

Abstract

Youth are most vulnerable to mental disorders and psychological disturbances than any other group in the society. Globally, mental disorders amongst the youths have been on increase with one fourth to one-third of the youths and adolescents experiencing these disorders across their lifetime. Kenya mental health policy 2015 – 2030 states that: about 40% of in patients youths in hospitals suffer from mental illness. In Tharaka Nithi County, statistical reports for the year 2014 indicate that there was a total of 1,966 mentally ill persons who visited the health facilities. Chuka sub-county hospital had a total of 806 in-patients diagnosed with mental disorders. Out of the 806 patients, 216 were youths aged 15 – 35 years representing 41%. This high percentage of youths admitted with mental disorders necessitated the study. The current study sought to find the risk factors for mental disorders among the youths in Chuka Sub County. Six locations were conveniently sampled, after which proportion of participants from each selected location was calculated. Individual participants were purposively sampled. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from 384 youths who were sampled through convenience sampling technique. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24. Frequencies and percentages were used to present descriptive statistics while Chi Square test of independence was used to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Significant results were then be subjected to logistic regression analysis. Majority of the youths were male, 74%. Those who were aged between 21-25 were 42.5%, 15-20 years were 28%, 31-35 years were 28% and 25-30 years were 0.5%. Majority of the youths had secondary education, 58.8%, followed by college 21.5%, primary 12.2% and university at 7.5%. A big percentage of the youths, 63% were single by the time of study, 34.7% were married and 2.3% had divorced or separated. The following demographic factors were associated with high risk of developing mental disorders; age of the youth ($p=0.022$), level of education of the youth ($p<0.001$), marital status of the youths ($p=0.018$), significant social risk factors included; youth discrimination ($p=0.016$), bullying by fellow students ($p<0.001$), mistreatment while growing up ($p=0.013$), and frequency of family conflicts, on economic risk factors, significant factors included; satisfaction with income earned ($p=0.018$), youth straining to fund social needs ($p=0.046$), and family financial support ($p<0.001$). Significant environmental risk factors included; area of residence ($p=0.025$), youths' participation in societal civic activities ($p=0.020$) and crime rate at the youths' area of residence ($p<0.001$). In conclusion, the study found interplay between social and economic variables which increased the risk of developing mental disorders among the youths. These socioeconomic risk factors compounded with environmental exposures increased the risk of developing mental disorders among the youths. The study recommended, that these interpretations of these findings should be done with caution, as inferences about real cause cannot be made.