

# South African traditional healers' approaches to mental illness: conceptualisation, diagnosis, and treatment: A scoping review

Daniel Lesiba Letsoalo <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

Nearly 80% of Black South Africans consult traditional healers, mainly for mental illness. Geographical accessibility and cultural compatibility are the main reasons for this trend. Consolidation of research on traditional healers' approaches to mental illness in South Africa is lacking. This review aimed to systematically map existing literature on traditional healers' approaches to mental illness in South Africa between the years 2004 and 2024. The review used Arksey and O'Malley's framework and the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Selected databases, namely Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycInfo, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Global Health, MEDLINE, and APA PsycArticles, were searched to identify relevant studies. To cross-reference the identified studies, manual searches on Google and Google Scholar were performed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the conceptualisation of mental illness by traditional healers encompassed three broad domains: the supernatural and spiritual, the biological and psychological, and the physical and environmental. Traditional healers commonly used divination bones and ancestral consultation for diagnosis. The preferred treatment was medicinal concoctions. However, additional research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of traditional healing treatments. The study contributes to the discourse on how traditional healers in South Africa approach mental illness. Mapping existing research and perspectives systematically provides insights that could help policymakers, healthcare professionals, and researchers shape the formal integration of traditional healing into mental healthcare. Furthermore, the results could aid in promoting collaboration between traditional and biomedical healing systems, thereby fostering more inclusive and culturally sensitive mental health services.

**Keywords:** South African Traditional Healers, Mental Illness, Conceptualisation, Diagnosis, Treatment

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a public health concern in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> This is due to an intricate interplay of sociopolitical, economic, historical and cultural factors. Traditional healers, indigenously known as *sangomas* or *inyangas*

---

<sup>1</sup> Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa, "The State of Mental Health in South Africa," 2023, <https://www.eapasa.co.za/the-state-of-mental-health-in-south-africa/>.

---

**CORRESPONDENCE** – Daniel Lesiba Letsoalo Email: [letsodl@unisa.ac.za](mailto:letsodl@unisa.ac.za)

**PUBLICATION HISTORY** - Received : 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2025 | Accepted: 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2025 | Published: 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2026.

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE** – Letsoalo, Daniel Lesiba. "South African traditional healers' approaches to mental illness: conceptualisation, diagnosis, and treatment: A scoping review." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.1 (2026): 182 - 209. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267114>

**COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING** - © 2026 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.

This is an open access article under the CCBY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

in IsiZulu, have been vital to South African communities for decades, providing culturally based and relevant mental healthcare.<sup>2</sup> A traditional healer is defined as “someone who is recognised by the community in which he or she lives as competent to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and other methods based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability in the community.”<sup>3</sup> The term “traditional healer” is an umbrella term as there are various types of traditional healers with varying training and expertise.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional healers use various methods to treat mental health issues. The most common include, inter alia, spiritual rituals and herbs, and their treatment approach is holistic by nature.<sup>5</sup> Despite the role of traditional healers in ensuring the holistic well-being of communities for years and their widespread use of traditional healing methods, there is still limited integration of these methods into formal mental healthcare.<sup>6</sup> This identified gap may lead to fragmented care and a missed opportunity for a more useful, holistic treatment approach that is respectful of cultural practices. Therefore, consolidating available evidence in the form of a review on the conceptualisation, diagnosis and treatment approaches used by traditional healers in treating mental illness is vital for a more nuanced understanding, guidance and development of inclusive mental health strategies which are effective, responsive and culturally sensitive.<sup>7</sup> This may also help to demystify their use.

Another aspect that complicates the mental healthcare landscape in South Africa is the stigma associated with both traditional healing practices and mental illness. That is, mental illness is usually not considered a real illness among most Black South African cultural groups but rather generally described as a “weak character”.<sup>8</sup> Socioeconomic challenges, such as unemployment and poverty, also exacerbate the situation. Meaningfully addressing the interplay of these difficulties requires not only an understanding and respect of traditional healing practices but also a sensitive cultural approach within the broader healthcare system.<sup>9</sup> Gaining a comprehensive understanding on the conceptualisation, diagnosis and treatment approaches used by traditional healers in the treatment of mental illness is vital for the development of mental health strategies and interventions that incorporate and respect cultural practices.

This scoping review aimed to systematically map the existing literature on the conceptualisation, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness by traditional healers in South Africa between the years 2004 and 2024. It sought to identify common methods used and highlight gaps in the research, providing a foundation for future research and contributing to the discourse on the potential integration of traditional healing into formal mental healthcare for a more comprehensive and inclusive healthcare system in South Africa. The following specific questions guided this review:

<sup>2</sup> Salome Thilivhali Sigida and Nare Judy Masola, “Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa,” *International Journal For Psychotherapy In Africa* 5, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Rama Shankar et al., “Traditional Healing Practice and Folk Medicines Used by Mishing Community of North East India,” *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine* 3, no. 3 (2012): 124, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0975-9476.100171>.

<sup>4</sup> Maboe G Mokgobi, “Understanding Traditional African Healing,” *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 20, no. sup-2 (2014): 24–34.

<sup>5</sup> Mokgobi, “Understanding Traditional African Healing.”

<sup>6</sup> Sebu S Semanya and Martin J Potgieter, “Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice,” *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 10, no. 1 (December 10, 2014): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-10-4>.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah J. Ponton et al., “The Mental Health of Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Scoping Review,” *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* 9, no. 2 (June 13, 2024): 94–103, <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.379>.

<sup>8</sup> Makhosazane Felicia Mashabane, “Difficulties in Knowledge and Perceptions of Mental Illness amongst the Student Population: Perspectives Gained from a Participatory Action Research Project by Psychology Master’s Students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal” (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2020), <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstreams/5e0b57b1-42e7-4045-a907-d5afec1e6f69/download>.

<sup>9</sup> Mokhwelepa Leshata Winter and Sumbane Gsakani Olivia, “A Scoping Review of Mental Health Needs and Challenges among Medical Students within South African Universities,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 21, no. 5 (May 4, 2024): 593, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21050593>.

- How do traditional healers in South Africa conceptualise mental illness?
- Which methods do traditional healers in South Africa use to diagnose mental illness?
- What approaches do traditional healers in South Africa employ to treat mental illness?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Prevalence of Traditional Healers in South Africa

It is estimated that there are roughly two million traditional healers in sub-Saharan Africa, and of this number, an estimated 200,000 to 368,000 practise in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> This number is staggering, considering that South Africa has an estimated population of 62 million people.<sup>11</sup> This number also surpasses the estimated number of medical doctors, which stands at about 46, 420<sup>12</sup> and that of psychiatrists, which stands at roughly 850.<sup>13</sup> This means that there are approximately 2.5 psychologists and 1.5 psychiatrists per 100,000 people in South Africa. The small number of psychiatrists and psychologists is also an indictment of the lack of mental healthcare practitioners in the country,<sup>14</sup> and this will likely serve as a barrier to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 3, which is good health and well-being. Research has established that of the 62 million South Africans, 80% consult traditional healers either as the sole source of help or as a supplement to Western medicine.<sup>15</sup> Based on the presented statistics, it is, therefore, reasonable to agree with Mothibe and Sibanda's assertion that traditional healers are overwhelmingly consulted by most South Africans, especially Blacks, and this partly has to do with the fact that they are more accessible, culturally relevant and affordable compared to Western doctors.<sup>16</sup>

### History and Evolution of Traditional Healing Practices in South Africa

During the pre-colonial era, African communities had a well-established system of providing holistic healing. Such practices were anchored in spirituality, cultural beliefs and nature. During this era, traditional healers played a key role in ensuring community health. Spiritual rituals, herbs and divination bones were used in combination to treat any form of mental and physical ailments.<sup>17</sup> However, due to colonialism, European powers suppressed and stigmatised traditional healing practices. Consequently, Western medicine was touted as superior, leading to a disregard for indigenous healing practices. This was made possible by Christian missionaries who actively discouraged the use of indigenous healing labelling it as *pagan* and superstitious.<sup>18</sup>

Despite colonial discouragement, indigenous treatment practices remained resilient and persisted. During the post-colonial era, traditional healers started integrating elements of Western medicine while

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn M. Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa," *BMC Health Services Research* 20, no. 1 (December 15, 2020): 655, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05515-9>; R.A. Street et al., "Traditional Health Practitioners and Sustainable Development: A Case Study in South Africa," *Public Health* 165 (December 2018): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.07.021>.

<sup>11</sup> Stats Sa, *Census, 2022* (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2022), [https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014\\_Census\\_2022\\_Statistical\\_Release.pdf](https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Ritika Tiwari et al., "Reflecting on the Current Scenario and Forecasting the Future Demand for Medical Doctors in South Africa up to 2030: Towards Equal Representation of Women," *Human Resources for Health* 19, no. 1 (December 2, 2021): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-021-00567-2>.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Janse van Rensburg et al., "Profile of the Current Psychiatrist Workforce in South Africa: Establishing a Baseline for Human Resource Planning and Strategy," *Health Policy and Planning* 37, no. 4 (April 13, 2022): 492–504, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czab144>.

<sup>14</sup> Anita Padmanabhanunni et al., "Characterizing the Nature of Professional Training and Practice of Psychologists in South Africa," *Annales Médico-Psychologiques, Revue Psychiatrique* 180, no. 4 (April 2022): 360–65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amp.2022.02.012>.

<sup>15</sup> Jaco Beyers, "Who May Heal? A Plea from Traditional Healers to Participate in Treating Covid-19," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (November 18, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6169>; Yap Boum et al., "Traditional Healers to Improve Access to Quality Health Care in Africa," *The Lancet Global Health* 9, no. 11 (November 2021): e1487–88, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(21\)00438-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(21)00438-1).

<sup>16</sup> Mmamoshedi E Mothibe and Mncengeli Sibanda, "South African Perspective," *Traditional and Complementary Medicine* 31(2019):1–10.

<sup>17</sup> Lyn Schumaker, Diana Jeater, and Tracy Luedke, "Introduction. Histories of Healing: Past and Present Medical Practices in Africa and the Diaspora," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 4 (2007): 707–14.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip M. Guma and Sekgothe Mokgoatšana, "The Historical Relationship between African Indigenous Healing Practices and Western-Orientated Biomedicine in South Africa: A Challenge to Collaboration," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (November 16, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6104>.

preserving cultural heritage. This indicates that healers were adapting to the evolving circumstances. As a result of the resilience of indigenous healing practices, certain aspects of traditional medicine were legalised in the 1980s, highlighting the significance of indigenous healing practices.<sup>19</sup> Resilience demonstrated over the past decades has set the stage for the formal integration of traditional healers into the healthcare system. This aims to ensure the provision of holistic healthcare. Despite these positive advancements, challenges such as stigma, disparities in accessing healthcare, lack of formal recognition and the use of concoctions that may be harmful continue to threaten the speed at which this much-needed approach will be realised.

