

# Reflective Minds: A Bibliographic Review of Ancestral Practices in the Worldview of Amerindian Peoples toward the Healing of the Spirit\*

[English version]

Mentes reflexivas: revisión bibliográfica sobre prácticas ancestrales en la cosmovisión de los pueblos amerindios hacia la sanación del espíritu

Mentes reflexivas: uma revisão da literatura sobre práticas ancestrais na cosmovisão dos povos ameríndios para a cura do espírito

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**Bairon Jaramillo Valencia\*\***

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6471-3139>

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**Colombia**

**Javier Augusto Lombo González\*\*\***

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5339-2162>

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\*\* PhD in Socio-education. Institución Universitaria Pascual Bravo. Medellín Colombia. Email: bairon.jaramillo@pascualbravo.edu.co

\*\*\* Master in Education. Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO). Medellín Colombia. Email: javier.lombo@Uniminuto.edu

## Abstract

**Objective:** To expose central aspects of ancestral practices and cosmovision as explanations for spiritual healing and mental balance in the Amerindian population. This is based on the guiding principle that each language, practice, and conception of life embodies the unique cultural wisdom of a people and ancestral knowledge, which are transformed through collective narratives in ancestral healing events. **Methodology:** A documentary review is used through a qualitative approach; and, in turn, the tracking is framed in indexed journals and academically validated books by means of the Boolean operators AND, NOT and OR. The categorical axes that guide the tracking are “Ancestral Practices,” “Cosmovision,” and “Mental Health,” and these words are related to criteria and content analysis. **Results and Conclusions:** It is understood that the use of language is substantial in effectively achieving desires for healing, restoration of well-being, and quality of life in the individual. Likewise, ancestral practices, ancestral elements, spiritual notions, and the healing of the spirit play a significant role in the balance of humanity.

**Keywords:** ancestral practices; language; cosmovision; mental health.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** exponer aspectos centrales de las prácticas ancestrales y cosmovisión como explicaciones de la sanación espiritual y equilibrio mental en población amerindia, partiendo del principio rector que cada lengua, práctica y concepción de la vida encarna la sabiduría cultural única de un pueblo y los conocimientos ancestrales; los cuales se transforman a través de las narraciones colectivas en eventos ancestrales de sanación. **Metodología:** se emplea una revisión documental a través de un enfoque cualitativo; y, a su vez, el rastreo se encuadra en revistas indexadas y libros validados académicamente por medio de los operadores Booleanos AND, NOT y OR. Los ejes categoriales que guían el rastreo son ‘Prácticas Ancestrales’, ‘Cosmovisión’ y ‘Salud Mental’, y dichos vocablos se relacionan con análisis de criterio y contenido. **Resultados y conclusiones:** se comprende que el uso del lenguaje es sustancial en la consecución efectiva de los deseos de curación, restauración del bienestar y calidad de vida en el individuo; asimismo, se reivindican las prácticas ancestrales, los elementos ancestrales, las nociones espirituales y la sanación del espíritu en el equilibrio del hombre.

**Palabras clave:** prácticas ancestrales; lenguaje; cosmovisión; salud mental.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** expor os aspectos centrais das práticas ancestrais e da cosmovisão como explicações para a cura espiritual e o equilíbrio mental nas populações ameríndias, com base no princípio orientador de que cada idioma, prática e concepção de vida incorpora a sabedoria cultural única de um povo e o conhecimento ancestral, que são transformados por meio de narrativas coletivas em eventos de cura ancestral. **Metodologia:** é utilizada uma revisão documental por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa; e, por sua vez, a busca é enquadrada em periódicos indexados e livros validados academicamente por meio dos operadores booleanos AND, NOT e OR. Os eixos categóricos que orientam a pesquisa são "Práticas Ancestrais", "Cosmovisão" e "Saúde Mental", e essas palavras estão relacionadas aos critérios e à análise de conteúdo. **Resultados e conclusões:** entende-se que o uso da linguagem é substancial para a realização efetiva dos desejos de cura, restauração do bem-estar e qualidade de vida do indivíduo; práticas ancestrais, elementos ancestrais, noções espirituais e a cura do espírito no equilíbrio do homem também são justificados.

**Palavras chave:** práticas ancestrais; linguagem; visão de mundo; saúde mental.

## Introduction

One of the essential elements underlying the understanding of spiritual knowledge and healing is woven through the deities known at different moments of a god's birth. Undoubtedly, one of the clearest examples is Mother Earth, *the Pachamama*, who provides natural elements to ancestral physicians for healing and delivers tools of the same nature to combat mental discomfort or spiritual weakness.

In relation to the above, it's important to note that indigenous peoples, constituting 5% of the world's population, have been victims of social inequities and marginalization due to policies jeopardizing their ancestral roots and knowledge, which in turn affects their mental health. Losing their sense of identity and cohesion as an aboriginal community, this problem results in spiritual instability and undermines their sense of life. In Latin America, this population has gained significant interest in being addressed and recognized through an intercultural approach. This approach promotes and celebrates their ancestral practices rooted in their cosmogony (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2014).

