

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Background**

Literature describing stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental illness by children in the developing world is lacking. Children's mental health issues in the Kenyan context are especially pertinent due to the increased likelihood of exposure to risk factors and the high prevalence of mental disorders. The objective of the current study was to examine socio-demographic factors associated with the endorsement of stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental illness among Kenyan school children.

### **Methods**

We analyzed cross-sectional survey data from 4585 primary school-aged children in standards one through seven in the Eastern Province of Kenya. We examined relationships between the endorsement of stigmatizing attitudes and age, gender, district, religion, being in the standard appropriate for one's age, and parental employment status.

### **Results**

Stigma scores decreased with increasing age ( $\beta = -0.83$ ; 95 % CI =  $-0.99$  to  $-0.67$ ). Boys had higher stigma scores compared to girls ( $\beta = 1.55$ ; 95 % CI =  $0.86$ – $2.24$ ). Students from the rural district had higher average stigma scores as compared to those from the peri-urban district ( $\beta = 1.14$ ; 95 % CI =  $0.44$ – $1.84$ ). Students who were not in the standard appropriate for their age had lower stigma scores than those who were in the standard typical for their age ( $\beta = -1.60$ ; 95 % CI =  $-2.43$  to  $-0.77$ ).

### **Conclusions**

Stigmatizing attitudes toward the mentally ill exist among primary school children in Kenya; thus, anti-stigma interventions are needed, and our findings highlight particular subgroups that could be targeted.