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Mechanisms for Coping with Socio-ethical Dilemmas of COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case of Girls in a Mixed-day Secondary School, Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures have affected every aspect of life including education sector by providing a new unique experience. Despite online learning adopted to fill the face to face learning gaps created by the pandemic, the plight of school going age girls cannot be ignored. The main objective of this case study was to examines some of the coping mechanisms adopted by girls in a day secondary school in Kiambu County in order to overcome the socio-ethical challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic. Descriptive design was utilized to collect data using a questionnaire. Purposive sampling was utilized to obtain a sample of 20 respondents. The main socio ethical dilemma that the school girls in the selected mixed day secondary school faced include disruption of their social groups and they were exposed to sexual and drug abuse. Among the coping mechanism the school girls adopted included engaging more on online activities and seeking sibling and parental assistance. The major remedy suggested is government interventions in the cost of internet provision during the pandemic. The paper contextualizes the issues raised with an aim of drawing practical implications for future education research, policy and planning.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Learning, Socio-ethical dilemma, Coping Mechanism*

Introduction

The unprecedented effect of COVID-19 pandemic resulted to a lot of socio-ethical dilemma across populations with school going age children especially girls bearing the brunt. Globally, most countries adhered to WHO (World Health Organization) guidelines implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 that included closure of schools Mechanisms for coping with Socio-ethical dilemmas of COVID-19 pandemic: A Case of girls in a mixed day secondary school, Kiambu County, Kenya work places, churches, suspension of large gatherings, maintaining social distance, implementing curfew and restricting entry and exit in most affected regions (Aluga, 2020, WHO, 2020).

The global efforts to combating COVID-19 pandemic impacted differently in all sectors of the society. A study in Bangladesh during COVID-19 reported that cases of violence increased within the surroundings among adolescent girls and their household earned no income during lockdown affecting provision of food (Amin, Rob, Billah, Ainul, Hossain, Rahman, Kundu, Ehsan, Haque, Hossain, & Manzur, 2020).

When surveying students across seven U.S. Universities, Browning et al (2021) cited in (Logel, Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2021) found that many students felt lack of motivation, anxiety, stress, and isolation due to the pandemic. In Canada a study pointed out that many students struggled with establishing a new routine, felt lethargic or lacked motivation, and faced logistical problems with online learning, felt lonely, depressed, and expressed financial concerns, worried about paying tuition, feeling nervous missing family and friends, missing a predictable routine as concerns and having uncontrollable worry.



A study in Spain documented that where citizens endured longer and stricter lockdown periods there were reductions in risky behaviors across genders and age groups, however, Asiamah et al cited in (Iddi, Obiri-Yeboah, Aboh, Quansah, Owusu, Enyan, 2021) in Ghana found the opposite with an increase in risky health behaviors an indication that school going age girls were vulnerable.

Insights from the population council surveys of adolescents in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic majority of respondents were skipping meals or eating less with 10- to 14-year-olds being most affected, there were increased household tension, an increase in arguments, majority of girls reported difficulty accessing their preferred menstrual hygiene management product and few adolescents reported increased tension with their romantic/sexual partner (Abuya, Austrian, Isaac, Kangwana, Mbushi, Muluve, Mwanga, Ngo, Nzioki, Ochako, Pinchoff, Tidwell & White, 2020; Population Council, 2020). In Benin, COVID-19 led to suspension of regular girls' club (Hone, 2020). Therefore the socio-ethical impact faced may thwart smooth implementation of education if not curbed.

Despite the bleak circumstances due to COVID-19 several studies revealed potential adaptation and resilience across the globe to counter the pandemic's pervasive disruptions. This is clear indication that students too experienced the effect of COVID-19 due to closure of learning institutions. Research in Canada among college students revealed that many students used proactive and creative coping strategies. The most common coping strategy used by many students was trying to maintain social or group activity remotely or within their household (Logel et al, 2021). There were three coping strategies that were mainly embraced by the students. They are: maintaining social connections, developing a satisfying routine, and trying new activities.

