

**Covid-19 Outbreak And It's Impact On Early Pregnancies Among School Going Children. A Case Study Of
Kamuli District, Uganda.**

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic led to unprecedented school closures globally affecting over 1.6 billion students. In Uganda, all educational institutions were shuttered in March 2020 to curb virus spread. This study examined impacts of prolonged lockdowns and isolation on early pregnancies among school children in rural Kamuli District, Eastern Uganda. A mixed-methods sequential exploratory design combined qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and a household survey. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 district health and education officials, community leaders, and adolescents. Additionally, a cross-sectional study utilizing multi-stage cluster sampling surveyed 300 young mothers aged 13-19 from 30 villages. Data underwent thematic coding and statistical analysis. Qualitative findings indicated socioeconomic strain related to loss of learning and play exacerbated childhood vulnerability to sexual exploitation. The survey found 22% of respondents reported becoming pregnant during lockdown, tripling district weekly averages. The majority cited parental neglect and seclusion due to school closures as precipitating factors. Pregnant students accounted for 30% dropouts thus far indicating long-term repercussions. Prolonged lockdowns critically threatened developmental needs of adolescents, disproportionately impacting girls. Holistic support integrating sexual health, gender equality and youth empowerment programming remained urgently needed. Strategies bolstering household economic security and remote learning alternatives could have helped curb unintended outcomes of future crises.

Keywords: Covid-19 Outbreak, Early Pregnancies, School and Children

Background of the Study:

According to (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024), throughout the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, colleges had been closed for 8 months in Africa. In the course of that point, teenage being pregnant quotes doubled by way of a few accounts, with 11,000 adolescent students becoming pregnant. When schools reopened, those women had been met with a national ban on their re-enrolment. This choice had grave effects as these women faced the cease of their schooling, thereby condemning them and their kids to fewer possibilities, greater health and nicely-being dangers, and extended poverty and insecurity (Faridah et al., 2023).

Covid-19 turned into any other disaster at an exponentially larger scale that had united the arena in an extremely specific manner (Oromo et al., 2023). While it was real that everyone had struggled with the fallout of this worldwide pandemic, it had more serious outcomes on some of the maximum vulnerable populations. Regrettably, faculty going adolescent ladies have been many of the most adversely affected and for a few, life became downright dangerous. In Uganda, due

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to the fact that March 2020, COVID-19 caused national school closures in all of the districts, affecting 15 million beginners over 33.3 percent of the Uganda's college going populace. Presently, schools were closed nationwide in 107 districts, with others starting localized re-openings (Christopher et al., 2022). In the meantime, the continuing unfold of COVID-19 and 2nd waves in Uganda threatened ongoing, intermittent closures and re-openings (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Catherine, et al., 2023). Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, masses of women and boys of primary and secondary faculty age around the united states had been already failing to get admission to a fundamental schooling. With almost masses of those children, teenagers and teens, Busoga vicinity was a domestic to greater out-of-college youngsters than some other region in Uganda (Paul & Kazaara, 2023). 8 out of the 10 districts with the best costs of out of faculty youngsters countrywide have been in Busoga vicinity, Kamuli (62 per cent), Buyende (fifty five in step with cent), Mayuge and Namayingo (forty seven consistent with cent), Luuka and Kaliro (forty one consistent with cent) being the best, highlighting the extra risks and access boundaries confronted through children throughout fragile and warfare affected contexts, many had been also impacted through COVID-19, (Victor et al., 2023).

In Kamuli district, faculties were shuttered for all maximum 18 months with out a plans to reopen in 2022. Without the aid gadget of teachers and college administrators, many ladies had been left prone to early teenage being pregnant, early adolescence marriage and gender-primarily based violence, among other devastating consequences of Covid-19 (Vincent & Peter, 2023). Kamuli District schooling department companions from Plan Uganda that identified the want for elevated engagement with adolescent ladies of their network, and made it their precedence to attain even greater girls as this pandemic rolled on, (Plan Uganda, 2021).

