

The fivefold ministry in African neo-Pentecostalism: Constructing a Pentecostal theology of edification



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Dates:

Received: 25 Oct. 2023

Accepted: 22 Nov. 2023

Published: 15 Mar. 2024

How to cite this article:

Kgatle, M.S., 2024, 'The fivefold ministry in African neo-Pentecostalism: Constructing a Pentecostal theology of edification', *In die Skriflig* 58(1), a3034. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3034>

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The fivefold ministry is the belief in the functioning of the five offices in ecclesial leadership such as apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. Contrary to the practice in mainline Christianity and classical Pentecostalism, African neo-Pentecostals believe that the fivefold ministry is functional in the contemporary church as much as it was in the early church. Hence, the clergy in these churches takes on various titles such as 'apostles' and 'prophets' as opposed to traditional titles such as 'reverend' and 'priest'. However, some African neo-Pentecostals have used this conceptual framework for the attainment of titles without training, ordination, and formal recognition. In addition, the practice of fivefold ministry in African neo-Pentecostalism has opened a door for other non-conventional titles like 'major 1' and 'seer 1' to name a few. Furthermore, there is also an overemphasis of titles as if there is competition within the fivefold ministry. This article argues that the biblical (particularly the New Testament) purpose of the fivefold ministry, is the edification of the church rather than the abuse of titles and competition by the clergy within African neo-Pentecostalism. The theoretical framework for the Pentecostal theology of edification is constructed within the biblical perspective on fivefold ministry in Ephesians 4:11. The framework is important in demonstrating that the fivefold ministry is important for the edification of the body of Christ. The use of the fivefold ministry is expected to benefit the church, not individual apostles, and prophets. Equally, the fivefold ministry encourages the participation of all believers.

Contribution: This article discusses the challenges of the abuse of ministry titles and other non-conventional titles by neo-Pentecostal groups from a Pentecostal perspective, and compares it to the biblical justification for the existence of such ministries in the early church.

Keywords: fivefold ministry; African neo-Pentecostalism; Pentecostal theology; edification; titles.

Introduction

African neo-Pentecostalism refers to Pentecostal churches that are different from classical Pentecostalism in the African context. These are the churches that emphasise the performance of miracles, healing, and deliverance (Banda 2020; Kangwa 2016; Khanyile 2016). Several African neo-Pentecostal churches emphasise the prosperity gospel of the faith movement (Adedibu & Igboin 2019). Other movements have merged within neo-Pentecostalism, such as new prophetic churches that emphasise the practice of prophecy (Kgatle 2021). These churches have spread across the continent of Africa and continue to grow in the 21st-century. African neo-Pentecostals have a different approach to the practice of the fivefold ministry. While mainline Christianity and some classical Pentecostals do not recognise the fivefold ministry within their ecclesiology, the African neo-Pentecostals do emphasise the fivefold ministry. For example, classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa do not ordain clergy as apostles or even prophets. This means that they recognise the office of the apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, and evangelist as leaders of their churches. However, this practice has produced various abuses such as the quest to attain titles without recognition or ordination, the use of other unfamiliar titles such as 'major 1', and the competition among the clergy. That calls for an exploration of the practice and theology of the fivefold ministry in the 21st century among the African neo-Pentecostals.

This article proposes the Pentecostal theology of edification from a biblical perspective – Ephesians 4:11-13 and other supporting biblical texts. This theology will be unpacked in demonstrating that the purpose of the fivefold ministry is not individualistic, but in the interest of the community of believers. This article will introduce the practice of the fivefold ministry within African

neo-Pentecostalism by focusing on each office in the ministry. The abuses of the fivefold ministry will be highlighted by looking at the use or abuse of titles, the use of unconventional titles, and the competition within the fivefold ministry. The words *unfamiliar* and *unconventional titles* will be used interchangeably in this article. The aim is to demonstrate that the Pentecostal theology of edification is relevant to dealing with the various challenges facing the fivefold ministry in the 21st century. In the next section, the practices of the fivefold ministry within the African neo-Pentecostal churches will be evaluated.