The manifestations, knowledge, and behaviors around the epistemology and etiology assigned by Amerindians to diseases are associated with spirituality from a psychological point of view. This allows recognizing that indigenous peoples possess a valuable accumulation of practices and expertise related to the body. All of the above is crucial for understanding social interactions within their communities, coexistence with nature, and their relationships with the deities. In this sense, praxis is based on animals, plants, spiritual therapies, and chants. These elements represent stability and balance, ensuring the well-being of its members. Ancestral traditions are rooted in the ideology of harmony and the integrity of the triad: body, mind, and Mother Earth.

In native communities one of the most relevant components in the attainment of mental health is "spirituality," understood as "a set of embodied practices, with its correlate of shared community presences, in which the collective identity of the peoples is expressed" (Ochoa, 2019, p. 158). From a cosmic vision that connects all beings in the universe, both human and non-human, there arises the resurgence and emergence of Mother Earth and those who inhabit her. This serves as a living metaphor that fosters meaning and existence. In this regard, Torregrosa (2016) suggests that "spirituality" represents the highest level of being, connecting the individual with themselves and those around them. This definition is closely related to logotherapy, which is a humanistic psychological approach that focuses on people's will to find meaning. In short, how one interprets

and feels their life involves “developing and making people participants and responsible for their human potential, thus assuming responsibility for themselves, others, and life” (Torregrosa, 2016, pp. 153-154). Indigenous people achieve this by attaining a spiritual life in harmony with their cosmovision.

Language plays a crucial role in traditional medicine as many of the methods practiced by ancestral physicians involve communication and energetic connection with spiritual beings, as well as reading and learning through dreams. Practices involving the creation of rituals, which, —through the oral richness of Indo-American peoples and the mystical nexus of their traditions and cultural roots— discover in words and praise the power of interconnection with the deities. This process serves as a source of relief for the soul. Therefore, the rite serves as a source of wisdom and a means of direct communication with the cosmic creator of life. This enables the individual to undergo a process of introspection, aligning their emotions with the supreme entity that governs their existence (Plevin, 2020). Likewise:

In contrast to modern Western cosmologies that conceive of a single nature and multiple cultures, Amerindian thought embraces multi-naturalistic cosmologies: All subjects, including animals, plants, rivers, stars, etc., possess consciousness and a spiritual dimension, but they inhabit different bodies and have different natures. (Delgado, 2022, p. 400).

The struggle between good and evil, as in other cultures, is detailed in the Amerindian peoples. An antithesis that:

Also takes place on the soul or spiritual plane with the presence of the *owirúame* and the *sukurúame*, the healer and the sorcerer. In the collective imagination, they enter into tension, positioning themselves in favor of or against one side or the other. (Acuña, 2021, p. 470).

In keeping with this eschatological vision, “it is valid to point out that humanism in the misnamed New Continent was also nourished by the spiritual production of many other great Amerindian societies —a heritage collected in other manuscripts and architectural finds” (Pérez, 2019, p. 16).

## Methodology

The methodological process of this study is based on the so-called “documentary review,” which emphasizes the search and recording of information to support ongoing research (*Ancestral practices and cosmovision as explanations of spiritual healing and mental balance*). Consequently, all the material found becomes a referential source for the research *per se*, pointing to the three major categorical axes that guide the systematization: ancestral practices, cosmovision, and spirit healing. Additionally, the qualitative perspective is the one selected for analyzing the information as it is being systematized. In this documentary review, the authors also reflect on the facts pertaining to spirit and mental health. Likewise, the qualitative approach allows inquiries with better sensitivity toward the individual and their conception of existence and the surrounding world (Santiago, 2018).

Regarding the selection criteria taken into account for the dynamics of the search for scientifically validated texts, during the entire tracking phase, certain filtering parameters are established to select sources considered relevant in the construction of this review article. All this material has been found in the following databases: Scopus, Latindex, Pubindex, Zotero, Scielo, EBSCO, Redalyc, and PubMed.

Regarding the criteria of validity, rejection, and reliability, a strategic selection is made to address the redundancy arising from the topics of healing, cosmovision, and medicine. Many of the suggestions provided are discarded because the vocabulary is broad and some findings are framed within the rigid sciences and Western methods of psychological and biological treatments.

In terms of the selection criteria, priority is given to texts published in the last five years, with exceptions made for authors, sources, or titles of fundamental significance in the topics being studied. Regarding exclusion criteria, the authors avoid selecting texts from strictly scientific or rigid perspectives on the subject of healing and the treatment of attitudinal conditions in humans through ancestral practices. Similarly, texts from databases lacking institutional validation and from non-indexed journals are excluded.

Lastly, emphasizing that search engines recognizing logical Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) are used to define affiliations or exclusions during digital searches is important. Efficiency in the search is achieved through the conceptual combinations used with the operators.

Using the descriptors, a set of questions is generated to guide the search and selection of findings in the literature review. Similarly, questioning is carried out using both first and second-level questions, addressing conceptual (what/which) and procedural aspects (how).

