

Research on mental health and disability in Ghana

March 2021

About this summary

This summary is intended for those who are commissioning research on mental health and disability in Ghana or those who want to improve mental health services in Ghana. It is based on a report which can be read by contacting Ghana Somubi Dwumadie (Ghana Participation Programme), who conducted the research and wrote the report.

Ghana Somubi Dwumadie is a four-year disability programme with a specific focus on mental health. This programme is funded with UK aid from the UK government and run by an Options-led consortium, which also consists of BasicNeeds-Ghana, King's College London, Sightsavers International and Tropical Health. It focuses on:

- Promoting stronger policies and systems that respect the rights of people with disabilities, including people with mental health disabilities
- Scaling up high quality and accessible mental health services
- Reducing stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities, including mental health disabilities
- Generating evidence to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of disability and mental health programmes and interventions

Background

To identify the research priorities for mental health and disability in Ghana, Ghana Somubi Dwumadie conducted an online survey of clinicians, researchers and academics, policy makers, funders, multilateral organisations, and non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations in mental health and disability.

The survey asked practitioners to identify their top research priorities in mental health and disability in the immediate and short term (within the next five years) and long term (more than five years).

Ghana Somubi Dwumadie also reviewed the existing published research available during the last ten years (2010-2020). The search for existing research was done by searching databases using a range of defined search terms and analysing the year of research, type of research, research and cross-cutting themes, research design, study population, study setting, research location, funding source and those conducting the research. This review included relevant internally generated reports from studies conducted under Ghana Somubi Dwumadie programme.

Research priorities for mental health in Ghana

The five main areas where stakeholders wanted more research are:

Epidemiological studies: studies on the analysis of distribution, patterns and causes of mental health conditions, and how much these conditions occur in different groups of people. This will help identify how mental health conditions emerge, and what makes some people more likely to have mental health disorders than others. Research on social determinants, such as where people are born, grow, live and work, their age, and mental health is particularly needed.

Design and evaluation of **intervention studies**, including 'economic evaluation,' of the financial impact of mental health on an individual but also on the Ghanaian economy.

Health systems, policy and legislation studies in order to, for example, better understand human-rights issues and their impact on mental health and disability; and to integrate mental health in primary healthcare.

Studies that examine issues around **public health emergencies** such as COVID-19 and mental health.

Community/public engagement studies that examine the role of traditional/faith-based healers in the delivery of community mental health care and increase understanding regarding effective community participation in mental health and disability programmes.

Research in Ghana

What exists

This review of existing research covered studies conducted on mental health and/or disability in Ghana over the past ten years. This meant that a lot of research was reviewed, but that some specific topics may not have been included. For example, if research covered a very specific condition such as schizophrenia, this may not have come up in the search terms used. Trends identified by the review:

- There has been a growing increase in the number of studies conducted on mental health and other forms of disability in Ghana over the past ten years, especially in the last four years
- Most research output in the past ten years has been on establishing the epidemiology of mental health conditions and disability
- Most of the research identified was about mental health (62%) rather than disability (38%)
- Most of the research was informed by observational quantitative or qualitative studies (82%), with very few intervention studies
- Most of the studies were conducted in the south of Ghana

Significant research gaps

- There has been limited intervention-based or implementation research (which is designed research studies with a clearly defined research question and defined protocol for data collection, analysis and dissemination)
- There are not many studies on children and adolescents' mental health and disabilities
- There were no disability studies conducted in Ahafo and Bono East regions and only a few mental health studies in Western Ghana
- There were fewer studies focussing on mental health and disability for men

Research capacity needs

Research capacity is the ability to conduct, manage, disseminate, and apply research in policy and practice. It also refers to the ability to conduct research relevant to the most important mental health challenges as needed. Building capacity for research is important to improving mental health services and systems. Research on mental health interventions should be specific to a country. The following findings were made about Ghana's research capacity:

- Academic and research institutions have low capacity for mental health and disability research, but strong capacity to carry out research in other areas (such as health systems, implementation science, ethical conduct)
- Researchers in health research institutions (for example, the three Ghana Health Service research centres) give research in mental health and disability high priority, but in universities, mental health and disability research appears low priority
- Both researchers and academics prioritise research on health systems, population-level surveys, implementation science, service-user empowerment research, ethical conduct of research, and qualitative research



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For further information, visit our website:

<https://options.co.uk/work/ghana-participation-programme>

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