



Gospel Music and Liturgical Hymns to the Researcher's Spiritual Healing during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Autoethnography Biblical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges for Christian believers worldwide, especially in developing countries like South Africa. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed COVID-19 as a pandemic. Many activities were suspended, including church gatherings. As a result, like many Christian believers, during the pandemic, the researcher was spiritually and emotionally affected and suddenly filled with fear, depression, panic, loss, and loneliness. During the peak of the pandemic, the researcher used gospel music and liturgical hymns to uplift the researcher's spiritual well-being. Although gospel music and liturgy hymn music have been used as devotional and spiritual music for the well-being of religious individuals, little academic attention has been given to gospel music and liturgy hymns. Hence, this article aims to provide important insights concerning the researcher's personal experience in using gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic. In this article, autoethnography was used as a research methodology. This article extends the literature about the researcher's experience of using gospel music and liturgical hymns as devotional and spiritual music for well-being. The article presents significant awareness and insights into gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic. The findings of this article are outlined under the following three themes: (a) feeling vulnerable during the pandemic; (b) the role of gospel music in liturgical hymns during the pandemic; and (c) the use of gospel music and liturgical hymns for healing during the pandemic. The article affirms that gospel music and liturgical hymns can improve psychological and spiritual well-being. This can be attributed to the role of gospel music and liturgical hymns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

It is essential to state that the term 'Christian believers' is broad and covers many Christian denominations divided into six main groups: the Church of the East, Oriental Orthodoxy, Eastern

Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Restorationism, among others.¹ In this article, the researcher used the term ‘Christian believers’ to refer to individuals who believe in the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

For I delivered unto you first that which I also received, how Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

In this article, Christian believers are those from a background of charismatic Christianity that emphasises the work of God, the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and modern-day true signs and miracles as an everyday part of believers’ lives. Gospel music and liturgical hymns are essential in the lives of Christian believers as they help believers pray, confess their sins, and proclaim the grace of God.² It is essential to mention that the researcher is from a background of charismatic Christianity.

Various scholars affirm that gospel music is important in religious experiences and spiritual appreciation in most churches worldwide.³ The use of gospel music and liturgical hymns as healing for psychological and spiritual well-being has been crucial even before the inception of the coronavirus 2019 pandemic (hereafter ‘pandemic’). This study states that long before gospel and hymns were historically documented, the hymns were sung in ceremonies such as funerals and church worship.⁴ Gospel music and liturgical hymns played an important role in healing many people who lost their loved ones during the pandemic.

It is prudent to foreground this article by stating that the closure of Sunday services and other church gatherings during the national lockdown created an outrage among devout Christian believers.⁵ Scholars have pointed out that many Christian believers felt the suspension of church gatherings and other church activities was a violation of their right to public worship and an outright assault on their Christian beliefs.⁶

Topics developed based on the researcher’s experience

In this article, the researcher establishes the following primary topics to provide an in-depth understanding of experiences with gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic:

- a. Feeling vulnerable during the pandemic
- b. Role of gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic
- c. Use of gospel music and liturgical hymns for healing during the pandemic.

It has been empirically established that the implementation of the national lockdown resulted in many Christian believers, including the researcher, listening to gospel music and liturgical hymns for their mental health and spiritual well-being.⁷ Gospel music and liturgical hymns play an important role in promoting spiritual healing and the well-being of the researcher. Music and spirituality can

¹ Francesco Rigoli, “The Link Between COVID-19, Anxiety, and Religious Beliefs in the United States and the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 4 (August 29, 2021): 2196–2208, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01296-5>.

² Sakhiseni J. Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (December 14, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.7038>; Marius Nel, “Attempting to Develop a Pentecostal Theology of Worship,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (March 31, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1661>.

³ Sunny Yoon, “Tuning in Sacred: Youth Culture and Contemporary Christian Music,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 2016, 315–42.

