



# A Scoping Review of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Medicinal Practice: An African Perspective from Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are a significant component of healthcare in many African communities, providing culturally relevant practices and medicinal resources. In Zimbabwe, IKS in medicine coexists with conventional healthcare, but its full scope, contemporary application, and potential for integration within the national health framework are not well understood. A systematic mapping of this field is needed. This scoping review aimed to systematically map the literature concerning Indigenous Knowledge Systems in medicinal practice within Zimbabwe. Its objectives were to describe the characteristics of this literature, identify predominant research themes and gaps, and examine how IKS is documented in relation to general, maternal, and reproductive health. The review was conducted according to the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology for scoping reviews. A systematic search was performed across multiple electronic databases and grey literature sources. Included sources were published in English and focused on IKS in medicinal practice within Zimbabwe. Data were extracted and analysed thematically. Seventy-eight sources were included. The literature demonstrates a strong focus on plant-based medicines for a wide spectrum of conditions, including maternal health concerns and infectious diseases. Traditional healers are consistently identified as central knowledge custodians. Key gaps include insufficient documentation of specific pharmacopeia, treatment protocols, and safety data. The literature also describes tensions between IKS and biomedical systems, alongside noted community interest in collaboration. IKS in Zimbabwe represents an extensive repository of medicinal knowledge, particularly concerning herbal medicine. Existing literature is fragmented and largely descriptive, with limited critical analysis of efficacy, safety, or sustainable integration models. This highlights a requirement for more systematic and collaborative research. Future research should prioritise ethical, co-produced studies with knowledge holders to document specific practices and pharmacopeia. Investigative focus should expand to include clinical safety, efficacy, and the development of equitable frameworks for integrating IKS within pluralistic healthcare systems in Zimbabwe.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems, traditional medicine, Zimbabwe, scoping review, medicinal plants, healthcare integration. This review provides a consolidated map of existing literature on Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwean medicinal practice, clarifying key themes, gaps, and directions for future research and policy development.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Traditional medicine, Zimbabwe, Ethnomedicine, Scoping review, African traditional healing, Medicinal plants*



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