



A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE OTAVALAN KICHWA POPULATION

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FOLLETO PRÁCTICO PARA EL ABORDAJE DE LA SALUD MENTAL EN LA POBLACIÓN KICHWA OTAVALO

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1. Abstract

[originally presented in English]

This pamphlet developed using a qualitative methodology to deeply explore the perceptions, experiences, and cultural practices related to mental health and cosmovision within the Kichwa communities of Imbabura. The qualitative approach allowed for an in- depth understanding of health, illness, and well-being from the perspective of indigenous communities. The study adopted an ethnographic research design to describe and analyze Kichwa culture in its natural context, focusing on practices, rituals, and beliefs surrounding mental health. Data was collected over three years through a combination of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and bibliographic analysis. Participants included 15 individuals from the Kichwa Turuku and San Rafael communities and 5 Kichwa psychologists, encompassing healers, community leaders, adults, and youth (ages 20-60). The sample comprised 85% women and 15% men. Two focus groups and semi-structured interviews fostered collective discussions on mental health, grief, and interpersonal conflict, with participants either receiving remuneration or food support. Observational data was gathered over three years, leveraging the experience of Kichwa consultants and the Kyllkay Foundation's database. Additionally, bibliographic analysis contextualized and enriched the findings. Integrating ethnographic texts, oral histories, and educational materials. This comprehensive methodology offers an authentic and culturally sensitive understanding of Kichwa mental health practices.

2. Introduction

The brochure is based on a qualitative and ethnographic approach, designed to understand the perceptions, experiences, and cultural practices related to mental health in the Kichwa community of Imbabura. It aims to explore the complexity of the concepts of health, illness, and well-being from an indigenous perspective, recognizing the importance of their ancestral knowledge.

The Kichwa population has managed to preserve its ethnic identity through community traditions and practices, especially in the textile industry. However, it faces challenges in mental health care that require an approach that respects its worldview and culture. The guide emphasizes that mental health should not be treated homogeneously but should integrate elements of traditional medicine and indigenous cosmology. To address the current needs of the Kichwa community, it is essential to recognize their history of struggle for recognition of rights and cultural identity. Mental health must be understood holistically, valuing the sociocultural context and promoting an approach that respects and values the community's ancestral knowledge. This will allow for a more effective and respectful approach to mental health care.

In "An Approach to Kichwa Mental Health," mental health is addressed from a holistic perspective, emphasizing that it should not be compared to Western mental health. It is suggested that interventions in Kichwa communities be conducted by individuals who speak or understand the Kichwa language.

Good mental health is defined as a state of integral balance that encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, and community well-being, achieved through reciprocity with nature and respect for ancestral cosmology. Practices such as healing rituals and the use of medicinal plants are essential for maintaining this balance. Poor mental health is considered to be caused by the imbalance between the individual, the community, and spirituality, influenced by external factors such as modernization and discrimination. Regarding mourning, it is established that the culturally appropriate time for grief is three days of wake, followed by one to three months of community support. The lack of social support is easily identified in the community, where cohesion facilitates the detection of individuals lacking family backing. Major life changes, both positive and negative, are those that affect the connection with the community and traditions, such as access to education or the loss of land.

The terms used to describe mental health include "alli kawsay" (good life) and "sumak kawsay" (full life) for good health, while "llakilla" (sadness) refers to poor mental health. Terms that emphasize balance are more widely accepted in the community than the general concept of well-being.

The Killkay Foundation is a non-profit organization committed to collective integral development, respecting and valuing the worldview of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities. We work on strengthening cultural identity and rescuing ancestral knowledge as tools to promote autonomy, equity, and poverty reduction. For over three years, we have benefited hundreds of people. Our members, belonging to the Kichwa peoples of Imbabura, have accessed scholarships that have allowed us to gain academic training and strengthen our capacities in areas such as mental health. Our main objective is to recover and promote the ancestral wisdom of the communities in aspects

of mental and physical health, seeking recognition and respect for our culture by integrating this knowledge into contemporary health services.

3. Guide Objectives

This guide is designed to provide health professionals, educators and community members with the knowledge necessary to address mental health in the Kichwa Otavalo population, integrating traditional conceptions and modern practices.

4. Methodology

Methodology

A qualitative approach has been selected for the development of this guide, as it seeks to deeply understand the perceptions, experiences, and cultural practices related to mental health and the worldview of the Kichwa communities of Imbabura. The qualitative methodology will allow for an exploration of the complexity of the concepts of health, illness, and well-being from the perspective of the indigenous communities themselves. This guide serves to understand the perceptions of mental health in urban populations, including the urban center and peri-urban communities.

Study Design

The design of this research is ethnographic in nature. Ethnography is chosen to describe and analyze Kichwa culture in its natural context; focusing on its practices, rituals, and beliefs regarding mental health. The data was collected over the past three years.

Participants

The selected participants were five members of the Kichwa Turuku community, five members of the San Rafael community and five Kichwa psychologists. This sample included healers, community leaders, adults and young people, with an age range of 20 to 60 years. Eighty five percent of the participants were women and 15% were men.

Data Collection

The implementation and collection of focus groups and bibliographic analysis lasted two months, during which time spaces were coordinated and managed to carry out the focus groups. On the other hand, population observation has been carried out for three years, so information was collected from the Kylkay Foundation database to enrich this guide. Below, we mention the techniques we used to collect data for this brochure.

Focal Groups & Semi-Structured Interviews

Two focus groups were held, two with community members and two with Kichwa psychologists, with the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews and fostering a collective discussion about practical perceptions related to mental health, grief management, and interpersonal conflicts. It is worth noting that the Kichwa professionals received compensation for their participation, while the interviewees from the communities were provided with food during the session.

Population Observation

As Kichwa consultants and as part of an organization that works in Kichwa mental health, we understand and experience community contexts. In addition, we have been collecting information for three years on topics of well-being and the Sumak Kawsay, respecting ancestral knowledge.

Bibliographic Analysis

Documents, ethnographic texts, oral accounts, and educational material were reviewed to contextualize and complement the data obtained from interviews and observations.

5. Sociocultural and Intercultural Description of the Kichwa Community

Otavallo is a town where two languages are spoken: Spanish and Kichwa. The indigenous population mainly consists of the Otavallo, Kayambi, and Natabuela peoples. They have managed to revalue their ethnic identity through their traditions and cultural values. This self-valuation has strengthened the image of Kichwa culture both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, cultural practices such as community work, the development of textile enterprises, and family ties have contributed to a stable economy, improving the quality of life for the indigenous population (Sarabino Muenala, 2007).

The indigenous population of Otavallo is made up of families living in a specific territory who identify with a particular people or nationality. Their way of life is based on reciprocity and solidarity; practicing an organizational system that encompasses political, administrative, economic, social, spiritual, and cultural aspects (CONAIE, 1997, cited by Sarabino Muenala, 2007).

To understand the long path toward the construction of an intercultural and plurinational state, it is important to know the historical memory of our country, Ecuador. We must reflect on our present and its marked social differences and why wouldn't we imagine new horizons of equality and social justice? More than 500 years ago, the Spanish invaded the lands we now call America; this event influenced the social landscape of contemporary Ecuador.

