

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

Results from the third round of adolescent data collection in Wajir, 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 Wajir 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 991 adolescents in Wajir were successfully interviewed between February and May 2022 using a mixed method approach.

EDUCATION FINDINGS

School Enrollment

- About 90% of 10–14-year-olds (range: 83%–95%) and two-thirds of 15–19-year-olds (range: 67%–74%), were enrolled with minimal gender gaps.
- Some adolescents were no longer in school either due to dropout or secondary school completion.
- Reasons for dropout included:
 - Engaging in income generation, and drug & alcohol abuse for boys; and
 - Domestic responsibilities, pregnancy, forced marriage, and childbirth for girls.

*“Some schoolgirls were forced to marry. Parents thought schools would never reopen after the corona pandemic, so they married off their daughters.”
Adolescent girl 15-19 years, Wajir*

RECOMMENDATIONS

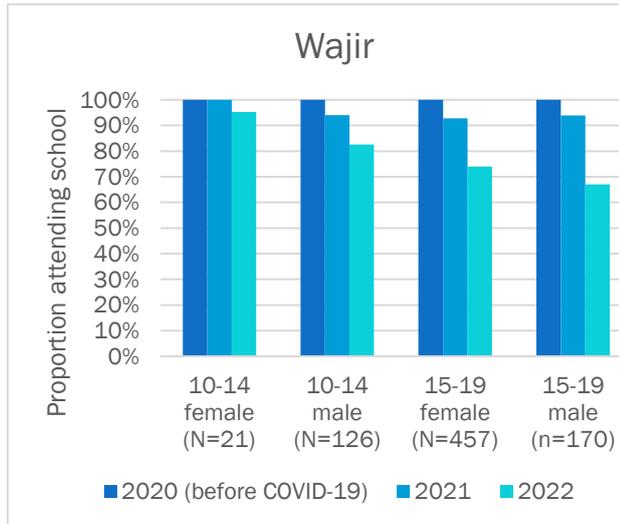
Recommendations to address immediate harms of the pandemic:

- Implement short-term programs to identify girls and boys that have dropped out of school due to the pandemic and provide the necessary youth friendly support for re-enrollment.
- Offer short-term, intensive learning support programs including peer to peer learning; so that those students that were not able to study remotely during the school closures can close the learning gap.
- 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.

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

- Strengthen systems for multi-sectoral and integrated programming, and cooperating between government ministries, so that future responses can address the array of issues that adolescents face in a time of crisis such as pandemics.
- 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.
- Adequate implementation of the existing Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) policy.
- 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

- The majority of the adolescents could not access water and soap for washing hands in schools as per the COVID-19 prevention guidelines.
- Unlike in other counties where this study was conducted, reports of classroom congestion were low; with the 10–14-year-olds females reporting the lowest % of congestion.
- There were general positive interactions between adolescents and their peers and teachers, although most teachers left due water shortages and other such ‘hardship’.

“Yes, the learning environment has changed. Initially we had a good number of teachers hence learning was going well. But after schools were opened only five teachers remained due shortages of water and there are no learning materials like books and chalk.” Adolescent girl 10-14 years, Wajir

Learning Quality

- The prolonged school closures had some negative effects on adolescents’ ability to pay attention in class after returning to school
- More than 69% of the participants stated having forgotten some of what they learned the previous term.
- The effect was mostly observed amongst the 10-14 year old males; with 81% reporting having 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 as a result of the pandemic & related parental loss of 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.
- The highest % of depressive symptoms was experienced in 2020, coinciding with lockdown restrictions & school closures.
- In Wajir, male adolescents (10-19 years) reported higher levels of depressive symptoms.

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.

Key Barriers to Accessing Healthcare

- Barriers to accessing healthcare emerged as an important concern for adolescents, which in turn impacted on their health and wellbeing.
- Financial constraints were 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.

“Yes. Corona has affected my health since it has affected family income. During Corona, we had no money to pay for medical care when one feels ill. Cost of transport increased because of COVID-19 19, which made access to hospital hard.” Adolescent girl 15-19 years, Wajir

CONCLUSION

- The study findings lay out an array of health and general wellbeing challenges that adolescents faced 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.

PARTNERS



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