



RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE SITUATION OF, AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SCHOOL GOING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN UGANDA

REPORT

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FAWE Uganda

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	Antenatal Care
ASRH	Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health
CDO	Community Development Officers
CFPU	Child Family Protection Unit of Police
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHO	District Health Office
DEO	District Education Officer
EA	Enumeration Area
FAWE Uganda	Forum for African Women Educationalists- Uganda Chapter
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
HMIS	Health Management Information System
IDI	In-depth Interviews
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
ODK	Open Data Kit
PSWO	Probation and Social Welfare Officer
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN- WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report contains findings of a study commissioned by Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Uganda Chapter in 2020, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to closure of schools around the country. The objectives of the study were to: 1) Estimate the prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda; 2) Investigate the drivers of engagement in sexual activity among school going girls and young women during the COVID-19 pandemic; 3) Assess the participation of school going girls in the learning opportunities that emerged during lockdown and the girls' interest in continuing their education; 4) Examine the involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic; and 5) Suggest innovations to support girls and young women to continue their education during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Study methodology

Using a cross-sectional survey design, data for this study was collected in December 2020. It was collected using a structured questionnaire from a total of 3,258 randomly selected school going girls and young women aged 10-24 years from 25 randomly selected districts across 16 regions of Uganda (i.e. Acholi, Ankole, Bugisu, Bukedi, Bunyoro, Busoga, Central 1, Central 2, Kampala, Karamoja, Kigezi, Lango, Sebei, Teso, Tooro and West Nile). Comparative data was collected using the same questionnaire from 3,136 boys and young men from the same districts. Key informants at the national, district and local levels were also interviewed. These were drawn from the Ministry of Education and Sports, District Education Officers, Oxfam, UNFPA, UNICEF, NUWODU among others. In addition, focus group discussions were held with groups of girls and young women; boys and young men; caregivers; and boda boda (commercial motorcycle) riders, etc. Data was also culled from the Health Information Management System and the records of some of the schools in the districts that were surveyed. Quantitative data was subjected to varying levels of analysis at Univariate, Bi-variate and Multivariate levels. Qualitative data was analysed thematically, initially following the key study objectives while considering key emerging issues.

Selected Key findings

i) Increased adolescent pregnancies and marriages during the COVID-19 pandemic

Between March 2020 and June 2020, there was a **22.5%** increase in pregnancy among girls aged 10-24 seeking 1st ANC from 80,655 to 98,810 respectively. Among girls aged 10-14 years, incidence of pregnancies had increased the most (by a staggering 366.5%—from 290 in March to 1,353 in September, 2020) compared to those aged 15-19 years (25.5%) and young women aged 20-24 (21.1%). The risk of getting pregnant was higher among girls and young women aged 20-24 with the highest number of pregnancy cases registered in Kampala (24,059), Wakiso (21,595), Mukono (8,639), Kamuli (7,847), Kasese (6,957), Jinja (6,950) and Mayuge (6,648). In addition, 5 in 10 young people perceive the number of girls getting pregnant to have increased during COVID-19 period compared to before; 3 in 10 girls (31.1%) were aware of a peer who became pregnant during the pandemic..

Although the incidence of early marriage was found to be low, 2.8% of the girls and young women surveyed reported being pressurized (including by their parents) to get married during the lockdown. This shows lockdown as a risk factor that disposed girls and young women towards early marriage, considering that 31% of study participants confirmed knowing a young girl/ woman who was married off during the pandemic. Marrying off a girl during COVID-19 was perceived by parents as a quick escape from the financial hurdles faced by families during COVID-19 period. School closures provided perfect pretext for parents to push their girls into marriage; thinking that government may never reopen schools.

ii) Increased exposure to risk factors associated with increased sexual engagement among school going girls

Over 30.3% reported multiple sexual partnerships during the COVID-19 lockdown. More boys/males than girls/females reported multiple sexual partners. Reasons cited for sexual engagement by girls and young women include; simply wanting to have sex (85.3%); forced to have sex/rape (2.6%); receiving money for sex (2.6%); access to basic needs including food and accommodation (2.0%); being asked by parents to have sex with men so that they can get money to support the family (0.6%). Discussions with stakeholders also revealed a range of other drivers to sexual engagement, including;

Household loss of income and the subsequent consequences for girls including child labour, early marriage and increased gender-based violence exacerbated the already fragile situation for girls. Given that some parents are no longer able to meet the needs of households and specific needs for girls has forced some parents to prompt their daughters to engage in sex for money, or in economic activities where they have been sexually abused.

High exposure to violence including sexual violence and online abuse: Girls and females were disproportionately affected by sexual violence linked to adolescent pregnancies and marriage. During COVID-19, over 5.4% of the girls/young women reported experiencing abusive sexual touching compared to 1.8% of boys/males. Slightly more females (0.6%) than males (0.2%) experienced pressured sex during COVID-19. Almost a half of the respondents (43.9%) said that sexual violence against girls has increased during COVID-19 because most girls are idle due to closure of schools. About 22.2% of girls said that some girls have been forced by circumstances of poverty in homes into transactional sex.

Contrary to the general perception that people close to children offer protection against harm, during COVID-19, violence was perpetuated by people close to the young people. For example, unlike males or boys who reported only two categories of sexual exploiters as friends (75.0%) and romantic partners (25.0%), for female or girls, they experienced a whole range of abusers including friends (37.8%), romantic partners (29.7%), strangers (8.1%) as well as neighbors (5.4%) and community leaders including religious leaders (5.4%).

As children were spending more time with their abusers, reporting abuse was almost non-existent. Slightly more girls (78.9%) than boys (77.9%) did not report any form of physical violence. Fear and self-blame were cited as the main reasons. Slightly more girls (69.7%) than males (67.4%) did not report anywhere when they were sexually exploited. Fear (34.0%) was the main reason why they did not report anywhere. More

girls (45.5%) than boys (40.6%) did not report physical violence because they felt it was their fault. Fear of reporting relates to a deep rooted cultural belief that socializes girls to accept violence as normal, which practice was amplified by COVID-19.

Due to the closure of schools, there is increased access to phone and phone usage among young people. Among those who had access to a phone with internet connectivity, 4.2% were female/girls and 8.2% are males/boys. Twice as many females (26.3%) as males (16.9%) were asked to send a photo of themselves and other parts of their bodies to someone they met online and more than a half (53.9%) went ahead and sent the pictures.

Parents were reportedly “absent” in the lives of children during COVID-19. While children were used to being at school where their lives are routinely structured, when COVID-19 struck, most parents were not prepared to substitute the school environment. Parents are not particularly used to offering and doing things routinely and this has had significant disruptions in the lives of the children.

School closures have created “idle youths”: Children who are not in school are idle for several reasons and tend to roam around, exposing them to increased alcoholism, drug abuse, bad company, and sexual violence. Some roam because parents cannot afford to pay electricity bills, they do not have televisions, radios (or reception does not reach their areas e.g. parts of Palabek); including newspapers and other education materials to keep them engaged at home.

Girls and young women reported high incidences of stigma fueling early marriages and fear to report cases of sexual violence. COVID-19 made it easy for some parents to marry off girls who become pregnant because in some communities, pregnancy is perceived to bring shame to families.

iii) Limited access to learning opportunities, platforms and materials during school closure

More than a half (51%) of the children have not had any form of learning during school closure. More boys (52.4%) than girls (49.6%) did not have access to learning during school closure. Younger learners aged 10-13 reported, comparably, low levels of access to learning during COVID-19, (40.1%) than those aged 14-17 (56.4%) and 18-24 years (58.2%). There were more learners within rural locations (52.2%) compared to those in urban locations (49.8%) did not have access to learning opportunities, platforms and materials during COVID-19.

While overall results suggest higher levels of access for girls/females than boys/males, regional analysis indicate that girls/females are even more disadvantaged than boys/males. For example, while Sebei (Kween) had the highest proportion of young people learning during COVID-19 compared to any other region, learning was disproportionately skewed in favour of boys/males (57.1%) than girls/females (42.9%) in the district. In addition, while Karamoja (Moroto and Amudat) had a relatively high-level access to learning during COVID-19, there were slightly more males (50.3%) than females (49.7%) who were accessing learning during this period in the two districts. Other regions with the lowest level of access to learning for girls/females was Bunyoro (Buliisa) where 55.8% of learners accessing learning during COVID were males/boys

compared to girls (44.2%). Similarly districts in central 2 (Mubende), there were more males (54.5%) accessing learning than females (45.5%).

Girls/females disproportionately experienced gender related barriers. More girls and young women (15.3%) compared to males/boys (12.6%) reported spending time doing household chores with no time left for learning. Other reasons cited include: lack of awareness of available learning platforms (37.6%); lack of accessibility to learning platforms (35.6%); disruptions caused by household chores at home (14.5%); loss of interest in schooling (1.9%) and having taken on a job (0.9%) among others.

For most children who were learning, radio (31.9%) personal revisions at home (25.9%) and learning via television (15.5%) were the main platforms or channels of learning. Others mentioned print media particularly materials distributed using newspapers (14.1%), volunteer or mobile teachers (8.2%) and there were also cases where parents were getting teachers to coach their children at home (3.5%).

iv) Girls were disadvantaged in terms of time spent doing household chores and learning

Girls are disproportionately disadvantaged particularly in terms of total time spent on learning and the time of the day when actual learning takes place. More girls and young women (15.3%) than boys and male (12.6%) cited household chores as reason for not learning during COVID-19. Among those who accessed learning, more boys (6.1%) spent more time learning, between one and six hours, compared to girls (5.5%) who spent same amount of time. More boys (43%) than girls (39%) study morning hours while slightly more girls (26%) than boys (23%) study in the afternoon between 1-4pm. Evidence from qualitative data situate this finding within the broader gender and social norms that favour boys education against girls explaining why girls wake up to do household chores and therefore have no time to learn in the morning hours which is usually the best time to learn. It appears that activities that males engage in are done mainly in the afternoon such herding cattle, petty trade, fishing, mining among others. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid these inequalities in learning particularly during school closures.

v) Girls were disproportionately affected by dwindling prospects for continued learning during and post COVID-19 school closure

About (2.4%) of the learners do not hope to continue attending school or resume school when schools reopen. Slightly more girls (2.6%) compared to boys (2.2%) said they may not return to school once schools resume due to general challenges that girls face, as more already see themselves as relatively old compared to boys, but also some have already married or become pregnant.

More girls and young women in the age group 18-24 years were less hopeful of returning to school (10.7%) compared to boys/males in the same age group (5.9%) and girls or boys in any other age group.

Education stakeholders should be worried that over about 31.3% of males and 26.8% females said the reason they are not likely to report back to school is because they lost interest in learning or schooling.

Additionally, about 9.8% of all the girls who said they will not resume school mentioned the fact that they became pregnant and cannot go back to school, as well as 9.8% of the females and only 1.5% of the boys said they married during this period of COVID-19 and therefore will not be able to resume school.

Although generally more refugees accessed learning during COVID-19 period, slightly more refugees (3.8%) are not hopeful of returning to school once schools reopen compared to non-refugees (2.4%) implying that COVID-19 exacerbated the generally precarious situation of refugees compared to non-refugees. Slightly more learners with disability (3.0%) are not hopeful of returning to school when schools reopen compared to those with no disability (2.4%). Therefore, COVID-19 exacerbated the preexisting inequalities in access to education between girls and boys and between refugees and non-refugees.

High dropout of candidates and finalists: There were more respondents among males (28.1%) who did not resume school compared to females (18.1%). This means that among girls, there were more participants who had resumed school (81.8%) at $Pr=0.012$ compared to those among males. In terms of age, results show that in the age group 18-24 years there were more participants who have not been able to resume school (43%) at $Pr=0.000$ compared to participants in other age groups. About six in every ten respondents (61.9%) also knew of another candidate (i.e., p.7; s.4, s.6, tertiary or university) who did not return to school when government reopened for candidate classes.

Assessment of school records sampled however show that more females had dropped out of candidate classes compared to males when schools resumed. For example, at Senior four, out of a total of 3,472 learners who attended senior four in the schools assessed before the COVID-19 period, 50.5% (147) of those who did not return to school were girls/females. The situation is so dire that in some schools, such as in Nabokotom secondary school in Amudat, all the girls that were in school before COVID-19 did not come back to school when the government reopened for candidate classes. As we noted later, the reasons are hinged on pregnancy.

Additionally, in senior six the situation is even grimmer for girls than boys. Out of a total of 1,052 who were in senior six in selected schools before closure of schools, 78.7% of those who did not return were girls/females compared to boys/males 21.3%.

Consistent with reasons why learners are not interested in returning to school or are not hopeful, reasons given for failure to resume school when candidate classes reopened include, lack of school fees (67.3%) mentioned more by males (69.6%) than females (64.4%) followed by lack of interest in learning (12.9%) mentioned slightly more by girls/females (13.3%) than boys/males (12.5%). Meanwhile, 11.1% of the girls/females cited pregnancy as the main reason while more females/girls (8.9% than boys/males (1.7%) cited marriage as the main reason. About 2.2% of the girls cited caring for siblings. Qualitative data indicate reasons such as teenage pregnancy and early marriage; economic hardships faced by parents, implying that some parents could not afford school fees and other scholastic materials; cultural specific barriers; as well as aspects such as interschool transfers.

vi) Increased risks associated with prolonged school closure

While risks for prolonged closure appear to affect both girls and boys, some specific risks are precarious for girls than boys. When schools closed, learners did not just miss playing with their friends, classes, talking to teachers, playing their favorite sport, having a sense of belonging, but interrupted personal growth and development of young people, skills acquisition, and for girls and young women, it meant loss of safe spaces that offer protection for learners and therefore loss of much more than classroom attendance. For girls also, closure of schools has had a direct bearing on exposure to risks such as sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and early marriage. About 2.4% of the participants revealed that pregnancy rates have increased because schools used to offer protection, which is currently not the case. In Amudat district, Karamoja sub region, in one of the schools all girls were married off immediately schools closed. In addition, school closure is likely to occasion a significant drop in schooling never seen before in Uganda and for some education institutions will most likely close as they the effects of prolonged school closure continue to hit hard.

vii) Increased engagement in economic activities among young people during COVID-19

There was a nine-percentage increase among young people who said they worked for money before COVID-19 (15.5%) and during COVID-19 (24.7%). Although the proportion of girls and boys involved in casual labour reduced from 41.4% before COVID-19 to 39.7% during COVID-19, casual labour remained the most common economic activity by young people. There were more young people involved in service industry particularly working in restaurants during COVID-19 (2.7%) since its one of the services that were opened earlier compared to before (1.9%). Similarly, unlike before COVID-19 when about 4.5% reportedly were involved in brick making, during COVID-19 this proportion increased to 6.1%. Three activities were mentioned to have attracted young people during COVID-19 which they were not involved in before COVID-19, i.e., working as a householder/maid (1.1%), burning and selling charcoal (2.1%) and working in a garage or mechanics (0.8%). In some districts such as Acholi Sub-Region a very big number of girls are involved in sugarcane growing at Adodi sugarcane plantation which supplies sugarcane to Atiak sugar factory; in Karamoja, young girls are involved in stone quarrying; in Amuria, most of the girls who live in upcoming urban centres are involved in selling local brew i.e., local waragi or ajono which is big business; in Adjumani, a group of young girls have joined commercial sex work and were reported to be members of 'TEAM NO SLEEP' group whose major activity is to exchange sex for money.

vi. Women and girls disproportionately bearing the burden of caregiving during COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the divide in caregiving responsibilities between men and women with women disproportionately bearing caring responsibilities. During COVID-19, the proportion of girls/females who mentioned caregiving by their mothers increased to (48.8%) while that of boys/males mentioning their mothers also increased to (43.8%). At the same time, girls/females who received care from their biological fathers during COVID-19 reduced to (37.3%) and boys/males who mentioned biological fathers also reduced to (42.6%). Girls and young women are disproportionately taking on the responsibilities to provide food, clothing, and any other basic needs including emotional care for families as a result of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a vacuum as some men retrocede the caregiving arena. Most young girls have taken up

economic activities, sometimes urged by their parents, as a way of supplementing household/family income to fill the void left by their fathers. At $P=0.006$, results show that girls (23.0%) were more likely to be told by their parents to work and contribute to family welfare than boys (12.7%). About 8.5% of the girls and no males said the reason why they were not hopeful of resuming school was because they are caring for their siblings, again highlighting the burden of care that girls and females or women generally are exposed to and continue to be exposed to that affect and interrupt learning.

Vii. Engagement in work is exposing girls to sexual violence: Besides exposure to long hours of work (25.5%), poor working conditions (22.4%); poor payment terms (24.5%) and physical harm, engagement in work has also exposed girls to sexual violence (1.8%) and direct loss of interest in participation in school (1.6%). Qualitative data corroborate evidence highlighting some of the effects of engagement in economic activities to include: failure to continue learning through available platforms during the COVID-19 period and exposure to violence. Testimonies showing girls who have been raped, defiled and generally suffered some form of sexual violence as they engaged in work were common. Cases of rape and defilement or generally sexual assault were also common in refugee settlements, where security is a big concern, making girls more vulnerable. Girls that have taken up work in bars are directly vulnerable to sexual abuse while others have been introduced to commercial sex work. Involvement in work has also resulted into school dropout for candidates/finalists and in the long-term, those engaged in work will find no incentive for returning to school.

Conclusion, emerging issues and recommendations

While the full scale of impact of COVID-19 may not be known until much later, the current evidence suggest that COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated the underlying inequalities between men and women. Findings of this study have shown that girls are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and that the pandemic has laid bare the far-reaching effects of COVID-19 on school going girls and young women. Some of the consequences of COVID-19 should be understood within a given context.

COVID-19 has revealed the general lack of preparedness for learning or continued teaching during pandemics. Schools and institutions of learning were not prepared for an emergency of this magnitude; it came as a shock impacting learning on several fronts. This was not helped by the fact that, Uganda's approach to COVID-19 as a purely health issue affected quick response from players in other sectors, who could have arrested some of its education related impact at an earlier stage. This lack of preparedness does not end with schools and institutions but it also manifests in poor parenting skills, as seen through; poor child-parent communication; lack of proper guidance, which have put the girls and boys at risk during pandemic, despite living with their parents.

Additionally, teenage pregnancies are on the increase with inadequate institutional mitigation strategies. About eight in every ten (81.8%) young girls that were pregnant said they plan to carry their pregnancy to term. What this means however is that in the next few months, girls who conceived during COVID-19 will become mothers. While education institutions are more receptive to girls re-entering school after delivery, they are ill prepared to retain pregnant girls in schools. The School re-entry guidelines by the MoES appear new to many and operationalization requires some concerted effort

towards ensuring that the girls have a strong social support network at home. As indicated girls who are pregnant fear returning to school because of the stigma attached to pre-marital pregnancy.

What is clear also is that the social norms and practices that disadvantage girls in education have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Instead of protecting and supporting girls during COVID-19, some parents looked at the pandemic as offering an opportunity for marrying off their daughters, and for some men their care responsibilities abandoned. Some of the girls were either unable to access learning or did so under strenuous conditions including spending more time doing household chores while boys attend lessons on line or roam around communities.

Our fears are that the effects of COVID-19 on the learners present a likely reversal of gains Uganda has registered over the years in education of the girl child. Given the high levels of loss of interest and potentially long terms effects of prolonged closure including school dropouts, Uganda risks a serious reversal of gains in girl child education and education in general.

The pandemic has also exposed Uganda's poor social protection program which only covers 3% of the population. As studies show, a significant proportion is susceptible to shocks and are unable to cope when pandemics like COVID-19 strike. It is not surprising that in the first months of lock down, children were going hungry with no social support system.

Therefore, this study is timely. First, the world is at a time of completing the first five-year cycle of Agenda 2030. Second, Uganda through its Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (2017-2020) firmly focuses on the realization of the targets of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) (2016-2025) and agenda 2030. Therefore, with COVID-19, the results presented here can feed into the review and planning processes at national and regional level and can add to knowledge generated by other education stakeholders in Uganda and beyond. Based on the findings and particularly emerging issues, an all-inclusive set of recommendations are made to the Government of Uganda, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Development Agencies;

1) Recommendations around education support during COVID-19

- **Adoption of alternative learning approaches:** It's high time to consider alternatives to classroom based/physical learning. For instance, support the development of e-learning infrastructure and models that are suitable and work in specific geographical and cultural contexts. Blended learning models that combine the physical and virtual learning platforms need to be strengthened and encouraged. For example, training and supporting mobile teachers to provide home-schooling or community-based learning combined with e-learning can be good approaches that lead to inclusive and equitable education. Results from the study show that several learners benefited from community-based learning where teachers were supported to provide group learning at lower level.
- **Capacity building of the education human resource:** Training, skilling and retraining teachers on how to offer online classes as well as blended learning models is an alternative that may come with more benefits for learners and teachers.

Rethinking the curriculum by MoES and its agencies such as the NCDC and move it towards self-individual learning as opposed to the current one which requires a teacher to deliver the content through physical teaching.

- **Reducing gender and poverty barriers to equitable and inclusive learning:** Girl child education advocates such as FAWE Uganda and other partners should support context tailored interventions for say refugees, hard to reach and vulnerable populations including children with disabilities and girls generally. Using innovative approaches to ensure that children continue learning, and where possible directly implement interventions and programs that address gender specific barriers that limit girls' participation in learning during pandemics like COVID-19.

2) Recommendations focusing on addressing risks associated with sexual violence

- **Revision of policy on child mothers and their reproductive health:** There is need to expedite implementation of "Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in school settings in Uganda (2020), as they provide for re-integration of adolescent mothers (10-19) into learning institutions post-COVID-19. In addition, a support mechanism for learners who have given birth that helps their re-integration back to the learning environment and creating a safer space for their babies is very crucial now at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic more than ever.
- **High rate of School Dropout:** Given strong evidence on the high number of children dropping out of school, a majority of whom are girls. Once schools reopen post COVID-19 orchestrated lockdowns, there is need to prepare for this glaring reality. MoES and its partners need to directly provide for integration of life skills training not only into formal education but also establish programs to skill and absorb the dropouts. Programs such as Skilling Uganda and Vocational education need to be supported. Life skills should aim at empowering learners to make good decisions outside the classroom which will also avert any sexually-related exploitation.
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should strengthen advocacy around Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (AYSRH) including establishment or functionalization of COVID-19 SOP compliant adolescent-friendly corners at all levels of health care, and promotion of sexual and reproductive health education in schools and communities should be implemented.

3) Recommendations focusing on livelihoods improvement

- **Economic recovery of the education sector:** COVID-19 related lockdowns have negatively impacted and will have medium to long term economic effects on the education sector. The private schools that form a key part of the sector are on the verge of economic collapse with indications of many of them not likely to open post-COVID while the surviving ones will have to increase fees to cope, making education less affordable. Advocating for an economic rescue package for private schools at a risk of closure due to effects of COVID-19 will ensure continuity of learning, employment and mitigate against overcrowding or dropout of millions of learners all together.
- **Economic recovery of the social sector:** With the well documented negative post-COVID pandemic effects on the households, the social structure and its capacity for resilience in the face of shocks, risks to crumble. The solution to averting this

situation will lie in strengthening and expanding coverage of social protection programs, such as cash transfers and community protection networks centred on the rights of the girl child and addressing gaps in identifying, reporting and responding to cases that require child protection during COVID-19 times. Child protection interventions, especially for vulnerable groups such as refugees, PWDs and girls from chronically poor households should be placed where they belong, under the essential services category. Enhancing financial and social inclusion and improvement in livelihood sustainability of vulnerable communities to move towards being self-reliant need to be prioritised.

4) Recommendations on parenting

- The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, and CSOs should strengthen and directly support establishment of parenting programmes that are gender-sensitive, streamlined and among others place emphasis on: enhancing parenting skills, and male involvement; increasing parent-child communication and appropriate information given to girls and boys during and beyond such emergency situations.
- Support revamping Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) to equip parents with basic skills in numeracy and literacy that would be handy during pandemics like COVID-19

5) Crosscutting approaches/issues

- CSOs should promote multi-sectoral collaboration and holistic strategies. COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the risks that girls and boys face do not fall under a single sector, e.g. health, education or livelihoods but cuts across sectors.
- Institutions such as Uganda Communications Commission should be lobbied to regulate access and use of internet for young people as it's a likely precursor to online sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings of a study commissioned by Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Uganda Chapter in December 2020 to examine the situation of, and impact of COVID-19 on, school going girls and young women in Uganda. The report is divided into eight sections: 1) Introduction (which gives a brief background of FAWE Uganda and the COVID-19 situation as well as the purpose and specific objectives of the study); 2) Methodology (which discusses the design, approach, sampling, instruments, analysis, ethical considerations, data quality, COVID-19 risk management and limitations of the study); 3) Profiling of School Going Girls and Young Women (i.e. age, sex, marital status, religious affiliation, education and disability status); 4) Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage; 5) Drivers of Sexual Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic; 6) Girls' Access to Learning Opportunities during the Pandemic; 7) Girls' Participation in Economic Activities; and 8) Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations.

1.1. BRIEF ABOUT FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS (FAWE) UGANDA CHAPTER

Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Uganda Chapter was established in 1997 with the goal of accelerating female participation in education and, therefore, close the gender gap at all levels of the education system in Uganda. It is one of 34 country chapters of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)—a pan African NGO founded in 1992 by five women ministers of education to promote girls' and women's education in Africa. FAWE Uganda's vision is *"a Uganda in which all girls and women effectively participate in sustainable development"* and its mission is *"to enhance gender equity, equality and inclusion in education by influencing policies, nurturing attitudes and practices, and implementing interventions that positively influence girls' education."* Pursuant to this mission, the organization is implementing several projects (including the Higher Education Access Program; Community Action to End Violence against Children; Promotion of Second Chance Education in Karamoja, Acholi, Rwenzori and Teso Bukedi sub regions; and a Re-skilling program in West Nile). In 2020, it commissioned this study on the situation of girls and young women in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

On March 1, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global public health emergency and urged all countries to undertake several precautionary measures to mitigate its spread. At the height of the pandemic, nearly 90% of students worldwide were affected by the closure of their institutions of learning (UNESCO, April 2020). While school closures may have been necessary to reduce the transmission rate of COVID-19, their full impact on the well-being of children and youth has not always been considered in the decision-making process not well known. Regardless, there is emerging evidence to suggest that COVID-19 has impacted access to quality education and learning (INEE Resource Collection, GEC, UNESCO, 2020). This suggests that COVID-19 crisis jeopardizes the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and leaves the most marginalized children and youth—especially those in vulnerable situations—even further behind their less vulnerable peers. Before the COVID-19 crisis,

258 million children were already denied their right to quality education; millions more are now at risk of having this right disrupted and denied (UNESCO, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased protection risks, including those related to various forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation, thereby putting the realisation of SDGs 5.2¹, 5.3², 8.7³ and 16.2⁴ further from reach.

Uganda confirmed its first case of the disease on Saturday 21st March 2020. And as of April 27th, 2021, 41,715 cases and 341 deaths had been confirmed⁵. Like many other countries, Uganda responded by enforcing a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the virus. This started with closure of all educational institutions in the country, resulting into the sending of 11,099,774 students to their families. Up to 49.8 percent of these are female and of these, 26 percent, representing 1,436,896, are teenagers or older. Effected in March 2020, the closure of educational institutions has now been in place for a year (and is continuing) save for candidate and semi-candidate classes, which were allowed to return after six months of total school lockdown. The closure of educational institutions was followed closely by incremental closure of other sectors of society until near total lockdown of economic, social and cultural activity in the country. Consequently, many of the families to which the students returned lost their livelihoods and experienced a surge in incidence of domestic and gender-based violence. Creditably, however, a range of educational programs (including homework packages, online classes, education television, education radio, community audio towers, home schooling, etc.) emerged as soon as lockdown was imposed. And although characteristically ad hoc, stopgap and fitful, these programs took shape and covered more and more students as lockdown persisted.

Coupled with the removal of students from their schools' protective environments and schedules, both the distortion of livelihoods and surge in incidence of domestic and gender-based violence factors could aggravate the susceptibility of girls and young women to abuse, risky sexual behavior and involvement in economic activities (including adverse undertakings that might affect their availability for educational programs during and after lockdown). Indeed, there are media reports indicating increase in adolescent pregnancies among school going girls. On 27th July, 2020, for example, *Daily Monitor* reported that during lockdown, up to 2,372 adolescent girls had conceived while 128 had been married off in the districts of Kitgum, Ngora, Kyegegwa, Kasese and Lyantonde⁶. Similarly, on 11th September 2020, *The Independent* reported that 4,000 girls in Acholi sub-region had conceived since the commencement of lockdown⁷. Moreover, when government started easing the lockdown on the economic activities in which parents are involved, many children remained at home redundant and unattended, presenting risk of exposure to abuse and/ or involvement in risky sexual behavior. Finally, it is noted that, their contribution notwithstanding, the

¹ 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

² Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

³ Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

⁴ End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

⁵ <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/>.

⁶ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/2-300-school-girls-conceive-128-married-off-during-lockdown-1909280>.

⁷ <https://www.independent.co.ug/over-4000-acholi-girls-made-pregnant-during-lockdown/>.

education programs that emerged during lockdown presented risk of leaving many children out, especially due to logistical constraints like lack of electricity, computer hardware, internet connectivity, money to pay teachers, etc.

In these circumstances, efforts to protect girls and young women and to support them to attain education in line with targets like SDG4 and FAWE Uganda's mission beg answers to questions about their situation in the context of the pandemic. However, the information available on this situation has largely been anecdotal, incomprehensive because COVID-19 is novel and research on it and its consequences is nascent. It is in trying to close this gap that FAWE Uganda commissioned this study—to guide programing for the successful protection and education of girls and young women in the ongoing- and post-COVID-19 situation.

1.3. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to assess the situation of, and impact of COVID-19 on, school going girls and young women in Uganda. The specific objectives were to;

1. Estimate the prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda.
2. Investigate the drivers of engagement in sexual activity among school going girls and young women during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Assess the participation of school going girls in the learning opportunities that emerged during lockdown and the girls' interest in continuing their education.
4. Examine the involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Suggest innovations to support girls and young women to continue their education during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This section contains information about the way the study was conducted. It explains the design and approaches; sampling (i.e., unit of analysis, sampling of study sites and selection of households and respondents); data collection methods and instruments; data management and analysis techniques and procedures that were used. The section also explains the ethical considerations, COVID-19 risk management measures and data quality assurance checks that the study team adhered to. At the end, the limitations of the study are disclosed.

2.2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

Approach: The overall approach was participatory in nature involving discussions with stakeholders at inception, development of study tools and general conceptualization of key issues underpinning the study. For example, at inception, the study team, technical team at FAWE Uganda secretariat, and gender and education specialists from the FAWE Uganda membership fraternity that discussed the objectives, scope, methodology and instrumentation of the study⁸.

