# SHIFTING NARRATIVES: EXPLORING GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN GHANAIAN LITERARY DEPICTIONS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

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**A B S T R A C T**

This research examines the evolving portrayal of mental health in Ghanaian literature over time using content analysis and the application of the labeling theory. We analyzed some of the most popular contemporary novels from the past 15 years and oral folklore from the largest ethnic groups, revealing a discernible generational shift. Modern Ghanaian authors offer more nuanced, scientifically-backed depictions of mental health, challenging old stereotypes. These narratives emphasize the interconnection of mental and physical well-being, underlining the importance of a comprehensive understanding of mental health. Despite positive developments, enduring challenges persist, particularly among less-educated populations who continue to seek traditional healers for mental health issues. As Ghana advances its mental health awareness campaigns and policies, this study underscores the significance of holistic approaches, cooperation between traditional and medical practitioners, and the role of cultural narratives in promoting an inclusive and

|  | nuanced dialogue surrounding mental health. |
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## INTRODUCTION

Ghana's storytelling tradition, once rooted in oral literature, has undergone a profound shift. The prominence of print and digital literature in recent years has reshaped the entire landscape (Osa, 1985). This resurgence of literature, particularly in the form of contemporary novels or "storybooks," has made fiction more accessible, particularly to children across the nation (Ghana Book Development Council, 2021). This shift has not been limited merely to the medium of dissemination, but also in its portrayal of health conditions such as mental illnesses. This is pertinent as media, including various literary forms, have played a major role in the perception of the stigma surrounding mental illness in Ghana. Drawing upon the historical context of mental illness portrayals in Ghana, this paper undertakes a comparative analysis of the changing depiction of mental illnesses within the Ghanaian literary scene. By examining the evolution of these portrayals across generations, the paper argues that there has been a discernible holistic generational shift in Ghanaian literary representations of mental illness.

This paper uses labeling theory and content analysis to analyze various forms of recorded oral tradition. The analysis will illustrate how these literary forms have presented mental illness and mentally ill people in Ghana, bearing in mind that literature not only entertains but echoes and informs the opinion of society (Dei, 2013). Subsequently, these same measures are also taken into account when analyzing some of the most popular Ghanaian contemporary novels of the past few decades and their portrayal of mental illness. These will be key in determining the presence of a discernible shift within these portrayals. Hopefully, the results from this research will spark some discourse on the lingering effects of stigmatization of mental illness in Ghana, and hopefully steer the government and individuals to enact changes that will move the country forward.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Folktales and proverbs in Ghana have achieved remarkable popularity, serving as artistic reflections of prevailing sentiments in society. Regrettably, these forms of folklore, along with other media, have often depicted individuals with mental illnesses in stereotypical ways, labeling them as harmful, demon-possessed, dirty, incapable, reckless, and as liabilities to society (Aina, 2004; Ampadu, 2012). These flawed depictions might stem from stigmatizing attitudes, myths, misunderstandings, and discriminatory beliefs (Wahl, 1995). A case in point can be found in Kwaku Anansi tales, which emerged as one of the most well-known folktales during the 20th century in Ghana. These tales feature the central character, Kwaku Anansi, who has even transcended national boundaries,

appearing in the Spiderman franchise within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Giacomazzo, 2021) and other shows. In these narratives, Anansi and other characters often encounter consequences for their misdeeds, manifested as 'curses' or 'punishments' that materialize in forms such as madness, violent dispositions, and disheveled appearances. As one of the most popular folktales told to Ghanaian children growing up, it helps to paint a negative image of people who exhibit these characteristics.

Furthermore, proverbs have significantly contributed to the perpetuation of stigma against mental illnesses in Ghanaian society. These succinct expressions wield substantial influence within various communities, particularly in African cultures. While dominant Eurocentric educational approaches confine learning to formal classroom settings (Dei, 2013), indigenous paradigms like that of Ghana emphasize holistic education, extending beyond classrooms to encompass a broader understanding of knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs, integral to the education of younger generations, play a pivotal role in educational, religious, and cultural contexts for both children and adults across the country. Paradoxically, the considerable power held by proverbs in African societies has been harnessed to perpetuate violence and disempowerment, particularly towards vulnerable groups. Extant scholarship on this discourse has illuminated the perils posed by certain fragments of oral folklore, such as some proverbs, across diverse groups and nations worldwide. Elements of these folk narratives sustain harmful ideologies, including gender inequalities, further marginalizing individuals beyond conventional learning (Alemu, 2007; Hussein, 2009; Dei, 2013).

