

**THE IMPACT OF LONG CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS DUE TO COVID-19 ON TEACHERS,
BOYS AND GIRLS IN KENYA¹**

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¹ This work was supported by the African Economic Research Consortium under **Grant No. AE/FAC/20-014** ERP Award 1461

Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze the impact of the long closure of schools on teachers, boys and girls. The study uses secondary data complemented with primary data to meet this objective. It also uses anecdotal evidence where available to provide a brief comparative analysis of how Kenya has fared in these aspects pre and during the onset to the Covid-19 pandemic relative to other countries in East Africa. COVID-19 adversely affected the education sector especially through the measures that the Government took to combat the spread of the virus. The long closure of schools led to loss of learning, increased dropout of students/pupils, increased cases of GBV, early pregnancies, early child marriages. The study recommends short term, medium terms and longterm proposals for the government to implement to prevent recurrence of the same in the event of another pandemic.

Key words

Covid-19, measures, education sector, impact, gender, Kenya, Gender based violence, child marriage

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first Kenyan Covid-19 case was reported as of 12th March, 2020, Kenya had tested 1,183,212 people by the 31st January 2021. The cumulative confirmed cases, cumulative death cases and the cumulative recovery cases have been increasing but at a slower rate than in the 1st quarter of 2020. As of 24th February 2021, Kenya had 104,773 cumulative confirmed cases of Covid-19. The number of fatalities was 1837, while that of recoveries amounted to 83,391 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Covid-19 Cumulative Confirmed, Recovered & Death Cases in Kenya

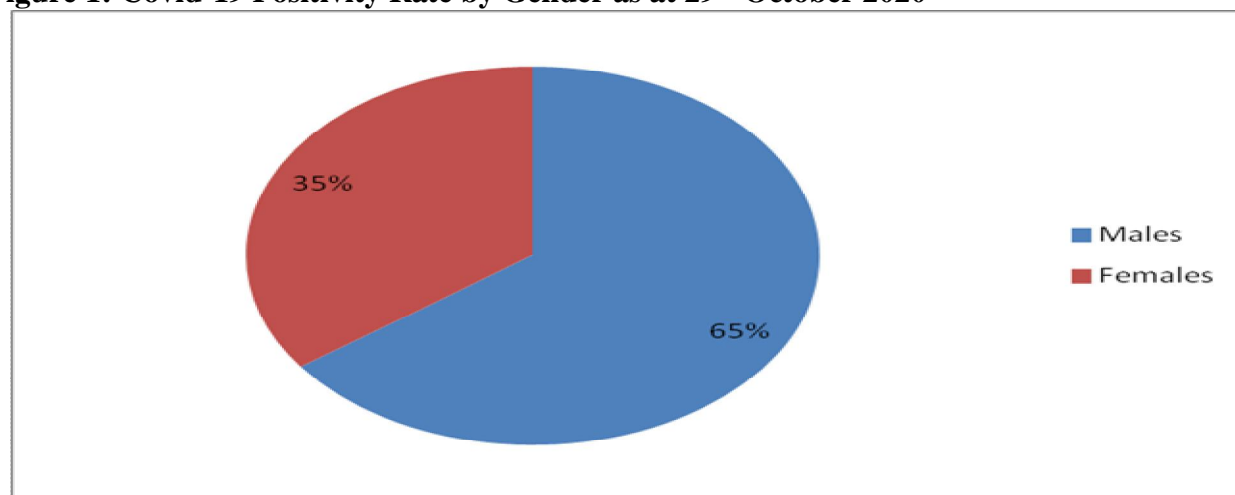
Date	Month	Cumulative Positive Cases	Cumulative recovered	Cumulative dead
3/31/2020	March	59	1	1
4/30/2020	April	396	144	17
5/31/2020	May	1962	478	64
6/30/2020	June	6366	2013	144
7/31/2020	July	20636	8165	341
8/31/2020	Aug	34057	19688	574
9/30/2020	Sept	38378	24740	707
10/31/2020	Oct	41619	36963	981
11/30/2020	Nov	83316	55610	1452
12/31/2020	Dec	96251	78737	1667
01/01/2021	Jan	100,773	83,855	1,755
24/02/2021	Feb	104,500	85,391	1,837

Source: <https://github.com/GuangchuangYu/nCov2019>

From Table 1, it is clear that the cumulative number of positive cases, death and recoveries has been on an upward trend since March, 2020 to date. As of March, 2020, the fatality rate of Covid-19 was 1.69% and was at its highest in April, 2020, with a fatality rate of 4.29%. As of 31st October, a total of 41,619 cases had been confirmed with 981 deaths. As at 31st December 2020, 96,251 cases had been confirmed with 1,667 persons succumbing to the illness. The rate of infection seems higher for

males than for females with 34237(65%) males and 18376 (35%) females infected as at 29th October 2020 as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Covid-19 Positivity Rate by Gender as at 29th October 2020