Design: The study employed a cross-sectional survey design. As with most survey designs, a representative sample makes it possible to generalize results to the entire population (Onwuegbuzie, & Collins, 2007).⁹ The findings of this study are therefore generalisable to the 25 districts of Uganda where the study was conducted¹⁰. The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were collected mainly using a questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the prevalence of early marriages and pregnancies; drivers of engagement in sexual activity; access to and involvement in available learning platforms; interest in continuing with education during and after the pandemic; and involvement in economic activities. Qualitative data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies. In-depth interviews with a range of key informants were conducted to augment the data elicited by the questionnaire. The interviews focused on intricate attributes of the girls' situation that are laced in complex contextual factors, which questionnaires were deemed constrained to illuminate. Focus group discussions were held with specific categories of participants. In addition, data was culled from the records of schools in the sampled districts and the National Health Management Information System (HMIS).

⁸ During inception meetings, it was for example agreed to adopt a definition of girls and young women to mean anyone aged 10-24 years who was attending school at the time government ordered schools closure. It was also agreed to broaden the target group to include boys and young men aged 10-24 years instead of limiting the study to only girls and young women aged 10-24 years. This was intended to identify gender issues by having comparable evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on school going girls and young women and boys and young men. By focusing on those aged 10-24, it meant that all female and male children and young people in the entire education cycle covering all levels from primary up to University and Tertiary Institutions had the same chance of being included in the sample. In other words, the study relied on a highly participatory approach involving the key stakeholders at various stages. The participatory approach generated consensus building and quality assurance at all stages.

⁹ Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Collins, K. M. (2007). A typology of mixed methods sampling designs in social science research. *Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 281-316.

¹⁰ Gideon, L. (2012). *Handbook of survey methodology for the social sciences*. New York: Springer.

2.3. SAMPLING

2.3.1. UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis¹¹ was defined as individual girls and young women. Girls and young women were defined (through discussions between the study team, a technical team at FAWE Uganda secretariat, gender and education specialists from FAWE Uganda membership) as females aged 10-24 years who were attending school at the time government ordered schools' closure. It was also agreed that the target group be broadened to include boys and young men of the same age. This was intended to enable comparison. Focusing on the ages 10-24 years meant that all female and male students from upper primary to (undergraduate) University had a chance of being included in the sample.

2.3.2. SAMPLING OF STUDY SITES

Twenty-five (25) out of the 134 districts of Uganda were considered for involvement in the study. This is because this number would give a statistically representative picture of the situation of girls and young women that might be generalized to the entire country. Selection of the districts started with clustering them according to the 16 sub-regions of the country. In each region, at least one district was randomly selected. However, because we needed to select 25 districts, an additional district was randomly selected from nine of the sixteen regions (Table 1).

Table 1: Districts regional¹² classification

	Region	Selected districts		Region	Selected districts
1	Kampala	Kampala	9	Karamoja	Amudat, Moroto
2	Central 1	Lyantonde, Kalangala	10	Lango	Kole, Lira
3	Central 2	Mubende	11	Acholi	Gulu and Lamwo
4	Busoga	Kaliro, Luuka,	12	West Nile	Adjumani, Arua
5	Bukedi	Butaleja	13	Bunyoro	Bulisa
6	Bugisu	Sironko	14	Tooro	Kasese, Kyegegwa
7	Sebei region	Kween	15	Ankole	Isingiro, Ntungamo
8	Teso	Amuria, Ngora	16	Kigezi	Kanungu

In each of the 25 districts, a list of all sub-counties/municipalities was obtained. Two sub-counties, at least one urban¹³ where it was possible, were randomly selected. After selecting the sub-counties, a list of all parishes in the selected sub-counties were obtained and then two parishes randomly selected from each sub-county/municipality. In each parish, a list of all the villages was constructed. This was done with the help of sub-county administration personnel. After, two villages were randomly selected per parish, making a total of eight villages in each district.

¹¹ Neuman, W. L. (2014). Basics of social research. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

¹² These are classifications according to UBOS, which have been used during some of the national studies to classify regions. We adopted similar classification for standardization purposes

¹³ The study adopted the definition of urban area/center adopted in the Uganda's Urban Development Policy (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 2017). An urban area/ Centre is defined, by hierarchy and level of service and means a town board, town council, municipality, city or metropolitan area (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 2017).

2.3.3. SELECTION OF HOUSEHOLDS AND RESPONDENTS

From each village, a sampling frame of the households was constructed. This was done with the assistance of one of the LC1 officials, and sometimes, the village health teams who had comprehensive households' lists. From each village, the required number of households was randomly determined. Selection of the households in the villages was done by use of systematic random sampling. At household level, all eligible young girls/women and boys/men aged 10-24 years were listed, and a simple random sampling procedure applied to select two eligible respondents (one girl and one boy). Where households had one eligible respondent, this would be compensated in the next household. This approach ensured that all eligible respondents in the household had an equal chance of being included in the sample. Overall, therefore, the study reached 6,394 young people who were drawn from 3201 households in 200 parishes (*annex 1; ii*). This sample size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s sample size estimation formula (*annex 1 (i)*).

2.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

The main data were collected using household survey questionnaire with girls and young women. This was augmented by key informant interviews, focus group discussions, documentary review and case studies. These were also used to ensure that gender and other relevant equity factors were captured in the study.

2.4.1 Household survey questionnaire with girls and young women: The main dataset was collected using a structured questionnaire (*annex iv a*). The questionnaire was directly administered by a team of trained data collectors using Open Data Kit (ODK). The questionnaire was developed through a participatory process involving the research team, the technical team from FAWE Uganda and gender and education specialists from FAWE Uganda's membership. This ensured that all the required information was captured. The questionnaire captured information on key demographics and the key objectives of the study; early marriages and pregnancies; drivers of sexual engagement among school going girls during the COVID-19 pandemic; proportion of girls accessing available learning platforms and the proportion of girls who have either lost interest or are still interested in school and education during the COVID-19 closure and post-closure period.

2.4.2 Key-Informant Interviews: Key informant interviews were conducted at three levels: national, district and community.

a) National level: Interviews were conducted with purposively selected officials from key government ministries, departments and agencies; CSOs; the private sector; and the academia (*see annex iv b*). Selection of these key informants was based on their knowledge of the issues that affect girl child education and the COVID-19 situation in the country.

b) District level: Interviews were held with key actors in education and child protection in the Districts. These included respondents from probation and social welfare offices, child and family protection units of Uganda police force, district education offices, district community development offices, district health offices, selected health facilities and civil society organisations that work to support girl child education (*see attached list of key informants*).

c) Community level: At the community level, discussions were held with selected duty bearers including opinion leaders, para social workers/child protection committees,

members of village health teams and cultural leaders. These discussions were conducted using an interview guide with open ended questions.

- d) School Level:** Following government directive to reopen finalists' classes, we conducted a quick assessment of the current levels of attendance in selected schools for candidate classes. In each district, at least three schools were visited and a quick check was done to ascertain the number of candidates who have since resumed school and the proportion of girls. A checklist was developed and used to assess resumption of school.

2.4.3 Focus Group Discussions: These were conducted with parents/ caregivers, boda boda riders and girls and young women—to get in-depth information, facilitate data harmonization/ validation and contextual analysis of the status of girls during the pandemic.

- a) Parents/ caregivers:** A total of 12 FGDs with parents/caregivers were conducted. These were conducted using a guide and separate discussions were held for female and male caregivers.
- a) Boda boda riders:** A total of six (6) FGDs were conducted with *boda boda* riders because they have been reported to be particularly susceptible to perpetration of sexual violence against girls.
- b) Girls and young women:** At least 12 FGDs were conducted in each of the districts, with groups of 5 to 10 girls, boys and young women and men. These hadn't participated in the survey.

The FGDs were conducted in the communities via face-to-face interactions. This was done with the help of FGD guides (*see tools 4, 5*). During the discussions, notes were taken and electronic recording was done. In line with the COVID-19 SOPs, each FGD had a maximum of seven participants.

2.4.4 Documentary Review

Health facility records, HMIS data and school records were also accessed, reviewed and analyzed.

- a) Health facility records:** Records on ANC attendances and deliveries were studied. The review process was used for engaging health workers about the nature of support available to young people. During data collection and reporting, all the records consulted were de-identified, so that no identifiers would be linked to persons.
- b) HMIS Data:** A comprehensive assessment of the HMIS data was conducted. Analysis was done for the first ANC attendances as a proxy for pregnancy among girls and young women.
- c) School records:** At the time of the study, the Uganda Government had reopened schools for finalist classes. We selected at least two schools in every district and reviewed the records of candidate classes. The goal was to establish enrolment in candidate classes before and after the lockdown of educational institutions. During the process of assessing school records, the data collectors engaged in discussions about school attendance. This provided insights on the situation of both individual schools and individual students.

2.4.5 Case studies

We conducted at least one case study involving a girl/young woman aged 10-24 in each of the 25 districts. The purpose was to conduct in-depth analysis of the situation of girls who

had experienced some of the issues investigated (i.e., early marriage, teenage pregnancy, dropout of school and involvement in economic activity). The cases were identified during the FGDs or referrals by the key informants. During discussion, we aimed at capturing information on the history of the girl, and experiences during COVID-19 and what these experiences mean for them.

2.5. DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

a) Quantitative data analysis

The questionnaire was programmed and uploaded on a tablet. Subsequently, a team of trained research assistants entered data into the tablets as they collected it. The data entered were then uploaded onto a server (KoboCollect). Once the data was on the server, the statistician checked it for accuracy and ensured that necessary corrections were done. The data were then exported from the server to Microsoft Excel and Stata version 15 for analysis. In Stata, data variables and value labels were created and analysed at univariate, bivariate and multivariate levels. At univariate level, descriptive statistics were computed and the distribution of data generated. At bivariate level, non-parametric techniques were used to compare subgroups within the sample.

b) Qualitative data analysis

Save for participants' refusals, the interviews were audio recorded. Interviews that hadn't been conducted in English were translated to English. The process was iterative, allowing reflections as data was being collected. Through this process, emerging themes were then identified and followed up while the data collection teams were still in the field. This ensured that the emerging issues were comprehensively studied. During daily briefings, the research team discussed emerging issues with the data collection teams, which enabled identification of issues that required following up. The records were transcribed and exported to Nvivo (Version 12 Pro). A code frame was developed. The initial code frame was based on the thematic areas developed from the objectives of the study. Subsequently, each of the transcripts was reviewed to identify the issues it raised and to establish patterns and analytical reflections for further analysis. After this process, areas of convergence, divergence, strengthening the interpretation and explanation of the quantitative findings were identified. During presentation of results, verbatim statements/quotations are used.

2.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study received ethical review and clearance from TASO Research Ethics Committee and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) (study number SS676ES). This study involved talking to young girls and women, and other people, some of whom had negative experiences of COVID-19 likely to evoke psychosocial effects. The research team was aware that talking to them about their experiences might evoke emotional stress, feelings of helplessness and cause unnecessary distress. Therefore, the following ethical action steps were taken;

- Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants and emancipated minors. For all young girls below the age of 18 years, informed parental/caregiver permission was obtained before seeking assent.
- All study materials that relate to participants at community level (including the consent forms and instruments) were translated into the relevant local languages.
- Personally identifying information was not elicited (including from the health and school records consulted).

- The study had an inbuilt stop-study criterion to address ethical dilemmas particularly in the event that a child or participant showed signs of distress. Signs of distress included, among others, crying in the middle of the interview, refusing to talk and outright aggression. Study teams were trained to immediately stop the interview for about ten (10) minutes. After the participant would be asked if she/he wanted to continue with the interview or not. If the person was not interested in continuing with the interview, the data collector was expected to inform the supervisor who in turn would call the District Probation and Social Welfare Officer to consider whether the child needed more support.

2.7. COVID-19 RISK MANAGEMENT MEASURES

All the necessary COVID-19 risk reduction measures/ guidelines provided by the Ministry of Health¹⁴ were adhered to;

- i. Hand washing facilities were put in place to ensure that research teams wash hands frequently with soap and water
- ii. Every team member was provided with a hand sanitizer to ensure that they sanitise before and after conducting an interview to avoid spreading the virus. Participants were asked to sanitise before and after interviews.
- iii. All participants, including interviewers and interviewees were asked to wear a mask during interviews. The study procured additional masks for teams to provide for households that did not have their own masks.
- iv. Interviewers and interviewees maintained at least 2 meters distance between themselves. All FGDs had 7 participants or fewer to allow social distancing.
- v. Frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs/handles, car doors, were disinfected regularly.
- vi. Vehicles taking the research teams carried four people or fewer.

2.8. QUALITY CONTROL/ASSURANCE CHECKS

A range of quality assurance checks were put in place to ensure that quality data was collected:

- a) *Regular interaction with FAWE Uganda:* A series of meetings were held with the FAWE Uganda technical team and Gender Specialists to harmonise the processes of the study. We had regular engagement around methodology, study tools, data collection and analysis.
- b) *Tools Design:* The questionnaire was programmed and downloaded on tablets in Open Data Kit (ODK). Herein, quality control checks were built to prevent wrong entries and detect errors. The tablets were password protected to ensure that access to data was restricted to authorised study team members.
- c) *Training of research assistants:* A team of experienced research assistants was recruited considering gender needs and language. Following preliminary discussions with the key Gender Specialists, it was proposed to have a mix of female and male RAs but skewed towards female RAs. All RAs had to be proficient in the local languages of the communities where they were deployed and English. In addition, all the RAs went through a two-day training on the objectives and design of the study, which included refresher training on data collection and research ethics. The RAs were also trained in conducting community-based surveys during COVID-19.

¹⁴ See, <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/prevention/>.

- d) *Pre-testing of tools*: The clarity, consistency and logical flow of the instruments was ascertained through pre-tests.
- e) *Supervision of the data collection process*: A rigorous supervision process was established to ensure that field RAs collected quality data. Each team of RAs had a supervisor who provided onsite support supervision. Challenges experienced were reported daily and corrections effected. Daily briefings were organized with the teams and attended by all members of the study teams via Zoom.

2.9. LIMITATIONS

A significant part of the data on which the study relies is self-reported. Studies have shown that sometimes self-reported data suffers from accuracy arising out of social desirability bias^{15,16}. Biases in response often occur when respondent desires to present themselves in a favorable light or in a way that may not elicit judgment, especially on sensitive topics such as sex, marriage and pregnancy. To address some of these challenges, we ensured that all data collectors were trained to avoid passing stereotypical statements during the interview that may elicit biased responses. We ensured that all interviews were conducted in spaces that offered the privacy of the respondent and everyone was assured of confidentiality and informed consent obtained at the beginning and throughout the interview. Some studies have shown that “level of information revealed by a respondent is positively related to the level of privacy of the interview”¹⁷. Besides, the study team also made every attempt to triangulate data sources and even methods. Evidence presented here is drawn from various sources using multiple methods including review of existing data bases.

Secondly, the COVID19 situation continues to evolve, so its effects are fluid. For example, at the time of data collection the government position on school reopening was rather ambiguous. Today, however, there appears to be a semblance of a robust framework within which schools should reopen. In fact, it is clear that the full impact of COVID-19 may not become clear until much later. Therefore, the findings of this study may only be understood in light of the context within which the study was conducted.

¹⁵ Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality & Quantity*, 47(4), 2025-2047....

Newman, J. C., Des Jarlais, D. C., Turner, C. F., Gribble, J., Cooley, P., & Paone, D. (2002). The differential effects of face-to-face and computer interview modes. *American journal of public health*, 92(2), 294-297.

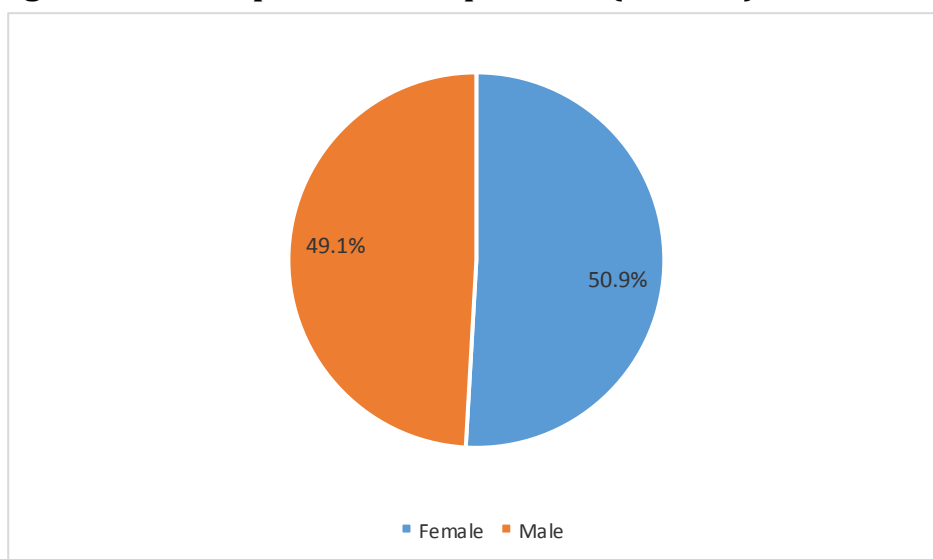
¹⁷ibid

PROFILING OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

3.1. AGE, SEX, MARITAL STATUS AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Overall (50.9%) of the respondents were female. Despite planning to have an equal number of female and male respondents, in some districts (e.g., Kween, Moroto, Amudat and Kalangala) most boys were away from home during lockdown, which made it difficult to access them for interviews. Nonetheless, the proportions reached for each category is significant enough to allow for independent analysis and comparison for some variables.

Figure 1: Sex composition of respondents (n=6,398)



In terms of age, a significant proportion of the respondents were aged between 14 and 24 years (52.7%) compared to those aged 10-13 years (47.3%). Nearly all (98.2%) of the respondents identified themselves as single and never married. About 2% of the respondents said they were either married (1.0%) or staying with a partner (0.5%) or divorced (0.2%). Given that one of the objectives of the study is to estimate prevalence of early marriage and adolescent pregnancies, this is a critical finding, which is explored further in subsequent sections. Majority of the participants reportedly belonging to the Catholic faith (41.2%) followed by Protestant/Anglicans (33.2%), Pentecostal/Born Again Christians (11.7%) and Muslims (10.7%). Others mentioned Orthodox, Lutheran among others. A significant proportion of the respondents were in rural areas (52.9%) while about 47.1% identified their places of residence as urban. Urban¹⁸ here means places designated by the Ministry of Local Government as urban including cities, municipalities and town councils.

Table 2 Profile of study participants (n=6,398, %)

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Age			
10-13	48.9	45.7	47.3
14-17	34.1	39.0	36.65

¹⁸ The study adopted the definition of urban area/center adopted in the Uganda's Urban Development Policy (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 2017). An urban area/ Centre is defined, by hierarchy and level of service and means a town board, town council, municipality, city or metropolitan area (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, 2017).

	18-24	17.0	15.3	16.15
Marital status				
	Single Never married	98.8	97.5	98.2
	Married	0.7	1.4	1.1
	Divorced	0.0	0.3	0.2
	Staying with a partner but not married	0.4	0.7	0.5
	Widowed	0.0	0.1	0.03
Religious affiliation				
	Catholic	41.4	41.0	41.2
	Protestant/ Anglican	32.8	33.4	33.2
	Muslim	11.1	10.3	10.7
	Pentecostal /Born Again	11.3	12.1	11.7
	SDA	2.1	1.9	2.0
	No religion	0.2	0.1	0.1
	Other	1.0	1.1	1.1
Location of respondents				
	Urban	47.4	46.8	47.1
	Rural	52.7	53.2	52.9

3.2. LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Majority (35.8%) of the participants reported having been in upper primary (P5-P7) at the time government enforced lockdown. These were followed by those who were in lower primary classes (P1-P4) (33.4%) and O-level (S1-S4) at (24.7%). There were also a few participants who said they were in vacation by the time the lockdown started including those who were in P.7 vacation (0.1%), Senior Four vacation (0.3%) and Senior Six vacation (0.2%).

Slightly more males (36.4%) than females (30.7%) were in lower primary. Conversely, slightly more females (37.8%) than males (34.1%) were in upper primary.

Almost all of the respondents in the age group 10-13 were in primary (97.9%) either at lower primary level (61.0%) or upper primary (36.9%). Relatedly, majority of the respondents in the age group 14-17 were in upper primary (44.8%) and O-level (44.4%). As expected, majority of the respondents in the age group 18-24 years mentioned O-level (51.8%), A-level (16.4%) and university level (6.7%) compared to any other age groups. For example, none of the respondents in the age group 10-13 mentioned either senior four vacation, A-level, or any other level of education beyond O-level.

Table 3: Classes/levels attained by respondents (n=6,140, %)

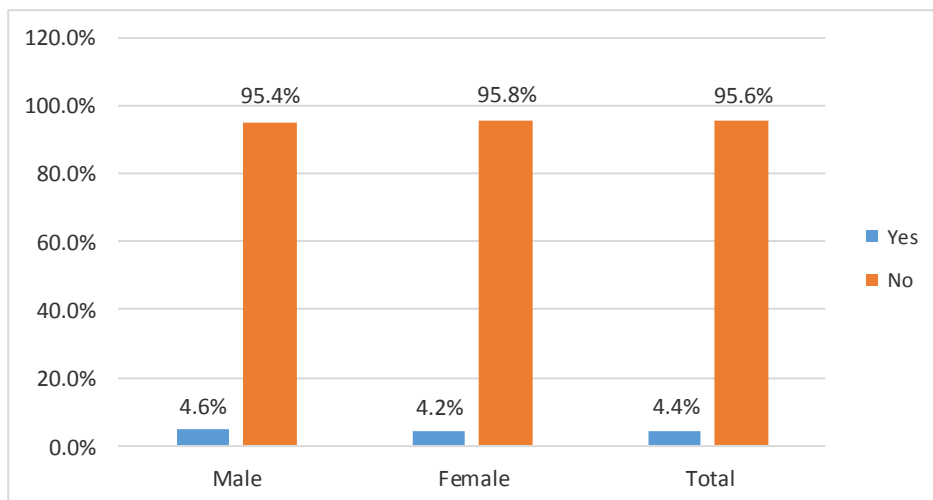
Response	Age			Sex		Total (%)
	10-13 (%)	14-17 (%)	18-24 (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Lower primary (P1-P4)	61.0	9.6	1.7	36.4	30.7	33.4
Upper Primary (P5-P7)	36.9	44.8	10.1	34.1	37.8	35.8
P7 vacation	-	0.2	0.1	0.1	-	0.1
O-Level (S1-S4)	1.9	44.4	51.8	23.5	26.1	24.7

S4 Vacation	-	0.0	2.1	0.2	0.4	0.3
A-Level (S5-S6)	-	0.7	16.4	3.3	2.0	2.6
S6 Vacation	-	-	1.0	0.2	0.1	0.2
University	-	0.1	6.7	0.9	1.1	1.0
Other (Tertiary etc.)	-	0.3	10.1	1.4	1.7	1.6

3.3. DISABILITY STATUS

Overall, 269 (representing 4.4%) of the respondents reported some form of disability. There were no significant differences between male and female respondents in terms of disability status.

Figure 2: Disability status (n=6,394)



By type of disability, a significant majority (67.2%) reported having some form of physical disability with slightly more males (72.7%) than females (63.8%). This was followed by visual impairment (23.4%) with more females (28.5%) than males (19.4%). Among those who reported mental disability, there were males (7.9%) than females (3.8%).

Table 4 Types of disability by sex (n=269, %)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Physical disability caused by cerebral palsy, amputation of a limb, paralysis	72.7	63.8	67.2
Visual disability including blindness and low vision disability	19.4	28.5	23.4
Mental disability, including psychiatric disability and learning disability	7.9	3.8	5.8
Speech impairment	2.9	1.5	2.2
Little people	0.0	1.5	0.7
Albinism	0.0	1.5	0.7

3.4. STATUS OF PARENTAL CARE

About eight in ten (84.2%) of the young girls and boys who participated in the study had both biological parents alive. About (2.8%) said they had only biological father alive and

(10.9%) had only their biological mothers alive. Meanwhile (1.5%) were total orphans and (0.5%) did not know whether their parents were alive or not. There were no significant differences across age and sex in terms of being orphaned. By nationality, more nationals (85.2%) said both biological parents were alive compared to refugees (64%).

Table 5 Proportion of young people whose biological parents are alive (n=6,140, %)

Parents who are alive	Age			Sex		Residence		Nationality		Total
	10-13	14-17	18-24	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Refugee	National	
Both	87.1	83.5	76.7	84.4	84.1	84.7	83.6	64.0	85.2	84.2
Father	1.9	3.4	4.3	2.8	2.9	2.66	3.1	3.4	2.8	2.8
Mother	9.5	11.2	15.1	10.9	10.9	11.1	11.1	22.5	10.4	10.9
None	1.0	1.6	3.0	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.6	6.8	1.2	1.5
Don't know (for both)	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.5	3.4	0.2	0.5

Slightly more girls (8.9%) than boys (8.4%) did not live with either of their biological parents. Relatedly, slightly more males (68.8%) than females (67.5%) said they live with both biological parents. This suggests that girls are more vulnerable than boys in view of the fact that, generally, living with parents is a protective factor against abuse.

About seven in ten participants (68.1%) said they live with both biological parents, with slightly more participants aged 10-13 (70.5%) saying they live with their both biological parents than the older participants aged 18-24 years (62.0%). This suggests that younger children are still in the care of both parents than older ones (some of whom live on their own).

Table 6 Young people that live with their biological parents (n=6,394)

	Age			Sex		Residence		Nationality		Total
	10-13	14-17	18-24	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Refugees	Non-refugee	
Yes, with both parent	70.5%	67.5%	62.0%	68.8%	67.5%	64.2%	65.2%	64.9%	60.6%	68.1%
Yes, with father only	4.6%	5.3%	4.6%	5.5%	4.3%	5.3%	4.9%	5.2%	1.5%	4.9%
Yes, with mother only	16.9%	18.9%	21.2%	17.3%	19.2%	19.8%	21.3%	20.0%	32.6%	18.3%
None	7.9%	8.3%	12.2%	8.4%	8.9%	10.7%	8.6%	9.8%	5.3%	8.7%

3.5 CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19

While the concept of care is often associated with “the action/process of helping those who are suffering”¹⁹, in this study, care was conceptualized to mean receipt of basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) by the young people. The person giving care could be a parent, friend, relative, grandparent or sibling. We asked participants to mention the person (or people) who were responsible for caring for them before and during the COVID-19 period. Our assumption was that care giving is important as a protective factor against the vulnerability of young people during COVID-19.

Results show men have become less involved exacerbating the care giving divide between men and women. There was a decline in the proportion of young persons who said they received care from their biological fathers during COVID-19 (39.9%) from 42.6% who received care from biological fathers before COVID-19. The proportion of young people who mentioned receiving care from their biological mothers increased from 43.5% before the COVID-19 pandemic to 46.4% during COVID-19 period. This may suggest that some men have left the care giving roles to women during the COVID-19 period. This could also have been occasioned by the significant disruptions in income flow for most households, where significant proportion of care givers are men. The challenge with this argument though is that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of young people received care from their mothers (43.5%) than their fathers (42.6%). This suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the divide care giving responsibilities between men and women, with women disproportionately bearing caring responsibilities. Girls and young women are disproportionately taking on the responsibilities to provide food, clothing, and any other basic needs including emotional care for families as a result of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a vacuum as some men retrocede the care giving arena. No wonder, as noted later, most young people have take-up economic activities, sometimes at the urging of their parents, as a way of supplementing household/family income to fill the void left by their fathers. What is also noticeable is a slight increase in care giving responsibilities for grandparents from (4.3%) before the COVID-19 period to (4.5%) during the COVID-19 period.

Before and during COVID-19, more males than females mentioned receiving care from their biological fathers while more females than males mentioned receiving care from their biological mothers. Before COVID-19, more females (46.1%) mentioned biological mothers as their source of care compared to (40.8%) of males/boys who mentioned biological mothers. Relatedly, more boys/males (45.3%) mentioned their fathers compared to girls/females who mentioned the same (40.1%). During COVID-19, the proportion of girls/females who mentioned care giving by their mothers increased to (48.8%) while that of boys/males mentioning their mothers also increased to (43.8%). At the same time, girls/females who received care from their biological fathers during COVID-19 reduced to (37.3%) and boys/males who mentioned biological fathers also reduced to (42.6%). This result corroborates the general evidence that care giving responsibilities for females have increased as a result of COVID-19.

Table 7: Care givers before and during COVID-19 (n=6,394, %)

	<i>Before COVID-19 (%)</i>			<i>During COVID-19 (%)</i>		
	<i>Male(%)</i>	<i>Female(</i>	<i>Total(%)</i>	<i>Male(</i>	<i>Female(</i>	<i>Total(</i>

¹⁹ Hermanns, M., & Mastel-Smith, B. (2012). Caregiving: A Qualitative Concept Analysis. Qualitative Report, 17, 75.

)	%))	%)	%)	%)
Biological Mother	40.8	46.1	43.5	43.8	48.8	46.4
Biological Father	45.3	40.1	42.6	42.5	37.2	39.9
Lives alone	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.3
Husband or Wife	0.1	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.2
Non-relative guardian	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5
Grandparent	4.7	3.9	4.3	4.9	4.1	4.5
Mother or Father's brother or sister (Aunt/Uncle)	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.8	2.6
Step-Parent	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Sibling	1.0	1.7	1.4	0.1	1.9	1.4
Other relative	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.4	0.3
Friend	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.0	0.04	0.02
Others	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.1	3.7	3.9

EARLY MARRIAGES AND ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES

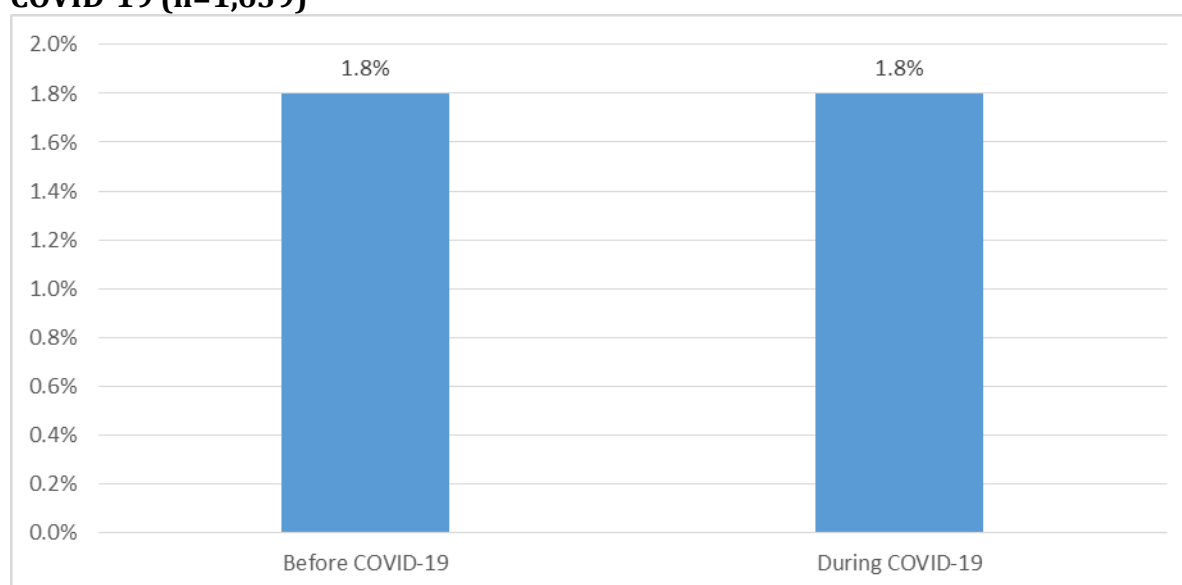
4.1. INTRODUCTION

Incidence of pregnancy among girls/ young women was established by asking them whether they had conceived during the COVID-19 (school) lockdown and whether they knew of their peers who had conceived. In addition, data on antenatal care visits was analysed from the HIMS database. This chapter contains the findings from both these sources. In the last section, the findings on the incidence of marriage among the girls and young women are presented.

