



How Indigenous Belief Systems Guide Help-seeking Behavior for Psychosocial and Medical Problems: A South African Perspective

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ABSTRACT Advertisements are placed in newspapers by people identifying themselves as “doctors” or “healers” in South Africa. This paper aims to identify what services are advertised, who offers these services, and the methods used to diagnose and treat these conditions. Adverts were randomly collected from a free community newspaper and analyzed by two independent coders using thematic data analysis. The results indicate that services were offered for various conditions such as relationship issues, the resolution of financial problems, winning lotteries, getting jobs or promotions, the removal of bewitchment, and help with medical and legal problems. Various treatments are also advertised. Findings are conceptualized within a South African indigenous belief system, which attributes causality of ill-health or misfortune to bewitchment and healing through traditional practices. It is recommended that “Western” trained healthcare providers be aware of the availability of these services and their use by “Westernized” or globalized Africans for problem resolution.