⁴ Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

⁵ Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, “Religious Live-Streaming in Response to Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic and the Subsequent Lockdown in South Africa,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (December 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2120>.

⁶ Yoon, “Tuning in Sacred: Youth Culture and Contemporary Christian Music.”

⁷ Matt Bradshaw et al., “Listening to Religious Music and Mental Health in Later Life,” *The Gerontologist* 55, no. 6 (2015): 961–71.

coexist harmoniously with the idea that musical experiences can enhance spiritual experiences.⁸ When Sunday services and other church gatherings were suspended, churches were forced to change their traditional church services from face-to-face gatherings worldwide.⁹ Churches that were financially privileged could move to live-streaming sermons and online bible studies to follow the strict regulation set by the government and curb the spread of the pandemic.¹⁰ Various scholars agree that during the national lockdown, many South African Christian believers were offended by the lockdown that restricted church gatherings. This was because, to faithful Christian believers, Sunday meetings are crucial for their spiritual healing and other miracles that manifest physically. The decision to shut down houses of worship sparked a “Sunday crisis”. Most believers demanded that church gatherings and Sunday services be permitted.¹¹

From the preceding, South African Christian believers, including the researcher, experienced serious challenges during the suspension of Sunday services and other church gatherings. During the height of the pandemic, the researcher used gospel music and liturgical hymns as devotional songs to focus on worshipping and praising God, as well as spiritual well-being.¹² Gospel music and liturgical hymns play an important role in Christian believers’ well-being during this time. The positive influence of gospel music and liturgical hymns on the psychological and spiritual well-being of Christian believers is caused by the profoundly comforting messages in the music.¹³

As the researcher listened to gospel music during the pandemic, the researcher indicates that listening to gospel music and liturgical hymns was essential in addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual pains during and after the pandemic.¹⁴ Furthermore, in their study, O’Neill and Mako state that Christian believers have used gospel music and liturgical hymns to remedy personal pain caused by the pandemic.¹⁵ Gospel music and liturgical hymns positively influence the spiritual and emotional well-being of Christian believers.¹⁶ This can be found in the Old and New Testaments, where King Saul would call David the Harpist to heal him through music.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief historical background of liturgical hymns in South African Society

During the apartheid era, liturgical hymns were the only hope for oppressed South Africans.¹⁷ Liturgical hymns played an enormous part in the movement against apartheid. The liturgical hymns

⁸ Coenie J Calitz, “Healing Liturgy: The Role of Music and Singing,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1–9.

⁹ Thembelani Jentile, “‘ICawa Ivaliwe’: The Church during the Pandemic,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 101, no. 1 (2020): 1–15.

¹⁰ Vhumani Magezi, “Exploring the Impact of COVID-19 on Church Ministries in Africa: A Literature Analysis Focusing on South Africa,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 7219; Onyekachi G Chukwuma, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Religious Practices of Churches in Nigeria,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021).

¹¹ Jentile, “‘ICawa Ivaliwe’: The Church during the Pandemic.”

¹² Godwin Nwadiabia Aja et al., “‘We Need a Song of Hope’: Responding to the COVID-19 Informational and Psychospiritual Needs of Residents of a Gated Community in the Philippines,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 60 (2021): 1543–55.

¹³ Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

¹⁴ Annemarie E Oberholzer, “Addressing Physical Pain with Religion and Spirituality during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *HTS Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 1–6.

¹⁵ Mary T O’Neill and Caterina Mako, “Addressing Spiritual Pain,” *Health Progress* 92, no. 1 (2011): 42.

¹⁶ Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

¹⁷ J Gertrud Tönsing, “Limnandi Evangeli and Hlangani Bafundi: An Exploration of the Interrelationships between Christian Choruses and South African Songs of the Struggle,” *HTS Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 1–12; Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

were the only hope for South Africans to fight for liberation.¹⁸ Black South African believers used liturgical hymns as an outcry against the hardships and brutality of the apartheid regime.

