



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Editors:
Tom Kwanya, Peter Matu

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The Technical University of Kenya • Nairobi, Kenya

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10. Historical Interventions on the Psychological Well-being of Adolescents in Uganda using a Socio-Cultural Approach

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Abstract

Internationally, the boundaries of cities have expanded, leading to an increase in the adolescent population residing and studying there, mainly due to the interconnectedness of the world as a global village. Adolescence, characterised by rapid change and various challenges, exposes young individuals to a myriad of psychosocial demands. In Uganda, as in many other African countries, adolescents from different regions often belong to vulnerable social categories and face risks such as forced migration, various forms of violence, early pregnancies, rape, sexual abuse, and genital mutilation, among others. These risks raise concerns about the mental well-being and thriving of adolescents in the region. Furthermore, there is interest in understanding how adolescents were mentally healthy in traditional settings in the past. This study aimed to investigate how adolescents in traditional communities maintained their mental well-being. A transdisciplinary participatory research approach was employed, involving the preparation of transcripts for all Focus Group Discussion (FGD) data and the development of qualitative data codes based on ancient and optimistic mental involvements from each region. Additionally, qualitative data themes were developed to explore the fundamental principles guiding the study.

Keywords: *Mental health, ancient and optimistic mental involvements, adolescents in Uganda*

1 Background information

Uganda, like many other African countries, has a significant adolescent population, with two-thirds (66.7 per cent) of Ugandans being under 24 years old (PMA 2020). Approximately one in five (18.6 per cent) are adolescents aged 15 to 24, while about 15 per cent are aged 10 to 19 years. Adolescents in various regions are part of susceptible social groups and are highly exposed to risks such as rape, defilement, and drug abuse, despite being the majority in those regions. Understanding what enhances the psychological well-being of adolescents in this generation, such as music, parental support, and lifestyle choices, is essential. The study sought to investigate how adolescents were traditionally kept psychologically well in the past. The purpose of this study was to explore how adolescents in traditional communities maintained their mental well-being and how adolescents in this generation perceive psychological well-being traditionally in their respective communities.

2 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative transdisciplinary participatory research design. According to Jahn (2008), this approach entails addressing complex societal and real-world issues by involving those affected by the situation in the research process and facilitating the co-production of transformative knowledge. By utilising a transdisciplinary research design and strategy, we made a deliberate effort to integrate the perspectives of stakeholders and beneficiaries to enhance

understanding of traditional interventions aimed at improving adolescents' psychological well-being (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2010).

The study was conducted in Uganda, situated in Eastern Africa. Uganda is comprised of four regions: Central, Northern, Western, and Eastern. We selected Uganda as our study area due to its substantial adolescent population, which prompted our interest in investigating traditional approaches to enhancing adolescents' psychological well-being.

The study adopted a qualitative transdisciplinary participatory research approach, collecting qualitative data from 24 adolescents aged 11 to 20 and 32 elders from four regions in Uganda: central, eastern, western, and northern regions. Eight adults from different regions in Uganda participated in each focus group discussion, utilising methods such as interviews, drawings, photovoice, focused group discussions, and participant data validation workshops.

Transcripts of all Focus Group Discussions were prepared, and qualitative data codes were developed based on historical interventions from each region. Qualitative data themes on the fundamental tenets guiding our study were developed, and data were analysed using thematic analysis. All the information obtained from adolescents' workshops and photo voices was critically synthesised and analysed carefully.

3 Literature review

In Schwartz's (2022) study, it is argued that children can attain greater levels of calmness, happiness, and overall health through engaging in enjoyable activities in nature. These activities, which can be enjoyed by both parents and children simultaneously, significantly enhance their mental well-being by reducing stress levels. Schwartz (2022) further advocates for families and individuals to cultivate habits of exploring nature as a means to achieve emotional happiness. However, despite the benefits of these activities, Schwartz (2022) underscores the importance of integrating tools such as traditional activities and interventions towards adolescents' mental wellness.