## Development and Discussion

### Ancestral Practices: Rites, Ceremonies and Ethnic Medicine

#### Q1. What Does the Expression “Ancestral Practices” Refer to?

“Ancestral practices” refers to the wide range of knowledge developed within ancient cultures, which holds significant importance in maintaining and treating both physical and psychological conditions within indigenous communities. This knowledge is transmitted through oral tradition and is profoundly influenced by social and historical contexts, aligning with the unique worldview of the specific community to which it belongs. As such, “ancestral practices represent a significant heritage for all of humanity. Their value extends far beyond the originating people or community, making them a universal resource for humankind” (Betancourt et al., 2020, p. 6). All of these elements constitute a collective heritage, deeply revered through the lens of their cosmology, where the forces of nature and the deities that dwell within it govern the entirety of their symbolic universe. This sacred connection serves to promote and safeguard the well-being of their community.

As mentioned by Choi et al. In 2023, “ancestral knowledge” was defined as a body of practical knowledge and beliefs acquired and developed by indigenous inhabitants through observation and custom, shaped by the distinct characteristics and conditions of their context. This knowledge is essential for preserving all facets of their identity. In parallel, the World Health Organization (2022) defines ancestral medicine as the set of health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs based on plants, animals, and/or minerals, as well as physical, mental, and spiritual therapies. Its primary objective is to provide balance and promote wellness. Similarly, the expertise of their knowledge encompasses concepts, myths, and practices related to the physical, mental, or social imbalances within a community. These elements serve to explain the etiology, nosology, and diagnostic procedures, which, in turn, guide curative approaches aimed at recovery and achieving health (Laforgue et al., 2022).

The practices employed within Aboriginal communities are strongly influenced by their cultural and symbolic vision. Likewise, the approach varies depending on the type of disease to be treated, as the treatment of a physical ailment differs from that of a soul-related condition. In this particular context, certain ethnic groups employ various practices encompassing stones, medicinal plants, and ceremonial rites, among others. In contrast to alternative practices

wherein “cleansings” are conducted in places imbued with magical and spiritual significance aligning with the respective worldview of the practitioners (Jongsma et al., 2021).

In a broad sense, these practices are perceived as mechanisms through which the well-being of a member within the ethnic community is rejuvenated, thereby alleviating instability arising from distress. This process is attainable through the holistic understanding of the individual and is intricately interwoven with the notion of a human being who is ruled and influenced by a complex interplay of social, historical, cultural, political, economic and familial environmental factors.

Consistent with the aforementioned perspective, Urraca et al. (2021) conducted a study involving the participation of indigenous people from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. Their findings revealed that among the Kankuamo, the etiological notion of disease is attributed to the intervention of an evil spirit, whereas for the Kogi, Arhuaco, and Wiwa, it is attributed to a loss of homeostasis. In other words, the cause is the internal imbalance of the psyche stemming from a disharmony between needs and satisfaction, as well as between the indigenous and the land. The land, in this context, provides sustenance in terms of nourishment, as well as a foundation for life itself. The indigenous person’s existence is intimately contingent on their profound connection with the land, while their detachment from it can serve as a significant catalyst for the onset of disease (Jongsma et al., 2021).

## Q2. What Does “Healing” Mean in Spiritual Medicine?

In the realm of Western medicine, clinical professionals including physicians, nurses, paramedics, and specialists in the various branches of biological knowledge, and psychologists responsible for mental health, assume specific roles in the treatment and recovery of patients. Within the Amerindian communities, a similar organizational structure prevails, marked by the presence of traditional indigenous practitioners, which include *sobanderos*, midwives, healers, pray-workers and individuals acting as traditional doctors, a term often interchangeable with shamans in other cultural contexts. Shamans demonstrate greater expertise in the management of disease, owing to their profound ancestral wisdom, enhanced by the energies emanating from Mother Earth. Furthermore, their spiritual mastery enables them to effectively channel the negativity directed toward the community and the spirit of each inhabitant.

Traditional healers and *rezanderos* stand as the sole agents within the indigenous reserves possessing the acumen to address psychological and spiritual conditions. They are guided by the ancestral knowledge bestowed by the gods



and divinities, drawing upon the essential elements requisite for the application of specific treatments tailored to particular ailments. As an Illustration, in southern Colombia, certain indigenous tribes use *Yagé* as the sole plant for medical procedures (Freire & Macías, 2021).

To this respect, individuals who ingest the constituents of the plant undergo hallucinogenic experiences, facilitating the recognition of the psychic ailment affecting them.

In northern Peru, traditional physicians use medicinal plants and various objects in the treatment of mental, neurological, and psychosomatic disorders. Its efficacy has been proven within the Peruvian indigenous populations, stemming from the cultural and doctrinal legacy inherited from their ancestors. This is achieved with the incorporation of a wide variety of objects possessing power, such as stones, sticks, shells, pre-Hispanic ceramics and so on. In many cases, the treatment entails the involvement of the patient in a cleansing or “purification” ceremony. This treatment can range from a relatively simple treatment with perfumes and holy water to more intricate and prolonged all-night ceremonies centered around the healer’s altar (Bussmann & Sharon, 2016).