During this regime, an "abyssal line" was created that rendered indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, their institutions, and knowledge invisible, through the establishment of a political and legal model that used the concept of "race" as a supposed "biological" difference justifying the superiority of one group over another's inferiority. Consequently, in 1830, the nation-state was consolidated from a fragmented identity that marginalized the majority of the population based on

criteria of race, gender, education, age, and economic status. A model was established that sought cultural, linguistic, and religious homogeneity, as reflected in the Constitution. The goal was to erase indigenous and Afro-descendant cultures within the mestizo [mixed] nation, based on the ideology of "progress."

During the colonial era, there were multiple uprisings by indigenous populations (Graph 1) subjected to a series of exploitations and abuses. Each of these struggles had a fundamental motivation: the respect of their rights, in line with their continuity for autonomy and self-determination as peoples.

Table 1: Indigenous Uprisings since Colonial Times

YEAR	UPRISING
1720	Sierra Centro
1730	Pomallacta
1760	Asiento de Alausí
1764	Villa de Riobamba
1766	Miguel de Mollentambo
1768	Ildefonso Workshop
1771	San Felipe
1777	Otavallo Township (Start of the uprising in Cotacachi)
1778	Guano
1780	Ambato Region (Pelileo riot, Quisapincha uprising, Píllaro uprising)
1781	Alausí Region
1797	Chambo
1803	Guamote and Columbe
1968	Cayambe: Amaguaña Transit
1990	National Level

The indigenous struggle seeks recognition and appreciation of the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, as well as their autonomy to make decisions about their own communities and territories. This implies the right of indigenous peoples to maintain their traditions, languages, systems of government and ways of life.

The Kichwa Worldview and World Experience:

The Kichwa worldview is an integral perspective that understands the world as an interrelationship between human beings, nature, and spiritual beings. The Kichwas see the universe as a living fabric, where everything is interconnected and each element has an essential role in maintaining balance. This vision not only encompasses the perception of the physical world, but also the spiritual, valuing reciprocity and respect for Pachamama. The Kichwa worldview, on the other hand, refers to how this worldview is put into practice in daily life. It manifests itself in forms of social organization, festivities, agricultural rituals, traditional healing, and a community ethic based on "ayni" (reciprocal work), "minka" (collective work), and "ranti ranti" (exchange). This way of life seeks balance not only with the natural environment, but also with the community and future generations, guaranteeing harmony and sustainability within the community (Ortiz, P. 2010).

The life cycle rituals in the indigenous communities of Otavalo are deeply linked to the Kichwa worldview. From birth to death, each stage of life is marked by ceremonies and offerings, which seek to ensure the well-being of the person and the community. Birth, for example, is celebrated with a welcome ritual, where protection is asked of the gods and Pachamama (Mother Earth) for the newborn. Rites of passage, such as marriage and maturity, are also carried out with ceremonies that include dances, music and the use of symbolic elements such as corn, considered a sacred food. Finally, death is seen as a transition to another form of existence, so funerals not only include mourning, but also offerings to ensure a good journey to the world of the ancestors (Almeida, E. 2013).

Spirituality is a fundamental pillar of their cultural identity and daily life. It is deeply connected to nature, the cycles of life and the spiritual forces that surround them. The Otavaleños believe in the sacred interrelation between human beings, Pachamama (Mother Earth) and their ancestors, which is reflected in their rituals, ceremonies and festivities. This worldview and world experiences allow them to maintain a spiritual and material balance, promoting respect for the earth and for every living being as part of a harmonious whole.

The ritual cleanses are spiritual and physical healing practices, which combine elements of ancestral medicine with Andean beliefs. These cleanses, performed by the "yachaks" or healers, are used to balance the body and spirit, eliminating accumulated negative energies. They use medicinal herbs, holy water, eggs and sometimes the guinea pig, a small rodent that is believed to be able to absorb people's illnesses. These cleansings are not only applied to sick people, but also to those who feel overwhelmed by emotional or spiritual problems. In the indigenous Otavalan worldview, health is an integral state that involves balance with nature, spirits and ancestors, and cleansings are fundamental to maintaining that harmony.

From the Andean worldview, the essential elements in relation to social well-being are: total interconnection, in which everything is somehow linked; communication, which helps to understand social problems by valuing present contradictions; connection, which unites unequal and opposite situations to achieve a harmonious solution; the accessory, which is based on the integration of each event with another, facilitating understanding not only between people, but also with Pachamama and the environment (Cruz, 2018).

There are difficulties that limit the practice of Kichwa “cosmic living”, due to the inequalities imposed by the State, limiting the creation of more equitable and inclusive societies. It is essential to reconsider our daily beliefs and behaviors, questioning ourselves if, for example, we believe that our culture is better than others, if we think that some races are superior, if we use our position to belittle others, or how we perceive those who work informally, such as a fruit vendor.

To continue we explore various key concepts for reflection:

1. **Folklorization:** This occurs when the cultural identity of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples is reduced to the merely folkloric or exotic, without recognizing the complexity and richness of their traditions and knowledge. For example, when they perform a dance, it is not just for entertainment, but is a profound cultural manifestation.
2. **Cultural imposition:** This is the belief that certain cultures are superior to others, which justifies a greater value and rights. This imposition has hindered the development of a plurinational and intercultural state, perpetuating inequalities and imbalances of power between ethnic and cultural groups. This manifests itself in various forms, such as racism, discrimination and political exclusion. An example is the low representation of police officers from Peoples and Nationalities in high positions in the National Police, highlighting the importance of affirmative action.
3. **Little interaction between cultures:** When there is little contact between different cultures, barriers and stereotypes can arise that make it difficult to understand cultural diversity. Cultural exchange offers the opportunity to learn about other ways of life. For example, the participation of the Community Police in “mingas” [communal work efforts] encourages the exchange of ideas and better mutual understanding.

Different cultures are intertwined in many ways. Intercultural coexistence involves recognizing and respecting our differences, as well as guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for all, regardless of their cultural origin. This also requires dialogue, empathy and openness to new perspectives and ways of life.

Principal Festivals and Traditional Rituals:

The Kichwa Otavalo community, located in the Andean valleys of Ecuador, is distinguished by its rich cultural heritage and vibrant celebrations that reflect a deep connection with its ancestral roots. Traditional festivals and rituals are central elements in the life of this community, serving both as moments of celebration and as occasions to reinforce cultural identity and keep alive the spiritual and social practices inherited from their ancestors.

In Otavalo, four main ritual festivals are celebrated, called **Raymikuna**, which coincide with the solstices and equinoxes of the year. These festivities are deeply connected to the Andean agricultural cycle, where corn, a symbol of fertility, plays a central role. In September, the celebrations begin with the **Koya Raymi**, a ritual that symbolizes fertility. Before the autumn equinox, the Yamor festivals are celebrated, where a ritual drink is made with seven varieties of corn. This festival unites various communities and institutions in a joint celebration of their traditions and to attract tourists (Sarabino Muenala, 2007).

Another of the festivities is the **Kapak Raymi**. Within the Andean worldview, the sun is the most important deity. The Kapak Raymi, celebrated in December during the solstice, honors the new political and spiritual leaders of the community, reflecting Andean values and spiritual practices. Furthermore, this festival is a significant moment for adolescents, marking their passage from childhood to adolescence (Guerrero, 2019).

In March, during the spring equinox, **Pawkar Raymi** is celebrated, a festival in honor of the first blooms and newly grown food. This celebration marks the beginning of a new agricultural cycle and is a time of gratitude to nature for its abundance. During Pawkar Raymi, communities gather to perform rituals, dances, and offerings, honoring the deep connection between the land, agriculture, and indigenous Otavalo spirituality (Sarabino Muenala, 2007).