Schwartz (2022) emphasise the importance of finding joy in nature for both homes and classrooms, as it contributes to improved health and well-being. However, they note a general oversight by Kiley in failing to emphasise historical approaches to maintaining adolescents' mental well-being.

Musanje et al. (2023) lament how psychosocial interventions have greatly influenced medication adherence among adolescents with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa; however, limited attention was given to traditional methods for enhancing adolescents' mental health, especially in ancient times in Africa, particularly in Eastern Africa. They note that while psychosocial interventions have greatly influenced medication adherence among adolescents with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, little has been mentioned about traditional methods used to promote mental health. The authors aimed to investigate traditional interventions for adolescents' mental well-being in Uganda.

Marshall et al. (2012) noted that individuals who demonstrate confidence tend to persist after failure, showing resilience in pursuing their objectives. They also explain that individuals can derive mental wellness from various activities or achievements, such as sports, social interactions, or familial relationships. Similarly, Harris and Orth (2020) emphasise the pivotal role of social relationships, especially warm parental relationships, in shaping self-esteem. Their study is remarkable, but it needed to tackle the historical tools that were employed in shaping adolescents' mental well-being. Furthermore, Marshall et al. (2012) highlight

the importance of prayer in restoring wellness during times of failure. Additionally, these perceptions are intricately shaped by societal norms, including prevalent activities and social interactions within communities. Family dynamics also play a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' self-esteem and their perception of self-worth within their communities.

There are various studies, including those mentioned above, addressing the issues of mental health in different settings and several social categories. However, few studies addressed concerns about traditional interventions for adolescents' mental well-being in Uganda, and little was known about historical interventions for the mental well-being of adolescents in Uganda.

4 Findings of the study

From the different focus groups, adolescents' workshops and photo voices. The results were further analysed and discussed below.

Since the children of long ago are now big people, data was collected from the elders who provided information on how adolescents' psychological well-being was ensured long ago. No particular criterion was followed when choosing the elders. However, elders from different parts of Uganda were contacted to provide information and respond to the different questions asked during the focus groups; it was a random selection. Elders ensured adolescents' psychological well-being socially, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously to prepare them to fit in every sphere of life; this was a way of ensuring that they were psychologically well.

They used to give adolescents gifts and clothes on essential days, tell them words of encouragement, entertain them through various forms of oral literature, punish them for keeping the right path, communal parenting to ensure proper ethics, train them to be clean, trained them to be united, provide proper feeding, organise parties and celebrations to relax. They educated them formally and informally, and they made sure that the children performed very well in their studies and always punished them for poor performance.

4.1 Gifting adolescents

In ancient times, parents often rewarded their children with gifts to ensure their psychological well-being. This practice is supported by researchers from the National Institutes of Health, along with colleagues from around the world, who measured brain activity among individuals who both received and gave gifts. They observed that all regions of the brain were activated (National Institutes of Health et al., n.d., as cited in mghclaycenter.org). The people from the central used to refer to this as "okugaba obulabo" For example, they used to gift their children with animals like goats, birds, and chickens when they did something extraordinary, and during the time serving food, they were gifted with extra portions of food which they refer to as "okuddiza" and after serving this child would be given the source pan which had a source to eat all the remaining soup, which they referred to as "okukomba essepiki". Novotney (2022) argues that Several scholars argue that gifting regulates the entire brain, which breeds pleasure, social connection, and trust, creating a "warm glow" effect on adolescents.

Among the Nubians, adolescents were gifted with their traditional wear called "kuru baba" "kikoi", and the Westerners were given traditional wear which is called "omwenda". These presents would make the adolescents very happy, hence being psychologically well. In addition to presents, adolescents would receive words and actions of encouragement from elders, which boosted their psychological well-being. People from the central would praise children

by saying.

“babi kulya balungi mirimu, olimbula bazinga, owanakati owenkeje...” which means or is interpreted as “Babi kulya balungi mirimu” means that it’s hard to feed children. However, they are helpful when it comes to doing tasks in a home. Olimbula bazinga means I will love you till your death.

