



TITLE: Ubuntu's Moderate Communitarianism: A Culturally-Grounded Approach to Suicide Prevention

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Abstract: *Suicide remains a global public health crisis, with rates rising sharply in many low- and middle-income countries. While biomedical and psychological interventions dominate prevention strategies, these often neglect the socio-cultural dimensions of mental health. This paper explores Ubuntu - a Southern African philosophical framework emphasizing relational personhood, community interdependence, and moral responsibility - as a viable conceptual model for suicide mitigation. Specifically, the paper defends Ubuntu's **moderate communitarianism**, which balances collective obligation with individual dignity, as an ethical lens for understanding and addressing suicide. Drawing from philosophical analysis, public health data, and examples of community-based practices in sub-Saharan Africa, the paper argues that Ubuntu offers a culturally resonant framework that could strengthen social cohesion, reduce isolation, and restore meaning in contexts where individuals feel disconnected or devalued. The concept of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons") fosters communal accountability and empathy, both of which are protective factors in suicide prevention. While recognizing the limitations of traditional systems, including issues of exclusion and normativity, the paper concludes that Ubuntu-informed interventions may enrich global mental health responses by grounding them in ethical solidarity and social care. A call is made for empirical studies to assess the practical integration of Ubuntu principles in suicide prevention programs across diverse contexts.*

Keywords: *Autonomy, Bantu, Communitarianism, , Human dignity, Ubuntu, Suicide,*

Introduction

Due to the challenges, the modern Bantu communities are going through, Ubuntu's radical communitarianism apparently no longer helps to address the suicide crisis. This paper proposes an alternative approach called Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism. This version of communitarianism balances the individual's personhood and the community's social demands. This approach, which aligns with the modernized and globalized world, is proposed as a way to address suicide issues in contemporary Bantu societies. The paper explores how Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism can be a strategy to mitigate suicides in modern Bantu societies. The main argument is that suicides can be reduced by focusing on the agency of the individual first, with the community existing in harmony with the individual, as opposed to Ubuntu's radical communitarianism approach that prioritizes the community over the individual. The paper will begin by analyzing the current situation that calls for this new version of Ubuntu's communitarianism, which allows individual members to evaluate, question, and revise his community's values and practices. Then the theory of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism will be elaborated in detail.

1.1 Challenges Facing Modern Bantu Societies Today

Commenting on the difference between the modern African societies and the pre-colonial ones, Anayochukwu Ugwu asserts that:

In the communitarian flow as obtainable in the African past, every home was a home for all for if darkness caught a child where he went for playing, the family was obligated to take care of him just as their own children, neighbor was first relative, who fed and beat the hell out of you for wrong deeds even before Papa and Mama were involved, every cooking pot was indeterminate as to how many people would eventually share from it, reckless shedding blood were so minimal, and most time, by accident, as against how consciencelessness and unconsciousness over the ontological consequences, have aided them today, land was communally owned and the community was obligated to intervene in community-member's existential challenge like when he was befallen by fire incident, age that he could no longer carry our personal and family responsibility, etc. it was an era when true and sincere love played among the people, facilitating oneness and ontological bond that parenting was communally observed as a woman could entrust her neighbor with her child to look after while she went to market, farming, fetching of water, firewood, etc.¹

However, the reality on the ground today is quite different as J.O. Oguejiofor observes:

the steady rise of individualism among Africans in modern times is an indication that communalism is a creation of the circumstances prevalent at that time in the history of Africa. The change towards more and more individualism is "a necessary change given continuous and on-going departure from the simple societies that were communalistic. It appears however that there is much that is negative in that change; corruption is one sure example- an outcome of weak legal systems as well as of myselfism, which are both antithetical to the communalist spirit. The many wars in most parts of Africa are based on personal ambition without any consideration of its effects on the rest of the community (ies). Politics is played not in the spirit of any genuine ambition to improve the lot of the community but rather, the community serves as pawns in political chess board."²

In a world shaped by individualism and Western influences, life today is very different from the pre-colonial era. In contemporary societies, behavior towards others often lacks the communitarian values that were once an inherent part of African life.³ It was Ubuntu's radical communitarianism that helped prevent suicide in the pre-colonial era by placing the community above the individual. In the traditional system, the community was prioritized, while the individual's rights were secondary, determined by what the community allowed.⁴ The radical communitarian system used to be very appealing and relevant at that particular time. However, due to the nature of the modern society, this form of communitarianism seems to be appealing no longer in modern African

¹ Anayochukwu Ugwu, A Critical Review of African Communitarianism, A Critical Review of African Communitarianism, in *Thought and Action Journal of Philosophy* 1. No 1 (2022): 722.

² J. O. Oguejiofor, "How African is Communalism" in Ike Odimegwu (ed.), *Perspectives on African Communalism* (Victoria, B.C, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2007), 78.

