Food insecurity as a social determinant of mental health among household heads in the Upper West Region of Ghana

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Abstract

According to the World Health Organization, poor mental health related diseases are becoming a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in developing countries. Despite the potential effect of food insecurity on mental health, empirical evidence on this relationship in sub-Saharan Africa, where incidence of food insecurity is relatively high, is almost non-existent. This study contributes to the literature by examining the association between food insecurity and mental health in the Upper West Region of Ghana. The study utilized cross-sectional data collected on household heads (n=1,438) in the Upper West Region of Ghana in 2014. We used the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale, DUKE Health Profile, and Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression to examine the food insecurity and mental health relationship in this context. The results show that heads of moderately food insecure (β=0.934, p<0.001) and food secure households (β=0.175, p<0.05) were likely to report better mental health compared to those from severely food insecure households. We also found that female household heads were likely to report poor mental health (β=-0.164, p<0.05) compared to their male counterparts. Our findings suggest the need to improve access to mental health care services and incorporate food security into mental health strategies and policy in Ghana and other developing countries.

Key Words: Mental health, Household food Insecurity, DUKE Health Profile, Social Determinants of Health, Ghana