“Owanakati, owekeje” These were popular sources among the people in the central area, and so they were used to praise the adolescents who would have pleased the elders. Being generous is not just loveable, caring and thinking about others improve adolescents’ psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

4.2 Love and affection

Furthermore, elders would treat the children with love and affection when they did something good, especially for the whole family. For example, among the people from the central region, whenever a child fetched water from the well, it was appreciated in a way that elders would help them remove the jerry can, pot, or container from their head peacefully without hurting them. This kept them in high spirits and, hence, psychologically well. Love is a strong pillar in supporting mental well-being. In the western region, children were rewarded with a carabash of milk, when ever, they did some thing outstanding. Additionally, still in the western region of Uganda, great importance was attached to virginity among young girls. A small goat and Herds of cattle were given to the to the family of the girl who got married a virgin, this inspired several girls to to keep their virginity without involving in fornication so that their families can also get the rewards when they get married virgins. This was the practice in all the regions. In relation to the above, divorce was unheard of because these children were prepared and orient well into adulthood and marriage. This was greatly done by the maternal aunties and uncles. Young boys were nurtured into responsible men by going with their fathers to rear the animals.

It has been demonstrated that love, compassion and joy boost human immune system, thereby empowering the body to fight against different diseases and infections. Powerful relationships have been seen in prognoses in chronic illnesses like cancer. This leads to a reduction in signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Schwartz (2022) explains that Science explains that warmth and affection expressed by parents to their children result in permanent positive attributes throughout the life of those children, hence their psychological well-being.

4.3 Words of encouragement

Among the Acholis from the north, adolescents were told words of encouragement to keep them robust, courageous and bold. This was not done in plain words, but they always told stories about elders who came before them; in these stories, they described how elders fought and killed big and strong animals like elephants. This would encourage them to be strong and bold in executing tasks, and with every success, they would get happy, which always left them psychologically well. Social support is a well-recognised protective factor for children’s mental health. While many interventions exist that seek to mobilise social support to improve children’s mental health, not much is known about how this can best be done Bauer et al. (2021).

Long ago, people in Uganda used the above and other words and actions of praise to appreciate adolescents, which has been reported to have ensured their well-being. For example “Babi kulya balungi mirimu, akwata empola atuukawala nawolovu atuuka ku kibuga.. ”. They also explain that social support, love, and affective words enhance people’s mental health (Bauer

et al., 2021).

Making time for one's child will make them feel that they are essential to you. Have fun while doing activities together, like watching a movie or playing games that they enjoy. Furthermore, research studies show that well-being is a combination of physical, mental, and emotional health. Well-being is also about fully engaging in life in all its various events and activities (Raising children.net.au), the Australian parenting website.

4.4 Entertainment through various forms of oral literature

Oral literature is the verbal form of literature that precedes the written form of literature. It is passed on from one person to another through word of mouth. Oral literature contains folk tales, ballads, dances, and myths, and they serve the purpose of educating the people. This was an everyday activity among various groups of people. For example, from the central, people used to compose songs. Elders would train adolescents how to sing and dance. They also used idioms referred to as "ebisoko" folk tales, "enfumo" and proverbs referred to as "engero". For example, such idiom included the following in the table below:

Table 1: Idioms and proverbs employed by elders for children's education

Original Phrase	Meaning
Akwata empola atuukawala.	Patience leads to success.
Akajja obunaku keemanya.	Your goals shape your attitude.
Enkolo tennyigwa.	The foundation is always crucial in everything.
Atalina mannyo mukama gw'awa ennyama.	Those without teeth are the ones whom god blesses with meat.
Ebibimba bikka.	Everything eventually comes to fruition.
Bugu bugu ssimuliro.	Rushing yields no blessings.

Being able to understand the idioms, explain the meaning of the proverbs, and answer questions correctly after listening to the folktales would give adolescents much joy, which enhances their psychological well-being. This is backed up by research conducted by the National Health Institute, which concluded that making time for your child will make them feel that they are essential to you. Have fun while doing activities together, like watching a movie or playing games that they enjoy. This is informed by the (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2021).