³ Chris Abakare and Vincent Okeke, Communalism Contemporary African Society: A Phenomenological Study in *Nnamdi Azikiwe journal of Philosophy*, 10 no. 10 (2018): 74.

⁴ Walter Magoma, In defence of Communitarianism Philosophy: The Contribution of Moderated Communitarianism to the formation of an African Identity in *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 41 no 1(2020): 3.

societies as Kwasi Wiredu opines that some communal practices may lose their value over time.⁵ This view is corroborated by Anayochukwu Ugwu as he asserts that:

It is pivotal to differentiate between the African-pre-western-contact and the African-post-western-contact eras. The latter has created a new-consciousness influencing 'what is to be African'; hence, it has become paramount to address communitarianism to suit the social realities of the two eras. In the African past, when the centre was still peacefully held, none of those cultural activities that bound the people together was conceived as evil, and ontologically irrelevant as conceived today following westernization of Africa and African minds.⁶

To address the challenges of suicide in post-colonial times, it is appropriate to advocate for a model of African communitarianism that balances individual autonomy and community values while addressing issues of freedom, dignity, and rationality. This approach, called 'Ubuntu moderate communitarianism', in essence integrates individual autonomy with communal traditions.⁷

1.2 The Theory of Ubuntu's Moderate Communitarianism

The theory of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism emerged as a response to an extreme or "unbalanced" form of communitarianism, which was considered radical because it failed to recognize the rational autonomy of individuals within the community. This disregard for individual agency was seen as detrimental, as it hindered personal growth and potential. In contrast, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism upholds the moral necessity of balancing individual rights with social responsibilities, whereas radical or unrestricted communitarianism prioritizes the moral supremacy of the community over the individual.⁸

Philosopher Kwame Gyekye argues that Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism seeks to grant both the community and the individual equal moral significance.⁹ This perspective acknowledges the individual as a distinct being while recognizing that their identity is inherently shaped by the community. It aims to strike a balance between personal autonomy (personhood) and communal living within the Bantu framework. The scholar Benezet Bujo highlights the challenges that arise when attempting to practice Ubuntu's radical communitarianism in the context of the modern African world as he asserts:

Excessive community also leads sometimes to questionable practices in socio-economic life. Community members nowadays often abuse the traditional solidarity provided by a relative although this relative is burdened with responsibility for his own wife and children. If many intellectuals like doctors or teachers or chemists etc. do not want to return to their home villages, it is partly because of their fears that the clan will become a burden to them. The other extreme is as shocking, when e.g. a medical doctor prefers to treat members of his family in preference to other patients, or a politician reserve jobs for his relatives. In the changed modern conditions such

⁵ K. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1.

⁶ Ugwu, *A Critical Review of African Communitarianism*, 722.

⁷ Hasskei Majeed, Moderate Communitarianism is different: A Response to J.O. Famakinwa and B. Matolino in *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, 6 no. 1 (2018): 9.

⁸ K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1997), 52.

⁹ Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity*, 41.

traditional, unadapted notions provide much freedom for injustice and the oppression of fellow nationals not belonging to one's own clan or tribe.¹⁰

Unlike Ubuntu's radical or extreme communitarianism, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism integrates individual thought with communal traditions, balancing personal autonomy and social connection. As Gyekye argues, the relationship between individuals and community involves two key aspects: individuals have autonomy, freedom, and dignity, but they also depend on community for realizing their potential and leading meaningful lives.¹¹ In other words, radical communitarians seek to organize society in a way that an individual's capacity for self-governance is dictated by the community. Gyekye critiques this rigid communitarian perspective, asserting that:

the capacity for self-assertion that the individual can exercise presupposes, and in fact derives from, the autonomous nature of the person. By autonomy, I do not mean self-completeness, but having of a will, a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and to pursue them, and to control one's destiny. These are attributes that appear to be lacking in the radical communitarian account of interests and needs as these are controlled by the community. The desire for autonomy and self-legislation is shackled by the community.¹²

Unlike Ubuntu's radical communitarianism, which prioritized the community over the individual during the pre-colonial era, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism begins with the individual's autonomy, recognizing that personal identity exists beyond community structures. It acknowledges the metaphysical significance of individuality, suggesting that each person's potential and rationality are vital for shaping communal norms.¹³ Communities consist of individuals whose creativity and critical thinking contribute to societal development. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism recognizes that while individuals are naturally part of a community, they should not lose their sense of personhood or be confined by oppressive norms.¹⁴ Instead, it advocates for communitarianism that respects and nurtures individual autonomy, ensuring that social norms align with human dignity and collective well-being. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism balances individual and community interests. In other words, communities should create environments that allow individuals to pursue personal growth and contribute meaningfully to collective goals. For example, young people can participate in community service while developing their individual talents and unique perspectives.¹⁵

For a community to prosper, it must grant its members the freedom to think independently and use their autonomy to generate new ideas that contribute to the collective well-being. Rational autonomy is crucial for a thriving society, as it empowers individuals to critically assess existing social norms and determine their continued relevance and benefits. Some communities have upheld traditions that undermined the dignity of certain individuals, with many accepting these customs simply because they were long-standing practices.¹⁶ Therefore, acknowledging the individual's role in African thought is essential, regardless of whether they have been integrated into the community through traditional rites and rituals.