### Types of Traditional Healers in South Africa

Like medical professionals, traditional healers are diverse with distinct practices.<sup>20</sup> In South Africa, various types of traditional healers exist.<sup>21</sup> These include traditional doctors (*Inyanga* or *Herbalist*), diviners (*Sangoma* or *Ngaka ya ditaola*), faith healers (*Prophet*, *Umthandazi* or *Umprofiti*), traditional birth attendants (*Ababelithisi* or *Babelegisi*), traditional surgeons and Sanusi (*Lebone*).<sup>22</sup>

Traditional doctors are specialists in the use of herbs and medicinal preparations used to treat various diseases. They are knowledgeable about curative herbs, medicinal concoctions and natural treatments. However, they become healers by choice and are normally mentored by elder healers.<sup>23</sup> Diviners, commonly known as *sangoma* in isiZulu, *ngaka* in Northern Sotho and *nanga* in Tshivenda, are considered senior within the African traditional healing system. They are mostly women who possess the ability to define, diagnose and treat illness within the patient's cultural context. Unlike traditional doctors, becoming a diviner is believed to be conferred by the ancestors.<sup>24</sup> If one is chosen to become a diviner, the individual is usually believed to experience dreams or an illness which does not respond to Western intervention.<sup>25</sup> The services they provide are multifaceted and include conflict resolution, revealing the causes of misfortunes, confirming the beliefs of patients, recommending solutions, and protecting against witchcraft.<sup>26</sup> Diviners are regarded as the most powerful of all the traditional healers, as they can diagnose a problem without eliciting any information from the patient. Faith healers on the other hand are believed to be called by the Holy Spirit, but they can also be *sangomas*. Their healing is believed to come from God. That is, their power is revealed through ecstatic and trance-like states with ancestral spirits and/or the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Faith healers diagnose illness by placing their hand on the Bible, burning a candle and praying. Their treatment approach involves the use of ash, holy water, and laying hands on patients.<sup>28</sup>

Traditional birth attendants are mostly elderly women who specialise in pregnancy and midwifery issues.<sup>29</sup> These are women who have been midwives for years and are respected for their obstetric knowledge and ritualistic expertise.<sup>30</sup> Their role is not restricted to midwifery duties; they also teach pregnant women behavioural avoidance, ritual disposal of placentas, ritual bathing of the mother and provision of traditional

<sup>19</sup> Guma and Mokgoatšana, "The Historical Relationship between African Indigenous Healing Practices and Western-Orientated Biomedicine in South Africa: A Challenge to Collaboration."

<sup>20</sup> Karin Ensink and Brian Robertson, "Patient and Family Experiences of Psychiatric Services and African Indigenous Healers," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 36, no. 1 (1999): 23–43.

<sup>21</sup> Mokgobi, "Understanding Traditional African Healing."

<sup>22</sup> Mokgobi, "Understanding Traditional African Healing"; T Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education* 49, no. 3 (January 2011): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14635240.2011.10708216>.

<sup>23</sup> Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

<sup>24</sup> Mokgobi, "Understanding Traditional African Healing"; Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study"; Ilse Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way," *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* 74, no. 8 (2007): 56–60.

<sup>25</sup> Rosemare Troskie, "The Role of Health Care Workers in Collaborating with Traditional Healers in Primary Health Care. Part 1," *Health SA Gesondheid* 2, no. 1 (1997): 29–35.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

<sup>28</sup> Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way."

<sup>29</sup> Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way."

<sup>30</sup> Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way."

massages and healing medicine post-delivery. For one to become a birth attendant, she must at least have a minimum of two babies, as having experienced the agony of giving birth is considered a requirement. Birth attendants also provide postpartum support to women, and they do not charge for their services but generally receive donations in the form of gifts.<sup>31</sup>

However, Mokgobi cautions that this category is at risk and that it is left to be seen how long it will survive, as most South Africans nowadays give birth in hospitals rather than at home.<sup>32</sup> Another category of healers are traditional surgeons, and their main role is mostly to circumcise boys during initiation school (*Koma* in Northern Sotho), which serves as a rite of passage into manhood. The category that deserves special mention is that of Sanusi, which is found among the Northern Sothos. Sanusi, commonly referred to as *Lebone*, can be both a diviner and a herbalist. This is someone who it is believed the spirits speak through and can therefore foretell someone's future and also provide advice on future events and how to avert them.<sup>33</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This review was conducted following the steps of Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework for conducting a scoping review study.<sup>34</sup> The framework is anchored in six steps, namely (a) identifying the research question(s); (b) identifying relevant studies; (c) study selection; (d) charting the data; (e) collating, summarising, and reporting results; and (f) consulting (which is optional and was not included in this study).

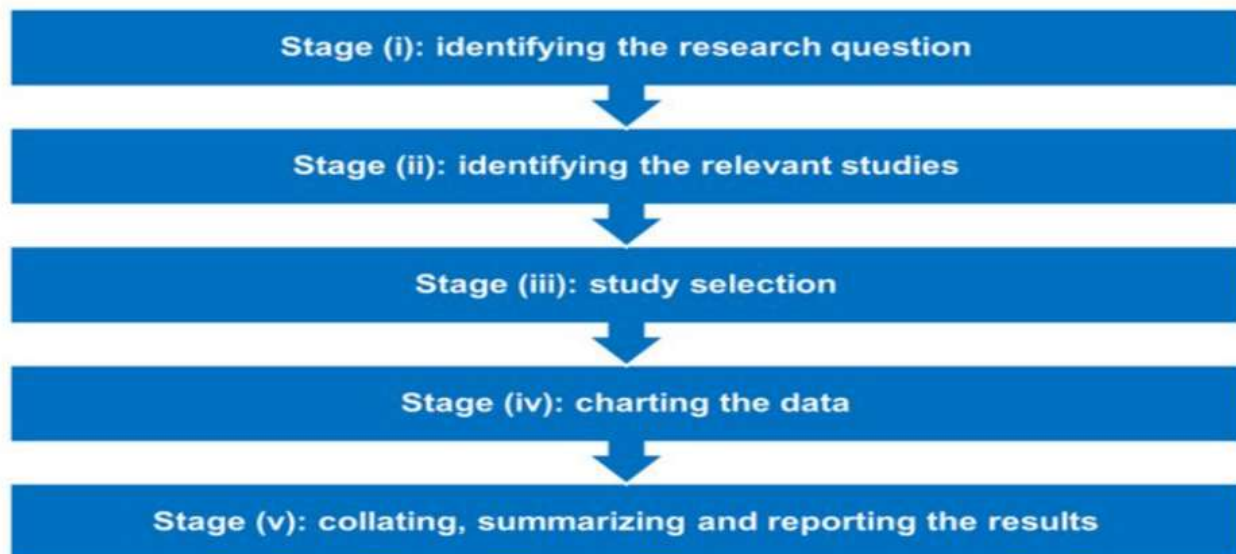


Figure 1: Five Steps of Arksey and O'Malley's Framework for Conducting a Scoping Review

### Identifying Relevant Studies

Relevant studies were identified through a search of selected databases using Medical Search Headings (MeSH) and Boolean keyword combinations and/or strings. The following databases were consulted to identify relevant studies: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycInfo, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Global Health, MEDLINE and APA PsycArticles. A freehand search was conducted on Google and Google Scholar to cross-check the identified studies. The MeSH used during the search were "Traditional Healing Practices", "Indigenous Healing Methods" and "Cultural Healing Approaches".

<sup>31</sup> Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

<sup>32</sup> Mokgobi, "Understanding Traditional African Healing."

<sup>33</sup> Mark O Nanyingi et al., "Ethnopharmacological Survey of Samburu District, Kenya," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 4, no. 1 (December 23, 2008): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-4-14>.

<sup>34</sup> Hilary Arksey and Lisa O'Malley, "Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (February 2005): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>.

This was supplemented with an expanded Boolean search string using a combination of keywords, which were “Traditional Healing Practices” OR “Indigenous Healing Methods” OR “Cultural Healing Approaches” AND “Mental Health” OR “Mental Illness” OR “Mental Disorders” OR “Psychiatric Illness” OR “Mental Health Conditions” AND “South Africa”. The search strategy string was created with the help of a subject librarian. The author identified relevant studies while keeping in mind the study’s inclusion and exclusion criteria as provided in the table below.

**Table 1: Summary of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Include</b>	<b>Exclude</b>
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies conducted only in South Africa</li> <li>• Between the years 2004 and 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies conducted in countries outside South Africa</li> </ul>
Research design/approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary studies (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grey literature</li> <li>• Review and meta-analysis studies, conceptual and opinion papers</li> <li>• Theses and dissertations, white papers, government gazettes, books and conference proceedings</li> </ul>
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies on conceptualisation, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness by traditional healers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies that investigated traditional healers’ conceptualisation, diagnosis and treatment of other psychological conditions</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English written studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications written in any other language</li> </ul>
Limiters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer reviewed</li> <li>• Full text</li> <li>• 2004 to 2024</li> </ul>	

**Study Selection**

Studies were selected and screened using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (please see Figure

