




# A Critical Exploration of Women's views about Indigenous Aphrodisiacs: The Case of Mpesu in Venda, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Mpesu is an indigenous Venda aphrodisiac, originating in the area of Thohoyandou in South Africa (Limpopo province). Mpesu helps empower penile erection for men, and it is commonly available in informal market stalls around Venda. Surprisingly, women know much more about Mpesu than men, who buy it for use at home and to combat erectile dysfunction during intimacy with their sexual partners. This paper explored women's views on the use of Mpesu to empower penile erection as they advertise and sell it to both men and women. An analytical theoretical framework was used as the lens to academically investigate the women's understanding and their perspectives on the use of Mpesu in this explorative study. A purposive sample of four women who sell Mpesu in Tshakuma was observed as they advertised and sold Mpesu at their stalls. Data were collected using observations. In addition to Analytic Theory, thematic analysis was adopted in this study to adequately assess women's perspectives on the use of Mpesu by men as the indigenous South African aphrodisiac. Additionally, three YouTube videos of interviews about Mpesu were used during the conceptualization of this study. This study adopted the observation method for data collection, and the researchers found that the use of Mpesu is more known and welcomed by women than by men in Venda, South Africa. Additionally, this study contributes empirical evidence to the existing body of literature, providing practical recommendations on the use of indigenous aphrodisiacs in Venda and similar settings globally.

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## INTRODUCTION

Aphrodisiac drugs have been used in South Africa for the last centuries because they are part of the necessary group of medicines used to cure general illnesses.<sup>1</sup> It is always desirable for all people to experience the full functionality of their body parts, especially the reproductive ones, as Owaba et al.

<sup>1</sup> A A Ajao, N P Sibiyi, and A N Moteetee, "Sexual Prowess from Nature: A Systematic Review of Medicinal Plants Used as Aphrodisiacs and Sexual Dysfunction in Sub-Saharan Africa," *South African Journal of Botany* 122 (2019): 342–59.

narrate.<sup>2</sup> The reproductive system of a human being becomes more important because its dysfunction threatens the production of offspring, which will take the human race to the next generation. From that understanding, Dube et al. argue that, in addition to their biological and medical reasons, having dysfunctional genitalia threatens the dignity of a person in the community.<sup>3</sup> The family name is worth preserving in the community by giving birth to children, which is why the erectile problem becomes a serious problem for everyone in the community.<sup>4</sup>

In South Africa, reproductive health is one of the things that is most valued by indigenous communities because it is viewed as the basis of all that the community is or has. According to Adu-Gyamfi and Anderson, indigenous communities in South Africa take reproductive health as the basis of life because it is what leads to the creation of families, children, and the communities' sustaining forces over the years.<sup>5</sup> In other words, if sexual or reproductive health can be less valued, there is a fear that the human race will become extinct. It is on this basis that Masango argues that reproductive health takes a serious space of importance for both men and women in indigenous communities in South Africa.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, once a man or woman suffers from a reproductive or sexual health illness, it quickly becomes a societal problem rather than an individual problem. Based on the purpose of the study, the following research question is posed:

- What are the women's views about indigenous aphrodisiacs in Venda, Limpopo, South Africa?

The paper is structured in the following manner. It starts by looking at the women's views about indigenous aphrodisiacs in Venda, Limpopo, South Africa. Next, the researchers reviewed the related literature on indigenous aphrodisiacs. Lastly, the study presents the research methodological procedures followed in collecting data and analyzing them to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Problems

Parpart argues that it is not surprising that women have more knowledge about Mpesu because, in some families, women get blamed when they do not give birth to children.<sup>7</sup> According to Ozioma and Chiwe, some families do not easily accept that their son has reproductive or sexual health problems, and within that nonacceptance, they then blame it all on the wife.<sup>8</sup> That is one of the reasons why women happen to be more stressed when men suffer from sexual health problems.<sup>9</sup> As a response to their frustration from being blamed by their husbands' families, they learn everything that can help. In other words, from women's frustrations in indigenous communities, there emerges some sense of peer education,<sup>10</sup> which this paper would refer to as "communal education." It is a communal education because it happens in the community as women in the village educate one another (and even their male counterparts) about Mpesu. Mpesu then gets to be understood by everyone as the solution to the erectile dysfunction of men in Tshakuma and even other parts of South Africa as people share knowledge about this indigenous medicine. In other words, similar to peer education, communal education can be explained as a transfer of knowledge from those who sell Mpesu to other community members who suffer from sexual or reproductive health

<sup>2</sup> Azibanasamesa DC Owaba et al., "Aphrodisiac Agents Used in Traditional Medicine and Their Mechanism of Action - A Review," *Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry* 10, no. 3 (May 1, 2021): 126–53, <https://doi.org/10.22271/phyto.2021.v10.i3b.14085>.

