

AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS'S NOTIONS OF BEREAVEMENT AND
GRIEF COUNSELLING WITH A VIEW TO DEVELOPING A CULTURAL GRIEF
COUNSELLING MODEL IN THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY IN VHEMBE DISTRICT
OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE

BY

TAKALANI FHATUWANI JAMES

SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE SUBJECT OF

PSYCHOLOGY

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

PROMOTER: PROF T SODI

CO-PROMOTER: PROF T MASHAMBA

SUBMITTED ON APRIL 2015

UNIVEN LIBRARY

Library Item : 20150978



ABSTRACT

The loss of a loved one may trigger psychological disorders that can disrupt people's lives for at least two years after a significant loss. People going through grief as a result of the loss of loved ones are vulnerable to extraordinary complications that relate to the difficult circumstances around death itself. People who are grieving usually have symptoms that can be characterized as physical, emotional, social and behavioral in nature. Bereavement and associated grief reaction takes place within the context of families and communities and is played out through social interaction.

The aim of the study was to analyze traditional healers' notions of bereavement and grief counseling and to develop a culturally appropriate grief counseling model that can be used in a multicultural community. The specific objectives of the study were to explore and analyze the traditional healers counseling techniques and processes used in the management of grief and bereavement and to develop a culturally sensitive intervention model. The study was conducted from qualitative point of view since the researcher would want to explore and analyze the notions of bereavement as understood and described by the traditional healers. A phenomenological research design was used in this study since it is associated with the way people experience their lives especially those that have lived experiences about a particular phenomenon under study.

Ten (10) traditional healers from Thulamela Municipality were identified using purposive and snowball sampling. The first participant used was selected purposefully and thereafter, the same participant identified others who had experience in the area under study. Data was collected by means of personal interviews that were semi-structured to allow for flexibility for the researcher and the participants. The main selection criteria used was that the participants should have experience of more than twenty years practicing as a traditional healer.

Data was analyzed in accordance with the interpretive phenomenological analysis and themes were developed from participants' responses. It was found that grief symptoms were varied and mainly psychological. This among others included: difficulties in making decisions about one's life, inability to forget the deceased, seeing things that are not there, and in some rare (and

extreme) cases what in western psychology could be considered to be effective. The study found that the interventions prescribed by traditional healers were effective in the cultural context where they practiced. Culturally relevant counselling, in particular was found to be one of the treatment strategies to manage grief. Cultural rituals and customs were also found to be useful in the treatment of grief and loss. It was further found that traditional healers share an underlying cultural understanding of bereavement even though they tend to have varied explanations for this and related experiences.

With regard to the culturally sensitive grief counselling model that was developed, it was found that traditional healers tend to attach great importance to rapport building when they introduce themselves to their clients. One of the objectives of counseling from western perspective is to build rapport between the client and therapist. The results of the present study suggest that there are striking commonalities between western and traditional healing systems when it comes to rapport building. However, the fact that traditional healers are part of the communities that they serves makes it even easier for them to relate easily to their clients.

The findings of the present study further suggested that traditional healers attach greater symbolic and therapeutic value to animals when it comes to the management of grief. For example, the specific use of a she goat during the performance of bereavement rituals, and the tendency to use a sheep in the case of someone who dies far from home, suggest that the management of grief is a culturally meaningful activity that has therapeutic gains for the grieving individual. Based on the findings of the present study, a number of recommendations have been proposed. These could include regular workshops for traditional healers to share skills on the management bereavement and other conditions of ill health experienced by members of their organization