



Using art to deal with pain

Art forms like embroidery can help women in telling their unspeakable traumatic narratives.

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are unable to express their trauma in words. Researchers at UNISA have used needlework to look at ways in which visual methods could be used in assisting older black women to express unspoken traumas.

"Beyond making visually appealing artwork, needlework has always been and still is used as a useful tool to tell difficult or unspeakable stories," says Professor Puleng Segalo.

Many older women have needlework skills. Through making embroideries that depict their lived experiences of gender trauma, they can have an outlet for the outpouring of their pain. While their embroideries serve as a canvas for the outpouring of pain, loss and trauma, they have also told stories of hope, resilience and resistance.

"The women weaved together experiences of the past and the present. The art told complicated stories of what it means to be a woman living in South Africa."

Embroidery as an art form is a useful tool that can be used to tell difficult stories. More communities could work together to use art forms such as embroidery to consider ways in which gendered societal challenges can be confronted.

Older black women who grew up during apartheid in South Africa used to be treated as second-class citizens. With the new dispensation, they were hoping to feel safe within their homes and communities, to be treated as equal citizens and to be

empowered to be self-sustaining.

While the government and nongovernmental organisations have put empowerment programmes in place which aim to curb some of their challenges, these are not enough. There are still people who



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