International Journal of Mental Health

ISSN: 0020-7411 (Print) 1557-9328 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/mimh20

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To cite this article: Vivian Dzokoto, Christina Barnett, Annabella Osei-Tutu & Alexis Briggs (2018) Mental health reportage in Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015: A qualitative analysis, International Journal of Mental Health, 47:3, 192-214, DOI: 10.1080/00207411.2018.1488557

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2018.1488557

Published online: 28 Aug 2018.

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MENTAL HEALTH
2018, VOL. 47, NO. 3, 192–214
https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2018.1488557

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Mental health reportage in Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015: A qualitative analysis

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ABSTRACT

Print media plays an important role in the circulation of information in contemporary Ghanaian society. We thematically examined the content of 164 mental health-related articles published between 2000 and 2015 in six widely circulating Ghanaian newspapers. The articles included investigative reports related to specific public events and incidents; advice columns; editorials; and didactic pieces. The articles covered the following four major topics: (1) Mental health awareness and advocacy; (2) Suicide; (3) Donations; and (4) Religion. Our findings demonstrate that Ghanaian newspapers promote awareness about mental disorders; advocate for those with mental disorders; provide mostly accurate basic knowledge about the nature and management of specific disorders; and inform the public about the state of mental health care in Ghana. We also observed that newspapers serve as a medium through which social representations of mental disorder in society are circulated, and in which tensions between common sense views and evidence-based information on mental health are expressed.

KEYWORDS

Ghana newspaper; mental health; media; Africa

Adinkrah's article "Crash-Landings of Flying Witches in Ghana: Grand Mystical Feats or Diagnosable Psychiatric Illnesses?" published in *Transcultural Psychiatry* analyzes Ghanaian newspaper articles about the salience of cultural and religious beliefs in the conceptualization of psychiatric illness and experiences of the elderly in a contemporary African society. The stories also highlight the fact that in this age of social media, print media still plays an important role in keeping the Ghanaian public informed about local events. Furthermore, Adinkrah's (In press) analysis of the local meanings made of—and narratives constructed around—finding disoriented elderly people in urban public spaces is a reminder of the utility of looking at newspapers as an indirect gauge of public knowledge of mental illness and the cultural models of meaning that people use to make sense of newsworthy, mental disorder-related events that occur in their

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world. The present study explores the content and type of mental health relevant information covered in Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015. In contrast to Adinkrah's (In press) work and the earlier work of Dzokoto and Adams (2005), the focus of this study is the typical—and not the sensational—mental health-related entries featured in newspapers. To achieve this objective, we first review the state of print media in Ghana. Second, we review two theoretical perspectives about the interplay between media and information in society. Third, we discuss our sources of data and approach to collecting and analyzing our data. Fourth, we summarize the content of our dataset of mental health-related articles. Finally, we discuss the implications of our observations.

Mental health in Ghana

A variety of mental health conditions has been reported in Ghana. The prevalence of common mental health disorders like depression and anxiety is estimated at 20%, and that of severe mental illness like schizophrenia is an estimated 3% (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). People tend to use a variety of health services (including biomedical and alternative health systems) to address mental health needs (de-Graft Aikins, Dzokoto, & Yevak, 2015; Read, Adiibokah, & Nyame, 2009). As of 2011, Ghana housed 123 mental health outpatient facilities, three psychiatric hospitals, seven community-based psychiatric inpatient units, four community residential facilities, and one day-treatment center (Roberts, Mogan, & Asare, 2014). Most individuals who sought treatment did so at outpatient facilities and psychiatric hospitals. The most prevalent presenting diagnoses at outpatient and psychiatric facilities included schizophrenia, mood disorders, and substance abuse disorders (Roberts et al., 2014). Within the country, there were 18 psychiatrists, 19 psychologists, around 1,070 registered Mental Nurses, 72 Community Mental Health Officers, and 21 social workers dedicated to mental health. Roberts et al. (2014) noted the limited number of mental health facilities and services available within the country.

Additionally, they recognized that nurses' responsibility for providing the majority of mental health care is disproportionate for a country of Ghana's economic status. The reality of a low resourced mental health public sector is a reality of neighboring West African nations as well. In 2011, Nigeria housed only 44 health outpatient facilities and eight mental hospitals (WHO, 2011). Schizophrenia was the highest diagnosed mental health disorder across all psychiatric settings. Mood disorders and substance abuse disorders were also among the most prevalent disorders. In Burkina Faso, where psychiatric disorders are estimated to contribute to 5.8% of the global burden of disease (WHO, 2008), as of 2011 there were no reported

mental health facilities available for its citizens (WHO, 2011). Ghana formulated and passed a new Mental Health Act (Act 846) in 2012 to coordinate services to meet the mental health needs of the country. The Act prioritizes public education, correction of human rights breaches, decriminalization of suicide, and implementation of drug rehabilitation facilities and halfway houses. The Act ensured the creation of the Mental Health Authority, and promotes the creation of the Mental Health Fund, and mental health review tribunals. Ghana's 2012 Mental Health Act is the only piece of stand-alone mental health legislation, distinct from policy or other integrationist mental health legislation, in West Africa. The implementation of training for mental health care providers as well as adherence to the new policies and guidelines set forth by the Act have progressed slowly. As such, mental health services are still inadequate, quality of care is poor, and social responses to mental disorders are negative (Barke, Nyarko, & Klecha, 2011; de-Graft Aikins, Dzokoto, & Yevak, 2015).

