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Perceptions and Beliefs about Mental Illness (Schizophrenia) among people in Ashanti communities and it awareness

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Concept of mental illness like schizophrenia is increasing and is particularly severe for people living in rural communities. Ghana adopted a community-based rehabilitation (CBR) for persons with mental illness to address the problem comprehensively. However, negative attitudes towards the mentally ill, stigmatization and discrimination constitute a serious barrier to CBR. The objective of the study was to assess societal beliefs and perceptions about people with schizophrenia, among the adult population in a rural community (Offinso, Obuasi and Nkawie other communities in the Ashanti Region. The study used a mixed method where both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed. A sample size was determined using a systematic approach. The respondents held fairly positive views about the mentally ill, despite a few negative authoritarian surroundingly restrictive attitudes and views. Though participants appeared to be knowledgeable about the possible physical, social and environmental causes of mental illness such as accidents and genetic factors, 96% of all participants thought mental illness could be due to witchcraft/evil spirits, and 60% felt that it could be a consequence of divine punishment. This is an indication that stigma and discrimination against the mentally ill were still widespread among the respondents.

The widespread belief in supernatural causes is likely to act as a barrier to designing effective anti-stigma educational programs and as a result frustrating the implementation of CBR. There is a need in the Ashanti Region and elsewhere to develop strategies to change stigma attached to mental illness at both the rural and urban community levels. This paper is one of the first to report to be made on attitudinal research on mental illness in the Ashanti Region by selected areas and the places are offinso municipal, Obuasi municipal and Nkawie district and other communities. Keywords: Perceptions, Beliefs, Attitude, on Schizophrenia (mental illness).

RELATIVE PREVALENCE OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

People with schizophrenia are more admitted than those with any other illness. In hospitals which are found in Ashanti region occupied by someone with schizophrenia.

As shown in the following table, schizophrenia is:

- Twice as prevalent as Alzheimer's disease
- 5 times as prevalent as multiple sclerosis
- 6 times as prevalent as diabetes, and
- 60 times more prevalent than muscular

RELATIVE PREVALENCE OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia
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☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹

Alzheimer's 2x
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Multiple sclerosis 5x ☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹

Insulin-dependent Diabetes 6x ☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹

Muscular Dystrophy 60x ☹

Given the high costs ---- 5 million Ghana cedi's annually------ and the high prevalence of the disease, much more funding for schizophrenia research should be allocated than is currently the case.