

# Comparative Views of Health Professionals and Traditional Healers on the trado-medical uses of Impepho leaf (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*) from Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal provinces in South Africa

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## Abstract

### Background

*Impepho (Helichrysum odoratissimum) is a plant utilised for spiritual and traditional medicinal purposes within South African culture. However, there are little or no empirical evidence on the trado-medical use of Impepho hence, this study aimed to close this gap by exploring differing views on trado-medical uses of impepho as a potential resource for drug development advancement. Methods The study design involved the use of a qualitative research approach where ten (10) key in-depth interviews (KIIs) were conducted. The study population that was purposively sampled included six (6) traditional healers and four (4) health professionals across three (3) districts each in Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces, South Africa. The KIIs were conducted using a question guide in the participants' preferred languages, which were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated for thematic analysis. Results: The mean/median age of the traditional healers and health professionals was 53 years. Average duration for both categories of participants in the traditional and medical professionals was 21 years. The emerged themes included Impepho significance and uses, Impepho in modern medicine, potential use, and integration into modern medicine. All participants recognised the cultural and medicinal importance of Impepho. Crucial aspects reflecting key views by each participant category were that the traditional practitioners referred to Impepho as a spiritual intercessory for communicating with the spirits and healing (communication with ancestors). In contrast, modern professionals viewed it as potential for drug discovery due to both the therapeutic and spiritual functions, they affirmed that the leaf has trado-medical and healing uses. Participants emphasised that there needs to be respect for cultural practices when considering Impepho for further drug discovery empirical research study (Impepho in modern medicine and cultural and healing uses of Impepho). Conclusions: The study highlights the importance of Impepho in traditional healers and health professionals, urging further research to confirm its medicinal value and determine the appropriate dose. Successful formulations require a collaborative approach, ensuring authenticity and effective treatment without harm to humans. Further research is needed to enhance healthcare delivery and policies.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural significance, Drug development, Traditional Medicine, Impepho leaf (Helichrysum odoratissimum), Therapeutic uses.*

## Introduction

Impepho, scientifically known as *Helichrysum odoratissimum*, is a plant utilised in South African culture for spiritual and traditional medicinal purposes (Health For Mzansi, 2023). Locally referred to as “everlasting” or “kooigoed,” Impepho is a leaf used in African Indigenous medicine for its fragrant and ceremonial benefits, where it is used to kindle, visualise, and allow spirit communication, or serve as a pathway between the seen and unseen worlds (Belani et al., 2022). The various beliefs and practices of health professionals and traditional healers concerning Impepho leaves, demonstrate the possible modulation of these two health systems. In traditional medicine, traditional healers consider Impepho the most spiritual herb with cultural and medicinal importance for purification and treatment (Mashabela, 2024). On the other hand, modern medical practitioners may lack extensive knowledge about local plants such as Impepho, but traditional healers perfectly well understand how to use them in different health practices (Mwaka, Achan and Orach, 2023). Dlamini also supports this by pointing out that traditional healers are consulted because they are culturally appropriate and have used herbal medicine as a proven form of treatment (Dlamini et al, 2023). Such practices are not only circumstantial; they are part of the cultural values of communities in which traditional healers are regarded as holders of oracy heritage knowledge (Mbuwir, Fonyuy and Yula

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2022). On their part, health professionals are likely to dismiss traditional healing practices with little effort placed in the scientific study of such remedies. However, there is an increasing concern to include those that comprise formal traditional practices in the modernised health care delivery system. For instance, Akol et al.'s (2018) views on the few interconnections between traditional Akal and biomedical organisations are for it to be applied to improve mental health service delivery.