1.1 KENYA GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Since the reporting of the first Covid-19 case in Kenya, many sectors have been adversely affected especially by the measures the Government of Kenya (GoK) took to contain the spread of the virus. Just like the rest of the world, the Kenyan government closed all learning institutions countrywide on the 16th of March 2020, in order to combat the spread of Covid-19. Learning was supposed to be offered online. In order to make sure that learning continued in schools despite the closure, the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education launched certain education programs broadcasted through television or radio as well as on You Tube. Also copies of textbooks were made available for all students on the Kenya Education Cloud. The Government also partnered with Telkom Kenya and Kenya Civil Aviation Authority who established Google's Loon Balloons carrying 4G base stations all over the Kenyan airspace. It was not until the 4th of October 2020 that the Government announced the return to school of classes 4 and 8 in primary schools and form fours in secondary schools.

Education is an important ingredient for human capital development. It trains manpower for all institutions whether private or public. Learning institutions comprise not only academic institutions but also training institutions such as those for teacher training, those training health personnel, information, communication and technology institutions, polytechnics and many others. The closure of learning institutions meant that the production of manpower in all sectors of the economy would adversely be affected. This study focuses on academic institutions including primary, secondary and universities.

Public Primary and secondary education in Kenya is supposed to be free with the government giving capitation per students in these institutions. Students studying in universities and other higher education institutions can apply for loans from the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). Due to these efforts, enrolments in public schools had been increasing over the years. However, the gains achieved in increasing enrolments for both boys and girls could have been eroded due to the long closure of schools as the pupils'/students' morale and motivation to go back to school could have been reduced after having been engaged in other activities not necessarily related to academics. The reasons for dropping out of school could be attributed to economic, social-cultural and school environment factors such as poverty, child labor, pregnancy and early marriages (Republic of

Kenya, 2020). Free primary and secondary school is supposed to ensure that pupils remain in school. In addition, the Kenya Government has a policy that allows girls who have given birth to return to school. Chiefs are given the task of following children, both boys and girls who for one reason or another fail to report back to school. However most girls who fall pregnant and give birth usually drop out of school due to the stigma attached to this and most of them end up getting married or remaining as single parents. Boys also drop out of school and engage in activities such as construction, bobaboda business, avocado picking, coffee picking and many others. This study investigates whether both boys and girls reported back to schools when they reopened in October as a result of the long closure caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

United Nations (2020, pp.2) reports that the “Covid-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents”. The report argues that closure of learning institutions has impacted 94% of the world’s student population.

Tumwesighe (2020) contends that in Uganda, low incomes because of the prolonged lockdown could mean that many children would not return to schools when they reopen, while the Republic of Kenya (2020) reported that closure of schools accompanied by restricted movement in areas facing challenges of spaces such as informal settlements may worsen cases of pornographic materials, drugs and substance abuse, rape, gender based violence (GBV) including defilement of children.

A study by Save the Children (2020) in Dadaab refugee Centre found that GBV had intensified as a result of Covid-19 measures. The gender based violence and abuse being experienced included; domestic violence (44.1%), sexual harassment (40.9%), defilement cases (18.3%), abduction and kidnapping (19.4%), female genital mutilation (FGM) (20.4%), forced marriage (8.6%) and grooming (2.2%).

When students are not occupied and their movement is curtailed, they are susceptible to experiment on drugs or alcohol. According to National Control of Alcohol and Drugs Authority (NACADA) (2020) 7.2% of primary school children and 23.4% of secondary school students had tried alcohol while 3.8% of pupils in primary and 9.3% in secondary had tried drugs during the lockdown. According to the NACADA report, the most common periods when drugs are abused are during the school holidays (30%) and on the way from school (22%). 29.3% of the students obtain alcohol or drugs from home. These figures could have increased during the pandemic as the children were idle and so had all the time to experiment on alcohol to pass time as they could buy it on line.

In rural areas and in informal settlements, children take up household responsibilities while not in school. Save the Children (2020) found that 28.4% of learners had taken up new responsibilities in the household because of Covid-19. These responsibilities included caring for the sick family members/relatives (29.6%), caring for siblings or other children (66.2%), domestic work (31%), child marriage (1.4%), sexual exploitation (2.8%) and fetching water (1.4%).

