



**Thinking outside the box: The use of wellness outreaches to destigmatize mental health seeking behaviors in a Ghanaian university**

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**Abstract:** Public understanding of the field of mental health is limited to the treatment of severe and persistent mental illnesses in underfunded government psychiatric hospitals. Consequently, mental health providers are assumed to only work with people labelled by society as “mad”. This stigma leads to a low number of individuals seeking any kind of mental health service even outside of psychiatric settings. The newly established counselling centre of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) faces the problem of low numbers of students utilizing counselling services. In order to rectify this problem, a number of initiatives ranging from psychoeducational brochures, newsletters and outreaches to educate students on the utilization of mental health services for a wide range of emotional issues were undertaken. The two wellness outreaches organized to date have included a collaboration with the GIMPIC medical clinic to help students achieve both physical and emotional wellness. Students participating in the outreaches were also given psychoeducation on the range of services provided by the counselling department. Following the outreaches, a 55% increase in the utilization of the counselling centre has been observed. The next steps to further destigmatizing mental health seeking behaviors in higher education is to disseminate findings from the follow up success of the outreaches as measured by the increased number of students seeking mental health services to other universities, and produce a documentary with collaborating universities to educate the public on the role mental health professionals play in helping individuals and communities achieve wellbeing.



**Biography:** Dr. Kyei is the student counsellor at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration in Ghana. She is a licensed psychologist in Ghana and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PA, USA), and a credentialed provider with the National Register of Health Service Psychologists (DC, USA). She completed her Doctor of Psychology degree in Clinical Psychology from Rutgers University (NJ, USA), her clinical internship at the University of Pennsylvania Health System (PA, USA), and her postdoctoral fellowship at Temple University (PA, USA).

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