

TITLE THE EMBODIMENT OF UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY IN FOSTERING EMPATHY AND COMPASSION IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Abstract

The Ubuntu philosophy, a rich African worldview that emphasizes humanity's holistic nature, interconnectedness, and communal values, has significant ramifications for social work practice, especially when it comes to developing empathy and compassion. Ubuntu, which has its roots in the African idea of "I am because we are," encourages social workers to see people as essential members of a larger community rather than just as separate individuals. This interconnectedness forms the foundation for enhancing empathy and compassion among practitioners, which are critical elements in effective social work. Social work, as a profession oriented towards the welfare of others, benefits from exploring this philosophy's principles to enhance caregiving practices. Research findings has shown that through the adoption of Ubuntu's fundamental principles, social workers practice holistic, community-based work that empowers clients, advances social justice, and improves long-term health. The study aim was to investigate the role of Ubuntu philosophy in fostering empathy and compassion in social work practice. It also aims to assess the potential effectiveness of integrating Ubuntu principles in social work education and training. The study carried out comprehensive desktop electronic research to gather data and themes from previous research. All the research's sources were properly referenced in accordance with APA guidelines to give credit to the original authors and their contributions and ensure ethical consideration in the study.

Keyword: *compassion, embodiment, empathy, Ubuntu, social work practice.*

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Introduction

Empathy and compassion are deemed important to professionals who work with individuals in need daily. Therefore, levels of empathy are high in professionals who help or deal with situations that go hand in hand with suffering, as empathy is essential in all aspects of life as individuals seek relationships to establish a sense of belonging, creating a shared understanding of our emotions and experiences (Rayes, Segal, & Lietz, 2022). This is the case with social workers whose daily task involves integrating individuals experiencing situations of need and vulnerability and social care.

This article draws its definition of the social worker profession from the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP), which defines social work as a profession that engages with people and structures to change, enhance and improve the well-being of the family, individual, and work or community level (Durham, 2023). At the heart of it, it is about changing people's lives for the better. Hence, empathy is of the essence in situations of vulnerability and need, as the situations have strong emotional components; empathy plays a role in understanding people's feelings and emotions in a cognitive and effective perspective. Contrary to this, compassion goes beyond empathy; it goes beyond understanding a situation to the basic sense of caring about the suffering of others and oneself, therefore implying that one needs to have the intention of preventing it and applying sensitivity;

this is seen as an answer towards distress, pain, and sadness (Ortega-Galan, Ruiz-Fernández, & Ortiz-Amo, 2021). Yet, in the last decade, researchers have brought a challenge deemed dangerous for social workers as they apply empathy and compassion through their practice. The challenge is that during the practice, showing compassion and empathy posits the risk of falling victim to compassion fatigue. This is stated by Nilson (2024), who states that during practice, due to being exposed to these persons and their traumas through stories, they come to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress themselves. A phenomenon referred to as 'vicarious traumatization', also 'compassion fatigue' or 'secondary traumatic stress'.

Ubuntu is a philosophical term that carries numerous definitions or interpretations according to one's environment. However, drawing from the work of Ngubane & Makau (2021), who defined ubuntu as an Indigenous African philosophy and a way of life that guides, shapes and maintains positive relations among Africans in communities and amongst themselves. Above all, Ubuntu offers holistic principles grounded in solidarity, cooperation, respect, kindness, and compassion, which are humanistic values, thus offering a transformative framework for integrating empathy and compassion into social work. Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because we are" emphasises the values of human dignity, solidarity, empathy and holding that one becomes a person through others resonates with the core principles or values of social work, emphasising the dignity and worth of individuals within the context of their communities (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

Despite its philosophical richness, the embodiment of Ubuntu in social work practice remains underexplored. There is a need to investigate how this philosophy can foster empathy and compassion, particularly in addressing the multifaceted challenges social workers face in diverse settings. This study explores the embodiment of Ubuntu as a framework for fostering empathy and compassion in social work practice. The objectives include examining its philosophical principles, assessing its relevance to social work, and identifying practical ways to integrate Ubuntu into professional practice.