3.0 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 DATA SOURCES

The study uses secondary data sourced from documented literature using electronic databases, grey literature, reference harvesting and discourse analysis. The secondary data were sourced from Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education, African Union Heads, International Monetary Fund, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, National Treasury and Planning, Republic of Kenya, UNESCO, KEPSA, National Crime Research Centre, United Nations, United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), World Bank, Government

of Kenya policy documents, Minet Insurance Company, Civil Societies, Non-Governmental Organizations and faith-based organizations. Additional literature and data were sought from other relevant institutions which included other Government ministries, departments, and autonomous agencies. We also analyzed social and mainstream media reports on the Covid-19. Secondary data were complemented with primary data.

3.2 METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

An electronic questionnaire was administered to students both male and female, parents, teachers, owners of private education institutions, and policy makers. Primary data were also gathered through focus group discussions (FGD) with parents, teachers, and education administrators. Oral testimonies were also recorded from the participants. Information was also gathered from key informants on education. Guided by circumstances facing the country at the time this study was conducted (curfew, Covid-19 pandemic) the author found it convenient to use purpose sampling. A total of 122 electronic questionnaires were sent by email² were sent by email and 61 participants responded giving a response rate of 60%.

The people interviewed in the electronic questionnaire were mainly education stakeholders who included students, educationist including teachers, consultants working in the education sector such as those working on education in emergencies, persons working with NGOs dealing with education, gender based violence, owners of private learning institutions and parents.

Information was also sourced from 12 participants in FGD from Kawangware, Kibera, and Mathare all in Nairobi; 20 key informants who included heads of learning institutions, Ministry of Education, Education in Emergency, private owners of learning institutions, and consultants in the Ministry of Education; and 10 students. The students were 2 from public universities, 2 from public secondary schools in urban areas and 2 from rural areas. There were 2 students from private secondary schools in urban areas and 2 from rural.

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

When the Government of Kenya ordered the closure of schools including tertiary institutions on the 15th of March 2020 to combat the spread of Covid-19, this caught the stakeholders in the education sector unexpectedly since they had not planned for this. This affected over 30000 primary and secondary schools implying that about 14 million pupils and students had their studies interrupted and 310,000 teachers rendered idle. Schools employ support staff including cleaners, cooks, bursars, nurses, matrons, among others. Some schools' employ their own teachers who are paid by the Boards of Management (BOM). All these support staff and BOM teachers found themselves unemployed and with no salaries for the first 5 months of Covid-19.

A report by Minet Kenya Insurance reported an increase in the number of teachers struggling with mental health concerns including depression and that in the month of April 2020 alone, 400 teachers sought mental health services in different health facilities in the country. Bungoma led the list with 28 teachers complaining of stress followed by Nairobi with 24 teachers, Bomet (23) Machakos (20) and Uasin Gishu (1) West Pokot (1) Mandera (1) and Marsabit (1). Male teachers comprised 54% of the total, females 29% and 17% of unknown category.

The health service provider reports that the number of both the inpatient and outpatient claims tripled during the first quarter of 2020 as compared to the last quarter of 2019. From March 2020 and 7th January 2021, 345 teachers in public schools had contracted Covid-19 out of which 159

² The author used email addresses of persons known to her and therefore no ethical considerations were broken. This happens quite often when doing surveys using survey monkey.

were males and 186 were females as reported by the Teachers Service Commission on January 7th 2021. Between March and 25th November 2020, 36 teachers had died of Covid-19 according to a report by Minet Insurance Company and out of these 15 of them were principals of schools and the rest were classroom teachers.

This study found that 36.1% of the respondents reported that their children went back to school when they reopened in October 2020 while 16.4% said that their children did not report back giving various reasons as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reason why Children did not Report back to school

Reasons why Children did not Report Back to School	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The school closed due to lack of finances	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
My child refused to go back to school	57	93.4	93.4	96.7
I transferred the child to a public school	1	1.6	1.6	98.4
All of the Above	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	61	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows 93.4% of the respondents reporting that their children refused to go back to school while 3.3% reported that the schools that their child had been studying was closed due to lack of finances.

