



OUT OF YOUR MIND

Dialogues on Mental Health in Ghana

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Nubuke Foundation, 7 Adamafo Close, East Legon

PRESS RELEASE

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DIALOGUES ON MENTAL HEALTH IN GHANA

An art exhibition curated by Ama de-Graft Aikins and Bernard Akoi-Jackson
Nubuke Foundation, Accra

Is mental health merely the absence of mental illness?
Are all mental illnesses madness?
How does it feel to live with a mental illness?
Who provides the best care: the psychiatrist, the pastor or the shrine priest?
Can the creative arts help us prevent or transcend mental illness?

Good mental health, like good physical health, is the default state of our everyday lives. We do not actively think about its centrality to our wellbeing until problems arise. Yet many of us face psychological stresses on a regular basis. Anxieties, anger, disappointments or despair about ourselves, our relationships or events can change our state of mind with knock on effects on our physical and social abilities. While some of us are able to manage these stresses, others may not be as successful. Persistent psychological stresses may transform into mild or serious mental disorders. Twenty-five percent of us, according to global statistics, are likely to experience serious mental disorders such as depression, substance abuse disorders, psychosis and schizophrenia. In Ghana individuals suffering from serious disorders do not get the quality treatment they deserve. The entire country is served by three psychiatric hospitals, all of which are located in the south. These compete with the more accessible, but clinically problematic, religion-based services such as prayer camps and traditional shrines. We do not have enough mental health professionals. At last count, in 2005, the entire country (popn: 21,029,853) was served by 15 Psychiatrists, 468 psychiatric nurses, 132 community psychiatric nurses, 1 psychologist, 6 social workers and 1 occupational therapist. Health policymakers continually marginalise mental health, allocating approximately 1% of the health budget to mental health. This budget is largely allocated to the Psychiatric hospitals, leaving community mental health services with virtually no funds. Yet the hospitals face constant financial crises so extreme they are often forced to borrow money to feed patients. This state of affairs presents great challenges for preventing mental illness in the general population or helping mental illness sufferers to recover and to rehabilitate their lives.

This exhibition has two aims. First it aims to facilitate dialogue on the personal, medical and political challenges in mental health through art. It focuses on what comes to the minds of many when they hear the phrase 'out of your mind': madness, the mad, danger, otherness, self-protection, fear, pity and other mixed thoughts and emotions. Psychiatric patients, artists, mental health researchers and professionals explore these issues through paintings, sculpture, sketches, photography, printmaking, prose and poetry. The second aim is to examine what role the creative arts can play in mental illness prevention, treatment and rehabilitation in Ghana. There is increasing scientific evidence to suggest that creative arts improve mental health status in concrete ways. Music reduces levels of anxiety, depression and epileptic seizures. Dance aids the healing process for trauma and psychotic illness. Visual arts facilitate emotional expression and neuro-cognitive regeneration. The core of the exhibition focuses on collaborative work by the visual artist Bernard Akoi-Jackson and patients at Pantang Psychiatric Hospital. Through this work we enter the experiential worlds of the mentally ill and explore the ways in which engagement with the creative arts transforms their lives and the lives of the therapists who work with them.

Donations and proceeds from the exhibition will go towards establishing an art therapy programme at Pantang Hospital. For further details on the exhibition contact Ama de-Graft Aikins at ada21@cam.ac.uk or visit www.african-encounters.com.