Moving forward, a relevant concept in this context is labeling theory, a sociological framework that highlights the profound influence of societal labels on individual behavior (Bernburg, 2009; Besemer et al., 2017). Labeling theory posits that individuals are not passive recipients of labels assigned to them by society, but rather, these labels influence their self-perception and behavior. As individuals are labeled, whether positively or negatively, they may internalize and conform to these labels, shaping their identity and actions accordingly (Becker, 1963). This encapsulates the dangers of labeling and stigmatizing individuals, in this instance, individuals exhibiting signs of mental illness. Narrowing the focus to the scope of this research, an insightful study conducted by Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy and Festus Moasun in 2020 employs the labeling theory to shed light on how Akan proverbs have contributed to negative perceptions of People with Disabilities across various parts of Ghana. This study illustrates how these proverbs have played a role in stigmatizing, marginalizing, and excluding individuals with conditions such as mental illnesses, angular kyphosis, and limb-related disabilities. The authors illustrate how people with these disabilities are negatively perceived in Ghana.

In this paper, the aforementioned literature will be built upon by exploring further how Ghanaian proverbs, beyond Akan proverbs, have depicted mental illness. Despite the prominence of the Akan ethnic group,

which is the largest, there exist five other major ethnic groups and numerous minor groups with languages spoken across Africa. This underscores the necessity of investigating how these diverse groups have portrayed mental illness to comprehend the issue within a broader Ghanaian context. Moreover, the study will also delve into how contemporary Ghanaian authors portray mental illness in distinct ways. This exploration aims to illuminate the evolving dynamics between oral folklore, mental illness depiction, and the shifting attitudes within Ghanaian literature and society.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this paper was qualitative. The specific method used was content analysis. Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages ( Holsti, 1968). Content analysis was most ideal for this research as my sources were in print. Data was collected from multiple avenues and was done over a two month period. I gathered data by reviewing books that had been published within the past 15 years. These books were among the most popular books of the past couple of decades. I scoured Goodreads and Amazon, two of the biggest online book communities, for the most popular Ghanaian novels, as determined by the number of ratings and reviews. I then selected the ones that featured themes of mental health and trauma as depicted by their descriptions and tags. I chose to focus on Ghanaian novels published within the past 15 years because this was a period of significant social and economic change in Ghana. I wanted to see how Ghanaian authors were responding to these changes through their writing.

Astonishingly, as at July 2023, 4 of the top 10 most reviewed Ghanaian books on Goodreads- *Homegoing* (#1) and *Transcendent Kingdom* (#2) by Yaa Gyasi, *Maame* (#4) by Jessica George and *Ghana Must Go* (#7) by Taiye Selasi all had depictions of mental illnesses. In the spirit of fielding a representative sample,   I also tried to include authors from both the diaspora and the country. And as more of the more popular novels were by Ghanaian diaspora authors, I added novels with less online presence such as *The Justice* by Boakyewaa Glover and *Harmattan Rain* by Ayesha Haruna Attah, both of which depicted mental illnesses just as adequately. I read each book twice. At first, I read leisurely, and the second time around, I re-read more slowly while making annotations, paying attention to the contexts in which words like "mental health", "mental illnesses", "mad', "crazy" and their variations were used.  I also paid attention to the depictions of symptoms of mental illnesses according to the American Psychiatric Association and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. These include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and Major Depressive Disorder. This process was expedited with the help of a Python code I created to efficiently detect the page numbers of these words and phrases on their digital copies.

A significant amount of the data collection process for the oral literature (proverbs and folklore) was conducted in Balme Library, Ghana's major national library and the biggest library in West Africa. Assistance was obtained from the library personnel of the Africana Library wing of the library who had access to transcribed copies of oral literature. We identified the most popular tales and proverbs from the largest ethnic groups in Ghana: Akan, Ewe, Dagbon, and Ga-Dangme. Ultimately, compilations by Appiah et al. (2007), Kudadjie (1996), and Abukari (2021) were most useful for the Akan, Ga-Dangme and Dagbon respectively. We found a few stories which highlighted themes of madness and mental illnesses in both original sources and adapted versions from the languages spoken by these groups. I manually translated the Ga source to English. The Khaya app and Google Translate were helpful with the Twi translations. Translators were also used when translating the Dangme and Ewe scripts as I do not have proficiency in the language. Another translator was used to cross-validate the translations. I also tapped some folktales from traditional Akan and Ga leaders.