4.2 ADOLESCENT PREGNANCIES

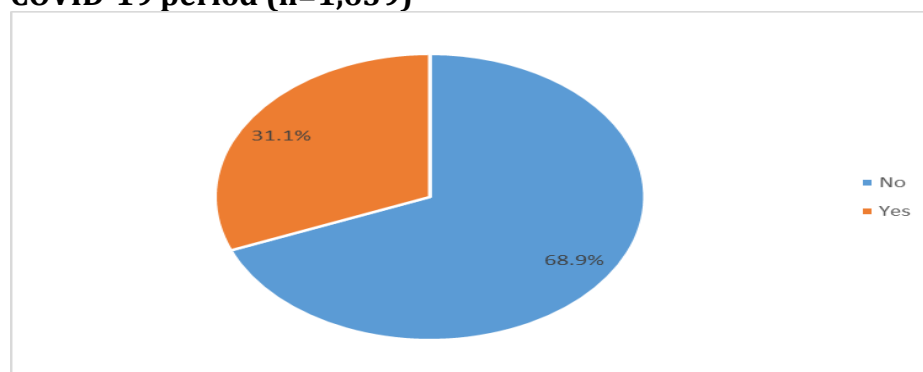
The findings were that 1.8% of the girls had conceived during lockdown (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of young girls who became pregnant before and during COVID-19 (n=1,639)



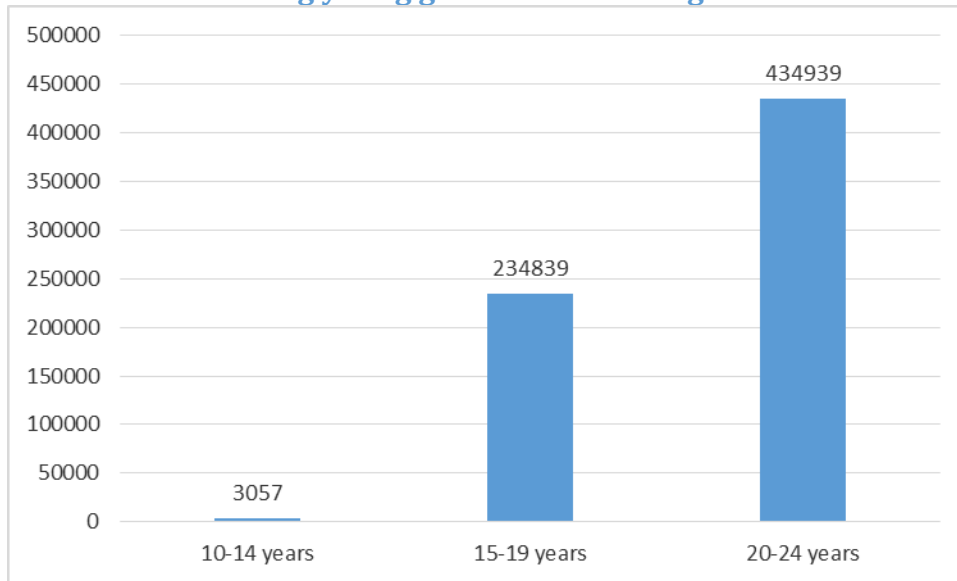
In addition, 31.1% of the participants indicated that they were aware of a peer who became pregnant during the same period (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Awareness of a peer (girl of same age) who became pregnant during COVID-19 period (n=1,639)



The inference from results presented in figure 4 above is that the incidence of pregnancy among girls and young women is probably higher than the 1.8 percent that the primary dataset indicated. Analysis of the HMIS database suggests a significant increase in pregnancies during COVID-19. Analysis of HMIS data indicates that between March and October 2020, a total of 672,831 girls and young women aged 10-24 years visited a health facility for their first ANC attendance. Out of these, 3,053 (0.5%), 234,839 (34.9%) and 434,939 (64.6%) of pregnancies were respectively recorded among children aged 10-14, 15-19- and 20-24-year olds (Figure 5).

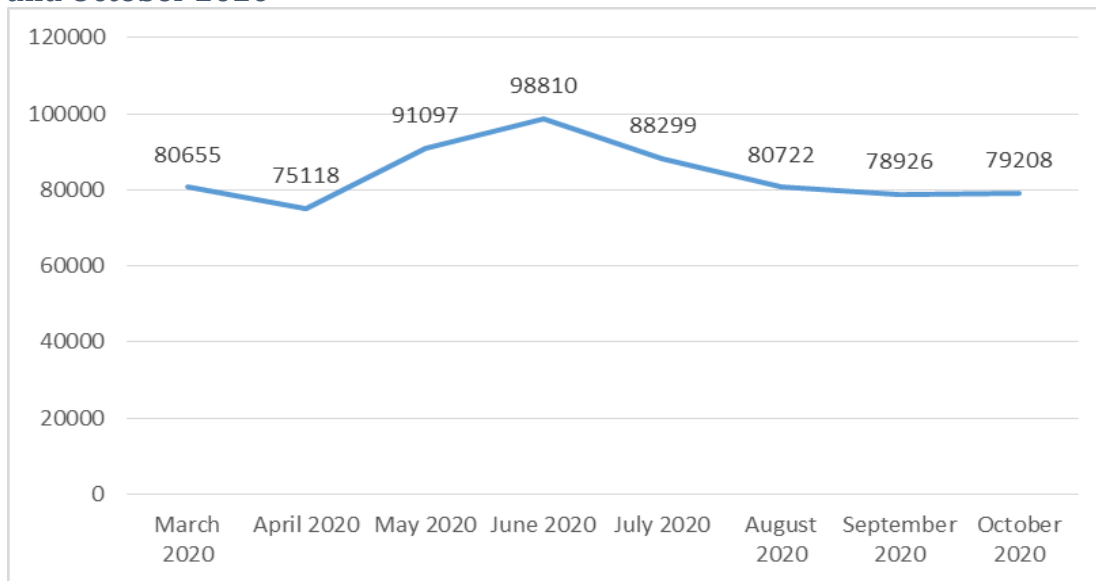
Figure 5: Total Pregnancies based on 1st ANC attendances between March and October 2020 among young girls and women aged 10-24



**** Source; HMIS Data, March- October 2020**

Indeed, the HMIS shows an increase of 22.5% of pregnancy cases among 10-24 year old between March 2020 (80,655) when the government announced lock down and June 2020 (98,810) (Figure 6). After June 2020, girls and young women visiting health facilities for their first ANC attendance began to fall and by October 2020, the ANC attendance were slowing back to pre-COVID-19 period.

Figure 6: Total number of 1st ANC attendance for 10-24-year-olds between March and October 2020

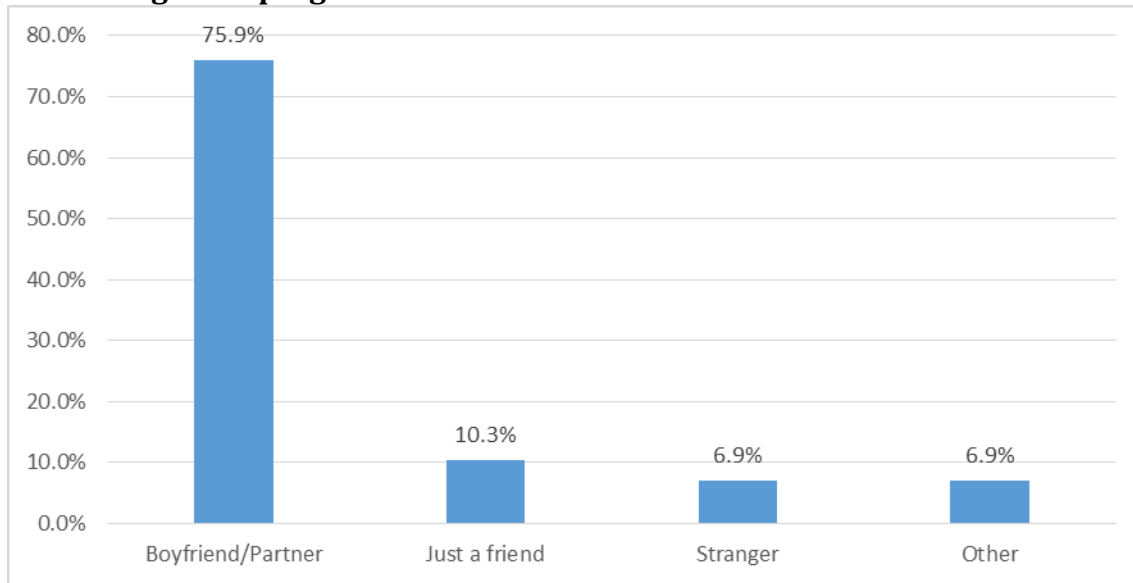


****:** Source; HMIS Data, March- October 2020

By location, Kampala (29,591), Wakiso (28,472), Mukono (12,308), Kamuli (12,224) and Kasese (11,634) registered the highest number of pregnancy cases among 10-24-year-olds during COVID-19. Equally affected were the districts of Mayuge (10,666), Jinja (10,113), Oyam (10,093) and Mbale (9,991). Overall, the least affected were Karenga (608), Moyo (1,042) and Nabilatuk (1,061). However, the variations could reflect differences in access to services and awareness of the existence and importance of ANC services as a result of which pregnant mothers are captured in the HMIS. It is also important to note that some women are attended to by traditional birth attendants and never visit healthcare facilities.

Most (75.9%) of the girls/ young women this study found to have conceived said that they had conceived of their partners (boyfriends) or men they characterised as “friends” (10.3%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of young girls who mentioned various persons responsible for making them pregnant



Of these girls/ young women, 75.9% were pregnant at the time of the study. The others had either secured an abortion, miscarried, or provided no information beyond indicating that they had conceived.

There were some slight differences across the various age groups (Figure 8). Majority of those who had become pregnant were aged 18 to 24 years. A possible explanation for this is that apart from being older (and, therefore, more disposed towards involvement in sexual activity), the pregnancy of women who are 18 or older is not prohibited by law. The challenge, however, is that these young women had been in school before lockdown and their conception might affect their ability to return to and succeed at school.

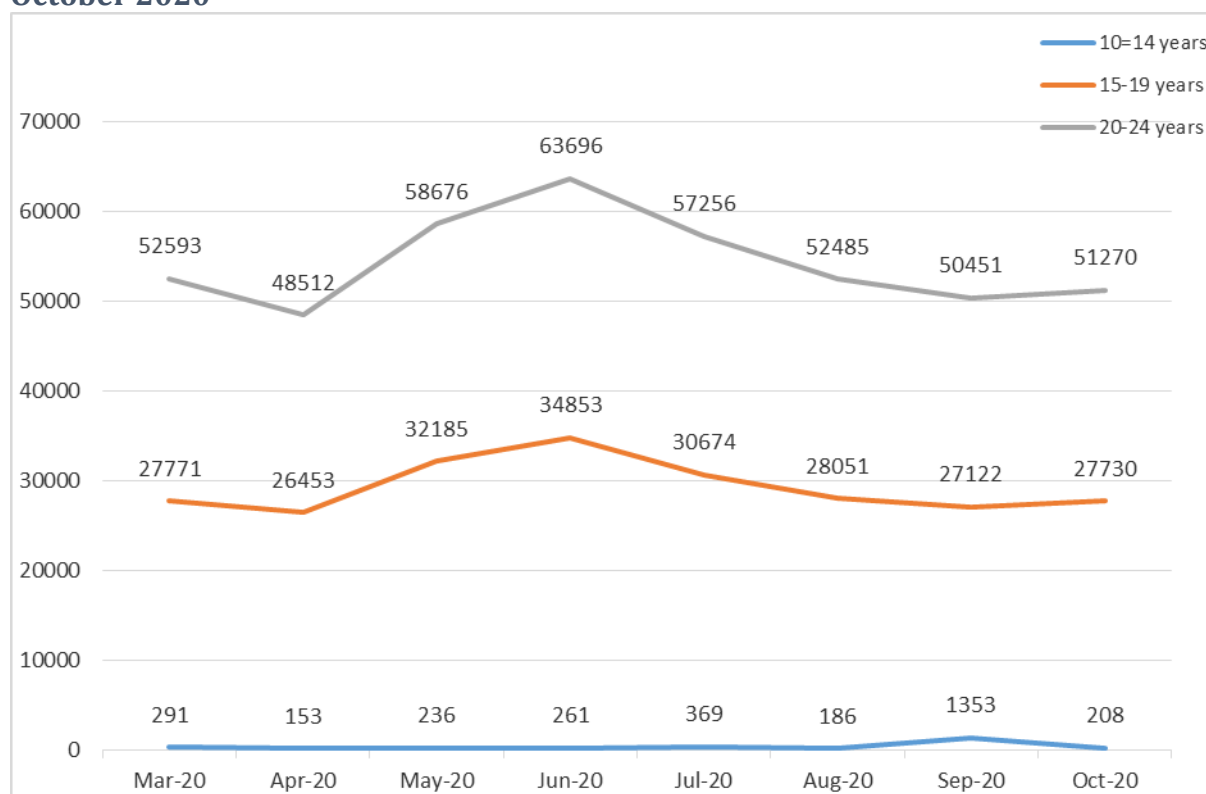
Among the 10-14-year olds, the number of young girls who attended first ANC, and by implication those who became pregnant increased by 366.5% from 290 in March 2020 when the country entered into a lock down to 1,353 in September 2020. The highest proportion of young girls aged 10-14 who became pregnant between March and October 2020 was recorded from Kikuube with over 1,106 pregnancy cases. Kikuube was followed by Sheema and Mbale with each district recording over one hundred cases. There were no cases of pregnancy among the 10-14-year olds recorded in Buhweju, Ibanda, Karenga, Kisoro, Nabilatuk and Rubanda. While it was not readily established why some of the districts were able to contain cases of pregnancy and others had high cases, it is possible to argue that since most of these cases are recorded at health facilities, some of the cases that remain in villages where there is no ANC services were never captured.

Among children aged 15-19, the highest number of ANC attendances/pregnancies were also recorded between March and June 2020. Over 27,771 pregnancy cases were registered in March 2020. By June 2020, over 34,853 cases had been registered showing an increase of **25.5%**. After June 2020, the cases of pregnancy started to decline and by October 2020, the cases had fallen to pre-COVID-19 period. The bulk of the cases of pregnancy among the 15-19 year olds between March and October 2020 were recorded

in Wakiso (6,826) and Kampala (5,507). These were followed by Kasese district (4,610), Oyam (4,448), Kamuli (4,346), Mayuge (3,984) and Mbale (3,763). The least cases were recorded in Karenga (135) and Moyo (264).

Among young women aged 20-24 years, the highest number of first ANC attendance was recorded between March and June 2020. The proportion of pregnancy cases increased by 21.1% from 52,593 cases in March to 63,696 cases in June 2020. After June 2020, cases recorded in the HMIS database started reducing and by October 2020, the recorded figure of 51,270 was better than the pre-COVID-19 cases of 52,593 recorded in March 2020. Between March and October 2020, the highest number of pregnancy cases were registered in Kampala (24,059) and Wakiso (21,595). This was followed by Mukono (8,639), Kamuli (7,847), Kasese (6,957), Jinja (6,950) and Mayuge (6,648). The least number of cases were recorded in Karenga (473), Moyo (777), Nabilatuk (794) and Ntoroko (855).

Figure 8: Trends in 1st ANC attendance for 10-24-year old between March and October 2020



** Source: HMIS Data, March- October 2020

Although comparable information was hardly available, analysis of total ANC attendances and re-attendances for the same period in 2019 shows no significant differences.

Table 8.1 Total ANC Attendance + Re-Attendance 2019 and 2020 among 10-24-year-old girls and young women

	<i>March-Oct 2019</i>	<i>March-Oct 2020</i>
March	248,540	241,142
April	260,189	239,236

May	266,959	255,358
June	250,802	281,471
July	275,935	295,972
August	269,774	326,551
September	446,974	281,308
October	275,736	278,050
Total	2,294,909	2,199,088

Source: HMIS Database, 2019/2020

4.3 PERCEIVED CAUSES OF THE SURGE IN PREGNANCIES DURING LOCKDOWN

The reasons cited for the surge in conception among girls/ young women are summarised in Table 8. The main ones of these reasons were: being idle (72.1%); poverty (34.5%); and lapses in parental care (23.9%). Most girls were idle, which gave them time to engage in sexual intercourse. As well, most girls have been unable to meet their personal needs and have ended up falling prey to men who are willing to give them some money in exchange for sex. This may be interpreted within the broader discourse on the effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods. There is evidence, even though anecdotal, that most parents and caregivers have had their livelihoods distorted, so they hardly afford the basic needs of the children in their care. It is therefore not surprising that girls are becoming pregnant in an attempt to meet their personal needs. Another reason was that parents are never at home to guide their children, leaving them susceptible to abuse. In fact, as a factor in fuelling pregnancies, gaps in parenting were highlighted by 6.6% of the participants who reported that some children have been forced by their parents to engage in sex to raise money towards household needs.

Table 9: Perceived reasons why pregnancy rates have increased during COVID-19 among young girls (n=2,921) **

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Most girls are idle, don't have what to do but engage in sex	72.1%
Most girls want to get money to meet their needs due to poverty in homes	34.5%
Most parents are never home to guide children	23.9%
Some girls are using sex as a means to survive	17.0%
Some girls are forced and influenced by their parents	6.6%
Don't know	4.4%
Some girls have given up hope of returning to school and feel they have grown old	3.8%
Schools used to offer protection, shut down of schools as a protective factor has exposed girls to abuse	2.4%
Some girls are not well guided by parents/caregivers or guardians	0.6%
Peer pressure	0.7%
Limited access to services	0.1%
Others	7.1%

** Multiple responses

4.4. PREVALENCE OF EARLY MARRIAGES AMONG GIRLS

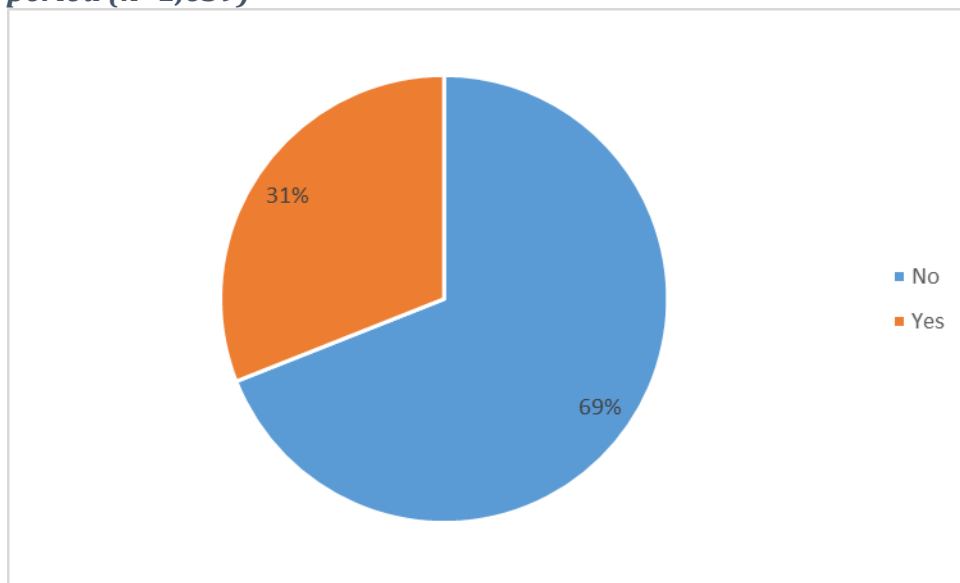
As far as marriage was concerned, only 0.9% of the participants were married before COVID-19 and about 1.2% were currently married. Of those who were currently married, over 35% married within the period of COVID-19 while 65% of those were married prior to COVID-19. This means that COVID-19 situation simply exacerbated an already existing problem.

Table 10: Proportion of young girls married before and during COVID-19

	<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>
Proportion of girls who were married before COVID-19? (n=1,217)		0.9%
Proportion of young girls who were married at the time of the study (n=1,639)		1.2%
<i>Period within which young girls were married</i>		
	Within last seven months (from April 2020)	35%
	Seven months to one year ago	25%
	More than a year ago	40%

About 31% of all the respondents said they were aware of a peer who got married during COVID-19 period. Again, just like pregnancy, it appears that although the proportion of young girls who said they were married during COVID-19 was low, overall there are indicators that there was a much bigger proportion of girls who got married during COVID-19.

Figure 9: Awareness of a girl or young women who got married during COVID-19 period (n=1,639)

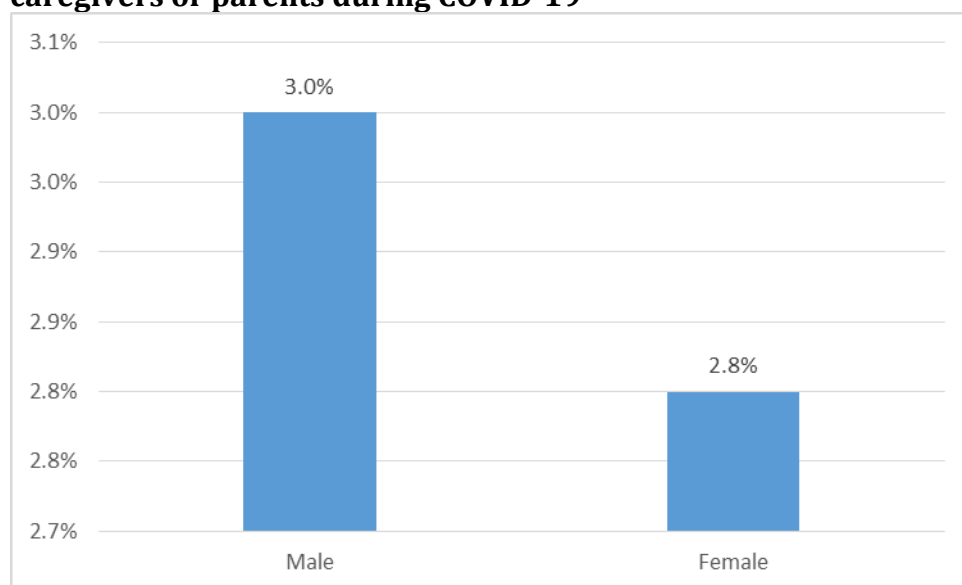


4.5. PRESSURE TO GET MARRIED DURING COVID-19 AMONG YOUNG GIRLS

About 2.8% of all the young girls who participated in the study said they have been encouraged or even pressured by their parents or caregivers to get married during COVID-19 period. Further discussions with girls and young women indicated that the pressure to get married was also occasioned by the fact that their marriage would help the family receive money and other goods because families were experiencing financial difficulties. Getting married was seen as a quick escape from the financial hurdles faced

by families. Meanwhile, results also show that males (3.0%) experienced pressure from parents/caregivers to marry.

Figure 10: Proportion (%) of females and males pressured to get married by caregivers or parents during COVID-19



It was also mentioned that pressure from parents and caregivers to get married was occasioned by closure of schools. Girls who participated in the study mentioned that their parents had pressured them to get married since there was no hope for government to reopen schools. At the time of writing this report, the government proposed staggered reopening of schools. It is not clear how this proposal helped to reduce such anxieties and fears. However, given that not all learners are due to restart, it is possible that some parents are still anxious about learning for their children. This also speaks to the general desperation that most participants expressed in this study about the general sense of hopelessness as to when schools will ever open for the learners. To some parents it appears that the prolonged closure of schools has a direct impact on several other decisions including marriage that many girls are subjected to. As we argue later, this has the danger of rolling back the gains Uganda has made over the years in advancing girl child education.

Table 11: Reasons why females/males were pressured to get married during COVID-19

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Female (n=40)</i>	<i>Males (45)</i>
My family believes I will be safer as a result of my marriage	15.2%	-
Because I made someone pregnant	-	4.4%
They think I am now mature to marry	-	51.1%
My family will receive money or goods from my spouse/ their family as a result of my marriage	10.9%	-
My family has trouble meeting basic needs, and will no longer have to support me after my marriage	8.7%	-
It is normal to get married at my age because my parents believe I am old enough	30.4%	17.8%
When schools closed my family decided I should get	8.7%	11.1%

	married		
	Other	26.1%	15.6%

**** Multiple response**

DRIVERS OF SEXUAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG SCHOOL GOING GIRLS

5.0. INTRODUCTION

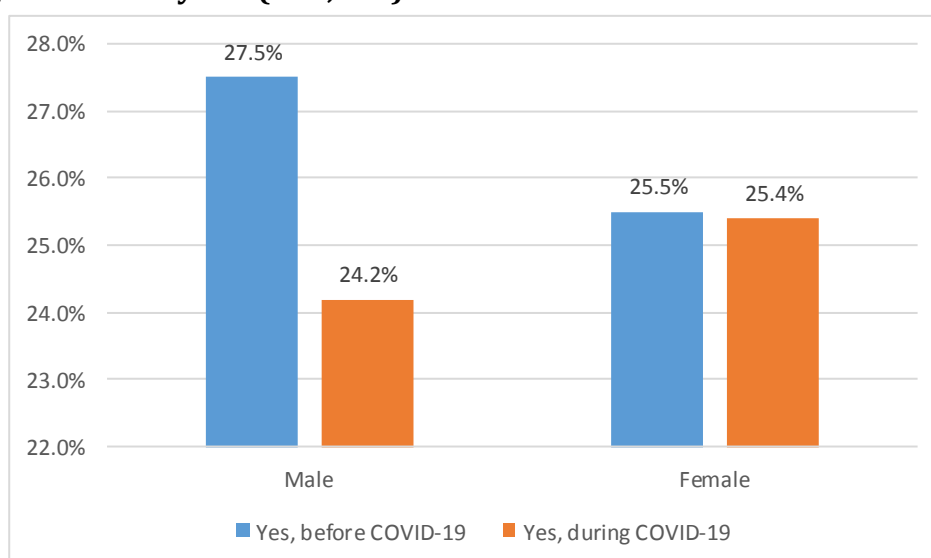
At the commencement of the study, media and police reports pointed to increased involvement of school going girls in sex, increased early marriages and teenage pregnancies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter contains information that corroborates these reports. Nevertheless, quality information on the drivers of these problems was generally non-existent. Thus, this study delved into these drivers. This chapter identifies the drivers as: Involvement in intimate relationships; disrupted livelihood sources and increasing poverty levels; failed parenting and the shift in the burden of care; limited access to adolescent sexual reproductive health information (ASRH) and services; lack of life skills among young people; increased exposure to violence; increased exposure to online sexual exploitation; indolence.

5.1. SEXUAL BEHAVIORS OF GIRLS AND BOYS BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19

5.1.1. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

The proportion of girls that had an intimate partner remained almost the same before COVID-19 (25.5%) and during COVID-19 (25.4%) compared to boys before COVID-19 (27.5%) and during COVID-19 (24.2%). The results probably suggest risk factors for girls' engagement in intimate relationships did not change much due to COVID-19 compared to boys. It also implies that for girls, the levels of vulnerability remained the same even when schools closed.

Figure 11: Proportion (%) of young people that had intimate partners before and during COVID-19 by sex (n=3,158)



Across age groups, more adolescents aged 18-24 years had a sexual partner than those aged 14-17 years. Slightly more adolescents aged 14-17 years (15.4%) had a sexual partner during COVID-19 compared to before COVID-19 (14.9%). More girls/females (16.0%) than boys/males (15.0%) reported having intimate partners during COVID-19.

Table 12: Proportion (%ge) of young people that had intimate partners before and during COVID-19 (n=3,158)

	14-17 (%)			18-24 (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes, before COVID-19	14.8%	15.0%	14.9%	55.0%	56.3%	55.6%
Yes, during COVID-19	15.0%	16.0%	15.4%	44.4%	53.1%	48.4%

While the proportion of girls and young women engaged in intimate relationships reduced in rural areas from 25.5% before COVID-19 to 23.6% during COVID-19, in urban areas, there was an increase from 23.8% to 26.9%. The highest increase was reported among males from 19.7% before COVID-19 to 25.2% during COVID-19 while that of females stagnated at 27.1%. What is clear also is that even when the proportion of males engaged in intimate sexual relations reduced, it remains relatively lower than that of females at 27.1% in urban areas and almost equal to the proportion of girls in rural areas who were engaged in intimate relationships. This means that exposure to risk factors that lead to teenage and adolescent pregnancies are prevalent in urban than rural areas. It is not surprising that the urban areas of Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono also ranked high among girls who became pregnant during COVID-19.

Table 13: Proportion (%) of young people that had intimate partners before and during COVID-19 (n=3,158)

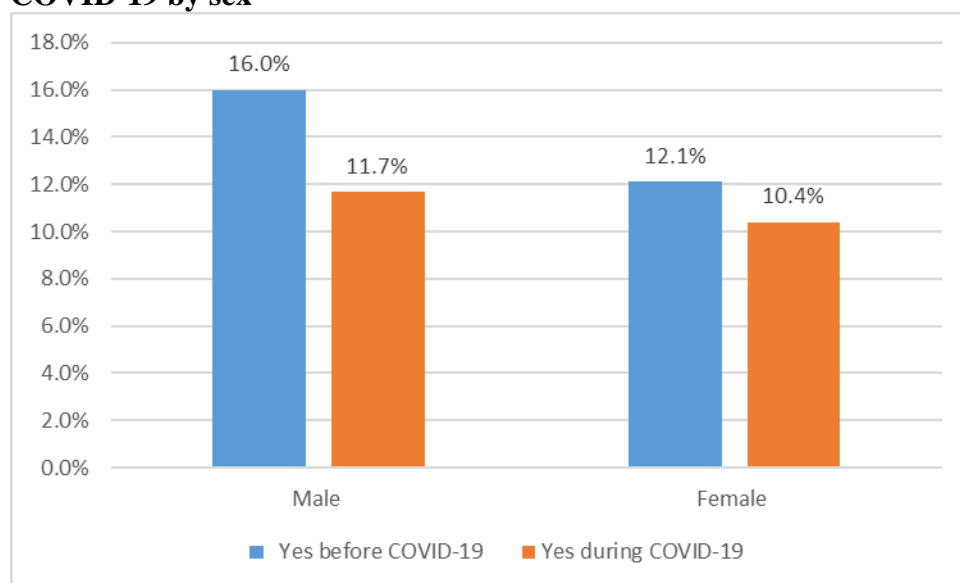
	Refugee (%)			Non-refugee (%)			Urban (%)			Rural (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes, before COVID-19	19.7	27.9	23.8	27.9	25.4	26.6	19.7	27.9	23.8	27.1	24.0	25.5
Yes, during COVID-19	24.6	23.0	23.8	24.1	25.5	24.9	25.2	27.1	26.9	23.1	24.0	23.6

5.1.2. SEXUAL PRACTICES BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19

The proportion of young people who say they had sexual intercourse did not significantly change before and during COVID-19. In fact, the proportion of young people who had sexual intercourse reduced slightly from 14.0% of participants who said they had sexual intercourse before COVID-19 to 11.0% of those who had sexual intercourse during COVID-19.