<sup>3</sup> Siphesihle Dube et al., "Health Risk Assessment of Metals in African Aphrodisiacs: A Case Study of Aqueous Concoctions from Johannesburg and Durban Herbal Markets, South Africa," *Applied Sciences* 13, no. 4 (2023): 2148.

<sup>4</sup> Ramandeep Singh et al., "An Overview on Traditional Medicinal Plants as Aphrodisiac Agent," *Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry* 1, no. 4 (2012): 43–56.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Adu-Gyamfi and Eugenia Anderson, "Indigenous Medicine and Traditional Healing in Africa: A Systematic Synthesis of the Literature," *Philosophy, Social and Human Disciplines* 1 (2019): 69–100.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Akwe Masango, "Indigenous Knowledge Codification of African Traditional Medicine: Inhibited by Status Quo Based on Secrecy?," *Information Development* 36, no. 3 (September 5, 2020): 327–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666919853007>.

<sup>7</sup> J. L. Parpart, *Women and the State in Africa: In the Precarious Balance* (Routledge, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Ezekwesili-Ofil Josephine Ozioma and Okaka Antoinette Nwamaka Chinwe, "Herbal Medicines in African Traditional Medicine," *Herbal Medicine* 10 (2019): 191–214.

<sup>9</sup> Ossy Muganga Julius Kasilo et al., "Towards Universal Health Coverage: Advancing the Development and Use of Traditional Medicines in Africa," *BMJ Global Health* 4, no. Suppl 9 (October 11, 2019): e001517, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2019-001517>.

<sup>10</sup> Ayebo Evawere Sadoh et al., "Effect of Peer Education on Knowledge of Human Papilloma Virus and Cervical Cancer among Female Adolescent Students in Benin City, Nigeria," *Annals of Global Health* 84, no. 1 (2018): 121.

problems.<sup>11</sup> Although peer education in this context is likened to communal education, caution must be taken because peer education is commonly mentioned with a negative connotation while communal education does not have a negative connotation attached to it. In this paper, women's peer education has been charitably renamed communal education due to the fact that it is driven by the idea of empowerment and providing solutions to societal problems.

### **Indigenous Aphrodisiac Medicines support and save Relationships**

It is worth mentioning that members of the Tshakuma market center refused to reveal the ingredients or recipe for preparing Mpesu. The researchers also had to withdraw from seeking knowledge of how Mpesu is made because that has never been necessarily the aim of this study. However, it was quite amazing for the researchers to see that communities even engage in communal education on sexual or reproductive health to solve their communities' problems that may lead to many societal problems. This seems deep, as Ahlberg argues that some women get abused by their husbands due to the frustration that accrues as a result of sexual health problems.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Ekene et al. argue that Mpesu, the indigenous aphrodisiac of the Venda people, was used by ancient ancestors from time immemorial since sexual and reproductive problems also began to be known ages ago.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, it seems that the majority of women in Venda defend the use of Mpesu by their husbands, except the few who claim to have not faced problems that require them to use Mpesu as a means of intervention. Perhaps, this advocacy of husbands using Mpesu to combat erectile problems is because sexual dissatisfaction affects both the man and a woman during the time of sexual intercourse. As this paper sets out to explore women's views about the use of Mpesu, there are important and interesting views as well as reasons why women get seriously interested in men's sexual health. This use of Mpesu in Venda even leads to discussions about cultural stereotypes, ideologies, and dogmas linked with sexual health illnesses, which this paper seeks to unravel and free women of all blame and accusations.

### **African Indigenous Knowledge Systems promote Communal Education**

Communal education in the case of Mpesu helps make a good case for Ubuntu ethics and the relevance of African indigenous knowledge systems. The Ubuntu ethic holds the view that "it takes a village to raise a child,"<sup>14</sup> which then defends the view that one person's problem is the whole community's problem. This view greatly contributes to the argument of this study, that is, men's sexual health problems affect women equally as they affect men. In many academic research studies, African indigenous knowledge seems to have been ignored or overshadowed by the influx of Western knowledge and Western scholarship in African universities.<sup>15</sup> It is against this backdrop that this study considers African indigenous knowledge worthy of being revived and further explored. This study unravels the indigenous knowledge of medicine and the respect for ubuntu (humanity) in African ethical philosophy. In this case, the Ubuntu ethic comes in as a value that makes people care about the continuous existence of their community rather than a vicious situation whereby everyone is by himself.<sup>16</sup> The communal education on Mpesu solutions to men's sexual problems vividly exposes the argument that humans are social beings by nature.<sup>17</sup> Once humans understand their social nature, they become involved in the collective search for solutions to their problems. This leads to another point of this study, which is that when the whole community is involved in improving one another's state of living, everyone will be involved in learning. Therefore, rather than

<sup>11</sup> Munmun Roy, "Home Makers: Unpaid Domestic Workers," 2020; Alex Asakitiki, "African Indigenous Medicines: Towards a Holistic Healthcare System in Africa," *African Identities* 20, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 365–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1820311>.