Social stigma surrounds mental health disorders. This is partly attributable to cultural practices and beliefs about mental disorders (Opare-Henaku & Utsey, 2017). Adinkrah (2015) noted that the attribution of negative life events to witches, evil spirits, and other demonic forces, was also ascribed to those with mental health disorders. Thus, those who experience mental health crises are suspected of a cultural wrongdoing. Barke et al. (2011) report that this stigma often manifests as familial shame, rejecting attitudes towards those with mental health disorders, and the belief in social consequences, like the removal of citizenship rights for the individual.

One means of dealing with stigma surrounding mental disorder is through education. Education has been associated with more positive regard towards those with mental health disorders (Barke et al., 2011). The print media, as an arbiter of information, is an important way in which knowledge about mental disorders is disseminated. However, Adjorlolo, Abdul-Nasiru, Chan, and Bambi (2016) reported that oftentimes Ghanaian print media perpetuates stigma by reporting on the criminal activities of those with mental health disorders, and not addressing the risk factors or context present that precipitated the crime in the first place. To gain a good understanding of the role of the Ghanaian print media in shaping public opinion and disseminating knowledge about mental health disorders, it is important to systematically explore the mental health-related information that is circulated in print.

The state of print media in Ghana

While the future of print media in many Western markets is anticipated to be similar to that of the rotary phone, it is unclear whether the patronage

of print media in Ghana is headed for a similar decline any time soon. On the one hand, print media is now more accessible to the population than it has been in previous decades. Illiteracy was cited as a barrier for 50% of non-newspaper readers in a 2009 AudienceScapes survey (Bowen & Goldstein, 2010). However, Ghana's adult literacy rate increased from 57.9% in 2000 to 76.6% in 2015 (a 15.30% average annual growth rate). Additionally, the youth literacy rate of Ghana increased from 70.7% in 2000 to 90.6% in 2015 (a 13.5% rate of growth; World Bank Group, 2017). Arguably, one could assume that increased literacy in an age of increased smartphone availability would push people more in the direction of more internet-based news. However, Ahiabenu (2015) observes that the expense associated with internet access in Ghana, as well as the fluctuating reliability of available internet service make it unlikely that print media will be completely replaced by electronic sources—at least not in the near future. In conjunction with relatively low computer literacy rates, Ahiabenu's (2015) reasoning may help explain the internet penetration estimate of 34.7% (Ghana Internet Usage Stats and Market Report, 2016) and a mobile internet subscriber penetration of 14% in a population where the mobile phone penetration rate is estimated at 129% due to multiple phone ownerships (Acquah, 2017). Pew Research Center (2007) reported that newspapers are the third media-based source of information used by Ghanaians, with television and radio being the primary sources of information, and the internet in fourth place. Although the newspapers with circulations above 80,000 (such as the Daily Graphic and Chronicle) maintain a non-subscription-based online presence, smaller solely in-print newspapers suffer from declining circulation and profitability (African Media Development Initiative, 2006; Yeboah-Afari, 2016). The existence of online versions of print media does inextricably link the impact of print and internet media, although some print content is often left out of internet versions. In sum, larger sections of the population can access newspapers than they could before, and print newspapers appear to be a sustainable business in Ghana, at least in the short term.

On the other hand, Ahiabenu (2015) observes that while newspaper readership may not be on the decline, it is certainly not growing in this Anglophone West African country's market. While this speculation has not been substantiated, it is possible that the lack of growth might be due to more people sharing newspapers to save cost given recent inflationary trends (Ghana's inflation rate between 2013 and 2017 has fluctuated between 12 and 20%; Trading Economics, 2017). Thirteen percent of participants in the 2009 AudienceScapes survey cited cost as a barrier to newspaper patronage (Bowen & Goldstein, 2010). Yeboah-Afari (2016) states that the current cost of newspapers make them an "affordable luxury" for

Ghanaians. Rashid (2017) indicates that newspaper sales have been on the decline, though his account of the trend references more global information than it does local. However, his perspective is supported by a 2015 survey by the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) that pegged daily national newspaper patronage at only 1.5% (Tsikata, 2015; Adogla-Bessa, 2015). While she does not give specifics, Yeboah-Afari (2016) also alludes to declining sales and readership of Ghanaian print media.

Like broadcast media, print media use in Ghana follows gendered and residential patterns (Power, Khatun, & Debeljak, 2012). At least 30% of urban Ghanaians and 9% of rural residents report getting news from newspapers on a weekly basis (Bowen & Goldstein, 2010), with men being twice as likely to read newspapers as women. The reach of information garnered from this source is greatly enlarged due to the circulation of knowledge within communities through word of mouth. Bowen & Goldstein (2010) report that *viva voce* is an important distribution modality for general news and information in Ghanaian communities for both women (29%) and men (46%). Information provided by friends and family, as well as others outside one's immediate circles, is generally considered relatively trustworthy (87% for friends and family, and 80% for less proximate community members). In contrast, estimates of trust in the information presented in newspapers ranges from 43% to 80%. Clearly, print media plays an important role in the circulation of information in contemporary Ghanaian society both directly and indirectly.

A 2016 Nielsen report indicates that a common feature of the media scene across many Sub-Saharan countries mirrors the pattern observed in Ghana: television, radio, and mobile have higher market penetration rates than print media and the internet. Internet connectivity affords consumers the ability to engage in a variety of activities of which reading email; reading news; searching for information; and viewing, downloading, and uploading photos, music, and videos were reported as the most popular activities. The obvious advantage of accessing information via the internet is its convenience. The ability to engage in real-time, have accessible information at any time, the lower cost of participation, and the capacity to interact with others set these platforms apart from print media (Agboola, 2014). While internet access is on the rise and will continue to increase over time, available data suggests that it has not yet outpaced traditional media sources as a primary information source in Sub-Saharan Africa. One possible reason may be perceived trust and quality. For example, in a sample of 20–35 year-old-Nigerian citizens queried, 64% preferred information and computer technology platforms (e.g., social media platforms, online news sources) to access news although they cited that the quality of print media content was superior to other platforms (Ohila & Arthur, 2014).

