

Voices of Children



Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Access to the Justice System



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Executive Summary

ChildFund is addressing both the global and local challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, through four areas: stopping COVID-19 from infecting children and families, ensuring that children get the food they need, keeping children safe from violence – physically and emotionally – and helping children continue with learning.

The purpose of this pulse survey was to get to understand children's views on COVID-19, access to justice system and recommendations. The survey was to hear from children and make critical advocacy recommendations. The activity took place

between May and June 10, 2020 in Baringo, Busia, Elgeyo Marakwet, Embu, Homabay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kisii, Kisumu, Makueni, Marsabit, Migori, Nakuru, Samburu, Tharaka Nithi and Turkana counties.

The findings show that majority of the children reported spending time at home undertaking chores assigned by parents (46%) while 42% were engaged in studying, 8% played with their peers, 3% took part in other activities that included gardening, herding livestock, watching TV, fetching firewood and water. Only 1% went to the market on given days.

About 42% of respondents reported that they participated in learning while at home.

Of these, 54% were boys and 46% were girls. 63% of children prefer traditional media i.e. TV and radio to access education. This could be because they were easily accessible in many homes. Books borrowed from siblings and friends as well as class notes complemented media. Only 12% relied on online learning and only 3% were home schooled by their parents and relatives.

Knowledge of COVID-19 among children is almost universal at 99%. In the sampled counties, radio and television were reported as the main sources of information on COVID-19 at 32% and 47% respectively. At least 92% of children cited that anyone could get infected by COVID-19. More girls (54%) than boys were knowledgeable on symptoms of COVID-19. The most widely known methods of protection against COVID-19 were washing hands with soap and water (25%) and wearing masks (15%).

Many children were worried about the morbidity of the disease, others feared getting close to people and being infected. They were also concerned about how fast the disease was spreading in the country. Other worrying issues for the children included lack of access to education opportunities, unknown treatment for COVID-19, how long the pandemic would last and increment of food prices at the local market.

There have been several negative effects of COVID-19 on children which include increased house chores limiting time for study, increased child labour as they have to support parents to get additional income over the weekends, and restrictions to play with friends. At the societal level, families have equally been affected as there were increased cases of gender-based violence and child protection issues in the community. 57% of the children knew where to call in case they or someone in the household felt sick. They confirmed the 719-hotline number correctly.

In terms of access to justice, at least 71% children indicated that they were informed of their rights by their parents, 12% by teachers, 17% cited other sources such as chiefs, police and children's office. Majority (93%) of children feel comfortable going to someone working in the justice system e.g. police to get help if something bad would happen to them. Only 7% were not comfortable citing: "The police were not friendly, police stations were far, there are no police station in our neighbourhood, the police will not listen, and I fear them (the police)". If accused of committing a crime, 61% said they would ask their parents for assistance, 24% would go to the area chief, 13% to the police and 2% to the children's office. Universally, 99% of children sampled have not been to court for any reason. For those charged, 100% had someone to explain to them their rights, 100% had positive experience at the courts citing: ***'The judge ruled the case fairly, and my parents told me that when you go there (the courts) you will be helped without discrimination'.***



Many children are worried about the morbidity of the disease, others are afraid of getting close to people and being infected.



At the societal level, families have equally been affected as there were increased cases of gender-based violence and child protection issues in the community.



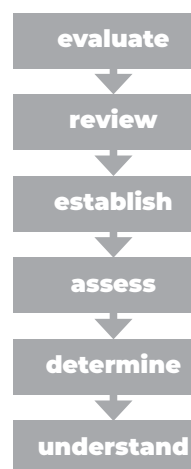
Introduction

Around the world, children are increasingly taking part in public decisions. They are speaking out in local, national and international forums, and working for common causes within different cultural traditions and political systems. Children's civil rights are guaranteed in the United Nations Convention on Rights of Children (UNCRC), along with rights to health care, education, leisure time and protection from abuse, exploitation and violence. For instance, in line with the Day of African Child 2020 theme on access to justice, the legal framework provides that; children's opinions must be listened to seriously in all matters that

affect their lives. This includes decisions made by courts and judges (Article 12), children have the right to express themselves freely and to access information, subject to prevailing laws (Article 13), children have the right to information that is beneficial for them, in their own languages and appropriate to their level of understanding (Article 17) and parents and guardians will provide direction and guidance to children, while respecting the 'evolving capacities' of the child (Article 5). Children's participation makes sense, not only because it is their right, but also because it is useful, educational and just.

