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Capstone Project: Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Healing in African Contexts

Project Title

Healing Trauma through Integrative, Culturally Grounded Care: Bridging African Traditional Healing and Modern Trauma-Informed Practice

Background and Rationale

Conventional trauma-informed educational frameworks have largely been developed in Western clinical contexts and often fail to fully address the spiritual, communal, and ancestral dimensions of trauma experienced in African societies. In Uganda and many low-resource settings, traditional health systems remain central to mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, particularly in cases of Traumatic Stress Disorder (TSD). However, these systems are frequently marginalized within formal mental health discourse.

This capstone project proposes an integrative model that centres African worldviews of trauma while aligning them with contemporary trauma-informed principles such as safety, empowerment, trustworthiness, collaboration, and cultural humility. The project positions traditional healing not as an alternative to mental health care, but as a complementary system with evidence-informed practices that warrant serious scholarly and clinical consideration.

Problem Statement

There is a critical gap between modern trauma-informed education and indigenous African approaches to healing trauma. This disconnect limits culturally safe care, undermines community trust, and reduces treatment effectiveness for trauma survivors whose experiences are deeply embedded in spiritual, ancestral, and collective frameworks.

Project Aim

To develop and pilot a culturally responsive, trauma-informed educational framework that integrates African traditional healing principles with modern TSD care models, fostering collaboration between mental health professionals and traditional health practitioners.

Key Objectives

1. **Reframe Trauma**: Conceptualize TSD through an African lens that includes mind, body, spirit, and community interconnectedness.
2. **Integrate Systems**: Create structured dialogue between traditional healers, mental health professionals, and trauma educators.
3. **Enhance Cultural Safety**: Develop trauma-informed practices that respect spiritual, ancestral, and communal interpretations of distress.
4. **Strengthen Community Healing**: Prioritize collective restoration alongside individual recovery.

Core Framework: Culturally Sensitive Trauma-Informed Care

This project advances five guiding principles:

- **Cultural Safety** – Acknowledging spiritual distress, ancestral relationships, and communal trauma as legitimate aspects of healing.
- **Holistic Healing** – Addressing trauma as a disruption of mental, physical, spiritual, and social equilibrium.
- **Collaborative Practice** – Building partnerships between traditional healers and mental health professionals.
- **Restorative Community Care** – Utilizing rituals, ceremonies, music, nature, and storytelling in healing processes.
- **Ethical and Safe Practice** – Ensuring that traditional methods are applied responsibly, transparently, and without harm.

Methodology

The project will be implemented through a four-episode fortnightly virtual webinar series titled **"Healing Trauma: Integrating Traditional Health Care in TSD Treatment."** Each session will bring together psychologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, traditional healers, researchers, educators, and community representatives to co-create knowledge and best practices.

Expected Outcomes

- A documented, culturally grounded trauma-informed care framework.
- Increased recognition of African traditional healing within mental health education.
- Strengthened collaboration between biomedical and indigenous health systems.
- A scalable model applicable across low-resource and multicultural settings.

Significance to Trauma-Informed Education

This capstone contributes to global trauma-informed education by expanding its epistemological boundaries beyond Western models and integrating indigenous African healing wisdom as a legitimate, structured, and ethical component of trauma recovery.

Lead Institution

Dr. Sekagya Institute of Traditional Medicine – Department of Integrative Medicine Research, Mpigi District, Uganda