The origin of medicinal plants is believed to reside in spirits situated within another dimension, accessible solely by shamans or traditional physicians. However, the use of these plants will depend on the approval bestowed to the shaman (Garzón, 2016). This can be achieved through the chants and invocations uttered during the ritual. By virtue of this association with the collective memory and history of people, the plant entails profound significance. Its mystical connotations along with its inherent application to the healing process, render it a powerful tool for those connoisseurs of ancestral knowledge.

According to Carvajal (2015), ancestral practices establish a close connection between Mother Earth, or *Pachamama*, and health through the use of cosmogonic ancestral knowledge. This knowledge is intricately associated with social well-being, the adaptation of territory, and the judicious use of resources within indigenous reserves.

The processes, grounded in the legitimizing expressions of ancient expertise, derive their syntactic foundations from the beliefs, traditions, and customs of Indo-American ideology which establish cultural and cosmic cohesion, fostering sense of life. This highlights the power embedded in the uttered words as a formative and impactful tool in the treatment of mental illnesses. Furthermore, this tool facilitates the preservation and fortification of a fundamental triad subject, nature, and community for the pursuit of well-being among diverse indigenous groups across the Americas (Daza & Valverde, 2017).

According to Carvajal (2015), the essence of human beings, spanning from their ancestors to the present, resides in spiritual experience. This psychological

journey fosters an understanding of oneself during active participation in the healing process. They find joy in spiritual chants, and the rituals associated with social events held in the ancestral *bohíos*, which are sacred places for the indigenous community.

### **Q3. Is There any Relationship between Western Medicine and Ancestral Medicine?**

The pivotal aspect shared by both ancestral medicine and psychology revolves around the equilibrium of individuals. This connection with the environment or functionality is essentially the harmonious balance between individuals and nature. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022), health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In other words, both psychology and ancestral knowledge emphasize the importance of physical, mental, and social factors in identifying emotional alterations in the subject (Bendixen, 2019).

Although ancestral and Western medicine hold distinct epistemological, ontological, and methodological positions, they both acknowledge a similar concept of “healing” or “recovery.” Hence, the etiology of a mental disease could be attributed to supernatural events, such as witchcraft and spiritism, as well as by psychological factors like anxiety, stress, and relationship problems, among others.

While Western knowledge is essential for mental health, the foundations of cultural manifestations transmitted by *taitas* are rooted in the traditions of indigenous communities. *Taitas* possess profound wisdom and play an important role in transmitting spiritual knowledge and facilitating healing within the cosmovision. According to Jaramillo and Betancur (2019), for Western medicine the significance of the individual who falls ill lies primarily in their role as the host of the disease within their body, rather than as an individual inscribed within a specific referential framework. However, for ancestral medicine, the individual examination is approached through the lens of social reality and the epistemological conceptions are grounded in the praxis of psychological therapeutic processes. Therefore, indigenous communities do not disregard Western medicine, rather they express respect for it according to their culture and beliefs.

With regard to the mental factor, ancestral wisdom does not explicitly delineate the maturation of the spirit through distinct stages that all community members must undergo to attain the expertise to control it. In contrast, developmental psychology offers various theories to elucidate the process of cognitive, affective, and personality maturity of individuals. In this regard, the gap stemming

from the definition of humanity is not as profound as the divergence between scientific and non-scientific knowledge. In terms of Romo (2018):

For the indigenous Arawak, disease is not solely a pathophysiological dysfunction of the body, instead, it is deeply rooted and motivated by the disruption of the bio-spiritual balance that exists between the indigenous person and nature. (p. 44).

This disruption of this homeostasis is the principal underlying cause for the varied manifestations of death observed in both flora and fauna.

## **The role of Language in the Healing of the Spirit**

### **Q4. How Is the Influence of Languages and Their Variations Manifested in Ancestral Healing Processes?**

Indigenous languages transcend the harmonious structure of a communication system, encompassing a myriad of knowledge and expertise that has evolved over millennia. This point does not overlook culture as a fundamental factor in achieving or attaining a state of social identity and community formation. Culture serves as the cohesive force that intertwines scholarly preservation and free expression of the conceptual content embedded in linguistic and symbolic models (Cevallos, 2019).

Within this context, there exists relational meanings within communities, as their customs and beliefs shape their conduct and behavior. Therefore, when languages face the risk of extinction, so do indigenous peoples (Degawan, 2019).

Within indigenous communities, language reincarnates, among many of its functions, as a strategy for healing and recovery of wounds caused by social oppression and traumatic events originating from “civilized” societies, within the context of globalized and developing economies and social structures. These structures jeopardize their ways of life which are grounded in healing practices based on the use of narratives and symbolic tools that hold profound significance, and value within Amerindian cultures. As well as the rhetoric used as a tool for shaping a coherent sense of self, language plays a role in the presence of culturally identified feelings that individuals use to reaffirm their identity and establish their sense of existence. In this regard, Marquina et al. (2015) determine that “contemporary and salvific discourse serves, in practice, as a healing drama for

the production of spiritual and symbolic kinship during the recovery from mental health problems faced by Canadian Indian reserves” (p. 310).