By sex and age of respondents, there was a significant drop among young people aged 18-24 years from 32.2% before COVID-19 to 25.5% during COVID-19 compared to those aged 14-17. However, the significant reduction notwithstanding, the proportion of young people aged 18-24 who had sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19 remains statistically significant and much higher than those aged 14-17 years. Between boys and girls, the differences across are not statistically significant although boys who had sexual intercourse were slightly higher before (16.0%) and during COVID-19 (11.7%) than the proportion of girls who had sexual intercourse before (12.2%) and during COVID-19 (10.4%).

Figure 12: Proportion of young people who had sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19 by sex



By age, there was a decline in the proportion of girls/females and boys/males who reported engaging in sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19 for all age groups. For example, there was a decline of 1.7% among those aged 14-17 from 6.7% before COVID-19 to 5.2% during COVID-19. For those aged 18-24, there was a decline of 6.7% from 32.2% before COVID-19 to 25.5% during COVID-19. While the decline occurred across sex of respondents, the reduction in proportions for girls/females occurred only marginally compared to the boys/males across all age groups. For example, among respondents aged 14-17 years there was a decline of 1.7% among males/boys compared to almost zero decline of 0.9% among females. Among those aged, 18-24, there was a decline of 9.8% among males/boys while females registered a marginal reduction of only 3.3%. Overall, the results suggest that females/girls continue to experience risk factors that expose them to sexual engagement compared to boys/males.

Table 14: Proportion (%) of respondents who had sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19 by sex and age

	14-17 (n=2,260)			18-24 (n=898)			P-value
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Yes, before COVID-19	7.7%	5.9%	6.7	33.8%	30.3%	32.2%	Pr=0.000
Yes, during COVID-19	6.0%	5.0%	5.2	24.0%	27.0%	25.5%	Pr=0.000

Results show that girls in the refugee settlements who engaged in sexual intercourse increased from 11.5% before COVID-19 to 13.1% during COVID-19. This is against the findings that while all other categories of females/girls and boys who engaged in sexual intercourse reduced or did not change, girls and young women in the refugee settlement were more exposed to sexual intercourse than others. Critical observations also show that for most cases, boys/males who engaged in sexual intercourse declined while the proportion of girls either remained the same or declined only marginally.

Table 15: % of respondents who had sexual intercourse before and during COVID-19 by sex and age

	<i>Refugee (n=122)</i>			<i>Non refugee (n=3,036)</i>			<i>Urban (n=1,513)</i>			<i>Rural (n=1,645)</i>		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes before COVID-19	16.4	11.5	13.9	16.0	12.1	13.9	16.2	13.7	14.9	15.8	10.7	13.07
Yes during COVID-19	13.1	13.1	13.1	11.6	10.3	10.9	12.1	11.7	11.9	11.2	9.2	10.2

5.1.3. MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS DURING COVID-19

About seven in every ten young women and men (69.7%) had one sexual partner, while 17.2% reported two sexual partners while 13.1% had three or more sexual partners. More males/boys (38.4%) reported having two or more sexual partners during COVID-19 period compared to girls/females (21.8%) who reported the same.

Table 16: Proportion of young girls and boys with multiple sexual partners (n=347)

<i>Number of sexual partners</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
1	61.6%	78.2%	69.7%
2	22.6%	11.8%	17.2%
3+	15.8%	10.0%	13.1%

5.2. DRIVERS OF SEXUAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS DURING COVID-19

While eight in every ten (85.3%) respondents said they had sexual intercourse during COVID-19 because they simply wanted, results show that girls were more susceptible to risk factors that increased exposure to engagement in sexual intercourse during COVID-19 than boys. For example, among those who said they were forced or raped (2.6%), majority were girls/young women (4.7%) compared to boys/young men (0.6%). In addition, while boys/young men did not mention experiencing sexual violence, 5.3% and 4.1% of girls and young women engaged in sexual intercourse because they were offered money in exchange for sex and other things like food and accommodation respectively. Relatedly, 1.2% of the girls said they engaged in sexual intercourse because they wanted money to support family which was not the case with the boys and young men in the study. Again, this highlights the level of exposure to sexual violence and abuse that girls find themselves in.

Table 17: Reasons why young people had sexual intercourse during COVID-19 (n=363)

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
I was forced/raped	0.6%	4.7%	2.6%

I wanted to have sex	89.3%	81.2%	85.3%
I was offered money in exchange	0.0%	5.3%	2.6%
I was offered other things like food, accommodation	0.0%	4.1%	2.0%
I wanted money to support my family	0.0%	1.2%	0.6%
My parents asked me to have sex so as to get money	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Others	12.4%	9.4%	11.0%

Discussions with various stakeholders indicate that the drivers of sexual engagement among school going girls are divergent in nature and include: economic; socio-cultural; limited access to ASRH services; exposure to sexual and other forms of violence; limited parental support or poor parenting skills and disruption in school routine that has left a significant proportion of young people idle and exposed to abuse.

Below, we examine some of these drivers.

5.2.1. DISRUPTED LIVELIHOOD SOURCES AND INCREASING POVERTY LEVELS

COVID-19 has caused untold loss of livelihood for most parents and caregivers. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, a very large population did not have any cover. As most parents lost their jobs, and ultimately their source of livelihood, most families have slid into poverty. Thus, there are challenges that have significant implications leading to susceptibility of girls and young women to pregnancy and early marriages. As most families slid into poverty, there has been a reduction in the ability of parents to meet the needs of young people, especially girls. Girls have special needs, including requirements for menstrual hygiene management.

Some families really have a high number of children, they cannot feed their children [and] they cannot provide the basic needs. The resources are strained so you realise some of these girls when they are at school mostly boarding, they have an opportunity of getting some of the requirements. Like parents may consider buying sanitary towels when girls are going back to boarding school. But when girls are at home, it's not an issue, it's not [seen] as [an] emergency...So we have seen such scenarios now, girls coming out to look for that kind of support, facilitation outside the home. **(Interview, official from UNFPA)**

Due to poverty, most parents/caregivers are not prioritizing the needs of girls and boys. At the end of the day, specific needs of girls are not given attention at all. Basic requirements of girls have been thrown in the abyss of priorities. In the struggle to meet their needs, most girls have been exposed to abuse and sexual violence.

Parents are poor but also they are not prioritizing basic needs of girls. For instance, with girls that are becoming pregnant, we tried to do some questioning in some of the districts. They were telling us that girls are becoming pregnant for simple things like a sanitary pad **(Interview, official from MoES)**.

In addition, poverty has pushed a significant number of young people into hunger. About 23.8% of participants said the number of meals or times they have been eating during COVID-19 has reduced compared to before COVID-19. About seven in every ten (74.7%) participants said the main reason why the number of times or meals eaten has reduced is because their families could no longer afford food during COVID-19 period.

In fact, at least two in every ten participants (20.2%) said they went to bed hungry at least once a week before the survey. Additionally, eight in every ten participants (85.9%) said the reason they went to bed hungry was that there was no food at home. This finding therefore suggests that COVID-19 has increased hunger among the young people. The consequences of this hunger has partially increased sexual engagement. For example, it is not surprising that 29.4% of the young people used money given to them at the last pay to cater for their food related expenses and about 2.0% said that the reason why they engaged in sexual intercourse was mainly because they were offered food in exchange for sex.

Poverty occasioned by lock down on parents has pushed young people into jobs that put them at risk of abuse. Some girls have been given away in exchange for food, money and other essentials to sustain families.

(...) there was a case. A man went to Jinja and trafficked two girls. He told their parents that *“I am giving you food such that I take these children to Kampala to work for me”*. When the children came, he turned them into sex slaves. Because the parents were desperate, they even thanked him for giving them food. It was that easy. But we alerted the Police and worked with them to resettle the girls to their home (...). Even when we reached the home, we found their other siblings feeding on jackfruit. They had nothing to eat. So, this man used that as an advantage to easily attract these girls from the village. **(KII, official from UYDEL)²⁰**

We learnt of cases where girls were being urged by their parents to have sex in exchange for money and contribute to household welfare. From the survey results, 0.6% said the reason why they engaged in sexual intercourse was because *“my parents asked me to have sex so as to get money”*.

Relatedly, a significant number of girls and boys are being pushed into marriage in order for families to get money to feed households. For example, 2.8% of young people said they have been encouraged by their parents/caregivers to get married during COVID-19. Of those who were encouraged to marry, 10.9% said they were encouraged to marry because of the perception that their families would receive money or goods while 8.7% said their families were in trouble meeting the basic needs. Meanwhile, about 9.5% said they were forced to marry during COVID-19. These pressures occasioned during COVID-19 imply that young people have been exposed to increased risks for sexual engagement.

5.2.2. POOR PARENTING AND THE SHIFT IN THE BURDEN OF CARE

Parents are “absent” from homes while young people are there. Consequently, these parents are not playing their parenting role of guiding the children and young people in their care. While children were accustomed to being at school where their lives are routinely structured, when COVID-19 struck, most parents were not ready to substitute the school environment. Despite the fact that children were home, parents are not

²⁰ See Musinguzi et al. (2020) Effect of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of Children in Uganda. Unpublished report. AfriChild Centre, Makerere University, Kampala

particularly used to offering and doing things routinely and this has had significant disruptions in the lives of the children.

So, for me I will say what could be one of the drivers is parents are not playing their role. I appreciate this is a hard situation and I know there are people struggling to make ends meet but sometimes as far as these issues are concerned, it is not about the money, it is about your presence as a parent in the life of this child who is going through a transition. So for me that could be one of the drivers. **(Interview, official from MoES)**

It was also revealed that some parents have taken advantage of COVID-19 to coerce their girl children into marriage and eventually into sex leading to pregnancies.

We got cases in Northern Uganda where parents had to marry off their girls. Because one, they looked at a year [of school lockdown] as a gone period. Girls who were in P.7, girls who were in senior 4, girls who were in senior 6, and now this year is gone. They don't know where they will get more money to take them to school in the following year. So they decided to marry them off to get dowry and capital for business as they had lost business. So the only source of income was to marry off the girl, get dowry, and money then start a business **(Interview, official from UNFPA).**

What is clear is that although the practice of forced marriage was rife in some communities before COVID-19, COVID-19 exacerbated social norms that disproportionately disadvantage girls and exposed them to early marriage.

Before COVID-19, on average, about 86.1% of the 10-24-year olds were being directly cared for by their biological parents. During COVID-19, there is a noticeable shift in parental care and responsibilities towards children. While the proportion of children who said their fathers provided the much-needed care dropped from (42.6%) before COVID-19 to (39.8%) during COVID-19, the burden of care shifted to mothers. The proportion of respondents who receive care from mothers increased from (43.5%) before COVID-19 to (46.3%) during COVID-19. The increased care burden for mothers was noted across all age groups and gender (Table 18).

Table 18: Parental care before and during closure of schools by age group

Direct parental care	10-13 (%)			14-17(%)			18-24(%)			(%)
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	Total
Before COVID-19										
Biological Mother	42.5	45.3	43.9%	40.8	48.6	45%	35.1	42.1	38.3%	43.5%
Biological Father	45.2	41.6	43.4%	46.5	38.1	42%	43.0	40.6	41.9%	42.6%
During COVID-19										
Biological Mother	46.1	49.0	47.5%	42.4	50.5	46.8%	39.7	43.1	41.2%	46.3%
Biological Father	40.8	37.7	39.3%	46.9	35.7	40.8%	39.4	40.2	39.7%	39.8%

5.2.3. LIMITED ACCESS TO ADOLESCENT SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION AND SERVICES

COVID-19 disrupted access to ASRH services and information for young people. At the beginning of the pandemic, several service providers including those providing ASRH services were locked out as non-essential service providers. This created a gap in service delivery. Particularly for young girls and boys, the closure of schools disrupted access to information on ASRH. It is important to note that most schools are critical points of access to information on ASRH. Schools have senior women and men teachers who provide information on a regular basis to school going children.

One there is an information gap relating to sexual and reproductive health. You will realize that now that the schools are closed, structured programmes that put these girls together to partly divert their mind from thinking about sexual relations or catching up with their boyfriends or girlfriends; that window is blocked. You know in the institutions at least there are people who are charged with having discussions related to sexual and reproductive health for instance the senior women in the schools. And right now, the senior women, the matrons are nowhere in the puzzle **(KII, official from Reproductive Health Uganda)**.

In addition, some of the youth friendly service points including youth corners have closed or scaled down their operations. While some young people fear to move into these spaces to get services for fear of catching COVID-19, some of the youth corners have closed because of failure to work within the SOPs.

There are a number of youth corners that are not operating to the maximum because of the desire to reduce contact amongst individuals. So, you realise that even the drop in centres around the country have really reduced because of that. You can't afford providing every person who comes into your premises a mask because of the cost implication. **(KII, official from Reproductive Health Uganda)**

Young people now spend a lot of time at home either with parents/caregivers or friends. Yet for most part, the parents lack the most important skills of talking about and discussing key ASRH issues with their children. Therefore, while the children are supposed to be getting information from their parents, the parents are not equipped to provide the much-needed information.

Locally, in communities sexual and health discussions are some of those discussions that are not common. Because of the cultural connotations and religious beliefs. We have kept quiet on discussing issues to do with sexual and reproductive health. And when it specifically gets to sexual relations, that is a no-go zone. We don't want to discuss issues. Parents are not there to discuss these issues with their children so there is a dilemma. Young people are not getting this information. **(KII, Reproductive Health Uganda)**

In the absence of parent-child communication, friends are the most immediate source of information for young people, yet "friends will always give you information that is not, at times credible", noted an official from RHU during the interview. All these challenges mean that the young people are unable to access information to guide decision-making thereby increasing the risks associated with exposure to sexual engagement.

5.2.4. LACK OF LIFE SKILLS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Increase in sexual engagement has been linked to lack of life skills among the young people. Life skills relate to: access to information; a sense of empowerment and self-worth among young people, and knowing that they have the confidence to refuse taking and making certain decisions if they are not ready for the decisions and their consequences. It is also about knowing the consequences of certain decisions and being able to make the best decisions.

Then the other issue that we should also really look at is the lack of life skills and I think these would have been imparted to these young people when they were at school. But in most cases, I think this is an area that was really not given emphasis because it does not mean that because your parents are poor, maybe you cannot afford the basic requirements and then you go and sleep around. So, lack of life skills, people failing to know where they want to go, to be able to make decisions concerning their lives and they are simply diverted by the *bodaboda* men, people who are making chapattis, it becomes a challenge. (Interview, official from MoES)

However, results from the survey showed a mixed picture. For example, while 86.9% of young people said they feel confident they can refuse sex if they do not desire it, only 63.4% said they feel confident they can have sex willingly and at the right time, and only 62.8% said they feel confident they can seek a pregnancy test from a nearby health facility (Table 19).

Table 19: Young people levels of confidence as indicator of life skills

	<i>I feel confident that I can refuse sex if I do not desire it (n=3,158)</i>			<i>I feel confident I can have sex when I want and at the right time (n=6,139)</i>			<i>I feel confident I can visit a nearby health facility for a pregnancy test (n=3,157)</i>			<i>I feel confident I can marry when I want and at the right time (n=6,139)</i>	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Agree	85.9	87.9	86.9%	63.4	63.5	63.4%	53.7	71.4	62.8%	66.6	65.7
Disagree	8.8	8.2	8.5%	17.9	20.7	19.3%	23.4	19.7	21.5%	16.6	20.3
Don't know	5.3	3.9	4.6%	18.7	15.8	17.2%	23.0	8.9	15.7%	16.8	14.0

The young people, both male and female, found it easier to talk to their mothers or female guardians than their fathers or male guardians. The feeling of confidence about choosing to get married at the right time, increases with age. On average, the variation between males and females who feel they can make a choice at the right time is not big at 66.6% for males and 65.7% for females. Likewise, the confidence about having a choice and having sex at the appropriate time increases with age. On average those who feel this way across the age groups are 63.4% males and 63.5% females. While the variation on choice for sex and marriage and having both at the appropriate time does not vary much across the sexes, it is quite low in terms of percentage. This means over 30% males and females on average do not feel empowered in terms of having a choice to have sex or marriage at the appropriate time. This lack of confidence is a likely driver and is likely to affect the 10-13 most followed by the 14-17 age groups.

5.2.5. INCREASED EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Upticks in domestic violence were reported in several parts of the country immediately after stay-at-home directives were announced. In this study, this emerged as an area of concern and a possible driver for sexual engagement. It was noted that many of the school going girls come from homes which have existing domestic violence. This violence was likely to increase when parents and children were confined at home for such long periods. In addition, some are also sharing the same space with sexual perpetrators. Children have been rendered more vulnerable due to the stress that comes with the fear of contracting COVID-19, along with the restricted movement during the time of the total lockdown, where permission was required from local and government leaders for one to move around. Adults on the other hand have been subject to increased alcoholism and drug abuse.

The concept of violence is used here to mean any “physical, emotional or mental injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse, intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against an individual which may result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation”²¹. Studies²² have linked sexual abuse and lack of control over sex with increased likelihood of teenage pregnancy among girls.

The experiences of sexual violence during COVID-19 depict a precarious situation for girls compared to boys. During COVID-19, over 5.4% of the girls/young women reported experiencing abusive sexual touching compared to 1.8% of boys/males. Additionally, slightly more females (0.6%) than males (0.2%) experienced pressured sex before and during COVID-19 compared to boys/males. Unlike males or boys who were sexually exploited by friends (75.0%) and romantic partners (25.0%), for female or girls, they experienced a whole range of abusers including mainly friends (37.8%) followed by romantic partners (29.7%), strangers (8.1%) as well as neighbors (5.4%) and community including religious leaders (5.4%). This suggests that girls’ experiences of sexual exploitation are diverse and come from all kinds of individuals. Results also show that girls are more vulnerable to abuse than boys.

Therefore, the general perception is that COVID-19 has increased various forms of sexual violence, which have disproportionately affected girls/females. When asked if they perceived sexual violence to have either increased or decreased during COVID-19. Results show that about a quarter (25.0%) of young girls and boys believe that sexual violence has increased compared to the period before COVID-19.

Table 20: Proportion of young people who say whether sexual violence has increased, decreased or remained the same during COVID-19 (n=6,394)

	<i>Age %</i>			<i>Sex %</i>		<i>%</i>
	<i>10-13</i>	<i>14-17</i>	<i>18-24</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Increased	13.7%	30.6%	48.3%	23.5%	26.4%	25.0%
Decreased	4.6%	7.0%	5.7%	5.7%	5.6%	5.6%
Remained the same	5.9%	7.1%	8.4%	6.2%	7.2%	6.7%
Don’t know	75.8%	55.4%	37.7%	64.6%	60.9%	62.7%

²¹ Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. Violence against Children in Uganda: Findings from a National Survey, 2015. Kampala, Uganda: UNICEF, 2015

²² Ochen, A. M., Chi, P. C., & Lawoko, S. (2019). Predictors of teenage pregnancy among girls aged 13–19 years in Uganda: a community based case-control study. BMC pregnancy and childbirth, 19(1), 1-14.

When asked why they thought that sexual violence had increased during COVID-19, a significant proportion (43.9%) said that it's because most girls are idle and most girls do not have what to do following school closure. Others mentioned that some girls have been forced by circumstances of poverty in homes into transactional sex (22.2%) and most parents are never home to guide and protect the girls against sexual violence (15.6%). About 6.2% of the girls who we participated in the study also noted that most girls are confined in an environment they are not used to with their abusers. About 1.5% said that increased domestic violence has also increased the level of exposure to sexual violence among girls.

Table 21: Reasons why some young girls thought sexual violence had increased during COVID-19 (n=1,138)

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>%ge</i>
Most girls are idle, don't have what to do following closure of schools	43.9%
Some girls have been forced by circumstances of poverty in homes into transactional sex	22.2%
Most parents are never home to guide girls	15.6%
Some girls have been forced by circumstances of poverty into transactional sex	6.4%
Most girls are confined in an environment they are not used to with abusers	6.2%
Domestic Violence has exposed girls to sexual violence	1.5%
Some parents lack skills to protect their children, including talking to them about sexual violence	1.0%
I don't know	3.1%

When schools were closed and the country entered into a lockdown, young girls and boys spent time at home with their parents, siblings or relatives or generally people known to them who also became their main abusers. Contrary to the general perception that people close to children offer protection against harm, during the COVID-19 pandemic, violence was perpetuated by people close to the children.

Before the lock down, we used to think that schools were areas where violence was being perpetrated but, this has showed us that may be there is a lot that we are not doing as a country. Maybe we have been trying to address the symptoms and not going to the root causes. Right now, children are with the families, they are with their parents but all these abuses are happening to them. **(Interview, official from MoES)**

Given that children are spending more time with their abusers, reporting abuse was almost non-existent. Fear and self-blame were cited as the main reasons. Slightly more girls (69.7%) did not report anywhere compared to males (67.4%) when they were sexually exploited. Fear (34.0%) was the most reported reason why they did not report anywhere, followed by those who did not report because they did not think it was a problem (18.4%) followed by those who said they did not report anywhere (14.2%) and those who said reporting would have been embarrassing for the themselves and their families (13.5%).

Reporting forced sex was also low. A significant proportion (44.4%) said they just feared to report, followed by those who said they did not think it was a problem (37.0%), followed by those who said that they knew nothing would be done (18.5%) and those who said they did not know where to report (18.5%).

In addition, about seven in ten participants (65.9%) did not report anywhere when they experienced any form of pressured sex. Among the main reasons mentioned for failure to report was that they just feared (44.4%), followed by those who said they did not think that the violence experienced was a problem (29.6%). About 14.8% also said that reporting would be embarrassing for themselves and family and 14.8% said that they did not report anywhere because they did not know where to report. Among the young people aged 10-13 years the only reason why they did not report pressured sex was because reporting would be an embarrassment for self and family.

Relatedly, eight in every ten (78.4%) respondents did not report anywhere when they experienced physical abuse for reasons ranging from self-blame, fear and a general feeling that reporting would not solve anything. About four in every ten (43.1%) boys and girls said that they did not report because they felt it was their own fault that they were physically violated. This result depicts self-blame on the survivors of violence, should be understood within the broader cultural context where there is a tendency to justify physical violence against young people especially that which is perpetrated by the adult caregivers. Children are socialized to believe and tolerate certain forms of violence and therefore look at it as normal. Between girls and boys, results show that more girls (45.5%) than boys (40.6%) mentioned that they did not report because they felt it was their fault, which relates to a deeply rooted cultural beliefs that socializes girls to accept violence as normal. For example, 16.8% of young girls and boys did not think that being physically abused was a problem that required being reported.

5.2.6. INCREASED EXPOSURE TO ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

COVID-19 has for some children meant online learning, often times unsupervised which in itself is a risk factor. About 6.2% of the young people who participated in the study said they have access to a phone with internet connectivity, majority of whom (24.6%) were aged 18-24 years followed by the 14-17 years (5.8%) and 10-13 (0.9%). Among those who had access to a phone with internet connectivity, 4.2% were female/girls and 8.2% are males/boys. As expected, majority of those who had access to a phone were from Kampala (12.2%). Surprisingly, when asked how much time they spend using a phone, 13.8% said they spend the whole day, followed by those who spend half a day at 13.3%. This suggests that about a quarter of all the participants spend between half a day to a whole day on phone, majority of whom were girls/females and older adolescents aged 18-24 years. While having access to a phone is in itself not dangerous, its usually what happens online that is a source of concern and increases the risk of exposure to sexual abuse. Almost six in every ten (59.6%) of young people said they spend time chatting or holding conversations with friends, followed by those who are simply browsing the internet (45.1%). Others mentioned that they spend time watching movies on line (16.5%), playing games (6.6%). Only 14.4% said they use the phone for online classes and 42.0% use it to read materials from their schools.

Results also show that exposure to internet has a deleterious effect. It has been noted that as result of COVID-19, some adult offenders are already initiating contact with children via social media and that some offenders also know that the more children spend time

online the more it's easier for them to have contact with them and expose them to sexual content and exploitation (EUROPOL, 2020)²³. Online sexual abuse includes asking the victim for parts of their bodies, performing sexual acts on phone among others.

In this survey, for example, when asked if anyone they met online has ever asked to send them a photo of themselves or any part of their bodies, 20.2% answered in the affirmative. Of these, twice as many females (26.3%) as males (16.9%) were asked to send a photo of themselves and other parts of their bodies to someone they met online. Of those who were asked to send photos, more than a half (53.9%) went ahead and sent the pictures while the rest either refused or cut off communication. What this means is that the potential for online sexual abuse is increasingly becoming a major concern. For example, the Uganda Child Help Line (UCHL) Report for August 2020 reveals that internet is now a platform for "distribution, trade, possession, and viewing of child sexual abuse and exploitation material"²⁴. It has also been suggested that online sexual abuse is usually a continuation of what happens offline (Kardefelt-Winther & Maternowska, 2020)²⁵. In such cases, online sexual exploitation should be seen as part of a bigger challenge regarding sexual abuse that children experience.

5.2.7. INDOLENCE

Children who are not in school are idle for several reasons and tend to roam around, exposing themselves to increased alcoholism, drug abuse, bad company, and sexual violence. Some roam because parents cannot afford electricity bills, they do not have televisions, radios (or reception does not reach their areas e.g., parts of Palabek) newspapers and other education materials to keep them engaged at home. On the other hand, the parents are out looking for what to feed the children who would normally have had meals at school; leaving them idle and unsupervised. It should also be noted that the refugee children under the accelerated programme had lost out on school due to the war. By the time they rejoined school they were old, some without any parental support. Being out of school and idle, without any parental support puts them at increased risk of early marriages and pregnancy and indeed some have fallen victim. About 43.9% of young people who said sexual violence had increased during COVID-19 said it was because most girls are generally idle, following closure of schools.

²³ EUROPOL (2020). Catching the virus: cybercrime, disinformation and the COVID-19 pandemic. Accessed on 13/09/2020 from <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/catching-virus-cybercrime-disinformation-and-covid-19-pandemic>.

²⁴ Uganda Child Help Line Report, August 2020, page 15.

²⁵ Kardefelt-Winther, D., & Maternowska, C. (2020). Addressing violence against children online and offline. *Nature human behaviour*, 4(3), 227-230.

ACCESS TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the findings on the opportunities for learning that became available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings on girls' and young women's participation in these opportunities; the challenges experienced in participating in the opportunities; and girls' continued interest in education (during and after the COVID-19 pandemic) are also presented in this chapter.

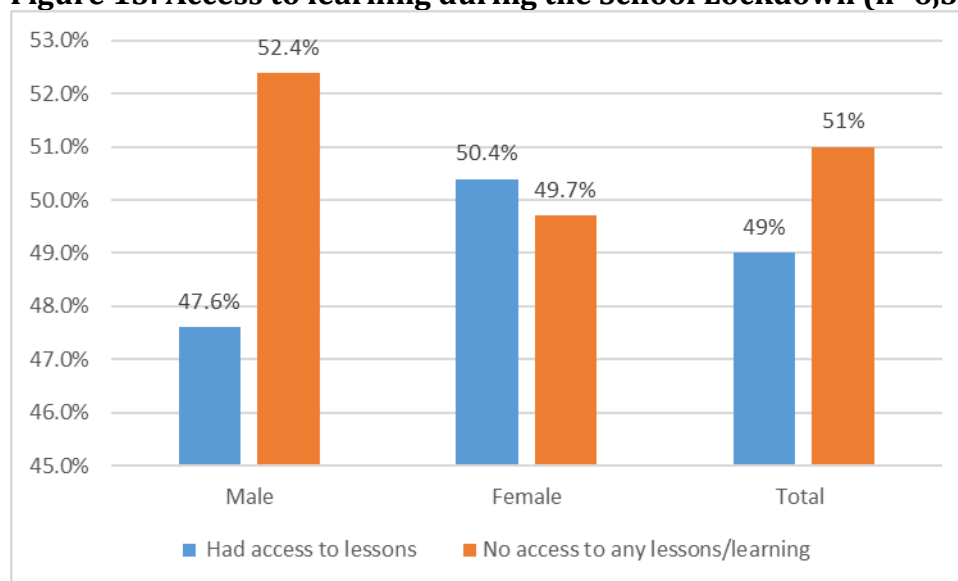
6.2. OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Following the closure of educational institutions, the Ministry of Education and Sports Framework for Provision of Continued Learning during the COVID-19 Lockdown in Uganda (MoES, 2020)²⁶. The framework outlines four key lesson delivery modes as; 1) Print and self – study home package; 2) Radio live recorded lessons and live presentations; 3) Television; and 4) Online uploads to be uploaded on phones. The framework ensured that all core subjects at both primary and secondary level were made available to learners across the country. Some schools also started conducting online classes using platforms like Microsoft teams and Zoom. As well, some families enrolled their children in home-schooling programs.

6.3. ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Overall, a significant percentage (51%) of the young people surveyed had no access to the opportunities for learning that became available during the school lockdown (Figure 14). This means that most of the children were left out. Among girls/ young women 50.4% of whom had access to the learning opportunities. On the whole, access to the opportunities for learning was higher among females, 18-24-year old, urban dwellers, people without disabilities, and refugees.

Figure 13: Access to learning during the School Lockdown (n=6,398, %)



²⁶ Ministry of Education and Sports, MoES (2020). Framework for provision of Continued Learning During the COVID-19 Lockdown in Uganda. MoES, Kampala Uganda. Accessed on December 20, 2020, from <http://www.education.go.ug/covid-19-sector-response/>.

Across all age groups, more females than males report having access to learning platforms during COVID-19. High access to learning platforms during COVID-19 was reported among those aged 18-24 years (58.2%) and the least was reported among those aged 10-13 (40.1%) who were also in lower classes at primary.

Table 22: Proportion (%) of respondents with access to learning during period when schools closed by sex and location (n=6,394)

	10-13 (n=3,022)			14-17 (n=2,342)			18-24 (n=1,000)	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Had access to lessons	39.5%	40.7%	40.1%	54.8%	57.8%	56.4%	56.7%	59.9%
No access to any lessons/learning	60.5%	59.3%	59.9%	45.2%	42.2%	43.6%	43.3%	40.1%

By region however, as expected there were more learners within urban locations (50.2%) accessing learning or learning platforms compared to those in rural locations (47.8%). As we show later, this is plausibly linked to the level of development of infrastructure that enables alternative learning as well as other factors such as leadership and external support. By sex of respondents, while there were noticeable differences, slightly more females in urban areas (51.2%) had access to learning platforms than those in rural areas (47.8%).