“A painful realisation for Christians who were involved in the struggle for justice in South Africa was how few hymns there were in traditional hymn books which could provide any kind of support and inspiration.”¹⁹

Oral history reveals that South African black believers used liturgical hymns to complain about their struggle. In addition, liturgical hymns played an essential role for black believers against spiritual oppression.²⁰ Many believers knew that liberation from physical and spiritual oppression could only happen through salvation. Liturgical hymns were essential during the apartheid era in South Africa. Liturgical hymns united black South African believers to stand against oppression. Apart from fighting apartheid, liturgical hymns were composed for praise, worship, celebration, and penitence.²¹

The General Role of Music in Society

Many scholars have agreed that music and society are closely connected.²² Music facilitates social change, stimulates relaxation, alleviates anxiety and pain, and encourages proper behaviour in vulnerable communities.²³ In general, music promotes value and quality of life in society beyond medical help.²⁴ Music does not exist in isolation from the society in which it is produced. Rather, music reflects society, its customs, norms, and political views. Music plays a crucial part in maintaining the unity of the community. Music is part of many creative and successful forms of creativity utilised to show deep feelings and has been regarded as the highest form of culture worldwide.²⁵ Music worldwide has been frequently used as a significant communication, reconciliation, and storytelling tool. Music is also used as an important moral agent within society.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, the researcher used a conceptual framework adapted from the book of 1 Samuel 16:23 (KJV):

“And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so, Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”

¹⁸ Mookgo Solomon Kgate, “Spirituality of Liberation in African Pentecostal Worship and Its Implications for Black Theology,” *Black Theology* 19, no. 2 (2021): 168–80; B Dube and H V Molise, “The Church and Its Contributions to the Struggle to Liberate the Free State Province,” *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* 43, no. 1 (2018): 160–77.

¹⁹ Gertrud Tonsing, “‘Forming Identity through Song’: How Our Songs in Worship Shape Our Theological Identity: A Study of Lutheran Hymns and How They Shaped German Descendent Lutheran Congregations,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1–11.

²⁰ Kgate, “Spirituality of Liberation in African Pentecostal Worship and Its Implications for Black Theology”; Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

²¹ Tonsing, “‘Forming Identity through Song’: How Our Songs in Worship Shape Our Theological Identity: A Study of Lutheran Hymns and How They Shaped German Descendent Lutheran Congregations.”

²² Yende, “The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories.”

²³ Carolyn J Murrock and Patricia A Higgins, “The Theory of Music, Mood and Movement to Improve Health Outcomes,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 65, no. 10 (2009): 2249–57; Moon Fai Chan, Zi Yang Wong, and N V Thayala, “The Effectiveness of Music Listening in Reducing Depressive Symptoms in Adults: A Systematic Review,” *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* 19, no. 6 (2011): 332–48.

²⁴ Katarina Habe, Michele Biasutti, and Tanja Kajtna, “Wellbeing and Flow in Sports and Music Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 39 (2021): 100798.

²⁵ Sandra E Trehub, Judith Becker, and Iain Morley, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Music and Musicality,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 370, no. 1664 (2015): 20140096.

The analysis of the above was vital to understand the importance and the role of liturgical hymns in the lives of believers. In this article, the conceptual framework is framed within the larger question of the spiritual healing and deliverance of society through liturgical hymns. As already outlined above, the question of the spiritual healing and deliverance of society through liturgical hymns is one that defined and shaped the lives of believers during the pandemic in South Africa. In this analysis, the researcher used 1 Samuel 16:23, which focuses on the scenario of David the psalmist and harpist, to argue that liturgical hymns play various roles in the spiritual lives of believers.