Secondary data from the National Crime Research Centre (2020) shows that the first half of 2020 recorded more than half the total number of gender based violence cases recorded in 2019 suggesting an increase in the number of GBV cases. The three top forms of GBV were sexual abuse, physical abuse, forced marriage, child abduction/kidnapping, emotional abuse and child marriage as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Forms of GBV in Kenya between January, 2018 and June, 2020

Forms of GBV	Number of cases reported during January–December period		Number of cases reported during January –June, 2020 period		
	2018	2019	3-months pre-COVID-19 restrictions period	3-months during COVID-19 restrictions period	Total for 2020
			Jan-March	April -June	
Sexual Abuse	455	248	59	132	191
Physical Abuse	396	250	62	103	165
Forced Marriage	53	0	0	0	0
Child Abduction/Kidnapping	50	20	12	18	30
Emotional abuse	48	43	11	29	40
Child Marriage	20	58	22	30	52
Child trafficking	16	10	2	2	4
Female Genital Mutilation	2	7	0	1	1
Child Abandonment	0	36	0	0	0
Child Labour	0	28	0	0	0
Child Neglect	0	147	0	0	0
Child Prostitution	0	1	0	2	2
Child radicalization	0	0	0	1	1
Unlawful Confinement	0	7	2	1	3
Online Abuse	0	1	1	2	3
Totals	1040	856	171	321	492

Source: National Crime Research Centre (2020)

The number of GBV cases reported during the 3-months pre-COVID-19 restrictions period covering January to March, 2020 and the 3-months period during COVID-19 restrictions covering April to June, 2020 shown in the above Table 11 shows that the number of GBV cases increased by 87.7% during the Covid-19 lockdown.

In Kenya, the decision by the government to close schools disrupted the calendar year meaning that current students will need to repeat an entire school year and will graduate one year later than expected. School intakes for Standard 1, Form 1 and pre-primary did not take place in January 2021. National exams which were due later in 2020 were cancelled and Class 8 pupils and Form 4 students who were to sit the exams in 2020 will do so in March 2021. Disruption of the education calendar will see some students not going back to class when schools reopen after the long period of school closure. When the question of why the students did not report back to school was answered by the students, 40% reported that they had not gone back to school. Among those who did not report back to school, 50% reported that they got pregnant, 25% said that they got into business and another 25% said that their class was not among those that were to report in October 2020. This corroborates reports from schools that when schools opened on 4th October 2020, approximately 20,000 pupils in class 4, standard 8 and Form 4 did not report back to school. In the North Rift region approximately 13,000 classes four, eight and Form 4 students did not report back to school

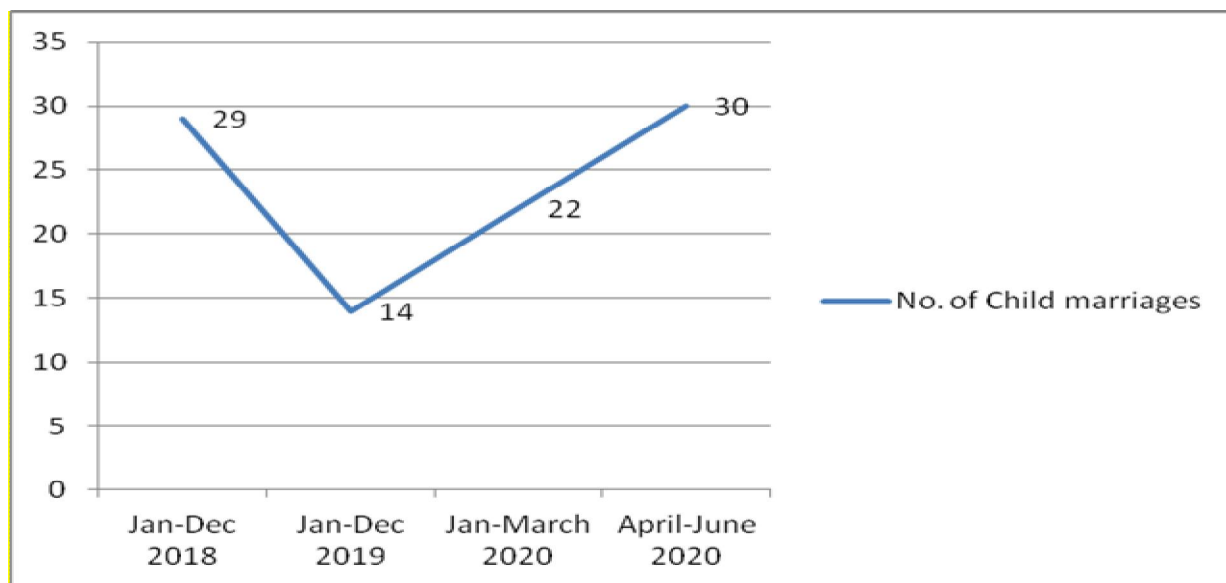
while Nandi County had 6,000 girls who dropped out of school. In Narok, 120 class 8 and Form 4 students did not reported back to school.

