

Background: Little is known about the prevalence of mental health problems among adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa. Research stems mainly from the United State and Europe and consistently determined violence and maltreatment to be important risk factors. In this study, we examined the prevalence of mental health problems among adolescents in Tanzania, as well as the association with exposure to violence and maltreatment.

Methods: We administered a set of questionnaires (e.g., Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire; Conflict Tactic Scale) to a nationally representative sample of 700 Tanzanian secondary school children (52% girls; age: 14.92 years, SD = 1.02) and 333 parents or primary caregivers (53% females; age: 43.47 years, SD = 9.02).

Results: Forty-one percent of the students reported an elevated level of mental health problems (emotional problems: 40%, peer problems: 63%, conduct problems: 45%, hyperactivity: 17%) in the past six months. Concordantly, 31% of parents reported observing an elevated level of mental health problems in their children (emotional problems: 37%, peer problems: 54%, conduct problems: 35%, hyperactivity: 17%). After controlling for other risk factors, we found significant associations between physical violence by parents and adolescent's mental health problems reported by students ($\beta = .15$) and their parents ($\beta = .33$).

Conclusions: Our findings suggest a high prevalence of mental health problems among secondary school students in Tanzania as well as an association between physical violence by parents and adolescents' mental health problems. Our findings emphasize the need to inform the population at large about the potentially adverse consequences associated with violence against children and adolescents.

Keywords: mental health, violence, prevalence, Sub-Saharan Africa