<sup>12</sup> Beth Maina Ahlberg, "Integrated Health Care Systems and Indigenous Medicine: Reflections from the Sub-Saharan African Region," *Frontiers in Sociology* 2 (2017): 12.

<sup>13</sup> Amaechi Kingsley Ekene et al., "Placing Indigenous Knowledge at the Core of Production and Marketing of Medicinal Plant ( Mpesu ) in Zimbabwe and South Africa," in *Casebook of Indigenous Business Practices in Africa* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), 167–85, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-251-520231017>.

<sup>14</sup> Nomlaungelo Ngubane and Manyane Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy—Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice," *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–12.

<sup>15</sup> Maren Seehawer, "South African Science Teachers' Strategies for Integrating Indigenous and Western Knowledges in Their Classes: Practical Lessons in Decolonisation," *Educational Research for Social Change* 7, no. SPE (2018): 91–110.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Mokhutso, "Ubuntu Is under Siege: A Reflection on the Challenges of South Africa Then and Now.," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Temitope Fagunwa, "Ubuntu: Revisiting an Endangered African Philosophy in Quest of a Pan-Africanist Revolutionary Ideology," *Genealogy* 3, no. 3 (August 3, 2019): 45, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3030045>.

viewing the sale of Mpesu as an exchange with value for money, the Ubuntu ethic made those women share African indigenous knowledge of medicine. The spirit of sharing embedded in Ubuntu has more to learn for the African indigenous communities and sharing starts from knowledge itself as an absolute virtue.<sup>18</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is committed to the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy emphasizes clarity and argument, which are often achieved through logical and linguistic analysis.<sup>19</sup> Frege is considered the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasizes the clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting thoughts.<sup>20</sup> Within this framework, Bertrand Russell found a space to argue for logicism and logical atomism.<sup>21</sup> According to Soames, logic and logical atomism refer to the practice of breaking an argument into basic propositions to understand its coherence as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Hallen and Sodipo argue for the analytical breakdown of issues into simpler and logical thoughts through the use of logic in simple ordinary language.<sup>23</sup> Soames seems to hold the view that philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of language and that all necessary truths are a priori, analytic, and true in virtue of the meaning of words depending upon how the world in fact is.<sup>24</sup> Analytic theory helps in producing philosophy that is not ideologically motivated but thought that is analytic and reflective.<sup>25</sup> Under Wittgenstein's inspiration,<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Carnap sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism as a development of this tradition.<sup>27</sup> Logical positivism holds that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts.<sup>28</sup> Carnap and other scholars contributed to this tradition by rejecting the doctrines of their predecessors about constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems.<sup>29</sup> They argued that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the "quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misleading intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy."<sup>30</sup>

The analytic framework in this research work helps to acquire a deeper or adequate understanding of the research problem before forwarding our own views. Since it is the framework that guides the methodology, it also helps to critically apply an analysis that cannot be accused of bias. This theoretical framework enables a researcher to be reflective and, at the same time, be within the guards of rationality while being critical of his or her thoughts. With the guidance of logical positivism, researchers have been able to deal with dogmas and ideological speculations around the issue of the use of indigenous aphrodisiac medicine while operating as neutral beings in the unfolding surprises of women having more knowledge of erectile problems than men. As Soames argues, logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths, but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts.<sup>31</sup> This has helped researchers simplify their thoughts in this exploration. This paper used ordinary language to produce critical thoughts while at the same time analysing the common thoughts that currently exist in South Africa about aphrodisiac medicines. The use of ordinary language is due to the fact that this work deals with real

<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Blickfeldt Willmore et al., "Ubuntu among the 'Born Frees': Exploring the Transmission of Social Values through Community Engagement in South Africa," *International Social Work* 66, no. 6 (November 7, 2023): 1803–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728221086151>; Yolande Steenkamp and Willem Fourie, "In Search of Commonalities: Ubuntu and the Transcultural Approach," in *A Relational View on Cultural Complexity: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Springer, 2023), 49–65.

<sup>19</sup> C. McGinn, *The Making of a Philosopher: My Journey through Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> G Frege, "Begriffsschrift. Grundgesetze Der Arithmetik" (London: Stanford, 1906), [plato.stanford.edu/entries/frege/#BasFerLogPreCal](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/frege/#BasFerLogPreCal).

