

Review of: "Prevalence of Common Mental Illness and Its Associated Factors among Hawassa City High School Students in Hawassa, Sidama Region, Ethiopia"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I think that the study contributes to the new knowledge and the manuscript is written well. It would benefit from the minor revisions - please see below:

General comment – it would be better to use a term mental disorder vs. illness and provide a reference to definition, ie from WHO ICD.

Background – please provide a short context on the country and region and some cultural factors and behaviors as chewing khat.

I don't think that description what depression, anxiety or somatic s=distress is indeed needed for the paper – you could skip/delete this part (the second paragraph?).

For the sentence "One in 5 adolescents aged 13-18 already have or will have a serious mental illness. Mental illnesses that manifest during adulthood begin during adolescence, 50% and 75% of all mental illness cases started by age 14 and 24 respectively" please use the proper references [i.e Kessler, Berglund, Demler et al., Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2005 Jun;62(6):593-602. doi: 10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593. Erratum in: Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2005 Jul;62(7):768. Merikangas, Kathleen R [added]. PMID: 15939837].

Please reference sentences as 'Individuals with mental disorders are also affected by diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS'; 'Homelessness and inappropriate incarceration are more common'.

Instruments - The SRQ has recently been validated in Eritrea , but not in Ethiopia?

Pls rephrase the sentence – „In this study, students who were found to have 7 or more symptoms of the 20-item self-reporting questionnaires (SRQ-20) in the last 4 weeks were considered as having common mental illness“ with – „Disorder criteria were present...“

Pls cinsistently use the past term (ie remove a phrase „school belongingness will be measured by the Simple School Belonging Scale“)

‘The pretest was carried out in 5% of the sample size one week prior to the actual data collection time at Shashemene High School’. Please explain why? To measure test-retest reliability/Cronbach alpha?

Please consider to mention the age of students instead of grades.

It would be better to differentiate students by gender while reporting results of substance use (tab 2).

‘Other references’ part is confusing – please either incorporate them into the paper or kindly remove the list.