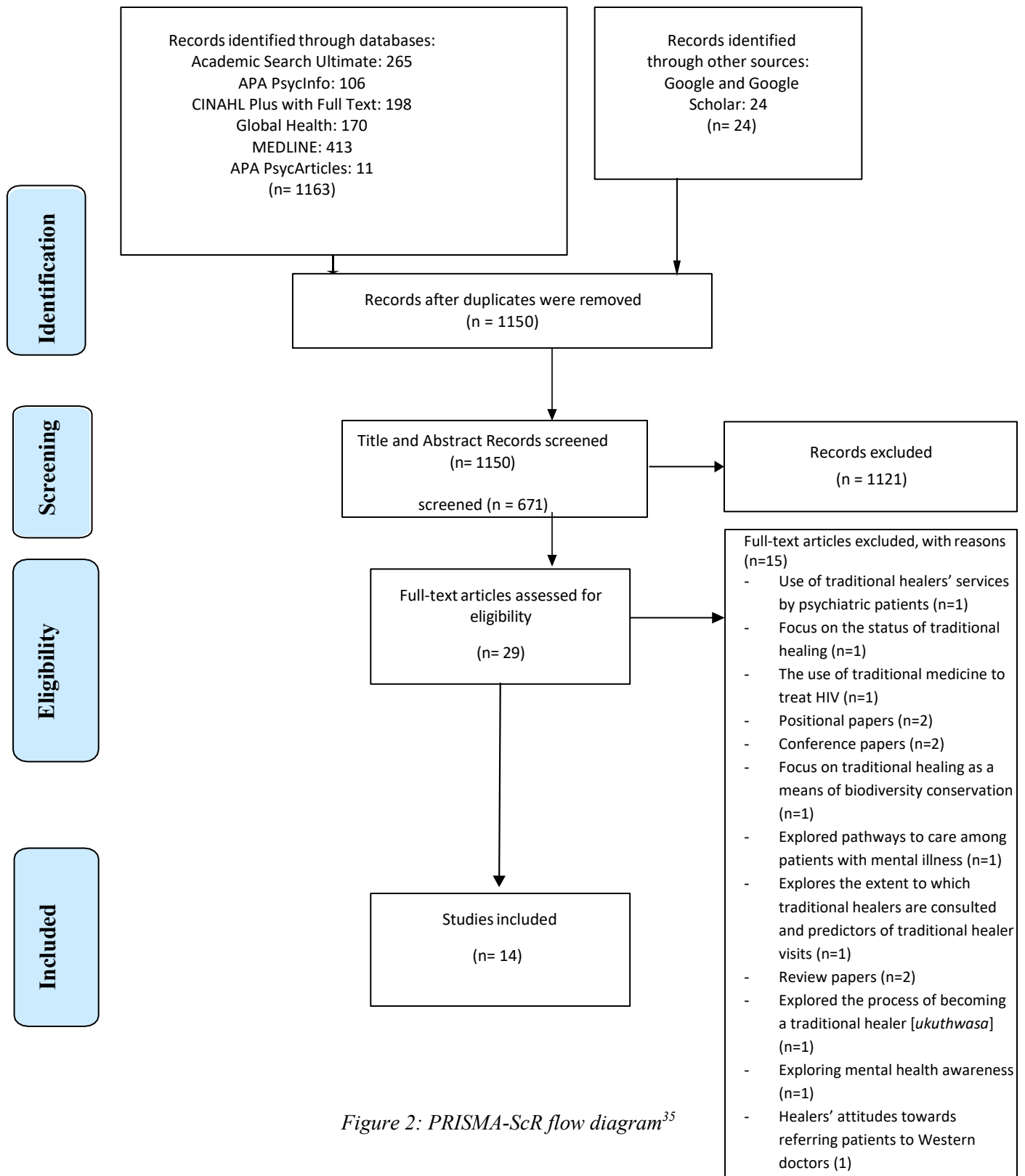


Figure 2: PRISMA-ScR flow diagram<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Zakia Salod and Ozayr Mahomed, "Mapping Potential Vaccine Candidates Predicted by VaxiJen for Different Viral Pathogens between 2017–2021—A Scoping Review," *Vaccines* 10, no. 11 (October 24, 2022): 1785, <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines10111785>.

### **Data Extraction**

During this phase, the selected studies were entered into an Excel sheet for the author to manage. After this, the relevant data were extracted from the studies. To keep author bias in check, the Excel sheet was shared with two peer reviewers whose research interests are in African psychology. Following this, the author then met with each peer reviewer independently, and a robust discussion ensued. The views of independent reviewers helped improve the author's critique. Data extraction was in line with the following characteristics: author(s) and year, title of the study, research design, population, country and key findings.

### **Charting the Data**

The final studies, which were reached through the advice of the independent peer reviewers following a robust discussion and selection procedure, were then charted on a table. This assisted the author in identifying patterns, themes, subthemes and gaps in the literature. The agreed-upon studies following the selection and extraction phase are charted in the table below (Table 2): Tool to Enhance Research Writing Skills in an Initial Teacher Education Program in a Compressive University, Eastern Cape, South Africa; Multilingualism in the Teaching and Learning of Accounting in Chris Hani West District, South Africa, Digital Transformation in Higher Education: Leadership Strategies for Ensuring Equity and Inclusion in Digital Learning Environments, Integration of Information and Communication Technology [ICT] in the accounting classroom in Chris Hani West District, Eastern Cape Province; Application of Problem-Based Learning in Accounting to Improve Learner Performance, O.R Tambo District, Eastern; Effect of Educational Technology on Learning Accounting in the OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape, South Africa; An Assessment of Secondary School Learners' Performance in Economics in the OR Tambo Inland District, Eastern Cape Province South Africa, and Utilizing Information And Communication Technologies To Enhance Teaching And Learning: The Case Of Alfred Nzo East District, South Africa. Her work aims to bridge the digital divide and empower educators and learners through effective use of technology. Zikhona Seleke is committed to sharing expertise and insights to drive positive change in education and the higher education landscape and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

**Table 2: Data Charting**

Author(s) and year	Title	Research design	Population	Country	Key finding(s)
Crawford and Lipsedge <sup>36</sup>	Seeking help for psychological distress: The interface of Zulu traditional healing and Western biomedicine	Ethnographic	Patients and traditional healers	South Africa	Psychological distress was explained in supernatural terms such as sorcery, displeasure from ancestors and social causes. Treatment was aimed at harmonising the patient with their environment through neutralising sorcery, appeasing the ancestors or directly manipulating the environment.
Galvin et al. <sup>37</sup>	Religious and Medical Pluralism Among Traditional Healers in Johannesburg, South Africa	Qualitative	Traditional Health Practitioners	South Africa Gauteng	THPs practised medical pluralism, mixing Western treatments with traditional practices/medicines. This involved adapting elements of Western and African beliefs to healing practices that span multiple religious and medical fields.
Mufamadi and Sodi <sup>38</sup>	Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa	Qualitative	Vhavenda Traditional Healers	South Africa Limpopo	The study found that factors such as heredity, witchcraft, sorcery and disregard of cultural norms were believed to be the causes of mental illness. Mental illness was also interpreted as an invitation to become a traditional healer. Traditional healers followed a logical and culturally congruent system to diagnose and treat patients with mental illness.

<sup>36</sup> Tanya A. Crawford and Maurice Lipsedge, "Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 7, no. 2 (June 2004): 131–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670310001602463>.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Galvin, Lesley Chiwaye, and Aneesa Moolla, "Religious and Medical Pluralism Among Traditional Healers in Johannesburg, South Africa," *Journal of Religion and Health* 63, no. 2 (April 27, 2024): 907–23, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-023-01795-7>.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Mufamadi and Tholene Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa," *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 9, no. 2 (2010): 253–64.

Mzimkulu and Simbayi <sup>39</sup>	Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers when Managing Psychosis	Qualitative	Xhosa speaking African Traditional Healers	South Africa Western Cape	Psychosis was attributed to supernatural powers and treatment involved cleansing both the patient and his family by washing, steaming, inducing vomiting, singing and dancing.
Ngobe et al. <sup>40</sup>	Psychological ailments and their treatment protocols: a case study of Swati traditional healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa	Qualitative	Swati Traditional Healers	South Africa Mpumalanga	Traditional healers treat various psychological ailments using different methods. The methods included herbal remedies, nasal ingestions, rehabilitation, total withdrawal, counselling, cleansing rituals, purification practices, offering sacrifices to appease ancestors, and drumming.
Ngubane and De Gama <sup>41</sup>	A quantitative evaluation of traditional health practitioners' perspectives on mental disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: knowledge, diagnosis, and treatment practices	Quantitative	Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs)	South Africa KwaZulu-Natal	THPs were knowledgeable about mental disorders. Mental disorders were treated by herbalists, diviners, faith leaders and a combination of these. Mental illness was believed to be caused by witchcraft and an ancestral calling. The common methods of diagnosis included spiritual interventions such as divination as a form of consultation with the ancestors, exploring familial backgrounds, burning of incense, which can also be part of communicating with the ancestors and through examination of the patient. The treatment methods used included medicinal concoctions and cultural rituals.
Semenya and Potgieter <sup>42</sup>	Bapedi traditional healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: their socio-cultural profile and	Quantitative	Bapedi traditional healers	South Africa Limpopo	Traditional healers used 154 plant species to treat health-related problems. Determining the efficacy of remedies was done through consultation with the ancestors.

<sup>39</sup> Kanyiswa G. Mzimkulu and Leickness C. Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis," *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 53, no. 4 (December 2006): 417–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120601008563>.

<sup>40</sup> Anastasia Ngobe, Sebu Semanya, and Tholene Sodi, "Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa," *African Health Sciences* 21, no. 2 (August 2, 2021): 884–95, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v21i2.50>.

<sup>41</sup> Ntombifuthi Princess Ngubane and Brenda Zola De Gama, "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 26, no. 3 (July 2, 2024): 181–201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2023.2194561>.

<sup>42</sup> Semanya and Potgieter, "Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice."

	traditional healing practice				
Shange and Ross <sup>43</sup>	“The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen”: South African Traditional Healers’ Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, It’s the diagnosis and Treatment	Qualitative	Traditional healers	South Africa Gauteng	Mental illness was attributed to spiritual, socio-cultural, psychosocial and physical factors. Diagnosis was based on throwing of bones, conducting observations and history-taking. Treatment included removing evil spirits, induced vomiting, washing, steaming and administering herbal remedies.
Sigida and Masola <sup>44</sup>	Diagnosis and Treatment of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Vhembe District, South Africa	Qualitative	Vhavenda Traditional Healers	South Africa Limpopo	The study discovered that traditional healers used several methods to diagnose mental illness. This included divination bones and behavioural observation. Various traditional remedies and practices were used to treat mental illness.
Sodi et al. <sup>45</sup>	Indigenous healing practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A qualitative study	Qualitative	Venda and Tsonga-speaking people	South Africa Limpopo	The study revealed seven themes of importance. Among the themes were diagnostic procedures and treatment practices for various ailments, including mental illness. The common diagnostic method used was bone divination. Different herbs were used as a treatment method. The herbs were mixed with soft porridge or drinks.

<sup>43</sup> Sinethemba Shange and Eleanor Ross, “‘The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen’: South African Traditional Healers’ Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 53, no. 5 (June 25, 2022): 503–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221077361>.

<sup>44</sup> Sigida and Masola, “Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa.”

<sup>45</sup> Sodi et al., “Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study.”

Sorsdahl et al. <sup>46</sup>	Explanatory models of mental disorders and treatment practices among traditional healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa	Qualitative	Traditional healers	South Africa Mpumalanga	Traditional healers had multiple explanatory models for psychotic disorders. Mental illness was believed to be caused by witchcraft, possession by an evil spirit, a call for one to become a traditional healer, family problems, substance abuse and poverty. Traditional healers consulted with ancestors for diagnosis. Treatment included traditional medicine. Healers also used herbs and incorporated ingredients in their treatment, which are potentially toxic.
Galvin et al. <sup>47</sup>	Perceptions of causes and treatment of mental illness among traditional health practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa	Qualitative	Traditional health practitioners (THPs)	South Africa Johannesburg	Traditional health practitioners (THPs) attributed mental illness to supernatural causes such as bewitchment, often linked to spirit possession ( <i>amafufunyana</i> ), calling for the patients to become THPs themselves, displeasure of the ancestors and natural causes such as stress, poverty, trauma, and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. THPs used eight primary treatment methods, namely throwing of bones ( <i>tinhlolo</i> ) to start communicating with ancestors, steaming ( <i>ukufutha</i> ) to start a cleansing process, sneezing ( <i>umbhemiso</i> ) to forcefully dispel the spirit causing the illness, induced vomiting ( <i>phalaza</i> ), and the administration of laxatives ( <i>mahlabekufeni</i> ) to remove the spirits poisoning the body, as well as animal sacrifice to purge spirits and communicate with ancestors. These were mostly followed by cutting ( <i>ukucaba</i> ), which is the final part of the treatment and ensures that the evil spirit cannot return.