Finally, among the most important festivities is the **Inti Raymi**, or Festival of the Sun, which is celebrated in June, during the summer solstice, in which indigenous communities celebrate this festival as a way of thanking Mother Earth and the sun for the ripening of fruits. It is one of the most important celebrations of the year, which lasts several weeks and offers a variety of events in the different communities of Otavalo (Sarabino Muenala, 2007).

It is worth noting that festivities and traditional rituals, such as rit cleansings and life cycle ceremonies, play a crucial role in the daily life of the Otavalan Kichwa, since this rich cultural tradition of Otavalo ensures the continuity of their practical values through the generations.

6. The Role of Cultural Identity and Health

The World Health Organization defines traditional medicine and says: "Traditional medicine is the entire set of knowledge, skills and practices based on indigenous theories, beliefs and experiences of different cultures, whether explainable or not, used for the maintenance of health, as well as for the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical or mental illnesses" (WHO, 2014 cited by Herrera Sosa, 2017).

For Herrera Sosa (2017), traditional medicine is based on practices, methods and treatments that come from the ancestral knowledge and customs of communities, peoples and nationalities. It is essential to their cultural identity, but today it is also used by people outside of groups. This medicine generally includes these spiritual and energetic procedures, and uses plants, essences and even animals to treat and cure ailments, diseases or wounds.

Medical Plant Uses and Ritual Cleansings:

In the Otavalan Kichwa population, medicinal plants and ritual cleanses are essential health practices, deeply rooted in their worldview and ancestral traditions. Medicinal herbs are fundamental in traditional Otavalan medicine. The indigenous community uses a wide variety of plants to treat different ailments. For example, eucalyptus is used for respiratory problems and chamomile to relieve stomach discomfort. These herbs are essential in the local pharmacopoeia and are an integral part of their health care. Ritual cleanses, on the other hand, are rituals intended to purify and restore the energetic balance of the body and spirit. Cleansing and healing ceremonies

are essential in traditional medicine. Performed in sacred places, these ceremonies combine herbs, chants and rituals to restore harmony and well-being both spiritually and physically. They are significant moments in which the aim is to balance and heal the person as a whole. Together, these practices offer a comprehensive perspective of health care, based on connection with nature and tradition (Otavalo, 2024).

The Kichwa healers “Yachaks”, have extensive knowledge of the healing properties of various local plants. Each plant is chosen based on its characteristics and the type of illness or imbalance it is intended to treat. Plants are prepared in different ways, such as infusions, decoctions, poultices or ointments. The preparation may involve combining several plants to enhance their healing effects.

Application:

- **Infusions and Decoctions:** These are used to treat digestive and respiratory problems, or to strengthen the immune system. The plants are boiled in water, and the resulting liquid is drunk as tea.
- **Pastes and Ointments:** These are applied directly to the skin to treat wounds, muscle pain and inflammation. Crushed plants are mixed with other natural ingredients to create an ointment paste.

Functions and Beliefs:

- Medicinal plants are not only used to treat physical symptoms, but are also believed to have the ability to balance the body's energies. Each plant is associated with certain spirits and energies that help restore harmony.

Integration with Traditional Medicine

- **Complementarity:** Medicinal plants and cleanses are not seen as alternatives to Western medicine, but rather as complementary practices. The Otavalan Kichwa often combine traditional treatments with modern medicine to address health in a holistic manner.
- **Community Role:** These practices are fundamental to community life and are passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the preservation of ancestral knowledge and its adaptation to current needs.

7. Concepts of Health and Sickness in the Kichwa Community

Otavalo is widely recognized throughout the country for its rich cultural heritage, which is especially highlighted by the ancestral practices of its indigenous groups. In this region, these communities make up the majority of the population and maintain traditions that include alternative health methods. Instead of resorting to the conventional medical system, they use local rituals and plants to treat various physical and spiritual ailments (Castro Rivera & Visarrea Terán, 2016).

In the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of September 13, 2007, Art. 24 it states that:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to their own traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their plants, animals and minerals of vital medical interest. Indigenous persons also have the right to access, without discrimination, all social and health services. Indigenous persons have the right to equally enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take such measures as are necessary to progressively achieve the full realization of this right" (United Nations, 2007 cited by Cruz Llumiquinga, 2021).

In Abya Yala, known today as America, indigenous peoples have kept alive their knowledge and cultural practices that are essential for their well-being. These traditions, such as the use of medicinal plants, childbirth techniques, and skin-to-skin contact, are part of an ancestral knowledge that encompasses natural, spiritual, and human elements. In the Andean worldview, health is understood as a balance between nature, spirit, and ancestors. This knowledge does not follow Western standards, but is based on a deep and respectful connection with Mother Nature, seen as a living being with whom one can converse and care, guided by "intuition" (Cruz Llumiquinga, 2021).

In this sense, in the Andean worldview, health, known as "wellbeing" **Alikay**, implies being in balance with nature, other living beings, and other humans. Nature, or Pachamama, is the center of everything, and the cosmos is seen as the shared home of all living beings. Health and balance are linked to humans, spirits and natural forces. Therefore, healing or restoring health requires bridges (**chakana**) that connect the macrocosm with the microcosm, where **Yachaks** or therapists play a crucial role in diagnosis and treatment. In this Andean vision, health and illness are opposites but complementary. On the one hand, health reflects people's way of life, respect for social laws, balance, harmony and reciprocity. On the other hand, illness represents the rupture of this balance and the lack of respect for social norms and the absence of reciprocity (Rodriguez, 2008).

Therefore, for the Otavalan Kichwa population, health and illness are not isolated phenomena that affect only the body or mind of an individual, but are closely linked to a holistic vision of well-being that includes physical, emotional, spiritual and social aspects. This comprehensive perspective highlights the importance of balance and harmony with oneself, the community and the natural environment.

The integration of traditional indigenous medicine, understood as those medical practices originating in the social geographic spaces of indigenous peoples, which emerged before colonization and/or during its process, whose therapeutic conceptions and methodologies are based on history, the worldview and the indigenous cultural identity, recognizes that they have undergone modifications over time, incorporating conceptual, medical and therapeutic elements of the dominant societies. Indigenous medicine has re-emerged in the current era, gaining legitimacy and relevance. Traditional herbal cures and spiritual treatments vary according to the indigenous people, but there are also elements common to all indigenous ethnicities, peoples and nationalities (WHO, 2006, cited by Meneses, Icaza, & Albán, 2020).

From the intercultural approach to health, the coexistence of "formal" and "informal" health systems is recognized. In practice, indigenous and other cultural users demonstrate that these approaches are complementary. Understanding the knowledge of the community will help us understand how health is conceived and, therefore, how to approach it. Andean indigenous peoples organize their thinking in pairs or dualities, such as cold and hot, high and low, or masculine and feminine, and show great respect for their ancestors, forefathers and spirits. In this area, rituals emerge that are part of both everyday life and particular events in the development of the person, such as conception, birth, care of the placenta and the navel, naming, the first haircut, the first nail cutting, and the rituals and ceremonies that accompany these moments. The encounter with death is described as a process of transition to other worlds. The concepts and practices of ancient peoples conceive health as the result of balance in all aspects of life: economic, political, cultural, spiritual and environmental. This must be reflected in the daily relationship with indigenous people and patients, through dignified treatment that takes into account their knowledge, expectations and hopes, their fears and emotions, and the pain and anguish in the face of illness and death (Ceballos, Amores, & Rojas, 2009, cited by Meneses, Icaza, & Albán, 2020).