A case study on the the coping mechanisms of senior high school learners in Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic at Goshen school of Technology and Humanities indicated positive mindset, worthwhile activities, family and friends support, and daily routine were good coping strategies. Part of their ways of coping was through prayer and meditations that develop them to acquire a positive mindset. This positivity enables one learner to look up to life facing COVID-19 differently. In that way, they were able to engage in different worthwhile activities as part of their daily routine. Through them, they could spread the positivity to their family and friends as a support system in a way that this positivity will be returned to them (Bangayan , Ambagan, Rosales, & Maming, 2021).

Coping strategies among college students during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia was emotional focus and problem focus coping by seeking social support from their friends, family members and university. The problem-focused coping included seeking social support. The emotion-focus coping included positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility and maintaining distancing (Falasifah, Fitria & Hak, 2020).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish mechanisms for coping with socio-ethical dilemmas of COVID-19 pandemic by school going age girls in amixed day secondary school. The knowledge about the impact of socio-ethical dilemma would help to curb any impediments during curriculum implementation.

Research objectives

- i. Find out the socio-ethical dilemma of COVID-19 pandemic from the experiences of secondary school age girls in mixed day secondary,Kiambu County.
- ii. Examine coping mechanisms adopted by secondary school age girls in mixed day secondary,Kiambu County.

Method

The study utilized descriptive design to find out the socio-ethical dilemma posed by COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school girls in mixed day secondary, Kiambu County, Kenya. The population involved 35 girls. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 20 participants who were purposefully sampled from the school.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of data from the questionnaires are presented as experiences of the secondary school age girls in the various sections.

General Information



The study sought to determine the age of the school going girls and whether they were infected by COVID-19. The results are presented in Figure 4.1 and 4.2.

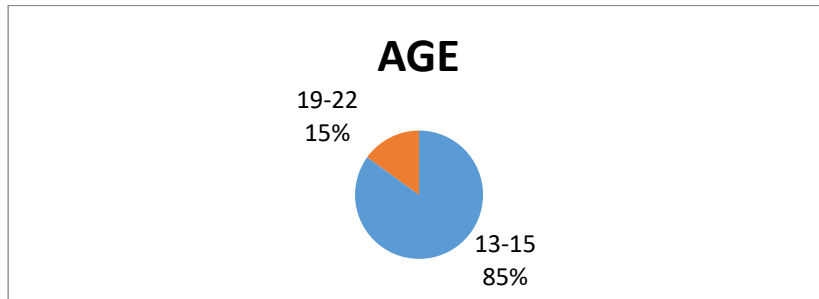


Figure 4.1. The Age of school going girls

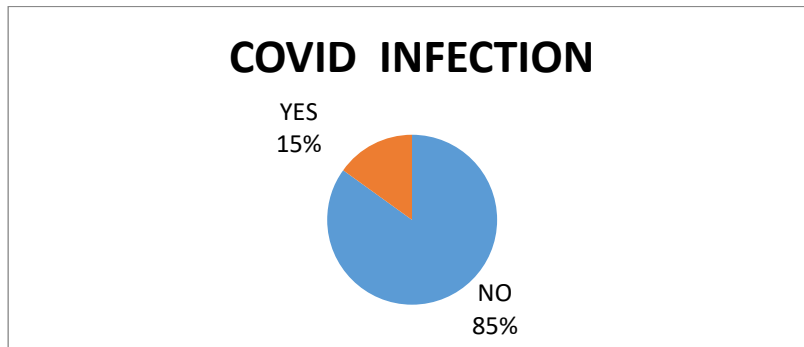


Figure 4.2. The COVID -19 Infection

From Figure 4.1 and 4.2. It is clear that most (85%) of the school going age girls were aged between 13-15 years, while a few (15%) aged between 19-22 years. Concerning COVID-19 infection majority of students were safe (85%), while a few (15%) were infected by COVID-19. Having the knowledge of the school going age girls determines rate of socio-ethical dilemma influence during COVID-19. Further, the COVID-19 infection could also reveal socio ethical dilemma the school going age girls faced and how they were able to cope.