In the context of semantic changes, that the struggle of aboriginal populations has given rise to a current of thought known as “pan-indigenism” is noteworthy. This ideological stance draws upon rituals, discursive sources, and indigenous cultural imagery as a healing tool. It places subtle importance on concepts derived from the narratives and sacred teachings of grandparents, particularly in relation to the ways of life, knowledge, and healing practices. These contribute to the identity and cultural roots of indigenous communities. This state is closely intertwined with mental health (Marquina et al., 2015).

The conception of health in the majority of indigenous territories is grounded in the belief in the unity of the human being with Mother Earth and the deities that dwell within her. This is manifested in indigenous people’s healing oratory, which formulates a terminology concerning the significance of indigenous spiritual life, their constant references to Mother Earth and the creator, as well as the importance of nature and respect for the land of their ancestors. “Language, notably, serves as a distinct, and constitutive element of indigenous identity. Language not only inhabits the worldview, but is also intricately linked to ethnicity, serving as a reflection of a distinct way of understanding and representing reality, unique to each ethnic group” (Osorio, 2017, p. 186).

Therefore, the healing process necessitates that the involved agents share common representative and discursive aspects pertaining to the etiology of the disease, as well as the components that contribute to the recovery of health. In summary, it is a communicative tradition with effective communication channels, wherein symbols uttered carry the validity, and support of the entire community.

#### **Q5. Can Language in Indian Tribes Have an Impact During the Healing Process?**

Everything addressed up to this point underscores the significance of language as a healing process within Native American communities. This begins with an examination of their own ideologies and ways of understanding the reality in which they are immersed. It is crucial to acknowledge that each culture or society contributes to a shared identity wherein individuals weave their personality and sense of existence, facilitated through social interaction. Highlighting the profound role that traditions and ancestral knowledge play in the aboriginal perception of health, which guides the adoption of treatments, particularly, those of a spiritual or psychological nature is crucial. In conclusion, a set of abstract concepts or attributes turned into symbols and meanings (words, gestures,

images, objects, and conceptions), configures the factor of social representation with the values and parameters of reality, a continuous hermeneutics, and social constructivism (Palomá & Delgado, 2021). Hawkes et al. (2020) establish that verbalization was a gift given by gods; therefore, it is sacred and impacts on reality. Likewise, in coca there is a ritual of oral verbalization, it is *rafue* (strong, power). Thus, *ra* (thing) is the container where power can be perceived, and *fue* (mouth) which receives the catalyst to establish the needed contacts: all action, all knowledge, all symbol.

The cultural and identity relationship of indigenous groups or communities is framed in the faith of their ancestral actions in the management and treatment of mental illnesses; this relationship between identity and culture creates a relationship between the *individual self* and the *social self*. This duality means well-being and equilibrium for indigenous communities, since insofar as the subject is bound to traditions, culture, and ways of community life, its being is claimed and finds the balance that becomes soul and physical (Muschalla et al., 2021). From language, peoples' health can be sustained efficiently as the loss of their knowledge turns into a denaturalization or disconnection with their roots, which for years has been a holistic health that they maintain among the world around them, exercising a double harmony (Vera et al., 2019). Thus, language is tradition, culture, territory, and everything that surrounds a people, because it allows them to acquire knowledge that levels their life with the cosmos. (Orozco et al., 2018).

For indigenous people in Santa Rosa de Huacaria, Peru, the ceremonial chants or *Icaro* —etymologically may come from the *Quechua* word *ikaray* that means to manipulate smoke in a healing way— are vocalizations of the master. According to the worldview, *Ícaro* is a tool of great therapeutic relevance for healers that generates a healing effect on its receptors. However, the co-dependence relationship between the healer and plants (harmonic relationship), as well as the mediating role of the *Ícaro*, as the header is understood as the channel through which the plant can exercise its healing power. Therefore, it is deduced that without the healer the plant could not exercise its power and the header without the plant could not do anything either; the action is made possible by the word. This is how the *Ícaro* becomes a way of merging this harmonic relationship; it acquires a power of connection between the soul and spirit of the healer, in symmetry with the knowledge and healing aspects that the mother plant provides. The *Ícaro* demands a high level of concentration, and in this way, the healer, in his ceremonial practice manages to generate balance for those who need it, through chants with symbolic and cultural representations for his listeners. In other words, it becomes a spiritual purification.

According to Jarry et al. (2019), words are abstract symbols, but signs materialize in the things they designate. Through words and signs a culture is being forged with several factors; it is understood as only one in which the self and the individual are part of a social context that learns through the oral tradition, cosmovision, customs, and traditions of their peoples; it is a catalyst for well-being and welfare. Thus, it is inferred that those who do not protect their traditions and reproduce them are condemned to lose their source of life, their sense of existence, their own identity, and, therefore, their mental health.