Table 23: Proportion (%) of respondents with access to learning during period when schools closed by sex and location (n=6,394)

	Urban (%)			Rural (%)		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Had access to lessons	49.5%	51.2%	50.2%	45.9%	49.5%	47.8%
No access to any lessons/learning	50.5%	48.8%	49.7%	54.1%	50.5%	52.2%

Further analysis based on disability status show that among learners with disability, there were more participants who had no access to learning (56.5%) compared to those with no form of disability (53.0%).

Analysis by district shows a mixed picture. For example, results show that the highest proportion of participants who had access to learning were from Sebei region (74.3%), followed by Karamoja (65.3%), and Kampala (60.7%). There was also relatively high level of access among refugees (62.7%). The least access was reported in Ankole (30.8%) followed by Teso (31.8%) and Lango (32.4%).

Table 24: Levels of access to learning during COVID-19 by district/region (n=6,139)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Had access (%)</i>	<i>Had no access (%)</i>
Refugee	62.7%	37.4%
West Nile	56.1%	43.9%
Kampala	60.7%	39.2%
Central1	59.6%	40.4%
Central2	46.1%	53.9%
Busoga	54.1%	45.9%

Bukedi	35.3%	64.7%
Bugisu	40.8%	59.2%
Sebei	74.3%	25.7%
Teso	31.8%	68.2%
Karamoja	65.3%	34.7%
Lango	32.4%	67.6%
Acholi	39.3%	60.7%
Bunyoro	54.8%	45.2%
Tooro	56.4%	43.6%
Ankole	30.8%	69.2%
Kigezi	37.4%	62.6%

Results indicated in table above suggest that some areas enjoyed better access to learning materials than others. While for some groups such as refugees may appear, a surprise given that access to learning materials is better than most non-refugee communities, discussions with key stakeholders suggest that the relatively high access to learning opportunities could be a function of the efforts of several actors to reach the refugees with learning materials. We learnt for example, that while refugee settlements like Palabek have poor network and therefore access to learning on radio or TV would be expected to be a challenge, efforts from some of the organizations to deliver learning materials physically to the learners compensates for poor network coverage.

Virtual learning was not actually in the refugee camps, for the reason being that in Palabek particularly, I am not sure about the other refugee camps but the network and radio signals are very poor. Even the TV networks do not connect there so the virtual learning was not taking place. But what we were only doing was delivery of physical materials, home learning materials to them in a cluster of villages. And now the teachers would support them in groups. That (method) is even happening up to now. **(Interview, OXFAM)**

Kampala being largely urban, it may be presumed that most of the learning platforms were accessible. However, the fact that about (39.2%) of children in Kampala reported no access to these learning platforms goes against the general public perception and expectation that learners in urban centers and Kampala, in particular, have access to learning opportunities during the COVID-19 school closure. It appears that children in Kampala, especially those from lower socio-economic status, including slum areas face the same challenges as those in rural areas. Additionally, the general public perception that all children in urban areas have access to learning opportunities may in itself limit access to support services that would increase learning.

In Karamoja and Sebei regions, the study team established that the relevant education stakeholders devised a robust system for distributing learning materials, which according to the findings, appear to have been successful. For example, while the districts in Karamoja have no access to most of Uganda radio and TV stations, the districts in the region partnered with existing agencies to ensure that they provide services to the children in their villages.

There was a proper and thorough system of distribution of education materials. It appears that the districts deliberately made clear arrangement to reach the learners

with materials during COVID-19. The district education department for example, developed a COVID-19 Education Response Plan which was then supported by the different partners such as UNICEF, ZOA, Straight Talk Foundation, World Food Program and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

During the COVID-19 period, we have been helping these children to learn in different ways. We, as the education office in the district had to link up with the development partners. I made up COVID-19 Education Response Plan which I sent to UNICEF, ZOA, Straight Talk Foundation and World Food Program and also the Ministry of Education. We told them our children cannot access learning through the TVs and Media. So the ministry sent for us learning materials, which was sent to the RDC, and the RDC sent to us, we then sent to the sub-county the first bunch, when there were shortages, they again brought and we sent to the schools. **(Interview, Education Department, Amudat)**

We engage partners like Save the Children, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) to try to get some teachers that can get to try to occupy these children (...) VSO has added a small component of getting some few primary school teachers to follow up these children and help them in their villages **(KII, Education Department, Moroto district)**

In Amudat, the district also partnered with World Food Program and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to provide children with food ratios at home so that they continue learning.

Then World Food Program as we interfaced with them, they organize with the OPM to provide home ratios for the children to help them get some energy to read the learning materials while at home. So we had to mobilize the Head Teachers from wherever they were to return and facilitate the process of food distribution to these children to help them read at home. So this is one of the ways we have done to help these children. **(KII, Education Department, Amudati)**

In addition, together with partners in education, the district of Amudat secured support from ZOA and trained teachers in small group learning which enabled children to continue learning in villages during the COVID-19.

ZOA trained our teachers on small group learning so that they help children in the villages learn in small groups. They were given bicycles, sanitizers, masks and paid for teaching children. **(KII, Education Department Amudat)**

Given limited coverage and access to Ugandan media in the whole of Karamoja region, the district of Amudat, with support from partners also innovatively record voices of children learning, send them to be aired on radio stations in Kenya which the local communities in Uganda access.

Recording the voices of the children and sending them to Kalia radio in Kenya where parents can listen to the children in the evening starting from 7-10pm as prime time for people in the village **(KII, Education Department, Amudat)**

The challenge is that most of these innovations have targeted primary school going children mainly because education partners in Karamoja have a strong focus on primary education. This means that secondary school going children remain largely unreached through most platforms in the region. In Moroto, partners like Save the Children and VSO are mostly supporting in the non-formal education. Also, geographical coverage of such interventions has been limited.

Levels of access to learning by sex of respondent and region

By sex of respondents, there were some variations. Interestingly, while Sebei (Kween) had the highest proportion of young people learning during COVID-19, learning was disproportionately skewed in favour of boys/males (57.1%) than girls/females (42.9%) in the district. In addition, while Karamoja (Moroto and Amudat) had a relatively high-level access to learning during COVID-19, there were slightly more males (50.3%) than females (49.7%) who were accessing learning during this period in the two districts. Other regions with the lowest level of access to learning for girls/females was Bunyoro (Buliisa) where 55.8% of learners accessing learning during COVID19 were males/boys compared to girls (44.2%). Similarly, districts in central 2 (Mubende), there were more males (54.5%) accessing learning than females (45.5%). By implication, while the overall results suggest that girls were accessing learning platforms, within all districts save for Lango (51.6% boys; 48.4% girls) there were more female learners who reported no access to learning than boys.

Table 25: Levels of access to learning during COVID-19 by region

	<i>Had access to lessons (n=3,263) (%)</i>		<i>No access to any lessons/learning (n=3,131) (%)</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Refugee	48.4	51.6	50.0	50.0
West Nile	48.2	51.8	47.4	52.6
Kampala	47.7	52.3	50.0	50.0
Central1	50.2	49.8	48.8	51.2
Central2	54.5	45.5	48.4	51.6
Busoga	50.7	49.3	46.8	53.2
Bukedi	52.9	47.2	44.8	55.2
Bugisu	52.0	48.1	44.3	55.7
Sebei	57.1	42.9	43.2	56.8
Teso	51.3	48.8	46.6	53.4
Karamoja	50.3	49.7	49.1	50.9
Lango	48.2	51.8	51.6	48.4
Acholi	50.5	49.8	48.9	51.1
Bunyoro	55.8	44.2	43.2	56.8
Tooro	49.8	50.2	48.3	51.7
Ankole	48.7	51.3	47.1	52.9
Kigezi	50.0	50.0	43.9	56.1

6.4. AVAILABLE LEARNING PLATFORMS ACCESSED BY LEARNERS DURING COVID-19

Among those who said they have been learning or accessing lessons, a significant proportion accessed lessons via radio (31.9%) followed by those who did personal revisions at their homes (25.9%) and learning via television (15.5%). Others mentioned

print media particularly study materials accessed through newspapers (14.1%), volunteer or mobile teachers (8.2%) and there were also cases where parents were providing coaching for their children at home (3.5%). These findings appear unsurprising. A 2017/18 National Information Technology Survey established that about three out of every five (65.3%) households reported owning a radio compared to one out of five (21.8%) that reported owning a TV²⁷. It therefore seems that the usage of these platforms for learning purposes is indeed informed by the coverage of such services. For example, among refugees only 0.7% said they were learning via TV compared to 16.2% among nationals. Majority refugees were learning via radio (54.1%) and mobile teachers or volunteers (38.4%). Access to newspapers was also low for refugees at 7.5% compared to nationals at 14.2%. Learning via radio was more accessible to males (33.9%) compared to females at 30.1% as well as learning via internet accessible to more boys/males (4.8%) than females/girls at 2.8%. However, more females/girls (8.3%) than males (6.3%) were being taught at home by their parents.

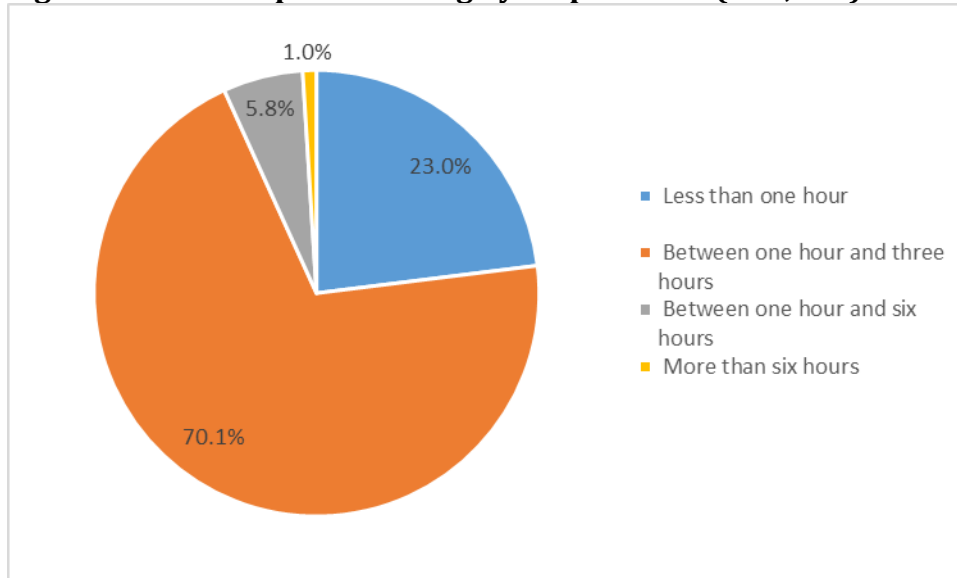
Table 26: Proportion (%) of young girls and boys accessing learning platforms during COVID-19 (n=2,830)

Platform	Total (%)
Learning via radio	31.9%
Learning via TV	15.5%
Mobile/volunteer teachers	8.2%
Learning through internet, e.g. zoom or Microsoft teams	3.8%
Learning through newspaper	14.1%
My parents are teaching me at home	7.6%
Personal revision at home	25.9%
Discussion groups with friends in the neighborhood	0.5%
My school provided me/us with materials to read	3.1%

Hours spent learning during COVID-19: Those who have access to learning were asked how many hours per day do they spend learning. About seven in every ten children (70.1%) spend between one and three hours a day learning. Almost a quarter or about two in every ten young girls and boys (23.0%) spend less than one hour in a day learning. Only about 5.8% spend between four and six hours learning and only 1% mentioned more than six hours.

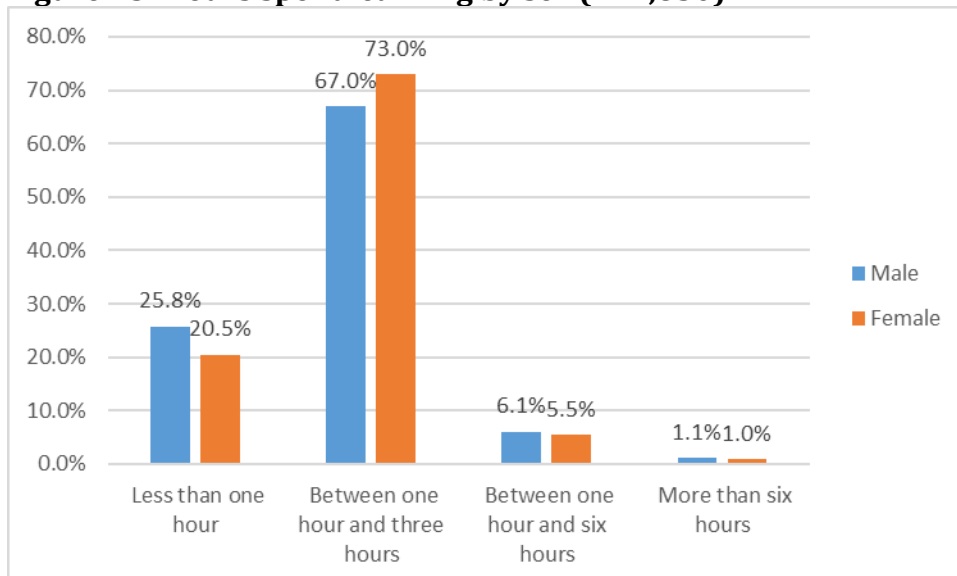
²⁷ See National Information Technology Survey 2017/18 Report, March 2018. NITA, Kampala Uganda

Figure 14: Hours spent learning by respondents (n=2,830)



There were no significant differences across sex and locations. However, slightly more girls spend between one and three hours (73%) of their time in the day learning compared to 67.0% among boys. However, those who spend between one and six hours boys were slightly higher (6.1%) than girls at 5.5%. One would argue indeed that overall, boys who access learning spend much more time than girls. One plausible reason could be that girls have more household chores to do at home than boys and that when it comes to accessing certain platforms like radio and even TV, they are disproportionately in favour of boys. In terms of location, learners in urban areas appear to have more time available to learning than those in rural areas.

Figure 15: Hours spent learning by sex (n=2,830)



By location, there were no significant differences across sex and location. However, there were slightly more females in urban areas (76.2%) compared to females in rural areas (70.2%) who said they spend between one hour and three hours attending lessons. At the same time there were more females (23.4%) in rural areas compared to females in urban areas (17.3%) who said they spend less than an hour learning. This

suggests that more females in urban areas have relatively more time learning than those in the rural areas.

Table 27: Hours spent learning by location and sex of respondent (n=2,830)

	<i>Urban (n=1,359)</i>			<i>Rural (n=1,471)</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than one hour	22.9%	17.3%	20.1%	28.5%	23.4%	25.8%
Between one hour and three hours	68.7%	76.2%	72.5%	65.5%	70.2%	68.0%
Between one hour and six hours	7.2%	5.4%	6.2%	5.1%	5.7%	5.3%
More than six hours	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.0%	0.8%	0.9%

In terms of the actual time of the day, a majority participate in learning during morning hours, or between 7am to 12pm afternoon (41.2%), about a quarter (24.6%) mentioned between 1pm and 4pm while 14.8% and 19.3% said they learn between 5 pm and 7pm and after 7pm respectively. Results did not show significant differences between boys and girls in terms of time of the day although slightly more boys (43%) than girls (39%) study morning hours while slightly more girls (26%) than boys (23%) study in the afternoon between 1-4pm. What this means is that time allocations in the homes is different for most girls and boys. It is possible to argue that while most girls wake up to undertake household chores including farming and only have little time in the later hours, most boys have morning hours at their disposal. These differences suggest that girls are generally still disadvantaged in the sense that they have to prove that they have done household chores before learning, which suggests that in most homes learning for girls is still looked at as secondary than that of boys. The implication also is that when someone attends classes in the morning hours when they are still fresh, concentration levels are high, which according to the survey results appear to generally benefit more boys than girls.

Table 28: Time of the day when learners accessed learning; disaggregated by sex and location (n=2,830)

<i>Time of day</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
Morning hours (around 7 to 12noon)	43%	39%	43.7%	38.9%	41.2%
Between 1-4pm	23%	26%	26.6%	22.6%	24.6%
Between 5-7pm	15%	15%	13.7%	15.9%	14.8%
After 7 pm	19.1%	19.6%	15.9%	22.5%	19.3%

6.5. SUPPORT EXTENDED TO YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACCESS LEARNING

Among those who are accessing learning, about four in every ten participants (36.7%) have not received any support from anyone in accessing learning platforms. Among those who received support to access learning platforms, majority mentioned their parents/caregivers (42.6%) followed by other relatives such as siblings, uncles (10.1%) and school teachers (8.9%). Meanwhile, some participants also mentioned support from local leaders (1.1%), direct government support (0.8%) and NGOs (1.4%).

Table 29: Support for learning during lock down**

<i>Response</i>	<i>%ge</i>
-----------------	------------

Support received in accessing learning during lock down (n=3,217)	
No support from any one	36.7%
Yes, my parents/caregiver	42.6%
Yes, other relative including siblings, uncles etc	10.1%
Yes, my school teachers	8.9%
Yes, friends	7.3%
Yes, my neighbor	3.9%
NGOs	1.4%
Local leaders	1.1%
Government support	0.8%
Other	6.6%
Nature of support received (n=1,959)	
Buys me things to help with learning like newspapers to get self-study materials, batteries to put in radio etc	68.5%
Helped me avail me with the phone/computer to access online classes	10.6%
Pays/hires someone to teach/coach me from home	8.0%
Buys me internet bundles	6.2%
Paid TV subscription	4.1%
Given time to revise and study	2.8%

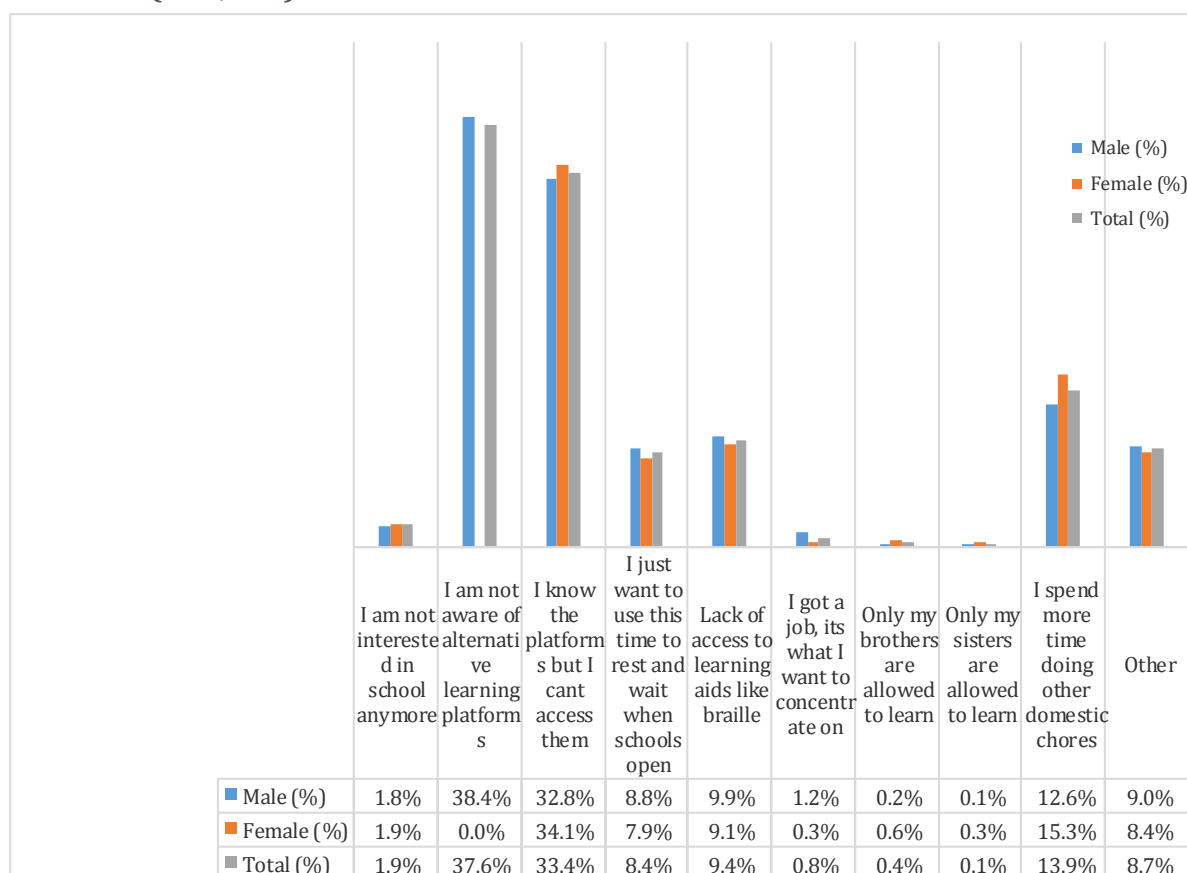
**: Multiple response were allowed

6.6. FACTORS HINDERING ACCESS TO LEARNING AND LEARNING PLATFORMS DURING COVID-19

A range of reasons were given as to why more than half of the young people were unable to learn during the pandemic period. About four in every ten respondents (37.6%) mentioned that they were unaware of any alternative learning platforms. About four in every ten respondents (35.6%) said that although they were aware of the available learning platforms, they experienced access related challenges. About two in every ten young girls/boys and women/men (14.5%) did not have access to any learning because they spent more time doing other domestic chores than learning.

Girls and young women were disproportionately affected than boys/men. For example, slightly more girls/females (34.1%) than males/boys (32.8%) said that while they knew about the existing platforms, they could not access them because of lack of support to access them and other barriers such as poor internet connectivity, lack of access to a radio among others. In addition, girls and young women (15.3%) were disproportionately affected by spending more time doing household chores with no time left for learning compared to males/boys (12.6%). Others mentioned that they got pregnant and could not continue learning (0.2%), others said they got a job (1.9%) while some said that they spend time playing with friends (0.7%)

Figure 16: Reasons why young girls and boys have not accessed learning during COVID-19 (n=3,263)



Discussions with stakeholders at various levels corroborate the evidence from the survey. It was noted that some of the platforms such as radio, television were not accessible to some areas because of poor connection. In addition, a significant number of households do not own radios or television sets where most learning was taking place. The 2017/18 National Information Technology Survey Report indicated for example that only 63.8% and 67.5% of households in rural and urban areas respectively had access to a radio set²⁸. The 2017/18 National Information Technology Survey Report further showed that only 14.0% and 33.3% of households in rural and urban areas respectively had access to a TV set²⁹. This means therefore that access to the necessary gadgets was a challenge. This ideally would mean that for parents, they needed budgets for TVs, radios, laptops, newspapers, smart phones, and other gadgets to be able to enable their children access learning during COVID-19. In addition, for effective delivery of e-learning there is need for access to stable supply of electricity. However, according to National Development Plan III (NPA, 2020), national access to electricity has only increased from 11% in 2010 to 24% in 2018/19³⁰. Even then the cost of electricity remains above the targeted 5 cents per unit for all consumer categories³¹. This means that for an average household in Uganda, alternative learning

²⁸ National Information Technology Survey 2017/18 Report, March 2018. NITA, Kampala Uganda

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ National Planning Authority (2020). Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25. National Planning Authority, Kampala Uganda

³¹ National Planning Authority (2020). Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25. National Planning Authority, Kampala Uganda

platforms during COVID-19 such as television, radio were an additional cost that most people would not afford. Therefore, for most households, cost of accessing the platforms was prohibitive.

The platform is not effective at all because some areas are too remote that even most radio stations cannot be captured. Even most families in rural areas cannot afford buying batteries to power the radios **(KII, Kyenkuru, Ntungamo district)**

Some of us are very poor. We can't afford radios and televisions. As you have seen the village, we even have no electricity and because of this our children could not continue learning **(FDG with caregivers, Kaliro)**

In Karamoja, the study team learnt that most areas are remote and have no access to most radio and TV stations in Uganda and can only access Kenya media. In such cases, learning via radio or TV became a challenge for Karamoja.

The only way was for them to send the materials which we received. And of course, for us here in Amudat, we only access this mass media through Kenya. If you go in the villages' even town here, you don't hear any radio of Uganda. It is only Kenyan radios and TVs that people are watching here. **(KII Education Department, Amudati)**

Besides cost and remoteness of some communities, there were also concerns that some of the designated learning platforms are controlled by men or generally adult males in households. This relates to the culturally deep-rooted norms and beliefs about access and use of information platforms such as radio.

When it comes to accessing the radio, culturally men are the ones that listen to the radio most of the time and when the man (head of the house) is not at home, boys in the home access the radio more than girls. **(KII, Kyenkuru, Ntungamo district)**

Gender inequality especially at home, boys control access to most of the items at home in this case the radio. So, it is difficult for a girl to listen to the radio and learn because most times boys are in control of everything **(FGD with bodaboda boys, Kaliro)**

This means that some platforms were by design unreachable for most girls in communities. Relatedly, and as already noted, girls also divide their time between learning and household chores. Results of this survey suggest that girls had generally more time in the afternoon to learn while most boys learnt in the morning hours. For example, more girls (48.3%) compared to 42.4% of boys said that their workload has increased. Slightly more boys (35.2%) than girls (31.9%) said the work load remained the same.

Table 30: Proportion of girls and boys who say workload has increased, reduced or remained same during COVID-19

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Yes, it has increased	42.4%	48.3%	45.4%	Pr=0.000
Yes, it has reduced	13.4%	13.1%	13.3%	

No, it has remained	35.2%	31.9%	33.6%
I can't tell	8.9%	6.6%	7.7%

Discussions with stakeholders corroborate the evidence that suggest that girls as opposed to boys tend to have more household chores allocated to them than boys. Where this happens, it means that a big section of girls have limited time to learn.

Also due to the nature of women/girls work that in most cultures girls have to do most of household chores like cooking, washing utensils while boys are listening to the radio **(KII, Kyenkuru, Ntungamo district)**

(The other challenge is) sharing work in the household. When you look at a girl, parents use this opportunity, we have always said that “this is the time to teach our girls housework”. So, girls have been engaged much more in housework than the actual learning compared to the boys who do little. Because boys are asked to do simple things like cleaning here and it’s done than the girls who have to hustle throughout the day to ensure they cook, ensure they take care of the babies and all that. So that denied them time to concentrate on their classes. **(Interview, UNFPA)**

We have a lot of challenges facing school going girls and some of these, if I am to mention them are, the work load for these girls at home - taking care of their little ones, collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking food, the corona pandemic its self is a challenge to these school going girls, the fact that schools were closed and they cannot access them is a challenge. Remember because of poor family planning, parents have many children. The girls are sacrificed for the boys to be educated since girl child education is not seen as a big deal here in Luuka district **(KII, Local Council 1, Luuka district)**

The girl learners were able to get these materials however finding time to read them was a problem since these girls were always engaged with a lot of household chores and thus unable to benefit from these materials. **(KII, Councillor, Lamwo district)**

For some of the girls who participated in the discussions, the issue of work load and parents sacrificing their education to that of boys is not necessarily new. However, while these challenges are not new, the findings show that COVID-19 has amplified these gender asymmetries in access to learning.

R3... We also face a problem of too much work while at home and this is especially before leaving for school, where by one has to do house work and then going to the garden, this is too much work for a school going child and then lastly the issue of pads, this is a serious issue because many of our friends have dropped out of schools because of lacking pads

R5... Some of our parents think educating a boy child is more important than educating a girl child this has been a major problem to us school going girls **(FGD with girls, Luuka)**

During discussions with girls in Kanungu district, they made it very clear that even when it comes to accessing learning materials, boys tend to be favored compared to

girls. They were concerned that boys seem to be free all the time while they (girls) are always heaped with work to do at home. In addition, while boys are generally untouchable, parents force girls to do work. All these take away the time they would have had for learning.

- R2: Boys are free but girls have a lot to do when it comes to house chores
- R5: Boys are untouchable; parents don't force them to do work
- R1: We get like 3 hours
- R 4: We get time at night when we are already tired (**FGD girls, Kanungu district**)

While some families were able to improvise for children who were not able to access TV and radio programs by hiring teachers to coach their children at home, or even provide support in terms of revision, it was mentioned that children in some families where the parents are illiterate or generally ignorant faced significant challenges. While the survey did not determine the relationship between parents' levels of literacy and the likelihood for children accessing learning platforms, discussions with key stakeholders highlighted it as a critical concern.

Ignorance among parents is also a big challenge. Some have never gone to school at all, some attained a certain level but lower than where their children are now. This also hinders much of their role in helping children learn effectively from home. (**KII, National Children Authority**)

I am imagining a home where the father and mother cannot read, really, they are just there. I don't think such a family can support their children during this period (...). We get pandemics of this nature and we are really talking about continued learning and parents cannot support. Then there is a gap because right now, the teachers are not there, who is in that gap to support the child to continue learning? If parents were really on top of the issue, they would be supportive. It doesn't mean that you should know biology but because you know the importance of biology, then you let the child attend either a program on radio, TV, or support them in their homework. Even when they are writing things you do not understand but when you are there and you have that level of literacy. So, for me that is where the problem is and nobody is actually mentioning it right now. (**Interview, MoES**)

Discussions with stakeholders also revealed that some of the education materials provided by government were few. Even where parents were made to photocopy the materials provided by government, access remained a challenge. Discussion with education officials revealed that the learning materials were inadequate. Some parents were tasked to photocopy the materials at their own cost. Those that could not meet the cost missed out on the materials.

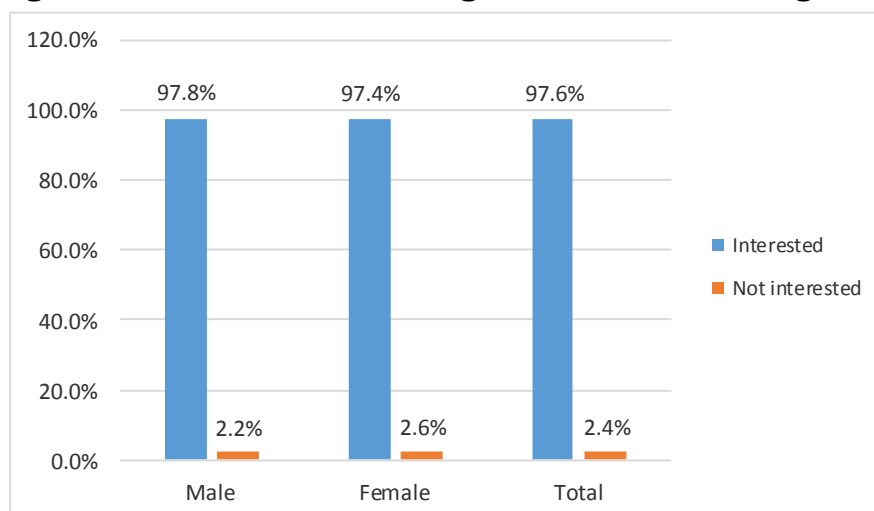
We faced a lot of challenges in accessing these learning platforms. One being that these materials were very few especially the papers provided by government compared to the households that needed them. So, we had to get a copy and then photocopy and give another person so for those who had no money, they didn't get (**KII, Education Department, Kaliro**)

We found out that the materials were not enough. So, we decided to give some copies so they photocopy. Some sub-counties received only a copy of the S.6 materials and others also received one or two copies. Parents were told to copy but it was a challenge. If a sub-county got one and some parent was supposed to photocopy and pass it on to other parents, that would disappear somewhere along the way. Even the parents were not able to pay for photocopying. **(KII, Education Department, Kween district)**

6.7. INTEREST IN CONTINUING WITH EDUCATION DURING AND AFTER COVID-19

Post COVID-19 was used more generally to mean when schools reopen for learners. When asked about being able to resume school when the government relaxes restrictions to open up schools, about 2.4% said they do not hope to continue attending school or resume schools when they reopen. Between boys and girls, there are slightly more girls (2.6%) compared to boys (2.2%) who said they may not return to school once schools resume. Despite the fact that currently few girls than boys are accessing the learning platforms available.