Among the northerners like the Acholis, they had riddles and told stories of long ago. In these stories, they told the young and the youth of the successful stories and the way of life of their forefathers; they, too, taught adolescents the casual dances for their culture, which is referred to as "Lakaraka". In the evenings, when at their grandparent's place, they were exposed to a number of proverbs as a way of educating them; this was a source of entertainment which ensured their psychological well-being. This is informed by Rebecca Marcus, who emphasises that brain games are very significant in several ways; for example, they improve focus, concentration and memory, they make individuals active and vibrant in their daily activities, and they may prevent age-related cognitive decline and dementia. Brain teaser games are also good for the brain. Research by Michael (2020) shows that participating in jigsaw puzzles boosts cognition and visual-spatial reasoning.

Like in other regions, adolescents from the north were always thrilled when they answered the riddles correctly, as well as learning their traditional dance and dancing perfectly.

On the side of the Nubians, adolescents were taught their traditional dance called the “duruka” dance, the westerner were taught their traditional dance called Ekitagururo for the Banyankole, Ekizino for the Bakiga, in the northerner region, children were taught Larakara dance, in the eastern region the Imbalu dance, and in the central region children were was taught Bakisimba Nankasa Muwogola to the adolescents as a way of entertainment, played different types of games, “Libu maama” that imitated the family setting, taught songs referred to as “Kungu” and danced the “duruka dance” while singing, they were also given time to play after completing their house chores. These helped to ensure that adolescents were psychologically well. This is informed by research findings that dance of any type gives physiological and psychological benefits to healthy and medically vulnerable populations.

Ensuring the psychological well-being of adolescents among the Western people was not far from the ways of the above people; they had various games like skipping, playing no ball, and imitating their parents, and this was supplemented by the stories from which they learnt a lot which was told around the fireplaces in the evenings. Brain teaser games are also good for the brain. Research shows that participating in jigsaw puzzles boosts cognition and visual-spatial reasoning (Michael, 2020).

4.5 Punishments

Adolescents were given punishments to show bad conduct and keep them on the right path. Growing up into a responsible, right person is a way the elders ensure the psychological well-being of adolescents. For example, among the central people, if a girl got pregnant before marriage, this was referred to as “kusoba’ and was also called “amawemukirano” this girl would not share a bedroom with her young sisters, so she usually occupied an isolated room out of the main house. This would show the other adolescents in the home how they should behave around boys, which kept them psychologically well. In addition, the people from the central region would intimidate and scare adolescents to enhance good morals. For example, In the Kiganda culture, if someone committed suicide, they would beat the dead body severely and even burn the grave to show the rest and the children- adolescents that this is an evil act which should not be done.

Furthermore, in the Gisu culture, adolescents are given slight punishments after several warnings. Elders would wait for the adolescent to finish all the meals and punish them at night because they did not want the neighbours to know so as to maintain dignity and respect. Additionally, in the Gisu culture, adolescents were trained not to participate in early marriages because this would lead to a poor future. They were always told stories relating to fierce animals like snakes, lions and many others, telling them that the suffering and pain they would go through if they married early was similar to the pain they felt when these fierce animals beat them or struggled with them as the men they marry might neglect them with their unborn children. This is supported by different psychologists’ behaviourist theories, like B.F Skinner’s and Ivan Pavlov’s, which emphasise negative reinforcement to do away with bad behaviour.

4.6 Communal parenting (trained, supervised and controlled by the community)

Long ago, adolescents’ psychological well-being was also ensured through training them to be patient, focused, and not to panic like among the Acholi. They connected adolescents to the maternal side for grooming. They were mainly connected to their grandmothers, who monitored their conduct. At their grandparents’ place, they were given much love and

affection, which made them psychologically well.