While the different forms of media are generally pitted against each other, they may not necessarily be independent of each other. For example, many newspapers now have websites, which means their readership can get the news off the internet rather than in print, and in some countries, such as Ghana, radio presenters read news articles on the air (Nyarko, 2016).

The media as a reflection of mental health cultural norms

The relationship between mass media and the society it influences is a complex one. Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) indicate that access to information via mass media has pro-civic consequences. That is, the audience is invoked to engage with a representation of certain processes of civic life and the human experience, such as politics, health, entertainment, policy, business, technology, sports, and science. The media, inherently, plays an essential role in the depiction of mental health in society. Thus, some analysts argue that undertaking an assessment of the media's representation of mental illness serves as a medium through which the social representations of mental illness can be observed (Wahl, 1995). Several studies covering the role of media in the United States, Israel, and The Czech Republic (Diefenbach & West, 2007; Klin & Lemish, 2008; Nawková et al., 2012) have pointed out that the broadcast and the print media's negative portrayal of mental illness have influenced the attitudes of people and subsequently contributed to the stigmatization of mental illness in society and this represents the wider attitudes of society to mental illness.

It has also been argued that the print media's negative portrayal of mental illness is reflective of society's outlook and is not due to the media's bias or influence (Anderson, 2003). In fact, the individuals who consume print media play an active role as co-creators of the articles they are presented with (Allen & Nairn, 1997). According to Allen and Nairn, (1997), newspaper articles are written in such a way that the readers are required to draw on common sense notions of mental illness to make meaning of the texts they read. Thus, the public are actively involved in the creation of meaning generated about mental illness (Olstead, 2002). The conceptualization of mental illness, then, is a socially constructed one and as a result, mental illness is a production of the schemas that inform one's society (Olstead, 2002). Thus, mental disorder can be understood via a cultural lens that is related to the social, economic, and political frameworks functioning in a particular society (Olstead, 2002).

The media as educator and influencer

The media is a tool that serves to educate, inform, and shape the opinions of people with regards to mental disorder. The print media by virtue of

defining, maintaining, and redefining how mental illness is framed, has become the hub for producing cultural meanings associated with mental disorder (Gamson, 1985). In particular, the media in general and newspapers specifically, play a crucial role in promoting the stigmatization of mental disorder (Anderson, 2003). In Central Europe–-Croatia, Czech Republic, and Slovakia–-a majority of media coverage of mental disorder contains stigmatizing content, much of which becomes front page stories (Nawková et al., 2012).

This phenomenon is not exclusive to content involving mental disorder, however. As an institution, newspapers routinely promote controversy with pieces that oftentimes endorse bias (Corrigan et al., 2005). Regarding media about mental illness, Corrigan et al. (2005) argue that print media ranks content about danger above other stories, placing pieces about mental illness on its front pages as a sensationalist tactic, while reporting scant constructive content about this topic. Mental illness is tantamount to crime, violence, malice, and intent to harm (Hannigan, 1999).

This portrayal of mental disorders feeds into the consumers' prejudices about those with mental illness (Magliano, Read, & Marassi, 2011). In Italy, for instance, Magliano et al. (2011) found that newspapers tended to use the terms "schizophrenia" and "schizophrenic" figuratively, (73.7%), and not in reference to an individual diagnosed with the disorder (19.2%). When used figuratively, the terms "schizophrenia" or "schizophrenic" typified individuals who were behaving incoherently or in a contradictory manner (85.1%); dangerously or aggressively (4.4%); and eccentrically or oddly (10.5%). In articles where schizophrenia was mentioned in relation to the psychiatric disorder, these stories were about homicides (48.7%), and assaults carried out by the diagnosed (14.5%) or assaults of the diagnosed (28.2%).

Not only does the media's negative depiction have the capacity to influence a stereotypical understanding of mental illness (Coverdale, Nairn, & Claasen, 2002), it also influences the audience's desire for social distance from people with mental illness. Angermeyer, Dietrich, Pott, & Matschinger (2005) found that the more people watched television that depicted those with mental illness in a stereotypical fashion, the more they cultivated the desire for social distance from those with schizophrenia. In a study that looked at the ways in which Eating Disorders (ED), notably anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are represented in newspaper articles, O'Hara and Smith (2007) found out that EDs were represented as disorders which affected mostly white, female, adolescents, and young adults, and could be cured by simply changing one's mind about their eating behavior and eating decisions. The biopsychosocial etiology or treatment for these disorders were not discussed. According to O'Hara and Smith (2007), popular opinion about EDs is largely shaped by the media's portrayal.

Fortunately, the representation of mental disorder in the media is not always negative. Research has shown the utility of media campaigns as a way of reducing stigma surrounding mental health and motivating people to shift attitudes or change behavior based on information. Several studies have shown that the media also portrays mental illness constructively, or without a pejorative characterization. For example, the media was instrumental in educating Jamaicans about the benefits of a community-based treatment approach that did not involve institutionalizing people with mental illness (Whitley & Hickling, 2007). The foremost Jamaican newspapers gave an optimistic outlook on the benefits of deinstitutionalization by citing evidence-based data and "appealing to reason" (Whitley & Hickling, 2007). Australian nonfiction media does not cater to content about crime and violence as do European media outlets (Francis et al., 2004). In the U.K., Goulden et al.'s (2011) longitudinal study about newspaper portrayals of mental illness from 1992–2008 found that there was a significant reduction in the amount of pejorative content indicating the media's influence as a change agent in the depiction of mental health.