The Socio- Ethical Dilemma of COVID -19 Pandemic

The study sought further to establish from the school going age girls the socio-ethical dilemmas they faced during COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are presented in Figure 4.3.



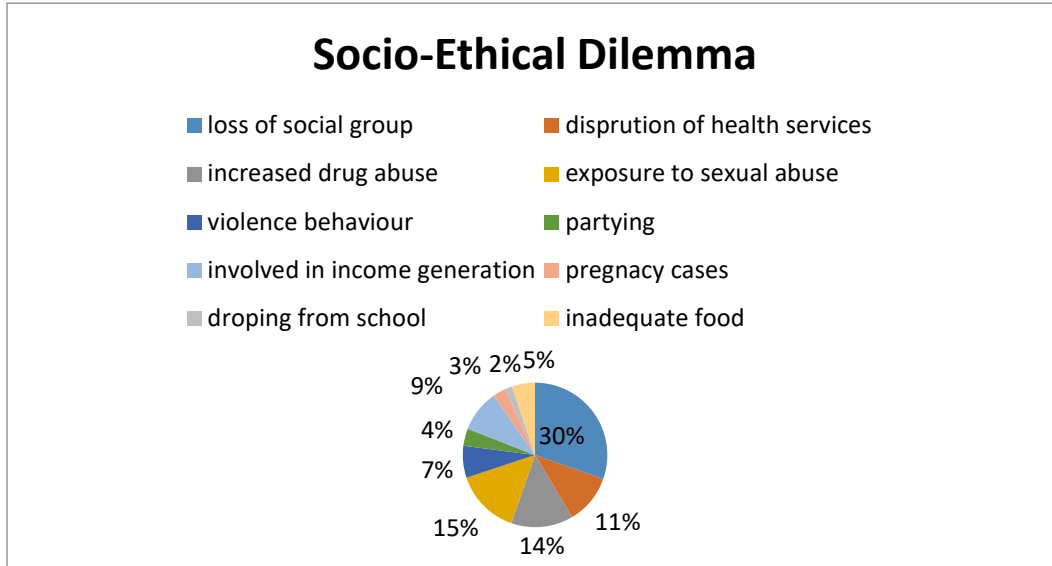


Figure 4.3. The school going age girls socio-ethical dilemma of COVID-19 Pandemic.

From Figure 4.3 it is clear that school going age girls were faced by various socio-ethical dilemmas necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is for instance majority of the school going age girls lost their social groups, were exposed to sexual abuse and there was an increase in drug abuse at 30%, 15% and 14% respectively. The findings on the loss of social groups by school going age girls agrees with the findings in Benin, that found that COVID-19 led to suspension of regular girls' club (Hone, 2020). Similarly, in Kenya a study by Abuya et al (2020) found that majority of girls reported difficulty in accessing their preferred menstrual hygiene management product. The results that the school going age girls were exposed to sexual abuse and drug abuse supports the research in Ghana that found an increase in risky health behaviors during COVID-19 (Iddi, et al, 2021). Further, the increase of drug abuse by school going age girls contravenes the Children Act provision of protecting children from drug abuse (Children Act, 2012).

Of concern to note are the school going age girls who were faced with violence behaviour, involved in income generation, lacked food and partying at 7%, 9%, 5% and 4% respectively. The violence behaviour and lack of food that the school going age girls faced collaborates the findings in Bangladesh that reported that during COVID-19 cases of violence increased within the surroundings among adolescent girls and their household earned no income during lockdown affecting provision of food (Amin, et al; 2020). Further, the findings that the school going age girls were exposed to violence behaviour, partying and pregnancy supports the research in Ghana that found an increase in risky health behaviors during COVID-19 (Iddi, et al; 2021). In the same vein, the findings of school going age girls lacking food and facing violence supports the study in Kenya that revealed the same conditions experienced during COVID-19 (Abuya, et al 2020; Population Council, 2020). Worth to note also is that the school going age girls involvement in income generation activities violates the provision of Employment Act (2012) and the Children Act (2012) that provide that all children have the right to be protected from work that threatens their well-being which include health and development. Similarly, the act provision that all children have a right to be protected from physical violence was not adhered during COVID-19 pandemic.

