

Abstract

Youth mental health challenges are increasingly recognised as important barriers to wellbeing, social participation, and economic engagement, particularly in resource-limited rural settings. This study examined changes in psychosocial outcomes following participation in a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) training programme among youth in Sotik SubCounty, Bomet County, Kenya. A quasi-experimental mixed-methods design employing a single-group pre-test/post-test approach was used. A total of 200 youth participants completed structured questionnaires before and immediately after the intervention. Qualitative data were collected through Focus Group Discussions and structured observation checklists to provide contextual understanding of participants' experiences. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, pairedsamples t-tests, and chi-square tests, with effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals reported. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and findings from the different data sources were integrated through methodological triangulation. The findings showed statistically significant short-term improvements in mental health awareness, stress management skills, self-esteem, emotional resilience, and psychosocial indicators associated with youth economic empowerment following participation in the training programme. Qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results, with participants reporting increased mental health awareness, reduced stigma, stronger peer support, improved coping strategies, greater self-confidence, and increased motivation to pursue livelihood opportunities. While these findings suggest that community-based MHPSS training is a promising approach for supporting youth psychosocial wellbeing in rural settings, the absence of a control group and the lack of long-term follow-up preclude causal inferences and conclusions regarding the sustainability of the observed changes. The study concludes that structured MHPSS training significantly improves psychosocial wellbeing and youth empowerment in rural settings. The study contributes context-specific evidence on community-based MHPSS interventions among rural youth in Kenya and highlights the need for more rigorous controlled and longitudinal studies to evaluate longterm psychosocial and economic outcomes. The findings may inform the design and integration of psychosocial support within youth development and economic empowerment programmes in similar resource-constrained settings.