



Laidlaw Scholarship Reflective Report

I've witnessed first-hand the stigma around mental health within my culture and the wider black and minority ethnic (BME) student population, with many refusing to talk about their emotions in fear of being judged and believing that their problems are linked to God. Despite many services available at university, none are specifically tailored to black people- it is not recognized that we have unique experiences, ones intricately linked to our faith, when it comes to mental health. This sparked my passion in becoming a Laidlaw Scholar. By giving a voice to BME students through research, I wanted to understand the impact of religion compared to other factors on their day-to-day university lives, and so understand how therapeutic environments can be tailored to promote their wellbeing.

Throughout my time as a Laidlaw Scholar both my communication, leadership and teamwork skills have been enhanced. For example, as a digital storytelling facilitator in my research project, I learnt the importance of being a reflective and an active listener and what it means to ethically engage with participants - facilitating their confidence but creating a personal space to avoid codependency. Similarly, in our Laidlaw field-trip, I was able to give clear instructions to my team members. I felt more comfortable with time, to also offer feedback to my team members or take constructive criticisms from them to improve my performance as team leader.

In my LIA, I worked alongside the psychiatric team at Dixcove Government Hospital to assess patient records and evaluate their progress. At first it was quite challenging to settle in - although I am originally Ghanaian and speak the native language, most of my colleagues still perceived me as a foreigner. It took some time to build rapport and break the misconceptions they had about me. I felt accepted, supported and respected in my team shortly after, which helped me to step out of my comfort zone at times e.g. take on additional responsibilities when the clinic was understaffed.

It brought me immense joy to observe patients as they transitioned from a state of adversity and shame to one of improvement. For example, seeing Yaw's recovery from alcohol addiction with the support of his church and family. I also had the privilege of conducting home visitations alongside the team, as certain patients' feelings of shame hindered their ability to seek care at the hospital. But it was truly heart-breaking and challenging at times, to perform these visitations as we encountered instances of patient neglect. During those times I had to really dig deep and confront my own feelings. I learnt that good time management does not reflect how much you can do in a day, but how much time you spend on the important things e.g. working whilst acknowledging and prioritising my wellbeing. I felt extremely empowered when utilising my supervision meetings to openly discuss my

insecurities and worries. It was a powerful reminder that seeking support and sharing my vulnerabilities is a strength not a weakness!

Volunteering in Ghana allowed me to reconnect with my roots, embrace my heritage and give back to a community which will always hold a special place in my heart. For me this LIA was a way to make a difference in the life of others and to further enhance my knowledge about the traditions that shape my identity. Special thanks to both the University of York and the Laidlaw Foundation for this opportunity!