Furthermore, there is a possibility that Impepho may be used as a link between indigenous and anthropological practices. According to the literature, conventional therapies such as Impepho are effective in supporting modern medicine in circumstances where medical facilities are scarce (Bounlu et al., 2021). A holistic approach to healing, as common in traditional medicine, cures not only the body but also the soul, the mind, and the spirit; the forthcoming notion of health fits the modern concept of health as an integrated system better (Elendu, 2024). Therefore, evidence regarding the differences and similarities perceived by health professionals and traditional healers on the perceived use of Impepho leaf is of utmost importance. Suppose the beliefs of the two paradigms are respected? In that case, there is a possibility of enhancing the health status of patients while at the same time promoting cultural understanding in the delivery of health care services. The two provinces in South Africa shown to have maximum dependence on Traditional Healers, where competencies of both Traditional Healers and Health Professionals are integrated into the community health systems, are the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal provinces (Twilley, Rademan and Lall, 2020). However, there is little or no empirical evidence; hence, this study aimed to close this gap by exploring differing views on trado-medical uses of Impepho as a potential resource for drug development advancement. This study aims to fill this gap by examining these divergent perspectives to establish that the plant holds the promise of helping move the drug development agenda forward. It is needed to recognise these beginnings to link the traditional practices and the scientific approach in health care advancement with cultural respect.

In provinces like the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and others, where traditional healers contribute to the health system, the majority of this information remains unrecognised. A minor portion of it is utilised, and traditional healers may need to be made aware that many of these remedies have therapeutic uses. Therefore, through exploring these contrasting perceptions, the study aims to support indigenous knowledge claims and show the cultural and therapeutic uses of Impepho. It also seeks to support traditional health systems' cooperation by improving culturally competent, holistic health care. Moreover, discovering the lead compound of Impepho for the development of medicine could help develop new products that build from an Indigenous epistemological framework and are underpinned by research knowledge. Thus, the findings of this study might help policymaking by arguing for widespread integration of traditional medicine into health policies with calls for respecting and tolerating traditional systems.

## Methods

### Study Design

This study employed a qualitative approach involving key in-depth interviews (KIIs) and was conducted between August 2023 and May 2024.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Walter Sisulu University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (Ethical Approval Number: 133/2022). All participants also signed consent forms before they participated in the study. All participants received an information sheet with the aims and methods of the study, as well as possible risks and benefits, and gave their written informed consent. Some of the safeguards adopted for purposes of participant anonymity were as follows: Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and any identifier or details likely to lead to the identification of the participants were omitted in the transcripts and data.

## Study Setting

The study was conducted across two provinces, namely the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces in South Africa. Three specific rural districts from each province were selected for participants' enrolment. For this study, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces were selected based on the knowledge and facts that they are among the provinces in South Africa where Impepho is used prominently and commonly in traditional healing practices. Traditional healers are common in both provinces and use Impepho in cultural and medicinal practices, which makes the two areas rich in diverse opinions about their therapeutic uses. In addition, these provinces have a cultural context where traditional medicine has a strong foundation with integration with modern medicine, a key strength that lends understanding to how Impepho is used and viewed by both the traditional healers and health professionals.

## Study Population

The study involved two categories: health professionals and traditional healers, whose insights regarding the holistic use of Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*) are crucial in shaping the direction of health care. This targeted health professionals included clinicians such as doctors, nurses and pharmacies working in the public health sector within the study setting. Conversely, traditional healers, popularly known as Sangomas and Inyangas in the communities, are skilled in the use of herbs for traditional medical purposes. The eligibility criteria for inclusion into the study were such that there were no sex-at-birth preferences for all participants. In addition, only those aged 18 years and above were included in this study to minimise the chances of participants who may not fully understand the cultural and medicinal uses of Impepho. The health professionals' criteria include at least two year's experience working in rural areas, as it is believed that they are more likely to come across traditional medicine in their practice. Traditional healers required at least five years of practice, that is, proof of substantial practice, thereby indicating sufficient knowledge on how to apply Impepho in healing practices. Furthermore, it was a prerequisite that all participants possessed varying degrees of experience with Impepho use, possibly prescribing it, or at least recognising it and its usage among certain population groups. The last criterion was the willingness of the participants to complete the in-depth interviews (IDIs) for the study and provide detailed information from both sides of the medical and cultural ways.

## Sampling Method

Purposive sampling techniques were used to select only those individuals who have the necessary understanding and experience regarding Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*). This approach was chosen to guarantee that participants would have a clear vision about the subject matters in which they are involved, in their activity or practice, and the participants' visions are different but complementary - the health professionals and traditional healers - would provide their perspective regarding the therapeutic uses, effectiveness and importance of Impepho.