In short, it is seen how through *atavian* processes —owned by the Amerindians— a rich production of narratives and symbolic meanings is found in the language that meant healing. Its reaches are able to create equilibrium and spiritual liberation through stories, myths, rites, as well as convergent and complementary rhetorical forms with spiritual beings. This enables the ability to provide peace to everyone who believes and connects with them through the word that attracts power —the power of healing (Martínez, 2016). This connection —filled with mysticism and a cluster of beliefs and ideologies marked throughout the times and aimed at achieving well-being and welfare— reaffirms the sense of community, reconciliation, and linkage with the earth; it allows it to sprout in the universe (Vallejo & Quiroz, 2016).

#### **Q6. What Is the Relationship between Ancestral Language and the Psychic Processes of the Human Being?**

Through language, psychological disorders are identified. In ancestral rituals, the people express their psychic disturbances between the struggle of good and evil; it is embodied by ancient wisdom that would be in harmony with the human psyche. It is essential therefore to understand healing from ancestral practices to mental health care since indigenous communities do not ignore Western knowledge, which means psycho-ancestralism. The Mental Health Law in Colombia defines “mental health” as:

A dynamic state that is expressed in everyday life through behavior and interaction in such a way that individual and collective subjects can deploy their emotional, cognitive, and mental resources in daily life, to work, to establish meaningful relationships, and to contribute to the community. (Law 1616 de 2013, art. 3).

In this way, communities carry out their actions under the identity of their ancestral practices for the treatment and cure of mental illnesses in such a way that they interact with emotional, cognitive, and mental resources in healing

rituals. These states allow thinking from the cosmology and cosmological perspective of indigenous cultural identities; they are determinants for the interaction and construction of ancestral knowledge and the conceptualization of the psychological disorders or symptoms present in indigenous territories.

The Political Constitution of Colombia (1991) states that the nation “recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation” (Art. 7). This determines that multiple ethnic groups and peoples with the same number of cultural manifestations coexist in the national territory, which makes the country a multicultural territory (Naranjo, 2019).

The definition of mental health would be intertwined with the practice of several traditional beliefs of communities in the national territory, and that is why ancestral knowledge should be recognized under the concept of “global mental health” and its contributions to new sciences as scientific models and new knowledge. On this aspect, indicating that mental health is the well-being experienced by people according to their efficient cognitive, procedural, and attitude functionality is necessary; all this makes it possible to withstand the stress generated by daily life (Jones, 2023).

Sprenge and Turner (2021) consider that mental health, far from being an individual dimension, has a dimension of linkage between individuals and groups; it has a proximity to the interactions that take place in society. Thus, mental health is understood as happening in different social, cultural, family, and work contexts, among others, keeping in mind that there is an efficient and satisfactory engagement of the individual within the environment in which it develops.

Colombia, a multicultural and multi-ethnic country, considers the indigenous people to be one of the largest populations in the country; however, throughout history, they have distinguished themselves from Western society by their traditional or cultural ways of understanding and living life. This has entitled them to a certain percentage of autonomy and self-determination to overcome their community system, through stimulation on issues related to health and education (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). As indigenous peoples manage their health systems internally, understanding that these communities protect different concepts of health is necessary. For the indigenous, the concept of “health” refers to the multiplicity of life; the imaginaries of each community, its cosmogony, and spiritual balance are imperative (Li & Chen, 2021).

From this point of view, “mental health” for indigenous peoples represents the equilibrium between physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being in relation to oneself, the family, the community, and nature. Accordingly, Valencia et al. (2020) highlights the definition of mental health from the view of indigenous medicine that dissociates itself from the organicist paradigm of the worldview and the configuration of man; it focuses more on biological and social aspects,

as well as recognizing the human being as a product of these two components versus the explanation of mental illnesses. This makes valuing ancestry highly before Western medicine possible.

However, for several indigenous communities, mental health is not seen as different from general health. Therefore, both physical and mental health in the ancestral worldview are much more than the absence of disease. They are the capacity of the individual to be normative with regard to the world, with regard to the scope of establishing their own vital norms and harmoniously transforming the environment according to needs. It is a particular way of being and being in the world as an experience that is learned and exercised through culture. In this way, disease is not understood as a biomedical discomfort but rather as the reason why the person is not in harmony with himself; here, health is considered a sign of harmony.

Thus, the process of diagnosis and treatment from the health perspective adopted by the indigenous territories consists of the use of medicinal plants, animals, spiritual ceremonies, minerals, and amulets, among other practices that benefit the conventional health system of their cosmovision. Indigenous peoples' therapists have perfected various forms of diagnosis; most of them consist of complex ceremonies involving the specialist and a number of elements such as herbs, animals, and minerals; many of them turn into gifts to the divinities.

