



Mental Health: an African perspective

New research contests Euro-centric views on treatment and provides compelling insight into African cosmology and mental illness.

While traditional healers have been recognised as important in offering primary health care services in South Africa, their role in treating mental illness is understudied and underrepresented. New research entitled *Ukugula Kwabantu: A Study of Traditional Healers' constructions of Mental Health*, by COE-HUMAN funded student Sinethemba Makhanya, suggests that traditional healers are still not seen as experts in effectively treating mental illness.

Traditional healers are less interested in treating symptoms and concerned more with the root causes of illness, especially those situated in the supernatural and ancestral realms. While this has typically raised suspicion and distrust in clinical settings, *Ukugula Kwabantu* shows that a traditional healers' worldview and range of treatment methods are nuanced, and diverse and are not diametrically opposed to the biomedical model.

Ukugula Kwabantu strengthens the understanding of traditional models of health and illness by examining them as existing on a continuum, expanding the classifications of the causes of mental illness and illness more broadly, beyond that of natural and

unnatural causes. An examination of this continuum offered categories of causation from which the research could abstract how health is constructed by traditional healers in a peri-urban setting.

Research work and science communication output:

Ukugula Kwabantu: A study of Traditional Healers' constructions of Mental Health is a study that looks at how psychology can integrate with *ubunyanga* ('traditional healing') to offer integrated approaches to (mental) health.

Makhanya has been interviewed by The Sowetan and Power FM:

<https://tinyurl.com/Makhanyasowetanlive>

<https://tinyurl.com/MakhanyaPowerFM>

Makhanya was also the winner of the Wits leg of the 2018 FameLab International Science Competition.