
**AN ASSESSMENT ON THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK ON EARLY
PREGNANCIES AMONG SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN.
A CASE STUDY OF KAMULI DISTRICT, UGANDA.**

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ABSTRACT

In 2021, it was predicted that the incidence of adolescent pregnancies in Kamuli District was 35.8%, which was higher than the anticipated 27% national average for rural areas in Uganda. As a result, it is now a worry for everyone in Uganda, not just the politicians who have expressed interest by publicly denouncing the practice of early gestation among school-age adolescents. The society has continued to criticize pregnant females returning to the school system following the lockdown. Because they allegedly encourage others to do the act and encourage teen pregnancy in schools, society discriminates against pregnant girls in school and young mothers who are returning to their studies. The study found that teenage pregnancies among schoolkids in Kamuli were mostly caused by the COVID-19 epidemic.

It was evident that the problem was caused and sustained by a combination of sociocultural variables including low literacy, cultural norms linked with bad parenting, child marriages, dropout rates, and cultural shifts, as well as the impoverished condition itself.

The issue was rendered difficult to address by political meddling. The investigator additionally noted that care in the community and obligation to keep girls in school, family factors and community involvement in openly counseling their children and not shying away, hypersensitivity of parents to support (especially) the girl child, counseling of both mom and dad and beginners about the consequences of early pregnant women and the duties associated with it, and utilizing the law to legally arrest and charge perpetrators could be helpful.

Key words: covid-19 outbreak and early pregnancies

Background of the Study:

Okumu (2020) claims that during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, schools throughout Africa were closed for eight months. According to some reports, teenage pregnancy rates increased throughout that time, with 11,000 teenaged students giving birth. These girls' s new in classes was prohibited across the nation when the schools reopened.

These girls faced the end of their education as a result of this choice, which rendered them and their offspring more susceptible to fewer options, greater dangers to their health and happiness, and heightened poverty and instability.

Other disaster that brought the world together in an exceedingly unusual way was Covid-19, which was also on an enormously greater scale. Despite the fact that the effects of this global epidemic were felt by everyone, some of the most susceptible communities had more severe effects.

Sadly, school-going adolescent girls were among those who were most negatively impacted, and for others, life actually turned perilous.

Starting March 2020, COVID-19 in Uganda has caused all district-level school cancellations, impacting 15 million students—or 33.3 percent of the country's enroled populace.

In 107 districts around the country, schools are currently closed, with some starting limited reopenings. In the meantime, COVID-19's subsequent waves and continuous transmission in Uganda posed a threat to ongoing, irregular suspensions and reopenings.

(Gentle. A, 2023). Thousands of children in primary and secondary schools across the nation already were unable to get a basic education before the COVID-19 outbreak.

More out-of-school children lived in the Busoga region than anywhere else in Uganda, numbering roughly hundreds of these kids, teens, and young adults.

Eight out of the ten municipalities in the nation with the greatest percentages of children who are not in college were in the Busoga region, with Kamuli (62%), Buyende (55%), Mayuge and Namayingo (47%), Luuka and Kaliro (41%), and Kamuli (62%), being the greatest. This highlights the significant risks and access restrictions that children face in unstable and conflict-affected environments; many also were influenced by COVID-19 (UBOS, 2016).

Statement of the Problem of Study:

The COVID19 outbreak caused terrible disturbances all across the world.

Everyone would keep experiencing the effects, albeit to varied degrees.

Due in part to the president's shortcomings in dealing with the repercussions, particularly for its vulnerable minority, including school-age children, Uganda, like most poor countries, was considerably worse.

The COVID-19 pandemic's additional measures and complexities exposed school-age children to harmful effects like a growing teenage pregnancy problem (UNICEF, 2008), rising rates of maternal death, difficulties accessing services for reproductive and sexual health, domestic abuse, rising levels of poverty, and sexual identity violent behaviour.

Specific Objectives:

- 1. To identify the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on school going children in Kamuli district.*
- 2. To find out the other causes of early pregnancies among school going children of primary and secondary schools in Kamuli district during the lockdown.*
- 3. To establish the effects of early pregnancies on school going children in Kamuli district as a result of school closure due to COVID 19 outbreak.*

Research Questions of the Study:

- 1. What were the effects of COVID 19 outbreak on school going children?*
- 2. What are the other causes of early pregnancies on school going children during this COVID 19 outbreak?*
- 3. What were the effects of early pregnancy on school going children during this COVID 19 outbreak?*
- 4. How could we limit early pregnancies on school going children during this COVID 19 outbreak?*

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5. *How could school on going pregnant children and teenage mothers be helped both at school and at home?*

Methodology

Research Design:

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that combines relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure, (Kothari, 2007). The study used a Descriptive survey that included both qualitative and quantitative approaches/or methods.

A survey is a tool of gathering information by administering a questionnaire to a group of people. It is commonly used to collect data about people's habits, opinions, behaviors, attitudes, perceptions or any other variety of education issues.