The practices of the fivefold ministry within African neo-Pentecostalism

The practice of the fivefold ministry is a common one in African neo-Pentecostalism (Resane 2008:24). This kind of practice is not so popular among the classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A few pastors would still be known as apostles in such churches, but this is exceedingly rare. Clergy in these churches are called by conventional titles such as 'reverend.' The clergy that uses titles such as 'apostle' or 'prophet,' would be doing so outside the formal process of the church at ordinations. However, among many African neo-Pentecostal churches, the fivefold ministry is a norm. Rather than using titles such as 'reverends' or 'priests,' the clergy in neo-Pentecostal churches are known as apostles and prophets (Thinane 2021:6). This section does not plan to discuss this practice in the whole continent, but to highlight the major practices in different regions with the focus on southern Africa. The titles in the fivefold ministry are used even for the marketisation and advertisement of the ministries in African neo-Pentecostalism. Thinane (2021:3) opines that in using such titles, the prophets, and apostles plan to authenticate their practices of, for example prophecy as genuine and coming from God. Consequently, this attracts crowds to meetings organised by men and women bearing titles in the fivefold ministry. This means that a certain meeting or crusade can be well attended depending on the title carried by the organiser of the same meetings. In other words, the greater the title that the clergy has, the greater the influence or popularity of them. It is for this reason that African neo-Pentecostals have broken away from the conventional titles such as 'reverend' and 'priest' to become known as prophets and apostles. This is because the African neo-Pentecostals, unlike the classical Pentecostal churches, do emphasise the fivefold and the hierarchy of titles such as 'apostle' and 'prophet.'

The word *apostle* comes from the Greek masculine noun, *ἀπόστολος* which is derived from the verb *ἀποστέλλω* which means 'I send' or 'I delegate'. This means that the apostle is the one who is sent or the one who is delegated to complete the mandate of the kingdom of God. This also means that the apostle is a messenger. In contemporary times, the word is used to refer to the one who is sent forth as a pioneer of

missionary work (Dent 2019:59). This means that a church planter can also be considered as an apostle among the African neo-Pentecostal churches. In addition, apostles, particularly when referring to the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, are also known for their writings, for establishing people or believers in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and for teaching the believers the ways of the Lord. According to Schreiner (2006), this is what apostles such as Paul were known for in the early church. In addition, the apostle Paul was known for being a soul-winner (Kuponu & Talabi 2021:3). In the end, an apostle can function in almost all the offices of the fivefold ministry (Green 2005:11). The title *apostle* is also used among the clergy in African neo-Pentecostal churches to refer to pastors who are overseers of other pastors within the fivefold ministry. In some instances, this title is used interchangeably with the title *general overseer* within the same churches. In large ministries, where different pastors are submitting under one pastor, such a clergy will carry the title of apostle. The practice of the office of the apostle in the 21st century, is the belief that this office goes beyond the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ. Hirsch and Catchim (2012:5) made the same argument in support of the ministry of the apostle beyond the disciples of ministries. Hence, there are many clergy in Africa who carry the gift of apostles. Some of the well-known apostles in Africa include Apostles Ben Ndobe of Dominion Life, Tembisa in South Africa, J Sithole of Bethsaida Word Centre, Polokwane in South Africa, Joshua Selman of Eternity Network International in Nigeria, Simeon Joshua of the Commander in Faith, Cape Town in South Africa, Johnson Suleiman – president and general overseer, Omega Fire Ministries International in Nigeria, Joseph (Wale) Adefarasin – senior pastor and general overseer of Guiding Light Assembly in Nigeria, and others. In Ghana, the church of Pentecost, although a classical Pentecostal church, also uses the title *apostle* for well-known apostles such as Apostle Peter Anim (Quayesi-Amakye 2009:40). According to White (2016:252) Apostle Peter Anim is one of the pioneers of classical Pentecostalism in Ghana.

Another important title in the fivefold ministry, is that of *prophet*. The noun *prophet* has been taken from the Greek word *προφήτης* which means the one who interprets the hidden things. The word *prophet* also refers to someone who has the Spirit of God within them and can speak the word of God with boldness. In the New Testament a prophet is therefore the one who speaks as being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This title is commonly used among the new prophetic churches across the African continent (Kgatle 2021:64). These churches are also considered to be part of the Pentecostal movement, although they are different from other classical and neo-Pentecostal churches (Kgatle 2019; 2021). In these ministries, almost every clergy is known by the title *prophet* and continues to function in the prophetic office. These ministries have raised popular prophets such as Prophets Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing Deliverance (PhD) in Zimbabwe, Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church in Zimbabwe Shepherd Bushiri of Enlightened Christian Gathering in Malawi, Uebert Angela of Spirit Embassy in the United Kingdom, Paseka Motsoeneng

known as prophet Mboro of Incredible Happenings in South Africa, Kusi Victor Boateng of Power Chapel Worldwide in Ghana, the late Prophet TB Joshua of Synagogue Church of All Nations in Nigeria, and others. There are numerous clergy of the new prophetic churches who also use the title *prophet* in their calling (Resane 2021b:170). These prophets have been caught in one controversy after the other over the years. This has also caused scepticism in other clergy using the same title, because it might appear as embracing the same controversies of other prophets.

The noun *evangelist* is derived from the Greek word εὐαγγελιστής which comes from the word εὐαγγελίζω [to bring the good news]. Thus, *evangelism* is the title given to those who deliver the words of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, the title *evangelist* is taken from the word *evangelism* which is more about the preaching of the good news to the lost souls. The title *evangelist* was extremely popular in the 20th century with great evangelists such as Nicholas Bhengu, Elias Letwaba, Job Chiliza, William Duma, Richard Ngidi, and Reinhard Bonnke (Kgatle 2020:5). Great evangelists rose in the last quarter of the 20th century such as evangelist T.A. Ralekholela of Gospel Fire Ministry. The evangelists are also known for preaching in crusades in the form of tent ministry or even open-air spaces (Gordon & Hancock 2005:386).

The word *pastor* is taken from the Greek word, ποιμήν and it means a *shepherd*. A shepherd is someone responsible for watching out for enemies trying to attack the sheep, defending the sheep from attackers, healing the wounded and sick sheep, finding, and saving lost or trapped sheep, loving them, sharing their lives, and earning their trust. Although the titles *apostle* and *prophet* are extremely popular among the African neo-Pentecostals, some would still refer to the leader of their congregations as *pastor*. This means that even if someone has a different gift or operates in a different office, they would still be referred to as pastor which denotes the shepherd of God's flock. Anyone with a calling to lead the church or a congregation will be called a pastor.

The word *teacher* is taken from the Greek word διδάσκαλος. However, this word is not generally used to refer to teachers, but rather to the one who teaches the words of Christ. The title *teacher* in the fivefold ministry is not used often; even if there are churches that believe in the teaching ministry, they will seldom call someone a teacher. However, the teaching ministry remains one of the important ministries in the body of Christ, and surprisingly, the same is emphasised in certain African neo-Pentecostal Christianity. Although some neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa do allocate time for teaching ministry, most would still emphasise other gifts such as prophetic ministry and the performance of miracles (Ramantswana 2018:3).

There is a certain dispensationalist view on the practice of the fivefold ministry in Africa. Dispensationalism, according to Robinson (2015:196), is the 'belief in a system of historical progression, as revealed in the Bible, consisting of a series of stages in God's self-revelation and plan of salvation'. This

phenomenon is important for the understanding of the Bible in different historical periods (Nel 2019:71–72). Some neo-Pentecostals have used the fivefold ministry according to different periods in time. This means that they believe that there was a season of evangelists, a period of prophets and a period of apostles. Some of them currently believe that they are in the season of apostles and prophets. Hence, it is not common in the 21st-century to hear about an evangelist as compared to the use of titles such as 'apostles and prophets'. This is a customary practice among new prophetic churches, as clergy in these churches take the title *prophets*. It is for the same reason that there are also prophetic schools in these churches for the primary purpose of training prophets who would assume leadership positions in these churches.

The challenges of the fivefold ministry within African neo-Pentecostalism

While the fivefold ministry is practiced within the neo-Pentecostal churches, it has produced various challenges. This article seeks to highlight a few challenges in the process of developing a Pentecostal theology of edification. As opposed to mainline Christianity and some classical Pentecostal churches, there are currently no requisites among neo-Pentecostals in terms of eligibility for the ordination or recognition of a certain office within the fivefold ministry (Resane 2021a:10). This means that anyone can assume the title *apostle* or *prophet* if they have a calling upon their lives. This leads to the abuse of titles by some of the clergy within the African neo-Pentecostalism, because anyone can take any title as they see fit (Pondani 2019:35). This is not the same with the classical Pentecostal churches that have a process of theological training, then the ordination of the pastor in preparation for the ministry. In these churches, pastors are also allowed to serve under an experienced pastor during their probation or ministry-integrated learning (White & Ntsiful 2018:260). However, among neo-Pentecostals, there is seldom an ordination process let alone the process of training the clergy within the theological education. Anyone can emerge and claim to be called by God for ministry and choose an office without following the necessary steps. In the end, the process of being called by a certain title, becomes a form of self-promotion by some of the clergy in African neo-Pentecostal churches.

The practice of the fivefold ministry among African neo-Pentecostals has opened a door for the practice of non-conventional titles like 'major 1' and 'seer 1'. According to Shingange (2021:103), these titles are sometimes used to exalt the individual prophet over and above other prophets, but also in competition with the person of Christ. Kgatle (2021:6) explains that this is because the title 'major one' is derived from the military rank, 'major general', with the implication that the prophet is of a higher rank and thus above other prophets. This kind of practice is common among the new prophetic churches such as the Enlightened Christian Gathering of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri. Bushiri is also known

as major 1, suggesting that there are minor prophets within the fivefold ministry and suggesting that he is above other prophets. Again, it must be reiterated that this is not common among the classical Pentecostal churches, as clergy in such churches use titles such as 'reverend' and no one has ever called themselves 'reverend 1' or 'priest 1'. It is only in the fivefold ministry where there is a tendency to abuse the prophetic titles by introducing different forms of the same title. Although titles such as 'major 1', 'seer 1' might appear very fashionable, they present a challenge of self-promotion and self-exaltation by certain prophets in neo-Pentecostal churches.

The current practice of the fivefold ministry also reveals a level of competition among the neo-Pentecostal churches. In other words, there is an overemphasis on certain offices, particularly the office of the apostle and the office of the prophet as compared to other offices (Quayesi-Amakye 2009:120). In the 21st century, it is not common for people to be called evangelists or even pastors; many of the clergy want to be called either apostle or prophet because of the perception around the superiority of these titles. This has caused competition among the clergy within the fivefold ministry, as there is pressure to accept a title that is higher than others. There is also a perception among many neo-Pentecostals that one title is superior to the other. This has caused the proliferation of titles such as 'apostle' and 'prophet' (Pondani 2019:35). This leads to a question as to why no one wants to go by the title *teacher* or even the title *servant of the people*, but rather big titles such as 'apostle' or 'prophet'? Titles such as 'servant of the people' are not so popular among African neo-Pentecostals. Clergy in these churches would rather be called 'powerful men or women of God'. In the end, this presents high forms of competition among the clergy in the African neo-Pentecostal churches in the 21st century.

Given its lack of regulation and process, the fivefold ministry has been hijacked by particular clergy who just use the titles *apostle* and *prophet* for personal benefit rather than serving the people of God (Quayesi-Amakye 2009:162). Others would insist on using these titles even if they do not necessarily have the gift for the same. Some of the clergy use the same titles to abuse the followers of certain neo-Pentecostal churches who would not suspect any wrongdoing. In other words, if the title *prophet* or *apostle* is used, there is a form of trust that the people place on the person. In the view of the researcher, this is based on the connection that people make, for example between the contemporary prophets and the prophets in the Bible. Consequently, the believers in African neo-Pentecostal churches do not expect the prophets and apostles to be engaged in malpractices. This is problematic, particularly concerning the titles *apostles* and *prophets* in the African context, because anyone, including false prophets, can accept the fivefold ministry titles to perpetrate abuses among the people of God. In the end, they become wolves in sheep skins and masquerade as genuine prophets, and they continue to abuse the people of God in the process. The assumption is

wrong that anyone with the title *prophet* or *apostle* is genuine, as all clergy need to be judged by their fruit and not necessarily by the title they hold in the African neo-Pentecostal churches. This does not only apply to the African neo-Pentecostalism alone, but to the Christian tradition as a whole: the clergy should not only be judged by their titles, but rather by their fruit.

The Pentecostal theology of edification in Ephesians 4:11-13

The Pentecostal theology of edification is constructed by looking at Ephesians 4:11–13 as the biblical foundation for the fivefold ministry. Ephesians 4:11–13 states:

And He gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

From this text, the fivefold ministry is based on Christ as the foundation of the ministry and not the person holding an office. The foundation of this ministry was never about the use of titles by individuals, but by those who are founded and grounded in Christ. Thus Jesus himself, gave the five offices of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher to the church. This means that anyone who wants to partake in the fivefold ministry is expected to have a foundation in Christ. Ephesians 2:20 clearly states that 'having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.' According to Green (2005:11), Christ is the one who decides on whom to apportion the gift of the office of the fivefold ministry and not an individual prophet or apostle.

The fivefold ministry is used for the equipping of the saints for the ministry of Christ (Hamon 2005; Kirkland 2015; Stevens 2002). In other words, each of the offices of the fivefold ministry is to be used not for individual gain, but for the equipping of the saints. Ephesians 4:12 clearly states that the reason Christ released all the offices in the fivefold ministry, was for the primary purpose of equipping the saints with different gifts. This means that the church that only depends on one office of the fivefold ministry is not fully equipped, as other gifts are important for the health of the church (Stephens 2018:21). So, the fivefold ministry becomes in a way, a healthy spiritual diet for the nourishing of the church. It is for the same reason that one office of the fivefold ministry cannot be exalted over others, as the church needs all the offices. Thus, for the church to be fully equipped, it needs all the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In the same way, those occupying these offices should have the same understanding that all the offices are important for the equipping of the church.

The function of the fivefold ministry is for the edifying of the church as stated in the second part of Ephesians 2:12. This

means that those who claim to be gifted in the fivefold ministry are expected to build others and not to destroy them. 1 Corinthians 14:12 states, 'So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.' Those who desire to be in the fivefold ministry should be prepared to edify the church through their gifts (Harris 2022:16). Similarly, the one giving prophecy, teaching, and sermon is expected to do so with the primary goal of edifying and not destroying the church. In the context of the African neo-Pentecostal churches, this means that the fivefold ministry is expected to edify these churches and not to propagate abuses that were highlighted in the preceding sections. It is for this reason that the theology of edification is relevant for addressing the abuse of titles and other abuses in the practice of the fivefold ministry.

The Pentecostal theology of edification is expected to bring the unity of faith including the unity of the five offices. The prophet is also expected to do away with the competition among the fivefold ministries such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher (Resane & Buitendag 2008:1527). The Pentecostal theology of edification is the proponent of unity with the primary purpose of building the church. It is for the same reason that each office in this kind of theology is acknowledged and allowed to function in the church for the same purpose of bringing unity. This is possible when those occupying the same offices in the fivefold can appreciate other offices instead of competing. 1 Corinthians 12:4–7 states:

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

This means that, as much as the fivefold ministry is based on the Holy Spirit, unity is possible, because the Spirit's work in one office is the same as in the other. This is important in African neo-Pentecostalism, as the movement is founded on the theology of the Spirit. So, if the Spirit is the same, there is no need for competition in the practice of the fivefold ministry, but edification of one another within the African neo-Pentecostal churches.

What about other important gifts other than the fivefold ministry? Why is there not a focus among the African neo-Pentecostals to introduce and value other gifts such as those listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–13:

One person is given the gift of teaching words of wisdom. Another person is given the gift of teaching what he has learned and knows. These gifts are by the same Holy Spirit. One person receives the gift of faith. Another person receives the gift of healing. These gifts are given by the same Holy Spirit. One person is given the gift of doing powerful works. Another person is given the gift of speaking God's Word. Another person is given the gift of telling the difference between the Holy Spirit and false spirits. Another person is given the gift of speaking with special sounds. Another person is given the gift of telling what these special sounds mean. But it is the same Holy Spirit,

the Spirit of God, Who does all these things. He gives to each person as He wants to give.

These gifts are equally important and can equip the church in the same way that the fivefold ministry would do. There is no reason for overemphasising the fivefold ministry, as other gifts are also important in the body of Christ. In other words, the church needs helpers, people of wisdom, faith, and discernment as much as the offices in the fivefold ministry are needed.

The theology of edification as a participation of all believers

The Pentecostal theology of edification is a theology that is expected to benefit the community of believers rather than an individual prophet or apostle. This means that the individual, carrying the gift, should use the same to benefit the church and not him- or herself. The pastors in African neo-Pentecostal churches should be in pursuit of the edification of all believers rather than the pursuit of titles. This also means that the clergy in these churches should learn to work together for the unity of the church. If one is gifted in prophecy, it does not mean that they should undermine the office of the teacher, for example. All the offices in the fivefold ministry are necessary for the edification of the body of Christ; hence, there is no need to exalt one gift over the other or to even exalt one particular prophet over other prophets within the African neo-Pentecostal churches.

The theology of edification encourages the participation of all believers rather than the participation of only the well-known prophet. 1 Corinthians 14:26 states clearly that, 'How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.' This means that the gathering of the saints is not a moment to hear only from the fivefold ministry, but also to hear from each other as believers. The Pentecostal church is not expected to be passive, but rather to be active by contributing to its spirituality. This calls for the African neo-Pentecostal churches to reconsider the dependence on the fivefold ministry, especially the offices of the apostle and the prophet into calling all the believers to exercise their gifts for the building up of the church of Christ. This means that the church is not only built by the apostles and prophets, but all the believers have a role to play in building the church and enhancing the unity of all believers. The fivefold ministry is expected to benefit the church beyond the African neo-Pentecostalism into other Christian traditions in the interest of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The fivefold ministry was discussed in this article by looking at the current practices within the African neo-Pentecostalism. Some current practices are inconsistent

with the biblical perspective on fivefold ministry. It is found that some clergy within neo-Pentecostal churches believe in the fivefold ministry for the attainment of titles without proper recognition, while others have a propensity to use titles such as 'major 1' and 'seer 1', which are unconventional titles even within the fivefold ministry. There are clergy that have developed a competitive spirit where titles such as 'apostles' and 'prophets' are overemphasised in contrast to others. This article proposed the Pentecostal theology of edification that defines the fivefold ministry as the ministry to edify the church through the offices of the apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors, and evangelists. The understanding of the fivefold ministry was developed in this article by using Ephesians 4:11-13 to show that the fivefold ministry is more communal than individualistic. The use of this ministry in the 21st century should be for the benefit of the body of Christ rather than for individual apostles and prophets. In addition, the theology of edification calls for the participation of all believers rather than a dependence on offices such as the one of apostles and prophets. As much as the fivefold ministry is important, we should guard against the abuses in the construction of the Pentecostal theology of edification.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology for the support provided in conducting this research.

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships exist that may have inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contribution

M.S.K. has declared sole authorship of this research article.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the University of South Africa, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee and ethics consent was received on 01 July 2019. The ethics approval number 2019-CHS-90343018-Dept.

Funding information

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the University of South Africa.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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