## Data Collection

Information was gathered through semi-structured in key-depth interviews (KIIs) aimed at capturing participants' experience on the uses of Impepho.

A semi-structured interview guideline was adopted. The interview guide developed for this study aimed to identify participants' awareness and perceptions about Impepho, its perceived purposes, efficacy, and apprehension, with its use within practice and educational settings. The guide developed contained questions to generate more complex responses from the participants, both the traditional healers and the health workers. The following questions regarded the role of Impepho for traditional and medical purposes and cultural aspects: perceived pros and cons and observed patient results.

These interviews were carried out in a comfortable environment in order to maintain anonymity and ensure comfort for the participants. All the interviews included participants' consent to be audio recorded to capture their responses as closely as possible. The interviews were performed in isiXhosa and isiZulu, the

participants' native languages, to ensure that the participants did not experience difficulties understanding the questions and that the questions posed were culturally sensitive. Therefore, the interviews averaged 30-45 minutes per participant. This format allowed the researchers to obtain clear and distinct qualitative patterns, along with possibly gathering more ideas, depending on participants' responses.

### Data Management and Analysis

All personal identifiers were replaced with unique Participant Identification Codes (PIDs) to protect participants and respect their privacy. This process of anonymisation helped protect personal details at all times during the course of the study. Data were kept safely stored in password-protected electronic files accessed by the research team only. The audio files used for the interviews were typed out word for word, and translation was done whenever it was considered essential. These transcripts served as the raw data for managing and interpreting data collected. Interviews provided qualitative data, which was analysed thematically per the guidelines described by Braun and Clarke (2021) to analyse and establish important themes relevant to the study objectives.

This method entailed determining patterns or themes in the data set and areas of agreement, disagreement and synergy between health professionals and traditional healers. The use of thematic analysis was helpful as it helped to systematically categorise the qualitative data into main themes and subthemes due to the numerous perceived similarities and differences concerning the use of Impepho. The themes were then further subdivided and contrasted between the two groups of participants so that those areas of 'common ground' and 'difference' could be highlighted. This comparison helped establish the basis for the different perceived uses of Impepho and its place in both conventional and traditional medicine delivery systems.

### Results

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants involved in the study. The target population of this study is the participants. The table elaborates on the gender of each participant and the educational background, experience and discipline. All the participants in this study were people from different fields of work and backgrounds, including health professionals and traditional healers. Of the ten participants, six were male, and four were female. The educational background was dissimilar, from Grade 12 up to traditional training and those who acquired a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. The work experience of the participants was also different, as they had between 6 years and 34 years of working experience in their disciplines. As a result of the diversified participants, the perception of the importance and uses of Impepho, both from considering formal medical knowledge and traditional healing practices, was adequately captured.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants**

Participant	Age (years)	Gender	Educational Qualification	Years of Work Experience	Discipline(s)
HP001	29	Male	Bachelor's degree	6	Nurse
HP002	52	Female	Master's degree	25	Nurse
HP003	56	Female	Bachelor's degree	28	Nurse
HP004	48	Male	Bachelor's degree	17	Pharmacist
TH001	76	Male	Grade 12 and Traditional training	34	Isangoma

TH002	52	Male	Grade 10 and Traditional training	12	Isangoma
TH003	63	Male	No formal education and Traditional training	28	Inyanga
TH004	59	Male	Bachelor's degree and Traditional training	19	Isangoma
TH005	54	Male	No formal education and Traditional training	23	Isangoma
TH006	47	Male	Bachelor's degree and Traditional training	15	Inyanga and makhosi

### Emerged themes

The main themes and sub-themes as will be discussed below are depicted in Figure 1:

Theme	Sub-theme
1.About Impepho significance and uses	1.1. Communication with ancestors
	1.2. Trado-medical and healing uses
	1.3. Cultural and Healing Uses of Impepho
2.Impepho in Modern Medicine	2.1. Potential Use and Integration into Modern Medicine

Figure 1: Main themes and sub-themes

### About Impepho significance and uses

Most of the participants have the knowledge regarding cultural and medicinal values of Impepho. Based on this information most participants are able to explain its main functions and significance within the community, in relation to both spiritual and treatise traditions.