Target Population:

The study targeted school going learners aged 15-18, Religious and political Officials, school administrators and parents. Learners formed the targeted population in this study. Teens who were pregnant at this particular time and those who were to give birth at a school going age too participated in this study to reveal out actual facts about the topic.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques:

Sample Size;

Sample size refers to the number of participants or respondents included in a study. In this study, 60 participants/or respondents were used in order to influences two statistical properties:

Table 1: Showing Number of participants in the Study;

Stake Holder	No. of Respondents	
School going children	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>
	15	10
Pregnant School going Children	10	
Young Mothers	05	
Parents	05	
School Administrators	10	
Religious and Political Officials	05	
Total	60 Respondents	

The study participants were randomly selected with the guidance of the randomly selected school administrators that participated in this study.

Sampling Techniques;

The area and the schools were randomly selected because of the past record of teenage pregnancies in Kamuli Municipality hence sufficiency of study population as required to make any research meaningful to the community and the state. The Sub County had several educational institutions but the selected schools and participants mentioned above were selected at random to act as the sample, representing the rest of the schools and population in the region.

Research Instruments of the Study:

Questionnaire forms that were predicted to be efficient and useful research tools for this study were used to collect the data.

The original study aims were taken into consideration when creating the surveys.

The participants preferred these questions because they knew that they would stay anonymous and have enough of time to consider their replies without being pressed.

To collect both the quantitative and qualitative information, the student employed both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

With the purpose of reducing biases originating from individual characteristics, the respondents were

treated identically.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Data collected was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Questionnaires were scrutinized for accuracy, then coded and entered in computer using Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) (Nelson. K, 2022). Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies. Qualitative data was mainly consisted of responses from interviews and open-ended questions in the formulated questionnaires.

RESULTS***Bio data information of the Respondents:******Questionnaire Return Rate:***

Three sets of questionnaires were used to collect data for this study; the school going children, key informant interview for young mothers and pregnant children, and interview guide for parents, school administrators and civil and political officials.

Table 2: Questionnaire Return Rate.

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>No. Expected</i>	<i>No. Returned</i>	<i>%-tage</i>
<i>School children</i>	25	23	92
<i>Young mothers</i>	05	05	100
<i>Pregnant School children</i>	10	07	70
<i>Parents</i>	05	03	60
<i>School Administrators</i>	10	08	80
<i>Religious and political officials</i>	05	04	80
<i>TOTAL</i>	60	50	

Gender of Respondents:

Gender was a factor to be considered among respondents because it would enable the researcher

acquire information from both genders.

Table 3: showing gender of Respondents.

Respondent	No. of Participants	Male	%age	Female	%age
<i>School children</i>	23	07	30	16	70
<i>Young mothers</i>	05	00	00	05	100
<i>Pregnant School children</i>	07	00	00	07	100
<i>Parents</i>	03	01	33	02	67
<i>School Administrators</i>	08	06	75	02	25
<i>Religious and political officials</i>	04	02	50	02	50
TOTAL	50	14	28	36	72

From Table 3 above, it is unmistakable that a higher proportional school administrator (75%) were male. These being mixed schools where the study was conducted from, there was need for gender balance in teachers to give balanced guidance and counseling to both boys and girls. From the findings of this study, it was evident that gender balance is lacking.

Age of Respondents:

Age of respondents more especially parents, school administrators, and religious and political Officials shows maturity and experience that they have in handling teenagers especially the pregnant ones in order to keep them fill comfortable in school and in the community at large while pregnant. They too have to counsel them and influence teenage pregnant girls to attend and perform well in schools. The researcher therefore found it necessary to ask for the age of the respondents. Responses on the participants' age are shown in table 4 below.

Table 4; showing age distribution of the respondents.

Respondent	No. of Participants	Below 15	%	15-18	%	Below 40	%	Above 40	%
School children	23	02	9	21	91	00	00	00	00
Young mothers	05	02	40	03	60	00	00	00	00
Pregnant School children	07	00	00	05	71	02	29	00	00
Parents	03	00	00	00	00	02	67	01	33
School Administrators	08	00	00	00	00	02	25	06	75
Religious and political officials	04	00	00	00	00	01	25	03	75
TOTAL	50	02		31		07		10	

Table 4 indicates that all the young mothers and the pregnant on school going children were between below 18 years. This age group is enthusiastic and inexperienced when it involves sexuality. The study suggests that these youngsters had adequate opportunity to experiment with homosexuality during the COVID-19 breakdown that resulted in school closure, and that this caused many of them to become pregnant as teenagers.

According to Table 4 above, the majority of school managers were 40 years of age or older.

This shows that they have enough expertise managing boys and girls in mixed-gender classrooms for better performance and behavior, to lower the amount or rate of adolescent pregnancies among school-age youngsters.

In a similar vein, parents with 30 years or more of experience are competent in their parenting role and are able to manage and guide youngsters.

These parents are also aware of the ideal parenting techniques.