The health practices of indigenous Ecuadorian communities reflect this holistic understanding. Treatments are not limited to physical aspects, but also include spiritual rituals and emotional therapies. Yachaks (healers) and midwives play essential roles in the community, using medicinal plants and purification rituals to treat illnesses.

8. Importance of Mental Health in the Imbabura Kichwa Population

Mental health in the Imbabura Kichwa population is a fundamental aspect that must be addressed from an intercultural perspective. The close relationship that Kichwa communities have with nature, their worldview and their cultural practices, such as community work and ancestral medicine, directly influence their emotional and psychological well-being. However, in recent years, an increase in stress factors derived from social, economic and environmental changes has been observed. Factors such as migration, racism, loss of land and exposure to Western lifestyles have generated tensions that affect the emotional stability of Kichwa families and communities, which makes it urgent to implement public policies that take these contexts into account.

One of the main challenges for mental health care in the Imbabura Kichwa population is the cultural and linguistic barrier that exists in conventional health systems. The vast majority of mental health services are not adapted to the indigenous worldview nor do they include elements of traditional medicine, which limits their effectiveness. For the Kichwa population, emotional or mental imbalance not only has biological or psychological causes, but can also be related to spiritual imbalance or the breakdown of harmony with nature and ancestors. Therefore, healing processes must include the accompaniment of wise men or Yachaks, who are in charge of performing rituals of spiritual cleansing or healing, to complement conventional treatments.

The approach to comprehensive mental health in the Kichwa population must include both the recognition of traditional medicine and the training of health professionals who can act as cultural bridges, facilitating a respectful dialogue between indigenous knowledge and Western medical

knowledge. In Imbabura, initiatives that integrate community strengthening, mental health education and respect for ancestral practices are essential to combat problems such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse, which are beginning to have a presence in the communities. In addition, it is necessary that these initiatives be built in a participatory manner, with the Kichwa communities themselves taking a leading role in defining the most appropriate care models.

9. Importance of Balance and Reciprocity in Mental Health

The importance of balance and reciprocity in mental health is a key concept that comes from indigenous and holistic worldviews, which conceive life as an interconnected network of relationships. In many cultures, including indigenous cultures in the Andes and Latin America, mental health is not understood in an individualistic way, but as a balance between the body, mind, spirit, community and the natural environment. This approach recognizes that psychological well-being cannot be achieved if people are in conflict or disconnection with their community, their environment and their spiritual life. In this context, reciprocity, "ayni" in Quechua, plays a fundamental role: the well-being of others is closely linked to the well-being of others, so helping and receiving help are essential aspects of maintaining emotional and mental balance.

From this perspective, reciprocity in social and community relationships is a mechanism of mutual support that ensures that no person is left behind or abandoned in times of difficulty. When a person gives something, whether it be emotional support, physical labor, or material resources, they always do so with the expectation that at some point the community or the environment will return that support in their own time of need. This principle of reciprocity helps to alleviate stress and anxiety, as it fosters confidence that there is a support network in place to deal with adversity. In terms of mental health, this type of social system reduces feelings of loneliness and hopelessness, which are common factors in the development of psychological disorders.

Furthermore, mental and emotional balance is also related to respect and harmony with nature. In many indigenous cultures, nature is not an inert resource to be exploited, but a living being with which a balanced relationship must be maintained. Disconnection with nature, caused by the modern pace of life, is seen as one of the main causes of stress, anxiety and other mental health problems in contemporary society. In this sense, practices such as rituals of gratitude to the earth or participation in community activities outdoors help people reconnect with their environment and restore a balanced mental state.

Finally, practicing reciprocity and balance in daily life has been shown to be an effective preventative strategy for mental well-being. Recent studies suggest that communities that practice reciprocity, both in social and ecological terms, have lower rates of mental illness compared to highly individualistic societies. This approach promotes a broader view of mental health, where interdependence and mutual support are not only a way to solve individual problems, but an essential component for building healthier, more resilient and emotionally strong communities.

10. Curative Practices and their Basis in the Andean Worldview

Healers and Yachaks

In the community, the Yachak is the guardian of cultural knowledge, and transmitter of the group's traditions, condensed in healing practices with beliefs, myths, legends, rituals and even forms of social control. In this context, even today in Ilumán, the Yachak is the healer of body diseases and "the one who knows" (Jaramillo & Coba, 1993):

The Yachak plays a crucial role not only in curing diseases, but also in maintaining social cohesion. The Yachaks are recognized for their deep knowledge, their historical and sociocultural training, and their reliability. Their practice, which is centered on the earth as a vital and protective source of life, reflects an ancestral religiosity linked to agriculture and indigenous mestizo culture (Garzón Paz, 2018).

Therefore, the Yachak specialize in health problems related to energy, performing practices such as rituals, energy cleansing and the healing of "ills placed." Its approach is mystical, and its main objective is to restore health, cleanse and purify, as well as improve the individual's relationships with his community (Vinueza Gómez, 2021).

The Cleansers

In Quechua, the cleansers or "jacudur" are people specialized in solving problems of fractures, joint dislocations and performing massages. Also known as sobadores, they treat veins, cuts, sciatica, and use Chinese menthol plasters to immobilize body parts that require it in order to soothe pain (Dioses Mendoza, 2014 cited by Garzón Paz, 2021).

The Midwives

Midwives, also known as "comadronas", are women, generally over 40 years of age, who assist in pregnancy and childbirth in communities. They use traditional techniques such as pulse palpation to diagnose pregnancy and the position of the fetus, and they use herbs to facilitate childbirth. In addition, they recommend care and nutrition for both the mother and the newborn. These women also have ancestral knowledge about natural methods of regulating fertility and treat various female conditions. Although they retain their traditional knowledge, they have begun to collaborate with state institutions through courses and training (Garzón Paz, 2018).

The Herbalists

They are people who have a deep knowledge of medicinal plants and use them to treat common health problems, such as colds, diarrhea, and body ailments. In addition, like other healers, they can alleviate various common conditions (Vinueza Gómez, 2021).

The Bad Energy and Trauma Healers

They are dedicated to healing energetic problems caused by traumatic experiences or by passing through places that are perceived as negative or charged, so that "Bad Air" is treated

through a body cleansing to expel evil since it is a condition caused by interaction with an evil spirit in desolate places, which causes symptoms such as headache, paleness and abdominal discomfort, while for "Fear [trauma]" the treatment consists of performing a ritual to recover the lost spirit that occurs when a person loses their spirit after an intense scare causing symptoms such as vomiting and sleep disorders (Vinueza Gómez, 2021).

Curative Practices

The healing practices of the Kichwa population of Otavalo are deeply rooted in the Andean worldview, which sees health as an integral balance between body, mind, spirit and nature. From this vision, medicinal rituals are carried out in a dark and mysterious environment, combining ancestral medicine with the energy of sacred stones and healing herbs. The Yachak performs a cleansing-healing, which begins with rubbing the patient's body with a candle. Then, the candle is lit to diagnose the disease. Depending on the diagnosis, up to three cleansings are performed, accompanied by prayers and baths (Garzón Paz, 2018).

