

POLICY BRIEF

ADOLESCENT EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND WELLBEING STATUS IN KILIFI COUNTY – TWO YEARS INTO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Results from the third round of adolescent data collection in Kilifi, Kenya, 2022

INTRODUCTION

- At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Kenya closed for 10 months starting from March 2020.
- This likely had negative effects on various indicators and outcomes including learning outcomes; school enrollment; mental health status; food security; and prevention of violence, adolescent pregnancy, and child marriage.

THE COVID-19 KAP STUDY

- This study was conducted in Kilifi and aimed to build understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents' education, health, and wellbeing; by exploring knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of adolescents and their households
- A total of 760 adolescents in Kilifi were successfully interviewed between February and March 2022 using a mixed method approach.

EDUCATION FINDINGS

School Enrollment

- Two years into the pandemic, about 90% of 10-14 and 15-19-year-olds (range: 83%-93%) were enrolled in school, with minimal gender gaps.
- For those that dropped out of school, reasons included:
 - Domestic responsibilities, pregnancy, and childbirth for girls.
 - Engaging in income generation, and drug & alcohol abuse for boys.

RECOMMENDATIONS

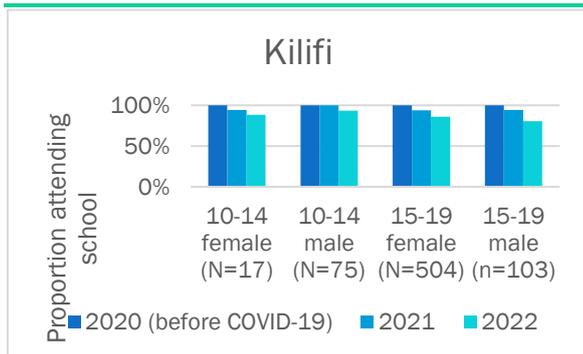
Recommendations to address immediate harms of the pandemic:

- Implementation of a short-term program to identify girls and boys that have dropped out of school due to the pandemic and provide the necessary support for re-enrollment
- Offer short-term, intensive learning support programs so that those students that were not able to study remotely during the school closure can close the learning gap. These programs could potentially be offered through schools.
- Deliver short-term psychosocial support to adolescents via schools and community-based programs to address the accumulated and remaining stress and anxiety caused by the impacts of the pandemic.
- Ensure specific training for teachers and community stakeholders who will provide psychosocial support to adolescents

Recommendations to build resilience for future pandemic or crisis induced extended school closures:

- Set up systems and protocols to be able to specifically target sub-groups of adolescents, and their households, that are the most marginalized; paying particular attention to learners with disabilities.
- Strengthen systems for multi-sectoral programming and cooperating between government ministries so that future responses can address the array of issues that adolescents will face in an integrated fashion.
- Strengthen the implementation of Kenya's 'return to school' policy for pregnant and parenting mothers, and other adolescents who are not enrolled in school for financial or other reasons.
- Implement policy measures that will further reduce the cost of schooling in Kenya.
- Establish the digital and analogue infrastructure for wider access to remote learning, should that be needed in a future crisis.

RETURN TO SCHOOL (AMONG THOSE WHO ENROLLED IN MARCH 2020)



School Environment

- There was overall improvement in school physical infrastructure compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Nonetheless, there was reported congestion of classrooms (more than 40 students per class) with 93% of the females aged 10-14 reporting higher congestion.

Learning Quality

- The prolonged school closures had some negative effects on adolescents' ability to pay attention in class after returning to school.
- More than 60% of adolescents had forgotten some of what they learned the previous term.
- The new 'compressed' school calendar and syllabus were also generally viewed as having a detrimental impact on learning.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING FINDINGS

Food Security

- Reduced food and nutrition security was reported because of pandemic-related loss of parental income.
- More than 50% of the adolescents reported skipping meals, having one meal a day, or eating only one type of food for several consecutive days.

Mental health

- About 1/3 of the adolescents stated having little interest or pleasure in doing things they normally enjoyed before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Kilifi was amongst the counties reporting higher percentages of adolescents feeling anxious, stressed, depressed, and nervous.
- Highest % of depressive symptoms was experienced in 2020, coinciding with lockdown restrictions & school closures.
- Older adolescents (15-19 years) reported higher levels of symptoms; with males being more affected in Kilifi.
- There were gender-specific mental health issues for adolescent girls who fell pregnant or had children during the school closures e.g., due to stigma & ridicule from others.

"Yes, I was stressed because I had to stay back at home while others were in school learning. I was afraid of going back to school while pregnant. My school mates would mock me, make fun of me, and talk ill of me."

Adolescent girl 15-19 years, Kilifi

Violence

- Some participants in Kilifi reported to have been personally humiliated, insulted, or threatened during the COVID-19 pandemic period (i.e., experienced emotional abuse).
- The highest % was recorded by 15-19 male adolescents (17%) followed by 10-14 male adolescents (16%).
- Some sexual violence (6%) was also reported among the 10-14 female adolescents.

Key Barriers to Accessing Healthcare

- Financial constraint was the key barrier to access (including resources to pay for transport to health facilities).
- The situation was especially dire for adolescent mothers who lived in unsupportive home environments.

"It was bad, when we (adolescent girl and baby) would get sick we would just take painkillers since we did not have money to go to hospital." **Adolescent girl 15-19 years, Kilifi**

Menstrual Health Management

- For some adolescents, basic hygiene including ability to bathe daily, was a challenge due to inadequate water supply and/or having to travel extremely long distances to fetch water.
- For girls in particular, menstrual hygiene and the related unaffordability of sanitary products, presented a gendered challenge that significantly impacted on their health and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

- The study findings lay out an array of health and general wellbeing challenges that adolescents are facing two years into the pandemic
- Economic constraints were a key barrier to education and returning to school for both girls and boys.
- In particular, the compressed school calendar and syllabus had an adverse impact on learning ability and adolescents' mental health.
- Food insecurity continues to be a challenge even two years into the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions generally had a negative impact on adolescents' mental health; although some improvement has been observed two years into the pandemic.
- For adolescent girls in particular, pregnancy and motherhood were a key barrier to not re-enrolling in school and had a significant adverse impact on mental health status.

PARTNERS



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