

## ***ABSTRACT***

Infant mental health in South Africa has been receiving more attention in recent years. Mothers appear to be the main caregivers of infants but they face many psychosocial, economic and cultural challenges. There exists very little evidence suggesting that mothers living in shelters or institutions have access to the necessary support and education to help them to understand their circumstances and how this may impact on the attachment with their infant. The New Beginnings Programme, as an early intervention model, is aimed at improving attachment between mother and infant so as to reduce the potential risk of mental health problems later in life for the infants, the mothers and future generations. This evidence based intervention focuses on the mother and her capacity for mentalisation, which refers to the mother's capacity to hold her infant in mind and recognise and respond to the inner states of the infant. The pilot study of the New Beginnings Programme within a South African context took place in two shelters in the Greater Johannesburg area. This particular study formed part of this bigger research effort. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of the mothers who attended the New Beginnings programme. A secondary aim was to explore these mothers' experiences of the programme within the context of living in a shelter. The adaptation of this programme to a South African context could contribute significantly to bridging the gap in mother-infant attachment which could influence the future mental health of the infant and their ability to foster ongoing healthy attachments later in life. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews and a narrative analysis from the theoretical perspective of psychoanalytic attachment theory. Thirteen mothers from two shelters participated in this research study.