The book of 1 Samuel 16:23 was appropriate as it tells the story of Saul who was tormented by evil spirits. David would play the harp, and Saul was restored and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. In the argument for this article, gospel music and liturgical hymns (not limited to instrumental but also vocal hymnody) played an essential role in the researcher's spiritual and psychological well-being during the peak of the pandemic. This nexus conjoins the analysis with the book of 1 Samuel 16:23 as a conceptual frame of reference in this article. The researcher focused on gospel music and liturgical hymns, including hymnody such as *iCilongo Levangeli*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this article, the researcher used a qualitative autoethnographic critical methodology to comprehensively understand the role gospel music played in the researcher's life during the height of the pandemic. The use of diverse autoethnographic narrative formats, such as diaries, field notes, poetry, novels, personal narratives or stories, and vignettes by scholars contributes to the growth of autoethnographic methodologies in social science research.²⁶ This was supported by various scholars who assert that autoethnography is a qualitative, inner-directed, and context-conscious research approach, and it affords the scholar with a distinctive "lens through which the external world is viewed."²⁷ The use of an autoethnographic technique is justified by its importance for understanding social and cultural backgrounds through the researcher's experiences. An autoethnographic approach is a unique form of methodology that focuses on 'self' examination, while ethnography focuses on the 'other' and examining other people's experiences.²⁸ For example, autoethnographic research is described as follows:

"I'll start with my personal life, I suppose. I am aware of my physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings. To try to understand an experience, I employ what I refer to as systematic sociological introspection and emotional memory. Then I compose a tale about my experience. I want to comprehend a way of life by investigating a specific life."²⁹

The following factors were the primary factors that the researcher considered while deciding on autoethnography as the approach for this paper. The researcher's experiences during the pandemic have not been explored in research, as was already mentioned. The purpose of the researcher's article was to provide a personal account of the researcher's experiences to further sociological knowledge in this field, and the use of autoethnography helped the researcher express his lived experiences, which were enmeshed in a socially created framework.³⁰ Firstly, several scholars supported this, who affirm that a researcher can share a personal account of lived experiences through the autoethnographic approach.³¹ Second, because autoethnographic research is inherently vulnerable, using this approach allowed him to get to know his personality better as a researcher and highlight the importance of gospel music during the pandemic. Lastly, using an autoethnographic technique allows researchers to explore

²⁶ David Butz and Kathryn Besio, "Autoethnography," *Geography Compass* 3, no. 5 (2009): 1660–1974.

²⁷ Clair Doloriert and Sally Sambrook, "Ethical Confessions of the 'I' of Autoethnography: The Student's Dilemma," *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 4, no. 1 (2009): 27–45.

²⁸ Stacy Holman Jones, "Autoethnography," *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2007.

²⁹ Carolyn Ellis, "Heartful Autoethnography," *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 5 (1999): 669–83.

³⁰ Sarah Wall, "Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 7, no. 1 (2008): 38–53.

³¹ Mariza Méndez, "Autoethnography as a Research Method: Advantages, Limitations and Criticisms," *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal* 15, no. 2 (2013): 279–87; Ellis, "Heartful Autoethnography."

subjects like loss, agony, and grief that are difficult to convey because doing so allows them to share their own pain, heartbreak, and other emotions.³²

Many scholars have noted that autoethnography, to a certain extent, constitutes a form of philosophy that precisely articulates methodologies that allows a researcher to have a sizable amount of artistic freedom in a textual representation.³³ Autoethnography is different from the traditional ethnographic research methodology. In ethnographic research, data traditionally comes from interviews, participant observation, field notes, and research diaries.³⁴ For instance, several autoethnographers have used their personal journals, letters, and articles to analyse their life experiences.³⁵

The positionality of the researcher is crucial in autoethnography because it allows them to examine their experience with new eyes by understanding their own beliefs and presumptions.³⁶ Positionality "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study".³⁷ Additionally, positionality is typically determined by situating the researcher regarding three aspects: the subject of the inquiry, the research participants, and the setting and methodology of the study.³⁸ For this reason, the researcher kept a research diary in which he wrote down his personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings throughout the lockdown period. Positionality enabled the researcher to first comprehend his own life before stepping into another's. The researcher developed the autoethnographic text using personal experiences during the pandemic in accordance with autoethnography.³⁹

Conceptualising the Researcher's Experiences through Autoethnography

This section contains the significant themes that emerged from the analysis of the autoethnographic data pertaining to the researcher's experiences during the pandemic. The prominent issues the researcher experienced during the pandemic that emerged from the data analysis include feeling vulnerable, the role of gospel music and liturgical hymns, and the use of gospel music and liturgical hymns for healing. The researcher hopes that examining the above central themes will give new insights into the role of gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic.