Survey objectives and purpose

- To **EVALUATE** the level of awareness amongst children about COVID-19 including diagnosis and prevention strategies.
- To **REVIEW** how children were continuing with education while at home.
- To **ESTABLISH** children's concerns about the pandemic and its effects on their individual as well as community life.
- To **ASSESS** the effectiveness of response mechanisms deployed by government and other actors from their own lens.
- To **DETERMINE** the status of the justice system and experiences therein as pertains to children accused of crime.
- To **UNDERSTAND** children's participation in Day of African Child and proposals for 2020 event given the current pandemic.



Methodology

The sampling design utilized a quantitative approach using a semi-structured questionnaire deployed on mobile data collection application i.e. Kobo Collect. The household survey sampling strategy was multi-stage clustered random sampling. The first cluster was the counties. The second cluster was the sub-counties and lastly communities. Children interviewed were selected randomly

per village/community. The sampling frame was derived from the sponsored households by ChildFund Kenya. The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967:886) formula as below i.e. $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ Where: n is the sample size; N is the population size (number of targeted beneficiaries); and e is the desired level of precision. In the survey, 620 children were interviewed.

Demographics of the respondents

Responses by Counties

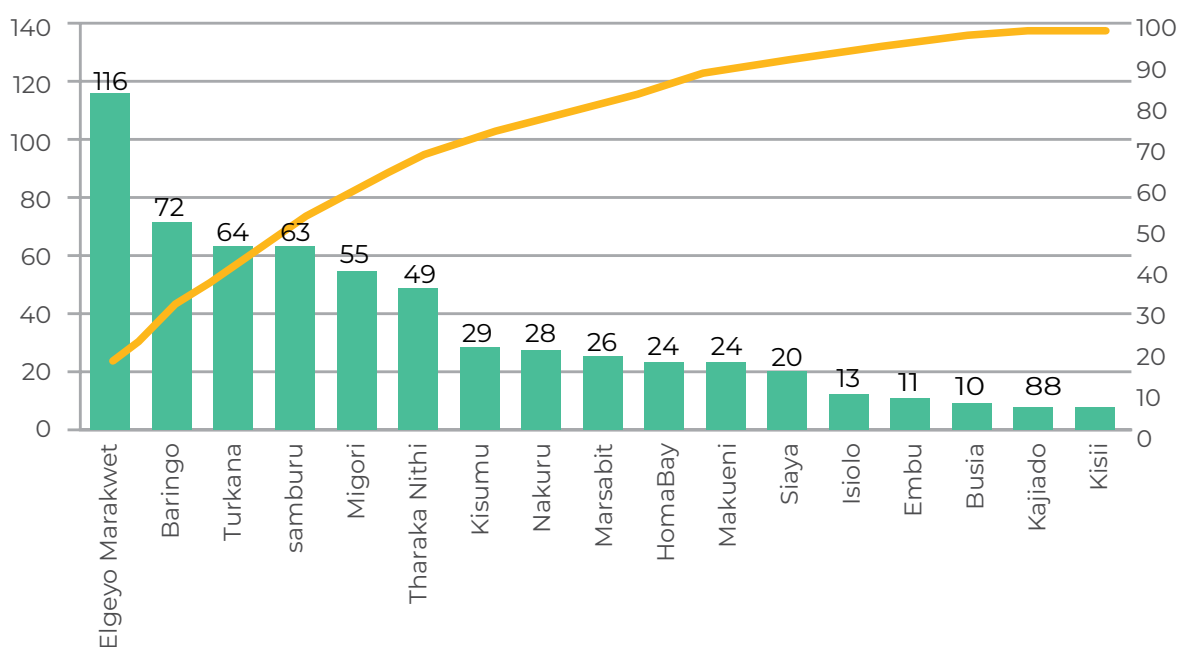


Fig 1: Responses from children by counties

Sex and Age of the respondents

53% of the respondents were female and 47% male.

The adolescents and youth (15-18 years) formed 49% of the respondents while those aged 9 years and below constituted 3%.

