

# AB015. Adolescent mental health in post-conflict communities: results from a cross-sectional survey in Northern Uganda

Kyra Guy<sup>1</sup>, Heather Wipfli<sup>1</sup>, Abigail Kim<sup>1</sup>, Kenneth Odur<sup>2</sup>;  
the Lira Youth Public Health Ambassadors

<sup>1</sup>USC Global Research, Implementation, and Training Lab, Department of Population and Public Health Sciences, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA; <sup>2</sup>Children's Chance International, Central Division, Lira Municipal Council, Lira, Uganda  
*Correspondence to:* Heather Wipfli, PhD. International Relations/Political Science, USC Global Research, Implementation, and Training Lab, Department of Population and Public Health Sciences, University of Southern California, 837 Downey Way, Los Angeles, California, 90089, USA. Email: hwipfli@usc.edu.

**Background:** This study evaluated adolescents' mental health, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about mental health conditions, and access to critical mental health services in Lira District, northern Uganda. The political history of the region, the epicenter of the decades-long conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government, makes for an interesting case study of the political and social determinants of mental health of those directly impacted by conflict, and on subsequent generations growing up in post-conflict communities.

**Methods:** This paper presents the results of a community-based participatory research study carried-out by youth public health ambassadors in Lira District, Uganda. The study consisted of a mixed methods cross-sectional survey of households, schools, and healthcare facilities.

**Results:** The study found 66% of adolescents indicated poor well-being and possible symptoms of depression and 41% of adolescents reported at least four childhood trauma events. Over 35% reported feeling extremely sad and 60% reported feeling socially isolated during the coronavirus disease (COVID) lockdowns that lasted from 2020 to 2021. Nearly half of the adolescents aged 13–17 surveyed (N=306) believed that witchcraft caused mental health problems, while less than 20% believed that traumatic experiences

could be a cause. 40% of respondents had no idea of where to seek mental health care, and few facilities had mental health services available.

**Conclusions:** These findings illustrate the need to study the political and social determinants of mental health, especially for those directly impacted by armed conflict and for the generations growing up in post-conflict communities as they seek to rebuild.

**Keywords:** Mental health; Uganda; political determinants of health; adolescents; community-based participatory research

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## Footnote

*Conflicts of Interest:* All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form (available at <https://jphe.amegroups.com/article/view/10.21037/jphe-2023-apru-ab015/coif>). The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

*Ethical Statement:* The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (as revised in 2013). The study was approved by the Ethics Board of University of Southern California (No. UP-21-00478) and Gulu University (No. GUREC-2021-84) and informed consent was obtained from all individual participants.

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