Feeling vulnerable during the pandemic

The data analysis of the researcher's personal experience during the pandemic led to the first topic of the research: feeling vulnerable. As the researcher analysed this data, the concerns felt were that the researcher's life was threatened, and the researcher was worried that he was exposed to the virus and possibly infected. The researcher wrote:

I really feel discouraged and concerned about my life as the virus is affecting many people that I am close to. How will I react if I were to be exposed to and infected by this life-threatening virus?

³² Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C Hernandez, and Heewon Chang, "Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research," *Journal of Research Practice* 6, no. 1 (2010): E1–E1; Doloriert and Sambrook, "Ethical Confessions of the 'I' of Autoethnography: The Student's Dilemma."

³³ Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Routledge, 2016); Sally Denshire, "On Auto-Ethnography," *Current Sociology* 62, no. 6 (2014): 831–50.

³⁴ Butz and Besio, "Autoethnography"; Kirsty Williamson, "Research in Constructivist Frameworks Using Ethnographic Techniques," *Library Trends* 55, no. 1 (2006): 83–101.

³⁵ Butz and Besio. "Autoethnography," 1660-1674.

³⁶ Robin M Boylorn and Mark P Orbe, "Introduction Critical Autoethnography as Method of Choice," in *Critical Autoethnography* (Routledge, 2016), 13–26.

³⁷ Andrew Gary Darwin Holmes, "Researcher Positionality--A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research--A New Researcher Guide.," *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 8, no. 4 (2020): 1–10.

³⁸ Angel M Y Lin, "Researcher Positionality," *Research Methods in Language Policy and Planning: A Practical Guide*, 2015, 21–32.

³⁹ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E Adams, and Arthur P Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 2011, 273–90.

The researcher kept in mind that during this time, the researcher was infected during the pandemic, experiencing bereavement and life-threatening illness. Therefore, regarding the researcher's sensitivity, the awareness of the risk that writing this article on this topic could potentially cause emotional trauma to readers. The researcher averted this trauma by refraining from revealing sensitive information about the researcher's personal life and experiences during the pandemic.

Previous research has also suggested that many Christian believers went through serious pain during the pandemic.⁴⁰ At the beginning of the pandemic, vulnerability to illness, death, fear of unemployment and social isolation threatened many Christian believers as churches were closed.⁴¹ Many Christian believers felt too 'vulnerable', especially regarding issues of spirituality. Also, scholars have revealed that "not having our spiritual needs met can, therefore, threaten our well-being, and, just as with social pain, we experience spiritual pain when our spiritual needs are not met."⁴²

Role of Gospel Music and Liturgical Hymns during the Pandemic

The study's second theme—the role of gospel music and liturgical hymns—was a key theme evident from the researcher's experience during the pandemic. The gospel music and hymns were essential for the researcher's psychological and spiritual well-being. When Sunday services and other church activities were suspended, the researcher constantly listened to various gospel music and liturgical hymns for healing. The gospel music and liturgical hymns played an essential role in the researcher's psychological and spiritual well-being. This is attributed to the fact that songs taken from *iCilongo Levangeli* calmed me. The role of hymns was to affirm that hymns play an essential role in calming the soul in a way that words cannot express.⁴³ The researcher points out:

As a believer, I was affected by the suspension of Sunday services and other church activities. However, I decided to listen to different kinds of gospel music and liturgical hymns for my spiritual healing. The hymnody of *iCilongo Levangeli* had a positive impact on my psychological and spiritual well-being.

