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Exploring the perceptions of mental illness among Pedi psychologists in the Limpopo Province

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ABSTRACT

Mental illness is conceptualised differently across cultural and religious groups. Perceptions of mental illness that are held in communities play a role in the treatment sought and the response to treatment offered. This study explored the perceptions of mental illness among 9 Pedi Psychologists practising in the Limpopo province and the effect of culture, if any, on these perceptions. Seven of the participants were registered as clinical psychologists, one as an educational psychologist and one in the category of counselling psychology. The participants were practicing in the Sekhukhune and Capricorn districts of Limpopo. Semi structured interviews were conducted at the practitioners' rooms with each interview lasting approximately 1 hour. The interview schedule consisted of 27 questions divided into three sections: contextual questions; psychologists' perceptions of the Pedi culture and mental illnesses in general; and Pedi psychologist's approach to treating clients with cultural beliefs about mental illness. The findings of the study revealed that mental illness in the Pedi community is conceptualised differently to mainstream conceptualisations. The perceptions of mental illness held by the community influenced the type of treatment sought, with the choice of treatment often being traditional and spiritual healing. It is apparent given the findings of this study that more knowledge on the perceptions of mental illness across various groups is needed in the delivering mental health services in South Africa. The practitioners highlighted the importance of cultural competence in serving communities holding cultural and religious beliefs in relation to mental illness.