

Research: Challenges young African migrants face when adapting to life in Australia

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Credit: Flinders University

New research has revealed the obstacles young African migrants face when adapting to life in Australia—with significant barriers leading to

high rates of alcohol consumption and poor mental health outcomes often caused by efforts to assimilate in new communities.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, focused on the traumatic impacts of losing family members and [social disruption](#) in their countries of origin, with African migrants and young refugees then experiencing stress related to inadequate socioeconomic and cultural support, discrimination, poverty and unemployment upon their arrival in Australia.

The researchers highlight the immediate need for interventions which address lack of employment opportunities and culturally unsafe [service](#) provisions to effectively support the migration groups.

Lead author Associate Professor Lillian Mwanri says participants who arrived in Australia as unaccompanied minors, following extended stays in refugee camps with poor basic nutritional, educational, or recreational services, faced a poor start to their new life as a result of their past experiences.

"This paper is part of a larger study that explored determinants of suicide amongst African youth in South Australia. A combination of social and [peer pressure](#), vulnerability, and complexities of their social deprivation could influence and contribute to substance use, ultimately leading to poor social and [health](#) outcomes."

"As a result of adapting to their new society, there was a consensus amongst the study participants that African migrant youths were conflicted, and their effort to fit in led to adverse outcomes, including alcohol abuse and [mental health issues](#)."

The researchers undertook in depth interviews with 23 participants and established a focus group with eight participants to better understand the

factors impacting their lives in Australia since migrating.

"Recognizing these issues calls for interventions that address the underlying social determinants of health amongst young African migrants which foster distress including addressing employment opportunities and culturally unsafe services to provide effective support services and improve their mental health and wellbeing."

The participants also believed that differences in cultural perspectives about alcohol use that exist in Africa and Australia also shaped their negative experiences.

"Alcohol use amongst African migrant youth may be a challenging behavior because of conflicting attitudes between African and Australian cultures regarding their use. In Africa, alcohol use by youths is restricted and often carry severe consequences, whereas it is socially accepted in Australia. Previous studies have supported the assimilation process as facilitators shaping the behaviors of migrants."

The study findings have broadened the cultural resource, knowledge and provide important information for Mental health service providers to provide quality mental health services to African and other young refugees from across the world resettling in Australia.

"Additionally, youths can be empowered through targeted initiatives to become ambassadors and agents of change in their communities."

More information: Lillian Mwanri et al. Alcohol, Other Drugs Use and Mental Health among African Migrant Youths in South Australia, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18041534](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18041534)

Provided by Flinders University

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