Literature review

Ubuntu is an Indigenous African philosophy that emphasizes humanity, life's sanctity, and a people-centred approach (Mugumbate, & Chereni, 2020). It is a collection of knowledge, values, and practices that African black people view as making individuals more human. Mugumbate & Nyanguru (2013) argue that Ubuntu relates to bonding with others, expressed in many African languages as being self through others. This concept is reflected in the well-known isiZulu phrase: "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," meaning an individual becomes human through interactions and relationships with others. This philosophy is further encapsulated in the idea, "I participate, therefore I am."

Ajitoni (2024) supports Mugumbate & Nyanguru (2013) by emphasizing that Ubuntu is founded on principles and values such as empathy, communalism, and interconnectedness. The principles affirm that every individual carries intrinsic worth and dignity. Ajitoni (2024) also highlights how Ubuntu fosters kindness, compassion, and cooperation, suggesting that humanity is defined through relationships with others. Ubuntu encourages responsibility and collaboration, emphasizing the importance of working together for the common good whether in economic, social, or familial contexts. Central to Ubuntu is the reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration of harmony. Ngubane and Makau support this argument, stating that in traditional African life, an individual's existence is shaped entirely by their community. They assert that the corporate group is responsible for nurturing and shaping an individual, as "for the individual depends on the corporate group."

Transitioning from this broader understanding of Ubuntu, its application in social work has been explored. Mugumbate & Nyanguru (2013) state that social workers aim to restore functionality in the lives of dysfunctional individuals. Mugumbate & Chereni (2020) Ubuntu thrives on the principle of collective contribution towards community aspirations and initiatives. Social workers, guided by Ubuntu, are expected to assist clients in harnessing their energies and knowledge to promote social development goals. Scholars have noted a natural alignment between Ubuntu and social work due to their shared principles. For instance, Chingangaidze (2022) underscores the role of social workers in multidisciplinary rehabilitation teams.

These teams focus on altering negative behaviours into positive ones aligned with Ubuntu's philosophy of promoting worthwhile behaviours that enhance health and reduce suffering. They further note that social workers train clients in social skills and emotional responses, aligning with Ubuntu's rejection of rage and promoting positive dialogue to restore relationships. As noted by Moudatsou, Stavropoulou, Philalithis, & Koukoulis (2020), communication skills are essential for health professionals, including social workers. Effective communication fosters understanding and emotional connections, enabling the development of therapeutic relationships and facilitating positive changes. Tenner (2019) adds that compassion, derived from the Latin words "com" (together) and "pati" (to suffer), underscores the essence of "suffering together." Compassion is, therefore, central to social

work, as it allows professionals to connect deeply with their clients. However, Tenner (2019) highlights the challenges faced by social workers in balancing compassion with the demands of their profession. The commitment to promoting social justice, rights, and values such as independence and impartiality often conflicts with emotional and relational aspects of well-being. Tenner (2019) argues that this tension arises because care and rights are often viewed as oppositional. Additionally, the neo-liberal context of social work exacerbates these challenges by prioritizing rational objectives and detachment over emotional connections. Procedural rules further act as barriers, preventing meaningful emotional engagement and shared humanity.

Atijola (2024) critiques these challenges, emphasizing that Ubuntu views individuals as intrinsically linked to their communities. The well-being of one person directly impacts the community's well-being, fostering solidarity and mutual responsibility. However, these challenges undermine the foundations of Ubuntu. Atijola (2024) argues that conflict resolution, a key aspect of Ubuntu aimed at restoring broken relationships and achieving social harmony, is unattainable without empathy and compassion. Ubuntu is a philosophy deeply rooted in African traditions, emphasizing humanity, interconnectedness, and collective well-being. This review highlights the strong alignment between Ubuntu and social work, with shared principles such as empathy, compassion, and communal responsibility. While challenges such as neo-liberal practices and procedural barriers hinder the integration of Ubuntu in social work, the philosophy remains a vital framework for promoting positive relationships and social harmony. By fostering emotional connections and collaborative efforts, Ubuntu provides a pathway for addressing individual and community needs effectively.

Research and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative desk research approach to examine the embodiment of Ubuntu in fostering empathy and compassion in social work practice. Through a descriptive-interpretative research design, the study analysed documentary evidence, academic literature, and published research to understand the relationship between Ubuntu philosophy and the cultivation of empathy and compassion in social work. This desk-based methodological approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the complex dynamics that shape social workers' empathetic and compassionate practices. The qualitative framework permitted a deeper understanding of both manifest and latent content within the collected literature, allowing for a rich interpretation of how Ubuntu principles influence social work practice.

