

BOOK REVIEW

Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, Jeff Grischow, and Festus Moasun. *Experiencing Disability Stigma in Ghana: Impact on Individuals and Caregivers*. Lanham, MD. Rowman & Littlefield, 2024. xii + 153 pp. \$95.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-66690-580-9.

Experiencing Disability Stigma in Ghana: Impact on Individuals and Caregivers by Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al. presents a compelling and comprehensive exploration of disability experiences in Ghana, drawing on over six years of rigorous research. The authors illuminate the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and the perspectives of their caregivers, showcasing the intricate interplay of traditional and religious beliefs. A compelling aspect of this study is its thorough examination of historical antecedents—precolonial, postcolonial, and independent Ghana—that shape current attitudes toward disability. By integrating traditional labels and local proverbs, the authors significantly enrich the discourse on the stigma faced by those with mental and physical disabilities. This groundbreaking work not only advances our understanding of disability within the Global South but also provides crucial insights into the sociocultural dynamics within Ghanaian society.

Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al. organize the book into six chapters, divided into three parts—Part One: Setting the Context; Part Two: Experiencing Disability and Disability Stigma; and Part Three: The Way Forward. The first part has a single chapter; Part Two—which forms the chunk of the book—comprises Chapters Two to Five; and Part Three concludes the book. Part One delves into the history of disability in Ghana. The authors paint a vivid picture that provides excellent insight, according to them, “a backdrop to the analysis” (34) that follows their extensive endeavor. In setting this backdrop, the authors distilled pertinent information from varying global sources (Muslim chronicles, European travelers, and oral traditions) that focused on stigmatizing attitudes towards disability spanning precolonial, colonial, and independent Ghana. The authors argue that the contemporary experience of stigma in Ghana is a constellation or intersection of traditional and European colonialist assumptions. Specific to Ghana, Mfoafo-M'Carthy et al. elaborated on the richness of some Akan proverbs to provide nuanced understandings of the attitudes of Ghanaian society towards stuttering. Though the authors contend that finding evidence of actions toward disability was difficult in precolonial Ghana, the evidence provided in this section highlights the acceptance and stigma associated with disability within Akan communities.

The second part of this book, “Experiencing Disability and Disability Stigma,” comprises a large chunk with quotes from their research participants to drive home the authors' salient arguments. This section provides four chapters, in this order: “Culture and Disability in Ghana,” “Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Illness in Ghana,” “Stigma, Discrimination, and Impact on Individuals with Disabilities,”

and “Stigma, Discrimination, and Impact on Ghanaian Families” and presents the findings of their authors’ work in Ghana. They state, “When culture combines with religious and spiritual belief systems—which is often the case—its impact on different aspects of society becomes complicated and difficult, if not impossible, to undo” (41). However, the authors contend that though a lot of stigmatizing beliefs in Ghana are often socially constructed, they can be deconstructed where there is a will and commitment of leaders to empower people with disabilities. They posit: “where leadership gives a positive outlook to disability and positively relates with individuals with disabilities, they will inspire the sociocultural and attitudinal changes necessary for the de-stigmatization and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society” (46). These chapters critically review the multifaceted experience of disability, particularly how people with disabilities and their caretakers confront societal stigma. Mfoafo-M’Carthy et al. argue that stigma often manifests in social exclusion and reduced opportunities, affecting the individual’s self-worth and access to resources. Caretakers are shown to bear a double burden, facing both emotional and social stress from managing stigma in their own lives and those of their dependents. The chapter exhibits considerable strength by examining the interpersonal and structural aspects of disability stigma in Ghana. However, it is crucial to acknowledge personal factors such as age, gender, and coping strategies that significantly influence individual experiences of disability, as underscored by the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) model. Mfoafo-M’Carthy et al. excluded these essential elements, resulting in a restricted analysis of disability experiences and overlooking a vital component of the World Health Organization’s holistic framework.

Chapter Six in the final part is dedicated to discussions on the “Way Forward.” Much of the work in this section discussed the “researchers’ experiences, key learning moments, and recommendations for research, policy, and practice with persons with disabilities” (115). The authors caution against violating ethical principles when researching impoverished individuals and their families. A final call is made to members of society to become allies and stand with people with disabilities as they advocate for their rights.

Experiencing Disability Stigma in Ghana: Impact on Individuals and Caregivers is an essential resource for policymakers, researchers, and program managers focused on disability issues. This comprehensive work offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of disability and its significant impact on individuals with physical and mental disabilities within Ghana’s complex social fabric. Mfoafo-M’Carthy and his team deliver a thoughtfully constructed narrative that captures the diverse experiences of those living with disabilities within Ghana’s rich historical and cultural contexts. By establishing itself as a distinctive contribution to the field, this book is indispensable for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of disability in the Ghanaian context.

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