¹⁰ Benezet Bujo, *African Christian Morality at the age of Inculturation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 102.

¹¹ Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity*, 33.

¹² Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 54.

¹³ Magoma, *In defence of Communitarianism Philosophy*, 3.

¹⁴ Magoma, *In defence of Communitarianism Philosophy*, 5.

¹⁵ P. Ikuenobe, *Philosophical perspectives on communalism and morality in African traditions* (Lexington Books, Oxford, 2006), 56.

¹⁶ C. Ngwenya, *What is Africanness?* (PULP, Pretoria, 2018), 10.

As regards, conflict resolution, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism fosters resolution by encouraging individuals to consider the impact of their actions on others. Shared values and mutual respect help resolve disputes without undermining individual rights. This communitarianism protects individual rights, it is an approach that ensures that individual dignity, autonomy, and rationality are integral to communal development. For instance, safeguarding individual concerns - such as respecting cultural or personal heritage - promotes a sense of belonging while advancing community interests. Just like any communitarianism, a clash may arise between individual and communal rights. To solve this problem Hasskei Majeed gives two practical examples:

(a) A community insists on its right to sacrifice an individual member for some mystical protection of its existence, while the latter insists on his right to live.¹⁷

(b) Suppose a young man (in any African community) who is a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church refuses to attend a 'communal labour' session (that is offering one's labour for a community owned project for free) on the basis that it falls on a Saturday and it is against his religious beliefs to work that day. Suppose also that the project in question is the construction of a school building for the community, yet the young man, through his lawyer, threatens to take the matter to the magistrate court should there be any attempts by the community to sanction him. His explanation is that his right to worship would be taken away by the community, although the latter also feels that the young man is part of the community and ought to ensure first that the community and its interests are respected.¹⁸

Now the questions regarding these two practical examples are: which of the two parties in each example above, is right? Whose interests and rights come first? Are their interests mutually exclusive? Who determines whose interest to protect? Questions such as these reveal how difficult it is to situate the individual within the community, and how best their rights and interests could be negotiated. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism attempts to solve this kind of clash between the individual member and the community in each example.

According to Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, one could expect the clash in the first example not to be resolved in favour of the community. After all it is inhuman and outdated to sacrifice human beings today. But the second example might be resolved in favour of the community. In spite of this, it cannot be maintained that the resolution of the clashes in favour of the community would necessarily amount to dominance of the community over the individual. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism adopts a middle ground and could argue for some rights of both the individual and the community. One reason for this is that it sees the community, consisting mainly of persons, as an extension of the individual person, and the individual as a microcosm of the community.¹⁹ In fact, when it comes to the conflict between the clashes of rights between the individual and the community, the latter has the final say. This is not to suggest that any claim of right made by the community should be or is really acceptable. For some communal values or practices are no longer relevant and appropriate today. As a matter of fact, rights of the individual become secondary only when they clash with some communal values such as peace, harmony, stability, solidarity and mutual reciprocities and sympathies.²⁰

¹⁷ Majeed, *Moderate communitarianism is different*, 3.

¹⁸ Majeed, *Moderate communitarianism is different*, 3.

¹⁹ Majeed, *Moderate communitarianism is different*, 12.

²⁰ Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity*, 65

Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism provides a balanced framework for integrating individual rights and community values. By emphasizing mutual respect and rational autonomy, it fosters environments where individuals can flourish while contributing to collective well-being. By rational or individual autonomy, it does not mean self-completeness but the having of a will, a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and pursue them, and to control one's destiny.²¹ This model reflects a modern interpretation of African communal values, ensuring that communities thrive through the empowerment and dignity of their members.²²

1.3 Ubuntu's Moderate Communitarianism and the Issue of Suicide

The issue of suicide is deeply complex, arising among other things, from personal struggles, social pressures, and mental health challenges.²³ It affects individuals, families, and communities, making it a significant public health and social concern worldwide. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism offers a valuable perspective for addressing suicide, emphasizing individual rights, human dignity, rational autonomy and the well-being of the community. This section explores how Ubuntu moderate communitarianism can provide a philosophical framework for addressing suicide, particularly in contemporary modernized Bantu societies, by examining two key aspects: Restoring Human dignity, balancing individual human rights (autonomy) and community living.

