

# Is research adequately assessing mental health interventions for children in low- and middle-income countries?

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It is estimated that globally, mental disorders affect about one in seven

children and adolescents aged 10–19 years. A recent analysis of published studies indicates that most research on child and adolescent mental health and psychological interventions in low- and middle-income countries is reactive rather than proactive, focusing on treating rather than preventing mental health problems or promoting mental health.

For the analysis, which is published in *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, investigators searched a wide range of bibliographic databases, libraries, and websites for relevant studies published between 2010 and 2021. They identified 697 studies and reviews that covered 78 low- and middle-income countries.

Most interventions (59%) focused on treating mental health conditions that had already arisen rather than preventing them or promoting mental health. Depression was the most frequently researched outcome analyzed by studies and reviews, followed by anxiety disorders, well-being, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Most studies and reviews investigated the effectiveness of mental health and psychosocial support interventions in early and late adolescence, rather than during early childhood. The research lacked diversity and often did not include subpopulations that have a higher prevalence of mental health and psychosocial problems and are less likely to have access to mental health care.

The findings reveal a lack of investment in thorough research on which interventions can improve child and adolescent mental health.

"Investment in child and adolescent mental health prevention, promotion, and care is essential," said corresponding author Ruichuan Yu, Research and Knowledge Management Specialist of UNICEF Innocenti—Global Office of Research and Foresight. "This work

generates a clearer picture of the available evidence on interventions to improve child and adolescent mental health in [low-resource settings](#), thereby informing future research, policy, and practice."

**More information:** Child and adolescent mental health and psychosocial support interventions: An evidence and gap map of low- and middle-income countries, *Campbell Systematic Reviews* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/cl2.1349](#)  
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