

ABSTRACT

Background: Around 50% of the mental disorders are believed to start by the age of fourteen and if untreated, these conditions may progress to adulthood, reducing prospects for a successful adult life. Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in adolescents and it is linked to a number of difficulties which include; poor social interaction, poor academic achievement, school difficulties, school dropout, health problems, increased substance abuse, as well as problems with peers and family and an increase in the suicide death rate. Adolescents experience traumatic events including accidents, natural calamities, child abuse and war and if left unattended, trauma further impairs the health of these adolescents and raises the suicide risk. Social networks have been linked to better mental health outcomes in adolescents. This study aimed to investigate the prevalence of depression, PTSD, and suicidality among school going adolescents in Yumbe district, rural northwestern Uganda and explore the relationship between these mental disorders and social networks

Method: We used a cross sectional study design and the study was done among school going adolescents in Yumbe district, northwestern Uganda. To identify the schools and eligible students, multistage stratified sampling was used. We collected information on depression, suicidality and PTSD using the MINIKID. Social networks were measured using the school connectedness scale (SCC) that was used to assess school connectedness; the Berkman-Syme Social Network Index was used to assess the offline social networks and, the social media use integration scale was used for online social networks. We ran logistic multivariable regression models to assess the association between depression, suicidality, PTSD and social networks among school going adolescents.

Results: We enrolled 683 participants. The overall prevalence of depression was 20.8%; suicidality was 17.7% and PTSD was 4.7%. In the final logistic regression model, better

online social networks (AOR: -2.06,95%CI: -1.33 -3.18, P=0.001) were not protective against depression. Similarly, better online social networks (AOR: -1.69, 95%CI: -1.08-2.65, P=0.022) were not protective against suicidality. Offline social network, school connectedness and online social networks were not associated with PTSD.

Conclusion: The prevalence of depression, suicidality and PTSD among school going adolescents is high in Yumbe district. Depression and suicidality were significantly associated with better online social networks. These findings can be used to tailor screening for depression, suicidality, PTSD among adolescents in school as well as monitoring of online networks by parents and teachers (parental control) to improve wellbeing of adolescents. There is also need to scale up mental health education for all stakeholders in the education sector to enhance early diagnosis and early interventions.