

Abstract

Cultural Determinants of Mental Health Problems as Perceived by Health Care Sciences Students at a Selected University in Limpopo Province, South Africa [†]

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[†] Presented at Faculty of Health Sciences: 8th Annual Research Day, Polokwane, South Africa, 17–18 September 2025.

Keywords: mental health problems; cultural determinants; health science students

Background: The diverse cultures found worldwide have a significant impact on various aspects of mental health. These include how health and illness are perceived, the behaviour of seeking health care, and the attitudes of both patients, professionals and health science students who will become future mental health professionals. **Objectives:** the study explored and described the cultural determinants of mental health problems among health science students from the Institution of Higher Learning, Limpopo Province, South Africa, and to propose recommendations for enhancing cultural competence education in health science programs. **Methods:** This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore and describe the cultural determinates of Mental illness. The study was conducted in the School of Medicine and School of Health Care Sciences in the University of Limpopo, South Africa. Medical students and nursing students participated in the study and were selected using a non-probability quota sampling. Data was collected using five focus group discussions. Tesch's open-coding method was applied for data analysis, and themes and sub-themes were generated. **Results:** The results indicated that cultural elements play a role in mental health issues within communities. Gender roles, strict expectations, and social pressure heighten psychological distress. Family traits and perspectives on Western medicine also significantly influence preferences, with numerous individuals favouring traditional healing methods rather than biomedical treatments. Faith in witchcraft has also been noted to play a role in mental illness. Religious beliefs provide assistance yet may strengthen stigma. furthermore, cultural norms and community expectations, as part of tradition, influence how mental distress is expressed and how individuals respond to it. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight a deep-rooted influence of cultural factors on the perceptions, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health issues. There is a need to incorporate cultural concepts, especially beliefs regarding witchcraft and the influence of cultural variances on help-seeking behavior into academic and clinical education.



Academic Editor: Takalani
Grace Tshitangano

Published: 11 December 2025

Citation: Ratsoma, M.T.; Phukubye, T.A.; Sumbane, G.O. Cultural Determinants of Mental Health Problems as Perceived by Health Care Sciences Students at a Selected University in Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Proceedings* **2025**, *130*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2025130043>

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Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.T.R.; methodology, M.T.R.; software, M.T.R.; validation, G.O.S.; formal analysis, M.T.R. and G.O.S.; investigation, M.T.R.; resources, M.T.R.; data curation, M.T.R.; writing—original draft preparation, M.T.R. and G.O.S.; writing—review and editing, M.T.R. and G.O.S.; visualization, M.T.R.; supervision, T.A.P. and G.O.S.; project administration, M.T.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC)—(TREC/1706/2024: PG) 02 December 2024.

Informed Consent Statement: Consent was obtained from all participants involved in the research. Informed consent in writing has been acquired from the participants to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The datasets that underlie the results of this research can be obtained upon request from the corresponding author, MTR. Due to the presence of information that might compromise the privacy of research participants, the data is not accessible to the public.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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