

Food Security and Mental Health: A Qualitative Exploration of Mediating Factors in Rural and Urban Ghana

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Abstract : The aim of this study was to explore the role of food insecurity as a mediator of mental health in sub-Saharan Africa, taking Ghana as a case study. Although a quantitative correlation has recently been established between food insecurity and mental illness in Ghana, the nature and validity of this correlation remains unclear. A qualitative exploration was employed to investigate this correlation further. During the data collection period, twelve semi-structured interviews and five focus groups were conducted with a total of 124 individuals who were diagnosed with mental illnesses and their primary carers throughout rural and urban areas in Ghana. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed, translated, and analysed using thematic analysis. Preliminary results suggest that food insecurity may play a role in mental illness in rural areas of Ghana where communities are reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods, but may play a lesser role in urban areas where communities are more reliant on petty trade as a source of livelihood. These results support psychosocial theories which suggest that the social and cultural factors involved in food production and consumption may be the key mediators between food insecurity and mental health.

Keywords : Food insecurity, Ghana, Mental health, Phenomenology

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