<sup>21</sup> S. Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>23</sup> B. Hallen and J. O. Sodipo, *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>25</sup> B Hallen, "Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth.," in *Analytic Philosophy*, ed. G. Preyer and G. Peter (Goethe University Frankfurt. Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> L. Wittgenstein, "Mind Association," *JSTOR* 61, 1937, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2252298>.

<sup>27</sup> R. Carnap, *Logical Syntax of Language* (London: Routledge Publishers, 1961).

<sup>28</sup> Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>29</sup> Carnap, *Logical Syntax of Language*.

<sup>30</sup> J. H. Glock, *What Is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Soames, *The Dawn of Analysis: Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*.

issues that involve real human beings in the world, other than some imaginary fancies. An analytical framework is adequately relevant when dealing with sensitive but amazing issues like this one of indigenous aphrodisiac medicine because, in South Africa, few scholars have rationally explored indigenous knowledge about aphrodisiac medicine in this analytic manner.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research design selected for this study is a case study. A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles.<sup>32</sup> McQuaid et al. explain that a case study explores issues based on time, situations, and environment.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Yin maintains that a "case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case or cases conforming to the phenomenon within a real-life context, especially where the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context, and by addressing the 'how' or 'why' questions concerning the phenomenon of interest." The case study enabled the researchers to understand the situations of the participants in real-life settings,<sup>34</sup> how they make sense of their real-life worlds, and their understanding of such a world. It also helped clarify the study topic and explored the views of women about indigenous aphrodisiacs.

### Research Locale

This study took place in Venda, situated within the focused province of Limpopo in South Africa. With its unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics, Venda faces specific challenges of sexual and reproductive problems, the use of drugs that produce erectile side effects, a high rate of divorce because of men's erectile problems, and the use of Mpesu as the only solution to cure sexual-related problems. The presence of these informal markets that sell indigenous aphrodisiacs further magnifies these challenges, making it essential for women to sell Mpesu in order to mitigate these issues.

### Selection of the Participants

The study followed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. A total of four informal market women who sell Mpesu were purposefully selected. In this way, the 4 women (stall owners) who agreed to be purposefully sampled for this study found it easier to work with the researchers as they posed no threat of disturbing the market business. The participants' profiles are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Profile of the Participants**

Participant	Gender	Age	Level of Education
W1	female	30	Matric
W2	female	27	Matric
W3	female	32	Matric
W4	female	31	Matric

Drawing themes from observations makes it easier for this explorative study to proceed because less participant involvement simplifies the whole process of confidentiality and anonymization.<sup>35</sup> Conflict of interest was avoided by first engaging (seeking consent) with any party involved before embarking on any step of this study. In a few instances where translation was needed (during the explanation of this study at Tshakuma), translation was offered by one of the researchers, as she is fluent in Venda vernacular.

<sup>32</sup> L. Cohen, L., Manion, and K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge Falmer, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Leona McQuaid, Katie Thomson, and Katrina Bannigan, "Case Study Research: Building the Occupational Therapy Evidence Base One Case at a Time," *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 30, no. 4 (2023): 435–43.

<sup>34</sup> P. Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (Guilford Publications, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Michelle E. Kiger and Lara Varpio, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131," *Medical Teacher* 42, no. 8 (August 2, 2020): 846–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>.

Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities (i.e., anonymity)—for example, Participant 1 (W1), Participant 2 (W2), Participant 3 (W3), and Participant 4 (W4).

### **Data Collection**

This study adopted the observation method of data collection because it proves more effective and relevant for researchers who operate within the interpretivist research paradigm.<sup>36</sup> The observation method is less complicated because participants only had to agree (orally) to be observed while advertising and selling Mpesu medicine. During the observation period, notes were recorded by the researchers as part of the study, and interfering with the business of Tshakuma was highly avoided as per the request of stall owners there. All published sources, like online YouTube interviews on Mpesu and literature about aphrodisiac drugs used in this study, are adequately acknowledged by referencing and citing (both in-text and bibliography). At Tshakuma Market Center, the 4 women participants gave oral consent to be observed, and researchers started by explaining this study to them before the observation happened. The observation took 7 days.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method in the study. TA is deemed relevant to qualitative data analysis; in this case, the main statements of the participants were identified, and a conclusion was drawn based on authentic evidence and reasoning from raw data. This method of data analysis involves "dismantling, segmentation, and assembling data to form meaningful patterns to draw inferences."<sup>37</sup> The data was transcribed, then interpreted, synthesized, and combined all relevant information into a single unit. The collected data were categorized to determine relationships, themes, and patterns. During the data analysis process, observation notes were first captured using the observation schedule. The information was disassembled and reassembled. Data from focus observations were transcribed, coded, and categorized into various themes regarding women's views on the use of indigenous aphrodisiacs.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permission to go and observe the selling women in the Tshakuma market center was granted by the University of Limpopo with ethical clearance number 2022/09/07/31362338/13/am. After receiving approval, informed consent was obtained from all the sampled participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time. The researchers also provided assent for informal market women to participate in this study. Ensuring that individuals involved in research comprehend its purpose, procedures, and potential risks is crucial for researchers. Respecting participants' autonomy and their right to make informed decisions about research involvement is a crucial aspect of safeguarding their well-being. During data collection, the researchers ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained, which is also a crucial element of ethical consideration.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Data were collected and analysed in line with the research question: What are the women's views about indigenous aphrodisiacs in Venda, Limpopo, South Africa? to answer it. Under research question 1, there are four sub-themes, such as knowledge of sexual and reproductive problems; indigenous aphrodisiac medicines produce fewer side effects; indigenous aphrodisiac medicines support and save relationships; and African indigenous knowledge systems promote communal education. See below Table 2.