Various studies demonstrate that music can influence a person's ideas, feelings, and behaviour, as well as help with stress management, emotional expression, and enhanced communication.⁴⁴ The above statement was corroborated in that the music enhanced researcher's spiritual and emotional well-being. Music is essential to spiritual healing if correctly presented.⁴⁵ From the biblical perspective, the book of 1 Samuel 16:23 (KJV) reads:

"And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so, Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him".

The passage of the Holy Scripture above presents and affirms the significant role of gospel music and liturgical hymns in psychological and spiritual well-being. During the pandemic, the evil spirit came upon and infiltrated believers' spaces, causing anxiety and physical pain. Through gospel music and liturgical hymns, spiritual and emotional well-being was healed.

⁴⁰ Oberholzer, "Addressing physical pain with religion and spirituality during and after the COVID-19 pandemic." 1-6.

⁴¹ Oberholzer, "Addressing Physical Pain with Religion and Spirituality during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic."

⁴² Margaret I Fitch and Ruth Bartlett, "Patient Perspectives about Spirituality and Spiritual Care," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Oncology Nursing* 6, no. 2 (2019): 111–21; Oberholzer, "Addressing Physical Pain with Religion and Spirituality during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic."

⁴³ Yende, "The Importance of Understanding and Making Sense of Zulu Traditional Hymns as a Symbol of Expressing Worship: Cognitive Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics of Hymnody Theories."

⁴⁴ Feng Wang et al., "Impact of Music Education on Mental Health of Higher Education Students: Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022); Genevieve A Dingle et al., "How Do Music Activities Affect Health and Well-Being? A Scoping Review of Studies Examining Psychosocial Mechanisms," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021, 3689.

⁴⁵ Mark Pretorius, "A Metaphysical and Neuropsychological Assessment of Musical Tones to Affect the Brain, Relax the Mind and Heal the Body," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1–9.

Use of Gospel Music and Liturgical Hymns for Healing during the Pandemic

The study's third theme—the use of gospel music and liturgical hymns for healing during the pandemic— was confirmed by music therapists who agree that music is essential to psychological and spiritual well-being.⁴⁶ The researcher used selected gospel music and liturgical hymns to heal spiritually during the pandemic, and his spirit was lifted and restored. The researcher wrote:

During the peak of the pandemic, I selected some traditional Zulu hymns to listen to as the Sunday services were suspended. I selected songs such as *iCilongo Levangeli* number 80 'Umzuzu noJesu'; *iCilongo Levangeli* number 60 'Hlengiwe–Limnandi lelizwi' and *iCilongo Levangeli* Number 215 'Ungumhlobo wam'uJesu'.

Music is well-recognised for touching several parts of the brain, for instance, the hippocampus for memory, the amygdala for an emotional reaction to music, and the cerebellum that causes foot tapping and dancing. The researcher also used the selected songs for brain well-being.⁴⁷ In addition, the researcher's spiritual pain was healed using gospel music and liturgical hymns, including fear, anxiety, grief, and impending loss. Music helped the researcher to experience hope, strength, comfort, and peace during this time. Studies demonstrate that gospel music and liturgical hymns can be a remedy for diminishing psychological and spiritual pain and speeding up recovery.⁴⁸ Gospel music and liturgical hymns significantly reduced stress and other psychological illnesses during the pandemic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This article aimed to provide important insights concerning gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic. This article highlights that when the pandemic began, the South African government implemented a national lockdown to curb the spread of the virus. The national lockdown resulted in the suspension of all gatherings, including school, religious, cultural, and sports activities. However, the suspension of Sunday services and other church activities created a tumult and disturbed many spiritually and psychologically. The researcher also witnessed this and shared his experience of the lockdown.

