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Letter to the Editorial Office

Employing Psychologist Assistants in Ghana: A Needful Cry

Crescens Osei Bonsu Ofori ^{a, b, *}, Nana Yaa Asakuma Ansah Boateng ^{a, c},
Edith Ekuyea Merley Offei ^{a, b}

^a Eastern Regional Hospital, Ghana

^b University of Ghana, Ghana

^c University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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This letter argues for the employment of psychologist assistants in Ghana. Also, it illuminates the benefits Ghana will gain by recruiting psychologist assistants.

Abstract

Psychologist assistants in Ghana are graduates with bachelor's degrees in psychology who have been registered by the Ghana Psychological Council. They work under professional psychologists to deliver psychological services and are effective in providing basic psychological first aid in many work settings. Though a common practice in countries like the United Kingdom and United States of America to recruit psychologist assistants, not much has been done in Ghana. By recruiting psychologist assistants, it will provide them the opportunity support licensed psychologists in fields such as education, health, business, security and sports. Thereby, providing a source of employment. In addition, this effort will serve as a means to gain relevant work experience for postgraduate training in psychology. This will decrease the unemployment rate of graduates with psychology and advance the discipline of psychology in Ghana.

Keywords: Employment, Ghana Psychological Council, Ghana, Letter, Psychologist Assistants.

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: crescens.ofori@gmail.com (C.O.B. Ofori), nhanayaaboat@gmail.com (N.Y.A.A. Boateng), nameledith@gmail.com (E.E.M. Offei)

Dear JARE Editors,

Psychology as a field is becoming a popular area of study in Ghana. With the increasing number of graduates in Ghana, it is common to identify a person with a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Education in psychology. Yet, most of these graduates end up being employed in jobs that are not related to psychology or are unemployed at all. Though employment issues haven't been dealt so well regarding the general profession of psychology in Ghana (Dziwornu et al., 2016), the scope of psychologist assistants (PAs) cannot be ignored also.

To become a PA in Ghana, one must have a bachelor's degree in psychology and be registered with the Ghana Psychological Council (GPC). This provision is supported by The Health Professionals Act, 2013, (Act 587 of 2013) (GPC, 2018). Holders of bachelor's degree in psychology at the undergraduate level read foundational courses in clinical, cognitive, community, counselling, developmental, educational, industrial, organisational, sports, school and social psychology. With the knowledge acquired in the aforementioned areas, PAs are very useful in many organisations where licensed psychologists work (Monsen, et al., 2009).

In developed countries, PAs are very valuable in both public and private organisations. In the case of Ireland and United Kingdom (UK), PAs worked in mental health, intellectual disability, forensic, educational, counselling, organisational and neurological sectors. In both countries, most PAs worked in mental health sectors (Hughes et al., 2015). Additionally, employing PAs according to Monsen, et al. (2009) "prepared them well for applying for professional training courses" (p. 369). Fundamentally, majority of PAs in Ireland and UK chose to work in their sectors because they wanted to gain experience to continue professional graduate education. Additionally, employment opportunities for PAs offered them opportunities for sustainable financial source of income (Hughes et al., 2015).

With these issues raised, it is certain that employing PAs in Ghana is a needful cry. In Ghana, approximately 650,000 and 2,166,000 of the 21.6 million people living are suffering from a severe mental disorder and a moderate to mild mental disorder respectively. This ratio leaves a treatment gap of 98% of the total population who are likely to have a mental disorder (World Health Organization, 2018). As Ghana cries about mental health problems in the country, employing PAs will be an innovation to bridge this treatment and psychological support gap.

To conclude, Ghana stands to gain by employing PAs in various sectors. Ghana will benefit through the employment of PAs as more future psychologists will be groomed through this means. Though mental issues and psychological care remain challenging in Ghana, this will be a step in the right direction to bridge a high treatment gap. Furthermore, formal recruitment of PAs will aid the national development of psychology as both discipline and profession. Consequently, graduates of psychology will be useful in society and this will enhance access to quality psychological care.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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