#### **Sub-theme: Communication with ancestors**

One participant, a Traditional Healer, mentioned under the sub-theme of communication with ancestors, *“Impepho is a plant used to connect with ancestors and communicate with people who have passed away. It is something that brings people together and helps in communicating with both the living and the deceased. It is very important. I don't have many stories about it, though.”* – **TH002EC, Traditional Healer, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape province**

Another one supported, *“You might dream of an ancestor and then wake up and realize it was your ancestor communicating with you, also Impepho can help with dreams.”* – **TH001EC, OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province**

While another Traditional Healer noted,

*“They (ancestors) also communicate with us. We respect each other because one may find that one now and another later can do that perhaps one finds out that they will find the answer [if] they want the answer. It is very important because there are many solutions we can find in Impepho, let's say someone has a problem and seeks help.”* – **TH003KZN Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal Province**

The health professional emphasises the deep cultural and spiritual importance of Impepho, *“Impepho is important as it provides a way to maintain and strengthen spiritual connections with ancestors. It is integral to cultural practices and personal spiritual well-being”*. **HP003, Zululand District, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province**

The pharmacist further elaborated on communication with ancestors, *“That is where they will burn incense and then start talking immediately. It starts releasing smoke. So those are the observations that when I grew up, I observed those things. And then you tend to know, ooh!!! Impepho is used for this practice. Furthermore, for example, if you're gonna take a long trip or a particular trip for whatever is in, then maybe the nights before, you will burn incense to report that you will be having this trip. About this and that. Well, but sometimes you wouldn't. It just depends on your beliefs or what resonates with you at the time. Because families are not the same. Yeah”*. **HP004, Umkhanyakude District, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province**

### **Sub-theme: Trado-medical and healing uses**

Participants, particularly traditional healers, elaborated on the sub-theme of trado-medical and healing uses of Impepho, recognising its role in both cultural practices and physical healing. Impepho is often used in rituals and spiritual ceremonies, but its medicinal properties are also highly valued within the community.

One Traditional Healer explained the healing properties of Impepho: *“Impepho is used for various purposes, similar to how medicine is used. It can be used to open up the chest and aid in breathing. It can also be used for other issues, like opening up the chest when someone is feeling congested or mixing it with other things like chillies for added effects.”*- **TH002EC, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

Similarly, another Traditional Healer emphasised the healing and preventative aspects of Impepho *“Initially, it is used for chest issues. It can help people with colds or sinus problems. It opens up the chest and helps in breathing.”*- **TH002EC, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province.**

A Health Professional also acknowledged the healing uses of Impepho from a medical perspective, saying, *“In my understanding, Impepho is a plant. Initially, I know it as a plant because in Xhosa culture, we burn it to cleanse spaces of bad energies. We burn it, and during the COVID-19 period, people were encouraged to use it for steam inhalation, and some even boiled it and drank it. So basically, I know Impepho as a plant with many uses. It is used to cleanse spaces of bad energies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was promoted for steaming and drinking. So, overall, Impepho is a plant with various uses.”*- **HP001, Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape Province**

### **Sub-theme: Cultural and Healing Uses of Impepho**

Impepho's role in both cultural rituals and healing practices was highlighted by various participants, who acknowledged its importance in addressing both spiritual and physical needs within the community. Traditional healers and health professionals shared their views on how the plant is utilised not only for connecting with ancestors, but also for its therapeutic properties, both as a preventative and curative measure.

One Traditional Healer described the cultural practice surrounding Impepho: *“Also, the teeth. Impepho enters the teeth; you use this thing when you are worshipping, but impepho only makes a sound. A mixture is made with impepho that has been processed, like a mixture that is shaken in a cup that is swirling like a pot.”*- **TH003KZN, Mkhanyakude District, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province.**

Another one added,” *Other uses of Impepho include supporting healing processes, maintaining cultural practices, and enhancing spiritual well-being.*” - **TH005EC, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