In the Gisu culture, the adolescents were exceptionally trained on how to do housework, house chores, and all other domestic work. Adolescents would support themselves to be independent, take good care, and become responsible citizens. Parents made sure that adolescents were aware of what they should not do as grown-up children and how to cope with the challenges of growing up. Adolescents were not shouted at, and their secrets or concerns were not shared with neighbours.

The impact of the above way of life is highlighted by Profe and Wild (2016, p. 1), who rationalise that “mother and closest grandparents’ involvement were positively associated with prosocial behaviour of children. They further argue the importance of considering grandparents in interventions to promote adolescent mental health”. Still, among the Acholi, children or adolescents were entrusted with the elders. That is, the boys with uncles and girls with aunties helped team them and grow into responsible adolescents, and this made them [adolescents] psychologically well. Social connections are cornerstones of health and well-being, and for adolescents, the connections with family, peers, and community have a critical effect on their development.

In addition, among the Nubians, adolescents were not allowed to talk or walk while eating; they were also not allowed to sit around when elders were talking, especially when they had a visitor. Collectively, the elders in the community ensured that adolescents respected this conduct. The approval from elders made them psychologically fine. Research strongly suggests that family remains a central influence in the lives of adolescents even as the importance of peers and the internet increases. Compared with less connected peers, adolescents who are connected to at least one parent experience fewer emotional problems, fewer suicide attempts, less conduct disorder, better school performance, higher self-esteem, and less involvement in violence and substance use.

4.7 Cleanliness

Adolescents were taught how to clean themselves and their surroundings. A case in point is the Acholis, who teach their adolescents domestic chores. A 2014 study published in the journal *mindfulness* found that participants who took part in ‘mindfully’ washing the dishes reported a 27% reduction in nervousness along with a 25% improvement in ‘mental inspiration’. For example, a girl is supposed to be hard-working. Both the mother and the aunt train her in grinding, cooking, digging, and other domestic activities. Individuals who are stressed and anxious concentrate on doing household chores like organising drawers, washing dishes, or mopping floors, which can enhance mood and bring their level of anxiety down. What makes a mother proud is when her daughter knows all the domestic chores like smearing the floor (dark, black day, cow dung), which also makes adolescents psychologically well – learning all the chores and mothers being pleased with them made them psychologically well.

Among the Gisu, at ten years, the girls would be oriented about the different body changes they are likely to experience, for example, experiencing their menstrual periods, cleaning their bodies, shaving their pubic hair, bathing some local herbs for giving them blessings and clearing their bodies, for example, brushing their teeth using eucalyptus tree and coffee plants, using ash powder, charcoal and clean water from the well. Hair in the bathtub can cause resentment and be a source of bad feelings, which is likely to impact your mental well-being. Another study in 2017, published in *The Lancet*, concluded that 30 minutes spent blitzing your home could reduce your risk of heart disease by one-fifth - as long as the

chores require some physical exertion and the session lasts the entire half hour. A 30-year-old woman weighing 130 lbs would burn approximately 130 calories mopping the floor for 30 minutes or 85 doing miscellaneous housework.

4.8 Unity

People of long ago also used unit or togetherness to ensure adolescents' psychological well-being. Abdallah & Gabr (2014) contend that social support from family, friends, and others boosts the quality of life and acts as an essential protective mechanism against mental health problems. For example, Acholis used to sit in congregations and eat from one big bowl as a whole family; this bonded all the people in the family, which enhanced adolescents' well-being.

This was also a way of life among the Nubians who taught their children to play together to ensure unity; they also ate from one tray; this would make adolescents feel accessible around elders, and they were free to open up and share anything that may be bothering them hence ensuring their psychological well-being.

Among the westerners, to stay together, all family members, including adolescents, would visit neighbours, friends and relatives on important and public holidays. This helped them stay united, and the interactions made the adolescents happy, which made them psychologically well. Blum et al. (2022) support this idea when they say that social connections are cornerstones of health and well-being. For adolescents, the connections with family, peers, and community have a critical effect on their holistic development and, hence, improving their psychological well-being.