Girard, (2016), cited by (Garzón Paz, 2018) mentions that guinea pig, eggs, sugarcane liquor, eau de cologne and various medicinal plants such as marco [a native bush], nettle, and chilco [a native tree], and white and red carnations are used for cleansings. These elements are rubbed on the patient's body to offer good omens.

11. Interpersonal Conflict Resolution in the Community Context

Conflict resolution processes occur differently in different cultures. To do this, it is important to understand how conflict is dimensioned in the Kichwa people in order to subsequently give rise to resolution. Conflict is understood as a situation in which there is a discrepancy or disagreement between two or more parties, which may arise from differences in interests, values, beliefs, needs. In the context of indigenous peoples, such as the Kichwa Otavalo, conflict can manifest itself in various ways, including:

- **Cultural differences:** Tensions may arise between the community's ancestral practices and beliefs and external influences, such as globalization and tourism, which may threaten its cultural identity.
- **Natural resources:** Conflicts may be related to access to and use of natural resources, where indigenous communities seek to preserve their traditional practices in the face of commercial exploitation or state intervention.
- **Transmission of knowledge:** The loss of ancestral knowledge and the difficulty in transmitting it to new generations can generate intergenerational conflicts, where young people may be more influenced by modern culture, while the elderly try to preserve their traditions.

Conflict is a complex phenomenon influenced by cultural, social and economic factors, and requires a sensitive and respectful approach for its resolution, especially in contexts where ancestral knowledge and cultural identity are fundamental. In this sense, conflict resolution in the context of the ancestral knowledge of the Otavalan Kichwa people can be approached from various perspectives such as indigenous justice and intergenerational dialogue, among others.

Practices for resolving conflicts in the context of the ancestral knowledge of the Kichwa Otavalo people may include:

1. **Dialogue of knowledge:** Establish a dialogue between scientific knowledge and ancestral knowledge, which allows for mutual understanding and respect for different perspectives.
2. **Indigenous justice:** Use practical procedures of indigenous justice that regulate social coexistence, acting as corrective and purifying measures to preserve harmony in the community and the individual.
3. **Involvement of elders:** Encourage the participation of elders in conflict resolution, since their knowledge and experience are essential to guide the process.
4. **Revaluation of ancestral knowledge:** Promote the revaluation and practice of ancestral knowledge as part of cultural identity, which can help prevent conflicts related to the loss of identity.
5. **Education and awareness:** Implement programs that educate the community on the importance of ancestral knowledge and its role in conflict resolution, fostering a deeper understanding between generations.
6. **Community mediation:** Facilitate mediation between conflicting parties through community leaders, respected individuals who can help find peaceful solutions.

These practices reflect a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to conflict resolution, which respects and values the ancestral knowledge of the Otavalan Kichwa people. Therefore, conflict resolution in this context not only involves the application of rules, but also the use of cultural practices and respect for ancestral knowledge, promoting a more holistic and community-based approach.

12. Grief and Loss in the Community

In the Otavalan Kichwa communities, the process of mourning and loss is deeply intertwined with cultural practices that reflect both biological and symbolic aspects of death. In these contexts, the funeral rite is presented as a social and collective practice, characterized by its repetitiveness and stereotyping. This ritualization not only underlines the inherent sociability of the human being, but also encompasses a set of beliefs, transcendental orders and mystical powers that transform death into an experience loaded with cultural meaning (Gil, 2002).

From an anthropological perspective, funeral rites in the Otavalo Kichwa communities are not merely observable acts, but rather they configure a reality that transcends the empirical. Death is understood from both a biological and cultural dimension, the latter being a symbolic manifestation of one of the most distinctive characteristics of the human being (Morín, 1999). The death rite becomes an essential process within the community life cycle, functioning as a project and a culmination that seeks to mitigate the pain of loss and strengthen kinship ties, both consanguineous and non-consanguineous (Cevallos et al., 2017).

The process of dismantling the altar and the items associated with the death of a child is a stage charged with symbolism and emotion. After the burial, the godparents and the “Tayta Rezador”

[Prayerful Father] are in charge of dismantling the table and other items left in the house. The Tayta Rezador plays a crucial role in this phase: while collecting the objects from the altar, he prays in a low voice so that the soul of the deceased child finds peace.

A significant aspect of this rite is the creation of a cross with petals of flowers from the altar, made of straw. The white flowers are for girls and the red ones for boys. This cross, about thirty to forty centimeters long, is placed on top of the door of the house, indicating to all who see it that a child has died there. Traditionally, this cross remains for a year as a symbol of family mourning. However, in recent times, some Kichwa families prefer to place the same wreath of flowers that was on the altar instead of the straw cross, displaying it on the door until it dries, as a manifestation of mourning for the loss of the child.

In this context, mourning is defined as the set of social practices and psychological processes that emerge following the death of a person during a certain period. For its part, grief encompasses the internal and distressing elements that accompany mourning. In the past, the ritual of dismantling the altar was carried out the day after the burial, and during the same day of the burial, even though the corpse was no longer in the house, a symbolic vigil was held on the table where the coffin had been, with the lit candles representing the deceased.

Processing Grief in the Otavalan Kichwa Town

Mourning in the Kichwa-Otavalo community is similar to that of other ethnic groups, although the specific rituals are distinctive and constitute an essential part of their cultural identity. This process begins with the death of the individual, even before, during the state of death in terminal illnesses or through premonitory dreams experienced by the family in critical situations. Often, these dreams are not communicated to the deceased and do not imply a break in the psychological state of the person, although they generate concern about the integrity of a loved one.

The uncertainty that accompanies death is addressed through symbolic representations before, during and after the wakes, which help to cope with the biological loss of loved ones. These rituals allow mourning, beyond being a mere grief, to begin a process of redefinition and adaptation in the psyche of the individual. Funeral ceremonies are usually surrounded by family, friends and neighbors, who with their presence mitigate the feeling of loneliness and sadness, transforming it into a feeling of company and support. In this context, the grieving process is configured from various community axes, where not only those affected are supported, but also the deceased in their transition, establishing a bond through shared spaces that include food, laughter, anecdotes, memories, nostalgia and tears.

Mourning in the Otavalan Kichwa community is a process deeply rooted in culture and community. Through rituals and collective support, the transition from pain to the redefinition of loss is facilitated, evidencing the importance of social cohesion of suffering. This shared experience not only honors the deceased, but also strengthens community ties and provides a space for emotional healing.

Grief Duration and its Treatment

The duration of mourning is an aspect that often generates debate and, in general, can be compared with what is observed in other cultures. In the case of the Otavalan Kichwa people, mourning processes can extend for at least six months. However, its particularity lies in the fact that the accompanying rituals and the treatment of the body during the wake allow the affected people, family members and neighbors, to carry out a faster healing process.

For example, at the time of a death, it is common for family members to be in charge of handling the body of the deceased, cleaning it and dressing it before the wake begins. This act, full of respect and affection, becomes an opportunity for the community to provide support in the logistics and organization of the event. The collaboration of friendly neighbors at this stage is essential, as it helps to create an atmosphere of solidarity and comfort.

The wake processes in the Otavalan Kichwa culture also involve the cooperation of the guests, who usually offer both economic and symbolic offerings. These contributions are vital, as they facilitate the transition process and provide meaningful support on several levels. During the wake, attendees have the opportunity to address pending issues with the deceased, such as forgiveness, which promotes deep reflection and emotional healing.