Though not one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana, I decided to include the Hausa ethnic group a few weeks into the project as I discovered they had a sizable population in Ghana, specifically in the Northern part. Their eponymous language, Hausa is one of the most spoken languages across West Africa (Onyeakagbu, 2022). Also, due to its large size, it has more documented content than the other languages specific to Ghana. I worked with a translator and mostly sourced from Dr. Abu-Ubaida Sani's work on Hausa folktales and literature.

With this data at my disposal, content analysis was then used to identify the same translated versions of words and phrases as had been done earlier. I then combed these words and counted the number of times these words were used in a context that depicted other meanings. Eg. in the form of homonyms. These were eliminated. Also, though the initial focus was to pick up words from stories in oral literature, the presence of proverbs was overwhelming and eventually took over the focus of that field. Most of the proverbs eventually used were collected from publications published within the past 50 years. After preparing and gathering the datasets with the words and contexts obtained from these two procedures, I then moved on to analyzing the data.

## DISCUSSION : INSIGHTS FROM GHANAIAN ORAL LITERARY DEPICTIONS

### Treatment and Recovery of Mental Illness in Proverbs

Some proverbs carry a historical perspective that may perpetuate the belief that mental illness are incurable, which can be damaging. It reinforces the notion that once someone exhibits signs of mental illness, they will be considered "mad" forever in the Ghanaian context. There is an Akan proverb which goes *Ɔbɔdamfoɔ se ne dam kɔ a, na nyɛ deɛ odehunahuna mmɔfra* ("If a madman says his madness is gone, a little remains for

frightening children"). This proverb implies that even when a "madman" claims to be cured, a trace of their madness lingers, enough to frighten children. This reinforces the stereotype that complete recovery from mental illness is unlikely.  The proverb's implication could discourage individuals from seeking treatment and perpetuate the notion that once deemed "mad," one remains so indefinitely.

Likewise, the Hausa proverb *Ba a hauka a warke duka* ("Madness cannot be cured totally") straightaway says that mental illness is incurable. Such proverbs might contribute to a sense of doom and resignation, hindering efforts to explore available treatment options. Proverbs like the ones above have significant impact, leaving lasting impressions on both speakers and listeners (Moasun &  Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge that various scientific studies have shown that there are treatment methods available that can significantly improve the conditions of affected individuals, enabling them to lead fulfilling lives (National Institutes of Health, 2007; Njoku, 2022 ). Psychotherapy, medication, and supportive interventions have shown positive outcomes in managing mental illnesses and facilitating recovery. It is crucial that the awareness of effective treatment approaches be promoted in order to challenge the stigma associated with mental health issues and encourage hope for those experiencing such conditions.

**Even well-meaning proverbs could have unintended consequences**
Proverbs are a significant part of cultural heritage, encapsulating wisdom, values, and beliefs. Yet, even well-intentioned proverbs can unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes about mental illness. One notable Dangme proverb , "*Godo tsâ hi pe we mi gu"(* which is translated to *"A mad person is better than an empty house")*. This proverb implies that having the company of a person, even if they are considered "mad" or have mental health challenges, is preferable to being alone. This saying expresses the conviction of the Ga and Dangme groups that all individuals ought to be respected and valued (Kudadjie, 1996). This includes people with mental illness. It serves as a reminder to avoid isolating or stigmatizing those with such conditions. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that this proverb may inadvertently reinforce the perception that individuals with mental illness are of a lower status or are to be accepted as a second choice. It is important to promote understanding, empathy, and equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of their mental health status.