4.9 Feeding

Proper feeding also helped to ensure the psychological well-being of adolescents. For example, the Nubians gave Kisira and Tusa, their traditional foods, to adolescents, while the Westerners gave them milk, fruits, millet, porridge, yoghurt and others. The Gisu would eat Malewa, which grows naturally on Mountain Elgon, as a cultural meal. Lowry says that Most people think that diet and exercise improve the physical health of the human body. "Diet and nutrition is one of the main factors that influence mental health outcomes,"

Eating healthy and proper portions would make adolescents happy, hence making them psychologically well. In relation to the above arguments, studies have shown that nutritional counselling combined with a decrease in junk food and an increase in nutrient-rich foods such as legumes and fish can have a significant, positive impact on mood and well-being.

4.10 Celebrations

Celebrations played a significant role in making adolescents psychologically well long ago. For example, the Westerners celebrated all important days with their relatives' neighbours and friends. They always celebrated birthdays by keeping milk in a pot for a month, and on their birthday, it was given to children, which made them psychologically fine. Celebrations among the Nubians were communal. Yang and Wang (2022) further explain that family rituals, family systems and subjective well-being are correlated in pairs, showing a significant positive correlation; Family rituals and family systems have significant predictive effects on the subjective well-being of college students; The cohesion and adaptability play part of mediating roles between college students' family rituals and subjective well-being (pg. 1). They celebrated Idd days. On Idd days, they ate plenty of food and visited neighbours, friends, and relatives from morning to evening; the excitement this came with gave adolescents much joy. Hence, they were psychologically well.

4.11 Cultural norms and practices were used to enhance adolescents' psychological well-being

The cultural way of life of different communities enhanced the psychological well-being of adolescents. They were given cultural wear, trained in the cultural way of life, prepared for marriage and the central people gifted girls who got married virgins. The Acholis also gave animals during marriages and praised their children for good conduct at marriage. For example; In the central region, if a girl got married to a virgin, a piece of cloth without any hole was given to the girl's parents as a sign that they took good care of their daughter. This was a recognisable cultural award, a very prestigious sign to adolescents that helped them be careful around the opposite sex; adolescents who were able to behave in the right way were happy about their conduct, and this made them psychologically well. Furthermore, in the Eastern region, for example, the Gisu culture nurtured their adolescent boys into circumcision; that is to say, boys at 12 years would be introduced to circumcision (Imbalu). That is a must-do by all Gisu adolescent boys. This was carried out in a congregation while moving around the whole village, singing and dancing "akadodi" to inspire other young boys who were still infants and those who had not carried out circumcision yet. Some specific elders participated in this. Notable clans, for example, Ente (Ikhafu), Babikala, and many others, would participate in circumcising the young boys to help them become responsible men. In relation to the above, still, in the Gisu culture, adolescents were made to grow up as a community, and boys were allowed to build their houses at their parent's homes, but girls were greatly encouraged to get married. This way, children were trained to be independent. Girls would have a share of their parents' property and also their husbands'.

4.12 Talking about marriage and love stories

The Acholis talked about marriage and love stories. Parents would nurture their children into marriage, and they organised marriage ceremonies, where the groom's family would crawl a reasonable distance to the girl's family and ask for her hand in marriage. The girl's parents would say "ayekene" (I have accepted this man to marry my daughter). Every adolescent loved this cultural practice, and they all wished to grow and have this celebration. This related to a study by Arslan et al. (2022) concluded that reading stories resulted in positive change in learners' mindfulness, optimism, happiness, and positive emotions and also caused a reduction in depression, anxiety, pessimism, and other negative emotions over five weeks, with a small to large effect sizes. So, the process of growing up looking up to this ceremony made them psychologically well.