The Ministry of Health's Kenya Information Systems (2020) data shows that in all the 47 counties, between January and June 2020, 8,264 adolescent girls of ages 10-14 years became pregnant. At the same time, 153,848 girls of 15-19 years of age became pregnant during that period which was a 40% increase in the country's monthly average. The data also shows that 3,966 girls under the age of 19 were pregnant in Machakos County alone. At the same time in Turkana County, 558 adolescent pregnancies were reported between March and June which was almost a threefold increase from the same period in 2019 as reported by the Kenya Health Information System. During the period 2019 to 2020 Nairobi County was leading with 11,795 teenage pregnancies in the period January-May 2020 compared to the same period 2019, where there were 11,410 cases reported. Kakamega County comes second with 6,686 cases compared to 8,109 cases in 2019.

Adolescents and teenagers who become pregnant sometimes get married off by their parents. One Key informant (a school principal) from a rural school reported that 10 students (7 girls and 3 boys) did not report back. She said that the chiefs reported to her that the girls had gotten married while the boys had entered into bodaboda business.

During the lockdown due to Covid-19, there was an increase in the number of child marriages as reported by the National Crime Research Centre (2020), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of Child Marriages 2018-June 2020



As shown in Figure 2, the number of yearly child marriages had been on a decline from 29 in 2018 to only 14 in 2019. However, within a period of 6 months (January to June 2020, the number of child marriages increased by 114.5% from 14 to 30.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In our study, 30% of key informants reporting knowing of children in their neighborhoods who were on drugs and alcohol confirming National Commission for Campaign Against Drugs and Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) (2020) report which found that 7.2% of primary school children and 23.4% of secondary school students had tried alcohol while 3.8% of pupils in primary

and 9.3% in secondary had tried drugs during the lockdown. According to the NACADA report, the most common periods when drugs are abused are during the school holidays (30%) and on the way from school (22%). 29.3% of the students obtain alcohol or drugs from home.

About 93.4% of the respondents reported that their children refused to go back to school. Children can drop out schools due to various reasons, such as, child pregnancies, child marriage, engaging in other activities not related with education. In Uganda, Tumwesighe (2020) reported that many children from low income areas would not return to schools when they reopen after the prolonged lockdown due to various reasons such as pregnancies or early marriages.

6.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 SUMMARY

The study analyzes the impact of the long closure of schools on teachers, boys and girl and uses secondary data complemented with primary data to meet this objective. It also uses anecdotal evidence where available to provide a brief comparative analysis of how Kenya has fared in these aspects pre and during the onset to the Covid-19 pandemic relative to other countries in East Africa. COVID-19 adversely affected the education sector especially through the measures that the Government took to combat the spread of the virus. The long closure of schools led to loss of learning, increased dropout of students/pupils, increased cases of GBV, early pregnancies and early child marriages.

6.2 CONCLUSION

From the study, it is clear that a number of students did not report back to schools when they reopened as the long closure of schools disrupted the academic calendar and some students got engaged in other business not related to academics while others, especially the girls got pregnant or got married. There was also an increase in the number of adolescent pregnancies in Kenya attributed to the long closure of schools due to Covid-19 measures. Covid-19 measures led to an increase in the number of early child marriages in Kenya.

Teachers were also adversely affected by COVID-19 pandemic as a number of them lost their jobs especially those in the private schools and those in public schools employed by the BOMs. A number of them also contracted COVID-19 while others succumbed to the disease.

6.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the short run, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development needs to strengthen the curriculum and school syllabus that address child rights, reproductive health and sex education in schools to empower children to speak out against violations of their rights and other abuse while at the school management level, there is need to establish a school-based child friendly GBV reporting mechanism.

Considering that students and teachers lost some of their own due to COVID-19, as well as the fact that some students had already entered the world of work without restrictions as they face in a school setting, there is need to have well trained guidance and counseling staff in schools in the medium term to help both teachers and students face the challenges that they may face as they try to adjust to school life. There is also need for education sector agencies to deepen the existing structures of guidance and counseling with a special focus on online guidance and counseling targeting educational, vocational and personal/social life of learners at all levels of education service.

Also in the medium term, the Department of Child Services and Department of Culture needs to formulate, plan and implement out-of-school programs for children across the country to keep them

occupied while Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and non-state actors need to urgently establish safe houses for children who experience GBV and other forms of violations. There is also need for strict regulation of the sale of alcoholic beverages and drinks as well as drugs and at the same time coming up with work/life balance programs for parents aimed at improving care and support of their children during this pandemic as well as any other that may come in the future.

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