Moreover, as we delve into the depiction of mental illness in various cultures, the Ewe proverb: *"Adza o, ɖonɔ o, ƒe o nu amesi."* ("Madness, ignorance, and childhood have no guilt") offers a thought-provoking perspective on certain behaviors associated with mental illness, ignorance, and the innocence of childhood. However, while this proverb presents an intriguing viewpoint, it also risks oversimplifying the intricate nature of mental health. By equating "madness" with ignorance and the natural naivety of childhood, the proverb might inadvertently undermine the

multifaceted complexities that mental conditions like "madness" entail. These conditions warrant a comprehensive examination through a medical and psychological lens, rather than being grouped alongside ignorance or childhood innocence. In essence, the proverb provides a starting point for discussing behaviors linked to mental health, yet it's crucial to emphasize that mental illness encompasses a spectrum of experiences that demand a more nuanced and empathetic understanding. By acknowledging the intricacies of mental health and avoiding sweeping generalizations, we can cultivate a more accurate and compassionate perception of individuals dealing with mental conditions.

**Misunderstanding and Stigmatization of Mental Illnesses**
In the context of misunderstanding and stigmatization of mental illnesses, various proverbs from different cultures provide insights into the prevailing attitudes towards mental health. In the Dangme tradition, the proverb "*A le ô tso e yi ba lokoji a tswaa e sipoku*" ("You must identify a tree by its leaves before you dig up its root") accentuates the significance of identifying the signs and history of mental illness and "demonic" dealings as a prerequisite for marriage (Kudadjie, 1996). While this proverb does not explicitly address mental illnesses, its application draws attention to the issue of misunderstanding and stigmatization surrounding mental health. This practice stems from a belief that mental illness may be hereditary and passed down through families. While studies do show a genetic component in certain mental illnesses like schizophrenia and autism (Information about Mental Illness, 2007), it is important to recognize that mental illness is not solely determined by family health history. The belief that one's family history determines their likelihood of experiencing mental illness can perpetuate stigma and discrimination. However, many studies have indicated that mental illness is a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and social factors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020; National Institutes of Health (US), 2007). Making judgments based solely on family history oversimplifies the matter and overlooks the broader context of mental health.

Similarly, the Akan proverb "*Ɔbaakofoɔ nkyere bodamfoɔ* (which translates to "one person does not arrest a lunatic") reflects the idea that there is safety in numbers when dealing with individuals showing signs of mental illness. This sentiment aligns with the misconception that mentally ill individuals are prone to extreme violence, a perception often exaggerated by media portrayal (Saleh, 2023). However, research indicates that people with mental illnesses are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators (Teplin, McClelland, Abram, & Weiner, 2005), highlighting the gap between perception and reality.

In the Dagbani culture, the proverb *Yiya yi baa kpirila kum* (which translates to "a mad dog dies with hunger") draws a vivid analogy between a "mad dog" and individuals displaying irrational behavior, suggesting that they often suffer negative consequences due to their actions (Abubakr, 2021). Although the proverb's intent may be to emphasize rationality and

prudent behavior, it inadvertently contributes to the stigma surrounding mental illness. By simplistically connecting madness with negative outcomes, the proverb reinforces the misconception that individuals with mental health conditions are destined to suffer, further perpetuating the stigma. This viewpoint disregards the diversity of experiences within the mental health spectrum and perpetuates fatalistic attitudes, overshadowing the importance of empathy, education, and supportive approaches for those navigating such challenges. In this section of the discussion, the focus shifts to some ways in which contemporary Ghanaian novels have depicted mental illness.

## DISCUSSION: DELIBERATE EXPLORATION OF GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON MENTAL ILLNESS AND TREATMENT IN GHANAIAN LITERATURE

### Deliberate portrayal of the varied intergenerational outlook on mental illness

The exploration of differing views on mental illness and their treatment across generations of Ghanaian characters is a deliberate theme woven into multiple novels. This pattern is evident in a selection of impactful works, each shedding light on the evolving attitudes and perceptions within Ghanaian society. Yaa Gyasi's 2020 global bestseller, *Transcendent Kingdom*, centers Gifty, a grieving PhD candidate who grew up with a depressed mum, an absent father and a brother who succumbed to his drug addiction. She grapples to find a connection between religion, specifically Christianity, science and human suffering-a tie most Ghanaians would relate to. This novel offers a very comprehensive portrayal of mental illness in the Ghanaian setting. One of such portrayals include a scene where Gifty and her aunt have opposing views on what a madman looks like: "Even now, I don't completely understand why my aunt singled the man out to me. Maybe she thought there were no crazy people in America, that I had never seen one before. Or maybe she was thinking about my mother, about the real reason I was stuck in Ghana that summer, sweating in a stall with an aunt I hardly knew while my mother healed at home in Alabama. I was eleven, and I could see that my mother wasn't sick, not in the ways that I was used to. I didn't understand what my mother needed healing from. I didn't understand, but I did. And my embarrassment at my aunt's loud gesture had as much to do with my understanding as it did with the man who had passed us by. My aunt was saying, "That. That is what crazy looks like." But instead what I heard was my mother's name. What I saw was my mother's face, still as lake water, the pastor's hand resting gently on her forehead, his prayer a light hum that made the room buzz. I'm not sure I know what crazy looks like, but even today when I hear the word I picture a split screen, the dreadlocked man in Kejetia on one side, my mother lying in bed on the other. I think about how no one at all reacted to that man in the market, not in fear or disgust, nothing, save my aunt, who wanted me to look. He was, it seemed