1.3.1 Restoration of Human Dignity

A central principle of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism is the emphasis on restoring human dignity. This approach values the individuality of each person while encouraging him to contribute meaningfully to his community, responding to the challenges and realities of his environment. Suicide, from the perspective of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, contradicts these principles. Actually, suicide signifies the cessation of an individual's potential to shape his community and a rejection of the dignity inherent in his capacity to influence his surroundings.²⁴ Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism views individuals not as isolated beings but as participants in a dynamic relationship between personal aspirations and communal responsibilities. This being the case, suicide disrupts this balance, severing an individual's connection to the communal fabric. Often stemming from feelings of hopelessness and diminished self-worth, suicide highlights the need to restore and protect human dignity.²⁵ This framework underscores that when individuals feel valued and respected in their communities, they may not consider suicide. Human dignity and self-worth are crucial for mental health and well-being. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism encourages communities to foster empathy, understanding, and support, creating environments where individuals feel recognized and appreciated.²⁶ For modern Bantu communities, applying these principles can significantly reduce the prevalence of suicide by promoting a culture that prioritizes respect for individual dignity within a supportive community framework.

1.3.2 Balancing Individual Rights and Community Well-Being

Ubuntu's moderate's communitarianism seeks a balance between one's rights and the community well-being. It respects personal autonomy while recognizing that actions such as suicide harm both

²¹ Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity*, 54

²² Magoma, *In Defense of Communitarianism Philosophy*, 5.

²³ Lemohang Tebeli, *Suicide and Agency in African Communitarian Societies: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Basotho Culture* (M.A. University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2023), 13.

²⁴ Tebeli, *Suicide and Agency in African Communitarian Societies*, 33.

²⁵ Anayochukwu Ugwu, A Critical Review of African Communitarianism, A Critical Review of African Communitarianism in *Thought and Action journal of Philosophy*, 1 no. 1 (2022): 72.

²⁶ Ugwu, A Critical Review of African Communitarianism, 73.

the individual and the broader community. From this perspective, suicide is not simply an individual act but a disruption of communal harmony.²⁷ This balance provides a practical approach to addressing social issues like suicide while upholding individual rights. Suicide prevention efforts can benefit from this philosophy by empowering individuals to seek assistance within their communities without fear of losing their autonomy. At the same time, community members are encouraged to actively identify and support individuals at risk, reinforcing a network of care and mutual responsibility. Bujo echoes this view as he asserts:

That the reciprocal relationship between the community and the individual has to be stressed. When we say that, on the grounds of participation theory, an individual is not in a position to live outside of community, then the same community must be eager to promote and to support the interest of the individual. The clan community must not destroy individual freedom, but must do everything to enable each one to have fullness of life. It must take greatest care that the individual does not act arbitrarily so as to forfeit his own life and the life of the clan.²⁸

The preservation of life as an inviolable right is a cornerstone of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism. Suicide, seen as the deliberate ending of life, violates this fundamental right. The theory of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism emphasizes the inherent value of life, advocating for its protection and preservation. Within African communities influenced by moderate communitarianism, the sanctity of human existence serves as a guiding principle for suicide prevention efforts.²⁹ Communities can draw upon this belief to emphasize the irreplaceable worth of every individual, fostering environments that discourage self-harm and encourage individuals to seek help during crises.

Since the idea of individual autonomy is central to this discussion, caution has to be taken here. It is as if the argument suggests that if a person chooses to die rather than continue living, no one else has the right to interfere with that decision.³⁰ In fact, failing to respect such a choice could be seen as a violation of their right to express themselves. One possible criticism of this view is that it appears to grant people complete control over their own bodies and lives, implying that personal autonomy has no limits. This idea can lead to complex ethical challenges.³¹ Existentialist thinkers have strongly supported this view, emphasizing that humans are free and must take responsibility for their actions.³² This view suggests that individual persons are in complete control of their own existence and are not accountable to any higher power. Following this reasoning, suicide would be considered morally acceptable as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. Philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche are known for advocating these ideas. This is contrary to the stand of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism which advocate doing nothing contrary to the Ubuntu moral values. This includes, suicide, homosexuality, incest, abortion etc. As a matter of fact, autonomy in Ubuntu moderate communitarianism is not a standalone principle but is shaped by the communal norms that govern the ethical consideration of life and death.

Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism offers a unique perspective on understanding suicide within modern Bantu societies. At its heart, the theory rejects a reductionist view of personhood,

²⁷ Tebeli, *Suicide and Agency in African Communitarian Societies*, 33.

²⁸ Bujo, *African Christian Morality*, 97.

²⁹ Majeed, *Moderate communitarianism is different*, 13.

³⁰ P. J. Thiroux, *Ethics: Theory and Practice* (London: Prentice Hall Inc, 1995), 2007.

³¹ Thiroux, *Ethics*, 2007.