A health professional also spoke on the broader uses of Impepho in supporting health and well-being: *“Impepho is a remarkable herb with many benefits. It helps you concentrate and stay focused, lifts your mood, eases headaches, prevents infections, and increases motivation and positive energy. It also sparks creativity and helps with sleep issues.*” **HP003,Zululand District,Kwa-Zulu Natal Province”**

*“Yes, Impepho can be used by medical scientists and health professionals. Like many traditional medicines derived from plants, Impepho has potential medicinal properties that could be explored scientifically. It is worth investigating if there are health benefits or medicinal values that could be extracted and utilised in modern medicine. Impepho should be studied for its potential health benefits and medicinal properties. Health professionals could explore its use in treating or complementing treatments for certain conditions, provided it is integrated with modern medical practices and thoroughly researched*” **HP003, Zululand, Kwa-Zulu Natal**

## Impepho in Modern Medicine

### Potential Use and Integration into Modern Medicine

Examines whether Impepho could be adopted and the potential for Impepho to be used by medical scientists, clinicians, and health professionals. It explores ideas, opinions, and concerns about integrating Impepho into modern medical practices, emphasizing

*Yes, if they are knowledgeable about how to use it properly. They would need to understand how to use it effectively and safely. It should be integrated with other treatments and used in a comprehensive manner.* - **TH002EC Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

*“Absolutely, considering Impepho for use by medical professionals could be beneficial. For example, if someone is experiencing spiritual or emotional distress, Impepho could be used to aid in their healing process. It has practical applications in supporting overall well-being.”*- **TH005EC Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

*“Yes, Impepho should be used by health professionals. It could offer additional support in healing processes and complement modern medical approaches.”* - **TH005EC Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

*“Yes, I think it can. Impepho has healing properties. It’s good for inflammation, and many people use it for respiratory problems. But... (pauses) it’s important to respect our traditions. This isn’t just a herb you can take and use—it has a spiritual purpose, too.”* -**TH006EC OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province**

*“Yes, but Health is selfish if they think that disease needs to be looked after by their medicine rather than looking at where we come from .Some people continue to live on the streets to find out that they are sick while they need a doctor to get a drip when they need a drip just because they see that you lose a lot of strength without it, they need a drip, they need that treatment for their health to continue with the treatment, if a doctor says it's ours and we can't enter as traditional they don't enter to take through: It doesn't work well, there are challenges..”* - **TH004KZN Zululand District, Eastern Cape Province.**

*“Using Impepho in modern medicine could be beneficial, but it must be done with cultural sensitivity and scientific validation to ensure it’s safe and effective.”* – **TH004KZN, Zululand District, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province**

*“I think Impepho could be used, but the challenge is ensuring it is safe and not toxic. In medicine, precise measurements are crucial, and Impepho lacks standardised measurements. If traditional practitioners could develop accurate dosage guidelines, it might be incorporated into medicine. However, the current issue is that there are no real measurements, which makes it difficult to use in a medical context.* - **HP001, Chris Hani, Eastern Cape Province**

*I think Impepho could be used by health professionals, but it needs proper research and standardisation. For example, I've heard that thiomalate, derived from Impepho, is used to help with sleep. If Impepho is scientifically validated, it could have beneficial uses. However, it should be studied carefully to ensure safety and appropriate dosing.* - **HP002, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

## Impepho in Modern Medicine

### Potential Use and Integration into Modern Medicine

The potential for Impepho to be integrated into modern medicine was a recurring topic among both traditional healers and health professionals. Participants expressed the view that while Impepho holds significant cultural and spiritual value, there is also a potential for it to be considered in modern medical practices, provided that it is approached with respect and scientific validation.

One Traditional Healer emphasised the importance of collaboration between traditional healing practices and modern medicine, stating, “*Traditional healers need to be involved. It's not just about its medicinal properties—there's a lot of spiritual knowledge attached to it. You can't just extract the herb and forget the meaning behind it. Collaboration is key, but with respect.*” - **TH006EC OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province**

This sentiment was echoed by another Traditional Healer from Buffalo City District, who added, “*Yes, if they are knowledgeable about how to use it properly. They would need to understand how to use it effectively and safely. It should be integrated with other treatments and used in a comprehensive manner.*” - **TH002EC Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province**