In sum, the print media, which remains an important source of information in Ghanaian society, may play multiple roles relevant to information about mental illness. It can serve a representational function, capturing "newsworthy" local depictions of mental disorder, thus providing insight into problems and events relevant to the experience and management of mental illness. Newspapers may also serve an educational function, since they can be used as a didactic medium to disburse information about mental health problems, and associated resources and policies.

The goal of the current study is to explore the content and type of mental health relevant information covered in Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015. We chose this period because of mental healthcare developments at national (e.g., revision of the national Mental Health Policy and Programmes in 2000, passage of the new 2012 Mental Health Act) and international (e.g., 2007 WHO report on mental health in Ghana) levels that occurred during this period. While mental health was clearly relevant to national policy, a look at newspaper reportage on mental health provides a lens of the extent to which it was a matter for public discourse and education. Thus, our analysis provides insight into the "pulse" of mental illness awareness and concerns in the public sphere in Ghana. It informs on extant social representations of mental illness and mental health concerns, identifies dimensions of mental illness that form part of a national conversation on this issue, and identifies information gaps which need to be filled.

Method

Data source

A multiple-step process was used to identify newspaper articles for our analysis. First, the Ghanaian newspapers with the largest circulations were identified. Next, a research assistant manually went through hard copies of newspaper archives and made photocopies of all articles published between 2000 and 2015 in the selected group of newspapers that were relevant, directly or indirectly, to psychology, broadly defined. In the next phase, two co-authors searched through all the selected articles to identify general and diagnostic terms that alluded to mental health. Examples of general terms identified included the following ones: alcoholism, crazed, crazy, hospital, institution, mad woman, madman, mental disorder, mental health, mentally ill, psychiatric hospital, psychiatry, psychology, substance abuse, substance use, suicidal, suicide, and witch. Examples of diagnostic terms included the following ones: anxiety, depressed, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, psychotic, and schizophrenia. These terms were used to inform the subsequent phase of the data analysis, in which the articles were sorted into mental health relevant and irrelevant articles. Criteria for inclusion were that the articles' subject matter was explicitly or implicitly about mental health as deemed by the raters and/or informed by theory relating to subjective well-being (Diener & Ryan, 2009) as well as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2013). Articles pertaining to clinical symptoms and disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and suicide, were included. Articles that discussed mental health treatment services were also included. Those articles that did not meet criteria were excluded. Articles related to substance abuse and sexuality are discussed elsewhere.

The resulting dataset consisted of newspaper articles from six Ghanaian newspapers that spanned the period of January 2000–August 2015 and covered issues pertaining to mental health. These included *The Chronicle* (14.6%), the most distributed private English-language newspaper in Accra, Ghana; The *Daily Graphic* (0.6%), a state owned newspaper; *The Ghanaian Times* (6.0%), a government-owned newspaper; *The Mirror* (15.2%; the weekly sister paper of the *Daily Graphic)*; *The Spectator* (41.5%), a weekend paper; the *Times Weekend* (0.6%, the *Ghanaian Times'* weekend publication); and a series of articles from these aforementioned sources whose originating newspaper was unfortunately lost during the photocopying process (21.5%).

Procedure

Qualitative data analysis: Inductive thematic analysis

To explore the content and type of mental health relevant information covered in Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of thematic analysis was conducted. In Phase 1, the coding team familiarized themselves with the data. In Phase 2, the coding team manually and systematically generated initial codes. These codes were data-driven. Coding was done via thematic analysis. A culturally relevant coding framework was created by the primary rater, and a second rater was trained to categorize the data accordingly. During this process, a subsample of articles (10%) were independently coded by both raters to assess reliability and refine coding criteria as needed. Once training and fine-tuning of the coding criteria was complete, coding was conducted by the two raters independently. In Phase 3, the coding team searched for themes and transformed codes into themes. In Phase 4, the coding team reviewed themes by collapsing or separating themes based on pattern and relevance. Both raters collaborated to review the final theme codes for every article. In Phases 5 and 6, the coding team defined the themes and provided detailed descriptions of the themes to be used for analysis. The reliability check of the articles yielded strong agreement. Discrepancies were revisited and resolved via discussion.

The primary unit of analysis was the content (central focus) of the article. These archival newspapers were advantageous in allowing the researchers to have access to a national sample, look at longitudinal implications of the data. Archival data analysis informed our qualitative analysis by allowing the researchers to take an exploratory approach using data that reflected normative cultural information for this period of time. The articles focused on the following issues: mental health, donations, misinformation, cultural incongruence, religion, suicide, and taboos. In addition, our analysis paid attention to the type of newspaper feature (the manner in which these topics were explored in the papers), such as whether the articles were didactic editorials, an investigative report, or an advice column.

Results

A total of 164 articles were included in the final sample. The articles were categorized into 4 types (99% inter-rater agreement; Interrater reliability was presented as an evidenced-based best practice to demonstrate agreement when conducting qualitative content analysis; High Interrater reliability justifies the coding scheme by speaking to its quality and applicability (Burla et al., 2008)). Articles in this arena were categorized as (1) *investigative* if they described a publicly available incident pertaining to mental

Table 1. Article thematic content by article type.