In this article, the researcher reports that during the pandemic, the researcher felt vulnerable and concerned about his life in the presence of the virus. During the peak of the virus, the researcher was deeply depressed and experienced extreme fatigue caused by the pandemic, but the gospel music and liturgical hymns brought a sense of comfort and peace. The gospel music and liturgical hymns that the researcher was exposed to, became a remedy for the researcher's psychological and spiritual well-being.

Consistent with previous research, the findings of the current study reveal that gospel music and liturgical hymns play an essential role in human spiritual healing.⁴⁹ As was demonstrated by discussing several empirical studies in this article, there is clear evidence that gospel music and liturgical hymns reduced psychological and spiritual stress among Christian believers. The study findings show that gospel music and liturgical hymns have a long-standing role in the spiritual and psychological healing of Christian believers. This finding is in line with the book of 1 Samuel 16:23 (KJV), which tells the story of King Saul and David, who played the harp to Saul whenever the torturing spirit attacked him, and Saul would be healed through music.

⁴⁶ Roia Rafieyan and Rose Ries, "A Description of the Use of Music Therapy in Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry," *Psychiatry (Edgmont)* 4, no. 1 (2007): 47.

⁴⁷ Pretorius, "A Metaphysical and Neuropsychological Assessment of Musical Tones to Affect the Brain, Relax the Mind and Heal the Body."

⁴⁸ Jill B Hamilton et al., "'You Need a Song to Bring You through': The Use of Religious Songs to Manage Stressful Life Events," *The Gerontologist* 53, no. 1 (2013): 26–38.

⁴⁹ Morakeng E K Lebaka, "Music, Singing and Dancing in Relation to the Use of the Harp and the Ram's Horn or Shofar in the Bible: What Do We Know about This?," *HTS: Theological Studies* 70, no. 3 (2014): 1–7; Mookgo S Kgatele, "Singing as a Therapeutic Agent in Pentecostal Worship," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019): 1–7.

Again, the current study's findings show that using gospel music and liturgical hymns was useful for healing the researcher during the pandemic. This finding corroborates the results of various scholars who found that it is common for Christian believers to use music for their spiritual healing.⁵⁰

SUMMARY

The current article has established that gospel music and liturgical hymns were imperative for the researcher's spiritual well-being during the pandemic. This finding is congruent with previous studies that affirm that the application of music to enhance healing among believers is not new. In the past, healing shrines and temples hired hymnologists and recommended music for emotionally unstable people.⁵¹ The results of this study reveal that the use of gospel music and liturgical hymns contributed to the researcher's psychological and spiritual well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings and reflecting on the researcher's experiences during the pandemic, the following recommendations are made: Firstly, future researchers interested in a similar topic should conduct research using broader spectrum methodologies to give more insight. Secondly, the researcher recommends using gospel music and liturgical hymns should not be ignored in Christendom. Thirdly, the researcher also recommends that medical and other therapists use music for psychological and spiritual healing for their patients.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS ARTICLE

This article was limited due to its autoethnographic methodology. Doing autoethnographic research was sensitive because the researcher touched on his personal experiences. The data collected from the researcher's personal experiences were significant in this article. This research demanded careful consideration of the research design and a careful selection of relevant information. Limiting this article to an autoethnographic exploration helped the researcher to have a manageable data collection process. However, for this reason, the results of the article cannot be generalised.

CONCLUSION

There is a considerable gap in research regarding researchers' experiences, especially musicologists. Studies have neglected researchers' experiences experienced while researching sensitive topics regarding other people's experiences. Hence, to fill this knowledge gap, this article presented an autoethnography of the researcher's experiences using gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic as a healing tool for his psychological and spiritual well-being. Using gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic demonstrated the efficacy of independent treatment for reducing stress and depression. The researcher highlights that gospel music and liturgical hymns have unique qualities that promote psychological and spiritual well-being. The researcher affirms that gospel music and liturgical hymns can improve psychological and spiritual well-being. This can be attributed to the role of gospel music and liturgical hymns during the pandemic.

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