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<sup>36</sup> Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt, "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars.," *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>37</sup> Kiger and Varpio, "Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data: AMEE Guide No. 131."

**Table 2:** Thematic representation of data based on the research questions.

Research questions	Analysis of Sub-themes
What are the women’s views about indigenous aphrodisiacs in Venda, Limpopo, South Africa?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge of sexual and reproductive problems</li> <li>● Indigenous aphrodisiac medicines produce fewer side effects</li> <li>● Indigenous aphrodisiac medicines supports and saves relationships</li> <li>● African indigenous knowledge systems promote communal education</li> </ul>

**Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Problems**

Women have more knowledge about sexual and reproductive problems because they are homemakers.<sup>38</sup> Being homemakers makes women more informed than men because it is their responsibility to take care of everyone at home.<sup>39</sup>

W1: Women have more knowledge and understanding of men’s erectile problems as they face those problems with their partners during intimacy at home.

In an actual sense, this means that it is not by chance or surprise that women know more than men about the issues of men’s erectile problems. Ugwu argues that even when a child is sick at home, the first person who is expected to understand the nature of sickness is the mother.<sup>40</sup> Within that same line of argument, Amaechi argues that in Venda, it is deemed an embarrassment for a wife to be ignorant about the problems that threaten the existence of the family, like reproductive health.<sup>41</sup> Agbanyim et al. narrate that, by virtue of being mothers, women become the first to know about men’s reproductive and sexual health. It goes without saying that they get to be the first people expected to seek medical help from any source available.<sup>42</sup>

From a psychological point of view, McMahon argues that sexual health issues that include erectile dysfunction create shame in men, and the closest people to share are mothers and wives.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps that is the reason why Capogrosso et al. argue that sharing confidential information with women is easier than with anybody else because most women are good keepers of secrets.<sup>44</sup> Since women are recipients of all kinds of information about issues at home, they get to be well-positioned to have more knowledge than anyone else.

**Indigenous Aphrodisiac Medicines produce fewer Side Effects**

The argument of this paper would then be that having more knowledge makes women fit to be the first seekers of solutions to their family problems. Erectile dysfunction is part of those family problems that women get to know first and are compelled to seek solutions for, for which Mpesu becomes one of the more relevant solutions. In this study, it is believed that erectile problems affect women in the same way as men because they are wives of those suffering men. This is justifiable, as Ahlberg argues that once a man and a woman are married, they then become one in all aspects, from the soul to all physical matters, including their personal bodies.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Brandy Thomas Wells, “No Less a Pioneer: Susie Wiseman Yergan and the Black Freedom Struggle in South Africa and the United States,” *The Journal of African American History* 107, no. 4 (2022): 523–47.

<sup>39</sup> Roy, “Home Makers: Unpaid Domestic Workers.”

<sup>40</sup> P. Ugwu, “Women in Agriculture: Challenges Facing Women in African Farming,” *Project Report of African Women in Agriculture*, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Iouisa N. Amaechi, “Women Empowerment And Sustainable Development In Nigeria,” *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 6, no. 11 (November 8, 2019): 5711–12, <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsshi/v6i11.04>.

<sup>42</sup> Stella Chimezie Agbanyim, Nwachukwu J Obiakor, and Ngozi Ojiakor, “Women Institutions And Festivals In Awka-Etiti Up To 1955,” *AMAMIHE Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>43</sup> Christopher G McMahon, “Current Diagnosis and Management of Erectile Dysfunction,” *Medical Journal of Australia* 210, no. 10 (June 17, 2019): 469–76, <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50167>.

<sup>44</sup> Paolo Capogrosso et al., “Should We Tailor the Clinical Management of Erectile Dysfunction According to Different Ages?,” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 16, no. 7 (July 1, 2019): 999–1004, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.03.405>.

<sup>45</sup> Ahlberg, “Integrated Health Care Systems and Indigenous Medicine: Reflections from the Sub-Sahara African Region.”