Effects of Covid-19 Outbreak on School Going Children:

The study aimed at identifying the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on school going children in Kamuli district. The participants' (school on going children) responses are as shown in table 6 below.

Table 6: showing Respondents' Responses on the effects of COVID-19 Outbreak on school going children.

Statement	Response					
	Agree	%	Not Sure	%	Disagree	%
COVID-19 Outbreak contributed to closure of schools in Kamuli	23	100	00	00	00	00
During the lockdown, girls were spending more time with men than they were while in school.	13	57	03	13	07	30
During the lock down as a result of COVID-19 Outbreak, school on going children engaged in risky sexual behaviors.	20	87	01	4	02	9
COVID-19 Outbreak contributed to early pregnancies among school on going children in Kamuli district: COVID-19 outbreak has effects on school going children?	23	100	00	00	00	00

According to Table 6, every single student who participated in the study and was still enrolled in school agreed that the COVID-19 Epidemic was a factor in Kamuli's schools being closed, as it was the case throughout all of Uganda.

As a scholar, I applaud and endorsed the president's effort to stop the Covid-19 pandemic from spreading.

As evidenced by the 57% of those surveyed who agreed that throughout the lockdown, girls were interacting more with men than they were while in school and the 100% of survey participants who said that during the lock down as a result of the COVID-19 Outbreak, school-going children participating in such behavioral patterns, the effects on children lasted for the rest of their lives.

The other factors that caused early pregnancies on school going children during the COVID-19 outbreak?

The study aimed at finding out the other key factors that could have contributed to teenage

pregnancies on school going children during COVID-19 outbreak. The 23 school on going children's responses that participated in this study are as shown in table 7 below.

Table 7; school on going children's responses on the causes of teenage pregnancy.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Not</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>%</i>
			Sum			
<i>Low Literacy</i>	12	56	10	43	01	04
<i>Cultural Practices</i>	22	96	00	00	01	04
<i>Poverty</i>	17	74	03	13	03	13

According to table 7 above, 56% of the school going children that participated in the study agreed that low literacy caused their fellow children to have teenage pregnancies during COVID-19 outbreak, 43% were not sure that low literacy caused teenage pregnancy among school going children and 4% disagreed that low literacy could cause teenage pregnancies among school on going children.

On the other hand, there was no child that was not sure and 4% disagreed.

Additionally, it is good to consider another factor of the relationship between teenage pregnancy and poverty as 74% of the school going children respondents agreed that it contributed to teenage pregnancies during the pandemic outbreak and on the other hand 13% were not sure and 13% disagreed.

The effects of early pregnancy on school going children during this COVID-19 outbreak.

The study aimed at establishing the effects of early pregnancies on school going children in Kamuli district as a result of school closure due to COVID 19 outbreak. The 23 school on going children's responses that participated in this study are as shown in table 9 below;

Table 8: Responses on the effects of teenage pregnancy on school going children.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Not</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>%</i>
			<i>Sure</i>			
<i>School dropout</i>	23	100	00	00	00	00
<i>Poor grades/or performance in class</i>	19	83	00	00	04	17
<i>Poverty/or economic hardships</i>	23	100	00	00	00	00
<i>Increased illiteracy among young people</i>	17	74	06	26	00	00
<i>Forced Early marriages</i>	16	70	05	22	02	09
<i>Generation gap between students' parents</i>	15	65	03	13	05	22

According to Table 9 above, all school-going children (100%) agreed that the majority of school-going adolescents dropping out of school was a result of adolescent pregnancy.

83% of respondents believed that adolescent pregnancy contributes to poor academic achievement, whereas 17% disagreed.

100% of respondents believed that teen pregnancy contributes to poverty or other financial difficulties for teen moms.

74% of respondents believed that adolescent pregnancy contributed to an increase in youth illiteracy since it caused more of them to drop out of school, while 26% expressed skepticism about this claim.

70% agreed that teenage pregnancy led to forced early marriages,

22% were not sure whether it was true, and 9% disagreed that teenage pregnancy led to forced early marriages among school on going children. 65% agreed that teenage pregnancy led to a generation gap between parents and their children, 13% were not sure with this statement and 22%

disagreed with it that such a generation can be caused by the parents' behavior.

Conclusion:

This qualitative research investigated how the COVID-19 outbreak affected teen pregnancies among Kamuli District school-age children.

The investigation shows that the impoverished situation along with the COVID-19 outbreak, sociocultural variables like traditional dances, inadequate parenting, and cultural shifts generated and perpetuated the issue.

It is challenging to solve the issue because of political meddling.

Girls who become pregnant as teenagers experience prejudice and stigma, and their access to opportunities for education and job advancement is severely restricted.

Recommendations:

Recognize child protection and Mental Health & Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) as essential lifesaving activities. We welcome the Government's commitment so far to ensure humanitarian access and to exempt some essential or lifesaving activities from movement restrictions. We urge the Government to ensure that child protection activities – including alternative care, case management and monitoring, out-of-school education and MHPSS are permitted and supported to continue.

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