With regard to treatment, it should be noted that, for its effectiveness, traditional medicine considers the follow-up of special care to be of great importance in order to ensure the efficacy of the procedures carried out and the prescribed remedies. These cares include dietary changes and restrictions, rest or directed physical activities, changes in habits, sexual abstinence, special care with temperature changes, and spiritual actions such as prayer and reconciliation, among others (Apud et al., 2022). Therefore, according to traditional medicine, the effectiveness of diagnosis and treatment depends on full compliance with the recommendations made by ancestral doctors, the prescribed remedies, and the medical follow-up that is carried out.

### **Q7. How Is Quality of Life Conceived from an Ancestral Perspective?**

Another important point of view is the perception of quality of life, since valuing this aspect of the existence of a person or community plays an important role in the relationship between it and health (Rojas, 2020). However, defining it is quite complex because each person has a different concept of what it is. It depends on what he/she feels and possesses. Scarpeta and Molano (2017) state that "quality of life is a state of general satisfaction, derived from the realization



of the potentialities of the person” (p. 16). Also, an alternative medicine and complementary therapies research, conducted by Shankar et al. (2021) states that the concept of “quality of life” must take into account both benign aspects such as happiness and well-being as well as negative aspects such as pain, illness, and even death.

Through its history, indigenous communities have recognized the incidence of social risk factors due to the breakdown of their sociocultural networks and many failures in the aforementioned dimensions. Despite this, information on the prevalence and incidence of problems related to mental health is scarce. Castro et al. (2021) express that it is the breakdown of these sociocultural networks that favors the appearance of physical, organic, psychological, and emotional disorders, turning the indigenous peoples of Colombia into a susceptible population, given that they face violations of human rights from multiple social sources.

Currently, the health situation of the indigenous populations is marked by structural conditions such as social marginalization and abandonment, as well as economic and political factors. In addition to this, social situations such as racism and discrimination, hostility, and abuse can favor the presence of pathologies that affect health (Gómez et al., 2016). Suicidal behavior, anxiety, alcohol and psychoactive substances consumption, and exposure to family and interpersonal violence are some of the most frequent psychosocial problems in these communities. The most recent research confirms that indigenous suicide rates and mental disorders vary between countries and regions, but are usually higher than those of the general population, especially concerning adolescent or young people.

A systematic review made by the Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics of the Hospital Universitario San Ignacio and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Bogotá, identified that the most frequent mental disorders in subgroups of indigenous populations are: major depressive disorder, mood disorders, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorder, psychotic disorders, dependence on substances of various kinds and alcohol dependence (Gómez et al., 2016). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is related to the limited resources that mental health services receive, where “more than half of the countries allocate only 5% or less of their health budgets to mental health” (Beviá & Girón, 2017, p. 7).

Both the psychologist and the ancestral doctor—in their action of understanding the complexity of these traditional communities and the limitation of their health services—are involved in the task of evaluating mental health while respecting the indigenous tradition, their worldview, and their laws. On the one hand, the ancestral or traditional doctor constitutes a central component of indigenous culture in maintaining the harmony and balance of physical,

mental, and spiritual care. It is the traditional doctor who allows the community to maintain a worldview linked to Mother Nature and her spirits, to strengthen unity, the family and their identity as ethnic groups (Franco et al., 2018). However, on the other hand, the psychologist's work includes implementing institutional mental health programs, integrating the body and mind as part of a whole, understanding the actions of the indigenous communities and ensuring their individual and collective well-being. The issue is to try to integrate the conceptual frameworks, and identify the possible way of applying clinical psychology from the elaboration of the transference. In this way, the practical theoretical approach can be facilitated, according to the different theories (Vélez et al., 2020).

Mental health, seen from the medical system and according to the perspective of Kanyadan et al. (2023), includes three sectors that influence the improvement or not of this on the indigenous community. These are: the professional, represented mainly by the medicine that is practiced in the West; the popular, in which the health beliefs that are transmitted from generation to generation by family members and acquaintances converge and the traditional, which is crystallized through healing, natural and magical procedures, which for some people is directed to indigenous medicine.

Therefore, the idea that health is related to harmony and balance among the environment, culture, and person is an indispensable component of a healthy environment, and increases the feeling that people are in harmony within their cultures.

## **Between Worldview and Cosmogony**

### **P8. How Is the Ontological and Eschatological Conception Configured in Indigenous Populations?**

The concept of “worldview” has its formulation in the ideas of Ortega (2022), who interprets it as the vision of the world that allows the identification and interpretation of various phenomena based on the explanations with which they provide nature, their relationship, and connection, giving shape to the concepts and ideas conceived by a group of people. Consequently, Vásquez (2022) understands “worldview” as the set of assumptions (including values and commitments/

loyalties) that influence the way reality is conceived and responded to, these being the heart of a culture and functioning, on the one hand, as a frame of reference that determines how reality is understood. On the other hand, it is a source of guidelines for people's behavior in response to this distinction from reality (Collao & Gálvez, 2021). The definition of “worldview” is focused on identifying, knowing, classifying, interpreting, and understanding the world. From the worldview it is possible to understand

Conceptual notions of its nature; that is, the meanings of traditional practices, the real and non-real interaction with which they explain the nature of their creation and existence, as well as the idea of man in life. (Badillo & Bermúdez, 2017, p. 68).