W2: South African women embrace the use of indigenous aphrodisiac medicines as they argue that they have fewer known side effects than Western aphrodisiac medicines.

This is a view that is corroborated by Mudau, wherein she argues that some wives get more frustrated when they are deprived of their conjugal rights of intimacy (including sex) by their husbands.<sup>46</sup> The word "frustration" in Mudau's argument can be read together with LaMotte's argument that sexual and reproductive problems sometimes lead to depression in both partners who are no longer satisfied with the quality of their sexual intercourse.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, frustration and depression are inevitable for young couples who need to have children because there is no other less expensive way of having children except having sexual intercourse.<sup>48</sup> Since Raslan and Gaber argue that in most cases, wives are blamed by their in-laws for being barren if they delay producing children,<sup>49</sup> Mpesu becomes very relevant and valuable in solving erectile problems and reproductive issues. It seems that one may also argue that women's knowledge of sexual health problems is valuable communal knowledge that has always helped in finding more practical solutions, like Mpesu.

### **Indigenous Aphrodisiac Medicines support and save Relationships**

Based on the finding that women have more knowledge about reproductive health and sexual health problems, it is the view of this paper that women become good teachers and good community builders. It is evident in the Tshakuma market center that women do not only sell Mpesu, but they also educate the community about sexual health problems and the importance of maintaining a healthy reproductive system. Montemurro takes a psychoanalytic turn when he argues that sexual health problems even create a situation of angry husbands at home who then become abusive to their wives.<sup>50</sup>

W3: Selling Mpesu supports and saves families or relationships that would have otherwise collapsed due to men's sexual or erectile dysfunction.

This still contributes to the idea that knowledge of aphrodisiac medications by women helps even in solving other problems related to erectile dysfunction.<sup>51</sup> In fact, Oladokun argues that women have always been under pressure to find solutions to all sexual health problems because even the untrained among them are home-based nurses.<sup>52</sup> According to this study, the term "home-based nurses" clarifies the point that women are always expected to solve different kinds of health problems, from physical to emotional ones, for everyone at home.<sup>53</sup> According to Adams et al., this is true because although men may be considered physically strong, sexual health problems do strike them off balance, and at that point, they get compelled to confide in women, who then seek solutions.<sup>54</sup> Their argument reveals that at some point women find themselves having to strengthen their husbands emotionally and seek medical help for them, and that is where communal education gets more important.<sup>55</sup> To clarify this point, one may refer to the Fatemi et al. argument, wherein they argue that women get to have informal sessions whereby they learn about solving family problems.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Z. Mudau, "Zwamaramani 2017: Mabundu for Libido in Zwamaramani," 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSdaN0AyBw8>.

<sup>47</sup> S. LaMotte, "It Just Didn't Enter My Mind to Initiate Sex; Low Sex Drive in Men Is Linked to a Chemical Imbalance," CNN HEALTH, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/11/health/male-low-sex-drive-treatment-wellness/index.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Deidre Pretorius, Ian D. Couper, and Motlatso G. Mlambo, "Neglected Sexual Dysfunction Symptoms amongst Chronic Patients during Routine Consultations in Rural Clinics in the North West Province," *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine* 13, no. 1 (April 28, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v13i1.2850>.

<sup>49</sup> Salma Raslan and Mohamed Gaber, "Sexual Dysfunction in Partners of Men with Premature Ejaculation.," *Menoufia Medical Journal* 34, no. 3 (2021): 852.

<sup>50</sup> Beth Montemurro, "'If You Could Just See Me': The Construction of Heterosexual Men's Sexual Selves and the Hierarchy of Desirability," *Sexualities* 24, no. 3 (March 6, 2021): 303–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720939045>.

<sup>51</sup> Alessandra Graziottin, Elisa Maseroli, and Linda Vignozzi, "Female Sexual Dysfunctions: A Clinical Perspective on HSDD, FAD, PGAD, and FOD," in *Practical Clinical Andrology* (Springer International Publishing Cham, 2022), 89–112.

<sup>52</sup> O O Oladokun, "Ethanol Root Extract of *Sphenocentrum Jollyanum* (Pierre) Ameliorates Paroxetine-Induced Erectile Dysfunction in Rabbits," *FUOYE Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences (FJPAS)* 7, no. 1 (2022): 108–20.

<sup>53</sup> Naser Lotfi Fatemi, Hossein Karimi Moonaghi, and Abbas Heydari, "Perceived Challenges Faced by Nurses in Home Health Care Setting: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Community Based Nursing and Midwifery* 7, no. 2 (2019): 118.