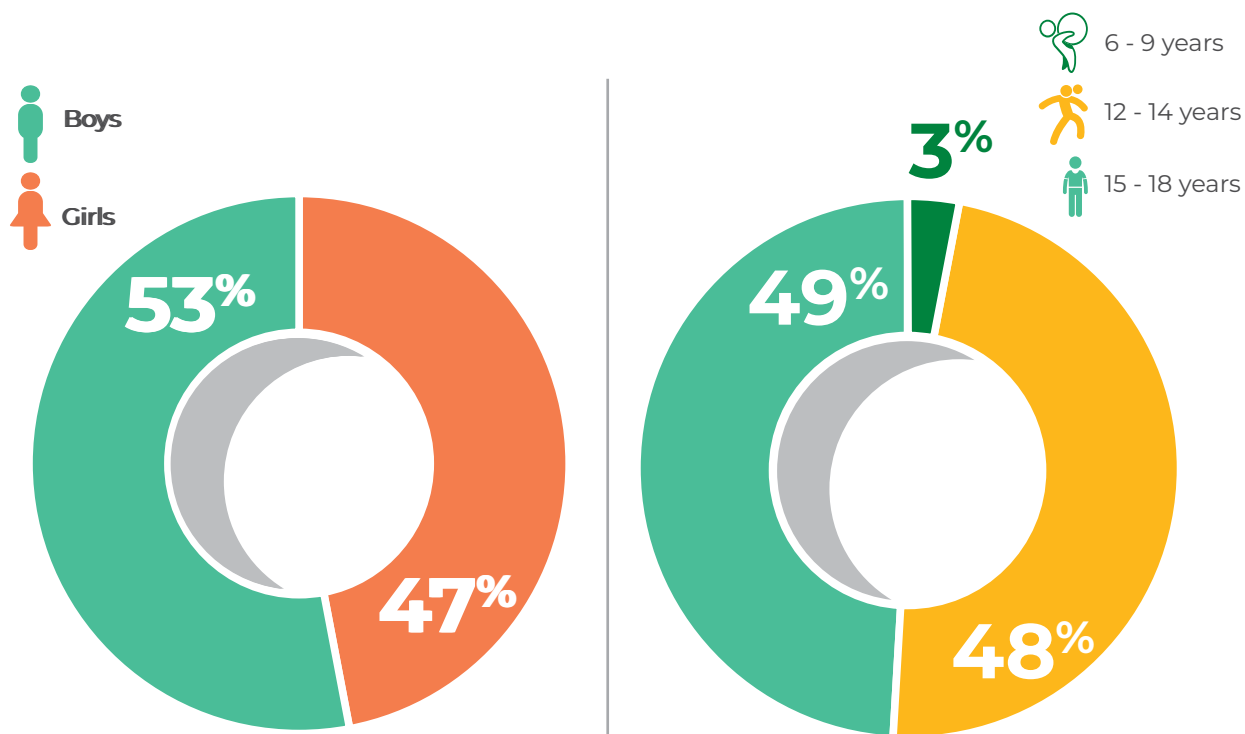


Fig 2: Responses from children by age and sex

Activities done while at home

Majority of the children reported spending time at home undertaking chores assigned by parents (46%), while 42% were engaged in studying, 8% played with their peers, 3% were engaged in other activities that included gardening, herding livestock, watching TV,

fetching firewood and water. Only 1% went to the market on given days. In terms of gender, 65% of girls were involved in house chores while 67% of boys were involved in other activities as earlier mentioned.

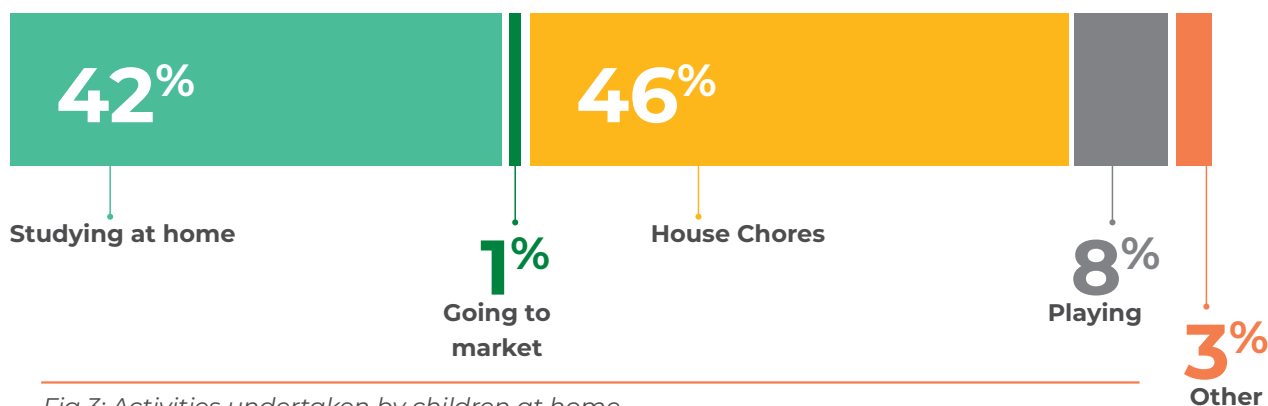


Fig 3: Activities undertaken by children at home

Education

About 42% of respondents reported that they participated in learning while at home. Of these, 54% were boys and 46% were girls. 63% of children prefer traditional media i.e. TV and radio to access education. This could be

because they were easily accessible in many households. Books from siblings and friends as well as class notes complemented media. Only 12% relied on online learning. Only 3% were home schooled by their parents and relatives.

