

BOITEKANELO

Journal of Public Health in Africa



Advancing Health & Research in Africa



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/3135-2944/2026/1.1/EN>

Editorial Note:

The first issue of *Boitekanelo: Journal of Public Health in Africa* brings into sharp focus a critical yet often under-addressed dimension of public health: adolescent well-being within complex social environments. Across five systematic reviews, this issue synthesizes evidence on the intersecting influences of community violence, school climate, bullying, mental health stigma, and household poverty on adolescent development. Collectively, these contributions highlight that adolescent health in Africa cannot be disentangled from the broader socio-ecological contexts in which young people live, learn, and grow.

The issue brings into sharp focus a critical yet often under-addressed dimension of public health: adolescent well-being within complex social environments. Across five systematic reviews, this issue synthesizes evidence on the intersecting influences of community violence, school climate, bullying, mental health stigma, and household poverty on adolescent development. Collectively, these contributions highlight that adolescent health in Africa cannot be disentangled from the broader socio-ecological contexts in which young people live, learn, and grow. A unifying theme across all five reviews is the **interconnectedness of social determinants and adolescent health outcomes**. Violence, poverty, stigma, and educational environments do not operate in isolation; rather, they intersect to shape the lived experiences of young people. This calls for integrated interventions that cut across sectors, including health, education, social services, and community development.

Furthermore, the reliance on systematic reviews in this issue strengthens the evidence base for policy and practice. By synthesizing findings from diverse contexts, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of key issues affecting adolescents in Africa. However, they also reveal gaps in the literature, particularly the need for more longitudinal studies, context-specific interventions, and the inclusion of adolescent voices in research. This issue also highlights the importance of prevention. While clinical interventions remain essential, there is a growing recognition that upstream strategies such as improving school environments, reducing community violence, addressing poverty, and combating stigma are critical for sustainable impact. Public health efforts must therefore shift towards proactive, rather than reactive, approaches.

In addition, the findings emphasize equity as a central concern. Vulnerable populations, including those in low-income households and high-violence communities, bear a disproportionate burden of adverse outcomes. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions and policies that prioritize the most at-risk groups.

The implications for practice are clear. Policymakers must invest in adolescent-friendly services that are accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate. Educators should be equipped with the tools to foster supportive school climates. Communities must be engaged in creating safe and nurturing environments. And health systems need to integrate mental health into primary care and public health programming.

As we reflect on the contributions in this issue, it becomes evident that improving adolescent health in Africa demands a holistic and collaborative approach. The evidence presented here provides a compelling case for action and offers valuable guidance for stakeholders across sectors.

In conclusion, this first issue of *Boitekanelo: Journal of Public Health in Africa* advances our understanding of the complex factors influencing adolescent health. It challenges us to rethink traditional approaches and to embrace integrated, context-sensitive strategies that address the root causes of vulnerability. By doing so, we can move closer to ensuring that all adolescents have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

The editorial board commends the authors for their rigorous work and encourages continued research and dialogue in this critical area. The health and future of Africa's adolescents depend on our collective commitment to addressing these pressing challenges.

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