The therapeutic applications of Impepho were highlighted, particularly in addressing spiritual and emotional well-being. However, some Traditional Healers raised concerns about the medicalisation of Impepho, stressing the need to balance cultural traditions with modern medical practices. One Traditional Healer stated, “*yes, I think it can. Impepho has healing properties. It's good for inflammation, and many people use it for respiratory problems. But... (pauses) it's important to respect our traditions. This isn't just a herb you can take and use—it has a spiritual purpose, too.*” - **TH006EC OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province**

A health professional from Chris Hani District echoed the importance of research and validation for Impepho's use in modern medicine: “*I think Impepho could be used, but the challenge is ensuring it is safe and not toxic. In medicine, precise measurements are crucial, and Impepho lacks standardised measurements. If traditional practitioners could develop accurate dosage guidelines, it might be incorporated into medicine. However, the current issue is that there are no real measurements, which makes it difficult to use in a medical context*” **HP001, Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape Province.**

Furthermore, a health professional from Buffalo City District emphasized the need for scientific validation: “*I think Impepho could be used by health professionals, but it needs proper research and standardization. For example, I've heard that thiomalate, derived from Impepho, is used to help with sleep. If Impepho is scientifically validated, it could have beneficial uses. However, it should be studied carefully to ensure safety and appropriate dosing*” **HP002, Buffalo City District, Eastern Cape Province.**

## Discussions

These results of this study provide information concerning the cultural importance, therapeutic application, and possible future employment of Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*) in modern medicine. Impepho was considered by both traditional healers and health professionals as possessing multiple uses in religious and medicinal practices, emphasising its role in fostering communication with ancestors and treating various ailments. Traditional healers underscored the importance of Impepho in spiritual practices, advocating for its respect, not only for its medicinal properties but also for its spiritual significance (Thompson-Assan and Ally, 2024).

The conclusion of this study re-emphasises the cultural, spiritual and therapeutic relevance of Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*), according to the perceptions of THs and HPs. Traditional Healers particularly emphasised its spiritual importance in rites for calling on the ancestors and warding off evil. However, Mamabolo (2018) agrees that it is also a genuine remedy for respiratory and skin complaints. In traditional healers' view, it has medicinal uses, particularly as an antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory agent. However, they were quick to caution that medical studies needed to be recognised that prove it could be beneficial in today's world (De Canha et al., 2021). Collectively, the results underscore the multi-functionality of Impepho, and it can be considered as the herb that may help people find a link between traditional and modern medicine.

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study in the region to provide a voice to Traditional Healers and Health professionals about Impepho. In the past, there have been studies conducted on the ethnobotanical or phytochemical value of Impepho. However, none addressed both groups of stakeholders. For example, De Canha et al. (2021) proposed the anti-microbial activity and anti-acne element of Impepho, the ability to combat *Cutibacterium acnes*, and the implication of its function in dermatological purposes. Therefore, this study did not have any cultural or spiritual value. Similarly, Zondi and Ntshangase (2022) investigated sociocultural constructions of Impepho burning, with specific emphasis on its cultural significance and meaning to the selected community of women, but with no mention or incorporation of a biomedical viewpoint. Moreover, Matrose et al. (2023) investigated the chemical constituents and antifungal activity of *Helichrysum* species, including Impepho, against *Botrytis cinerea*, while their work only focused on the laboratory experiment, and they did not interview any traditional healers or health professionals.

The initial data confirmed the therapeutic value of Impepho (*Helichrysum odoratissimum*) and any other species of *Helichrysum*, mainly due to their antioxidant and antimicrobial activity. For example, Matrose et al. (2023) found out that, Impepho extracts from South African have high antioxidant activity and good antifungal activity as explained by Choo et al. (2023), where acetone extracts have high soluble solid, total phenolic content and DPPH radical scavenging capacity. This is particularly true given the fact that the plant can be a source of bioactive compounds that can be used to against pathogens such as *B. cinerea*. Further, Akinyede et al. (2021) focused on the effectiveness of *Helichrysum* species as one of the promising sources of bioactive compounds for the management of diseases stored in the folk remedy database. Additionally, a study done by Akaberi et al. (2019) revealed that pyrones and phloroglucinols attributes exist in *Helichrysum* species, which possess antimicrobial properties, further affirming the plant as a potential source of drug. Altogether, a study conducted by Akaberi et al. (2019) showed what was referred to as pyrones and phloroglucinols responsible; these are properties found in *Helichrysum* species of plants that have antimicrobial capability, thus proving the plant's potential as a drug.