Theme	Investigative	Advice	Opinion	Didactic	Evidenced Based	N	%
Mental Health	**32**	**11**	**16**	**43**	**65**	**102**	**60.4%**
Awareness	11	10	7	42	37	70	42.7%
Advocacy	11	0	3	0	14	14	8.5%
Opinion	3	0	5	0	5	8	4.9%
Report	7	0	0	0	7	7	4.3%
Misinformation	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**1.8%**
Suicide	**34**	**5**	**4**	**2**	**37**	**45**	**27.5%**
Report	24	0	0	0	24	24	14.6%
Crime	8	0	0	0	8	8	4.9%
Awareness	1	0	4	2	4	7	4.3%
Ideation	1	5	0	0	1	6	3.7%
Donations	**13**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**13**	**13**	**7.9%**
Religion	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**2.4%**

N represents sum of article type (i.e., investigative, advice, opinion, and didactic). Articles within each type category were either evidence-based or not.
Boldface indicates major category.

health; (2) *advice* if the reader wrote to the columnist posing a question and expecting a response on how to change an aspect of their life and the columnist provided the requested information; (3) *opinion*, if the article's author made an argument that was biased toward their personal beliefs and provided a social commentary that may or may not draw upon evidence; and (4) *didactic* if the author provided information to the reader in order to teach about a particular subject. A majority of the articles were considered investigative (49.4%). The second most frequently represented articles were didactic in nature (28.7%), while opinion (12.2%) and advice (9.8%) were similarly represented in the articles (see Table 1).

Observed themes

Mental health

There were a variety of articles that directly focused on mental health. A subset of these articles was about *mental health awareness*. They attempted to raise awareness about a particular facet of mental health, as well as highlighted how mental health intersected with other elements, such as gender and child rights. For example, a 2012 article from *The Spectator*, titled "Are You Suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder" written by Professor Dodoo, raises awareness about Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as follows:

> Do you always walk back to the house to check whether the electric iron is still plugged in and turned on? . . . Are you superstitious such that certain numbers, colors, shapes or figures make so much meaning to you that they drive your activities and actions? If so you may be suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder! . . . Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder causing sufferers to have unwanted, intrusive, and repeated thoughts, feelings, ideas, behaviors sensations that force them to do things just to relieve the anxiety . . . The exact cause of OCD is unknown but it is known to run in families. Hence people whose family have OCD are more likely to have OCD . . . OCD is very difficult to

> treat. Medicines used to treat depression (anti-depressants) have been found to be useful . . . (Dodoo, 2012).

This and similar articles bring specific mental disorders into public attention, providing information about the nature of such disorders and available treatment options to audiences that may have no or limited knowledge about such issues.

Other articles unfortunately included *mental health misinformation*, in which they made false claims or misidentified mental health issues. For example, in a 2013 article titled "This is Killing Me Softly," in *The Mirror*, advice columnist Nana Ama responds to Bismark's request for help for being shy around women. The 19-year-old male writer, who described himself as "shy and fearful," reported a life-long difficulty with speaking in mixed company, including in the classroom. In such situations, he consistently experienced difficulty opening his mouth, shaky voice, shivering, and increased heart rate. He reported being depressed about his problem (which was hampering ongoing class participation since he was the only male in his class at the time of seeking help); being convinced that many girls looked down on him, and was concerned that he might be unable to marry in the future. He observed that many people attribute his problem to his mother's possible behavior when she was in labor prior to his birth. The columnist responds as follows:

> Dear Bismark,
>
> You need to overcome your fear of girls. Happily, you have been thrown into an all-female class. Set yourself the task of overcoming your fear. For a start, try being nice to your classmates. Greet them politely, make sure you smile. But remember it, is not everybody who's nice so don't get discouraged if one or two do not respond warmly to you. Then, try to make friends with a few of them. Study very hard to ensure that you perform well in class. This will boost your ego, which appears to be very low at the moment. Forget about what your mother might or might not have done when she was in labor. That is past and besides, there is no substance in it. What you need is to boost your self-esteem, which appears to be low. (Ama, 2013, p. 20)

While Nana Ama's response has a few recommendations for Bismark about challenging himself to interact with women, her advice can be considered misinformation because it fails to acknowledge the mental health implications of Bismark's symptoms in offering him solutions. Bismark's letter suggests a chronic history of anxiety, perhaps triggered by social situations. Advising him to "overcome" his fear of girls can be considered dismissive, and not particularly useful in addressing his concerns about the cause of his anxiety nor how to deal with his symptoms. Instead, it would behoove Nana Ama to consult with a mental health professional to determine if he meets criteria for an anxiety disorder diagnosis, address the

expressed depression, and provide him with coping strategies and interventions that may be of use to him.

Another example is an article by Edmund Mensah, titled "Why Should Women Abandon Their Children," in which the columnist conflates postpartum depression with sexual and parental irresponsibility on the mother's behalf. He writes as follows:

> If there is anything about women which I don't envy is pregnancy. I don't envy pregnancy because of the trauma women go through . . . . However, I find it intriguing that a woman will endure all pains and later abandon a baby . . . a woman attempted to strangle her child, but it was rescued. My research into the issue revealed that there is a medical condition called post-partum depression . . . In worse cases, if a mother suffers it, she can kill her own baby. However, this condition can be brought under control within three weeks, if detected . . . For me, there should be nothing like accidental births. If one is unsure of how one can take care of a child or ward, one should have protected sex . . . . For a woman to suffer this tedious phenomenon of pregnancy and delivery, only to abandon the child or maltreat it is not only shameful but wicked . . . (Mensah, n.d.)