Figure 17: Interest in Continuing with Education during and after COVID-19



There were no significant variations across the different categories and age groups although slightly more participants aged 18-24 (8.0%) said when schools resume they may not be able to go back to school. For boys/males and girls/women in the lower age categories, there almost no differences between those who say will not resume school when schools reopen.

Table 31: Distribution of Young People by Interest in Continuing Education and Age (n=6124, %)

	10-13			14-17			18-24		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes	99.2	99.3	99.3	97.4	97.7	97.6	94.1	89.3	92.0
No	0.8	0.7	0.7	2.6	2.3	2.4	5.9	10.7	8.2

Between refugee and nationals, results suggest that slightly more refugees (3.8%) are not hopeful of returning to school once schools reopen compared to the proportion of nationals (2.4%) who said they will not resume school. Among girls/females and

boys/males, there were no major differences save for the fact that among refugees slightly more male refugees (4.2%) than female refugees (3.3%) said they were not likely to resume school when schools reopen. This is possibly related to the idea that most refugee boys tend to be mobile moving in and out of the settlements more often than girls. Therefore, COVID-19 could have created opportunities for them not to return to school.

Table 32: Distribution of Young People by Interest in Continuing Education and Nationality (n=6124, %)

	<i>Refugee (%)</i>			<i>Non refugee (%)</i>		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Yes	95.8	96.7	96.2	97.9	97.4	97.6
No	4.2	3.3	3.8	2.1	2.6	2.4

Among the children with disabilities, results show that slightly more learners with disability (3.0%) are not hopeful of returning to school when schools reopen compared to those with no disability (2.4%). Slightly more girls/females with a disability (3.8%) compared to the boys/males (2.2%) said they were not hopeful of returning to school when schools resume.

Table 33: Distribution of Young People by Interest in Continuing Education and Disability Status (n=6, 394, %)

	<i>PWDs</i>			<i>No disability</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Yes	97.8	96.2	97%	97.8	97.4	97.6%
No	2.2	3.8	3.0%	2.2	2.6	2.4%

There is a general perception that the MoES did not give learners with disability priority. For instance, the deaf and blind could not access the digital learning platforms. Those with physical disabilities who can read did not access newspapers.

While the Ministry of Education told us they had digitized the curriculum, (...) it wasn't accessible for learners with disabilities. I remember some partners getting to us and telling us 'you know, let's pool resources together because much as they have digitized the curriculum, for us learners with hearing impairments will not access, learners with visual impairment will not access...'. So, I can say that the ministry did not give those learners a priority, they didn't look at it in an equitable manner. **(Participant, Uganda Society for Disabled Children)**

It was also observed that most parents do not have the capacity to home school children with disabilities.

Then parents said that yeah but you can't expect us to cope, we are not teachers, we can't cope, we don't know where the child is in their learning, they don't know how much to even tell their own child. Because all along parents have not been involved. **(Participant, Uganda Society for Disabled Children)**

Materials for children with disabilities came in later.

I think obviously those with disabilities have fallen behind because their materials were printed and came a little late and as there were some challenges

with printing them even from the government side some materials for learners with disabilities were finalized later and we need to check if they were ever distributed because there seems to be a learning challenge. **(Participant, UNICEF)**

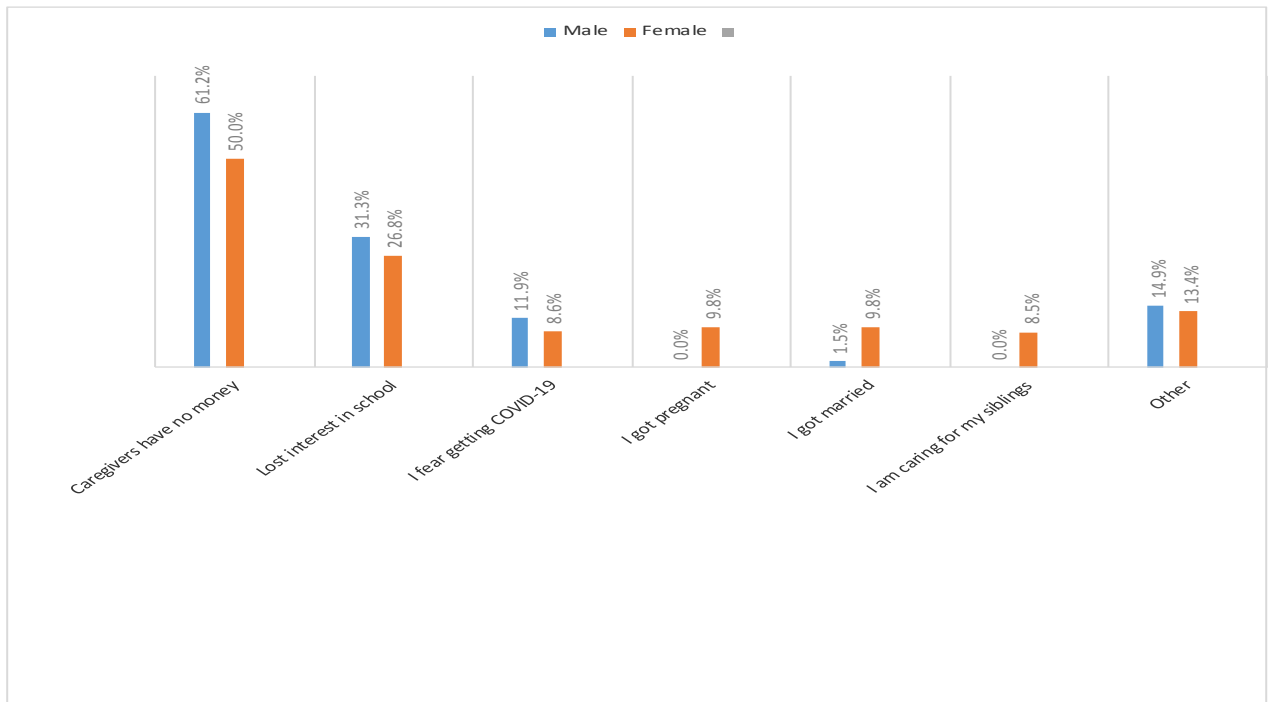
The participant from NUWODU notes that, “CSOs for PWDs contacted MOES and requested for special e-learning materials i.e., Kireka School for Children with Visual Impairments”. In terms of impact, this lack of learning platforms meant that children with disabilities fell back in their studies. Some are likely to totally forget what they learned, e.g. sign language.

Some teachers have been offering some lessons to CWDs during the lockdown or else the children forget everything they had studied i.e. sign language. Parents should be creative enough to see how they help children. Otherwise, if they do not learn for a long time, they will forget i.e., a child in P2 has now forgotten sign language. **(Participant, NUWODU)**

6.8. REASONS WHY SOME LEARNERS WERE NOT HOPING TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION

Learners mentioned several reasons why they were not hopeful to resume school. The main reason was that the parents and caregivers do not have money for school fees and other scholastic materials. This was mentioned by more than a half of all respondents (55%) but more among males (61.2%) than females (50.0%). In addition, more males (31.3%) than females (26.8%) said the reason they are not likely to report back to school is because they lost interest in learning or schooling. Overall, this ranked the second most mentioned reason. This should worry all education stakeholders. About 9.8% of all the girls who said they will not resume school mentioned the fact that they became pregnant. This calls for interventions that encourage expectant and child mothers to go back to school and stay there until they successfully complete their study programs. Meanwhile, 9.8% of the females and only 1.5% of the boys said they married during the pandemic and were not hopeful of going back to school. About 8.5% of the girls said they are caring for their siblings and are therefore not hopeful of resuming school. This highlights the burden of care that girls and young women are exposed to, which affects their availability for learning. Other reasons mentioned include the fact that some learners have opted to learn a new skill like tailoring and are no longer interested in formal schooling (4.7%); others said they got a job (3.4%) and saw no need for continuing with school; and 1.3% said they lost a caregiver.

Figure 18: Reasons for not Hoping to Continue with Education (n=149)**



**: Multiple responses

6.8. HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG CANDIDATES/ FINALISTS

In October 2020, government eased the school lockdown by allowing schools to reopen for their candidate classes and finalists in higher institutions of learning like universities. In view of this, we asked respondents who were in candidate classes if they had resumed school at the time. Close to a quarter (22.6%) of all the respondents who were in candidate classes when schools closed did not resume school when government ordered partial reopening for finalists'. There were more respondents among males (28.1%) who did not resume school compared to those among females (18.1%). This means that among girls, there were more participants who had resumed school (81.8%) at Pr=0.012 compared to those among males. In terms of age, results show that in the age group 18-24 years there were more participants who have not been able to resume school (43%) at Pr=0.000 compared to participants in other age groups. This relates to the information collected from school records which show that senior four and senior six had more candidates not returning compared to primary seven.

Across all age groups, there were more males than females who said they did not resume school when schools reopened for candidate classes.

Table 34: Proportion of learners in finalists' classes who resumed school when schools reopened for finalists by age group (n=447)

	10-13 (%)			14-17 %			18-24 %			Total %			P-value
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	
No	11.5	7.5	9.1	20.0	13.8	16.5	51.7	34.9	43.0	28.1	18.2	22.6	P=0.000

Yes	88.5	92.5	90.9	80.0	86.2	83.5	48.3	65.1	57.0	71.9	81.8	77.4
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About six in ten respondents (61.9%) also knew of another candidate (i.e., p.7; s.4, s.6, tertiary or university) who did not return to school when government ordered reopening for candidate classes. More female respondents (64.9%) knew of another fellow candidate who did not return to school when schools reopened.

Table 35: Proportion of participants aware of a peer who did (or did not) resume school when government opened schools for finalists’ classes (n=362)

Response	Male	Female	Total
Yes	58.1%	64.9%	61.9%
No	41.8%	35.2%	38.1%

In view of the evidence above, a random survey of a few schools in the districts visited to gain insight into the resumption of education among girls and young women show that girls or females are disproportionately affected by school dropout than males during COVID-19 when schools resumed for candidate classes.

Evidence of drop out or failure to resume school when government reopened schools was more evident at senior four and senior six (see annex ii) than P.7. Analysis of selected schools’ records indicate that, at Senior four, out of a total of 3,472 learners who attended senior four before COVID-19, only 3,181 returned to school suggesting that a total of 291 learners did not return to school in October when Government opened up for candidate classes. Female learners were disproportionately affected with more than 50.5% or 147 of the senior four candidates/ finalists failed to return to school (see annex ii). There were some unique cases across various regions. For example, in Nabokotom SS in Amudat, all the girls that were in school before COVID-19 did not come back to school when the government reopened schools for candidate classes. As we note later, the reasons are hinged on pregnancy.

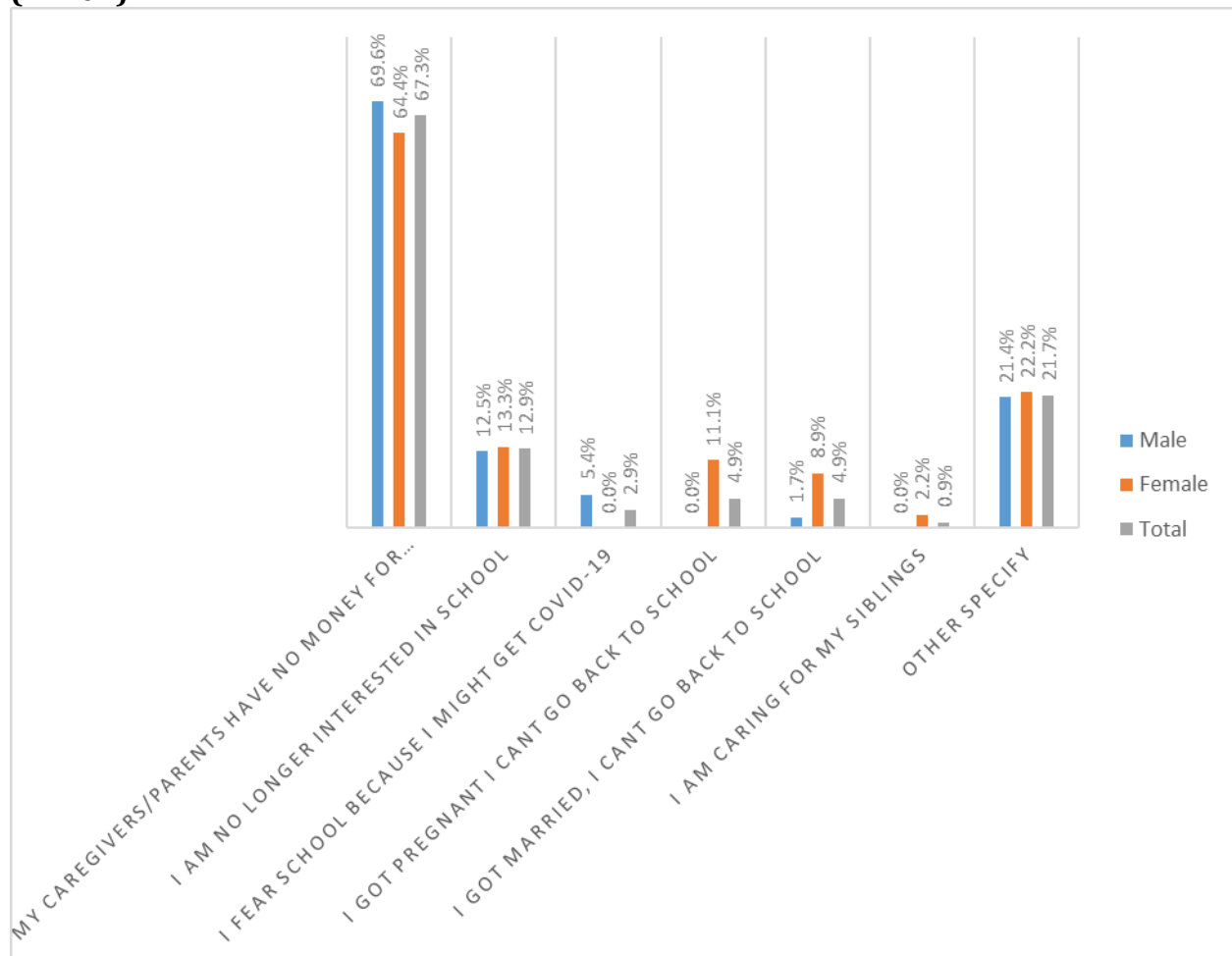
In senior six, out of a total of 1,052 candidates/finalists, over 59(78.7%) of those who did not return to school were females while 16(21.3%) are males (see annex ii). The effect of COVID-19 on candidates’ failure to return to school appear to affect higher classes than lower classes.

Reasons for failure to resume school for learners in candidate/ finalist classes

Consistent with reasons why learners are not interested in returning to school or are not hopeful, reasons given for failure to resume school when candidate classes reopened include; lack of school fees (67.3%) mentioned more by males (69.6%) than females (64.4%), followed by lack of interest in learning (12.9%) mentioned slightly more by girls/females (13.3%) than boys/males (12.5%). Meanwhile, 11.1% of the girls/females cited pregnancy as the main reason while more females/girls (8.9% than boys/males (1.7%) cited marriage as the main reason. About 2.2% of the girls also cited caring for siblings. Among others (21.7%), respondents mentioned reasons such as

sickness (1.0%), and taking on a new trade or programs specifically focusing on vocational skills like tailoring (6.9%).

Figure 19: Reasons why some candidates were unable to resume school (n=101)**



**** Multiple response**

Discussions with stakeholders at various levels reveal a range of reasons and factors that explain the variance between enrolment in candidate classes before COVID-19 and enrolment when Government reopened schools. Among the key reasons cited are: teenage pregnancies and early marriage; economic hardships faced by parents which imply that some parents could not afford school fees and other scholastic materials, culturally specific barriers as well as aspects such as interschool transfers.

Early marriage and teenage/adolescent pregnancy: In almost all the discussions with the stakeholders including teachers and head teachers, it was noted that early marriage and teenage pregnancy are a contributing factor to why candidates have not been able to resume school. This was noted to have affected girls at all levels of education i.e. primary seven, senior four and six.

Some of the factors that have limited these girls from coming back to school could be that some of them got pregnant and that they could be shy to return and others could also be married off (**KII, TESO Integrated College, Ngora**)

What am sure of is that two boys changed school and one girl should have got pregnant. We knew that she was under the care of her grandmother and then during the lockdown, she actually got married. It was not mere getting pregnant. **(KII, Benedict Kaliiro Primary School)**

Some girls have been married off and others have become pregnant **(KII, Amuria Secondary School, Amuria)**

We hear that two girls got married and gave birth already. We are not very sure because we have not followed them up. They were from Rukungiri district and we have not managed to get in touch with them but obviously COVID-19 has also had an effect. **(KII, Kinkizi High School Kanungu)**

Some of the girls who got pregnant feared going back to school mainly because of the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy. Girls with disabilities suffer double stigmatization when it comes to pregnancy and are more likely not to be supported to go back to school.

Most of them may not go back to school. When a girl CWDs gets pregnant, this marks the end of their education. No parent or guardian is willing to take her back to school. The school environment is not friendly to a pregnant girl with disabilities. Her peers will stigmatise her. Even at home she is stigmatized. Because they want to know who impregnated her. They just utter words to her such as 'you know you are a disabled girl how dare you get pregnant'. **(Participant, NUWODU)**

In some cases, the situation of girls was reportedly complicated by the fact that some of them were made pregnant by their relatives, which interferes with the possibility of getting justice for the victim.

One of the girls became pregnant and she's dropped out of the school. I talked to the parent of the pregnant girl and I learnt that she got a premature birth. The parents had wanted her back but she refused. She has fear that the pupils will laugh at her.... I took time to get the details of the girl, the parent came to school and I hear she was impregnated by a relative who is also around 16-17 years. Actually, the father of the girl is the chairman of the village, he had wanted to take the man to the prison/police but he feared since the culprit is a relative. **(KII, Kinkizi High School)**

There is high drop out of girls, most of them have gone to marriage and some have gotten pregnant so they feel it is embarrassing to come back to school **(KII, Amuria High School, Amuria)**

Some of the teachers and head teachers that the study team talked to indicate that some of the girls who have successfully returned to school are pregnant.

We got a report from the school nurse about one of our girls who was suspected to be pregnant. However, we are supposed to conduct another test to ascertain whether she is really pregnant. We have surely handled her professionally and the girl is really here doing her work so well. **(KII, Kinkizi High School, Kanungu)**

Others are said to have contracted some sexually transmitted diseases.

There is no single girl who is pregnant but one of the girls seems to have contracted an STI. The senior woman teacher took her for treatment at the hospital and they have already returned. **(KII, Bugantira Primary School, Gulu)**

In some communities, marriages were reportedly taking place with the knowledge and support from the girls' parents. In one school, in Ntugamo called Trust High School, we learnt that 8 girls got married in S4 and others remained at home. In Kween at Kwasir Girl's Boarding Secondary School, enrollment in S.4 declined sharply from 77 learners before COVID-19 to 50 learners when schools resumed, which the head teacher and teachers noted that "majority of the missing girls went into marriage". Further discussions with the teachers from Kwasir indicate that girls "who were forced into marriage (by their parents) were already pregnant".

In Amuria primary school, one of the girls who did not turn up was reportedly forced by her parents "to go to her man because she slept out". A number of other girls from the same school were also married off by their parents and as reported by the head teacher of Amuria primary school "the rest I tried to follow up who got pregnant they were married very far some distance in Kapelebong, I called the parents they said they cannot call them back" and the "parents told me that they had now taken the dowry and they were already settled in their homes" reveals the head teacher Amuria Primary school.

It is important to note that cases of forced child marriage have often been recorded in most communities in Uganda before COVID-19³². However, COVID-19 appears to have aggravated the problem. In communities like Kween, it appears that COVID-19 has exacerbated the already fragile situation of child marriage and teenage pregnancy which are deeply rooted in the cultural practices and beliefs. In such communities, schools were regarded as safe spaces that provided parents a form of space where the children would be protected. In a discussion with teachers at Kwasir, in Kween, teachers noted that as a single girls' school, the interaction between girls and male counter parts is always limited when girls are at school. They expressed concern that prolonged closure of schools means that "most girls have become trapped in pregnancy and early marriages".

Our observation therefore is that marrying off girls during COVID-19 ought to be understood within the overarching structural patriarchy and violence that exists in several communities in Uganda (Gardsbane, Bukuluki, & Musuya, 2021)³³. For some parents when a girl becomes pregnant unmarried, it brings shame to the family. Consequently, they would rather have the girl married off. For example, in Kasese as was noted in several other places, cases of teenage girls who got pregnant and were married off by their parents were reported.

I called one of the parents and they told me that one of the girls was pregnant and that they had to take her to her husband or the man who was responsible for her pregnancy **(KII, Kasese Secondary School)**

³² Gardsbane, D., Bukuluki, P., & Musuya, T. (2021). Help-seeking within the context of patriarchy for domestic violence in urban Uganda. *Violence against women*, 1077801220985943. See also, Abdoulaye, S. (2020). Empirical Analysis of the Prevalence of Child Marriage in Uganda;

³³ Gardsbane, D., Bukuluki, P., & Musuya, T. (2021). Help-seeking within the context of patriarchy for domestic violence in urban Uganda. *Violence against women*, 1077801220985943.

Therefore, with the education institutions closed for more than eight months, concerns about increased violations including cases of forced marriages have been noted, especially among communities which, prior to the pandemic, had a proclivity for gross violations of rights of girls to education.

In Karamoja, some of the factors affecting girls and boys are also deeply engrained in the beliefs towards education of girls. For example, in Nabokotom, where all the girls that were in school before COVID-19 never returned when the Government opened up schools for candidate classes, the head teacher pointed to two possibilities. He mentioned that while parents often say that the girls travelled across to Kenya to study from there due to COVID-19, the most likely reason is that all of them were married off and therefore use travel to Kenya as a cover up.

If you become hard on them (parents tell you where girls went), they tell you they have gone to study across. (But) we have stayed here for long and we know them very well. When they have married off their children, they tell you they have gone to study in Kenya, which is a lie **(KII, Nabokotom SS Amudat)**

Additionally, in Karamoja, it was noted that some of the parents have taken advantage of COVID-19 to take their children for FGM in preparation for marriage. This also suggests that Uganda and in particular communities that had made significant progress on girl child education are in danger of reversing the gains attained before COVID-19.

For boys, most of them have taken on to grazing cattle, which activity demands that they move from one place to another.

For the boys, they have taken on grazing animals and that is the major work boys do. Like now, it is becoming a dry spell. For them they are shifting to the other side of Nakapiripirit. That is where their animals are and that is where parents send their children. **(KII, Nabokotom SS Amudat)**

Failure to afford school fees: Discussions also suggest that one of the main reasons why some candidates have been unable to resume had to do with inability by their parents to meet the fees and other scholastic demands. One of the key reasons pointed out that as a result of COVID-19, most parents lost their sources of livelihood and could not therefore afford to take their children to school.

Parents have failed to raise money to bring back children to school since reopening of schools was abrupt. **(KII, Amuria High School, Amuria)**

The other two parents failed to get fees but they have shifted them to government aided schools. These are still studying and have registered in those two schools. **(KII, Green Hill Primary, Lamwo)**

Some of the boys decided to change schools. Before March 2020, we had a boarding section and all candidate pupils were in boarding. Now all candidates are boarding. The financial situations of the parents have gotten worse and they have pulled out their children due to the failure to raise the fees. Even the pupils

who have returned many have not up to now cleared their school fees. **(KII, Bugantira primary school, Gulu)**

Inter school transfer/change of schools: Our detailed discussions with the stakeholders also indicate that some learners have changed schools, partly because of financial constraints. We learnt for example, that there is some degree of transfer of learners from private schools where it is believed to be costly to government aided schools. For example, in almost all schools visited by the study team, there were cases of learners changing schools. In Kanungu district, the study team confirmed the transfer of one girl from Kirima primary school to Nyakatara Primary which is a government aided school. It was reported that Nyakatara charges lower than what they were paying at Kirima. At Kirima, they paid 230,000UGX while at Nyakatara, they charge 30,000UGX.

We were told that she changed school to Nyakatara Primary School. When we opened, the parents came here and told us that due to corona virus effect, they can't afford a boarding school. So they thought of school fees in these two months and again early next year there will be more school fees to pay and finally they decided to take away the girl to a government school. **(KII, Kirima Primary School, Ntungamo)**

Indeed, when the study team visited Nyakatara Primary school in the same district, the enrollment in P.7 increased from 39 children before COVID-19 to 41 children when schools reopened for candidate classes. Other schools reported changes in candidates' classes due to transfers.

In S.4 we had 145 students out of these 5 students did not return but we managed to get-in 6 students who transferred into the school **(KII, St. John Paul II College, Gulu)**.

The numbers increased slightly after resumption of candidate schools especially senior six. This is because some parents could not take back their children to Kampala schools and preferred them registering from here. Others were complaining of higher fees from their former schools. For S.6, all had turned up but two boys have not registered with us. They transferred to a neighboring school. The good thing is that they have not dropped out of school. All the S.6 girls turned up. We also have had a good number of transfer-ins. **(KII, Gulu Secondary School, Gulu)**

Similar observations were noted in other schools like Ober Primary in Lira where the total number of girls in P.7 increased from 40 to 43. It was noted that three girls transferred from other schools to Ober because the school had introduced the feeding program. However, the reduction in the number of boys was attributed to fear of COVID-19.

However, other schools like Binyiny Primary School in Kween reported an increase in enrolment by over 40 students because, as a government aided school, it was perceived to be well facilitated to ensure that they put in place all the COVID-19 SOPs. Therefore, as some private schools were closing in the district, the government aided schools were experiencing an influx of learners. While this is important, if the trend continues, public schools may also become overwhelmed especially in districts where there are few and

also where private schools are likely to close because of the financial burden imposed by COVID-19. In a discussion with the head teacher of Binyiny she mentioned that all the children returned and more new ones enrolled.

When learners heard about masks in our school since it is a government school and we have everything, they all ran from private schools to our school. That explains the increment of the school's enrolment from 60 before corona to 100 pupils after corona outbreak. We have enough classrooms, so we separate them 20 per class for spacing purposes. And we have good hand washing facilities, the one which is stepped by the foot, about four of them. Most of the private schools have been closed because they could not fulfill the SOPs. We have sanitisers for teachers, masks, jik which we put in the hand washing facilities to kill germs. We have both liquid and bar soap so the pupils are well protected. We also have the temperature gun to check all the teachers' and learners' on a daily basis. We have a corona committee and an isolation room in case of suspicion. We also have the contacts of the Kween district Corona task force. **(KII, Binyiny, Kween district)**

The above is corroborated with evidence from Kween Modern Secondary school where the total number of students in candidate classes reduced. Kween Modern Secondary school is a private school in the district.

The school being private, depends on the thinking of the people. Lockdown got us before we reached middle of the term. That means majority had not yet paid school fees though some had maybe paid a quarter of the fees. The requirement, when the schools reopened was for them to pay first the school fees for the first term then the one for the second term in addition to paying registration fees **(KII, Kween Modern, Kween district)**

Most proprietors of private schools have called government to subsidise them so that they are able to continue offering the services since majority risk closure. Therefore, indeed as noted by UNICEF (2020) in the recent report titled "Education on Hold: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling because of COVID-19", it is important to note that "Beyond the immediate impact of school closures on children, the financial consequences of the unfolding education crisis will ripple through"³⁴. In Uganda, the financial crisis is not only felt by the parents, it's also felt by particularly private schools.

6.9. RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL CLOSURES

Closure of schools does not only mean closure of classes and interruption in classroom activities, it's impact is more far reaching, resulting in interruption in personal growth and development, interruption in skills acquisition, disruption of safe spaces that offer protection for learners especially girls and young women, and generally loss of much more than an education.

Direct effects on the learners: Six in every ten (62.9%) children said they missed playing with friends at school due to school closure. About four in every ten (40.4%) participants mentioned that they miss talking to their teachers and about one in every ten participants said they miss having meals/food at school (12.5%). Important to note

³⁴ UNICEF, 2020: EDUCATION ON HOLD: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling because of COVID-19. UNICEF

also is that about 6.6% said that because of school closure, they now spend time with people they don't like at all. About 2.9% mentioned missing extracurricular activities and about 0.7% said they miss just being within the school environment and wearing school uniform. This is probably a sense of comfort and satisfaction that learners get and sense of belonging being at school. Most of these effects are not just about the education they receive in class but about who they are as human beings.

Table 36: How school closure affected participants (n=9,782) **

I miss playing with my friends	62.9%
I miss talking to my teachers	40.4%
I spend a lot of time at home	25.1%
I miss food at school	12.5%
Nothing	8.1%
I spend time with people I don't like	6.6%
I miss school extracurricular activities like drama, choir, football and school clubs	2.9%
I miss just being in the school environment including just wearing a school uniform	0.7%
Lost hope in going back	0.4%
As girl, men and boys around disturb a lot	0.1%
Counseling and guidance	0.1%

****:** Multiple responses allowed

Being out of school has several associated risks. As indicated, learners miss playing with their friends, talking to teachers, playing their favorite sport and just having a sense of belonging.

- a) Increased exposure to abuse and various forms of violence:** Being away from school exposes children and learners to several other risks including direct abuse. About (6.6%) said closure of school means they spend time with people they do not like. Some of the people children spend time with are their abusers. As indicated already, closure of schools has occasioned high cases of pregnancy among young girls. About (2.4%) of the participants revealed that one of the reasons why pregnancy rates have increased is that because schools used to offer protection, with school closure resulting in girls being susceptible to abuse and various forms of violence. For example, in Amudat in Karamoja, in one of the schools, all girls were married off immediately on schools getting closed. In Kween, in one of the schools, it was noted that school offered a form of protection to the girls and once this protection was taken away, most girls were exposed to abuse and have become pregnant.
- b) Increased school dropout:** School closure has the risk of increasing school dropout rates in the country. Results suggest that a significant number of learners have lost hope in going back to school when schools reopen. Parents have also become anxious. Some of the young learners who have taken up economic activities say they do not see the reason for returning to school once schools reopen. All these are likely to occasion a significant drop in schooling that has never been seen before in Uganda. Studies elsewhere have also predicted/projected significant drop in

enrolment of first-time students³⁵.