While health professionals pointed out various therapeutic benefits of impepho, some called for scientific research and regulation of this natural medicine. This reinforces a growing global trend of seeking to understand how traditional medicines can be used with healthcare systems of treatment, as there is an appreciation that merging the traditional with modern medicine requires practitioners to fashion them, bearing in mind the dosage, treatment regime and culture (Cheung et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2016). The concern that traditional healers must be involved in the process, along with the need for accurate dosage guidelines, underscores the complexity of integrating traditional practices with contemporary healthcare systems (Delima et al., 2020).

The healthcare industry is seeking scientific proof to support the use of Impepho for treating such primary inflammation, respiratory conditions, as well as symptoms of emotional disturbance. But it also exposes the shortcomings of applying traditional practices in clinical practice since, while scientifically effective means that it is safe to apply, it cannot be used in clinical practice before the same is proven (Kassa et al., 2020). The findings suggest that while there is a growing interest in the therapeutic potential of Impepho, collaboration between traditional healers and health professionals is essential for successful integration into modern healthcare frameworks (Bulcha & Zepre, 2021). The study reveals that Impepho holds significant cultural and therapeutic value, recognised by both traditional healers and health professionals. Integrating Impepho into modern medicine requires a collaborative approach that respects traditional knowledge while ensuring scientific validation.

Such conspicuous absence in the empirical literature means that the present study will attempt to fill this gap by including the perspectives of both Traditional Healers and Health Professionals. The study identifies an interesting research niche, namely, to define how the resources promoting healing and well-being, such as Impepho, can be scientifically proven, while not losing their cultural meaning. Such a dual view provides relevance to healthcare policy in a broader sense, especially in encouraging the assimilation of traditional medicines into current healthcare systems. Future works should focus on using Impepho from both ethnobotanical experiences, clinical investigations and cooperation from stakeholders, so that the plant's benefits can be fully exploited. Moreover, there is a need to discuss the existing regulatory structures in order to correct the ways to integrate traditional medicine such as Impepho into the general health system. Future research should focus on the efficacy and safety of Impepho, paving the way for its potential incorporation into contemporary healthcare practices.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to studying. First, the sample size means that participants may not be a broadly accurate representation of Southern African opinions and practices on Impepho. A wider and more representative population sample would provide a wider cultural and ethnopharmacological view. Also, there may be a problem of sample and response biases in this study since participants may have given opinions that may be perceived to be socially acceptable, knowing that traditional and health systems of healing are perceived to be different or even incompatible. This could distort some of the information concerning the use of Impepho in contemporary medical practice. Despite these limitations, the study's findings are crucial and unique in fostering further multi-disciplinary collaborative discussions on how to advance the trado-medical uses of Impepho.

### **Conclusion**

Impepho has been widely used for cultural and religious purposes by the communities where it has been identified and, due to its therapeutic properties, its functional uses are still worth exploring in more detail. However, for Impepho to be included in how medicine is practiced, it will be necessary to use modern medicine with reliance on traditional knowledge and embrace the traditional methods. Moreover, there is a requirement to deliver the proper kind of healthcare services that are safe and efficient and follow the best practices in the field. This would entail the involvement of community herbalists and medical practitioners to ensure that the emergent use of traditional medicines does not compromise the people's cultural beliefs or their health.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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## Author Contributions

A.B, K.E.O, F.L.H, conceptualized the study and sourced financial resources  
 All authors contributed to the study design.  
 F.L.H., and K.E.O. supervised A.B. in this study.  
 A.B carried out data collection.  
 A.B. and K.E.O. performed the data analysis and interpretation under the supervision of K.E.O.  
 A.B wrote the first draft of the manuscript  
 K.E.O. and F.L.H. provided critical revisions.  
 All authors approved the submission of the final version of the manuscript.

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