Throughout the three days of the wake, the grieving family can process, re-signify and reconstruct their narrative in relation to their loved one. This process of accompaniment is not limited to the days of the wake, but extends afterwards, allowing the grieving family to feel supported. The continued presence of family, friends and neighbors generates periodic visits, creating a cathartic environment that helps alleviate the feeling of grief.

This sustained accompaniment can result in a significant reduction in nostalgia and pain within a period of up to four months. Although the grief is not completely resolved, the re-signification and functionality of the affected people begin to return to normal. In the Kichwa-Otavalo people, the grieving process thus becomes a collective journey, where the community becomes an essential pillar for healing and emotional reconstruction.

Psychological Characteristics and Management Strategies During Grief

People who are grieving tend to develop and enhance a series of psychological characteristics that constitute an important strength for both their personal recovery and that of their loved ones. This process does not occur automatically or mystically; rather, it is the result of life, history, and community management of various difficulties and factors that promote well-being. The Kichwa people's previous work, relational, emotional, and psychological experiences have led the community to develop skills and conditions that facilitate the process of grief, allowing it to be managed in a unique way and adapted to their needs.

In addition, the skills developed in work and emotional contexts allow the Kichwa to approach grief with a more open and constructive perspective. The ability to adapt to difficult situations and the use of community resources to deal with loss are key elements that help grieving people move forward in their healing process. In this sense, the Kichwa people demonstrate that grief management is a process deeply influenced by culture, shared history and community strength and sustained by the following psychological characteristics:

Resilience: Resilience in the Otavaleño Kichwa people manifests itself as the ability to adapt and recover from loss and pain. These people have learned to transform suffering into a process of growth, relying on their traditions and social cohesion. The strength they develop through shared experiences allows them not only to cope with grief, but also to find meaning in it, turning tragedy into a path to collective healing.

Recommendation: Incorporate activities that strengthen resilience, such as sharing stories of overcoming and reflecting on the lives of the deceased. This helps group members see grief as an opportunity for growth and connection with their roots.

Catharsis and emotional expression: Catharsis is fundamental in Kichwa mourning rituals, where emotional expression is encouraged through community. During vigils, people have the opportunity to share their feelings, cries, and memories, which facilitates a process of emotional release. This expression not only relieves the emotional burden, but also allows mourners to reflect on their experiences and connect more deeply with their loved ones.

Recommendation: Organize sessions where participants can express their emotions openly. This may include the use of traditional rituals, such as shared crying or telling anecdotes about the deceased. Creativity, through music or art, can also be an effective means of facilitating catharsis.

Connecting to support networks: Support networks are crucial in the Kichwa grieving process. The community comes together to offer emotional and practical assistance, creating a supportive environment. This connection with family, friends and neighbours not only helps to mitigate feelings of loneliness, but also allows mourners to feel that they are accompanied in their suffering, promoting a sense of belonging and mutual support.

Recommendation: Encourage participants to involve their family and friends in the grieving process. Organize community gatherings, strengthening the sense of collective support and reducing the feeling of isolation.

Solidarity and reciprocity: Solidarity is a fundamental value in Kichwa culture, especially during mourning. Reciprocity is manifested in the way the community supports each other in times of need. During wakes, community members collaborate not only in logistical organization, but also by offering their time and resources. This exchange of support creates a strong bond between individuals and reinforces social cohesion.

Cognitive Flexibility: Cognitive flexibility is the ability to adapt to new situations and perspectives. In the context of grief, this ability allows Kichwa people to reinterpret their loss and find new ways to move forward. By being exposed to different viewpoints and experiences central to their community, mourners can restructure their thoughts and emotions, facilitating their healing process. This characteristic may not be generalized throughout the community.

Recommendation: Introduce exercises that encourage reflection and change of perspective on the loss. Activities such as using open-ended questions or discussions about the meaning of grief can help participants adjust to a new reality.

Creativity: Creativity is manifest in the way the Kichwa people honor their loved ones and transform mourning into meaningful rituals. Through their music, dance, storytelling, and other artistic expressions, the Kichwa find innovative ways to remember and celebrate the life of the deceased. This creativity not only enriches the grieving process, but also helps build an emotional legacy that endures in the community.

Recommendation: Implement creative workshops where participants can use art, music, and writing to express their feelings. These activities not only help process grief, but also honor the life of the deceased in a meaningful way.

Psychological distress (imbalance): Psychological distress or emotional/spiritual imbalance, is a common experience during grief. However, in the Kichwa community, this distress is addressed collectively, which helps mitigate its effects. Although loss can provoke feelings of sadness, anxiety and confusion, community support and rituals help mourners find a sense of balance, allowing them to confront their grief constructively and with the support of their environment.

Recommendation: Provide a safe space where participants can talk about their experiences of psychological distress. Offer coping tools, such as breathing techniques or mindfulness focused on the connection to the earth and agriculture, sacred points or spiritual balancing rituals, to help them manage anxiety and emotional pain.

13. Recommendations for the Use of Culturally Adapted Interviews and Questionnaires

Administering psychological tests effectively and ethically requires a deep understanding of the tools and the people to whom they are administered. For non-psychologists, here are some key recommendations for handling these instruments appropriately:

1. **Basic Training:** Before administering a psychological test, it is crucial they receive basic training on the tool in question. This includes understanding the purpose of the test, how it is administered, and how to interpret the results in general terms, whenever necessary. Training helps ensure that correct procedures are followed and that errors are minimized. It is important to be clear about the purpose of the test. Knowing whether it is used for

diagnostic assessment, research, personnel selection, or any other specific purpose helps to contextualize the application and to interpret the results appropriately.

2. **Clear Instructions:** Make sure to provide clear and complete instructions to participants. Instructions must be understandable and precise to avoid confusion that may affect the validity of the results. You can use language adaptation to expand the explanation, as long as the thread and meaning of the question are not lost.
3. **Informed Consent:** Obtain informed consent from participants. This involves explaining to them the purpose of the test, how the results will be used, any potential risks or benefits. Make sure they understand and agree to participate voluntarily – this may be part of the admissions processes for the program in question.
4. **Confidentiality:** Keep results and personal information of participants confidential. Ensure data is stored and handled securely to protect individuals' privacy.
5. **Cultural and Contextual Adaptation:** If you are working with people from different cultural backgrounds, consider cultural adaptation of tests. Tests should be appropriate for the culture and context of participants to ensure accurate and relevant results.
6. **Standard Administration:** Administer the test according to established guidelines. Any deviation in the administration process may affect the validity and reliability of the results.
7. **Interpretation and Use of Results:** If you are not a psychologist, it is critical not to attempt to interpret test results independently. Results should be reviewed and interpreted by a trained professional, who can provide appropriate analysis and recommendations based on the results.
8. **Consult with Professionals:** If you have questions about the administration or interpretation of a test, consult with a psychologist or other qualified professional. They can offer guidance and ensure that the test is used appropriately.
9. **Ongoing Assessment:** Reflect on the effectiveness of the test administration and seek feedback to improve the process. Ongoing assessment helps identify areas for improvement and ensure that the test is administered effectively.
10. **Agreeing on meanings:** During the implementation of any test, it is crucial to agree on the meanings of the terms and concepts used in it. It checks the understanding of certain words or phrases and what they mean to them in the context of their culture and emotional experiences. This ensures that the results authentically reflect the participants' perspectives.
11. **Linguistic interpretation:** Aim to produce a linguistic interpretation that should not only be accurate, but also culturally relevant. Where possible, agreed meanings should also be agreed in the native language if there is a linguistic approximation. Consider working with translators who understand both the language and the cultural subtleties, which will help avoid misunderstandings and build trust in the process.
12. **Contextual exemplification:** Use examples that are relevant and meaningful to the Kichwa community. When developing questions or items for tests, incorporate situations or anecdotes that resonate with the cultural experience of the participants. This will help them feel more comfortable and make the test more understandable and applicable to their reality.
13. **Managing fatigue:** Recognize that testing can be emotionally draining, especially in the emotional context. Plan testing times so that they do not extend too far and provide

appropriate breaks such as coaching. Also, offer emotional support resources so that participants can process what they are sharing and avoid emotional overload.