³² Existentialism, The, by Richard Dark, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Accessed December 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>

recognizing it as more than just individual attributes. Instead, personhood is realized through a balance of individual autonomy and communal responsibilities.³³ In Bantu cultures, where community plays a central role in shaping identity, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism challenges the notion of suicide as solely an individual act. Instead, it views suicide as a complex interplay between personal struggles and community interconnectedness. This perspective emphasizes that individuals are not isolated but are deeply embedded in a network of relationships, shared values, and mutual responsibilities.³⁴ Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism also acknowledges the tension between individual autonomy and communal obligations.³⁵ It recognizes that while individuals have agency, their decisions are intertwined with their responsibilities to the community. In the context of suicide, this perspective considers self-harm as more than a personal choice, highlighting its broader implications for communal well-being.³⁶ This communitarianism encourages a holistic understanding of suicide, considering the interconnectedness between individuals and their communities. By addressing the communal and individual dimensions of mental health, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism provides a culturally sensitive and community-driven foundation for suicide prevention and intervention strategies in modern Bantu societies. It emphasizes the need for communities to create environments that nurture both individual autonomy and collective well-being, offering a comprehensive approach to addressing this pressing issue.

1.4 Ubuntu's Moderate Communitarianism and Suicide Prevention

There is need for exploring how Ubuntu moderate communitarianism, emphasizing individual autonomy within a communal context, can be practically applied to suicide prevention in modern Bantu societies. By integrating cultural practices, community dynamics, traditional beliefs and modern strategies, this approach aims to develop effective and culturally sensitive strategies for reducing suicide rates.

Applying Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism to suicide prevention means finding a balance between individual autonomy and communal responsibility. In modern Bantu societies, integrating cultural traditions, community networks, and both traditional and modern approaches can help develop effective and culturally relevant strategies to reduce suicide rates. By strengthening community support systems, promoting open discussions, and ensuring that individuals feel valued and included, Ubuntu offers a way to address the root causes of suicide while fostering a culture of care, resilience, and collective well-being.

1.5 Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is essential for ensuring that suicide prevention efforts rooted in Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism are respectful, effective, and relevant to specific cultural contexts. By integrating cultural beliefs, values, and traditions, these strategies become more meaningful and widely accepted within communities. In many Bantu societies, communal life and traditional customs play a crucial role in shaping how individuals experience and address mental health challenges. Understanding the cultural dimensions of mental health is key to developing sustainable and effective suicide prevention strategies worldwide.³⁷

Culture significantly influences how mental health and suicide are understood. In many Bantu communities, mental health issues are often viewed through spiritual or communitarian lenses,

³³ Majeed, *Moderate communitarianism is different*, 13.

³⁴ A. Etzioni, *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 33.

³⁵ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 67.

³⁶ Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 67.

³⁷ K.L. Lovero, P. F. Dos Santos, A. X. Come, M.L. Weinberg, and M.A. Oquendo, *Suicide in global mental health. Current psychiatry reports* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2023), 45.

with traditional local healers and community elders serving as key figures in the healing process.³⁸ Incorporating these perspectives into suicide prevention strategies promotes a holistic approach that aligns with community values. Additionally, recognizing the diversity within communities is important for creating interventions that address specific cultural, linguistic, and societal factors. N. Ndosi highlights that suicide prevention must incorporate traditional approaches that prioritize community-based interventions.³⁹ These efforts often combine indigenous healing methods with modern healthcare systems, ensuring that mental health care remains both accessible and culturally appropriate. Scholars like S. Pitikoe also emphasizes the complementary role of traditional healers in mental health support, noting that collaboration between traditional and formal healthcare providers can strengthen community-based mental health services.⁴⁰

Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism is not just a theoretical concept, it has practical applications that align with cultural traditions. V. Patel highlights the relationship between personal autonomy and communal welfare, advocating for an approach that finds a middle ground between the two.⁴¹ In the context of suicide prevention, this balance is crucial, as it respects both individual circumstances and the communal duty to provide care and support. This middle-ground strategy acknowledges personal struggles while upholding the communal responsibility to provide care and prevent isolation, ultimately fostering a supportive environment for healing and suicide prevention. In Bantu societies, communal support networks such as mutual aid and shared responsibilities are fundamental, making Ubuntu a suitable framework for mental health interventions. Gyekye's argument that individual well-being is inseparable from communal well-being further supports the idea that suicide prevention must be a collective effort.⁴² Extending Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism to suicide prevention provides a culturally sensitive and practical approach to addressing mental health challenges. By fostering community involvement and integrating traditional and modern healing methods, this strategy strengthens social support networks, reduces stigma, and enhances the effectiveness of suicide prevention efforts in contemporary Bantu societies.

