Promoting Access to Mental Health Care Services using community structures such as Traditional Mental Health Centers in Ghana

\*Gina Teddy, \*\*Wendy Abbey, \*\* George Owoo: \*Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, \*\* Human Rights Advocacy Centre

Ghana, like many developing countries is recognized for making significant strides at the end of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, very little was achieved in mental health to improve access and quality of care leading to inequity, inaccessibility and social exclusion for those in desperate need of mental health services. Despite an estimated 2.8 million people living with mental disorder in Ghana, less than 2% access mental health services. The systematic challenges in providing mental health services cuts across administrative levels of service provision throughout the country leading to treatment gap of about 98%.

Traditional Mental Health Centres (TMHC) are community systems that complements formal mental health services. Yet, there is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the practices, services, management, regulations, rights and responsibilities in Ghana. This study explores the role of TMHCs in providing mental health services to complement the gaps in service delivery and the critical role of community systems in achieving universal health coverage.

This exploratory study is being conducted across six regions in Ghana using both qualitative and quantitative methods to generate primary and secondary information from communities and TMHCs while advocating for mental health improvements and collaborative provision across communities.

The study revealed extraordinary barriers to accessing mental health services in Ghana leading to inequality and social exclusion of person with mental disorder. Challenges associated to the use of mental health services is attributed to lack of information, stigma associated with utilization mental health services, inadequate resources and the perceived inability to meet socio-cultural needs for mental disorders. Preliminary findings revealed the significant role of TMHCs as complementing formal health services in Ghana. TMHCs deals with the perceived spiritual and physical causation of mental disorder led by the prayer camps, traditional healers, herbalists and spiritual treatments centers. Yet, there was little or no regulations for their functions, practices, services and quality of care leading to widespread convictions of abuses and mistreatment of people with mental disorder seeking the services of TMHCs.

This study concludes by advocating for a multi-sectoral approach by communities, researchers, NGOs and the Mental Health Authority to recognize, support, standardize, regulate, develop and improve the work of TMHCs in Ghana. We emphasis improving access and quality of care to make TMHCs responsive in providing dignifying mental health services for improved access to care. Policy lesson from this study will inform knowledge, practices, regulation and policies guiding the practices of TMHCs across communities in Ghana to create a vibrant community health system.