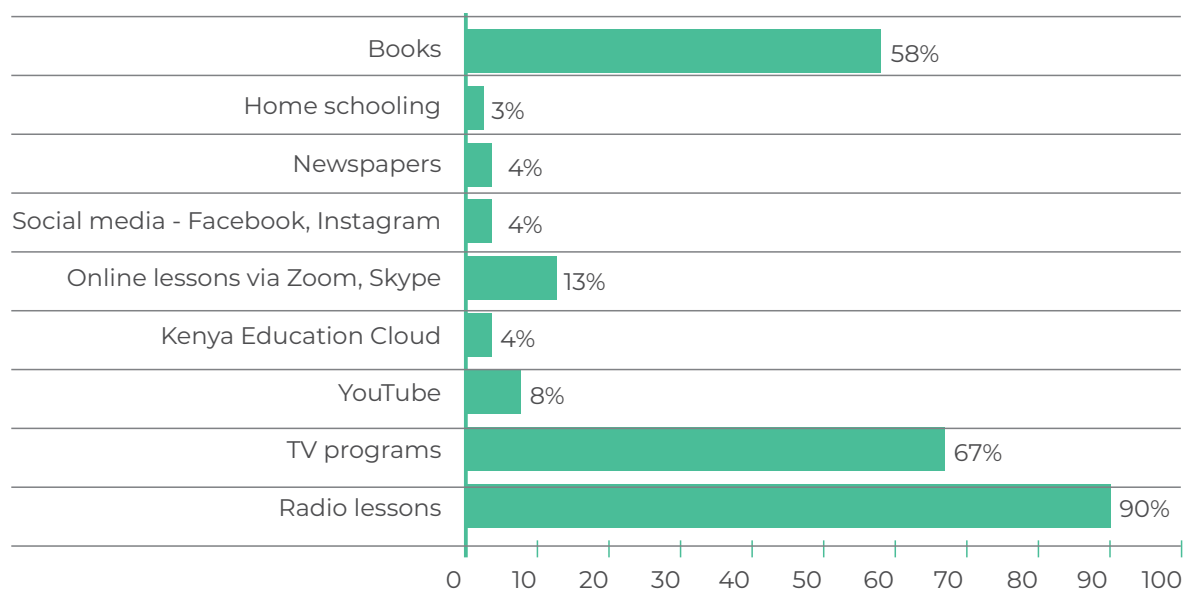


Fig 4: Learning opportunities for children while at home



Knowledge of COVID-19

The respondents were asked questions on knowledge of anyone infected by COVID-19, sources, symptoms, and measures they were taking to protect themselves from the disease.

Awareness of COVID-19

Knowledge of COVID-19 was almost universal above 99% nationally for both males and females.

Sources of information on COVID-19

The respondents mainly received information on COVID-19 from television and radio at 47% and 32% respectively.

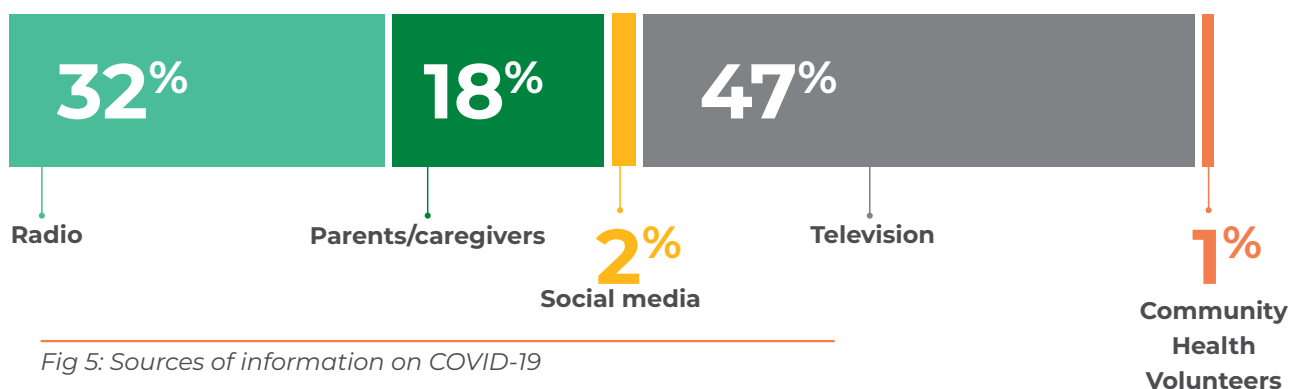


Fig 5: Sources of information on COVID-19

Most vulnerable groups for infection of COVID-19

Majority of respondents (92%) reckoned that anyone can be infected by the virus while 5% mentioned the elderly, 2% adults and 1% children.