The Coping Mechanisms for the Socio-Ethical Dilemma of COVID-19 Pandemic



Given that the socio-ethical dilemma of COVID-19 pandemic affected students in different context, the study sought to establish the school going age girls coping mechanism. The findings of the coping mechanisms adopted are presented in Figure 4.4

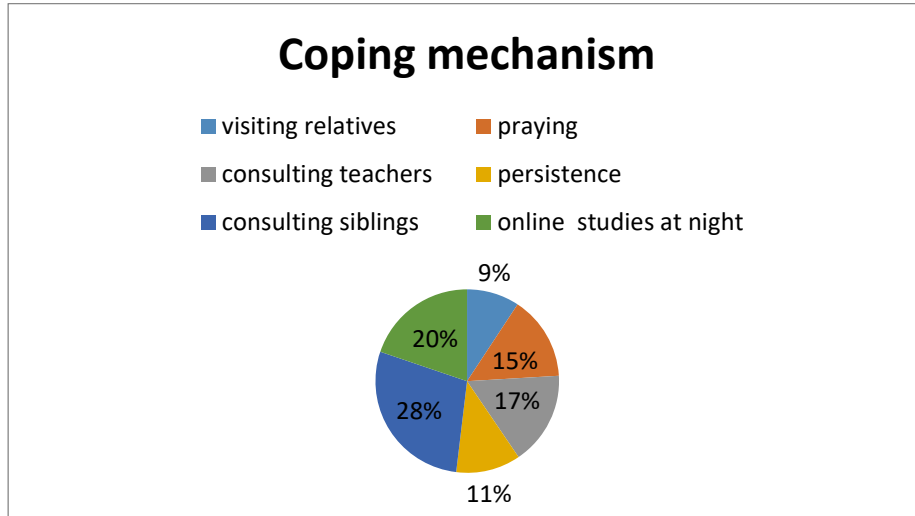


Figure 4.4. The Coping Mechanisms for the Socio- Ethical Dilemma of COVID -19 Pandemic

Despite the COVID-19 socio- ethical dilemma facing the school going age girls, majority adopted the strategy of consulting their sibling, followed by those engaging in online activities at (28%) and (20%) respectively. The girls coping mechanism of seeking help from their siblings supports the research carried out in Philippines and Indonesia where students sought help mainly from family members (Bangayan et al, 2021; Falasifah, et al 2020). It is commendable that despite the girls facing socio-ethical dilemmas during COVID 19 majority were able to consult their siblings and teachers widely. This indicates that the World Bank (2020), UNESCO (2020) recommendation and Kenya government (2020) efforts for online learning adoption as a stop measure contributed positively during school closures. Further, the findings of the girls engaging on online activities also supports research in Canada that revealed college students embraced online activities during the COVID-19.

Worth to note are those school going age girls adopting the coping mechanism of praying and being persistent at (15%) and (11%) respectively. The coping mechanisms adopted by the girls reflect similar coping mechanism adopted by senior high school learners in Philippines where part of their ways of coping was through prayers to develop a positive mindset (Bangayan et al, 2021). Further, the girls coping mechanism of persistence may be attributed to stress and isolation due to the measures adopted to contain COVID-19 as reported by (Logel, et al, 2021).

The Remedies proposed for curbing the Socio- Ethical Dilemmas of COVID -19 Pandemic

In order to mitigate the impact of socio-ethical dilemma of COVID 19 among the school going age girls, the study sought remedies that could be adopted to alleviate the situation. The results are presented in Figure 4.5.