14. **Support:** Ensure that there is ongoing support during the application of the tests. Facilitators should be available to provide emotional support and clarify any questions that arise. This support not only helps participants feel more secure, but also allows for more accurate and meaningful information to be collected.
15. **Recording and language adjustment:** Keep a detailed record of how test items are interpreted and answered in the cultural context. If misunderstandings or problems with understanding arise, adjust the language and wording of the questions. This process of language adjustment is essential to ensure that the test remains relevant and effective, while always respecting the cultural richness of the Kichwa community.

14. Ethical and Cultural Considerations for Intervention

Ethics in care for the indigenous population and in general involves several key aspects that must be considered by the personal facilitators who try to generate processes of community accompaniment and support. As a recommendation we have the following:

1. **Respect for culture:** It is critical that practitioners recognize and respect the traditions, beliefs and values of Indigenous communities. This includes a deep understanding of their worldview and cultural practices, which can influence how mental health and wellbeing are addressed.
2. **Informed consent:** Interveners must ensure that members of the Indigenous population fully understand therapeutic processes and provide informed consent. This may require adapting language and communication methods to be culturally appropriate.
3. **Community participation:** Involving the community in the therapeutic process is essential. This may include collaboration with community leaders and the use of approaches that integrate traditional community wisdom and practices, as long as the effectiveness of the program being developed is not compromised.
4. **Sensitivity to history and social contexts:** Professionals must be aware of the history that indigenous communities have faced, which can influence their mental health and their willingness to seek help.
5. **Ethics of Relationship:** Establishing relationships of trust and mutual respect is crucial. Interveners must be sensitive to power dynamics and work to empower Indigenous individuals and communities in their healing process.

15. Summary of Key Findings

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma speaks about the psychological and emotional wounds accumulated over generations due to colonization, oppression and systematic discrimination that the Kichwa people have suffered since the arrival of European colonizers. These traumas are not only manifested in the memory of violent events, such as slavery, land dispossession and the imposition of a dominant culture, but are also perpetuated today through social exclusion,

poverty, racism and lack of access to basic services such as education and health. These factors generate a legacy of intergenerational suffering that affects the emotional well-being, social cohesion and cultural identity of indigenous communities. To heal this trauma, it is essential to recognize these injustices, preserve the indigenous identity and worldview.

General Wellbeing

Wellbeing is conceived in an integral way, where physical, mental and spiritual health are deeply interconnected with the community, nature and the cosmos. For these people, wellbeing is not limited to the absence of illness, but involves living in harmony with oneself, with others and with the natural environment. The concept of "sumak kawsay" or "good living" is central to this vision, where balance, reciprocity and a respectful relationship with Pachamama (Mother Earth) are prioritized.

A Sense of Belonging to a Community

Belonging to a community is of vital importance, as your identity, sense of belonging and well-being are deeply intertwined with the collective. The community not only represents a physical space, but also a social, cultural and spiritual support nucleus "ayllu" where ancestral knowledge, traditions and values are transmitted. Through reciprocity and cooperation, the community guarantees the balance between people and nature, strengthening social cohesion and cultural survival. For many indigenous people, being in a community means being in harmony with their history, their land and their future. Individual well-being is not separated from the collective; the well-being of the community and the environment is fundamental to the health and prosperity of each person. This holistic approach to well-being is key to understanding how indigenous communities value and seek life in balance with all beings.

Religious Syncretism

Syncretism is the result of the fusion between ancestral Kichwa beliefs and the influences of Catholicism brought by the Spanish colonizers. This mixture has given rise to a unique coexistence of spiritual practices, where traditional indigenous rituals, centered on the relationship with Pachamama and the Kichwa cosmic living, are combined with Catholic activities, such as the cult of saints and religious celebrations. For example, during festivals such as Inti Raymi, which celebrates the June solstice, Kichwa rituals of gratitude to the land are mentioned with Catholic names. This syncretism has allowed the communities of Otavalo to preserve their indigenous traditions while adapting aspects of Christianity, creating their own religious identity that reflects both cultural resistance and adaptation to historical circumstances.

Connection to the Planting Process

The process of sowing in Kichwa communities is an activity deeply rooted in their worldview, where the relationship with the land and natural cycles plays a central role in their cultural identity. For the Kichwa, sowing is not only a means of subsistence, but a spiritual act that reflects reciprocity and balance with life. Each stage of the agricultural process, from soil

preparation to harvest, is accompanied by ritual offerings to honor the natural elements that allow life. This process is not only a productive task, but a manifestation of understanding the world, where human beings, nature and the spiritual are interconnected.

Feminine Energy

The female figure is a figure that allows catharsis and emotional expression in the Otavaleño Kichwa population. Beyond being encapsulated in a generic sexual axis it is suggested as a maternal energy, a caring procreative energy, an axis that allows life to continue to be maintained. In this sense, this energy can be transmitted and consolidated in people whose interests are reflected in the care and interest in otherness, in promulgating and sustaining it. Feminine energy is one of the most important energies when talking about mental health, as it is an important mental health agent, such is this that it promotes the processes of care and protection in the population. Its implication is so broad that many organizations can maintain matriarchal structures both at the organizational-political level and at the health and care level.

Generational Differences in Mental Health Care

Age groups approach mental health differently. We can talk about psychological support processes. Yes, in the earliest generations and perhaps with broad knowledge thanks to globalization and the migratory processes of this population, especially if we talk about our elders, this approach is almost non-existent. In this sense, the processes that are corrected are living in a community, family, sowing and harvesting processes, caring for small animals, rituals and cleansings, solstice festivities and visits to sacred sites. Each of these processes allows for emotional expression, discharge and self-reflective processes that can promote significant cognitive changes. The intervention effects of a specialized psychological approach cannot be compared since the purpose of the same is not similar and they do not meet the same criteria. Since there are no clear concepts of mental health problems, this logical framework is not as applicable to the population that has not had a previous approach to these constructs.

Mental Health an Approach to Balance (the individual being, nature, spirituality and community)

The balance in the life of the Kichwa, is perhaps the closest we can have to mental health, in that sense being and well-being is holistic since its implications have to do with the individual being in constant and harmonious relationship with nature, as long as it can take care of it and be taken care of by it as this is an energy, spirituality is staying connected with spiritual agents, gods, counselors and rituals that constantly claim spiritual position and an exchange with the community in living their reciprocally and jointly. In the case that one of these areas is affected, it is very likely that its balance will be affected and consequently its mental health, in that sense the human being is a social, spiritual and natural being.

