

This newsletter presents recent evidence and research in global health. The topic of this edition is adolescent health, which addresses all matters of health related to persons aged 10–19 years who represent around 1.2 billion individuals or 16% of the global population. Several global initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals, target youth and promote adolescent health. The 12th World Conference on Adolescent Health was held in November 2021 in Lima, Peru, in collaboration with the World Health Organisation. There is a plethora of research available on this topic and this newsletter showcases four recent publications.

### Adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) for all in sub-Saharan Africa: a spotlight on inequalities

This article was published as an introduction to *Reproductive Health*, volume 18 Supplement 1 2021: Adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) for all in SSA: are inequalities reducing? It summarises and looks closer at the findings of five other journal articles all of which highlight and discuss inequalities and trends of key SRH challenges for adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa.

Chandra-Mouli, Neal and Moller draw some main conclusions from their review and highlight the challenges and opportunities to the readers:

SRH data is increasingly available in sub-Saharan Africa and enable analysis disaggregated by age, sex, wealth, education and urban–rural residence as well as other attributes such as religion, ethnicity and gender norms/attitudes. However, even though more data is

**“Intersectionality has rarely been explored in the context of ASRH, yet is vital if we are to have a more holistic understanding of the way in which social systems, power and identity influence outcomes and behaviours.”**

available, and these five articles provide evidence of what determines the inequalities in SRH outcomes, more nuanced analysis is needed if those adolescents with the most pressing SRH needs are to be identified. For example, there are pockets in urban areas of informal settlements with worse SRH outcomes than the general urban population – something that needs to be taken into consideration when planning interventions.



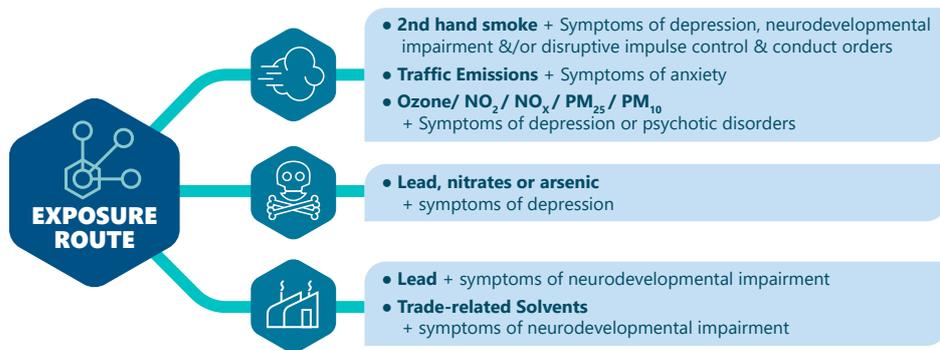
Additionally, the authors highlight the ever important aspect of intersectionality and the need to acknowledge the different realities and outcomes within groups, and that individuals are members of more than one group for which data might be collected. They also emphasise that looking at national or sometimes even regional averages risks hiding the realities experienced by disadvantaged or minority groups.

[Read the research](#)

### ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

- Evidence suggest that mapping acceptance of health interventions among youth in sub-Saharan Africa is a key feature for successful programming that is increasingly practiced.
- It is important to disaggregate data further, e.g. beyond national averages and according to intersectional indicators, when designing successful SRH interventions.
- There is a correlation between pollution and poor mental health among youth and adolescents. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an adverse impact on the mental health of this demographic group, particularly girls and older adolescents.





## A systematic review of the mental health risks and resilience among pollution-exposed adolescents

The relationship between adolescent mental health and pollution is not yet thoroughly explored within the academic community, however the 2022 February edition of the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* presented a review of studies that do explore this correlation in adolescents and youths. The review finds that in many of these studies, air and water pollution exposure is associated with depression, generalised anxiety, psychosis, and/or disruptive, impulse control and conduct disorders. This suggests that exposure to different types of pollution is indeed a risk factor to adolescent mental health. Theron and her colleagues note the limited quality of the studies they reviewed and called for high-quality research, including into factors and processes that protect the mental health of pollution-exposed adolescents. They also argue that studies of adolescents living in low- and lower middle-income countries and the southern hemisphere must be prioritised as they are disproportionately vulnerable to pollution related threats.

[Read the research](#)



## Global prevalence of depressive and anxiety in children and adolescents during COVID-19

Racine et al. (2021) argue that depression and anxiety symptoms among children and adolescents have doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rates appear to have increased as the pandemic progressed and girls and older adolescents seem to be more heavily affected than other groups. Previous studies have also demonstrated that youth living in regions who experienced high COVID-19 infections and urban areas

reported more declines in mental health. Some of the specific causes of depression and anxiety symptoms include social isolation and missed so-called “life milestones” such as graduation and other social activities, along with school closures, quarantine orders, increased family stress, and decreased peer interactions. Compared to the beginning of the pandemic, evidence points to the rates of mental illness among youth, which have increased significantly and

remain high, thus warranting attention for mental health recovery planning. As governments and policy-makers prepare to implement recovery plans, precise reviews of the burden of mental illness for youth are urgently needed to inform both service delivery and resource allocation.

[Read the research](#)



## Acceptability of interventions aimed at improving adolescent and youth health and social outcomes in Africa

This is a mapping of previous research that investigates the level of acceptability of interventions aimed at improving adolescent health in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Acceptability – meaning people find that projects and interventions aimed at improving their health outcomes – are relevant, useful and welcome. The authors acknowledge that a key feature of the success of such interventions is the level of acceptability within the community for which they wish. Research on acceptability among adolescents is still limited in LMICs and this report is the first to synthesize evidence based on interventions in Africa.

The authors highlight two encouraging trends, first that there has been an increase in the number of acceptability studies, which might indicate an increased recognition of the importance of working with young people in designing and implementing interventions aimed at them. Secondly they found that the levels of acceptability of interventions were generally high, implying an overall good alignment of interventions with adolescent needs and preferences.

[Read the research](#)