<sup>46</sup> KR Sorsdahl et al., “Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa,” *African Journal of Psychiatry* 13, no. 4 (November 11, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpsy.v13i4.61878>.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Galvin, Lesley Chiwaye, and Aneesa Moolla, “Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa,” *South African Journal of Psychology* 53, no. 3 (September 13, 2023): 403–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463231186264>.

Audet et al. <sup>48</sup>	Mixed methods inquiry into traditional healers' treatment of mental, neurological and substance abuse disorders in rural South Africa	Mixed methods	Traditional healers	Rural northeastern South Africa	Mental illness ( <i>Nhlanyi</i> in xiTsonga) was attributed to external sources such as demons, spirits or sorcery and psychological causes such as stress and excessive drinking, which affect the nerves in the head. Treatment methods included herbal remedies (prepared as teas, porridge or drops) and traditional practices (rituals such as mixing the blood of the patient with that of a pig).
Menze et al. <sup>49</sup>	Profiles of traditional healers and their healing practices in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa	Mixed methods	Traditional healers	South Africa Cape Town	The study found that most traditional healers relied on their ancestors to assist in diagnosis.

<sup>48</sup> Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa."

<sup>49</sup> Ntombizanele Menze et al., "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa," *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 24 (September 20, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsy.2018.v24i0.1305>.

## Collating, Summarising, and Reporting Results

During this phase, the author synthesised the findings to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing evidence. This involved summarising key themes and subthemes, identifying gaps in the literature and providing suggestions for future research. The advice of independent reviewers was also sought to ensure that the themes and subthemes reflect the studies charted. The results are presented in the results section below.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The development of the themes was guided by Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis.<sup>50</sup> The steps are as follows: (a) familiarising oneself with their data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. First, the author read and reread the final full-text articles and the charted data and started noting initial ideas by using notes on the PDFs and the Excel document. Second, the interesting features of the data were systematically coded across all selected studies, collating data relevant to each code. Third, the codes were collated into potential themes, gathering data according to each theme. Fourth, the themes were checked to see whether they worked according to the coded extracts and the whole data set. During the fifth step, the specifics of each theme and the story that the analysis tells were refined. Each theme and subtheme was given a clear name and definition. The results report was the final product. The results are presented below, first in a table and then discussed in detail thereafter.

**Table 3: Emergent Themes and Subthemes**

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Traditional healers' conceptualisation of mental illness in South Africa	Subtheme 1.1: Supernatural and spiritual causes of mental illness Subtheme 1.2: Biological and psychological explanations Subtheme 1.3: Physical and environmental causes
Theme 2: Methods used by traditional healers to diagnose mental illness in South Africa	Subtheme 2.1: Consultation with ancestors, observation of symptoms and behavioural patterns Subtheme 2.2: Use of divination bones, physical examination, patient history and explanations from relatives
Theme 3: Traditional healers' approaches to the treatment of mental illness in South Africa	Subtheme 3.1: Herbal remedies and traditional medicine Subtheme 3.2: Rituals, ancestral consultations, physical and forced interventions Subtheme 3.3: Healing through spiritual practices, cleansing and medical pluralism

### Theme 1: Traditional healers' conceptualisation of mental illness in South Africa

Traditional healers conceptualised mental illness through three main lenses: supernatural and spiritual, biological and psychological, and physical and environmental. The theme is substantiated with the subthemes below.

#### Subtheme 1.1: Supernatural and spiritual causes of mental illness

Most of the studies reviewed indicates that South African traditional healers ascribe mental illness to spiritual and supernatural causes. For instance, the study of Sorsdahl et al. found that traditional healers attributed mental illness to supernatural and spiritual causes, including witchcraft, evil spirits, and ancestral calling for

<sup>50</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 21, 2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

one to become a healer (*ukuthwasa* in isiXhosa).<sup>51</sup> Similarly, in Mufamadi and Sodi's work, mental illness was linked to witchcraft, disregarding cultural norms, a call to become a traditional healer, spirits (evil or ancestral), taboo violations, wrongdoing, and defying ancestors.<sup>52</sup> Comparably, Mzimkulu and Simbayi, ascribed mental illness to supernatural forces such as spirit possession, witchcraft, or ancestral vengeance.<sup>53</sup> The study by Shange and Ross echoed similar sentiments, as they found that mental illness was attributed to spiritual and supernatural causes, including ancestral curses, witchcraft, envy, and vengeful acts.<sup>54</sup> Along the same lines, in the study by Ngubane and De Gama, mental illness was also believed to be a consequence of witchcraft and ancestral calling.<sup>55</sup> In the same vein, in Galvin et al., mental illness was attributed to supernatural causes such as bewitchment, often linked to spirit possession (*amafufunyana*), calling for patients to become traditional healers and displeasure of the ancestors.<sup>56</sup> The study by Audet et al. came to a similar realisation whereby mental illness was attributed to external forces such as demons, spirits, or sorcery.<sup>57</sup> Comparably, in the work of Crawford and Lipsedge, mental illness was framed within a supernatural context, where it was attributed to ancestral anger and sorcery.<sup>58</sup>

Crawford and Lipsedge used the Zulu ethnic group as a case example. They found that among Zulus in South Africa, sorcery (*ubuthakathi*) is believed to be practised by anyone.<sup>59</sup> It is commonly used when one has a grudge against another person and then uses traditional concoctions (usually acquired from a herbalist) to harm that person. Sorcery can be divided into three categories to denote the type of sorcery used; these categories are “eating”, “stepping over” and “throwing” illnesses. Stepping over illnesses (*umeqo* in isiZulu) is believed to be due to the offender putting the illness in the victim's path. That is, the offender usually sprinkles “concoctions” where the victim is likely to walk or pass, and as the victim passes over the sprinkled concoctions, they fall ill. The symptoms attributed to this type of sorcery include loss of appetite and strength, headaches, abdominal pains, joint pains and loss of enthusiasm. Eating illness (*ukudlisa* in IsiZulu) is believed to occur when the perpetrator places harmful “concoctions” in the food of the victim. The exact nature of the symptoms is dependent on where the “concoction” settles in the victim's body. For instance, it is believed that if the concoction lodges in the kidneys, the victim may suffer paralysis of the legs. The throwing illness (*ukuphonsa* in IsiZulu) commonly occurs when the victim is asleep. The offender prepares a special ‘concoction’ and then performs a ritual in which an illness is transmitted remotely to the victim. To ensure that the correct victim is affected, all the perpetrator needs is the victim's name. It is believed that this type of illness can be fatal, and the only way to stop it is to identify the source and send the illness back to the source. This is a procedure that can only be performed by skilled traditional healers with sufficient powers.

### Subtheme 1.2: Biological and psychological explanations

The reviewed studies also revealed that mental illness was believed to be caused by biological and psychological explanations. For example, in the study by Mufamadi and Sodi, mental illness was ascribed to biological factors, particularly heredity. They also attributed mental illness to biological factors, specifically genetic predisposition; this suggests that those with a family history of mental illness are believed to be

<sup>51</sup> Sorsdahl et al., “Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa.”284-290.

<sup>52</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, “Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa.”

<sup>53</sup> Mzimkulu and Simbayi, “Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis.”

<sup>54</sup> Shange and Ross, “‘The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen’: South African Traditional Healers’ Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment.”181-20.

<sup>55</sup> Ngubane and De Gama, “A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners’ Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices.”

<sup>56</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, “Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa.”

<sup>57</sup> Audet et al., “Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa.”

<sup>58</sup> Crawford and Lipsedge, “Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine.”

<sup>59</sup> Crawford and Lipsedge, “Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine.”

predisposed to acquire it.<sup>60</sup> Mental illness was also associated with psychological causes. For example, in the study by Sorsdahl et al.,<sup>61</sup> mental illness was attributed to psychological factors, such as family problems, substance abuse and poverty.<sup>62</sup> Comparably, the results of the reviewed study by Mufamadi and Sodi concurred, as they revealed that mental illness was attributed to psychological factors, such as thinking too much, debt, lack of sleep, emotional problems, use of dagga (especially when mixed with other drugs), abuse of alcohol and drugs and problems that confuse the mind. Similarly, the study by Galvin et al. revealed that mental illness was linked to psychological factors such as stress, poverty and trauma.<sup>63</sup> Similar sentiments were echoed in the study by Audet et al. which found that mental illness was attributed to psychological causes such as stress and excessive drinking, which were believed to affect nerves in the head.<sup>64</sup>

### **Subtheme 1.3: Physical and environmental causes**

Concerning physical and environmental factors, the reviewed study by Mufamadi and Sodi revealed that mental illness was believed to be caused by various of these factors including epilepsy (*tshifakhole* in Tshivenda), not having sexual contact for a very long time, abdominal illnesses, sores in the chest and spinal cord, prolonged use of contraceptives, constipation for a long time, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), bad blood, some disorders of the stomach, too much water in the head and a lack of sleep.<sup>65</sup> These results were echoed by the findings of the study by Shange and Ross, which revealed that mental illness was attributed to sociocultural, psychosocial and physical factors.<sup>66</sup> Psychosocial factors included abuse and adverse environmental conditions. Finally, physical factors include head injuries and seasonal changes.

## **Theme 2: Methods used by traditional healers to diagnose mental illness in South Africa**

Traditional healers use/d various interconnected methods to diagnose mental illness in South Africa. The theme is elaborated using the subthemes discussed in detail below.

### **Subtheme 2.1: Consultation with ancestors, observation of symptoms and behavioural patterns**

The reviewed study by Ngubane and De Gama revealed that the common methods used by traditional health practitioners in KwaZulu-Natal include consulting with ancestors, questioning the patients about their background, observing patients for signs and using patients' symptoms to guide the diagnosis.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, in Menze et al., traditional healers called on ancestors to assist them with a diagnosis.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, similar results were found in the study by Shange and Ross which found that the common diagnostic methods used by traditional healers were observations, consultation with the ancestors through the throwing of bones and history-taking.<sup>69</sup> Comparably, in Sorsdahl et al., the common method of diagnosis among traditional healers was consultation with ancestors, observation and identification of extreme behavioural disturbances in patients.<sup>70</sup> The authors add that overt signs of disturbance, including violence, incoherent speech, garbage

<sup>60</sup> Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis."

<sup>61</sup> Sorsdahl, Katherine Rae, A J Flisher, Z Wilson & D J, Stein. "Explanatory models of mental disorders and treatment practices among traditional healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa." *African Journal of Psychiatry* 13, no. 4 (2010): 284-290.

<sup>62</sup> Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

<sup>63</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa." 403-415.

<sup>64</sup> Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa."

<sup>65</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa."

<sup>66</sup> Shange and Ross, "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment."

<sup>67</sup> Ngubane and De Gama, "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices."

<sup>68</sup> Menze et al., "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa."

<sup>69</sup> Shange and Ross, "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment."