4.13 Cattle rearing

To prepare them to face the world, parents trained adolescents in economic activities like cattle rearing, which the Acholi trained their children to do. Learning how to rear animals and doing it right made adolescents psychologically well among the Acholi people. People from the West empowered adolescents both formally and informally with education by taking them to schools within their vicinity, and academic excellence made adolescents happy and, hence, psychologically fine. Additionally, in the Gisu culture, the adolescents would learn from their grandparents to rear cattle, which they used to sell all over East Africa for a living. Gisu also carried out agriculture; they would grow coffee, cassava, sorghum, bananas, yams, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and many others. Adolescents were also nurtured into growing and carrying out agriculture to help them have plenty of food to eat and to grow. The money from agricultural products would be used to pay school fees.

4.14 Agriculture (farming)

From the central and eastern, they taught people how to dig and farm both for cash and domestic purposes. Children were taught how to make art and design products, such as mats, necklaces made from beads, baskets made from banana fibres and banana leaves, handbags, decorations, and many other products. Children would enjoy the harvesting season. For example, in the Gisu tribe from eastern Uganda, girls would go with their parents to harvest; they used to enjoy the fruits and help them in picking and harvesting ready mangoes, oranges, and strawberries. They would eat the fresh fruits while harvesting and keep the rest in the store for sale and future use. Gisuus also carried out agriculture; they would grow coffee, cassava, sorghum, bananas, yams, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and many others. Economically, the Gisu learned from our grandparents to participate in cattle keeping and cattle selling all over East Africa. We would use the money to pay school fees. In agriculture, we would grow coffee, cassava, sorghum, bananas, yams, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and many others.

4.15 Hunting

Hunting, especially for the boy child, would always go with his father to participate in the activity. This way, children would learn how to get enough meat for their families. Meat as sauce and a meal is used to enhance the happiness of the entire family, and children would really get very excited about eating meat at home. They would invite their friends from the neighbourhood to come and dine with them. For example, in Buganda, they even developed various sayings like "Ssenya enku twokye ennyama," meaning collect firewood and roast our meat. Songola oluti ne tulya ku nnyama enjokye enjigge ewoomabulala, which can be translated as sharpening the stick and eating the meat because the roasted meat is very delicious.

4.16 Bark cloth making

In Buganda, in addition to the above, children were also taught bark cloth making; from this activity, they would give children beautiful bark cloth for putting on when they went for essential occasions like worshipping their small gods, for example, the god responsible for wealth and money was called Jajja Ddungu, the one for children Nabuzaana, the one for rain Musoke and Mukasa, for fortune Kiwanuka and very many other gods. What is more, they would also put on bark cloth as their piece of cloth in their everyday life, for bed sheets and blankets and presents, given as part of dowry during the marriage ceremony. To strengthen adolescents' relationships, they would always send a piece of bark cloth to their friends. This would significantly enhance the psychological well-being of their friends.

4.17 Fishing

Fishing was another activity taught to children to make them psychologically well. They would go fishing with their fathers and elders from different communities. They would come back home with fish. The fish caught would be used as a meal (sauce) and for commercial purposes. Children, especially adolescents, would enjoy fish because it made their meals delicious. This was carried out in most parts of Uganda. For example, in the central part of Uganda, the Baganda would go fishing in Lake Nalubaale (Lake Victoria). Young boys considerably followed the footsteps of their elders and also stood independently and fished for themselves.

4.18 Iron smelting

Iron smelting was another economic activity that was carried out in Buganda. They would concentrate on making products from Iron like forks, pots, cups, plates, jerricans, and saucepans. Adolescent boys enjoyed this activity very much because they would even sell

some of these products or exchange them for another product which they did not have. This would significantly make them very happy; this activity was carried out communally. Boys would go with the male elders to enable them to learn how to fish. They used to enjoy fishing. The parents of long-ago maintained adolescents' well-being parents of long ago through training them to be religious. For example, the Nubians were constantly reminded and trained to thank Allah (Lord) and the person who cooked food. They gifted them with kanzus and hijab, which are religious wear. They also trained adolescents to praise god after eating food. Worshipping god made adolescents psychologically well, and the religious gifts supplemented this. Adolescents were always taught to praise god. They would go to the nearby prayer places; we were taught always to give charity in the church.