<sup>54</sup> Catina Adams, Leesa Hooker, and Angela Taft, "A Systematic Review and Qualitative Meta-synthesis of the Roles of Home-visiting Nurses Working with Women Experiencing Family Violence," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 79, no. 4 (2023): 1189–1210.

<sup>55</sup> Adams, Hooker, and Taft, "A Systematic Review and Qualitative Meta-synthesis of the Roles of Home-visiting Nurses Working with Women Experiencing Family Violence."

<sup>56</sup> Fatemi, Moonaghi, and Heydari, "Perceived Challenges Faced by Nurses in Home Health Care Setting: A Qualitative Study."

## African Indigenous Knowledge Systems promote Communal Education

For the argument of this paper, it is worth mentioning that Mpesu happens to be one of the topics in those informal sessions that happen at Tshakuma Market Center. Women in Tshakuma not only sell Mpesu to their customers and be happy that their merchandise is being bought but there is some form of educational session that takes place there. When selling Mpesu, those women in the Tshakuma market center are educated about (i) how to use Mpesu, (ii) when to use it, and (iii) what to expect after using it. In other words, the knowledge that these women have ends up being shared as they continue with the process of advertising and selling Mpesu. Although women in the Tshakuma market center refused to share knowledge of Mpesu ingredients, it is worth mentioning that this study takes interest in Mpesu for three reasons: (i) many studies have been conducted on other aphrodisiac medicines that exclude Mpesu; (ii) Mpesu being a South African indigenous aphrodisiac reveals the aspect of communal care (Ubuntu); and (iii) Mpesu reveals a good narrative of practical communal education geared towards problem-solving. W4: Women engage in communal education that happens while advertising and selling Mpesu in the Tshakuma fruit and vegetable market.

These are really fascinating aspects that are of interest in this study because Tshakuma Market Center proves to be an educational community center besides being a mere fruit and vegetable market center. Another interesting aspect of Mpesu is that it is argued to be an aphrodisiac that has no side effects.<sup>57</sup> Nelwamondo argues that some of the medications create dependency or cause other problems for the person using them, and based on the testimonies of those who have used Mpesu, there have been no side effects at all.<sup>58</sup> Mudau et al. even add that the method of administering Mpesu is so simple that a wife can just put it in her husband's porridge, and their erectile problem will be solved after drinking that porridge.<sup>59</sup>

This is to show how easily Mpesu can be administered because porridge is one of the common foods eaten by the Vhavenda people, which is also known to be beneficial in terms of building strength in the early hours of the day. Therefore, besides the fact that Mpesu is bought at a reasonable village price, even administering it to the victim of erectile dysfunction is easier and more understandable for everyone.

In other words, the money that Tshakuma women earn from selling Mpesu can be considered a token of appreciation, while customers obtain valuable knowledge about solving their sexual problems. One of the truths that emerged with this case of Mpesu selling at Tshakuma is that communal education does not require any society or structures like schools and universities, but it can happen in any part of the community. This observation corroborates Gbenga's argument that textbooks and the confinement of buildings like formal schools were never important in constructive education that has learners' intrinsic aims.<sup>60</sup>

## Implications

According to Williams, teaching and learning with intrinsic educational aims is the kind of education to solve the problems of the learner rather than learning to solve fictional problems or problems of other people elsewhere.<sup>61</sup> Since Mpesu has been there for ages, as Adeola narrates, it is quite surprising that there is no literature about it and it does not appear on the shelves of renowned pharmacies.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this means that more research needs to be done in this field of African indigenous medicine. By far, this case of Mpesu in Tshakuma market center may count as one of the women's revolutions, in which they take it up to themselves to provide social care and spread knowledge about indigenous medicine. Based on this

<sup>57</sup> Munyadziwa Rosette Nelwamondo, "The Antioxidant, Cytotoxicity and Antimicrobial Activities of Medicinal Plants Used for Male Sexual Healing in Venda, Limpopo Province" (2022).

<sup>58</sup> Nelwamondo, "The Antioxidant, Cytotoxicity and Antimicrobial Activities of Medicinal Plants Used for Male Sexual Healing in Venda, Limpopo Province."

<sup>59</sup> T E Mudau, J O Olowoyo, and S O Amoo, "Ethnobotanical Assessment of Medicinal Plants Used Traditionally for Treating Diabetes in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa," *South African Journal of Botany* 146 (2022): 304–24.

<sup>60</sup> Gbenga Michael Adeyeye, "The Impact of Social Adjustment on Academic Performance of Learners in Secondary Schools in Ogbomoso Nigeria," 2019.