Understanding that all people have different ways of seeing the world and generating questions about its creation and development —and from where visions of the world arise— it is relevant to talk about “cosmogony,” referring to myths that show the creation of the world. As Romero (2017) explains: “cosmogony’ —in its etymological semantic perspective— comes from a Greek compound ‘Kosmos’ (structure, world) + ‘Gignesthai’ (become)” (p. 205). In other words, cosmogony does not imply what is finished but what is being formed. According to Rivas and Bonilla (2021), the worldview is based on cosmogony, since it refers to beliefs about the beginning of the cosmos, the energies of both life and death, and the life of human beings. Hence, myths serve as an explanation and justification of a way of seeing the world, of legitimation of a social and political order, of how social and moral norms arose (due to the exemplary action of the ancestors or mythical founders) and why they must be fulfilled and respected (Avalo, 2023).

Based on the above, clarifying that the recognition that the different indigenous communities acquire becomes visible to other communities through their worldviews or particular interests is important, which in turn allows the communication of knowledge about the way of life. However, the heir of the indigenous tradition —also a resident of the reservations— recognizes himself as a member of a community that supports his sense of belonging in the relationship with others and nature, as well as in the preservation and recovery of traditional knowledge, from which he builds the life plan of and for his community (Leyva, 2022).

Similarly, from the psychological point of view, elements are taken from the worldview in terms of the transcendence of spiritual healing rituals. Understanding that, from their evocations, Mother Earth represents the feeling of humanity, because there, “care” is defined as an accumulation of tasks and

knowledge based on a comprehensive approach, which comes close to various dimensions of the person and incorporates care, treatments and notifications linked to space-time, cultural expressions, and the spirit (Zhang, 2022). Consequently, the greater purpose is to achieve physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harmony of the individual, as well as of those around him.

In this way, this manuscript is closed, defining the worldview from “the importance of knowing and understanding the worldview of a person, family or community to whom care for health is intended to be bestowed” (Badillo & Bermúdez, 2017, p. 68). This characterization becomes important, especially in indigenous communities, where it is necessary to know and understand care from their vision of the world, the traditional practices they implement in their daily lives to take care of their health and diseases, along with the way they treat them.

## Conclusions

Continue critically reviewing the epistemological and etiological aspects of indigenous medicinal practices is urgent. This is important for the protection of ancestral rituals and the identification of the balance between nature and man. Also important is examining the question of what is psyche, human and natural for the indigenous communities and, especially, for the ancestral doctors, which emerge from the Western world through governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations. For example, the terminology used by PAHO and WHO, among others, although seek to reduce the epistemological and etiological barriers of the definition of mental health—from a comprehensive point of view and assuming the relationship between man and nature—continue to represent a dichotomy in the definition of mental health and the healing of the spirit, being considered metaphysical but not scientific.

Failure to overcome these dichotomies of understanding and definition will likely prevent the healing of the spirit, ancestral practices, what is human and natural, and the particularities between the scientific and non-scientific from being recognized. Recognizing the epistemological and etiological foundations of healing linked to the territory, collective well-being and harmony with Mother Nature—comparable to good living, without distinctions of the physical and the mental—would be one more step, necessary to avoid the empty scientific discourses that exist concerning ancestral practices and spiritual healing.

Regarding ancestral practices and healing in spiritual medicine, it is concluded that language is extremely intervening in this process, acting as a means to heal and to preserve cultural ideas through generations. Similarly, plants

and drinks derived from them are always present, accompanied by prayers that tell narratives with sacred words.

The relationship between Western medicine and ancestral medicine is established, but not proportionally. This means that indigenous communities do recognize multiple contributions of psychology to guarantee mental health, as well as prevention and some disease treatment practices. However, in Western medicine there is still a perceived resistance to recognizing diseases as consequences of both physical and psychic aspects, and they relegate the causes to referentially bodily factors.

For its part, the impact that language exerts during healing processes in indigenous tribes is presented as a signing set of images, words and objects with a semiotic charge. This hermeneutical representation helps the social construction of communities. Language is health that is crystallized through the interaction of members, and its interruption in the communicative act would be the impossibility of sustaining the knowledge of ancestral wisdom through generations.

In indigenous peoples, both the ontological and eschatological conception are understood from myths, where nature always intervenes as a transversal axis between the human and the divine. The creation of the world and man—in addition to their due transformations—are elements that make the tribes guardians of the fauna and flora, since they incarnate the explanation and justification of forms of life that are about to be experienced after the end of existence on the earthly plane.

Therefore, the fact of redesigning mental health care models should be kept in mind, which would contribute to the care of cases of psychological illnesses or events, respecting customs, but applying knowledge from psychology. In short, a “psychoancestrality.”

In short, developing diverse programs and strategies in mental health, based on multiculturalism and miscegenation, assuming a position of recognition of ancestral wisdom and the training of intervention in spiritual ailments by ancestral doctors is recommended.

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