This perspective does not accurately operationalize postpartum depression, nor does it provide context to the stories of these women who either gave up or harmed their babies. Rather, it misinforms the public about the nature of a mental health issue while simultaneously painting the phenomena and women with the same broad brush.

The last example of this type of articles was found in *The Spectator*. Written by Raymond Kyekye, the article titled "Women More Prone to Depression, Mental Issues" similarly genders mental health as a woman's issue:

> Women are more prone to stressful conditions which eventually lead to depression and results in mental problems. Unlike men who easily forget about issues and move along cheerfully, women, on the contrary, keep issues to heart which develops stress and finally becomes depression. The Chief Psychiatrist of the Ghana Health Service, Dr. Akwesi Osei told *The Spectator*, in an interview on Wednesday that women, by their disposition, have myriad of problems ranging from hormonal factors, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, menopausal conditions, and obnoxious cultural practices among others culminating in depression . . . (Kyekye, n.d.)

Again, this article highlights the relation between mental health disorder and gender. While the input from the Chief Psychiatrist of the Ghana Health Service (it is unclear whether this is actually what was said or the journalist's interpretation of what was said) sets an authoritative tone about the triggers of depression for women, this information misrepresents literature on the incidence of mental disorders. Essentially, the article spreads propaganda under the guise of expert advice. While these types of articles miseducate the audience, it is important to note that only 1.8% of articles spread misinformation in these types of ways. This can be a testament that

in general, the information newspapers provide to their audiences about mental health is more realistic and precise.

Some articles focused on *mental health advocacy* and aimed to rally public support around mental health policy or recommendations. A 2014 article in *The Chronicle* titled "Ghana's Population in Psychological Distress" calls for the implementation of Ghana's Mental Health Law:

> Dr. Akwasi Osei, Acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Mental Health Board said the study organised by the Yale University has showed that Ghana had 41 percent prevalence of psychological distress in various degrees, out of which . . . seven percent [was] severe, meaning there was a problem serious enough to be considered mental illness . . . . The current state of mental health is one of a centralised over medicalised, lack of human resource, stigma, discrimination, human right abuses which contributes to poor mental health care. Under the [new] law, there will be the establishment of the Mental Health Authority, a fund training of human resources, decentralisation of mental health, emphasis on research, community oriented care, criminalisation of human right abuse among other measures . . . Members of the proposed mental health fund should put in place measures to ensure release of funds in order to not inherit problems (Ghana News Agency, 2014, p. 5)

This and similar articles illuminate barriers to implementation of mental-health policies, and administrative hurdles facing the expansion of mental health services in the public sector.

Other articles' content expressed the author's *opinion* about a mental health issue. As an illustration, the following quote from a 2010 editorial, "Probe Psychiatric Health Institutions," expresses a writer's view on a probe into psychiatric health institutions in Ghana. The editorial was written in response to a revelation of malpractices in mental health institutions in the country made public by an investigative journalist, Mr. Anas Aremeyaw Anas:

> *The Spectator* is gladdened by the prompt response elicited by the health authorities to get to the very bottom of the "Madhouse Story" broken by Mr. Anas Aremeyaw Anas of the *New Crusading Guide* newspaper. The story alleges several forms of abuse of patients, peddling of drugs, . . . neglect, confinement in inhabitable enclosures, brutality, deaths, and the naked theft of hospital supplies . . . The authorities must be willing and able to find out for certain how long these alleged offences have been committed against humanity . . . If hard drugs will continue to be sold to patients in hospitals that are mandated and funded by tax-payers' money to cure patients, then it is better those institutions shut down. If they cannot be shut down, then they must be properly run by conscientious staff, people who have love in their hearts for suffering people, and have the milk of human kindness in their being. (Mensah, n.d.)

This illustrates the use of newspapers (especially editorials) as a platform for providing social commentary on mental health-related matters. This is a good example of the press's role in holding public agencies accountable,

and illuminating and keeping tabs on issues which would otherwise be swept under the rug.

Other articles that depicted mental health issues did so from an investigative journalist perspective. These articles, or *mental health reports*, are articles in a journalistic or news-writing style that give an account or investigative depiction of an event pertaining to mental health. These stories typically answer the basic "who, what, where, why, and when" about a mental health event. An example was found in a 2013 article in *The Spectator* titled "Mad Men Take Over Walkway." Samuel Opare Lartey (2013, p. 33) writes as follows in reference to an accompanying picture of a populated sidewalk:

> Picture shows a mad man stationed at the pedestrian way in front of the Melcom Shopping Centre at the business centre of Koforidua. Most of the people therefore prefer to use the main road instead of the walkway for fear of their lives. A passersby . . . appealed to the New Juaben Municipal Assembly and the Social Welfare to find a way of clearing the mad men and women in the town because they pose a threat to the society.

This class of articles reflects the spatiality of the performance of mental illness in the public sphere. The care of the mentally ill is generally split between families, psychiatric hospitals, and traditional healing centers. Thus, the majority of issues related to mental illness are kept away from everyday life in both urban and rural settings for individuals not directly involved with care provision for the mentally ill. It is through cases such as those highlighted in the article above that individuals are reminded about the closeness of the reach of mental illness: it does not just affect those restricted to homes, prayer camps, or psychiatric wards. It intersects with everyday life, and the geography of everyday life, traversing the spaces where people live, work, shop, and pass through.