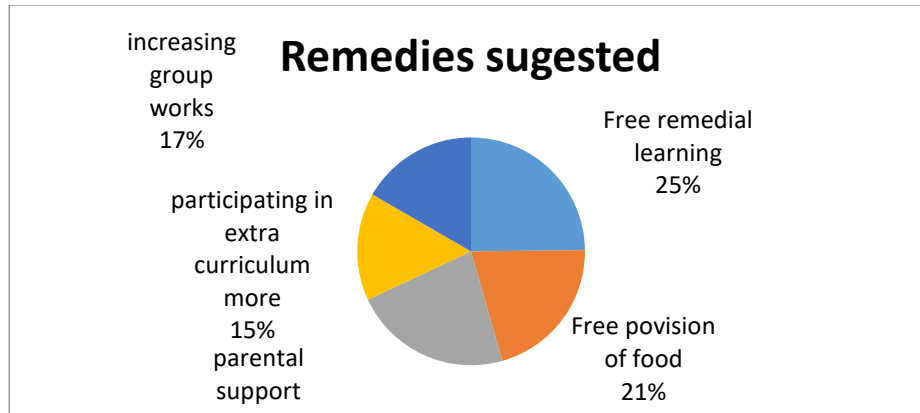


Figure 4.5. The Remedies adopted for the Socio- Ethical Dilemma of COVID -19 Pandemic

It is evident from Figure 4.5 that majority (25%) of the school going age girls desired for the provision of free remedial learning. The high percentage of the girls remedy to have free remedial learning may be attributed to parents and guardian loss of income as was the situation in Bangladesh (Amin etal; 2020), an indication that parents could not meet their children education needs during the peak of the pandemic. The school going age girls desire for free remedial learning also supports the Basic Education Act (2013) that provides for the provision of free and compulsory basic education to every child. Further, girls desire for free remedial learning may be attributed to desire to improve their performance as a study has found significant difference in the scores of pupils after the remediation intervention (Asio & Jimenez , 2020).

The remedy for parental support and free provision of food at 22% and 21% respectively is paramount to note. As provided in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (2017) , the need for parental empowerment and engagement is key in the provision of education. Therefore the girls remedy may be fully justified during this period to enhance their smooth teaching and learning.

Participating in extra curriculum as a remedy given by 15% of the school going age girls is significantly notable and supports the findings that there is a positive correlation between co-curricular activities and academic performance of learners (Rahman, Islam, Akash, Parvin, Moon, & Nur, 2021). Therefore the girls call for co-curriculum is vital during this period, especially, when schools resumed learning and teaching.

Conclusion

The unprecedented situation of COVID-19 posing socio-ethical dilemma for school going age girls in mixed day secondary school during school closure threatens smooth progression of their education if no serious interventions are put in place. Whereas the effort of government to ensure continuity of learning was acknowledged, more proactive mechanisms by all education stakeholders are necessary in curbing the socio-ethical challenges revealed in this research.

Reccomendations

On the basis of the research findings, the study recommends the following:

There is need for the government to strengthen provision and the implementation of free learning for all children in all circumstances as provided in the basic education act 2013. This will enhance access, retention, progression and completion rates in all the levels of education.

There is need to increase watchdog meachanisms for all stakeholders to be on the lookout for those who breach the Employment and Childrens Act inorder to enhance protection of young learners from unethical practices such as child labour, drug and sexual abuse at all the time.



All the learning institutions should endeavour to strengthen modalities that support provision of free remedial learning to enable learners fill in the gaps that arose from school closures during Covid-19.

Due to hard economic conditions of most learners, day secondary schools that have feeding programmes to ensure that all learners are catered for in order to avoid child labour and cases of school dropouts. The government on the other hand should ensure food provisions are subsidised to enable majority of families access food stuff.

There is need to strengthen school and parental support systems during the teaching and learning process because the experience of Covid-19 situation revealed that if parents are empowered, they can also play a crucial role in learning of school content and giving necessary moral support to learners.

All school should embrace the co-curriculum activities and implement them accordingly to promote learners psychomotor and affective skills. This is because such activities do not only develop the above skills but also free the mind of learners from unethical and anti-social behavior that may be necessitated by idleness.

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