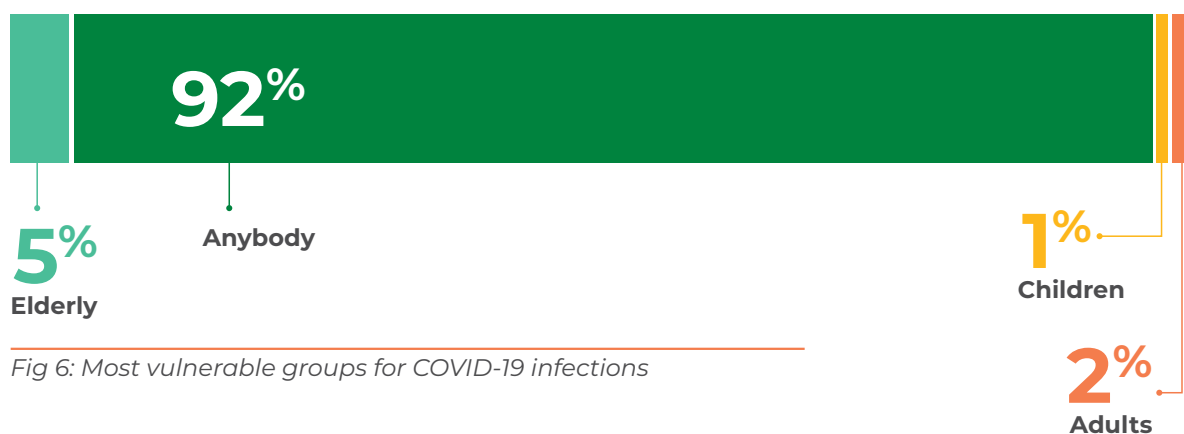


Fig 6: Most vulnerable groups for COVID-19 infections

Knowledge of symptoms of COVID-19 infection

There were many differentials on knowledge of symptoms of the COVID-19 by sex of the respondents. More girls (54%) could correctly identify core symptoms compared to boys,

46%. There were children who cited diarrhoea as a symptom which the World Health Organisation (WHO) states as a less common symptom.

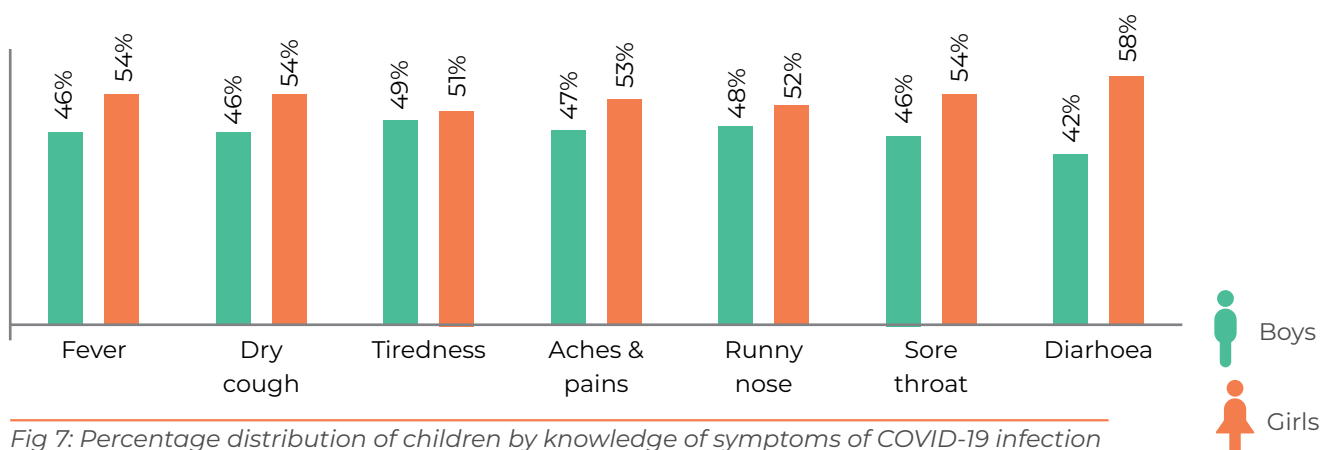


Fig 7: Percentage distribution of children by knowledge of symptoms of COVID-19 infection

Knowledge of methods of protection from COVID-19

The widely known methods of protection from COVID-19 as reported in the survey were

washing hands with soap and water and wearing masks at 25% and 15% respectively.