Suicide

A number of articles covered content related to *suicide*, and included articles pertaining to suicide ideation, reports on completed suicide, and awareness campaigns about the link between mental health and suicide. Most articles about suicide were *investigative reports* about completed suicides. These articles identified the victim and the alleged circumstances that led to suicide completion. Other articles aimed to raise awareness about suicide. For example, Benjamin Xornam Glover's (2008) article, "More Youth Attempt Suicide," published in The Mirror, described the number of cases of attempted suicide recorded in the Kassena-Nankana District of the Upper East Region. It highlights the alarmingly large number of youth suicide deaths, and provides context by citing how loss of social cohesion, the breakdown of marital relationships, growing economic instability,

unemployment, and rising prevalence of depressive disorders may explain the rising rates.

Still, other articles highlighted the role that newspaper columnists play in the lives of their readers as authorities about the topic of suicide, as it pertained to *suicide ideation*. For example, one reader writes to an advice columnist who works for *The Spectator*, soliciting advice about his thoughts of suicide in a 2012 letter titled "I have Sextuplets, I want to Commit Suicide." He wrote that he was contemplating suicide because he was not able to financially provide for his sextuplet newborns. The advice columnist provided resources where the writer could obtain services via the Department of Social Welfare, organizations, non-profits, and philanthropists.

Finally, articles provided investigative reports about the *criminality* of attempted or completed suicides. In a 2014 *Mirror* article titled, "Cobbler Remanded for Attempted Suicide," Ekow Yamoah (2014, p. 23) writes as follows:

> The Agona Swedru District Magistrate Court, presided over by Mr. Kwaku Baah Frempong, has remanded a cobbler, Richard Kwaku Nimo, in prison custody for attempting to take his own life by hanging. Nimo pleaded not guilty to the charge of attempted suicide but the judge remanded him in prison custody for a fortnight . . . Nimo was said to have stated in his caution statement to the police that he had consulted a Mallam at Agona Swedru to help him stop drinking but the problem rather got worse after he applied the soap given to him by the Mallam; considering self-destruction as a result.

These articles point to the reality of suicide in contemporary Ghanaian life. While not all featured stories report on completed suicides (giving suicide a "face"), these articles introduce the idea of suicide into the public sphere, allowing for citizens to learn more about it. Advice columns allow for safe and anonymous spaces for people to share their suicidal ideations and associated motivations, while suicide awareness articles discuss suicide in a more abstract, factual manner. Still, a majority of the articles with content about suicide ideation indicate that while readers feel safe asking for advice and columnists are willing to give advice about the topic, only a small percent of these articles have content that is evidenced based (see Table 1). The suicide reports are framed in an investigative reporting slant, which is reminiscent of the fact that suicide is considered a crime in Ghana, so the tone is similar to what it would have been if the article were reporting a murder or other criminal act.

Donations

A subset of articles reported on donations (time, cash, and in-kind contributions) by individuals, corporations, organizations, and churches to psychiatric hospitals to improve their conditions for the inhabitants.

The Mirror's 2009 article "Methodist Church Donates to Psychiatric Hospital" is an example of such an article:

> The women's group of the Komenda Wesley Methodist Church has presented items worth GH 2000 cedi to the Ankaful Psychiatric Hospital. The items included assorted clothing, a quantity of soap and fruits. An executive member of the group, Mrs. Rejoice Arko-Mensah, said the presentation was to show the love of Christ towards others in obedience to God's word. She promised that the group would continue to support the hospital from time to time . . .

The recurrent theme of local philanthropy that this article illustrates reflects (i) the low rate of funding available to support the operation of psychiatric hospitals, and (ii) the public recognition of this funding gap and the willingness to assist with the provision of resources.

Religion

Other articles explored the relationship between Christian *religiosity* and mental health as a means of self-care. In a 2014 article, "Trusting God with Our Anxieties," Dr. Joyce R. Aryee (2014, p. 18) suggests how to trust God for help dealing with the anxieties of life:

> Jesus tells us that worrying is of no use. In Matthew 6:25-34 we find seven reasons why we should not worry: (1 God is the giver of our lives and so we can trust him for all that is necessary to support life . . . 7) Jesus tells us that we can defeat worry when we learn to live one day at a time. We should learn to handle the demands of each day as it comes without worrying about the unknown future . . .

The intersection of religion with well-being as promoted by this article is not surprising given the high rate of religious affiliation in Ghana (DOS, 2015), and the centrality of the spiritual in African cosmology. Articles such as these promote religious strategies for managing daily hassles. On the one hand, they reflect prevailing notions about coping, and the Ghanaian reality that religion is often a default resource for dealing with lifestyle disruptions. On the other hand, such articles serve as a spiritual education, and perhaps an evangelical tool through the lens of challenges to well-being.

Discussion

Newspapers are the third largest media-based source of information used by Ghanaians (Pew Research Center, 2007). This study explores the content and type of mental health relevant information published in six Ghanaian newspapers between 2000 and 2015. The articles covered perceptions of mental health, suicide, donations to mental health facilities, and the intersection of religion and mental health. Collectively, they were sources of advice, information, advocacy, incident reports, and occasionally

misinformation about matters pertaining to the experience, expression, treatment, and policies of mental health and illness. The newspaper discourse includes information about the most prevalent mental disorders as well as problems of living that can negatively impact mental well-being.

The reviewed newspaper articles demonstrated that mental health is part of the contemporary narrative in Ghana. On the one hand, the media's coverage of the aforementioned themes indicates that the print media has created a space for people to learn about mental health problems prevalent in Ghanaian society. For example, some articles reported on cases of suicide, thus informing the public about incidences of suicides that occurred. Missing from the newspaper discourse, however, is information about rights-based and community-centered mental healthcare, which are foci of the Mental Health Act. On the other hand, some articles had an educational function, and created awareness about the risk factors of suicide for instance, and offered the public resources to prevent suicide.