The qualitative dimension involved a systematic review of multiple data sources: scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals, social work practice frameworks, professional guidelines and policies, case studies highlighting Ubuntu-based interventions, and documentation of social work practices incorporating African philosophy. This qualitative approach provided rich contextual insights into how Ubuntu principles foster empathy and compassion in social work practice. Integrating theoretical frameworks with practical applications offers a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes in implementing Ubuntu-based approaches in social work.

The study utilized thematic analysis as its primary analytical framework, enabling a systematic examination of patterns within the collected data. This approach facilitates identifying and interpreting key themes regarding the embodiment of Ubuntu in fostering empathy and compassion in social work practice. The thematic analysis proceeds through several stages: initial data familiarization, systematic coding of relevant information, theme development and refinement, pattern analysis across different data sources, and integration of theoretical and practical findings. This methodological approach ensured a balanced analysis by combining philosophical understanding with practical applications in social work settings.

Integrating Ubuntu principles with social work practices provided a comprehensive picture of the opportunities and challenges in fostering empathy and compassion through an African philosophical lens. The methodology's design specifically addressed the need to understand the theoretical foundations of Ubuntu philosophy and its practical application in fostering empathy and compassion in social work practice. It further enabled the study to contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge while providing practical insights for social work education and practice.

Findings and discussion

Table 1: Study themes, sub-themes and explanation

Themes	Subthemes	Description
Theme 1: Understanding Ubuntu Philosophy and its Core Values in Social work		Ubuntu emphasizes interconnectedness, mutual respect, and shared humanity, which are foundational to building compassionate and inclusive social work practices.
Theme 2: Ubuntu as a Framework for Empathy and Compassion		Ubuntu provides a framework for fostering empathy and compassion by focusing on the inherent dignity and worth of individuals and the importance of collective well-being in social work.
Theme 3: Culturally Competent Social Work Practice and Ubuntu	Sub-theme 1: Ubuntu and Cultural Awareness in the Practice of Social Work Sub-theme 2: Empowerment and Ubuntu in Social Work with Marginalized Groups	Incorporating Ubuntu into social work promotes cultural competence by emphasizing respect for diverse cultural backgrounds and understanding the unique social dynamics of clients.
Theme 4: Challenges in Embodying Ubuntu in Social Work Practice	Sub-theme 1: Bureaucracy and Institutional Barriers Sub-theme 2: Misunderstandings in Culture and Context	Incorporating Ubuntu into social work promotes cultural competence by emphasizing respect for diverse cultural backgrounds and understanding the unique social dynamics of clients.
Theme 5: Impact of Ubuntu on Client Outcomes		Ubuntu-driven approaches in social work have been shown to positively impact client outcomes by fostering a sense of community, belonging, and empowerment in individuals and families.
Theme 6: Ubuntu in Global Social Work Practice		Ubuntu's principles of shared humanity and collective responsibility offer valuable insights for global social work practice, fostering solidarity and effective interventions across different cultural contexts.

Theme 1: Understanding Ubuntu Philosophy and its Core Values in Social Work

Ubuntu, a concept profoundly established in Southern Africa, is centred on the premise that "I am because we are," underlining the interdependence of all people and the value of community (Munyama, 2020). The key values of Ubuntu include mutual respect, shared humanity, community responsibility, and a stress on communal well-being over individual interests (Kamwangamalu, 2014). People can only be fully understood in the context of their interactions with others and the community in which they live, according to Ubuntu's emphasis on relationality. This fundamental principle is in perfect harmony with social work's objectives, which aim to advance social justice, human dignity, and people's overall well-being (Tshwete, 2019). According to Khoza (2013), Ubuntu offers an alternative worldview that supports the holistic, people-centred approach of social work, where practitioners are encouraged to engage with clients in a way that honours their humanity and context. It does this by challenging the individualistic mindset that is frequently found in Western frameworks and placing a higher priority on collective support and solidarity, positioning the individual as inseparable from the collective social environment (Bedi, & Kumari, 2015).

