



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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Acute stress seems to enhance women's verbal memory, says UCT PhD graduate

Acute stress does not impair people's visual and spatial memory, but exposure to it does appear to improve verbal memory in women. This is one of the research findings of Dr Christopher du Plooy, a PhD graduate from the University of Cape Town.

Dr Du Plooy's doctoral thesis, "The effects of acute stress on visual and spatial memory retrieval", also investigates how the administration of prednisone, an anti-inflammatory or immunosuppressant medication, affects the retrieval of visual-spatial material. Prednisone is used to treat conditions such as allergic disorders, skin conditions, arthritis, lupus or breathing disorders.

The results of Dr Du Plooy's research show that prednisone administration also does not impair people's visual and spatial memory, but that it seems to impair verbal memory in both men and women.

No existing theoretical framework accounts fully for this pattern of data, but the current results are consistent with a functional perspective on memory.

Dr Du Plooy, who holds a BA degree from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and an honours degree from UCT, used two validation studies: one exploring the effects of the psychosocial stressor on memory retrieval in the virtual environment, and the other exploring the effects of a 25mg prednisone dose on the same memory task.

Dr Du Plooy's initial registration for a master's degree at UCT was upgraded to a PhD registration. He was awarded his PhD degree in June this year.

ENDS

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Patricia Lucas

Tel: (021) 650 5428 Fax (021) 650 5628

Cell: **076 292 8047**

E-mail: pat.lucas@uct.ac.za

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Website: www.uct.ac.za