1.6. Community-Based Suicide Prevention

Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism emphasizes the importance of community-driven strategies in addressing suicide. These approaches involve the active participation of community leaders, traditional healers, family members, and public awareness initiatives. Drawing from Bantu cultural practices provides a meaningful foundation for developing effective suicide prevention efforts. Ubuntu's focus on balancing personal autonomy with communal responsibility makes it an ideal framework for shaping mental health interventions that are both effective and culturally relevant.

Bantu traditions, influenced by the Ubuntu philosophy, emphasize interdependence and community well-being, reinforcing the importance of community engagement in mental health care. Patel opines that involving communities in mental health initiatives helps close treatment gaps and improves mental health outcomes.⁴³ Similarly, P. M. Mahlomaholo demonstrate how

³⁸ Samuel Nwankwo, Suicide, human value and the Moral Question in Africa, in *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies (IJMSSPCS)*, 7 No.1 (2024): 7.

³⁹ N. K. Ndosi, Y. Mhando, S. Mbepera and S. Wilson, Social Factors and Suicide: A Study of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 9 no 3, (2024): 7.

⁴⁰ S. Pitikoe, Basotho herders learn through culture and social interaction. *Learning, culture and social interaction*, (2017), 13.

⁴¹ V. Patel, M. Koschorke, and M. Prince, Closing the Treatment Gap for Mental Disorders. In *Routledge Handbook of Global Public Health* (2010), 385.

⁴² Gyekye, *Person and Community in African Thought*, 67.

⁴³ V. Patel, M. Koschorke and M. Prince, Closing the Treatment Gap for Mental Disorders 1. In *Routledge Handbook of Global Public Health* (Routledge, 2010), 385.

interventions by the communities in sub-Saharan Africa have successfully reduced mental health challenges, including suicidal behaviors, by fostering supportive environments and reducing stigma.⁴⁴ These interventions, grounded in Ubuntu values, showcase the power of community involvement in strengthening mental health resilience and reducing suicide risk.

Beyond utilizing communal resources, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism encourages a shift from individualistic approaches to communities' strategies that recognize the interconnectedness of personal and community well-being. S. Fazel and M. Grann stress the wider social impacts of untreated mental health conditions, advocating for community-based responses that address social and economic factors contributing to suicide.⁴⁵

Addressing stigma is also a key component of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism. Mahlomaholo highlights the importance of mental health education and awareness campaigns in changing public attitudes, encouraging open conversations, and reducing barriers to seeking help.⁴⁶ Traditional storytelling and cultural teachings can be used to promote understanding and awareness of mental health challenges. Additionally, community leaders and traditional healers play a critical role in suicide prevention by raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and connecting individuals to appropriate support systems. Their involvement lends credibility to mental health initiatives, fostering stronger community participation and trust. Integrating community-based strategies into a broader suicide prevention framework requires collaboration among all sectors of society. Leaders, healers, families, and educators must work together to ensure that there is a supportive environment that acknowledges the complexities of suicide and mental health struggles. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism offers a holistic approach that respects individual rights while ensuring collective welfare, making it a valuable tool in developing suicide prevention ways that are both culturally sensitive and socially inclusive.

1.7. Integrating Ubuntu's Moderate Communitarianism with Ubuntu Moral Values

The increasing prevalence of suicide has been linked to the erosion of Ubuntu moral values. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism seeks to restore and reinforce these values to counter the rising suicide crisis. Living by the principles of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism involves balancing communal obligations with individual autonomy while remaining guided by Ubuntu moral values. While reverting to pre-modern traditions is neither feasible nor necessary, incorporating Ubuntu moral values within contemporary cultures and global influences can effectively address mental health challenges, including suicide. By re-establishing Ubuntu moral values as a core philosophy, communities can cultivate environments that promote mutual support, challenge mental health stigmas, and mitigate suicide risks. Strengthening the sense of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism and reinvigorating the spirit of Ubuntu will improve care for individuals struggling with mental health within family and community settings.

1.7.1. Solidarity

Restoring solidarity within Bantu societies is essential to addressing the increasing rates of suicide. Ubuntu, a philosophy rooted in human interconnectedness, emphasizes collective responsibility, which is further reinforced by Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism that balances communal care

⁴⁴ P.M. Mahlomaholo, H. Wang, Y. Xia, Y. Wang, X. Yang and Y. Wang, Depression and suicidal behaviors among HIV-infected inmates in Lesotho: prevalence, associated factors and a moderated mediation model. *AIDS and Behavior*, (2021): 25. Accessed on 5/01/25 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34095985/>

⁴⁵ S. Fazel and M. Grann, The population impact of severe mental illness on violent crime. *American journal of psychiatry*, 163 no 8, (2006): 67.

