
Let's Help Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder. A Call to Social Workers- Ghana

Agyekum HA*

BA Social Work, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

*Corresponding author: Agyekum HA, BA Social Work, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, Tel: 233505517635; E-mail: haagyekum1@gmail.com

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When we look around the society, there are a lot of people with disabilities walking the streets. When in a car from Madina to Accra, you would not count less than fifty persons with disabilities begging on the streets. As Social Workers who say we have people at heart and a passion to help others what are we doing? Disability is worldwide, but this will not be seen in most countries. This opinion article is a wakeup call to Social Workers in Ghana.

Following researches I have conducted and that from others I have studied, the following recommendations will be pragmatic and I believe they should be looked at as a matter of urgency. The following recommendations are presented to guide the government, communities, social workers, and individuals who champion disability rights, especially the rights of persons with autism as well as policy makers to be knowledgeable and effective in dealing with matters arising as a result of taking care of an autistic child.

To begin with, the government can help reduce the financial burden on parents with children with autism by implementing the provision on health in the Disability Act of Ghana (2006). The Act calls for free medical screening and treatment for persons with disabilities. The country has the National Health Insurance Scheme; the government should therefore improve the scope to provide better and cheaper services for children with autism. This will help reduce cost, improve mortality rate and help in general development. Social workers should therefore advocate for this policy to be fully implemented in the country. They can begin with general petitions and advocacy.

Additionally, the government has to provide more schools that admit children with autism and other developmental disabilities in the country. Though there are special schools in the country, they are not enough. The classes are above their limits, and they do not have the needed materials to help the children with skills training and are not adequately funded. In one of my articles, a participant when interviewed said how she had to always support the special school at Hohoe financially. This being said there are a lot of people who make donations and support to these schools before they can operate

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properly. Aside the governmental special schools, the government should make periodic donations to private special schools to help reduce the financial burden that parents are facing. Individuals and corporate agencies should also be made aware by social workers that they are free to donate in these schools to help in the management of the school.

To add on, social workers should enlighten parents about the disorder through public education. To reach a greater audience, social workers can use religious gatherings as an avenue for such education. There are a lot of parents with children with developmental disabilities, especially those with autism in Ghana who do not know because they are not aware of the disorder and its symptoms. Social workers should collaborate with the government at the regional and local levels and the media to make parents aware of the disorder and how they can go about with the intervention. This will help in early diagnosis as parents will be aware of the signs to detect the disorder. Parents should also be made aware of the diagnostic test to find out if a child will be born with a disability so that they can prepare for the arrival of the child. The government should also implement the Disability Act particularly sections 34 and 35 which calls for periodic screening of children in order to detect, prevent and manage disability as well as the establishment and operation of health assessment and resource centers at each district as a means of providing early diagnostic medical attention to mothers and infants.

In a similar fashion, the community must be educated on the need to love children with autism and disabilities at large. For stigmatization to reduce, the community must be made aware of the effects their acts of discrimination have on both the child and the parent. There are so many international days for disability awareness. For instance in Canada, January is known for Alzheimer's Awareness. Social workers can hold talks on the various media platforms, especially social media platforms to enlighten people on these disorders. The continuous awareness will help reduce stigma and improve acceptance.

In like manner, social workers should advocate for teachers under training to be taught how to handle children with developmental, intellectual disabilities and disability in general in order to prepare them in handling their students with special needs. Itinerant teachers' positions under the Inclusion Education policy should be filled up by social workers since they have been trained in that field.

Adding up, the government should make a policy that all special schools in the country should have a social worker who will be working alongside the school authorities to ensure the betterment of services they provide to students and their parents. With this being said social workers should be alert on notices of meeting days of support groups for parents with children with disabilities and collaborate with them to help parents deal with their problems.

Social workers should advocate for the inclusion of time being laid off for parents with children disabilities in the fringe benefit package of employees, so that these parents can have ample time for their children. This should be something social workers can come together to work on to help parents with children with disabilities.

Above all, social workers can form a fund which will consist of government contribution and private donations that parents with children with disorders can rely on. Autism Speaks has a fund where donations are made into to provide financial assistance to parents with autistic children in the United States. Ghanaian social workers can also adopt this strategy in order to provide assistance to these parents.

The Ghana Association of Social Workers is in the process of being strengthened, this could be projects they can be implementing. Social workers are not recognized in Ghana because what is expected of us is not done. With the association growing into a better one, I hope more innovations will be put in place.

Below is a link to world's disability awareness days:

<https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/awareness/awareness-dates.php>