

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

Results from the third round of adolescent data collection in Kisumu, 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 Kisumu 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 377 adolescents in Kisumu were successfully interviewed between February and May 2022 using a mixed methods approach.

EDUCATION FINDINGS

School Enrollment

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

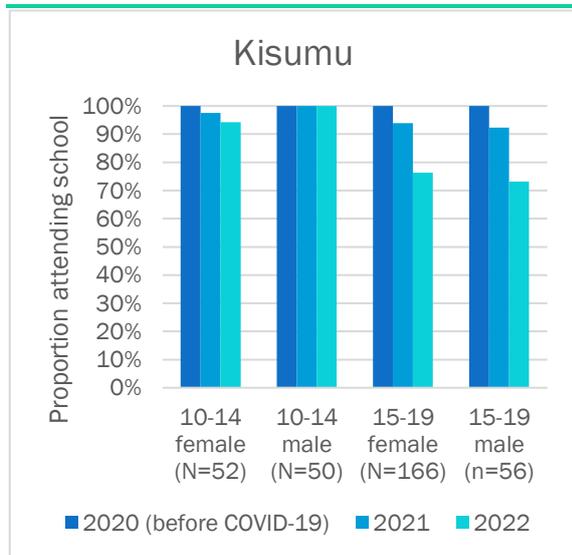
Recommendations to address immediate harms of the pandemic:

- Implement short-term programs to identify girls and boys that have dropped out of school due to the pandemic and provide the necessary support for re-enrollment.
- 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. This could include counselling centres that mirror the existing VCT centres.
- Initiate tailor-made programs targeting parents, to encourage positive parenting.
- Promote social behavior change strategies that utilize non-traditional approaches such as theatre and role models; to engage young people in generating localized solutions that resonate with their social context.

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.
- Implement policy measures that will further reduce the cost of schooling in Kenya.
- Establish the necessary 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

- Students observed an overall improvement in physical infrastructure of schools compared to pre COVID-19.
- Nonetheless, there was reported congestion of classrooms (more than 40 students per class), with 70% of the males aged 15-19 reporting higher congestion.

Learning quality

- The COVID-19 pandemic was shown to have a negative effect on adolescents' ability to pay attention in class after returning to school.
- More than 63% of the adolescents had forgotten some of what they had learned the previous term.
- The new 'compressed' school calendar and syllabus were also generally viewed as having a detrimental impact on learning.

"We started [the school syllabus] from where we had left off but time was short, and we skipped some parts...there are certain things we had to repeat because they were not done perfectly." Adolescent boy 15-19 years, Kisumu

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.
- Kisumu 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 Kisumu.
- 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.

Violence

- Some adolescents reported to have been personally humiliated, insulted, or threatened during the COVID-19 pandemic period (emotional abuse).
- Highest percentages were reported by both males (25%) and females (20%) in the 10-14 category.
- Some sexual violence (less than 10%) was also mentioned by the adolescents.

Key Barriers to Accessing Healthcare

These included:

- Financial constraint was the key barrier to adolescents accessing healthcare.
- The situation was especially dire for adolescent mothers who lived in unsupportive home environments
- Hesitation in accessing treatment especially related to sexual health (or misperceptions of sexual debut).

“I was told that I have UTI and Warts and sometimes they are painful. They are the ones affecting my health...For example, when I feel sick today and tomorrow, I feel better, I do not go to hospital. Especially when I have no money.” Adolescent girl 15-19 years, Kisumu

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.
- 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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