Ubuntu also emphasizes empathy, kindness, and understanding values that are directly relevant to the practice of social work. Ubuntu encourages its adherents to establish a profound emotional connection with others, acknowledging their inherent dignity and worth regardless of their circumstances (Mokwena, 2017). This focus on empathy, according to Tshiwula (2018), increases the sense of camaraderie between social workers and clients, facilitating a better comprehension of the client's needs, challenges, and strengths. Through Ubuntu, social workers

engage in practices that promote active listening, respectful communication, and emotional support, which are key aspects in creating trust and fostering lasting relationships (Van Der Walt, 2016). Ubuntu's call for relational healing offers a useful framework for social workers who want to empower and support their clients in their communities as social work practice increasingly attends to the complex social and emotional needs of diverse populations (Gumede, 2015). Ubuntu offers social work a strong ethical and philosophical foundation, but it also calls for a careful balancing act between personal freedom and group accountability. According to Ngubane (2016), Ubuntu urges social workers to see their clients as a part of a network of relationships that encompasses their families, communities, and society collectively, rather than as individuals (Mawere, 2014).

This interconnected view it helps social workers understand the multiple layers of influence affecting a client's life, from social networks to societal structures. Yet, this emphasis on community responsibility sometimes conflict with the individual-focused systems present in modern social work practice, which often operates within frameworks prioritizing autonomy and personal choice (Smit, 2018). Ijeoma (2017) highlights that incorporating Ubuntu into social work practice necessitate a mental adjustment that puts the welfare of the group above individualism, pushing practitioners to use more cooperative, community-focused therapeutic techniques.

Theme 2: Ubuntu as a Framework for Empathy and Compassion

In social work practice, the Ubuntu philosophy offers a profound framework for cultivating empathy and compassion because of its emphasis on interconnectedness and collective humanity. As Bhana (2020) argues, Ubuntu fosters a sense of collective responsibility by helping people understand how their lives and well-being are inextricably intertwined with those of others. In social work, this perspective encourages practitioners to approach clients not as isolated individuals but as part of a broader community and social fabric. Daniels (2021) stresses that the practice of Ubuntu cultivates emotional intelligence, enabling social workers to relate to the challenges of clients with empathy, understanding, and respect. By embracing Ubuntu, social workers can more successfully engage with clients, responding to their emotional and psychological needs with compassion (Dube, 2020). This relational approach enhances the social worker-client relationship, allowing for more meaningful interventions that honour the client's dignity and humanity (Mkhize, 2022).

Ubuntu offers social workers a framework for approaching their job with cultural humility and a profound regard for a range of experiences, in addition to encouraging emotional relationships. Moletsane (2021) examines how Ubuntu empowers social workers to recognize the complexity of their clients' lived realities and comprehend them within their social and cultural contexts. This is especially important in cross-cultural contexts where cultural biases or misunderstandings can occasionally impede empathy and compassion (Nkomo, 2020). Social workers who embrace Ubuntu are better able to overcome cultural differences and build therapeutic relationships based on mutual respect and trust. According to Pooe (2022), Ubuntu's emphasis on empathy and respect for one another allows social workers to work with clients from oppressed or marginalized backgrounds in ways that are both empowering and sensitive, moving away from a purely individualistic model and toward one that embraces collective well-being and communal healing.

Theme 3: Culturally Competent Social Work Practice and Ubuntu

The foundation of culturally competent social work practice is the capacity to comprehend, value, and function well in the cultural contexts of various populations (Smit, 2021). With its focus on interconnectedness, respect for one another, and communal values, Ubuntu provides a strong framework for improving social workers' cultural competency. Kamwangamalu (2014) asserts that Ubuntu encourages social workers to see their clients as part of a broader cultural and community context rather than in a vacuum. This is especially true in South Africa and other African countries where people's identities and experiences are greatly influenced by cultural diversity (Steyn, 2020). Social workers who embody Ubuntu in their practice are more to engage clients with respect for their cultural heritage and values, thereby promoting a more effective and empathetic approach to intervention (Zulu, 2023). In this way, Ubuntu is a useful instrument for fostering cultural competency and understanding in the social work field rather than just a philosophical idea.

