EDITORS' PREFACE

This volume brings together twelve chapters by scholars and practitioners from across the African continent and its diaspora. Their work draws on fieldwork and community practice in Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Eswatini, Nigeria, Oman, Egypt, and Australia. Together they address the mental health of children, elderly women, incarcerated individuals, aspiring entrepreneurs, widows, men navigating gendered expectations, and diaspora communities, all through lenses that centre African philosophies, indigenous knowledge systems, and community-based interventions.

We have deliberately sought contributions that challenge Eurocentric assumptions, that cite African authors and African-context research, and that speak to practitioners working in under-resourced and culturally complex settings. The book is structured to support teaching and learning: each chapter opens with its aims, contextualises its argument, introduces key African concepts, and concludes with resources for further engagement.

This book builds on these foundations to present African understandings, models, and interventions in a systematic and practice-oriented manner. It engages both classical texts and contemporary innovations, recognising that knowledge production is an ongoing process shaped by historical continuity and present-day realities. The aim is not to reject Western contributions wholesale, but to reposition them within a pluralistic framework where African epistemologies are central rather than marginal.

The book is organised into four sections. Section I: (Chapters 1–3) establishes the theoretical and philosophical ground for African-centred mental health practice. Section II (Chapters 4–8) examines how children, incarcerated persons, communities, widows, and grassroots organisations experience and address mental health within African family and communal structures. Section III (Chapters 9–11) explores how cultural identity, gender norms, entrepreneurship, and institutional systems shape mental health outcomes in eSwatini, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho. Section IV (Chapters 12–13) addresses the mental health of elderly rural women under climate stress and the role of faith communities in supporting African diaspora populations in Australia.

Chapter 1 introduces African understandings of mental health, followed by Chapter 2 which presents African mental health assessment tools, arguing that effective assessment must engage clinical, indigenous, and integrative approaches alongside African idioms of distress. Chapter 3 compares African and Western mental health care models, demonstrating that Ubuntu-grounded, communal frameworks offer a philosophically distinct and often more effective basis for care. Chapter 4 examines mental health issues affecting children in Benin Metropolis, Nigeria, and proposes social work measures grounded in African communal values. Chapter 5 addresses barriers to mental health support for incarcerated persons in Africa, arguing for community-reintegration approaches that restore relational belonging. Chapter 6 presents the Hurukuro Dialogues Initiative as an indigenous knowledge system for mental health care, positioning communal dialogue as a primary rather than supplementary healing medium. Chapter 7 explores the mental health experiences and resilience strategies of Sotho widows in Zimbabwe, demonstrating how communal and cultural coping resources are foundational rather than peripheral to care. Chapter 8 examines the Friendship Bench model, in which trained community grandmothers deliver structured psychosocial support at primary health care clinics, as Africa's most globally scaled community-based mental health innovation. Chapter 9 investigates how African indigenous medicine in eSwatini addresses fear of failure among aspiring entrepreneurs, arguing for integration of spiritual, ancestral, and communal healing traditions into entrepreneurial mental health support. Chapter 10 examines the relationship between masculinity and mental health among Ndebele men in Zimbabwe, proposing community-centred, culturally grounded approaches that restore relational belonging rather than treating individuals in isolation. Chapter 11 makes the case for Lesotho's schools as frontline platforms for mental health and psychosocial support, demonstrating through case studies that trained teachers and school social workers can reach children at scale. Chapter 12 explores culturally grounded pathways for supporting the mental wellbeing of elderly women in rural Zimbabwe facing climate change, arguing that resilience is communally sustained through storytelling, rain ceremonies, and kinship bonds. Chapter 13 examines the roles of clergy and

social workers in promoting mental health among African Australians, arguing that effective diaspora care requires an integrated, Ubuntu-grounded model that centres communal belonging over individual clinical treatment. The final chapter, 14, presents pedagogical approaches in African mental health. At the end of the book there is an annotated bibliography of key sources and a list of mental health conditions and issues.

This book will be of value to mental health practitioners, social workers and counsellors working with African communities in Australia and beyond. It will also serve academics and students in psychology, social work and public health engaging with African-centred frameworks. Policy makers and service planners designing culturally responsive mental health systems will find the assessment tools and models directly applicable. Community organisations and diaspora support workers will find practical value in the Friendship Bench and African Computerized Adaptive Test (AFRICAT) approaches. It will also speak to anyone, African or otherwise, seeking a deeper understanding of mental health through African philosophical thought.

We are deeply grateful to every contributing author for their scholarship, their openness to peer review, and their commitment to this project. We also thank the decolonisation reviewer, the anonymous peer reviewers, the whole-book reviewer and the team at Zivo Publishing for their partnership in bringing this work to life.

William Abur and Rugare Mugumbate, 2026