<sup>70</sup> Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

collection, public disrobing and excessive walking, are diagnostically useful. The latter results were echoed by Semenya and Potgieter, who discovered in their study that among the Bapedi traditional healers, the method of diagnosis for mental illness was symptomatology.<sup>71</sup>

### **Subtheme 2.2: Use of divination bones, physical examination, patient history and explanations from relatives**

The use of divination bones was the predominant method of diagnosis for mental illness. The reviewed study by Sodi et al. showed that divination bones (*ditaola* – Northern Sotho) were primarily used for diagnosis.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, in the study by Ngubane and De Gama, the common diagnostic methods included spiritual interventions such as consultation with the ancestors using divination bones, exploration of familial backgrounds, and burning of incense, which can also be part of communicating with the ancestors and through examination of the patient.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Shange and Ross found that methods used for diagnosis were throwing of bones, conducting observations and taking history.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in the reviewed study by Sigida and Masola the use of divination bones (*mufuvha* or *thangu* –in Tshivenda) and behavioural observations were commonplace.<sup>75</sup> Comparably, in Mufamadi and Sodi, the methods used by Vhavenda traditional healers to diagnose mental illness included: divination bones, observations, physical examination, eye movement and explanations provided by relatives. According to the authors, the use of divination is multifaceted. First, they help traditional healers to diagnose the mental illness. Second, to establish from which side of the family (matrilineal or patrilineal) the illness originates. Third, they confirm the origin of the mental illness.<sup>76</sup>

### **Theme 3: Traditional healers' approaches to the treatment of mental illness in South Africa**

While there were minor discrepancies, the reviewed studies showed largely consistent results regarding traditional healer mental illness treatment approaches. The topic is discussed in more detail in the following subthemes.

#### **Subtheme 3.1: Herbal remedies and traditional medicine**

In the reviewed study by Ngubane and De Gama, medicinal concoctions were used the most.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in the study by Sorsdahl et al., it was found that traditional medicine was the most used.<sup>78</sup> However, it should also be noted that, in addition to herbs, some healers incorporated modern ingredients into their concoctions, which could potentially be toxic. Correspondingly, the study by Ngobe et al. revealed that herbal remedies were mostly used to treat mental illness.<sup>79</sup> Within the same context, Shange and Ross found that treatment by traditional healers included the administration of herbal remedies.<sup>80</sup> The results of the study by Audet et al. echo these results and revealed that herbal remedies (prepared as teas, porridge or drops) were used for the treatment of mental illness.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Semenya and Potgieter in their study found that plant-based

<sup>71</sup> Semenya and Potgieter, “Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice.”

<sup>72</sup> Sodi et al., “Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study.”

<sup>73</sup> Ngubane and De Gama, “A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners’ Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices.”

<sup>74</sup> Shange and Ross, “‘The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen’: South African Traditional Healers’ Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment.”

<sup>75</sup> Sigida and Masola, “Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa.”

<sup>76</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, “Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa.”

<sup>77</sup> Ngubane and De Gama, “A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners’ Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices.”

<sup>78</sup> Sorsdahl et al., “Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa.”

<sup>79</sup> Ngobe, Semenya, and Sodi, “Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.”

<sup>80</sup> Shange and Ross, “‘The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen’: South African Traditional Healers’ Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment.”

<sup>81</sup> Audet et al., “Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa.”

remedies prepared from 154 plant species were used for treatment of mental illness.<sup>82</sup> Bulbs, bark, fruit, pericarp, root, rhizome, seed, thorn, stem, twig, tuber, and the whole plant are among the plant parts used which were used in remedy making. However, traditional healers preferred roots and leaves above all else. The remedies were prepared using a variety of methods. The methods included boiling, pounding, macerating, burning, steaming, raw prescription, frying, crushing, and squeezing. The use and application of these mixtures were also multifaceted. First, these concoctions could be given orally, in liquid form, with soft porridge, smoked, or raw. Second, they could be administered nasally; this involves inhaling the steam or smoke from the burned or steamed plant parts. Third, the topical application of the prepared remedies may be self-administered or administered by the traditional healer. Furthermore, the mixture can be given anally by the traditional healer. However, only an experienced traditional healer can execute the latter procedure, which requires meticulous execution.

In line with the above, the reviewed study by Sodi et al. also found that traditional healers used various herbs in the treatment of mental illness.<sup>83</sup> The herbs were mixed into drinks and soft porridge and administered orally. Similarly, Sigida and Masola found that traditional remedies and practices were commonly used to treat mental illness in their study.<sup>84</sup> In this instance, the remedies were administered orally mixed with soft porridge and nasally by inhalation and steaming (*u aravedziwa dzi tsemo* in Tshivenda).

### **Subtheme 3.2: Rituals, ancestral consultations, physical and forced interventions**

The reviewed studies revealed that rituals, ancestral consultations, physical and forced interventions were also used to treat mental illness. Regarding ancestral consultation, the reviewed study by Mufamadi and Sodi discovered that the treatment approach of the Vhavenda traditional healers was guided by consultation with the ancestors.<sup>85</sup> That is, consultation with the ancestors using the divination bones was used to determine the treatment needed, establish whether any rituals need to be performed or clarify if one has a “calling” to become a traditional healer. If the patient is violent, then specific herbs (*dzitsemo* in Tshivenda) are used for sedation. The herbs are steamed, and the patient inhales them. Steaming is believed to remove the illness, subsequently helping the patient regain the complexion that they could have lost due to the disease. To those who have a calling, training is the most important remedy. Dreams are also considered important for treatment purposes. Rituals such as libations and ritual-like dance (*malombo* in Tshivenda) can also be performed to treat mental illness.

Consultation with ancestors using divination bones also reverberated in the reviewed study by Ngobe et al., whereby it was showcased that before initiating treatment, Xhosa traditional healers sought reverence from the ancestors using divination bones while dressed in traditional attire and beads (*ngiphengula nge tihlola* in isiXhosa).<sup>86</sup> Traditional healers' consultations with the ancestors are for advice and guidance regarding the patient's problem and the specific treatment method to use. In this study, traditional healers revealed that the cause of a specific mental illness determines the kind of methods used. For mental illness due to ancestral calling, the treatment approach was believed to be initiation (*kwetfwaswa* in isiXhosa). During the initiation, which is conducted under the guidance of a senior healer (*gobela*), the trainee learns the basics of traditional healing that span months and years. The training is centred on learning humility towards the ancestors and learning purification processes such as taking a bath in the blood of a sacrificed animal, steaming and the use of *umuthi* (traditional medicine in isiZulu).

Drumming is also used as part of the healing process. During this process, patients dance, which helps traditional healers to connect with the ancestors of the patient. For perceptual disturbances such as delusions

<sup>82</sup> Semenya and Potgieter, “Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice.”

<sup>83</sup> Sodi et al., “Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study.”

<sup>84</sup> Sigida and Masola, “Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa.”

<sup>85</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, “Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa.”

<sup>86</sup> Ngobe, Semenya, and Sodi, “Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.”

and hallucinations, herbal concoctions and nasal inhalants are preferred. The herbal concoctions (*timbita* in isiXhosa) used are usually a combination of roots from various plants and animal substances. The uses of the concoctions are twofold. First, they are boiled and inhaled. Second, the cool extracts are used to bathe. These are believed to cleanse evil intrusions and lead to healing. For substance-induced mental illness, herbal remedies, nasal inhalations and total withdrawal were used. For mental illness due to bewitchment, cleansing and incision (*kugata* in isiXhosa) were used. The notion behind this is that witches who possess mystical powers use them to harm someone mentally or kill them. It is believed that incisions provide passage for causative forces to leave the body, and steaming is believed to open skin pores, making way for medication to easily enter the body, consequently chasing out evil spirits. In some cases, traditional healers also serve as mediators, especially for those who got bewitched after they transgressed others by stealing from them or insulting them. Traditional healers help by serving as mediators between the two families and encourage the offender to compensate the victim's family as a sign of remorse and a plea for forgiveness. Sometimes, if the latter is not possible, traditional healers perform rituals to break the curse and subsequently heal the patient's mental illness. For mental illness due to the breaking of cultural taboos, ritual enactments, cleansing rituals, sacrifice to appease the ancestors and purification processes are the most common treatment methods. In extreme cases of patients who exhibit violent behaviour, ropes and chains are used to tie the patient as a form of restraint. Other reviewed studies have also come to a similar realisation.<sup>87</sup>

### **Subtheme 3.3: Healing through spiritual practices, cleansing and medical pluralism**

The reviewed studies also revealed that spiritual practices, including, among others, steaming, washing, induced vomiting, inhalation of herbs and sacrifices, were used to cleanse the patient's cultural misconduct for healing purposes. The study by Mzimkulu and Simbayi showed that the methods used to treat mental illness by traditional healers included cleansing of both the patient and his or her family of evil spirits, by washing, steaming and induced vomiting.<sup>88</sup> The cleansing is extended to the patient's home by singing and dancing. Menze et al. also came to a similar realisation in their study.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Galvin et al. revealed that steaming (*ukufutha*), sneezing (*umbhemiso*) to forcefully dispel the spirit causing the illness, induced vomiting (*phalaza*), and the administration of laxatives (*mahlabekufeni*) to remove the spirits poisoning the body, as well as animal sacrifice to purge spirits and communicate with ancestors, were practices used to treat mental illness.<sup>90</sup> These were mostly followed by cutting (*ukucaba*), which is the final part of the treatment and ensures that the evil spirit cannot return.

Crawford and Lipsedge found that traditional healers preferred treatments that aimed to harmonise the relationship between the patient and their environment by offering sacrifices to appease the ancestors, neutralising sorcery, and directly manipulating the environment.<sup>91</sup> Some examples of manipulation of the environment in their study involved including the community in the intervention and applying for social and/or disability grants. In Shange and Ross, as in most studies reviewed, the spiritual methods used by traditional healers were steaming, induced vomiting and removal of evil spirits by washing.<sup>92</sup> On the contrary, in the study by Galvin et al., it was revealed that traditional healers practised medical pluralism and approached mental illness as such.<sup>93</sup> That is, they adapted elements of both Western and African belief systems that span multiple medical and religious fields into the healing of mental illness.

<sup>87</sup> Sigida and Masola, "Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa"; Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa."

<sup>88</sup> Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis."

<sup>89</sup> Menze et al., "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa."

<sup>90</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa."

<sup>91</sup> Crawford and Lipsedge, "Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine."

<sup>92</sup> Shange and Ross, "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment."

<sup>93</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa."

## DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the conceptualisation of mental illness by traditional healers was framed within three broad domains, namely supernatural and spiritual, biological and psychological and physical and environmental. Supernatural and spiritual causes included witchcraft, possession by evil spirits, a call by the ancestors to become a traditional healer (*ukuthwasa* in isiXhosa), sorcery (*ubuthakathi*), disregard for cultural norms or breach of customs, non-observation of taboos, evil deeds, envy and punishment or revenge and failure to submit to the wishes of the ancestors resulting in anger, displeasure and retaliation.<sup>94</sup> These findings were confirmed in various past and recent national and international studies. For instance, the study by Bodibe established that mental illness was attributed to the failure of the living to uphold the requests of the ancestors, leading to retaliation.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the study by Verginer and Juen conducted in Uganda discovered that mental illness was believed to be due to supernatural forces such as witchcraft, the influence of demons, the devil and spiritual forces, as well as poor relationships with the ancestors.<sup>96</sup> All these resonate with the assertion by Monama and Basson, who illuminated that the common belief among African people is that ill-health is influenced by culture-related reasons, and that mental illness can be attributed to sorcery, while in some cases it may be interpreted as a calling (*ubizo* in isiZulu).<sup>97</sup>

Within the biological and psychological domain, the biological factors included heredity and/or genetic predisposition.<sup>98</sup> This affirms the assertion by Trang et al. that mental illness is linked to genetic makeup.<sup>99</sup> The psychological causes included thinking too much, debts, a lack of sleep, stress, poverty, trauma, emotional problems, use of dagga (especially when mixed with other drugs), abuse of alcohol and drugs (believed to affect the nerves in the head), problems that confuse the mind, family problems, substance abuse and poverty.<sup>100</sup> This underpins the results of the study by Chavunduka<sup>101</sup>, who found that traditional healers believed that psychological factors played a role in causing mental illness.<sup>102</sup>

The causes within the physical and environmental domain included illnesses such as epilepsy (*tshifakhole* in Tshivenda), going without sexual contact for a very long time, abdominal illnesses, sores in the chest and spinal cord, prolonged use of contraceptives, constipation for a long time, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), bad blood, some disorders of the stomach, too much water in the head, a lack of sleep,

<sup>94</sup> Crawford and Lipsedge, "Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine"; Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa"; Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis"; Ngubane and De Gama, "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices"; Shange and Ross, "The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen": South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment"; Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

<sup>95</sup> RiC Bodibe, "Traditional Healing: An Indigenous Approach to Mental Health Problems," *Psychological Counselling in the South African Context*, 1992, 149–65; S Mohr, "The Relationship between Schizophrenia and Religion and Its Implications for Care," *Swiss Medical Weekly* 134, no. 2526 (June 26, 2004): 369–369, <https://doi.org/10.4414/smww.2004.10322>.

<sup>96</sup> Lucia Verginer and Barbara H. Juen, "Spiritual Explanatory Models of Mental Illness in West Nile, Uganda," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 50, no. 2 (February 19, 2019): 233–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022118813652>.

<sup>97</sup> D. D. Monama and W J Basson, "Looking in the Mirror: The Cultural Experiences of Patients Diagnosed with Schizophrenia," *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 31, no. 2 (2017): 46–58.

<sup>98</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis."

<sup>99</sup> Nguyen Minh Trang, Jennifer Tran Cao Van, and Do Hoang Phuong Trang, "Genetic Influences on Mental Health," *European Journal of Medical and Health Research* 2, no. 5 (September 1, 2024): 247–55, [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmhr.2024.2\(5\).25](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmhr.2024.2(5).25).

<sup>100</sup> Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*; Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa"; Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

<sup>101</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis"; Shange and Ross, "The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen": South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment"; Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

<sup>102</sup> Gordon L Chavunduka, "Traditional Medicine in Modern Zimbabwe," (*No Title*), 1994.

abuse, head injuries, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, adverse environmental events and seasonal changes.<sup>103</sup> The role of physical factors as causes of mental illness affirms the results of the study by Bereda, who discovered that people consult traditional healers for a variety of physical conditions, including STIs, which, if not treated, are believed to evolve into mental illness.<sup>104</sup> The role of environmental factors, such as seasonal changes, in causing mental illness confirms the preliminary results of the study by Brandl et al., which revealed that certain weather patterns are believed to be associated with an exacerbation of mental illness symptoms.<sup>105</sup> Thompson et al. also came to a similar realisation.<sup>106</sup> However, the latter should be interpreted with caution, as the pathway through which seasonal changes are linked to mental illness remains unclear and/or elusive.

### Methods used by traditional healers to diagnose mental illness in South Africa

The findings revealed that traditional healers used various methods to diagnose mental illness. Sodi et al. add that the diagnostic process in conventional healing is a method and an art that seeks to establish the condition and its origin.<sup>107</sup> That is, the process assists in establishing the immediate, efficient and ultimate causes of illness.<sup>108</sup> However, the specific diagnostic method to be used depends on the nature of the illness.<sup>109</sup> The various diagnostic methods used by traditional healers in the reviewed studies included inter alia consulting with the ancestors, interpretation of dreams, questioning the patients about their background (history taking), observing the patients for signs of extreme behavioural disturbances (i.e. violence, incoherent speech, garbage collecting, public disrobing and excessive walking) and using patients' symptoms for guidance in reaching a diagnosis as well as throwing of the bones (*ditaola* in Northern Sotho).<sup>110</sup>

However, of all the methods, divination bones were the most widely used diagnostic method. The observation of symptomatology as a diagnostic tool confirms the results of the study by Mabogo.<sup>111</sup> Diagnostic reliance on symptomatology also supports Robertson's claim that African understandings of mental illness centre on behaviour inconsistent with societal expectations.<sup>112</sup> The use of divination bones corroborates Makgopa's research, which highlighted their diagnostic and therapeutic roles.<sup>113</sup> Within the same context, using dreams diagnostically aligns with Mashamba's study, which revealed their crucial role in mental illness diagnosis, helping healers distinguish if the illness was due to ancestral causes.<sup>114</sup> Konadu

<sup>103</sup> Mufamadi, J & Sodi, Tholene. "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa."

<sup>104</sup> Julia Elisa Bereda, *Traditional Healing as a Health Care Delivery System in a Transcultural Society* (University of South Africa (South Africa), 2002).

<sup>105</sup> Eva Janina Brandl et al., "Weather Conditions Influence the Number of Psychiatric Emergency Room Patients," *International Journal of Biometeorology* 62, no. 5 (May 4, 2018): 843–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-017-1485-z>.

<sup>106</sup> R. Thompson et al., "Associations between High Ambient Temperatures and Heat Waves with Mental Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review," *Public Health* 161 (August 2018): 171–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.06.008>.

<sup>107</sup> Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

<sup>108</sup> Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way."

<sup>109</sup> Tshilidzi M Mashamba, "The Role of Traditional Healers in Suicide Prevention," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 17, no. 1 (2007): 52–68.

<sup>110</sup> Menze et al., "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa"; Ngubane and De Gama, "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices"; Semenya and Potgieter, "Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice"; Shange and Ross, "The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen: South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment"; Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."<sup>110</sup> Menze Ntombizanele, Van der Watt Alberta SJ, Moxley Karis & Seedat Soraya. "Profiles of traditional healers and their healing practices in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa."

<sup>111</sup> M. Dowell, *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the Future of America* (USA: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> B A Robertson, "Does the Evidence Support Collaboration between Psychiatry and Traditional Healers? Findings from Three South African Studies," *South African Psychiatry Review* 9, no. 2 (2006): 87–90.

<sup>113</sup> M. A. Makgopa, "Indigenous Healing Knowledge Systems: An Oral Transmission," in *Building on the Indigenous: An African Perspective. Proceedings of an International Conference on Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, ed. M. Masoga and A. Musyoki (National Research Foundation, 2004), 135–42.

<sup>114</sup> Mashamba, "The Role of Traditional Healers in Suicide Prevention."

adds that through dreams, healers may learn about the nature and treatment of mental illness.<sup>115</sup> The diagnostic value of divination bones is multifaceted, a point made by Mufamadi and Sodi.<sup>116</sup> First, they aid the traditional healers in identifying the mental illness. Second, they help them establish from which side of the family (matrilineal or patrilineal) the illness originates. Third, they aid in confirming the origin of the mental illness.

### **Approaches employed by traditional healers to treat mental illness in South Africa**

The findings revealed that traditional healers used various approaches to treat mental illness. These approaches could be grouped into three categories, namely herbal remedies and traditional medicine, rituals, ancestral consultations, physical and forced interventions and healing through spiritual practices, cleansing and medical pluralism. The common approach used in the herbal remedies and traditional medicine category was medicinal concoctions.<sup>117</sup> The concoctions were prepared using a variety of plant parts and methods, which include boiling, pounding, macerating, burning, steaming (*u aravedziwa dzi tsemo* in Tshivenda), raw prescription, frying, crushing, and squeezing. These preparation methods are confirmed in various studies conducted in South Africa and other African countries, specifically, Kenya and Ethiopia.<sup>118</sup> These concoctions are commonly administered orally (in liquid form or mixed with soft porridge), nasally, anally, smoked, or raw. These methods of administration are consistent with how Western practitioners also administer medication. The route of administration was interesting because some traditional healers also used syringes to administer some concoctions rectally. However, only experienced healers performed the latter, as it is considered dangerous. The use of medicinal concoctions affirms the results of the study by Musyimi et al., which found that medicinal concoctions were believed to be effective in treating mental illness in Kenya.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, other studies have also affirmed herbal medicine as the most used treatment method for mental illness in their respective studies.<sup>120</sup> It is worth noting that, in addition to herbs, some healers incorporated modern ingredients (i.e. methylated spirits) into their concoctions, which could potentially be toxic. This shows that they are adaptable to the changing times. However, despite their adaptability, the concern is that the safety of ingesting these chemicals mixed with other herbs is unknown, and this may put patients at risk. This is where integrating traditional healing into the formal healthcare system may be valuable, as working in collaboration with Western doctors, since they have laboratories, chemicals used by healers can be tested for potency, protecting patients from taking harmful concoctions.

<sup>115</sup> Kwasi Konadu, "Medicine and Anthropology in Twentieth Century Africa: Akan Medicine and Encounters with (Medical) Anthropology," *African Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 2 & 3 (2008): 45–70.

<sup>116</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa."

<sup>117</sup> Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa"; Ngobe, Semenya, and Sodi, "Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa"; Ngubane and De Gama, "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices"; Semenya and Potgieter, "Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice"; Shange and Ross, "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment"; Sigida and Masola, "Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa"; Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study"; Sorsdahl et al., "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa."

<sup>118</sup> R. M. Coopoosamy, "An Ethnobotanical Study of Medicinal Plants Used by Traditional Healers in Durban, South Africa," *African Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* 6, no. 11 (March 22, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPP11.700>; J.J.J. De Beer and B.-E. Van Wyk, "An Ethnobotanical Survey of the Agter-Hantam, Northern Cape Province, South Africa," *South African Journal of Botany* 77, no. 3 (August 2011): 741–54, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sajb.2011.03.013>; Ahmad Cheikhoussef et al., "Ethnobotanical Study of Indigenous Knowledge on Medicinal Plant Use by Traditional Healers in Oshikoto Region, Namibia," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 7, no. 1 (2011): 10; B Kebu, K Ensermu, and A Zemedu, "Indigenous Medicinal Utilization, Management and Threats in Fentale Area, Eastern Shewa, Ethiopia," *Ethiop J Biol Sci* 3, no. 1 (2004): 37–58; Nanyingi et al., "Ethnopharmacological Survey of Samburu District, Kenya."

<sup>119</sup> Christine W Musyimi et al., "Forming a Joint Dialogue among Faith Healers, Traditional Healers and Formal Health Workers in Mental Health in a Kenyan Setting: Towards Common Grounds," *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 12, no. 1 (2016): 4.