Sub-theme 1: Ubuntu and Cultural Awareness in the Practice of Social Work

Ubuntu encourages practitioners to approach clients with an open mind, free from prejudice and preconceived preconceptions, to foster cultural awareness. According to Tshiwula (2020), Ubuntu pushes social workers to actively hear their clients' distinct experiences and acknowledge the significance of cultural influences on how they perceive the world. By living up to Ubuntu, social workers recognize the rich diversity seen in communities and recognize that cultural differences are not barriers but rather important factors that shape how individuals live their

lives (Smit, 2021). As social workers gain an understanding of the intricacies of cultural identity, their interactions become more sympathetic and caring. Additionally, Khoza (2013) emphasizes that Ubuntu mandates that practitioners interact with clients in a way that honours their dignity, guaranteeing that social work interventions are sensitive to the client's needs and suitable for their culture. Consequently, Ubuntu improves the social worker's capacity to collaborate with people from a variety of backgrounds, building more solid, trustworthy connections (Nkomo, 2020).

Sub-theme 2: Empowerment and Ubuntu in Social Work with Marginalized Groups

Ubuntu supports marginalized communities' empowerment in addition to fostering cultural awareness. Ngubane (2021) argues that Ubuntu requires social workers to comprehend how people, especially those who have experienced marginalization or oppression, are interconnected within communities. Social workers engage clients in ways that empower them to advocate for their needs and express their rights since the idea highlights that a person's identity is defined by their relationships with others (Steyn, 2020). This empowerment is essential to Ubuntu's function in promoting compassion and empathy in social work because it motivates professionals to assist clients in realizing their own potential and intrinsic value (Tshwete, 2021).

Munyama (2020) argue that social workers oppose oppressive structures and cooperate with underprivileged groups to advance social justice by taking an Ubuntu-informed stance. Thus, ubuntu becomes a tool for encouraging resilience and self-determination among people who are most vulnerable, in addition to providing compassionate and sympathetic care. Ubuntu enhances social work practice by emphasizing cultural sensitivity and empowerment, guaranteeing that interventions are transformative and respectful. Ubuntu provides a fundamental framework for social work practice that is culturally sensitive and consistent with social work's dedication to social justice, empathy, and compassion (Tshiwula, 2020). Deeper, more lasting connections with clients are fostered by Ubuntu, which assists social workers in navigating the challenges of dealing with different populations by promoting cultural sensitivity and community empowerment (Van Der Walt, 2021). Social workers' and clients' emotional health and the efficacy of therapies are both improved when Ubuntu is embodied in their work.

Theme 4: Challenges in Embodying Ubuntu in Social Work Practice

Practicing social work with embodying the Ubuntu principle might be difficult at times, especially when Western social work models are prevalent (Nkomo, 2020). The conflict between Ubuntu's collectivist ideals and individualistic Western social work models is one of the main challenges. Ubuntu places a strong emphasis on relationality, interdependence, and communal responsibility, viewing the welfare of the individual as inextricably linked to that of the community (Biko, 2019). On the other hand, individual autonomy, self-determination, and personal rights are given priority in many contemporary social work methods, particularly in Western contexts (Ngubane, 2021).

Due to institutional frameworks that prioritize speed and customized interventions over community-based solutions, social workers find it challenging to completely incorporate Ubuntu into their practice because of this tension. According to Smit (2021) social workers who have received training in Western approaches find it difficult to apply Ubuntu's collective ethos, which frequently results in the separation of personal needs from broader community dynamics (Munyama, 2022). This mismatch between individualistic social work methods and Ubuntu results in a disjointed approach to client care that is less successful in cultivating the compassion and empathy that Ubuntu encourages (Daniels, 2021).

Sub-theme 1: Bureaucracy and Institutional Barriers

The institutional and bureaucratic limitations in social work practice are a major obstacle to living up to Ubuntu. It can be challenging to implement the relational, client-centred approaches that Ubuntu promotes since social work systems frequently function under strict regulations, standardized procedures, and time constraints that favour quantifiable results (Gade, 2020). According to Bhana (2020), Ubuntu's focus on empathy and relational care necessitates a more adaptable, customized strategy, which frequently conflicts with institutional demands for productivity and efficiency. Oftentimes, social workers follow strict guidelines, which might hinder their capacity to interact intimately with clients and offer the kind of compassionate care that Ubuntu promotes (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, 2020). Additionally, the fast-paced nature of social work result in emotional burnout, especially when social workers are expected to handle many cases or meet specific targets (Molefe, 2021). This leaves little time for reflective practice, which is necessary to embody Ubuntu's principles of empathy and community healing (Munyama, 2020). As a result, whereas Ubuntu promotes profound empathy and connection,

the organizational design of many social work settings frequently prevents these ideals from being fully incorporated into practice.