- c) *Collapse of education institutions:*** Although not part of this study, conversations with stakeholders in education sector suggest that the cost of closure of education institutions will be felt long into the future, especially by the private investors. Most of the private education institutions relied heavily on school fees paid by the learners to sustain operations. Closure of these schools therefore means not just closure of a school but it risks loss of employment and livelihood as several teachers have already diverted to other vocations.
- d) *Increased risk of overcrowding in public schools.*** Uganda has achieved a remarkable improvement in physical infrastructure explained by improvement in the Pupil Classroom Ratio from 87:1 in 2003 to 55:1 in 2018³⁶. However, COVID-19 is likely to reverse such gains. Prolonged closure of schools means that when schools finally reopen, there will be fewer schools to take on many learners. The likely impact will be felt by public schools, which anecdotal information suggests that their infrastructure may be lacking in many respects to take on additional learners. As results of this survey already show a significant number of learners in candidate classes are changing from private schools to public/government aided schools citing school fees and ability of public schools to afford and adhere to SOPs. Consequently, the influx of learners to public schools means that the private schools are not only left with fewer learners and run risk of further collapse but also that the public schools will be overwhelmed. The long-term risk is further deterioration of the quality of learning children will receive rendering it even more difficult to realize the targets set by the ESSP.

³⁵ UNICEF (2020). EDUCATION ON HOLD: A generation of children in Latin America and the Caribbean are missing out on schooling because of COVID-19. UNICEF

³⁶ National Planning Authority (2020). Third National Development Plan (NDPIII) 2020/21 – 2024/25. National Planning Authority, Kampala Uganda

PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

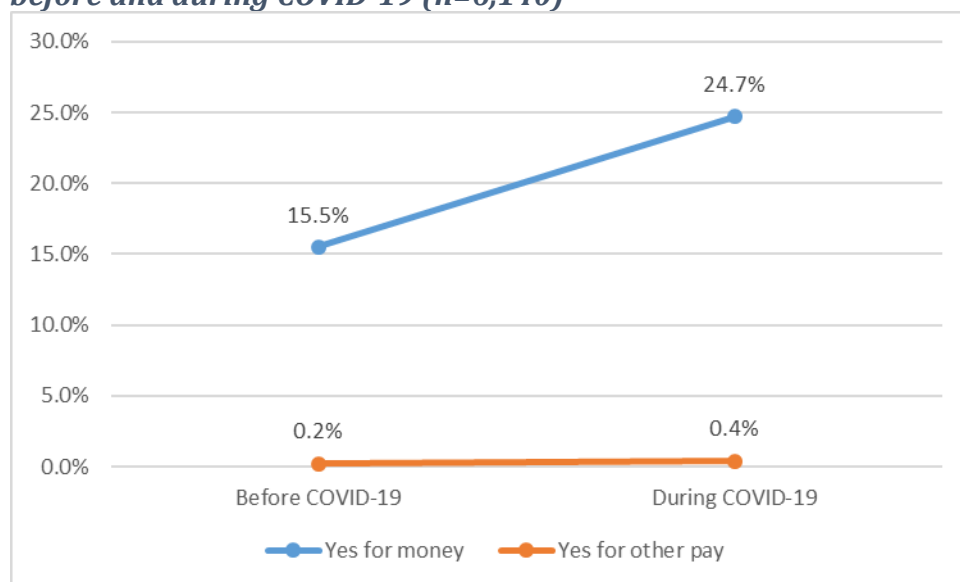
7.1. INTRODUCTION

This study sought to examine the level of involvement of school going girls in economic activities during COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of their involvement particularly on their lives. Results in this section highlight the proportion of girls and boys involved in economic activities before and during COVID-19; the nature of activities involved in and the effects of these activities on the lives of girls and boys.

7.2. LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Results show a nine-percentage increase among young people who said they worked for money before COVID-19 (15.5%) and during COVID-19 (24.7%) and a 0.2% increase among those who worked for other forms of payment such as being given clothes, food and accommodation. COVID-19 has left young men and women at the perils of economic survival and the survival of their families.

Figure 20: Proportion of young people involved in work for money and other pay before and during COVID-19 (n=6,140)



By sex of respondents, more males/boys have taken up economic activities for monetary payment and other form of pay than females/girls. For example, the proportion of males who engaged in economic activities for monetary payment increased from 20.5% before COVID-19 to 32.6% during COVID-19. Among females, the proportion of those engaged in economic activities for payment increased from 10.7% before COVID-19 to 17.0% during COVID-19.

Table 42: Proportion (%) of respondents involved in work for money and other pay before and during COVID-19 (n=6,140)

	Worked to earn money or other payment before COVID-19			Worked for money or other payment during COVID-19		
	Male %	Female%	Total %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Yes, for money	20.5%	10.7%	15.5%	32.6%	17.0%	24.7%
Yes, for other form of	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%

pay							
No	79.3%	89.1%	84.3%	67.1%	82.6%	74.9%	

Among those who mentioned money as their form of payment, about eight in every ten (84.5%) earned below 50,000UGX (approximately USD14) the last month they received their payment. About nine in every ten (93.5%) participants who said they were paid in monetary terms said the money was paid to them directly and 6.1% said money was either paid to them through parents, siblings or employers.

About five in every ten (51.8%) said the decision on how money was used was made by their parents while four in every ten (43.2%) made the decisions on their own. The rest mentioned siblings (1.5%), intimate partners (0.8%), other relatives (2.2%) or jointly with their intimate partners (0.3%). When asked how they use their money, majority mentioned clothing (48.7%), personal effects (41.2%) and other essential items such as buying food (29.4%). We also found that some of the respondents gave their money to parents to buy household items and other essentials like salt, soap among others (2.8%).

Table 37: Level of earnings and decision making about use of money earned

	Response	%ge
Money earned the last month received payment (n=1,517)		
	Below 50,000	84.5%
	60,000— 100,000	9.0%
	110,000<200,000	3.8%
	210,000<500,000	2.2%
	510,000<1,000,000	0.3%
	1,000,000+	0.1%
Who decides what you do with the money you earn? (n=1,530)		
	My parents	51.8%
	Myself	43.2%
	Other relative (Aunties, uncles, etc)	2.2%
	My siblings	1.5%
	My boyfriend/partner	0.8%
	Joint, my partner and I	0.3%
	My employer	0.2%
How did you use the money you last received as your pay? (n=2,139)		
	Clothing	48.7%
	Personal effects	41.2%
	Bought food	29.4%
	Saved it	5.2%
	Gave it away to my friends and other relatives	3.6%
	Small scale investment including buying chicken, goats etc	3.2%
	Paid for accommodation	2.6%
	Gave it to my parents to buy items for home use like salt, soap	2.8%
	Bought scholastic materials	1.5%
	Started a business	0.6%

7.3. NATURE OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES GIRLS/YOUNG WOMEN AND BOYS/YOUNG MEN ENGAGED IN

When asked what sort of activities/work they were involved in, results indicate a range of but mainly of informal nature. The nature of work involved in, does not seem to have changed much though at the two periods, before and during COVID-19. Although the proportion of girls and boys involved in casual labour reduced from 41.4% before COVID-19 to 39.7% during COVID-19, casual labour remained the most common economic activity. Casual labour included; digging for people, weeding, working as a labourer in plantations of sugarcane, coffee and fetching water. However, there was a slight increase in the proportion of respondents involved in service industry, particularly working in restaurants from 1.9% before COVID-19 to 2.7% during COVID-19. Similarly, unlike before COVID-19 when about 4.5% reported being involved in brick making, during COVID-19 this proportion increased to 6.1%. During the COVID-19 some respondents were involved in three activities that were not engaged in before: working as a householder/maid (1.1%), burning and selling charcoal (2.1%) and working in a garage or as mechanic (0.8%).

Table 38: Nature of economic activities engaged in by study respondents

	Work involved in before COVID-19 (n=645)	Work involved in during COVID-19 (n=1,540)
Vending items (e.g., sweet bananas, food, pancakes)	22.5%	15.2%
Involved in selling metals and scrap (e.g., plastics)	4.0%	1.6%
Stone quarrying, sand mining etc	3.1%	2.4%
Casual labour like digging for people, weeding, working as a labourer in plantations of sugarcane, coffee and collecting water	41.4%	39.7%
Animal husbandry including poultry keeping, cattle keeping and dealing in related business such as selling eggs	1.7%	2.2%
Fishing and fish related business	2.2%	2.3%
Involvement in Business/Petty trading including selling clothes, selling in a shop, operating mobile money business clothes	14.9%	12.0%
Service industry (salon, restaurant)	1.9%	2.7%
Handcrafts/weaving	4.7%	4.2%
Working at a construction site	8.8%	8.7%
Brick making	4.5%	6.1%
Took on work as a house help (commonly called housemaid)	-	1.1%
Casual labour, burning and selling charcoal	-	2.1%
Working in a garage, mechanics	-	0.8%

While there were some specific activities that respondents were involved in during the COVID-19 period, it appears that all regions had children involved in economic activities during COVID-19. For instance,

- In Acholi Sub-Region respondents indicated that a very big number of girls are involved in sugarcane growing at Adodi sugarcane plantation which supplies sugarcane to Atiak sugar factory.
- In Eastern Uganda and Karamoja, girls are involved in stone quarrying with their parents who prefer not to leave these girls in the homes on their own but instead support them as they do their quarrying work.
- In all districts, especially Buliisa the girls are involved in domestic activities for monetary benefit.
- In Amuria, most of the girls who live in upcoming urban centres are involved in selling local brew (*waragi or ajono*) which is big business. Others are found selling tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, and egg-plants along the road in local trading centres. Other girls in Amuria town are working in restaurants where they are employed to cook, attend to customers, while others work in bars, and daily markets selling local food crops.
- In Adjumani, a group of girls have joined commercial sex work and were reported to be members of a 'TEAM NO SLEEP' group whose major activity is to exchange sex for money.
- In almost all major urban areas and towns, girls have turned to vending food, hawking items especially on the roadside, in bars and other places.

Discussions with a range of stakeholders seem to suggest that girls and boys have taken on a range of economic related activities. In Kanungu district, discussions with young girls show that they are involved in baking and selling in their parents' shops.

R4: For me, I bake **sumbusa** every morning and sale them to meet my needs. I earn something like 10,000/- a day. I feel like taking my business to another level, but I still want to go back to school.

R1: For my family we formed a saving group where we save 1000 per week after casual labour

R6: I sell in my parents shop and at times I am paid

R7: I also help in selling at my parents shop **(FGD participants, girls Kanungu)**

In Lango sub-region, girls are reportedly involved in group farming where they sell the produce, while others have also taken on baking and others craft making using papyrus.

R5. Most girls do group farming called "alulu" whereby at the end of the year, in December you find people are giving out money that they saved as a result of their farming in a group.

R3. I have seen that during this time, girls joined the business of making pan cakes, whereby if you see at this time, many girls are making pan-cakes. Parents left that work to their children to make some money for soap. I have also noticed that girls who are in technical schools during this lockdown, they continued to practice what they are studying e.g. Tailoring - and construction for others.

R2. Girls are now cutting and making papyrus to make mats or to make roofs and or used for building simsim rakes **(FGD Participants, FGD with boys, Kole district)**

In Kasese, we learnt that some girls are involved in baking, but a good number are hired to dig in people's gardens and get paid for the work done. In Kasese, particularly urban areas,

boys have reportedly joined *boda boda* business while others are into hawking items and food vending.

P2: Some children are hired to work in people's gardens and they are paid according to the amount of work to be done.

P1: Some few girls sell pancakes along the road. I also know of some girls who left our village and went to Kasese town to work in Bars. I have at least witnessed many **(FGD with Male caregivers, Kasese)**

R: Boys have become bodaboda riders, others are working in hotels, and other children are involved in trading fruits. If you go to town now, you will see others vending vegetables, and food items. **(KII, Education Department, Kasese)**

In Kalangala, school going girls are hired to dry and sell fish particularly silver fish, while boys are hired to work as guards in business factories.

When you move in the evening, you find these ladies selling food, fish and chips and you find girls. Also the other business is of moving fruits around. Girls mainly dry silver fish because they don't fish while boys are contracted to guard the silver fish. **(KII, Education Department Kalangala)**

In Sebei region, particularly Kween, most girls are used by their parents to help with a range of activities such as selling food for income, selling vegetables while boys tend to animals.

R1. They help us in gardening more especially in planting, weeding and harvesting and selling some of the food for income which we use to support these children.

R6. They sell vegetables like cabbages, tomatoes among others.

R3. For me I send my daughter down the stream (lower belt) to bring milk for sell to earn some income for the household

R4. My daughter helps me in selling matooke

R5. We assign the boys to look after the animals

R2. Somewhere, we are seeing an increment in the number of girls who have become maids in other peoples' homes **(FGD with female caregivers, Kween)**

R6. Some were helping their mothers in weeding the maize and planting second season beans

R1: Opening small businesses like eating joints, making mandazi, small salons, tailoring, hawking and vending vegetables among other things **(FGD participants, boys, Kween)**

7.4. REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN WORK DURING COVID-19 PERIOD

When asked why they took on work for money or other form of payment, about seven in every ten (67%) of the girls and boys mentioned the need to meet their own needs, about three in every ten (30.3%) mentioned the need to supplement on family income and about 16.4% said their parents asked them to work. closely related is that about 13.4% mentioned that they took on work to fend for their families while 12.5% said that taking on work for pay was occasioned by the need to keep busy since closure of schools meant that they are spending more time at home. What these results mean however is that all the reasons given rotate around the need for survival which was occasioned by the loss of livelihood due to COVID-19 restrictions for most families.

There were statistically significant differences between boys and girls working for money or other form of payment during COVID-19. At Pr=0.006, results show that girls (23.0%) are more likely to be told by their parents to work than boys (12.7%). Slightly more boys work to meet their own needs (69%) compared to females who work to meet their own needs (63%).

Table 39: Reasons for involvement in work for money or other pay during the period COVID-19 (n=1540)**

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>P-value</i>
To meet my own needs	69%	63%	67%	Pr=0.006
To supplement on family income	30.6%	29.8%	30.3%	
My parents told me to work	12.7%	23.0%	16.4%	
To fend for my family	12.7%	14.6%	13.4%	
I don't have anything else to do, work keeps me busy	13.5%	10.7%	12.5%	
Caregivers no longer afford	7.3%	6.8%	7.1%	
Other	7.7%	5.3%	6.9%	

****:** Multiple responses

Discussions with various stakeholders indicate the challenges that girls and boys have faced that drive them into economic activities. Our informed opinion suggest that the factors that have increased involvement in economic activities for girls and boys can be seen as both push and pull factors. Pull factors include what seem to be things that attract girls and boys while push factors are those immediate concerns that have made the life of girls and boys uncomfortable. Some of these factors include;

Loss of livelihood for parents/caregivers

The COVID-19 period has been unprecedented and caused a lot of financial hardships with increased levels of poverty in families and communities at large. As a result, a number of girls and boys were pushed to work to support their families' make ends meet. As noted, the survey results show that about 30.4% said that they decided to start engaging in economic activities to supplement on family income. Qualitative evidence also corroborates the survey results.

R: Most girls engage in economic activities mainly because of the low incomes of parents, and some of these children even pay their own fees. Some of these children are engaged in business, then girls are involved in making mats, baskets and they later sell them in the community. But before COVID-19, some of the children were in boarding schools, they had enough time to study than work. **(KII, Local Council I, Kyegegwa)**

In addition, discussions with some of the caregivers suggest that in most cases the money earned by the children is shared with the parents to enable the parents supplement on their incomes.

P3: Some of the children especially those working in gardens, are at times paid 2,000UGX and once they get money, they share it with their parents to help at home. **(FGD Male Caregivers Kasese district)**

This was also echoed during discussions with some of the girls who participated in the study. Testimonies from the girls corroborate the evidence that most girls who have been involved in economic activities are using part of it to meet their own needs but also supplement on household income and needs.

R4: I have done these activities to meet my needs when schools open because I know my parents may not manage. At times I buy salt and soap at home to help my parents

R2: I am preparing to go back to school and I know my parents will not manage alone.

R1: Preparing for the reopening of schools to lessen on the burden am likely to put on my parents **(FGD with girls, Kanungu)**

R6. This money is not for these children. It is for home consumption and they consume it all because of the family sizes. **(FGD participant, Female Caregivers, Kween)**

Meeting personal needs

As noted, a number of families had their breadwinners losing sources of employment. This meant that most girls and boys who relied on their parents and caregivers for support in meeting their needs could no longer afford that. This has resulted into most participants taking advantage of the work opportunities available to work so that they are able to meet their own needs. No wonder as survey results show, a significant number of children cited the need to meet personal needs as the main reason they were involved in economic activities.

Participant 5: Some parents tell you to go and work such that you get money and you get personal needs because “I don’t have money”. When you ask them for the need and they do not have money, they tell you to go and look for money to help yourself **(FGD with girls, Butalejja)**

P6: Some other children especially girls have their special needs, when they get this money, they can use it to buy Pads, others buy soap for washing their clothes and this is good because it can help them to access what they need. **(FGD with male caregivers, Kasese)**

P3: Of course, they also want to earn some money, in most cases there are some girls who fear to tell their parents all their needs like PADs or even buying some clothes that they like;

P4: To be financially independent. **(FGD with boys, Bulisa district)**

Pressure from parents and caregivers

Discussions with parents/caregivers and girls and boys show that parents/caregivers have to some extent pressured their children to take on paid work to meet their own needs. What is clear is that when parents pressure their children to work, it is partly to ensure that they take on a responsibility of supplementing on family income. As we have already noted, some of the earnings by children is given to their parents to buy the necessary items at home.

Besides, testimonies from various stakeholders also indicate that some parents look at their children working as a way of inculcating a sense of responsibility in them. The

study team learnt for example, that some parents especially women cannot allow a grown child to stay home and do nothing when they have so many personal needs like Vaseline, clothes and food. Our opinion therefore is that the closure of schools has piled pressure on these parents to ensure that the children have something to do. Some parents also have no skills in engaging their children, hence asking them to take on paid work is one of the ways of occupying them. Some parents, especially those that run businesses like shops, retail, grocery stores, and local brew appear to have found cheap labour because their children are available. Instead of hiring someone else to work with, some parents have taken advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions and school closures - that have made children redundant to involve them in their businesses, usually at a small fee or sometimes through some form of none-monetary payment. For example, some parents currently work with their daughters in the different enterprises like selling local brew, selling at stalls in the markets, cooking in restaurants, selling pancakes, fry fish, chips, *mandazi* in the evening markets, or any other venture that the mothers are involved in. One of the girls we talked to said that, she has to work to be able to purchase sanitary towels for herself and her sister.

Idleness

Survey results show that about 12.5% of the respondents (13.5% male; 10.7% female) mentioned that they have taken on work to keep busy.

Many children have been at home for now close to 8 months doing nothing. As a result they have used the opportunity to learn activities like sawing, tailoring, hair dressing and other technical works; and many are not going back to schools because of this **(FGD with female parents, Luuka)**

Most school going girls have gone into business like vending food, juice and greens like cabbages, onions, and they are earning some small money. This was more especially after the COVID-19 outbreak as most school going children are idle doing nothing at home so they decided to do business **(Interview youth leader, Kaliro)**

7.5. EFFECTS OF INVOLVEMENT ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES ON GIRLS/YOUNG WOMEN AND BOYS/YOUNG MEN

Some of the effects mentioned, is the long hours of work (25.5%). This appeared to have been the main concern. For example, when asked how many hours they work, about six in every ten (59.6%) of the participants mentioned working more than four hours a day with about 6.8% working more than 10 hours. Other problems mentioned include poor working conditions (22.4%), poor or no payment for the work done (24.5%) and some mentioned feeling physical pain on their bodies. Perhaps what is also critical is that about 1.8% experienced sexual violence as a result of work and 1.6% said that participating in work has created a sense of loss of interest in school.

Table 40: Effects of involvement in economic activities (n=1,733) **

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Sexual violence (including threats of rape/defilement)	1.8%
No payment	24.5%
Working long hours	25.5%
Working conditions are bad (e.g. no protective equipment)	21.7%

I always feel pain because of work	22.4%
I have lost interest in school	1.6%
Sickness	0.5%
Accidents at work	1.0%
No major problems	13.5%

****:** Multiple responses allowed

What is clear is that while the effects mentioned relate directly to their involvement in work, it is also important to note that some of the effects may not be easily noticeable until later.

Short term effects

Lack of access to existing learning platforms during COVID-19: Results from the survey show that 0.9% of the participants have not been involved in learning during COVID-19 because of work. Participation of young girls and boys in economic activities has affected them to the extent that it has taken away the time they would have used for learning. Qualitative interviews revealed that transition to work affected their motivation to participate in learning activities during COVID-19. It was also noted that engagement in economic activities presents a time burden that limits or stops people from participating in learning.

For the boys the economic activity may not affect so much their learning, but for the girls it really affects them because they don't create time for learning and they cannot also afford the needs they want, many have gotten married and may not go back to school **(FGD with female parents, Kaliro)**

Exposure to violence: Discussions with participants show that school-going children's participation in economic activities presents risk to violence. It was reported that some girls have been introduced to exploitative work and become targets by perpetrators of sexual violence. Most of the girls involved in vending food and hawking other items have been raped, defiled and sexually violated. Cases of girls being raped and defiled was noted to be critical. During discussions, participants in Kasese recalled a scenario when a girl went to sell boiled maize and was attacked by men and raped. Within the refugee settlements, where security is a big concern, girls were particularly vulnerable. For example, in Palabek it was noted that girls who sell in the market face the risk of getting raped on the way because the market is 2-3km away and many times they have to walk back home after dusk. The study team also learnt of a case of a girl who while trying to fend for the family in Amuria town was raped and killed.

You have to pray a lot in such an incidence because imagine if your daughter works in a saloon this means men will think she is mature and in due course she might be exposed to sexual violence **(FGD with female parents, Kaliro)**

These children walk long distances, for example girls who vend yellow bananas, pan cakes, avocado, you never know what might happen from one village to another. Many things can happen along the way say rape, defilement; even because of the distance one can faint on the way, so some of these activities are risky and platforms for violence **(Interview with religious leader, Luuka)**

There are some children who are involved in work that directly exposes them to sexual violence, such as those who work in bars.

Another example are those that work in bars, these kind of jobs really expose these children to violence. Imagine a primary seven pupil working in a bar, yes this is true because we have examples of them here, men have been assaulting them **(KII, LCI, Luuka)**

The girls working as bar attendants are exposed to danger. As you know these are the people who drink and by the time they get drunk, they start looking at these girls as mature women and you know that's the time, they develop the interest they want to have sex and when they begin touching these girls inappropriately, talking to them in any language and with time the girls also get interested **(KII, Community Development Office, Amuria)**.

Some children have been introduced in commercial sex work.

Some of these activities have exposed these school going girls to sex for money because they have seen the merits of having money and been linked to men who have money, many are tempted to engage in sex for money. **(Interview with youth leader, Kaliro)**

Work generally exposes girls and brings them into contact with men who take advantage to abuse them.

R: At times these girls sell food items like beans or when they are selling their products like mats, on their way, they meet men who begin luring them. Some of the men give them money, instead of buying an item at 500UGX, they instead give the girl 1000UGX and tell them to keep the balance. The man will say *'You can keep that balance, it will help you buy what you want'*. We noticed these things happen and there is girl who was impregnated like that **(KII, LCI, Kyegegwa)**

Overall, children selling and hawking food items in this era of COVID-19 are themselves at risk of being infected. Most of these children are not even protected, they do not wear masks or any form of protection.

Besides sexual violence, learners involved in work have also been exposed to physical violence. Some of the girls and boys have also been physically assaulted in the course of their work. Examples of children who have been beaten up, denied payment have been noted in Amuria, Kases and Kyegegwa among others.

School dropout: Involvement in work has resulted into school dropout for candidates/finalists. The survey results show that when candidate classes were opened, about 3.4% said they did not see the need for going back to school once schools resume precisely because they had secured work/jobs and were earning money. A number of the boys and girls who have been working during the lockdown lost interest in learning and are now more focused on making money while some of the girls conceived and were married off during the lock down as some of the respondents commented. Discussions with some of the head teachers in some of the schools that have reopened for candidate classes revealed that some of the learners who did not return were fully involved in economic activities, such as simsim growing in both northern and eastern Uganda. Discussions with the teachers and head teachers also indicated that where the

learners returned, concentration in class is a challenge because their minds are always on the work and money that they were earning during lock down.

Positive effects: On the positive side however, there are activities which are productive and have enabled these girls and boys to acquire some skills. For instance, if the girls or boys got involved in the garden work and the parents took advantage of that because they had labour, the children much as some of them got over worked, they learnt that it is through hard work that we get food, through hard work that we are able to get something and maybe to sell and get what we don't have and so forth. So at least they got some skills, they got some knowledge they got to know how food is put onto the plate because before you would find that they were at school most of the time and maybe once in a while they would go to the garden.'

This view was reaffirmed by a respondent from UNATU who noted that, "the children participating in economic activities started in good faith, like the majority I have ever met, I find them carrying liquid soap which they have made by themselves, this is the life skill they got from school. Now instead of just being there, sited at home some of them are trying out doing business. But you see it is just the process, it is not bad for them, but it is only what happens. Because when they make liquid soap they are supposed to move round like hawkers, from house to house for people to buy. But the process of walking that is where now the danger comes in. In any case many of the parents are encouraging the children to start small businesses because no one knows when the schools are opening.'

Long-term effects

Discussions with the stakeholders suggest that one of the long-term effects of children's participation in economic activities is that most children will not be able to return when schools officially reopen.

Some students are earning and they will continue to work to keep the income flowing. They have already lived that independent life and so they will compare and may decide to continue working instead of going back to school. **(KII, St. Johns Comprehensive Secondary School)**

One of the challenges is that when the young people touch money, they do not want to go back to school, they become focused on money. As WAKISA Ministries something that we are very fearful about is involving these young girls in early employment. We want to make them understand that as they go back to school, they should be focused. Why should they go back to school, where they used to be! They have met challenges and have seen where the opportunities and goals are coming from. **(KII, WAKISA Ministries)**

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The overall intent of this study was to establish the situation of and impact of COVID-19 on school going girls, young women, boys and young men aged 10-24 years in the 25 districts of Uganda. Specifically, the study has documented four issues; prevalence of early marriages and adolescent pregnancies; drivers of sexual engagement; level of participation of school going girls in available learning opportunities and their continued interest in education during the pandemic and post COVID-19 period; and involvement of school going girls in economic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of this on the lives of school going girls.

While the full scale of the impact of COVID-19 may not be known until much later, it is evident from this study that the pandemic has exacerbated a learning crisis for girl children, increased exposure to risk factors that have driven high cases of teenage pregnancy and early marriages and laid bare the barriers to effective learning for girls during pandemics, like COVID-19 has been. What is also clear is that for many sectors, individuals, and institutions, COVID-19 came as a shock but also found a fertile ground on which to wreak havoc. As has been established in this study, all evidence suggest that women and girls are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the crisis, right from increased burden of care as most men became emasculated by business closures to direct experiences of violence arising from the effects of lock down measures.

8.2. KEY EMERGING ISSUES

Uganda risks a reversal of gains made in advancing girl child education. Unless the situation is halted, evidence in this report suggest that Uganda risks a reversal of gains attained over the years in girl child education. Evidence shows that several girls have become pregnant and by the time schools reopen, some will be mothers. While the Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School settings in Uganda were passed by MoES, there is hardly any evidence to show that the social structure and structural barriers that make teenage pregnancy “a shame” and shifts blame onto the survivors/ girls, have been addressed. Given that these barriers generally pertain, and many girls have become pregnant, there is a danger that majority will not return to school. As results suggest and evidence from testimonies show, some of the girls who became pregnant were fearful of returning to school while others lost interest in school all together.

Indeed, majority of the candidates and finalists who have not returned to school, majority of whom girls, cited pregnancy related causes and work. In addition, the prolonged closure of schools means that new enrolments will be affected. Given that girls are the most disadvantaged culturally, this might affect the number of girls enrolling in school. This is at the back of the realization that some parents are unable to afford school fees and other scholastic materials while some have forced girls to get married. All these are likely to compound a significant reversal in enrollment of girls in school, affect retention and eventually impact completion.

Are teenage pregnancies a time bomb and what does it mean for schools' re-entry? Analysis of the HMIS data suggest that there is increased cases of pregnancies. As

established, pregnancy cases increased by about a quarter for girls aged 10-24 in the first three months of the COVID-19 engineered lock down. About eight in every ten (81.8%) girls that were pregnant said they plan to carry their pregnancy to term. What this means however is that in the next few months, girls who conceived will become mothers. Consequently, these girls are expected to be in class. This means that schools and classes have to be prepared to receive the expectant and child mothers who are ready to resume school.

Given that the current MoES school re-entry guidelines offer a glimpse of hope, there is need to prepare schools to receive not just pregnant learners but also create an environment that allows learning to take place for child mothers. Creatively, it may require schools to create additional space, allow the child mothers to come to school with their children and child helpers and offer breaks where they can also breastfeed their children. It means preparing schools, administration, fellow learners, child mothers, their parents and the general community. This means also that CSOs should start the process of discussing these critical issues early enough so that they don't wait for when the child mothers are supposed to be in school to start. In a way there is need to marshal the social support system.

During discussions with some education institutions, the study team observed that while the institutions are more receptive to girls re-entering school after delivery, they are ill prepared to retain pregnant girls in schools. Factors advanced include: a number of schools being faith-based/ leaning and may be unlikely to embrace retention of pregnant girls; the health-related challenges of giving birth and complications that may come with child birth in an unequipped school setting; the need to prepare and sensitize the other pupils and students to accept the pregnant girls; and more notably is that some teachers are already frustrated.

Lack of emergency education preparedness: COVID-19 has revealed the general lack of preparedness for learning or continued teaching during pandemics. Schools and institutions were not prepared for an emergency of this magnitude- it came as a shock. Even when the MoES developed a framework for online teaching, it was perceived as a short-term measure. As one national level informant noted: "Of course COVID-19 was new, everybody was rushing to remove their children from school, and take them back home. And we thought maybe it would take a week or two. It has now taken forever."

Another area where there is lack of preparedness is lack of counseling and support for young people as evidenced by increased pregnancies and even suicides. As one respondent notes; "we did not prepare our girls well to adjust for such shocks in life. So the men use that opportunity now to get girls off the line of education then they put them into marriage. You realize that girls were not empowered enough while in school to be able to adjust to such risks". Additionally, the parents probably don't have the skills even on how to address such issues with girls. The girl is left in that space, no teacher to talk to, the parent doesn't know what to say to them. The Police also cites lack of resources to do community sensitization, especially given the additional precautions that need to be taken due to the pandemic. Radio programmes on GBV, pregnancy etc do not appear to reach the intended targets as it is often men who call in and their questions are often not related to the topical issues.