<sup>120</sup> Truter, "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way"; Busisiwe Precious Dlamini, "African Indigenous Methods of Health Promotion and HIV/AIDS Prevention" (2006); Mashamba, "The Role of Traditional Healers in Suicide Prevention."

Within the rituals, ancestral consultations, physical and forced interventions category, the specific approaches used were consultation with ancestors through the use of divination bones (*ngiphengula nge tinhlola* in isiXhosa) for guidance on which treatment to use, undergoing training or initiation (*kwetfswa* in isiXhosa) for those with a calling, interpretation of dreams, libations, ritual-like dance (*malombo* in Tshivenda), drumming, nasal inhalants, total withdrawal, cleansing and incision (*kugata* in isiXhosa), burning of incense, mediation, sacrificing and purification processes.<sup>121</sup> The use of ritual-like dances supports the results of the study by Sodi, which revealed that ritual-like dances (*malopo* in Northern Sotho and *intlombe* in IsiXhosa) were commonly used as treatment methods for mental illness.<sup>122</sup> These rituals involve the beating of drums, clapping of hands, songs and calabash rattling. Likewise, the use of purification processes, performance of summoning rituals and the burning of incense (*Helichrysum petiolare*) to treat mental illness affirms the results of the study by Mlisa and Nel, which showcased that various purification processes (i.e. bathing, steaming, vomiting, nasal ingestion, incisions, enemas) were used to treat mental illness.<sup>123</sup> In extreme cases, where patients display violent behaviour, specific herbs (*dzitsemo* in Tshivenda) are used for sedation, and if this is not effective, physical interventions such as ropes and chains are used to restrain the patient.<sup>124</sup>

Within the healing through spiritual practices, cleansing and medical pluralism category, the common spiritual and cleansing practices include steaming (*ukufutha*), administration of laxatives (*mahlabekufeni*) to remove the spirits poisoning the body, washing, induced vomiting (*phalaza*), inhalation of herbs and sacrifices to cleanse the patient's cultural misconduct and purge spirits, sneezing (*umbhemiso*) to forcefully dispel the spirit causing the illness and cutting (*ukucaba*) to release the spirits.<sup>125</sup> The findings also revealed that traditional healers also preferred to use treatments that aimed to harmonise the relationship between the patient and their environment by offering sacrifices to appease the ancestors, neutralising sorcery, and directly manipulating the environment.<sup>126</sup> The manipulation of the environment involved including the community in the intervention. Interestingly, in Galvin et al., traditional healers practised medical pluralism in their approach to the treatment of mental illness.<sup>127</sup> That is, they adapted elements of both Western and African belief systems that span multiple medical and religious fields to treat mental illness. This confirms Zabow's assertion that numerous African psychiatric patients seek treatment from both indigenous healers and psychiatric clinics.<sup>128</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Many implications and recommendations for future research are derived from the results of this study. Firstly, the findings revealed that for mental illness attributed to ancestral calling, initiation (*ukuthwasa*) is considered the solution. More studies are needed to determine whether symptoms disappear after one has listened to the ancestral calling. A clear distinction needs to be made between psychotic symptoms that

<sup>121</sup> Mufamadi and Sodi, "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa"; Ngobe, Semenya, and Sodi, "Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa."

<sup>122</sup> Sodi Tholene, "The Healing Drum: Taking a Look at Malopo Dance.," in *Music in Medicine. Health and Harmony*, ed. S. C. Woodard (Music Therapy Society of Southern Africa, 1998), 38–51.

<sup>123</sup> Lily-Rose Nomfundo Mlisa and Philip Nel, "Umbilini Experiential Knowledge and Indigenous Healing Praxis in Ukunyanga Tradition," *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 21, no. 3.2 (2015): 913–29.

<sup>124</sup> Audet et al., "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa"; Sigida and Masola, "Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa."

<sup>125</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa"; Menze et al., "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa"; Mzimkulu and Simbayi, "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis"; Shange and Ross, "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment."

<sup>126</sup> Crawford and Lipsedge, "Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine."

<sup>127</sup> Galvin, Chiwaye, and Moolla, "Religious and Medical Pluralism Among Traditional Healers in Johannesburg, South Africa."

<sup>128</sup> Tuviah Zabow, "Traditional Healers and Mental Health in South Africa," *International Psychiatry* 4, no. 4 (October 2, 2007): 81–83, <https://doi.org/10.1192/S174936760000521X>.

require anti-psychotic medication and psychotic symptoms that are a result of ancestral calling, as to date, this remains blurred. Through clinical experience, the author (as a practicing clinical psychologist) has noticed that the process is not always successful, as some of these patients end up in psychiatric hospitals. Second, more studies need to be conducted on the effectiveness of treatment approaches used by traditional healers to treat mental illness, as currently, information on this aspect is not only scarce but also mostly anecdotal. Third, medicinal concoctions are the most widely used treatment method. The composition of these concoctions remains mostly unknown, even to patients. Traditional healers safeguard the composition of their concoctions under “sacredness” and may only reveal the composition to traditional healers they train. Secrecy incites paranoia and suspicion and poses a risk to the patients, as these medicinal concoctions are not scientifically tested and regulated. An integrative health care system that seeks to include traditional healers would require that all medicinal concoctions be regulated under the auspices of the Medicines Control Council.

Additionally, some of the practices used by traditional healers infringe on human rights and may violate international treaties and conventions to which South Africa subscribes, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Treatment practices, such as tying with ropes and chains, which were unearthed in this review, under these treaties are considered inhumane. These practices should be monitored and evaluated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to ensure accountability; however, this is likely to remain elusive until traditional healers are formally integrated into the healthcare system. This is even more imperative as a significant number of South Africans not only consult traditional healers but use them as a first point of contact, particularly for mental illness. However, any attempt to fast-track the integration process should be done with caution, being mindful that most treatments used by traditional healers are untested, and as such might be harmful and violate human rights, particularly for patients with severe mental illnesses due to their susceptibility.

## **CONCLUSION**

The review aimed to systematically map the existing literature on the conceptualisation, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness by traditional healers in South Africa between the years 2004 and 2024. The findings revealed that traditional healers conceptualised mental illness through the lenses of three broad domains: supernatural and spiritual causes, biological and psychological, physical and environmental. Additionally, the results revealed that traditional healers employed various methods to diagnose mental illness, of which the use of divination bones and consultation with the ancestors were the predominant ones. Furthermore, traditional healers also used various approaches to treat mental illness, with medicinal concoctions being the most common. However, in extreme cases, such as with violent patients, physical restraints were also used. Overall, the results of the study show that traditional healers’ approach to conceptualisation, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness in South Africa is holistic. Although their approach to mental health is comprehensive, it is concerning that some traditional healers include potentially hazardous modern ingredients, such as methylated spirits, in their treatments. The efficacy of their treatment methods is unproven; formally integrating them into the health system would allow them to take advantage of Western resources to assess the composition, toxicity, and effectiveness of their concoctions.

## **Limitations**

This scoping review, while comprehensive, has limitations. First, the studies included in this review were generated from selected databases, namely Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycInfo, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, Global Health, MEDLINE, PsycArticles and cross-checked through Google and Google Scholar. The study excluded grey literature, dissertations, conference proceedings and review studies as the focus was on original studies. As a result, studies published in other databases may have been excluded. Second, the review focused on studies conducted within the South African context; therefore, the results cannot be generalised or extrapolated to other areas. Additionally, the search strategy was filtered for full-text articles

written in English, and peer-reviewed, therefore, valuable studies written in other languages, if any, may have been omitted.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arksey, Hilary, and Lisa O'Malley. "Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (February 2005): 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>.
- Ashforth, Adam. *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Audet, Carolyn M., Elisa Gobbo, Daniel E. Sack, Elise M. Clemens, Sizzy Ngobeni, Mevian Mkansi, Muktar H. Aliyu, and Ryan G. Wagner. "Traditional Healers Use of Personal Protective Equipment: A Qualitative Study in Rural South Africa." *BMC Health Services Research* 20, no. 1 (December 15, 2020): 655. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05515-9>.
- Beer, J.J.J. De, and B.-E. Van Wyk. "An Ethnobotanical Survey of the Agter-Hantam, Northern Cape Province, South Africa." *South African Journal of Botany* 77, no. 3 (August 2011): 741–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sajb.2011.03.013>.
- Bereda, Julia Elisa. *Traditional Healing as a Health Care Delivery System in a Transcultural Society*. University of South Africa (South Africa), 2002.
- Beyers, Jaco. "Who May Heal? A Plea from Traditional Healers to Participate in Treating Covid-19." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (November 18, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.6169>.
- Bodibe, RiC. "Traditional Healing: An Indigenous Approach to Mental Health Problems." *Psychological Counselling in the South African Context*, 1992, 149–65.
- Boum, Yap, Sylvie Kwedi-Nolna, Jessica E Haberer, and Rose R G Leke. "Traditional Healers to Improve Access to Quality Health Care in Africa." *The Lancet Global Health* 9, no. 11 (November 2021): e1487–88. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(21\)00438-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(21)00438-1).
- Brandl, Eva Janina, Tristram A. Lett, George Bakanidze, Andreas Heinz, Felix Bempohl, and Meryam Schouler-Ocak. "Weather Conditions Influence the Number of Psychiatric Emergency Room Patients." *International Journal of Biometeorology* 62, no. 5 (May 4, 2018): 843–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-017-1485-z>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 21, 2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Chavunduka, Gordon L. "Traditional Medicine in Modern Zimbabwe." (*No Title*), 1994.
- Cheikhyoussef, Ahmad, Martin Shapi, Kenneth Matengu, and Hina Mu Ashekele. "Ethnobotanical Study of Indigenous Knowledge on Medicinal Plant Use by Traditional Healers in Oshikoto Region, Namibia." *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 7, no. 1 (2011): 10.
- Cooposamy, R. M. "An Ethnobotanical Study of Medicinal Plants Used by Traditional Healers in Durban, South Africa." *African Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* 6, no. 11 (March 22, 2012). <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPP11.700>.
- Crawford, Tanya A., and Maurice Lipsedge. "Seeking Help for Psychological Distress: The Interface of Zulu Traditional Healing and Western Biomedicine." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 7, no. 2 (June 2004): 131–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670310001602463>.
- Dlamini, Busisiwe Precious. "African Indigenous Methods of Health Promotion and HIV/AIDS Prevention," 2006.
- Dowell, M. *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the Future of America*. USA: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007.
- Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa. "The State of Mental Health in South Africa," 2023. <https://www.eapasa.co.za/the-state-of-mental-health-in-south-africa/>.
- Ensink, Karin, and Brian Robertson. "Patient and Family Experiences of Psychiatric Services and African Indigenous Healers." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 36, no. 1 (1999): 23–43.

