

Original article

Psychosocial problems among students in preparatory school, in Dessie town, north east Ethiopia

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Abstract

Background: The family environment is critical in supporting a healthy adolescent development. With the establishment of preparatory schools, many students of school age move from rural areas to nearby towns leading to changes in their living arrangement and possibly family connectedness. However, whether this phenomenon predisposes adolescents to greater psychosocial problems is not clear.

Objective: This study assesses differential vulnerabilities of preparatory school adolescents to psychosocial problems with reference to their living arrangement and parental attachment.

Method: A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 667(512 male and 155 female) preparatory school students in Dessie town, north east Ethiopia in 2004 using a pre-tested and structured questionnaire. Qualitative information was also obtained from four focus group discussions.

Result: Approximately a quarter of the students included in the study reported feeling of sadness which made them stop performing some regular activities. Six percent of the adolescents also reported having attempted suicide in the 12 months preceding the study. The study revealed that lower family connectedness and having a living arrangement separate from both biological parents (or living with friends, relatives or alone) were associated with increased odds of having a depressive symptom after controlling for observed covariates. Suicide attempts reported in the 12 months preceding the study were linked to having a history of suicide attempt in the family or among friends, female gender and sexual activity but not with family connectedness.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that the burden of psychosocial concerns including depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts are high and living with both biological parents and good parent-teen connectedness are related to better psychosocial health. [Ethiop.J.Health 2006;20(1):47-55]