<sup>61</sup> P. M. Williams, "Folktales: Characteristics. African Folktales: Overview, Importance, and Examples," 2023, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/african-folktales-importance-commonalities-changes.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Ogechi Adeola, "Advancing Africa's Indigenous Business Practices: Recommendations for Educators and Business Actors," in *Casebook of Indigenous Business Practices in Africa* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), 225–43, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-762-420231022>.

study's observation, the way people come to buy Mpesu signifies that it works for them. To emphasize this point, one may refer to Mudau's argument that selling Mpesu is different from selling fairytales and vain hopes because some family relationships between spouses have been repaired through the use of Mpesu.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, Magwede et al. argue that other families that were on the verge of collapse were revived due to the introduction of Mpesu to those family couples.<sup>64</sup>

The case of Mpesu lays a clear understanding that African people always had their own indigenous ways of dealing with issues, from medical to spiritual to societal. Nevertheless, as Mudau would argue, with the popularization of Western methods, African ones fell victim to being ignored.<sup>65</sup> Magwede et al. argue that without having hospitals and 'so-called' advanced equipment, Africans knew all there was to know about medicinal herbs and their use.<sup>66</sup> The issue, then, might be recording that information. According to Williams, the oral tradition of passing knowledge from one generation to the next was abandoned when academics came with textbooks and many ways of recording knowledge.<sup>67</sup> It is at that point that gems of African indigenous knowledge and teaching methods get ignored. Therefore, it is a good thing that women in Tshakuma have taken it upon themselves to educate the community about human health and solutions to sexual health problems. This paper holds that, besides the fact that Mpesu has no known side effects, its sale takes into account human dignity and prioritizes the family wellness of those who need help. Perhaps more studies that link individual health and societal health should be conducted to emphasize the role of Ubuntu and the interconnectedness of individuals with their communities.

By far, communal education reveals the usefulness of all community members, regardless of whether they are educated or uneducated in the academic sense. In this era of reverting to learning about indigenous knowledge systems, the study of indigenous medicines and their utility in rural communities needs to be prioritized because this also advances some revolution in the field of medicine as well as psychology. The sale of Mpesu in Tshakuma is igniting the reality that, without laboratories, Africans have always survived many medical conditions through the use of indigenous medicines.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study implies that if women can be more empowered in their small businesses, like the one selling Mpesu at Tshakuma Market Center, communities would benefit more. The communal education driven by women can be more transformative or progressive in terms of spreading indigenous knowledge in villages. Academics can make more progress if education is driven by the spirit of Ubuntu, which includes caring and sharing rather than competing and maximizing individual gains. More research needs to be done to approve indigenous medicines such as Mpesu to even appear on the shelves of renowned pharmacies. Further studies should be conducted to find more solutions to men's mental health and gender-based violence among couples in homes, as it appears that men's sexual health problems are one of the causes of GBV. There is still a need for researchers to conduct more studies that expose the benefits that communities accrue from having empowered women in South Africa.

## CONCLUSION

This study has used an analytic theoretical framework to analyse women's perspectives on the use of Mpesu in Venda, South Africa. Throughout the study, this theoretical framework has shown great utility because it gets to the finer details of the observations without any bias. The findings have shown that women have more knowledge and understanding of men's sexual health problems than most men. Mpesu is one of indigenous aphrodisiac medicines in South Africa that have helped men deal with their erectile problems with no known side effects, and the fact that it has no side effects make Mpesu easier to use. While selling Mpesu at Thakuma Market Center, women also engage in educating their customers about the use of Mpesu as a South African indigenous medicine. Women from Venda practice the ethical way

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<sup>63</sup> Mudau, "Zwamaramani 2017: Mabundu for Libido in Zwamaramani."

<sup>64</sup> K. Magwede, B.-E. van Wyk, and A.E. van Wyk, "An Inventory of Vhavenda Useful Plants," *South African Journal of Botany* 122 (May 2019): 57–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sajb.2017.12.013>.

<sup>65</sup> Mudau, "Zwamaramani 2017: Mabundu for Libido in Zwamaramani."

<sup>66</sup> Magwede, van Wyk, and van Wyk, "An Inventory of Vhavenda Useful Plants."

<sup>67</sup> Williams, "Folktales: Characteristics. African Folktales: Overview, Importance, and Examples."

of Ubuntu as they engage in communal education while selling Mpesu, and that maximizes the spread of indigenous knowledge while at the same time making money for themselves. Since communal education is driven by problem-solving, it encompasses many principles of Ubuntu ethics, which include caring and sharing, from the burden of problems to information about solutions to societal problems. Solving men's sexual health problems may even lead to the solution of other problems closely related to erectile problems, like mental health and domestic violence, or gender-based violence (GBV). Shared indigenous knowledge of medicine helps in family and community building in the case of Mpesu, as it is not only for the monetary gain of the seller but also for empowering the buyer. It is within the depth of the findings that one may reasonably argue that communal education brings solutions to societal problems without any need for the qualifications and formalities required in formal education systems.

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