EYE ON AFRICA

Speakers: **Dr. Ursula M. Read, King's College London & Dr. Lily Kpobi, University of Ghana**

Topic: *The Interdependence of Human Rights in Mental Health in Ghana: Why Breaking the Chains is Not Enough*

Date: **Thursday, February 4th, 2021**

Time: **12:00 – 1:30 PM (EST)**

Place: **Zoom Webinar: Register Here**

All Are Welcome!

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Ursula Read is a research associate in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London, UK. She obtained her PhD in anthropology from University College London. Since 2005 she has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Ghana, focusing on the impact of mental illness on family life, help-seeking, and moral and ethical dilemmas around care and consent, as well as the emergence of global mental health and rights-based approaches to mental health. She is currently leading several research projects in Ghana exploring community inclusion for people with mental health conditions, collaborations between mental health workers and traditional and faith healers and the potential of participatory arts for mental health advocacy and activism.

Lily Kpobi is a research fellow in the Regional Institute for Population Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. She holds a PhD in Psychology from Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Her research activities over the years have focused on improving access to mental health care in Ghana and understanding cultural and religious perspectives on mental health. Her work has included examining indigenous mental health care practices and identifying pathways for achieving integrated care within resource-limited contexts. Lily is currently involved in several projects on mental health in Ghana including using visual methods to understand how health workers collaborate with healers to minimise human rights abuses in traditional healing centres, as well as using participatory arts to initiate conversations about mental health for advocacy and change in Ghana.

ABOUT THE TALK

Human rights interventions in relation to mental health in Africa have often focused on so-called negative rights, that is freedom from coercion and restraint, in particular the chaining and shackling of people with mental health conditions by families and traditional and faith healers. However such campaigns often fail to engage with the wider context within which such human rights abuses occur, in particular poverty, fragile infrastructure and under-resourced health systems. A focus on chaining may obscure less visible human rights violations such as structural discrimination within health service provision and exclusion from work, family and cultural life. Human rights theory however recognises that human rights are interdependent, with social and economic rights and opportunities as much as freedom from restraint essential to enable full participation of people with mental health conditions.

This presentation will draw on longstanding ethnographic research on human rights and mental health in Ghana, as well as more recent research with community mental health workers and mental health advocates in the country to illustrate how people with serious mental health conditions experience human rights violations, not only through deprivation of liberty, but through discrimination and exclusion operating at structural as well as individual levels. We will also show how mental health advocates, families, communities and mental health workers come together to struggle for social inclusion and justice.