The coverage of mental health related topics also presents a picture of the types of articles featured in Ghanaian print media. For example, a majority of articles were investigative (49%) and didactic (29%) articles. While traditional investigative reporting is maintained as a standard or traditional vessel to provide information about society's goings-on, there appears to be a large commitment to providing readers with education or knowledge about mental health. This didactic angle also seems to be deliberate posturing––essentially to prove to their audiences that print media outlets are trustworthy authorities. The small percentage of articles that promoted misinformation about mental health is testament to the validity of these newspaper outlets' efforts. In a similar vein, 62.5% of articles that were opinion based and 100% of articles that advocated for mental health in some capacity were evidenced based––referring to evidence, either specified or unspecified, that implicated a professional organization, research study, professional opinion, or provisional statistics.

Whilst it is important that people find avenues to learn about and discuss mental health issues, it is equally critical that they receive accurate information. In this regard, we found that some (a small number) of the representations on mental health in the media do not reflect current understandings in psychology or mental health but reflect societal positions. This is a tension that the media has to address with care. To illustrate, when discussing the social consequences of mental health disorders, in some circumstances, columnists implicated their own gender bias by deferring to antiquated stereotypes about the association between the fragility of women and resulting mental distress, rather than citing professional sources. Similarly, the coverage pertaining to the criminalization of individuals exhibiting suicidal behavior is another arena in which the print media reflects on this accepted societal

norm rather than on the psychological implications or invoke the need for treatment for those who struggle with depression or suicidal ideation.

These results also speak to the role of print media as influencer. For example, newspapers showcased individuals' requests for help in dealing with distressing situations. In the case of the later, the print media has become a consulting outlet for obtaining mental health services. Advice columns offer a "safe" outlet to discuss sensitive issues as writers can be anonymized. The print media as an outlet offers commentary about the prevalence of mental health concerns within society, and also indicates the ways in which mental health issues can still be shameful or stigmatizing. The liberty people feel to anonymously ask for mental health help also seems to reinforce this authoritative role that the newspaper plays in providing information for its readers about available resources.

The newspaper articles highlight the reality that there is room for improvement in the realm of public sector funding of mental health services. The articles that focus on donations are a stark reminder that mental health services are severely underfunded in Ghana and health care services have often depended on philanthropists to meet their needs (Roberts, Mogan, & Asare, 2014). Due to an integration of mental health services into the general health budget and a thrifty allocation of funds that are often incongruent with concrete spending, outsourced funds have become essential to the continued running of mental health services, and have often come in the form of philanthropies made by non-government organizations (Roberts, Mogan, & Asare, 2014). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2015), Ghana spent about US$0.12 per capita on mental health in 2014.

Given that print media plays a role in the public's understanding of mental health matters, it behooves newspapers to do everything within their power to ensure that they consistently disseminate accurate mental health information to their readers. One avenue to achieve this might be for newspapers to hire a mental health professional as a consultant for fact-checking purposes. The onus for accurate mental health reporting should also fall on journalists as individuals and members of organizations. In this regard, mental health experts could be an important resource for providing continuing education in journalism, training media personnel on general mental health concepts that they may encounter in their journalistic endeavors. This type of training ought to also stress how everyday occurrences naturally intersect with mental health concerns. Furthermore, it might be a good idea to include courses on mental illness, social work, helping skills, and psychology in the training curricula of aspiring journalists and advice columnists. This will maximize the likelihood that future journalists will have an appropriate knowledge base about mental health related matters to assist in the quality of their future reporting.

One limitation of our study is the scope of the newspapers we examined. Our selection of the top six newspapers with the most widespread readership in the country was at the expense of print media with significantly smaller distributions. (In 2012, it was estimated that there were over 136 newspapers in distribution in Ghana; Center for Research Libraries, 2012) Assuming that some of the smaller newspapers featured unique content relevant to mental health, the tradeoff may have resulted in their exclusion. Narratives about mental health from these less known newspapers could have contributed to richer results. However, the lesser-known papers tend to be niche papers that rarely generate national conversations. A second limitation of our study concerns the study's time span. We explored newspapers published during a decade and a half of Ghana's history to exclusion of other periods. As such, our study neither captures reportage in the previous century nor immediately current coverage. Finally, as previously stated, our focus on print media exclusively does not reflect the increasingly blended nature of media in Ghana such as the introduction of newspaper content online and the broadcasting of radio programs that read newspapers, both of which makes the boundaries of true print media less distinct.

Overall, this study provided a panoramic view of mental health information featured in Ghanaian print media for a decade and a half. Newspapers—such as those reviewed in our study—provide insight into the extant societal and cultural concerns of their target audience. The scope and content of our analyzed reportage provided insight into local understandings of mental health and illness; a glimpse at the cultural lens through which mental illness is viewed; and an assessment of the quality of mental health information that Ghanaian citizens read about. As previously stated in this article, (i) Ghana—similar to its neighbors—has a low resourced mental health system, and (ii) the status of print media in Ghana is similar to that in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, our findings may have relevance beyond Ghana's borders to such settings. Our review should not be taken as an exhaustive overview of public sources of knowledge about mental illness, since such information is also accessible to the public via radio, television, websites, and social media. Future research should therefore explore mental illness reportage in these complementary sources of information in Ghana and elsewhere.

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