Sub-theme 2: Misunderstandings in Culture and Context

The possibility of contextual and cultural misinterpretations is another difficulty in implementing Ubuntu in social work practice, particularly when working in cross-cultural or multicultural environments (Gergen et al, 2020). Ubuntu's tenets are not always understood by clients from diverse cultural backgrounds or may be misunderstood by social workers who are not familiar with its philosophical foundations because it is rooted in African cultural contexts (Pato, 2022). Social workers from Western backgrounds find it challenging to interact with Ubuntu's communal principles, particularly if they are used to taking an individualistic stance on social issues (Tshiwula, 2018). The social worker may not completely understand the cultural importance of Ubuntu's emphasis on community well-being, which might make it more difficult for them to build sympathetic, caring connections with their clients (Gade, 2020). Potential conflicts or a lack of understanding between social workers and clients arise from social workers' inability to implement Ubuntu in heterogeneous settings in a way that is both contextually relevant and culturally sensitive (Mkhize, 2022).

Theme 5: Impact of Ubuntu on Client Outcomes

Social work practice that embodies the Ubuntu ideology consist of greater impact on client outcomes, especially when it comes to promoting empathy, compassion, and general well-being (Babbie, & Mouton, 2023). Ubuntu places a strong emphasis on community and the interdependence of all individuals, which is quite like the relational and holistic approach that social work aims to use in its interventions. When social workers adopt the tenets of Ubuntu, they interact with clients as essential members of a larger community and relational network rather than as isolated individuals (Zulu, 2023). Because clients frequently feel heard, respected, and understood in the context of their social settings, this viewpoint results in interventions that are more lasting and effective. Ubuntu's emphasis on community enables social workers to empower clients to create and fortify social networks in addition to attending to their urgent needs, which fosters resilience and long-term healing (Chambers, 2022). According to Bhana (2020), Ubuntu also lays the groundwork for practitioners to develop sympathetic, caring connections that improve the emotional and mental health of their clients.

When social workers include Ubuntu into their work, their clients experience a higher feeling of empowerment, enhanced trust, and increased involvement in the therapeutic process (Dube, & Mthembu, 2021). Ubuntu encourages a cooperative relationship between social workers and clients by highlighting respect for one another and shared accountability in problem-solving (Mkhize, 2022). Since clients feel more invested in their own recovery and decision-making, this partnership dynamic improves client happiness and results. Tshiwula (2020) also emphasizes how Ubuntu's emphasis on empathy and community support improves social workers' capacity to react to the needs of marginalized groups in a sensitive manner. Social workers who practice Ubuntu assist clients in overcoming present obstacles as well as creating coping mechanisms and support networks for future challenges by attending to both individual and group needs (Eze & Ogbu, 2020).

Theme 6: Ubuntu in Global Social Work Practice

The Southern African ideology of ubuntu, places a strong emphasis on community, compassion, connectivity, and shared humanity, provides insightful guidance for social work practice worldwide (Jones & Ngubane, 2023). Ubuntu has its roots in the principle "I am because we are," as it emphasizes the connection between community and individual well-being. In a world where cross-border connectivity is becoming more and more significant, this idea is extremely helpful in global social work by fostering empathy, solidarity, and cultural competency (Kgatle & Moeti, 2021). By advocating for a community approach to social challenges that places a higher priority on relationality and mutual respect, the fundamental ideas of Ubuntu challenge the Western individualistic approach, which frequently concentrates on personal autonomy and self-reliance (Lindiwe & Manase, 2022). Through the integration of Ubuntu, global social workers see their clients as part of a broader social and communal fabric rather than as separate individuals. This promotes greater understanding and more long-lasting, community-based solutions to challenging social issues (Gade, 2020).