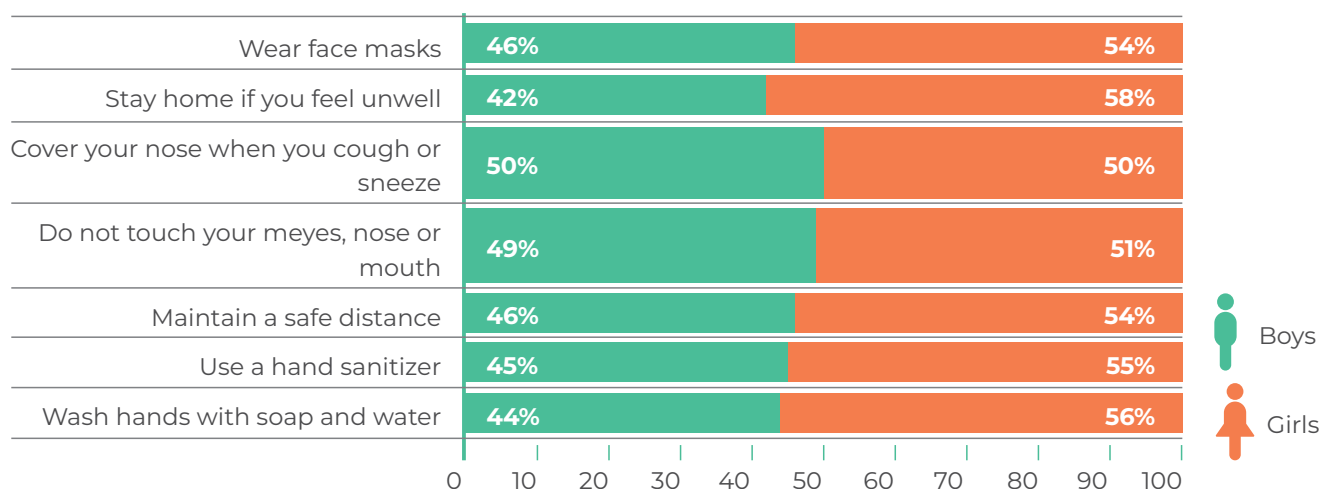


Fig 8: Percentage distribution of individuals by knowledge of protective measures against COVID-19

There were major differentials on knowledge of methods of protection from the virus by the different sexes. As seen on the graph, girls were

more aware of all the strategies compared to boys except covering nose when coughing or sneezing (50 %).



Social distancing has made it hard for me to interact with my grandparents who are now my caregivers after my father died.

Thomas* from Siaya



Everything has come to a standstill. No studying especially students from the village who lack access to electricity, TV and internet.

Haggai*, Elgeyo Marakwet

What worries children about COVID-19 pandemic

Many children were worried about the nature of the disease, feared getting close to people and being infected. They were also concerned about how fast the disease was spreading in the country. Other issues included:

- Lack of access to education opportunities because of schools' closure.
- Unknown treatment for COVID-19 and how long the pandemic would last.
- Increment of prices of food at the local markets.
- Loss of jobs for the caregivers.
- Inadequate capacity of hospitals to attend to people affected by COVID-19.
- The measures put in place by government such as social distancing means churches, mosques, temples, and other places of worship were shut down.

Effect of COVID-19 on individual children (excerpts)

- It has stopped me from going to school and church.
- It has prevented me from playing with my friends.
- It has become hard for caregivers to earn livelihoods and I have to work during the weekend to earn extra income for the family.
- Increased house chores making it difficult to study while at home.
- Lack of food because of increment of food prices.
- Not enough face masks and sanitizers at home.
- Access to some government and non-government institutions have been restricted due to fear of spreading COVID-19.
- Boredom since there are no social gatherings and soccer games.



My education has been affected since I am supposed to sit the national examination. Studying on my own is not easy. I need teachers to guide me at this crucial moment of my education.

Ogutu*, Kisumu

Effect of COVID-19 on friends and family

- No playing /meeting with friends.
- The economy has been affected and parents are rendered jobless.
- Increased sexual and gender-based violence with continued stay-at-home rule.
- Lack of food.
- Lack of access to education resources.

Actions that would make children safer and happier

- Get the vaccine for COVID-19.
- Provide hand washing items like soap, sanitizers, buckets, water tanks and clean water .
- Provide food and school learning materials.
- Government to act fast and save lives by educating the community about COVID-19.
- Reconsider curfew timing to allow parents to fend food.
- Leaders should keep on advocating for their people to benefit from the government support.
- Reopen schools and churches with safety guidelines in place.
- Consider those who are homeless due to floods for support in shelter and incentives to start businesses to support themselves.
- Donation of COVID-19 emergency response funds.
- Construction of more health facilities to accommodate rising number of COVID-19 cases.



