attain academic excellence and deliver transformative and integrative teaching, research, healthcare and public service relevant to mental illness and well-being in local, African and global contexts.

The UCT team consists of four experts: Prof. Dan Stein, Dr. Adele Pretorius, Deborah Jonker and Weslin Charles.

Coming up in the next issue

Stay tuned with our next newsletter coming out in April 2020. The topics in the next issue include:

- Training of trainers
- Implementation of the mobile application
- Announcing the conference in Lusaka in September 2020
- Feedback on the partner meeting in Cape Town
- Planned coordinator visits to Lusaka and Bloemfontein
- Meet the teams: University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University and Lusaka Apex Medical University



Partner institutions



Contact details



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