Mental Health Problems

Mental health problems can be understood as problems of energy imbalance and historical trauma that have not allowed adequate development or the promotion of unpleasant

feelings. In this sense, violence, alcoholism, exclusion from the community or loneliness and intra-family conflicts can be described as predominant. This does not exclude the diagnostic profiles that may exist in the general population or the possibility of the existence of serious mental disorders or conditions, but the community cannot distinguish beyond stress, depression and anxiety as conceptual categories rather than broad and spectral psychological diagnoses, which can interfere with their approach.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a fundamental practice that involves the exchange of favors, help, or resources without an immediate or concrete interest on the part of the recipient, thus fostering a sense of community and mutual support. In family, neighborhood, or acquaintance contexts, this type of exchange strengthens social ties, creates a network of constant support, and contributes to the cohesion and well-being of individuals. By offering help without expecting immediate compensation, trust and solidarity are reinforced, promoting healthy relationships and a sense of belonging.

16. An Approach to Kichwa Mental Health

In this section we will answer questions posed by people outside the Kichwa communities. It is important to mention that since Kichwa mental health is viewed from a more holistic perspective, it is important not to compare it with Western mental health. The information you have received in this guide must necessarily be complemented by the personal experience and expertise that each person may have in the Kichwa communities. It is recommended that interventions be carried out in the Kichwa communities with a person who speaks and understands the Kichwa language.

Describing Good Mental Health (balance)

Good mental health (balance) is understood as a state of integral harmony that encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual and community well-being. This balance is achieved through reciprocity with nature, respect for the ancestral worldview and maintaining the meaning of the Ayllu. Practices such as healing rituals, the use of medicinal plants, and participation in traditional festivities are essential to preserve this balance, as they connect people with their cultural roots and promote social cohesion. If you want more information, you can review chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, chapters that address the balance of the Kichwa people.

What Do People Think Causes Poor Mental Health?

The Otavalan Kichwa population is very spiritual, which means that poor mental health is mainly caused by the imbalance between the individual, the community and spirituality. This imbalance can arise from external factors such as the negative influence of modernization, economic and social stress, and discrimination are also perceived as generating emotional and mental discomfort in the community. You can review chapter 6, which will find a little more about the meaning of poor mental health.

What is the length of time (approximately) that is considered culturally appropriate to grieve after the death of a loved one, before it is considered 'too long' and the person should seek outside help?

The Imbabura indigenous people take three days to mourn the deceased. Based on this action, the family receives support from the family community “Ayllu”. This support is estimated to last one month and a maximum of three months. These times can vary depending on the circumstances of each family. Many times people do not seek help directly, it is necessary to be attentive to non-verbal communication and understand signals. It has worked very well for us to be attentive to these signals after the third month of mourning. If you want to know more about the dynamics of mourning in the communities, review chapter 11.

How would someone know if a person lacks sufficient social support (does not have good family or friend support)?

It is common for a Kichwa person, especially in communities, to have friends who actively participate in community mingas [collective work for the community]. In cases where a person lacks this support network, it is essential to turn to other members of the community, who usually identify those who are experiencing a lack of family or social support. Community cohesion makes it easier to detect these situations, promoting an environment of solidarity and mutual support.

What would be considered major life changes? Both positive and negative in a person's life?

Major changes are considered positive and negative if they have a profound impact on their connection to the community, the land, and their traditions. Positive changes include access to better education, job opportunities within or outside the community, and the strengthening of their cultural identity. On the other hand, negative changes may include forced migration due to lack of resources, the loss of ancestral lands, or the breakdown of family and community cohesion. These changes can affect the sense of belonging, emotional balance, and general well-being. You can also find supporting information in Chapter 10.

What terms do community members use to describe good and bad mental health? Is well-being more commonly used? Which term is more widely accepted?

The most common terms to describe good mental health are usually related to balance and harmony, known as “alli kawsay” (good life) “sumak kawsay” (full lives), which imply holistic well-being and connection to nature, community and self. For poor mental health, terms that reflect imbalance or loss of harmony are used, such as “lakilla” (Sadness). Although the concept of well-being is recognized, traditional terms that emphasize balance between body, mind and cultural environment are often more welcome and resonate within the community. We have left some words of support in the GAD7 and PHQ9 assessments.

How would you describe the symptoms and signs of poor mental health?

Symptoms and signs of poor mental health are often described through visible changes in behavior and disconnection from the community. These include social isolation, reduced

participation in community activities such as mingas [collective work for the community], lack of interest in cultural practices, emotional and physical exhaustion, and irritability. They can also be perceived as a mismatch between the person and their environment, manifested in the breakdown of harmonious relationships with others and with nature, which affects their overall well-being. Additional information can be found in chapters 6, 9 and 11.

Are there specific words or phrases to avoid in discussions about mental health?

There are no specific words that should not be used, but it is important to avoid terms that may be stigmatizing or do not align with your worldview, such as "mentally ill" or "crazy," as these can be perceived as negative labels. Instead, it is preferable to use words that focus on well-being and balance. Additionally, phrases that imply guilt or weakness should be avoided, as they can generate rejection. It is essential to use respectful language that recognizes the connection between body, spirit, and community, and that reflects traditional ways of understanding integral well-being.

What metaphors are commonly used to describe mental health?

In Kichwa communities, metaphors to describe mental health are often linked to nature and spiritual balance. For example, "mental health" can be referred to as the "balance between thought and heart," or the "connection with sowing," indicating a state of inner peace that is reflected in the connection with nature. Lack of mental health can be described by comparing the mind to a river that stops flowing smoothly or to a plant that stops growing or grows poorly. These metaphors underline the relationship between individual well-being, the environment, and the community.

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18. Appendix

Interview

Introduction and Personal Context

1. General Context

- Can you tell me a little about yourself and your community?
- What does it mean for you to live in harmony with nature and the community?

Understanding of Health

2. Health Definition

- How do you define health in the context of the community?
- What practices are considered essential to maintain wellbeing following the Andean worldview?

3. Health Factors

- What elements or factors are considered to influence the health of a person in their community?
- What role do diet, physical activity, and social relationships play in health?

Understanding Illness

4. Health Definition

- How does your community understand the concept of sickness?
- What are the common causes for sickness though the Andina worldview?

5. Managing Illness

- What methods or practices does your community use to treat illness?
- What role do healers and spiritual leaders have in the treatment of illness?

Andean Worldview: Allikay and Sumak Kawsay

6. Allikay (Wellbeing)

- How do you understand the concept of Allikay (wellbeing) in your community?
- What practices are followed to obtain and maintain Allikay (wellbeing)?

7. Sumak Kawsay (Good Living)

- What does Sumak Kawsay mean for you and your community?
- What is the relationship between Sumak Kawsay and health and wellbeing?

Integration of Knowledge

8. Interaction With Western Medicine

- How does your community perceive Western Medicine?
- Do conflicts or harmony exist between traditional medicine and eastern medicine in your experience?

9. Adaptation and Change

- Have you noticed changes in the health and illness practices in your community in the past few years?

- How have these changes influenced the understanding of health and illness?

Personal and Community Perspective

10. Personal Experiences

- Could you share a personal or communal experience about managing health or illness?
- What would you like other people to understand about the Andean worldview and its relation to health.