My dad spends the whole day in the house with us because his workplace was closed. My mother can only sell a few secondhand clothes so there is not enough money for us.

Kimani, Busia



Help my father get a job so that he will stop being stressed.

Josephine*, Isiolo



My friends are no longer going to school their dreams have been shuttered. Families are going through a rough time and no food. Landlords are pressurizing tenants, yet families have no money since their jobs were cut off.

Nashon, Marakwet

Government actions to assist children during the COVID-19 pandemic period

- The government should provide books to help children study at home.
- Provide hand washing buckets, soap, face masks, enough clean water.
- The government should support children with food because parents were not getting enough money now.
- Government should provide more information/create awareness on COVID-19.
- Government should ensure that the school syllabus is taught through radio because not every house has a phone, TV or access to the internet.
- Child protection mechanisms be strengthened at national and community level to avoid gender-based violence and violence against children.
- Review the school calendar for schools to reopen with all preventive measures put in place.
- Government to ensure all citizens have electricity and TV sets for children to follow online learning.

Awareness of COVID-19 emergency hotline

Majority, 57% of the children were aware of where to call in case they or someone in the household fell ill. They confirmed the 719 hotline number correctly.

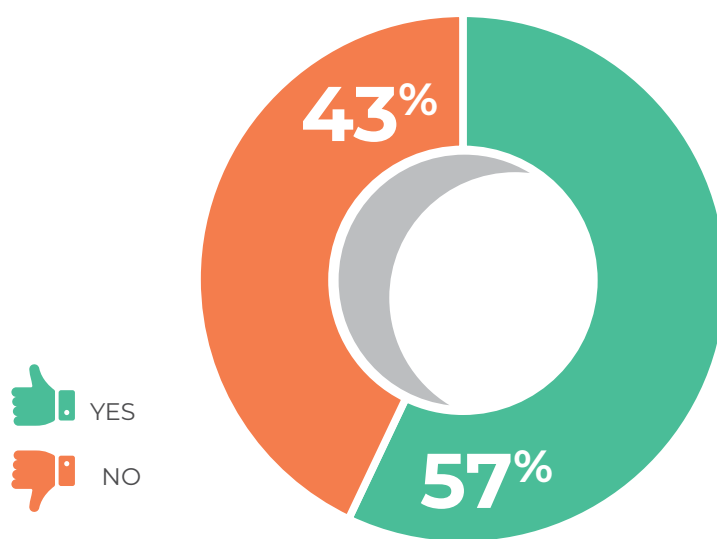


Fig 9: Awareness of COVID-19 emergency hotline

Recommendations on COVID-19 pandemic

- Children would like more effort put into acquiring the vaccine for COVID-19.
- Government should provide hand washing items like soap, sanitizers, buckets, water tanks and clean water.
- Provide cash assistance and relief food as caregivers' livelihoods have been disrupted with the restrictions.
- Government to act fast and save people by educating the community about COVID-19.
- Reconsider the curfew restrictions to allow caregivers to fend food for the families.
- Leaders should advocate for their people to benefit from the government support.
- Consider those who are homeless due to floods for support in shelter and incentives to start businesses to support themselves.
- Construct and equip more health facilities to accommodate rising number of COVID-19 cases.
- Government should provide children with books to help them study at home.
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Access to Justice

The theme for the Day of the African Child 2020 was **Access to Child-friendly Justice System in Africa**. The theme is in line with the articles 32 and 33 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). This section

of the report sought to understand children's opinions on the country's judicial system and provide recommendations to the government on areas of improvement.

Reference for children about their rights

From the survey, 71% of the children were informed of their rights by their parents, 12% by teachers, 17% got information from other sources including chiefs, police, and children's office.