- Galvin, Michael, Lesley Chiwaye, and Aneesa Moolla. "Perceptions of Causes and Treatment of Mental Illness among Traditional Health Practitioners in Johannesburg, South Africa." *South African Journal of Psychology* 53, no. 3 (September 13, 2023): 403–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463231186264>.
- . "Religious and Medical Pluralism Among Traditional Healers in Johannesburg, South Africa." *Journal of Religion and Health* 63, no. 2 (April 27, 2024): 907–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-023-01795-7>.
- Guma, Phillip M., and Sekgothe Mokgoatšana. "The Historical Relationship between African Indigenous Healing Practices and Western-Orientated Biomedicine in South Africa: A Challenge to Collaboration." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (November 16, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6104>.
- Janse van Rensburg, Bernard, Carla Kotzé, Karis Moxley, Ugasvaree Subramaney, Zukiswa Zingela, and Soraya Seedat. "Profile of the Current Psychiatrist Workforce in South Africa: Establishing a Baseline for Human Resource Planning and Strategy." *Health Policy and Planning* 37, no. 4 (April 13, 2022): 492–504. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czab144>.
- Kebu, B, K Ensermu, and A Zemedede. "Indigenous Medicinal Utilization, Management and Threats in Fentale Area, Eastern Shewa, Ethiopia." *Ethiop J Biol Sci* 3, no. 1 (2004): 37–58.
- Konadu, Kwasi. "Medicine and Anthropology in Twentieth Century Africa: Akan Medicine and Encounters with (Medical) Anthropology." *African Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 2 & 3 (2008): 45–70.
- Makgopa, M. A. "Indigenous Healing Knowledge Systems: An Oral Transmission." In *Building on the Indigenous: An African Perspective. Proceedings of an International Conference on Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, edited by M. Masoga and A. Musyoki, 135–42. National Research Foundation, 2004.
- Mashabane, Makhosazane Felicia. "Difficulties in Knowledge and Perceptions of Mental Illness amongst the Student Population: Perspectives Gained from a Participatory Action Research Project by Psychology Master's Students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal." University of KwaZulu Natal, 2020. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstreams/5e0b57b1-42e7-4045-a907-d5afec1e6f69/download>.
- Mashamba, Tshilidzi M. "The Role of Traditional Healers in Suicide Prevention." *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 17, no. 1 (2007): 52–68.
- Menze, Ntombizanele, Alberta S.J. Van der Watt, Karis Moxley, and Soraya Seedat. "Profiles of Traditional Healers and Their Healing Practices in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa." *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 24 (September 20, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsy psychiatry.v24i0.1305>.
- Mlisa, Lily-Rose Nomfundo, and Philip Nel. "Umbilini Experiential Knowledge and Indigenous Healing Praxis in Ukunyanga Tradition." *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 21, no. 3.2 (2015): 913–29.
- Mohr, S. "The Relationship between Schizophrenia and Religion and Its Implications for Care." *Swiss Medical Weekly* 134, no. 2526 (June 26, 2004): 369–369. <https://doi.org/10.4414/smw.2004.10322>.
- Mokgobi, Maboe G. "Understanding Traditional African Healing." *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 20, no. sup-2 (2014): 24–34.
- Monama, D D, and W J Basson. "Looking in the Mirror: The Cultural Experiences of Patients Diagnosed with Schizophrenia." *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 31, no. 2 (2017): 46–58.
- Mothibe, Mmamoshedi E, and Mncengeli Sibanda. "South African Perspective." *Traditional and Complementary Medicine* 31 (2019): 1–10.
- Mufamadi, Jane, and Tholene Sodi. "Notions of Mental Illness by Vhavenda Traditional Healers in Limpopo Province, South Africa." *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 9, no. 2 (2010): 253–64.
- Musyimi, Christine W, Victoria N Mutiso, Erick S Nandoya, and David M Ndeti. "Forming a Joint Dialogue among Faith Healers, Traditional Healers and Formal Health Workers in Mental Health in a Kenyan Setting: Towards Common Grounds." *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 12, no. 1

(2016): 4.

- Mzimkulu, Kanyiswa G., and Leickness C. Simbayi. "Perspectives and Practices of Xhosa-speaking African Traditional Healers When Managing Psychosis." *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 53, no. 4 (December 2006): 417–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120601008563>.
- Nanyingi, Mark O, James M Mbaria, Adamson L Lanyasunya, Cyrus G Wagate, Kipsengeret B Koros, Humphrey F Kaburia, Rahab W Munenge, and William O Ogara. "Ethnopharmacological Survey of Samburu District, Kenya." *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 4, no. 1 (December 23, 2008): 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-4-14>.
- Ngobe, Anastasia, Sebua Semanya, and Tholene Sodi. "Psychological Ailments and Their Treatment Protocols: A Case Study of Swati Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa." *African Health Sciences* 21, no. 2 (August 2, 2021): 884–95. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ahs.v21i2.50>.
- Ngubane, Ntombifuthi Princess, and Brenda Zola De Gama. "A Quantitative Evaluation of Traditional Health Practitioners' Perspectives on Mental Disorders in KwaZulu-Natal: Knowledge, Diagnosis, and Treatment Practices." *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 26, no. 3 (July 2, 2024): 181–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2023.2194561>.
- Padmanabhanunni, Anita, Kyle Jackson, Zorina Noordien, Tyrone B. Pretorius, and Jean-Pierre Bouchard. "Characterizing the Nature of Professional Training and Practice of Psychologists in South Africa." *Annales Médico-Psychologiques, Revue Psychiatrique* 180, no. 4 (April 2022): 360–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amp.2022.02.012>.
- Ponton, Sarah J., Mikaela Gabriel, Jay Lu, Suzanne Stewart, Roy Strebel, and Sabina Mirza. "The Mental Health of Indigenous Peoples during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Scoping Review." *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* 9, no. 2 (June 13, 2024): 94–103. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.379>.
- Robertson, B A. "Does the Evidence Support Collaboration between Psychiatry and Traditional Healers? Findings from Three South African Studies." *South African Psychiatry Review* 9, no. 2 (2006): 87–90.
- Salod, Zakia, and Ozayr Mahomed. "Mapping Potential Vaccine Candidates Predicted by VaxiJen for Different Viral Pathogens between 2017–2021—A Scoping Review." *Vaccines* 10, no. 11 (October 24, 2022): 1785. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines10111785>.
- Schumaker, Lyn, Diana Jeater, and Tracy Luedke. "Introduction. Histories of Healing: Past and Present Medical Practices in Africa and the Diaspora." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 4 (2007): 707–14.
- Semanya, Sebua S, and Martin J Potgieter. "Bapedi Traditional Healers in the Limpopo Province, South Africa: Their Socio-Cultural Profile and Traditional Healing Practice." *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 10, no. 1 (December 10, 2014): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-10-4>.
- Shange, Sinethemba, and Eleanor Ross. "'The Question Is Not How but Why Things Happen': South African Traditional Healers' Explanatory Model of Mental Illness, Its Diagnosis and Treatment." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 53, no. 5 (June 25, 2022): 503–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221221077361>.
- Shankar, Rama, GS Lavekar, S Deb, and BK Sharma. "Traditional Healing Practice and Folk Medicines Used by Mishing Community of North East India." *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine* 3, no. 3 (2012): 124. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0975-9476.100171>.
- Sigida, Salome Thilivhali, and Nare Judy Masola. "Diagnosis And Treatment Of Mental Illness By Vhavenda Traditional Healers In Vhembe District, South Africa." *International Journal For Psychotherapy In Africa* 5, no. 1 (2020).
- Sodi, T, P Mudhovozi, T Mashamba, M Radzilani-Makatu, J Takalani, and Jabulani Mabunda. "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study." *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education* 49, no. 3 (January 2011): 101–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14635240.2011.10708216>.

- Sorsdahl, KR, AJ Flisher, Z Wilson, and DJ Stein. "Explanatory Models of Mental Disorders and Treatment Practices among Traditional Healers in Mpumalanga, South Africa." *African Journal of Psychiatry* 13, no. 4 (November 11, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpsy.v13i4.61878>.
- Stats Sa. *Census, 2022*. Department of Statistics South Africa, 2022. [https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014\\_Census\\_2022\\_Statistical\\_Release.pdf](https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf).
- Street, R.A., M. Smith, M. Moshabela, B. Shezi, C. Webster, and T. Falkenberg. "Traditional Health Practitioners and Sustainable Development: A Case Study in South Africa." *Public Health* 165 (December 2018): 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.07.021>.
- Tholene, Sodi. "The Healing Drum: Taking a Look at Malopo Dance. ." In *Music in Medicine. Health and Harmony*, , edited by S. C. Woodard, 38–51. Music Therapy Society of Southern Africa, 1998.
- Thompson, R., R. Hornigold, L. Page, and T. Waite. "Associations between High Ambient Temperatures and Heat Waves with Mental Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review." *Public Health* 161 (August 2018): 171–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.06.008>.
- Tiwari, Ritika, Angelique Wildschut-February, Lungiswa Nkonki, René English, Innocent Karangwa, and Usuf Chikte. "Reflecting on the Current Scenario and Forecasting the Future Demand for Medical Doctors in South Africa up to 2030: Towards Equal Representation of Women." *Human Resources for Health* 19, no. 1 (December 2, 2021): 27. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-021-00567-2>.
- Trang, Nguyen Minh, Jennifer Tran Cao Van, and Do Hoang Phuong Trang. "Genetic Influences on Mental Health." *European Journal of Medical and Health Research* 2, no. 5 (September 1, 2024): 247–55. [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmhr.2024.2\(5\).25](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmhr.2024.2(5).25).
- Troskie, Rosemare. "The Role of Health Care Workers in Collaborating with Traditional Healers in Primary Health Care. Part 1." *Health SA Gesondheid* 2, no. 1 (1997): 29–35.
- Truter, Ilse. "African Traditional Healers: Cultural and Religious Beliefs Intertwined in a Holistic Way." *South African Pharmaceutical Journal* 74, no. 8 (2007): 56–60.
- Verginer, Lucia, and Barbara H. Juen. "Spiritual Explanatory Models of Mental Illness in West Nile, Uganda." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 50, no. 2 (February 19, 2019): 233–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022118813652>.
- Winter, Mokhelepa Leshata, and Sumbane Gsakani Olivia. "A Scoping Review of Mental Health Needs and Challenges among Medical Students within South African Universities." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 21, no. 5 (May 4, 2024): 593. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21050593>.
- Zabow, Tuviah. "Traditional Healers and Mental Health in South Africa." *International Psychiatry* 4, no. 4 (October 2, 2007): 81–83. <https://doi.org/10.1192/S174936760000521X>.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the subject librarian for assisting with the search strategy and the two independent reviewers for their valuable insights. I would also like to acknowledge Unisa's Directorate Language Services (DLS) for their assistance with editing.

## ABOUT AUTHOR

Prof. Daniel Lesiba Letsoalo holds a doctorate (PhD) in psychology and is a clinical psychologist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa. He also coordinates the MA clinical psychology programme. He has served as a peer reviewer for multiple local and international journals, externally examined dissertations for various academic institutions, supervised postgraduate students to completion, published several articles in various peer reviewed journals and serve on the editorial board for an international journal. His research interests are mental health, African psychology, gender and sexuality, intimate partner violence and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS).