



**How can Traditional Brazilian Candomble Practices be used in the Treatment of
Anxiety?**

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Introduction

Anxiety is a common mental health issue experienced by people globally, characterized by excessive worry and fear, leading to physical and psychological symptoms. While several conventional treatments are available, alternative therapies are becoming more popular, including traditional practices such as Candomble, a religion with African roots in Brazil. Candomble incorporates various rituals and ceremonies, including music, dance, and herbal remedies, to connect with spirits, ancestors, and deities (De Souza Cavalcante et al., 2016). Central to Candomble is the belief in Orishas, or deities, who are associated with different aspects of life, such as health, wealth, and love. The religion also incorporates the use of rituals and herbal medicine in its healing practices. This paper examines the potential of traditional Brazilian Candomble practices in treating anxiety through two disciplinary perspectives, namely religion and social science.

Candomble practices in treating anxiety from a religious perspective

Candomble practices are rooted in African traditional religions and have been practiced in Brazil for centuries, particularly among the Afro-Brazilian population. In Candomble, anxiety is often viewed as a spiritual issue that can be resolved by communicating with spirits and invoking deities through rituals and ceremonies (De Souza Cavalcante et al., 2016). Candomble rituals incorporate music, dance, and drumming, which are believed to have a calming effect on the body and mind, promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety levels. Rebecca Seligman's article, "The Unmaking and Making of Self: Embodied Suffering and Mind-Body Healing in Brazilian Candomble," explores how Candomble practices can be used in the treatment of anxiety. Seligman (2010) argues that Candomble offers a unique approach to healing that integrates the mind, body, and spirit. She notes that anxiety is often experienced as embodied suffering, meaning that it is felt in the body as well as the mind. Candomble rituals, such as dance and music, help to engage the

body in the healing process, which can be effective in reducing anxiety. Candomble practitioners believe that by invoking the spirits and deities through rituals and ceremonies, they can seek their guidance and protection. The sense of connection and spiritual support can help reduce anxiety levels and promote a sense of calmness and wellbeing. Rebecca Seligman's article, "Distress, Dissociation, and Embodied Experience: Reconsidering the Pathways to Mediumship and Mental Health," explores the relationship between mediumship and mental health in Candomble. Mediumship is the ability to communicate with spirits, and it is a significant aspect of Candomble healing practices. Seligman (2005) argues that mediumship can be a helpful tool in treating anxiety, as it provides a means of accessing and addressing the underlying emotional and spiritual factors that contribute to the disorder. Mediumship can also provide a sense of connection and support for the patient, which can be beneficial in reducing anxiety.

Candomble practitioners also use herbal remedies in treating anxiety. Plants are believed to possess spiritual energy and are used to make teas and baths, which are believed to cleanse the body and mind and promote a sense of calmness (Braga et al., 2017). One example of such a plant is chamomile, which is commonly used in Candomble ceremonies to promote relaxation and reduce anxiety levels. Braga et al. (2017) argue that the use of herbal medicine in Candomble can be effective in treating anxiety, as many herbs have calming and soothing effects on the body and mind. The authors also note that the use of herbal medicine in Candomble is based on a holistic approach to healthcare that emphasizes the connection between the mind, body, and spirit. This approach to healthcare can be particularly helpful in treating anxiety, as it addresses the root causes of the disorder rather than just treating the symptoms.

The use of mollusks in rituals constitutes another aspect of traditional Brazilian Candomble practices that is vital in the treatment of anxiety. Léo Neto et al. (2012) explore

the symbolic and ritualistic importance of mollusks in Candomble in their article, “Mollusks of Candomble: symbolic and ritualistic importance.” They found out that mollusks have significant cultural and spiritual significance in Candomble and are used in a range of rituals. In Candomble, mollusks are believed to have healing properties and are used to treat a range of physical and psychological ailments. The authors argue that the use of mollusks in healing practices can be effective in treating anxiety, as it provides a tangible object for the patient to focus on and can serve as a source of comfort and support (Léo Neto et al., 2012). The use of mollusks in Candomble also has symbolic significance. Mollusks are associated with the Orisha Yemanjá, who is the mother of the sea and the source of all life. Yemanjá is often invoked in Candomble healing practices, and mollusks are used to represent her power and presence (Léo Neto et al., 2012). The symbolic significance of mollusks can be helpful in treating anxiety, as it provides a sense of connection and grounding for the patient.

The relationship between intercessory prayer and mental health is the dimension of how Candomble practices can be used to treat anxiety. Miranda et al. (2019) conducted a study that focused on the effects of intercessory prayer on the mental health of breast cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy. The authors found that intercessory prayer had a significant positive effect on the patients’ spiritual coping, which in turn improved their mental health outcomes, including anxiety reduction (Miranda et al., 2019). The study also found that salivary amylase levels, which are associated with stress and anxiety, were significantly lower in the intercessory prayer group compared to the control group. Maier-Lorentz (2004) also established that offering prayers could be instrumental in reducing factors that are associated with stress.

Candomble practices in treating anxiety from a social science perspective

Candomble practices are believed to promote social support, which can reduce anxiety levels. Candomble practitioners often belong to a community, and the practices are

usually performed in groups. The sense of belonging and support from the community can help individuals cope with anxiety and promote a sense of wellbeing. Wiencke Markus's article, "Social Dimensions of Health: Ritual Practice, Moral Orders, and Worlds of Meaning in Brazilian Candomble and Umbanda Temples," examines the social and cultural aspects of Candomble healing practices. Markus (2020) argues that Candomble is a holistic form of healthcare that incorporates not only physical but also social and spiritual elements.

Candomble healing practices are based on the idea that illness is not just a physical ailment but is also caused by social and spiritual factors. Markus (2020) also notes that Candomble healing practices are often based on the idea of moral orders. Moral orders are systems of values and beliefs that govern social behavior. In Candomble, the moral order is based on the relationship between the Orishas, practitioners, and patients. This relationship is built on trust, respect, and reciprocity, which are essential for effective healing.

Candomble practices also promote a sense of agency and empowerment, which can reduce anxiety levels. The rituals and ceremonies involve active participation, such as dancing and drumming, which can promote a sense of control and mastery over one's body and emotions (Seligman, 2005). This sense of agency can help individuals feel more in control of their lives, reducing anxiety levels. Candomble practices are also believed to promote a sense of identity and meaning, which can reduce anxiety levels. The practices are often passed down through generations, and practitioners often identify with their cultural and spiritual heritage. The sense of connection to one's identity and heritage can provide individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning, reducing anxiety levels.

The relationship between the practitioner and the patient in Candomble healing process is also a significant element that would be critical in anxiety treatment. Seligman (2005) also emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the practitioner and the patient in Candomble healing practices. In Candomble, the practitioner is seen as a healer

who has a special relationship with the Orishas. This relationship is essential in the healing process as the practitioner is seen as a conduit for the Orishas' healing power. Therefore, this relationship can be particularly helpful in treating anxiety, as it provides a sense of connection and support for the patient.

Conclusion

Traditional Brazilian Candomble practices have the potential to treat anxiety from both religious and social science perspectives. From a religious perspective, Candomble practices incorporate music, dance, herbal remedies, and spiritual practices to promote relaxation, reduce anxiety levels, and connect with spirits and deities. From a social science perspective, Candomble practices promote social support, a sense of agency and empowerment, and a sense of identity and meaning, all of which can reduce anxiety levels. As such, traditional practices such as Candomble can complement conventional treatments and provide individuals with additional coping mechanisms for managing anxiety. However, Candomble practices should not be viewed as a substitute for professional medical treatment for severe cases of anxiety. It is crucial to seek professional help if one is experiencing severe symptoms of anxiety.



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