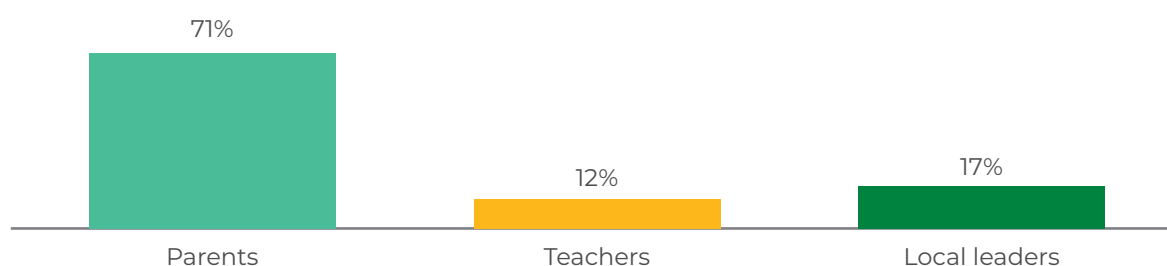


Fig 10: Individuals that children engage to understand their rights

Children's experience with the justice system

Majority (93%) of children feel comfortable going to someone working in the justice system e.g. police to help if something bad would happen to them. Only 7% were not comfortable citing **“that the police were not friendly, police stations were far, no police station in the area, they will not listen, I fear them.”**

If accused of committing a crime, 61% of the children will ask their parents for assistance, whereas 24% will go to the area chief, 13% to police and 2% to the children's office.

99% of children sampled had not been to court for any reason. For those charged, 100% had someone to explain their rights to them, 100%

had positive experience at the courts citing **‘The judge ruled the case fairly, and my parents told me that when you go there you will be helped without discrimination.’**

The opinions were split between perception on whether they felt their age affected how they were treated at 50:50.

For children who had not been to court, some thought they would be mishandled because of their young age, the need for fair judgement, the need to be taken seriously, lack of confidence to express themselves, lack of finances to access justice and the need for their voices to be heard.

Recommendations on how to improve the justice system from children

- School curriculum should be revised to incorporate child rights and justice content.
- Train children, children leaders, parents and the community on child rights and protection.
- Ensure closer access to justice system at the community level by:
 - Putting up more police stations/posts within communities.
 - Employing more child protection officers in every location for easier access to all children in the community.
 - Putting up more children's courts at the location level.
- Fundraise to support children in the justice system access to pro-bono legal services.
- The government should act firmly on corrupt officers and ensure they serve children's needs. .
- Child protection offices should have a lawyer to support children who encounter the justice system.
- Children should be given enough time to express themselves.
- To have some child protection offices in the town centers because local chiefs were sometimes slow to act.
- Thorough investigations be conducted for children accused of committing crimes.
- The government officers in the judiciary should visit children courts to assess the situation in the county and subcounty levels.



Those who do wrong to children should be jailed, so that we are encouraged to speak if something bad happens to us.

Ann, Tharaka Nithi



Children Officers in the area should respond quickly when a case is reported to them and forward as some ignore.

Mutisya, Makueni

Participation in Day of the Africa Child 2020 event

Majority of the respondents (66%) had never participated in the Day of the African Child events held annually.

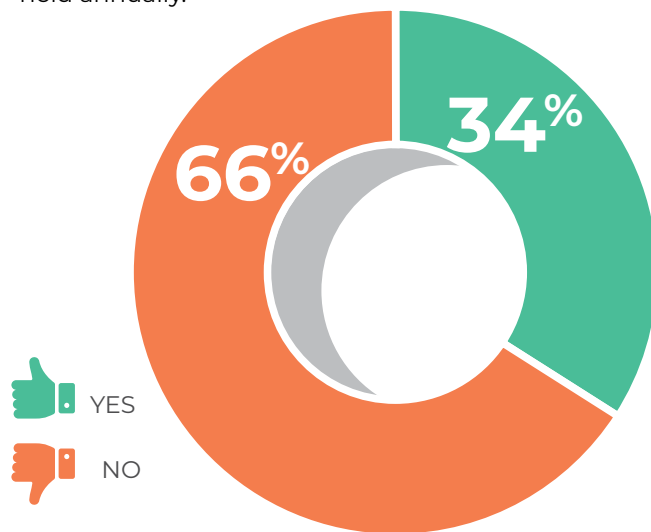


Fig 10: Children who have participated in the annual Day of the African Child event

Recommendations on celebrating DAC 2020

Children recommended that 2020 DAC should be celebrated through TV and other social media platforms so children will participate while at home. Others urged

that the government should provide food to families e.g. milk to prevent malnutrition, especially for children with disabilities.



Conclusion

Since schools closed in March 2020, following a government directive to prevent rapid spread on COVID-19 infection, children have been under immense stress levels at home and community levels as evidenced by the findings of this report. Being out of school means children have been exposed to more forms of violence, they have limited access to educational opportunities, learning resources and school feeding programs. Lack of access

to computers, internet, data, radios and televisions has left many children unable to engage in remote learning. Many children shared feelings of stress and anxiety arising from staying in isolation and living with stressed parents. Even worse, children have been abused sexually with the perpetrators being relatives, guardians and/or persons living with the victims.





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