ABSTRACT

PURPOSE:

The aim of this study was to estimate the prevalence and correlates of mental disorders among upper primary school children in grades five through seven in Kenya.

METHODS:

The Youth Self Report (YSR) instrument was adapted for use in Kenyan schools and administered to 2267 school children in grades five through seven from 23 randomly selected schools. We estimated the prevalence of DSM-IV mental disorders, and used logistic regression analyses to examine the socio-demographic factors associated with each disorder.

RESULTS:

The prevalence of any mental disorder among Kenyan school children was 37.7 % (95 % CI = 35.7-39.7 %). Somatic complaints were the most prevalent (29.6 %, 95 % CI = 27.8-31.5 %), followed by affective disorders (14.1 %, 95 % CI = 12.7-15.6 %) and conduct disorder (12.5 %, 95 % CI = 11.2-13.9). The presence of one or more comorbid mental disorder was seen among 18.2 % (95 % CI = 16.6-19.8 %) of children. Male sex, living in a peri-urban vs. rural area, being held back in school, having divorced or separated parents, and having an employed mother were associated with an increased likelihood of having most of the mental disorders examined, whereas increasing age was associated with a reduced likelihood.

CONCLUSIONS:

We observed a high prevalence of mental disorders among school children in Kenya. If not detected early, these disorders may interfere with children's psychological, social, and educational development. Our findings highlight the importance of implementing screening measures in schools that can detect single and multiple disorders in order to improve the mental health and well-being of the next generation.