Furthermore, it has the potential to revolutionize how social workers interact with oppressed and underprivileged groups, which is a crucial component of Ubuntu in global social work practice (Mabunda & Moosa, 2021). Ubuntu offers a framework for tackling social justice and inequality from an all-encompassing viewpoint because of its emphasis on compassion, decency, and respect for one another. In order to promote more inclusive, context-sensitive methods of practice, it challenges social workers to think about the larger sociopolitical

and cultural situations in which their clients live (Bebe & Gwandure, 2023). According to Jones & Mthembu (2022), social workers are inspired to participate in community organizing and advocacy by Ubuntu's emphasis on collective well-being, which addresses systemic injustices and empowers clients via relational support. Ubuntu provides a framework that is inclusive and culturally competent, which enables practitioners to interact meaningfully with clients from diverse backgrounds in global social work, where they frequently face a range of cultural norms and experiences. This result in better client outcomes since Ubuntu places a high value on building cooperative, trusting relationships that promote resilience and empowerment over the long run (Kamwendo & Khumalo, 2020).

Nonetheless, there are certain difficulties in incorporating Ubuntu into social work practice worldwide. Despite Ubuntu's strong communal ideals in African and collectivist civilizations, its implementation in individualistic societies may encounter opposition (Mchunu & Nel, 2021). It is difficult for social workers in Western settings, where autonomy and individualism are strongly prized, to completely embrace Ubuntu's relational ethos, particularly in settings that place a premium on efficiency, objectivity, and standardized interventions (Bhana, 2020). Furthermore, Zulu (2023) points out that cultural gaps between African and Western viewpoints on social work occasionally result in misinterpretations of Ubuntu's ideals, especially when cross-cultural encounters are involved.

Discussion

The study of the Ubuntu philosophy and its fundamental principles has revealed its enormous potential to revolutionize social work practice in a variety of settings. Ubuntu, which is based on the idea that "I am because we are," prizes community duty, connectivity, and well-being over individualism. The fundamental principles of Ubuntu: compassion, empathy, respect, and humanity, form the basis of a social work practice that encourages more in-depth, caring interactions with clients. Acknowledging that social work solutions address both personal and community issues, Ubuntu urges social workers to interact with their communities in addition to their individual clients. Ubuntu, as a framework for empathy and compassion, emphasized the value of shared humanity and mutual respect, transforming the social worker-client connection. A holistic approach is encouraged by social work practice based on Ubuntu, where social workers acknowledge the interdependence of their clients' circumstances and lives, building stronger, more cooperative connections.

The study revealed that Ubuntu is included into social work practice, social workers are better equipped to provide compassionate, culturally aware treatment that promotes empowerment and healing and putting Ubuntu into practice in social work can be difficult, especially in settings where Western social work models dominate as they prioritize efficiency, individualism, and standardized interventions. Ubuntu's emphasis on relational and community-centred activities is frequently undermined by institutional limitations, including bureaucratic procedures, time limits, and huge caseloads.

Ubuntu's effect on client results is very remarkable. Adopting Ubuntu values helps social workers, and their clients develop closer, more trustworthy bonds that encourage empowerment, emotional healing, and client involvement. To promote long-term resilience and community development, social workers are encouraged by Ubuntu's emphasis on collective well-being to see their clients as members of a wider community rather than as isolated individuals. Furthermore, the focus Ubuntu places on solidarity and interconnection offers a chance to address social justice issues more broadly in the context of global social work practice. While adjusting Ubuntu to various cultural contexts might be difficult, its increasing appreciation in international social work points to its ability to heal divisions, improve cultural competency, and foster empathy internationally.

Conclusion

The application of the Ubuntu philosophy to social work practice is a viable avenue for fostering compassion, understanding, and cultural competency in ways that respect the interdependence of humans and communities. The study findings shown that through the adoption of Ubuntu's fundamental principles, social workers practice holistic, community-based work that empowers clients, advances social justice, and improves long-term health. The use of Ubuntu in social work education, training, and practice assist lessens the difficulties caused by institutional hurdles, cultural misunderstandings, and conflicting professional perspectives. Ubuntu offers a timeless, revolutionary framework that can direct practitioners toward more moral, inclusive, and successful social work interventions as global social work continues to develop. Clients and communities around the world will probably benefit from more long-lasting and culturally appropriate solutions because of the continued incorporation of Ubuntu into social work practice.

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