to me, at perfect peace, even as he gesticulated wildly, even as he mumbled. But my mother, in her bed, infinitely still, was wild inside." (p.1-2). This scene shows the generational gap in comprehending mental illness. Gifty, with her studies in neurosurgery and exposure to mental health discussions, offers a science-based perspective compared to her aunt's stereotypical viewpoint. The duality of perception is also demonstrated here, with the dreadlocked man in the marketplace on one side and Gifty's mother's struggle on the other. It illustrates the complexity of understanding and empathizing with mental illness, as it can exist both visibly (as in the man in the marketplace) and invisibly (as in Gifty's mother's inner turmoil).

Similarly, *The Justice* by Boakyewaa Glover is a mystery thriller which features some depictions of mental illness as well. The narrative orbits Chief Justice Joseph Annan, an aspiring Presidential candidate. A pivotal storyline emerges from the character of his emotionally unstable wife, Adubea, casting a shadow over his political ambitions. Adubea's emotional fragility surfaces early in the narrative, challenging Chief Annan's aspirations. Her bipolar disorder's complexity becomes evident in a charged exchange with their daughter, Abby: "She has a mental disorder, Daddy. She is bipolar," she said through clenched teeth. Those are just words and terms that doctors like to throw around. I have your mother's situation handled!" he hissed. (p.6).

Chief Annan's reaction reflects broader societal hesitancy to address mental health openly, reflecting generational and cultural nuances. His denial mirrors a hyper-masculine environment, stifling discussions on sensitive topics as opposed to his daughter who comes from a different generation who have shown more progressiveness on these issues. This exchange echoes the societal discourse, demonstrating the intersection between mental health awareness and traditional gender norms. Accra-based psychologist, Dr. Carol Mathias O-Chez, delves deeper into this phenomenon, where notions of masculinity intersect with mental health stigma: "As a society, we associate mental health challenges with weakness, and we are not very forgiving or accommodating of men showing weakness" (Asiedu, 2020). Dr. O-Chez's perspective unveils the complexity of addressing mental health within the Ghanaian society.

In Jessica George's 2023 novel *Maame*, readers are introduced to a vibrant and witty 25-year-old Black woman who triumphs over life's challenges, including navigating grief, race, cultural norms, and gender expectations. In one particular segment of the novel, Maame is grappling with the profound loss of her father. Maame's mother, a deeply traditional Ghanaian woman, has been somewhat absent from her daughter's life. However, as the story unfolds, Maame's mother endeavors to connect with her daughter, especially as Maame struggles with the weight of depression.

On the phone, she told me about the counseling—that you go regularly." I did wonder when this would come up. "Yes, I do. "But you didn't tell me and I know why." She sighs. "At first, I didn't like the idea of strangers—

Godless strangers most likely—directing you. I hoped you'd find your answers in God, but maybe this will help you seek Him, for answers to the bigger questions. Therapy can help the smaller things. I don't want you to struggle with ... mental problems, so if this opportunity means you won't, then you should take it."
"Really?"
"I will of course pray about the counselor. What is her name?"
"Angelina."
"Is she Black?"
I nod and this seems to mollify her instantly. "That is good."
"Ghanaian too. I think she's even Christian," I add. I obviously have no idea if she is the latter, but Mum looks pleased.(p.255)

Amidst this context, the novel offers a glimpse into a pivotal conversation between Maame and her mother. The dialogue revolves around Maame's decision to seek therapy for her emotional well-being. The concept of therapy and counseling, particularly from sources other than church leaders, is foreign and somewhat unfamiliar within the realm of a Ghanaian Christian middle-aged woman like Maame's mother. As their conversation unfolds, Maame's mother cautiously explores the idea of therapy, aiming to understand and support her daughter's choice to seek professional help.

