



HEALTH BUILDERS

SUPPORTING GLOBAL HEALTH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

S. RYAN JACOBUS – HEALTH BUILDERS – RWANDA - 2022

Master of Science in Global Health Equity

DR. RACHEL THOMPSON GLOBAL HEALTH EQUITY FUND

S. Ryan Jacobus completed his internship focused on mental health in Rwanda with partners, Health Builders (HB), from March 14 – 31, 2022. Their mission is “[...] strengthens management, improves clinical care, and builds health care infrastructure so every person has access to high quality health care, allowing them to live dignified, healthy, and prosperous lives.”

There is special emphasis on mental health in Rwanda given the traumatic fallout from the civil war. Through this opportunity in experiential education, he and his partners at HB conducted key informant interviews with site managers and staff at 14 different facilities (health posts, health centers, district hospitals, and schools) on their perspectives on the state of mental health care. The information gathered revealed common themes- the most outwardly apparent mental health problems were the highest reported diagnoses (schizophrenia and psychosis); however, these are likely not the most prevalent and may be umbrellas for more nuanced issues. Secure, consistent funding is needed to support existing and novel programs to address the less obvious, underlying issues, with intersectoral collaboration. A brief summary is given below:

“It was important for me to use my own lived experiences to inform my thesis work as I had the opportunity to initiate conversations of reducing mental health stigma with patients and providers.”

Community health workers, the base of the healthcare system, are volunteers and are overworked	Interventions need to be cost effective and efficiently achieve their goal- primary schools provide a good opportunity
Stigma prevents accessing services until problem is severe	Focus on mental <i>wellbeing</i> , instead of mental <i>illness</i>
Surveillance of behavioral disorders is difficult, hindering the referral process and contributing to underreporting	Socialization may eventually lead to discussions about mental health, increasing education and decreasing stigma

Next steps include key informant interview data review, summarize the qualitative information, co-design low cost and effective projects to fill mental health stigma and assessment gaps, and funnel funds from private business.



Rugoro Emmanuel, Nzige Health Center Manager Key Informant



Health Builders' Team in mentor Immaculate Kyarisiima's home



Health Builders' offices in Kigali, Rwanda

“This internship has been indispensable to my progression as a global public health professional. I was able to use the skills I have learned in master’s degree and entire life with these partnerships and projects. I intend to continue collaborating with Health Builders, and Rwanda as a nation, long into the future. Thank you to everyone who made these monumental moments possible. My life will never be the same as a result.”