⁴⁶ P.M. Mahlomaholo, H. Wang, Y. Xia, Y. Wang, X. Yang and Y. Wang, *Depression and suicidal behaviors among HIV-infected inmates in Lesotho*, 56.

with respect for individual autonomy. Solidarity under this framework becomes a critical means of tackling mental health challenges. Ubuntu's fundamental belief that "I am because we are" fosters a deep sense of belonging and connectedness, which helps combat the isolation often associated with mental health struggles. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that while communal support is encouraged, it does not overshadow individual needs, creating a safe environment where individuals can seek assistance without fear of judgment.

In this context, solidarity supports peer-led mental health initiatives, community-based interventions, and open discussions on emotional well-being. These efforts promote shared responsibility and mutual aid while respecting personal boundaries. Huxley and Thornicroft note that people with mental illnesses often face social exclusion at various levels, from employment to community life.⁴⁷ Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism asserts that solidarity should encompass interpersonal, biological, and non-biological bonds, encouraging individuals struggling with mental health to participate in community life through traditional activities such as singing, dancing, storytelling, and ritual practices.⁴⁸

An Ubuntu-inspired moderate communitarian society ensures that mental health resources, including counseling, support groups, and awareness programs, are equitably distributed and easily accessible. This approach upholds the communal spirit while safeguarding individual autonomy, preventing excessive dependence on collective structures. By harmonizing Ubuntu's communal ethos with the equilibrium of moderate communitarianism, communities can create environments where individuals feel supported and empowered in their mental health journey.

1.7.2. Compassion

Compassion, a core Ubuntu value, encompasses empathy, care, and shared humanity. Within the realm of mental health, compassion fosters a nurturing community in which individuals feel understood and valued. When integrated with Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, which balances collective care with personal autonomy, compassion emerges as a transformative force in addressing mental health challenges. E. Collucci underscores this idea by highlighting the importance of witnessing and validating each other's lived experiences, emphasizing that compassionate engagement builds respect and affirms the dignity of individuals with mental health concerns.⁴⁹ Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness encourages communities to approach mental health struggles with understanding rather than judgment. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that while compassion is extended, it also respects personal boundaries, allowing individuals to receive support without undue social pressure.

Compassion fosters open dialogue about mental health, reducing stigma and creating safe spaces for individuals to share their struggles. It inspires communities to provide both emotional and practical assistance - such as checking in on one another or offering encouragement - while ensuring that this support remains voluntary and non-intrusive. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism promotes a culture of mutual care, reinforcing that individuals should not feel isolated in their mental health struggles while ensuring they maintain autonomy over their healing journey. Compassion-driven initiatives can enhance access to mental health resources, ensuring they are available and utilized without stigma. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism guarantees that these resources are provided with dignity and voluntary participation, allowing individuals to seek help at their own pace. By intertwining compassion with Ubuntu's moderate

⁴⁷ Peter Huxley and Graham Thornicroft, Social inclusion, social quality and mental illness, in *British journal of Psychiatry*, 2 no. 3 (2003): 182.

⁴⁸ Ugwu, *A Critical Review of African Communitarianism*, 76.

⁴⁹ E. Callucci, Religion and Spirituality along the suicidal path. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour*, 38 no, 2 (2008): 229.

communitarianism, communities can create an inclusive and balanced framework for mental health care, fostering resilience and collective well-being.

1.7.3. Survival

Ubuntu's concept of survival emphasizes the communal effort required to navigate challenges and sustain the well-being of all members. When paired with Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, which integrates collective care with respect for personal autonomy, survival becomes an essential framework for mental health support. It centers on shared resilience and mutual assistance, ensuring that individuals do not face struggles alone. Ubuntu teaches that survival is a collective responsibility, where communities work together to support all members. This shared resilience can alleviate mental health difficulties by fostering an environment of inclusion and care. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism enhances this approach by ensuring that support systems remain accessible without infringing upon individual independence or creating unhealthy dependencies. By prioritizing survival, communities can establish peer support systems, mental health initiatives, and culturally relevant healing practices. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that these efforts are voluntary and autonomy-respecting, allowing individuals to seek assistance on their terms.⁵⁰ Ubuntu underscores the idea that one person's well-being is intrinsically connected to the health of the broader community, reducing the isolation often experienced by those with mental health challenges.

When mental health is reframed as a shared community concern rather than an individual struggle, stigma diminishes, and interventions become more effective. Ubuntu's survival ethos encourages proactive community action, including raising awareness, normalizing mental health discussions, and making resources widely available. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that these collective efforts remain inclusive, offering individuals the freedom to engage at their discretion.⁵¹

1.7.4. Respect and Dignity

Respect and dignity, foundational principles of Ubuntu, highlight the importance of every individual and the need to treat others with fairness and compassion. When applied to mental health, these values foster an inclusive and supportive environment. Integrating them with Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, which balances collective well-being with respect for personal agency, creates a powerful framework for mental health support. Ubuntu's emphasis on respect ensures that individuals facing mental health challenges are met with empathy rather than stigma, allowing them to seek help without fear of marginalization. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism complements this by ensuring that individuals' autonomy is honored, allowing them to access support in ways that align with their personal circumstances. Dignity, as an Ubuntu principle, asserts that every individual possesses inherent worth, regardless of their mental health condition.⁵² Recognizing this dignity fosters self-worth and encourages a sense of belonging. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that while communal recognition is provided, individuals retain the freedom to define his own healing journey without external pressures.