*Harmattan Rain* is a multigenerational saga which follows the ambitious Lizzie Achiaa, her free spirited daughter Akua Afriyie, and her unconventional granddaughter Sugri. This book is a historical drama and touches on crucial points of Ghana's history such as post independence struggles and coups. It has its fair share of thematic issues such as its portrayal of mental illnesses on characters like Sugri and Lizzie's love interest, Bador Samed. A similar exploration of how various authors depict the differing views held by multiple generations of Ghanaian characters toward mental illnesses and their treatment can also be found in this novel. The excerpt below highlights a conversation between Sugri and her mother, Akua Afriyie. Akua Afriyie flies to visit her daughter in university, and as they catch up, Sugri confesses that she has been to a therapist.

"Remember how horrible last semester was for me?" she asked her mother, who was leading a piece of oxtail into her mouth.
"Yes, a C in Chemistry. Ellis, cheated.... Uh huh," Akua Afriyie said.
"Well, I saw a therapist," she said and paused.
"You did? Why didn't you just talk to me?"
"Long story. I went for only one session."
"It must have been useless, then," Akua Afriyie said.
"She kept asking me all these questions about our family and the lack of a father figure in my life. Blah blah blah." (p.359).

This excerpt highlights a conversation between Sugri and her mother, Akua Afriyie. Akua Afriyie flies to visit her daughter in university, and as they catch up, Sugri confesses that she has been to a therapist. Her

mother's response highlights the generational differences in approaching mental health, as therapy is viewed with skepticism and seen as useless compared to family support.These novels collectively illuminate the evolving perspectives on mental illness and treatment within Ghanaian society, showcasing the dynamics between generations and cultural norms.

**Multi-dimensional portrayal of symptoms of mental illness**
The Ghanaian authors of recent time have also begun portraying mental illness in earnest. There have been more elaborate and extensive backstories on characters with mental illnesses, thus contributing to the destigmatization of mental illness.  This is unlike proverbs and early tales where mental illnesses have no diagnosis, but instead manifest as a mix of traits and symptoms such as being violent and homeless, and whose only cure is by interference from gods or God.

Some of these efforts include *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. Akua, is one of the main characters who is referred to as "Crazy Woman". This is because she is haunted by nightmares of a fire woman in her sleep and during one of these nightmares, she sets her hut on fire, killing a couple of her children. She is ostracized and shunned by the members of her community. It is revealed that these nightmares stemmed from her early trauma from the death of her mum, being raised by racist missionaries and watching an innocent white man get burned by the town people.  The latter incident haunts her particularly as she is one of the few who understood his innocent cries for help. These reflect similar symptoms to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). It is easy to root for Akua as Yaa Gyasi writes about her as a hurt woman without even explicitly referring to her PTSD.

In Yaa Gyasi's novel *Transcendent Kingdom,* Gifty and her mother confront significant family losses—a father's absence and a brother's tragic drug addiction.  The narrative provides a comprehensive depiction of mental illness within the Ghanaian context. Gifty's mother becomes distant and bedridden, directing her frustration at Gifty with statements like "I only wanted Nana, and now I only have you." Despite evident signs, Gifty's mother refrains from labeling her state as mental illness. She thinks depression is a problem reserved only for people from the West. This thinking is gotten from her consumption of TV where "Americans get[ting] depressed and they cry." This goes beyond a portrayal of a difficult mother, reflecting the temperament of a grieving and unwell parent. This underscores the tendency in some Ghanaians to dismiss personal mental struggles during times of grief, refraining from seeking help. The novel poignantly reveals the societal tendency to overlook mental health issues and the importance of acknowledging and addressing them.