COVID-19 as a public health concern: COVID-19 was initially approached as a purely health issue. Other structures were closed out in the initial stages of response and it took a lot of lobbying and advocacy to get the MoGSLD and other players that could tackle social issues represented on the COVID-19 National taskforce. Education and other child protection services were for example locked out in the initial phases of the pandemic. The MoGSLD Child Helpline was closed for almost two weeks and only reopened when cases of violence spiked amidst lobbying. The child protection structures at district and community level were locked out. In fact, in some districts the district Probation and Social Welfare Officers did not join the COVID-19 task forces until later when the violence against children cases were already high. Consequently, several services including child protection services were hardly planned for. This greatly hampered response services and created a vacuum whose consequences will continue to affect the country, including high cases of violence against children with attendant long-term consequences.

One-size-fits all does not work during pandemics: The pandemic has revealed that the one-size fits all model does not work. During this pandemic, there has been significant innovations tailored to specific communities particularly Karamoja. For example, we found that in the districts of Karamoja and refugee settlements that they have challenges with access to media; innovations focused on reaching every child in the community have proved effective. These innovations did not only focus on distribution of materials but also innovations around small group learning, reorienting teachers around small group teaching, food distribution at village level and also voice recordings to allow children listen to lessons later was very critical for the learners. It was not surprising that some of the learners in Karamoja were able to access learning during COVID-19.

At the verge of vulnerability: COVID-19 has exposed how vulnerable the general population and how people who are already marginalized including girls and women become more susceptible when disasters strike. While the Uganda government distributed food in Kampala, the effects of hunger particularly on learners have been far reaching. Some anecdotal evidence suggest that poverty levels have increased, despite the fact that the full extent is not yet known. A reduction in household income and food insecurity are some of the direct consequences of COVID-19 control measures (World Health Organisation, 2020)³⁷. COVID-19 response measures including strict lockdown has resulted in closure of businesses and loss of income crippling the ability of caregivers to provide for their families including buying essential items like food. As already noted, some learners have been forced to go into economic activities to fend for their families. Most parents have suffered financial and psychological distress (Fontanesi, et al. 2020)³⁸. For Uganda's case, COVID-19 has exacerbated an already worse situation. For example, despite progress made in fighting poverty a significant proportion of the population remains vulnerable to external shocks³⁹. For every three

³⁷ World Health Organization (2020c). COVID-19 could deepen food insecurity, malnutrition in Africa. <https://www.afro.who.int/news/covid-19-could-deepen-food-insecurity-malnutrition-africa>. Accessed December 2, 2020.

³⁸ Fontanesi, L., Marchetti, D., Mazza, C., Di Giandomenico, S., Roma, P., & Verrocchio, M. C. (2020). The effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on parents: A call to adopt urgent measures. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*.

³⁹ See, World Bank. Accessed from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uganda/overview>.

Ugandans who get out of poverty, two fall back in⁴⁰. This means that COVID-19 exacerbated an already bad situation. But what this means also is that Uganda's social protection programs are still weak and limited in scope. Only 3% of the population are covered under existing social protection programs⁴¹. For an already vulnerable and marginalized group like women and girls, the effects of such shocks are even more brutal. For example, the results established that some girls have been encouraged by their parents to get married in exchange for money to feed families. The study team also learnt of a story in Jinja where a family offered their two children to a man who offered to give the starving family some money and the girls were recruited into sex trade and were only rescued after one of the CSOs got to know of the case. Several stories that even never got reported and even those that were probably not captured during this study suggest the extent to which women became vulnerable during the pandemic.

Changing social cultural norms and practices that affect girls and women during COVID-19: When COVID-19 hit Africa and Uganda in particular, two schools of thought appear to have emerged. One school of thought argued that COVID-19 measures have disrupted the cultural and social norms. For example, Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Executive Director at the Women's International Peace Centre, Kampala, Uganda and Angeline Nkwenkam Nguedjeu, the Peace and Development Advisor at the United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator, Congo Brazzaville wrote an opinion article where they argued that "COVID19 Response Is Disrupting African Cultural and Social Norms"⁴². Their argument was that COVID-19 response measures such as social distancing, stay at home measures, lock down etc were antithesis to who and what Africans are and espouse as their cultural values. The second school of thought espouses the idea that COVID-19 measures are exacerbating the social-cultural inequalities between men and women which were also engrained within the cultural beliefs and values—the idea that a man is the provider of a home and women are submissive to men. When lock down measures took effect, some of these inequalities became even more glaring, amplifying the negative social norms that make the position of women precarious in most societies. This study has shown examples of such cases in many ways. Early and child marriages have increased and sometimes parents justified it because children were not at school and it was not clear when they would go to school. When family livelihoods sources suffered, it was easy for parents and caregivers to turn to girls and urged or even forced them to get married in order to provide some basics for the starving families, which as studies have documented before that "daughters are seen culturally as a source of wealth"⁴³ (Wodon, Nguyen, & Tsimpo, 2016). In Karamoja, one school had all the girls failing to return because they were all married off or pregnant when schools reopened for candidate classes. In some communities like Karamoja, some parents were reportedly marrying off their daughters and telling authorities—which they believe is a lie—, that children travelled to Kenya for education during COVID-19. In Jinja, as alluded to already, girls were exchanged as sex slaves for food for the family. COVID-19 therefore created a vacuum in response but also amplified the negative social norms that impact gravely on women and girls. This is likely to continue even when schools

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² See link to read this article on; <https://wipc.org/covid19-response-is-disrupting-african-cultural-and-social-norms/>.

⁴³ Wodon, Q., Nguyen, M. C., & Tsimpo, C. (2016). Child marriage, education, and agency in Uganda. *Feminist Economics*, 22(1), 54-79.

reopen, where communities send their children into marriage and circumventing authorities with claims that children have travelled to study.

The pandemic has also exposed Uganda's poor social protection program which only covers 3% of the population. As studies show, a significant proportion of the population are susceptible to shocks and are unable to cope when pandemics like COVID-19 strike. It is not surprising that in the first months of lock down, children were going hungry with no social support system.

8.3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and particularly emerging issues, some of the following recommendations can be made.

1) Recommendations around education support during COVID-19

COVID-19 has revealed that there are three types of schools i.e., that learning should take place in homes, the community and the formal school. While the formal schools have been closed, it's important that home and community schools continue. However, we also noticed that some parents were illiterate, worried and some who lost livelihood became de-motivated. In the circumstances, we recommend the following;

- There is need to rethink education as a whole and study the available modalities such as online teaching, home and community based to understand the most suitable to specific circumstances. Prolonged closure of education institutions has a potential of generating irreversible consequences for learners, education actors including teachers, institutions of learning among others. While government is quick to close institutions as a measure to curb the spread of COVID-19, it is also important to invest in strengthening alternative learning platforms. We found the current alternative models of providing learning when schools closed, as not sustainable and inclusive. It favours learners with diligent parents, learners from relatively well to do families, and in some cases where there is external support.
- **Establish education taskforces at community/village level.** As we have seen with COVID-19 task forces at various levels, education response partners need to strengthen existing collaborations and establish education taskforces to tackle concerns related to education of children during pandemics. The taskforce should comprise of academic heads of schools, local health authorities, local leader and parents among others. The taskforce would be critical in ensuring continued delivery of learning for learners while following health guidelines on COVID-19 to ensure learning takes place in a safe environment. The taskforce would also be critical in encouraging parents to support and adopt community learning or home to home learning.
- **Train and support mobile teachers to provide homeschooling or community-based learning at village level.** Results from the study show that several learners benefited from community-based learning where teachers were supported to provide group learning at village level, as seen in Karamoja and refugee communities. It is therefore, our considered opinion that investments in scaling-up learning during COVID-19 should focus on models that support teachers to be mobile, move to the village, get learners of the same class and help them learn, using available materials while bearing in mind safety of learners and teachers.

- Relatedly, there is need, as part of the process of rethinking education in Uganda, **to strengthen community and home-based learning including ensuring teacher pedagogy that is suited to the context.** For example, teachers should be trained on how to offer online classes and allow real learning to take place on line. In line with rethinking education, actors should support establishment of secure virtual learning platforms. In addition, the MoES should be supported to rethink the curriculum and move towards self-individual learning as opposed to the current one which requires a teacher to deliver the content through physical teaching. The teachers need to be retrained to facilitate learning as opposed to being teachers.
- Many learners have lost interest while others have become disoriented about education as a result of COVID-19. Given the circumstances, **efforts should be focused on continuous awareness creation on the importance of education,** to ensure that the progress made is not reversed. ‘Go back to school’ campaigns should be strengthened focusing on learners who have lost interest in education, become disoriented and ensuring that, those at the verge of dropping out are retained in school. Parents and other caregivers should be sensitised about the importance of education, to help change the attitude of many children who have become disoriented or lost hope. For some parents, particularly those who are not appreciative of benefits of education and used Covid-19 as an excuse to marry off their daughters, constant reminders about the need for education is critical.
- Drawing from lessons regarding innovative approaches used to ensure that children continue learning in Karamoja, the Government of Uganda and partners should support context tailored interventions for say refugees and other hard to reach populations including children with disabilities. Using innovative approaches to ensure that children continue learning, as was noted in Karamoja and among some refugee settlements was a critical and timely innovation.
- CSOs should set up an advocacy lobby to ensure full opening of schools as an immediate area of attention. Results show that prolonged closure of schools has short and long-term effects, sometimes irreversible, consequences including a total reversal of gains in girl child education. There is need to strike a compromise and ensure that schools reopen under strict observance of COVID-19 SOPs.
- CSOs and partners should support the process of reopening schools by creating awareness among the parents and learners of the importance of learning and going to school. As results show, some learners lost interest in learning. Others are anxious. Prolonged closure also created uncertainty. Efforts and energies of both parents and learners have been diverted and therefore a massive program on awareness creation is critically important.

2) Recommendations on addressing effects of adolescent pregnancies and early marriages

- The Government of Uganda should, as a matter of urgency, allocate adequate funds to roll out the “Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in school settings in Uganda (2020), as they provide for re-integration of adolescent mothers (10-19) into learning institutions post-COVID-19. CSOs should directly work with the MoES to ensure that there is a mechanism in place of preparing all actors to receive and support girls who have given birth to return, especially in line with sections 3 of the revised guidelines.
- There is need to build the capacity of teachers and re-orient their thinking to supporting re-entry of learners who are pregnant back to school. Successful re-

entry of the learners who became pregnant during COVID-19 will depend on the attitude of teachers and other learners. It is therefore, important that they are oriented on issues around acceptance and supporting learners who became pregnant return to school.

- Strengthen advocacy around Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (AYSRH) including the establishment or functionalization of COVID-19 SOP compliant adolescent-friendly corners at all levels of health care, and promotion of sexual and reproductive health education in schools and communities should be implemented.
- Partners should lobby parliament to pass the sexual offences bill. Results show that school going girls have experienced high cases of sexual abuse and violence during lock down.
- There is need to place strong emphasis on ensuring that girls have access to sanitary materials. For example, it is important to support agencies involved in supporting girls make reusable sanitary pads so that perpetrators do not take advantage of girls and lure them into sexual activities. The MoES together with partners should make access to sanitary pads a priority.
- Establish a strong lobby network that calls on schools to establish child friendly corners in schools where learners who have given birth can be allowed in schools and supported to breastfed their children, while at school. For example, where possible, FAWE Uganda and like-minded agencies should provide direct support to girls and their families to pay for baby sitters while they attend classes.
- CSOs should, as a matter of great importance, advocate for, and/or directly provide for integration of life skills training in formal education set-up/learning and training. Results show gaps where girls and boys were not well empowered to resist and also take alternative routes that do not expose them to problems of teenage pregnancy during pandemics like this. Life skills should aim at empowering the learners to make good decisions outside the classroom.

3) Recommendations on livelihood support

- CSOs should lobby for an economic rescue package tailored to support private schools at a risk of closure due to effects of COVID-19. Those that have opened are unable to afford the COVID-19 SOPs. Some have been forced to increase school fees which has forced learners to join cheaper public schools hence overcrowding or dropout all together. There is need to lobby government and other partners to prepare an economic rescue package and extend it to private education institutions. One way could be to link the providers to financial institutions or provide soft loans or waivers.
- CSOs should advocate for social protection programs and community protection networks centred on the rights of the girl child and addressing gaps in identifying, reporting and responding to cases that require child protection during COVID-19 times. Child protection interventions should be placed where they belong, essential services category.
- There is need to extend social protection programs to families particularly those in the rural areas. While the government food distribution program supported a few households in Kampala, several households have struggled accessing food. Children have experienced hunger and the need for food overrides any ability to stay home. Consequently, this has forced girls to make invidious choices to

survive including for some getting into transactional sex. One of the main reasons is that households have experienced significant disruptions in household income leading to financial distress. In fact, as this continues, many more families are at the verge of falling into poverty. It is therefore, important that government come-up with a livelihood support and response package to cushion families and households that have been impacted by COVID-19.

- Relatedly, we recommend cash transfers as a quick fix short-term measure/solution for the very vulnerable households where most of the girls who have become prey to abuse come from.

4) Recommendations on parenting

- CSOs should strengthen and directly support establishment of parenting programmes that are gender-sensitive, streamlined and among others place emphasis on: enhancing parenting skills, and male involvement; increasing parent-child communication and appropriate information given to girls and boys during and beyond such emergency situations. While the Government through the MoGLSD has the Parenting Guidelines, such guidelines need to be tailored to situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Parenting programmes, need to be streamlined and place emphasis on the roles of parents during such pandemics including the nature of information to be given to girls and boys among others.
- There is need to revamp the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) program to provide basic literacy skills to the parents. The study found that some parents would have been in position to keep supporting their children with learning during COVID-19 times however, when a majority lack basic literacy skills, it becomes difficult for them. It is therefore, critical to support revamping the FAL program under the MoGLSD.

5) Cross cutting multi-sectoral approaches

- CSOs should promote multi-sectoral collaboration and holistic strategies. COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the risks that girls and boys face do not fall under a single sector, e.g. health, education or livelihoods but cut across sectors. Relatedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important it is to ensure and promote multi-sectoral collaboration and strategies. When schools were closed, for example, girls and boys found little protection from other sectors such as health, livelihood and access to basic information on SRH became significantly constrained. Access to SRH commodities such as condoms was affected. This left girls and boys exposed to risks of sexual engagement, and abuse among others. The impact of COVID-19 should therefore, be understood as an interplay of various social dimensions including poverty, social inequality, social norms and gender. Any response therefore, is likely to be effective if it considers a multi-sectoral view taking into consideration the overlapping changes impacting greatly on the populations. Our informed opinion is for actors to advocate and promote a multi-sectoral strategy that holistically addresses concerns of girls and boys. For most CSOs, this is a call to rethink some of the interventions so that girls and boys are able to get an education but also are empowered to access SRH services and also resist pressures that come with certain situations. One practical way is to try to bring duty bearers and key interest groups such as senior men and women teachers, cultural and religious leaders, policy makers, women champions, women organizations and several other actors on board.

- Results have also shown that there is high access to phones and internet among young people which is likely to increase cases of online sexual violence. CSOs should support efforts to regulate internet use to protect young people who are exposed to online abuse.

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Annex 1:

i) Sample size calculation

The sample size calculation was computed using the following formula by Krejcie & Morgan (1970);

$$n = \frac{Zsqd * P(1 - P) * Deff}{Esqd * RR * h}$$

Let define:

p: Proportion of population that you want to estimate (proportion of school going girls and young women. We considered 0.5 to give us the maximum sample size)

q: 1-0.5=0.5

n: Sample size

RR: Response Rate (95%). The response rate of 95% means that 95% of the population targeted would respond to the survey.

H: household size

E: the level of precision with which you want to achieve (level of precision at 0.05-equivalent 5%)

Z: Confidence level at 95% (1.96)

Deff: Design Effect (1.5) (The design effect was used to adjust the survey sample size due to sampling methods that were used resulting in better sampling than what would be expected with simple random sampling. The design effect tells you the magnitude of these increases. Therefore, the total sample size computed was 6,364. Overall, therefore, the study reached 6,394 young people who were drawn from 3,201 households in 200 parishes

ii) Sample size distribution; proposed and actual

Region	District	Total HH⁴⁴ sample per district	Targeted sample size per district	Actual sample reached	Response rate
Kampala	Kampala	173	346	336	97.1%
Central 1	Lyantonde	135	270	257	95.1%
	Kalangala	240	480	433	90.2%
Central 2	Mubende	138	276	269	97.4%
Busoga	Kaliro	110	220	246	111.8%
	Luuka	112	224	253	112.9%
Bukedi	Butaleja	110	220	190	86.3%
Bugisu	Sironko	138	276	260	94.2%
Sebei	Kween	115	230	218	94.7%
Teso	Ngora	103	206	205	99.5%
	Amuria	107	214	207	96.7%
Karamoja	Amudat	98	196	186	94.8%
	Moroto	114	228	232	101.7%

⁴⁴ As indicated already, for each household, two respondents were selected. One female, and another male.

Lango	Lira	135	270	248	91.8%
	Kole	124	248	237	95.5%
Acholi	Gulu	124	248	244	98.3%
	Lamwo	123	246	341	138.6%
West Nile	Adjumani	112	224	322	143.7%
	Arua	113	226	212	93.8%
Bunyoro	Buliisa	120	240	230	95.8%
Tooro	Kyegegwa	129	258	278	107.7%
	Kasase	120	240	225	93.7%
Ankole	Isingiro,	126	252	248	98.4%
	Ntungamo	128	256	259	101.1%
Kigezi	Kanungu	135	270	262	97.0%
Total	25	3,182	6,364	6,398	100.5%

Annex 2: Districts' justification for selection

District	Additional features of the districts
Adjumani	It's a border district, was among the first border districts to report cases of COVID-19 and is a refugee hosting district. Its among the districts with high rates of school dropouts for girls as well
Amudat	Represents the unique region of Karamoja and existence of unique cultural practices like FGM makes it an important addition to the list
Arua	It is on the border to DRC and hosts refugees as well. Its inclusion also brings in critical west Nile regional dynamics.
Butaleja	Represents a multi-ethnic district
Isingiro,	It's a border district with Tanzania and also hosts refugees
Kasese	Kasese is one of the districts alongside Kitgum, Ngora, Kyegegwa and Lyantonde reported in the Daily Monitor newspaper of 27th July 2020 where up to 2,372 girls were noted to have conceived and 128 married off during the lock down in March 2020. One of the FAWEU districts
Luuka	High prevalence of child marriage and teenage pregnancy district. Recent media reports show that districts like Luuka and Kaliro are reporting high levels of violence against children during COVID-19, particularly high pregnancy rates among girls aged 14-17 years. The inclusion of Luuka district in the sample is intended to capture this dynamic as well.
Kampala	The oldest city in Uganda. When COVID-19 was declared in Uganda, Kampala was the most affected by the lock down measures. It also has a significant proportion of children who go to school. Available data from the Uganda Child Help Line, shows that Kampala and Wakiso are among the leading districts in Central Uganda with high cases of sexual violence against girls
Kaliro	Kaliro is one of the districts in Busoga region.
Bulisa	One of the FAWEU districts
Kyegegwa	Cultural diversity; part of the Albertine belt. In addition, Kyegegwa is one of the districts alongside Kitgum, Ngora, Kasese and Lyantonde reported in the Daily Monitor newspaper of 27th July 2020 where up to 2,372 girls were noted to have conceived and 128 married off during the lock down in March 2020.

Kanungu	One of the districts where FAWEU works. It also represents Kigezi region
Kole	Represents one of the big ethnic groups in the country (Lango)
Amuria, Ngora	Represents one of the big ethnic groups in the country (Teso). In addition, Ngora is one of the districts alongside Kitgum, Kasese, Kyegegwa and Lyantonde reported in the Daily Monitor newspaper of 27th July 2020 where up to 2,372 girls were noted to have conceived and 128 married off during the lock down in March 2020.
Lamwo	Post conflict and has high prevalence of child marriage. One of the districts where FAWEU works and also hosts refugees in Palabek
Lira	Represents one of the big ethnic groups in the country (Lango)
Lyantonde	In addition, Lyantonde is one of the districts alongside Kitgum, Ngora, Kyegegwa and Kasese reported in the Daily Monitor newspaper of 27th July 2020 where up to 2,372 girls were noted to have conceived and 128 married off during the lock down in March 2020. Lyantonde is also at the border between Central and Western regions of the country. It is also a transit route for truck drivers ⁴⁵ , a category of people where high cases of COVID-19 have been registered.
Moroto	Existence of unique cultural practices like FGM but also represents one of the oldest districts in Karamoja
Mubende	One of the biggest districts in central Uganda
Ntungamo	Has one of the lowest prevalence of child marriages based on 2014 census
Gulu	Post conflict and has one of the high prevalence of child marriage. Also one of the district where FAWEU works
Sironko	Represents one of the big ethnic groups in the country (Bagisu)
Kalangala	Represents the critical group of fishing communities that also has its own dynamics

⁴⁵ <https://www.health.go.ug/covid/>.

Annex 3:

a) Enrolment of Candidate classes before COVID-19 and resumption of classes for selected primary schools (P.7)

District	Name of school	Type of school (Private/public)	Enrollment before COVID-19				Enrollment when school reopened for candidate classes			
			F	M	Learners with disability	Total	F	M	Learners with disability	Total
		-								
Arua	Ozivu P/S		69	83	00	152	63	86	00	149
Adjumani	Uganda KIDS Nursery and P/S		22	20	00	42	22	20	00	42
Amuria	Amuria Primary School	-	45	37	00	82	43	37	00	80
	Agirigiroi primary school		23	18	00	41	23	18	00	41
Ngora	Ngora Township Primary school		42	33	00	75	42	33	00	75
Gulu	Bungatira Central Primary School	Government aided	18	22	00	40	19	13	00	32
Lamwo	Green Hill Primary School	Private	24	12	00	36	21	12	00	33
Lira	Ober Primary School	Government aided	40	44	09	84	43	35	09	78
Kole	Okole Primary School	Government aided	19	13	00	32	13	21	00	34
Lyantonde	Benedict Kaliiro Primary school	Government aided	22	21	00	43	21	19	00	40
Kanungu	Kirima Parents Primary School	Private	30	23	00	53	29	23	00	52
	Nyakatare	Government aided	19	20	00	39	22	19	00	41
Ntungamo	Kyenkuru	-	20	10	00	30	20	10	00	30
	Nyakibobo		16	11	00	27	16	11	00	27
Isingiro	Rwambaga P/S		32	32	00	64	32	32	00	64
	Buhunga P/S		11	07	00	18	11	07	00	18
Kween	Binyiny Primary School	Government aided	35	25	01	60	63	37	01	100
Amudati	Alakas primary school	Government aided	05	16	01	21	05	12	00	17
Moroto	Chilo Jesus P/S		57	43	00	100	58	45	00	103

	Lia P/S		16	19	00	33	14	20	00	34		
Sironko	Bukiise P/S		25	15	02	40	25	14	2	39		
	St. Joseph Orphans P/S		16	15	02	31	18	16	02	34		
Butaleja	Queens Primary School		25	30	01	55	22	16	00	38		
	Namunasa P/S		22	17	00	39	14	18	00	32		
Kaliro	Satellite P/S		14	16	00	30	14	16	00	30		
	St. Thereza P/S	-	31	16	00	47	30	16	00	46		
	Lubuulo P/S		25	13	00	38	21	12	00	33		
Kasese	Mothercare Preparatory	Private	12	19	00	31	11	18	00	29		
	Kasese P.7 School	Government aided	61	41	00	102	69	42	00	111		
Bulisa	Uganda Martyrs PS	Government aided	12	19	00	31	11	15	00	26		
Kyegegwa	Bujubuli PS	Kyaaka Refugee settlement	37	37	02	74	40	35	02	75		
	Kyegegwa P/S	Government aided	32	16	00	48	31	18	00	49		
	St Thomas Junior P/S	Private	16	16	00	32	16	16	00	32		
			89	3	779	18	1,670	90	2	762	16	1,664

b) Enrolment of Candidate classes before COVID-19 and resumption of classes for selected primary schools (S.4)

District	Name of school	Type of school (Private/public)	Enrollment before COVID-19				Enrollment when school reopened for candidate classes			
			F	M	Learners with disability	Total	F	M	Learners with disability	Total
Arua	Arua Academy		15	19	01	34	12	15	01	27
	Arua secondary school		96	124	01	220	90	109	01	199
Adjumani	Biyaya Secondary School		50	70	01	127	57	76	01	133
	Bezza Al-Hajji SS		32	62	01	94	13	36	00	49
Amuria	Amuria High School		62	148	00	210	66	109	00	175

	Amuria Secondary School		85	113	00	198	73	96	00	169
Ngora	Teso Integrated School		65	73	00	138	61	72	00	133
Gulu	Gulu Secondary school		208	216	00	424	198	210	00	408
	St John Pauli II College		64	80	01	145	65	81	00	146
Lira	Barr Secondary School		25	22	00	47	35	34	00	69
Lyanton de	St. Johns Comprehensive Secondary School	Government aided	61	52	00	113	61	51	00	112
Kanungu	Kinkizi High School	Government aided	63	94	00	157	61	94	00	155
Ntugamo	Public Trust High School	-	53	31	01	84	39	28	00	67
Isingiro	Endiizi High School	-	15	15	00	30	15	15	00	30
Kween	Kween Modern School	Private	48	41	00	89	36	32	00	68
	Kwosir Girl's Boarding Secondary School	Public	77	n/a	00	77	50	n/a	00	50
Amudati	Pokot SSS	-	36	55	00	91	32	49	00	81
	Nabokotom SS		13	30	00	43	07⁴⁶	01	00	08
Moroto	Moroto High School		43	117	00	160	41	117	00	158
Sironko	Buhugu SSS		88	95	00	185	92	104	00	196
Butaleja	St. Marys SSS Kapisa		81	117	00	198	71	111	00	182
Kaliro	Kaliro Town SS		10	15	00	25	09	11	00	20
Kasese	Kasese SS	Government aided	78	90	00	168	76	80	00	156
Bulisa	Bugungu SS	Government aided	29	50	01	79	29	60	01	89
	Uganda Martyrs Comprehensive SS	Private	75	62	01	137	65	57	01	122
Kyegegwa	Bujubuli SS	Government aided	81	92	00	173	53	90	00	143

⁴⁶ The study team learnt that all the 7 girls were new comers. None of the girls who was in school before came back

	Kibuye Secondary school	Government aided	23	13	00	36	22	14	00	36
Total			1,576	1,896	8	3,472	1,422	1,752	5	3,181

c) Enrolment of Candidate classes before COVID-19 and resumption of classes for selected primary schools (S.6)

District	Name of school	Type of school (Private/government aided)	Enrollment before COVID-19				Enrollment when school reopened for candidate classes			
			F	M	Learners with disability	Total	F	M	Learners with disability	Total
Arua	Arua SS		30	35	00	63	13	30	00	43
Adjumani	Biyaya SS		12	54	00	66	07	76	00	83
Amuria	Amuria High School	-	05	49	00	54	07	46	00	53
	Amuria Secondary School		25	108	00	133	19	80	00	99
Ngora	Teso Integrated School		45	71	00	116	41	69	00	110
Gulu	Gulu Secondary School		35	70	00	105	35	77	00	112
	St John Paul II College		44	87	04	135	44	87	04	135
Lyantonde	St. Johns Comprehensive Secondary School	Government aided	13	30	00	43	13	30	00	43
Kanungu	Kinkizi High School	Government aided	16	60	00	76	17	60	00	77
Ntugamo	Public Trust High School	-	17	11	01	28	05	12	01	17
Kween	Kween Modern School	Private	32	29	00	61	28	18	00	46
Amudati	Pokot SS		07	15	00	22	04	11	00	15
Moroto	Moroto High School	-	05	15	00	20	05	15	00	20

Sironko	Buhugu SSS		00	17	00	17	05	19	00	24
Kasese	Kasese Secondary School	Government aided	16	42	00	58	15	41	00	56
Bulisa	Uganda Martyrs Comprehensive SS	Private	00	14	00	14	00	14	00	14
Kyegegwa	Bjubuli SS	Government aided	24	19	00	43	09	25	00	34
Total			32	726	5	1052	267	710	5	977

Annex 4a) Caregiving before COVID-19 by sex, age, residence status of the participants

Caregiver	Age			Sex		Residence		Total
	10- 13	14-17	18-24	M	F	U	R	
Biological Mother	43.9%	45.0%	38.3%	40.8%	46.1%	43.0%	47.4%	43.5%
Biological Father	43.4%	41.9%	41.9%	45.3%	40.1%	41.2%	37.9%	42.6%
Live alone	0.07%	0.04%	1.7%	0.5%	0.1%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Husband or Wife	0%	0.1%	2.0%	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%
Non relative guardian	0.3%	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%	0.4%
Grandparent	5.1%	3.8%	2.5%	4.6%	3.9%	4.3%	4.2%	4.3%
Mother or Father's brother or sister (Aunt/Uncle)	2.2%	3.1%	2.9%	2.5%	2.7%	3.2%	2.5%	2.6%
Step-Parent	0.1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
Sibling	0.8%	1.7%	2.2%	1.0%	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	1.4%
Other relative	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	0.3%	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%
Friend	0%	0%	0.2%	0.03%	0.03%	0.1%	0.0%	0.03%
Employer	0.03%	0%	0.1%	0.03%	0.03%	0.0%	0.0%	0.03%
Others	3.6%	3.1%	6.6%	4.3%	3.6%	4.6%	4.7%	3.8%

Annex4 b) Caregiving during COVID-19 by age, sex and residence (n=4,175)

Caregiver	Age			Sex		Total
	10 to 13	14-17	18-24	Male	Female	
Biological Mother	47.5%	46.8%	41.2%	43.8%	48.8%	46.4%
Biological Father	39.3%	40.8%	39.8%	42.6%	37.3%	39.9%
Live alone	0.1%	0.1%	1.5%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%
Husband or Wife	0%	0%	1.3%	0.04%	0.3%	0.2%
Non relative guardian	0.3%	0.4%	1.0%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%
Grandparent	5.3%	3.8%	3.5%	4.9%	4.1%	4.5%
Mother or Father's brother or sister (Aunt/Uncle)	2.4%	2.8%	2.5%	2.4%	2.3%	2.6%
Step-Parent	0.1%	0.2%	0%	0.2%	0.04%	0.1%
Sibling	0.9%	1.8%	2.2%	1.0%	1.9%	1.4%
Other relative	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Friend	0%	0%	0.2%	0%	0.04%	0.02%
Employer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	3.8%	2.9%	6.3%	4.1%	3.7%	3.9%

Annex iv: Data collection tools

(To be inserted)

All other annexes to be inserted in the final submission