4.19 Children were indoctrinated into a custom of believing and worshipping their small gods

Worshipping their small gods, for example, the god responsible for wealth and money was called Jajja Ddungu; for example, they sing the one for children Nabuzaana, the one for rain Musoke and Mukasa, for fortune Kiwanuka and many other gods, Kibuuka was for warfare in Buganda, Namalere for Lakes, Muwanga for peaceful homes, and very many others. Adolescents would always be guided to believe in these small gods and seek refuge from them whenever they had any challenges. They were always guided to keep up praising their small gods whenever they were going to do any activity or event. The Gisu religiously would go to the nearby prayer places, and we were always taught to give charity in the church.

4.20 Practical Implications of the study

Traditional ways of making adolescents psychologically well resulted in higher academic achievements and lower behavioural and psychological problems among adolescents of long ago, unlike interventions for this generation, which have bred street children, school dropouts, early marriages and our adolescents imitating the Jamaican way of life which has affected the generation negatively.

Overall, indigenous interventions toward adolescent mental health focus on traditional methods such as maintaining order and discipline, shaping external behaviours through consistent rules, and upholding adult authority, among several other approaches discussed above, to enhance adolescents' psychological well-being. This suggests that the government, parents, and all other stakeholders should adopt indigenous interventions toward adolescent psychological well-being. This will enhance discipline and respect for authority figures, establish structures, and produce morally and mentally healthy adolescents, unlike modern therapies, which have bled and witnessed several cases of mentally ill adolescents.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, historical interventions such as storytelling, communal parenting, and cultural practices played a crucial role in ensuring adolescents' psychological well-being. These traditional methods offer insights that could inform contemporary approaches to adolescent development and mental health promotion. Adopting indigenous interventions may contribute to the holistic well-being of adolescents in modern society. Elders played a vital role in ensuring the psychological well-being of adolescents through various means, including social support, gifts, encouragement, and entertainment through oral literature. These practices were instrumental in nurturing resilient and well-adjusted individuals in the community.

The elders primarily ensured the psychological well-being of adolescents in the past. Elders trained, controlled, and nurtured adolescents to become responsible individuals. They gifted, praised, punished, and guided them along the right path, which helped foster a responsible community. Approval from the elders in all their endeavours, as well as making their parents happy, contributed to adolescents' psychological well-being. This is supported by findings obtained from a participant in the study who stated, "Psychological well-being means being praised in public, having positive remarks made about me, making my mother happy, and feeling content with whatever I do, which makes me psychologically well (happy). Even if I live in an impoverished house, as long as people are making positive statements about me, I will be thrilled. My mother resides in a mud house, but people praise her for her exemplary character (good character). I am perfectly content with living in a mud house with my entire family, as long as people are praising us for our good character" (Participant C, as cited in Personal Communication, 2023).

Historical interventions such as storytelling, rewarding and promising, using historical narratives, seeking refuge from their gods for happiness, employing proverbs and idioms, engaging in productive conversations with elders, and communal parenting were among the interventions used by parents in the past to maintain their children/adolescents' psychological well-being. These historical interventions could be revisited and utilised to help achieve and implement sustainable development goals in Africa.

6 Recommendations

- Further investigation into historical indigenous interventions for promoting adolescent psychological well-being across Africa is warranted.
- Additional research focusing on adolescents residing in African slums is necessary. Exploring socio-cultural approaches to enhancing adolescents' mental health could be instrumental in preventing mental illness.
- It is essential to re-evaluate our perception of slums through a socio-cultural perspective.
- Reconsidering traditional methods of nurturing adolescent psychological well-being can contribute to the development of academically proficient and well-rounded individuals, thus aiding in the reduction of behavioural and psychological issues among adolescents from several generations.

7 Ethical considerations

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the Makerere University Ethics Review Board before data collection.
- Assent was sought from adolescent participants.
- The informed consent was obtained from guardians/parents.
- Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential; all the stakeholders signed the confidentiality policy.

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