

**Perceptions of the Vhavenda Regarding the Significance
of IKS Rituals and Customs in Women's Health:
"The Other Side of The Coin"**

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ABSTRACT The paper aimed to explore and describe the perceptions of the Vhavenda people regarding the significance of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) rituals and customs in promoting Women's Health. Indigenous knowledge should be given a platform to add to our understanding of the world and advance philosophies that inform research approaches and interventions that sustain and acknowledge the role played by IKS in promoting women's health. The HIV epidemic, disproportionately affecting sub-Saharan African women and their families, has put an academic spotlight on African beliefs systems and IKS. Most of the academic studies are based on western approaches, which are built predominantly around individualistic western beliefs and cultures that perceives IKS as the 'other' form of knowledge that can pose a threat to African women's health. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted. In depth interviews were held with key informants who were knowledgeable about Vhavenda cultures. The findings demonstrate that beliefs about polygamy, widow inheritance and initiation schools are more complicated as participants perceived these customs as having benefits and risks to women's health. The paper recommends adopting the African philosophy of ubuntu to assist in harmonizing the Vhavenda IKS to assist in addressing women's health challenges.