



UP helps family access shelter and education support through SAPRIN initiative

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During a fieldwork visit on 18 April the University of Pretoria (UP) team from the South African Population Research Infrastructure Network (SAPRIN) stepped in to make a life-changing intervention. A mother and her two children were rescued from an abusive household in Melusi after UP researchers intervened during a routine community visit. This showcased how research can translate into real-world impact.

While conducting household data collection as part of the Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS), researchers identified a household in urgent distress. A woman living with her two children—a girl aged 11 and a boy aged 13—was found to be experiencing abuse at the hands of her current boyfriend. The situation was further compounded by the fact that both children were not attending school at the time.

Recognising the seriousness of the case, the UP SAPRIN team acted swiftly. In collaboration with a social worker from the Community Oriented Substance Use Programme (COSUP), they visited the family to assess their situation and explore support options. After a careful evaluation, the team was able to secure a placement for the family at a shelter in Bronkhorstspuit, located approximately 80 km from Pretoria.

The Faculty's procurement team assisted by arranging transport through UP's vehicle service to ensure the family could be relocated safely. Upon arrival at the shelter, the family was registered with the support of Mr Donald, a resident social worker, who assured the team that steps would be taken immediately to prioritise the children's school placements.

"This intervention marks a critical step toward ensuring the safety, dignity, and future of the mother and her children," said Professor Rhena Delport from the Department of Family Medicine, and Research Coordinator of the COPC Research Unit. "We will continue to monitor their situation and support them as needed. There are many pressing issues in the Melusi community, and we are committed to helping wherever we can."

The intervention highlights the broader goals of SAPRIN, which operates under the Faculty of Health Sciences and is part of a national effort to create an integrated health and demographic surveillance system in both rural and urban communities. In Gauteng, SAPRIN research is being conducted through the Gauteng Research Triangle (GRT) as part of a collaboration between UP, Wits, and UJ. This urban expansion includes communities such as Melusi and Atteridgeville in Tshwane, as well as Hillbrow and Joubert Park in Johannesburg.

The overarching objectives of SAPRIN include gathering interdisciplinary evidence on rapidly changing socio-economic and health profiles, informing targeted policy interventions to reduce inequality and monitoring the effectiveness of national strategies across departments such as Health, Social Development, Home Affairs and Basic Education.