Ubuntu challenges societal biases surrounding mental health, advocating for inclusion and understanding. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that stigma-reduction efforts are handled sensitively, respecting diverse perspectives.⁵³ Dignity also demands equitable access to mental health resources, ensuring that no one is left behind. Ubuntu's communal spirit drives collective efforts to provide support, while Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures these

⁵⁰ Majeed, *Moderate Communitarianism is different*, 9.

⁵¹ Majeed, *Moderate Communitarianism is different*, 13.

⁵² Gyekye, *The unexamined life*, 44.

⁵³ Majeed, *Moderate Communitarianism is different*, 16.

resources are offered respectfully and without coercion. By combining respect and dignity with Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, communities create a balanced and empowering mental health framework. This approach fosters acceptance, reduces stigma, and enhances individual and collective well-being, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more supportive society.

1.7.5. Principle of Extended Family

The concept of the extended family, deeply rooted in Ubuntu, underscores the significance of interconnected relationships and shared responsibilities beyond the immediate family unit. It serves as a vital support system, ensuring collective well-being. When integrated with Ubuntu moderate communitarianism, which harmonizes communal care with respect for individual autonomy, the extended family becomes a powerful tool in addressing mental health challenges. Within the Ubuntu framework, the extended family provides emotional, social, and practical support to individuals facing mental health struggles, fostering a sense of belonging that mitigates isolation. Ubuntu moderate communitarianism ensures that while this support is readily available, individual boundaries are respected, allowing members to seek help without feeling overwhelmed by societal expectations.

Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism emphasizes collective responsibility, encouraging extended families to actively participate in the well-being of their members. This approach distributes the caregiving role, preventing any single person from carrying the full burden. Ubuntu moderate communitarianism complements this by maintaining a balance - while the family extends its support, individuals retain autonomy over decisions regarding their care and mental health journey. Open dialogue about mental health is another crucial aspect of the extended family structure within Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism. This cultural norm fosters trust and empathy, making it easier for individuals to express their struggles. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism enhances this by ensuring that discussions about mental health are conducted with respect for privacy, personal choice, and dignity.

Furthermore, Ubuntu values inter-generational wisdom, with elders playing a key role in offering guidance and support to younger members. This wisdom, sharing can be instrumental in navigating mental health challenges. However, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that such guidance is not imposed but offered in a way that allows individuals to embrace it according to their own needs and circumstances. The extended family also plays a crucial role in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health. When mental health struggles are recognized within close family circles, they become less taboo, fostering understanding and empathy. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that while the family provides care, it does so in a way that considers the one's dignity and right to privacy. Recognizing that mental health challenges affect not just individuals but entire family units, Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism promotes collective healing. Families work together to provide emotional and psychological support while ensuring that each person's unique recovery path is honored. Beyond the family unit, the extended family serves as a bridge to the broader community, reinforcing a culture of care and responsibility. Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism ensures that this expansion of care remains inclusive and voluntary, allowing individuals to set boundaries and determine their level of engagement.

Ultimately, the extended family, as an Ubuntu value, plays a fundamental role in mental health care by offering a supportive and compassionate environment. When aligned with Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, this approach effectively balances communal solidarity with individual autonomy, fostering resilience, reducing stigma, and ensuring holistic mental well-being both within the family and across the wider community.

Conclusion

This paper explored how Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism can be applied to suicide prevention within modern Bantu communities. It emphasized the need of community participation, cultural sensitivity, and integrating traditional practices in developing strategies that balance individual freedom with communal well-being. The discussion highlighted the need for approaches that consider both one's rights and community's responsibilities when addressing mental health challenges.

As far as suicide prevention is concerned, it has been found that Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism offers valuable insights into how individual and communal strategies can work together. By balancing individual autonomy with shared responsibilities, cultural narratives, traditional healers and community support systems play a very important role in enhancing mental resilience. It is evident that culturally sensitive approaches, which respect both individual and community needs, are essential for effective suicide prevention. The principles of Ubuntu's moderate communitarianism, as seen in Bantu communities, offer a model for culturally sensitive mental health strategies. By integrating traditional practices, strengthening community support, and respecting both individual and collective needs, communities can develop effective mental health interventions. This approach not only respects cultural identity but also uses community strengths to create a good environment for individuals struggling with mental health challenges.