Also, *In Ghana Must Go*, Taiye Selassie writes about how the children of Kwesi Sai's death reflect upon their barely present father's death. One notable sibling is Sadie, about whom Taiye writes very compellingly. Sadie grapples with insecurity from not matching up to her uber-

successful siblings, while also navigating life with her roommate and her white family.  The author reveals how Sadie's insecurities about her self-worth become entangled with her relationship to her own body image as she becomes bulimic.  Here, the author presents how mental health conditions could also arise in the form of physical disorders like bulimia, an eating disorder.  The depiction of Sadie's bulimia is a poignant example of how mental health conditions can intertwine with physical behaviors, showcasing the interconnectedness of the mind and body.  Through Sadie's story, Gyasi uses sensitivity to challenge traditional narratives of mental health and diversifies the means by which such experiences could be seen. Subsequent research papers and discussions reflect characters like Sadie, Gifty's mum and Akua's popularity among readers(Maymin, 2021; Bosch, 2019). This showcases the power of contemporary literature to dismantle stigma, foster empathy, and initiate meaningful conversations about multifaceted mental health experiences.

## LIMITATIONS

The analysis of contemporary novels is limited to the past few decades. This could be considered as limited historical depth since the term "contemporary" is not very definitive, and novels have been published in Ghana as far back as the 1970s. However, I chose to focus on books within the past few decades only as they remain in circulation and there are extensive reviews on them online.

   Also, serving as the sole researcher for this paper, the interpretation of data is primarily subject to my own analysis. There may be certain contextual clues I could be missing. It could be argued that the frequent use of translating to English during the research process may result in the loss of meaning behind certain words and the erasure of the cultural contexts, which could result in possible misinterpretation. Even with the review of multiple certified translators, certain cultural and linguistic subtleties might not be fully captured in the English versions. However, this paper included side by side translation for every single foreign language that has been introduced, hence making it easy to follow for readers who are strangers to said language.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation that has been brought about by globalization has been not confined to technological and environmental advancements but it has also extended into the heart of Ghana's literary landscape. With a significant rise in internet penetration and the utilization of global satellite television (Kemp, 2021), these media have helped catalyze a new wave of mental health awareness. This awakening also paves the way for a revitalized exploration of mental health within literary narratives. Through thorough analysis of literary narratives, this research has illuminated distinct patterns in the depiction of mental illnesses. Examining the chronological progression of Ghanaian literary forms has provided a comprehensive view of the evolving portrayal of mental health and

illnesses. While the topic is not very present in many stories, it is evident that the growing Ghanaian population is resonating with the stories that do address mental health.Yet, it is crucial to bear in mind that the audience engaging with these contemporary narratives—primarily Generation Z and subsequent generations—constitutes only a portion of Ghana's population (World Bank, 2019). Thus, the need for a holistic approach to combat stigma surrounding mental health is therefore accentuated. In confronting the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, embracing traditional cultural elements becomes essential. Recognizing the influence of folklore and proverbs in portraying mental illness in Ghanaian culture is a crucial step towards dismantling misconceptions.

Recently though, there have been encouraging signs with the establishment of the *Mental Health Law* (Act 846 of 2012). This act emphasizes community-based treatment, regulates informal mental health care providers like traditional and faith-based healers. It also aims to promote collaboration between traditional healers and medical practitioners in eradicating stereotypes about mental disorders in the country (Government of Ghana, 2012; Sottie et al., 2016). Also, the focus on mental illness has proven to be an exigent issue as demonstrated by the recent Mental Health awareness campaigns that the country has been undertaking( Eaton & Ohene, 2015; GhanaWeb, 2019).

It is worth acknowledging that despite these positive developments, challenges remain. In more developed parts of Ghana, psychiatric hospitals and counseling centers witness decent patronage; however, among the less-educated populace, stereotypes persist. Traditional healers, known as *juju* priests in Ghana, and Christian pastors are often sought after instead of licensed medical professionals for addressing mental illnesses (Read et al., 2009). The persistence of shaming culture, along with witch camps and juju centers, continues to pose obstacles to destigmatization efforts and comprehensive mental health care in the country. Moreover, the mental health budget in Ghana constitutes only 1.4% of the overall health budget (Roberts et al., 2014), highlighting the relative lack of investment the Ghanaian government has put into the well-being of its citizens' mental health.

Similar to the collaboration between traditional healers and medical practitioners, another promising strategy emerges in the fusion of traditional wisdom with contemporary knowledge. By advocating for mental health awareness within the framework of traditional proverbs and cultural narratives, a more inclusive and nuanced dialogue can be fostered—one that bridges generational perspectives. This approach could dispel myths, and cultivate an atmosphere of acceptance.

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