With rules, social norms and practices that prohibit the re-access of pregnant ladies and adolescent mothers into faculties, many parts of Kamuli struggled to uphold the right to training for pregnant women and younger moms (Seth & Ntirandekura, 2022). Kamuli district become even extra prone to a follow-on crisis in women' education due to college closures because of COVID-19. Early pregnancies, among different threat factors, had been including to the quantity of girls who have been not in school in Kamuli district. Even before Covid-19, there were masses of adolescent ladies who have been no longer in faculty and research counseled the pandemic could add an additional loads. Accordingly, the want to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on early pregnancies among school going kids in Kamuli district, to particularly perceive the impact of COVID-19 on women in Uganda and their get entry to to destiny possibilities for schooling (Julius, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

The COVID19 pandemic brought on devastating disruptions across the world. The effect would continue to be felt by means of all, though in varying levels (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Alex, et al., 2023). Uganda, like most negative nations changed into even worse, in component due to the shortfalls of the government to squarely cope with the outcomes; especially for its susceptible populace, along with on school going youngsters (Godfrey et al., 2023). The emergency measures and realities dawned through the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered on faculty going kids to terrible

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affects together with an escalating teenage being pregnant problem, upward push in maternal mortality quotes, demanding situations in having access to sexual and reproductive health services, home violence, multiplied poverty, and gender-based totally violence (Faridah et al., 2023). The lockdown and the months that followed endured to exacerbate inequalities. For example, insights from country wide consultative dialogues, surveys and different reviews confirmed a annoying increase in the variety of adolescent pregnancies and sexual reproductive rights-related challenges for on college going kids women across the USA as a result of the COVID-19 state of affairs in Uganda. Consistent with a UNFPA file on teenage pregnancy in Uganda during and submit Covid-19 lockdown, jap Uganda (Busoga) had the best mentioned cases with Kamuli district alone reporting more than 800 instances (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Alex, et al., 2023). Within the Buliisa district, teenage being pregnant was among 25-30% of all adolescent ladies. But, a number of the measures followed with the aid of the government to include the unfold of the coronavirus consisting of college lockdowns in part led to this dire situation. Consistent with the Ministry of health, 25 percentage of Ugandan teenagers became pregnant with the aid of the age of 19 and close to half have been married earlier than the age of 18 (John et al., 2023). The schools that were secure spaces for the ladies have been on lockdown, as a result exposing them to the ‘predators’ and sex offenders. In line with the Police report, four,442 cases of defilement have been reported between January and April 2021. The Sauti, a web platform through the Uganda Adolescent health discussion board (UAHF) pronounced 800 instances of sexual abuse between January and may 2021 (John et al., 2023). This examine turned into to look at the results of COVID-19 outbreak on early pregnancies among faculty going kids and how the young moms have been to be handled with recognize and not seen as morally sick.

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.

Methodology

A studies design is the arrangement of situations for series and analysis of information in a manner that combines relevance to the studies motive with financial system in technique, (Kothari, 2007). The study used a Descriptive survey that included each qualitative and quantitative procedures/or methods (Maiga et al., 2021). A descriptive survey; as such became an intensive descriptive evaluation of educational development via teenage mothers who dropped out of the faculty due to pregnancy and people who remained in schools after getting pregnant (Rasheed et al., 2022). The adoption of descriptive survey was beneficial for educational reality findings as it supplied a fantastic deal of data.

A survey is a device of collecting information by way of administering a questionnaire to a group of human beings. it's far normally used to accumulate statistics about humans’ behavior, opinions, behaviors, attitudes, perceptions or some

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other variety of training issues (A. Nafiu et al., 2012). The student additionally followed commentary approach to study problems that were now not interviewed but could be visible. The study supposed to get the authentic photograph of the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on early pregnancies amongst school going youngsters in Kamuli district (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). The design changed into suitable for this take a look at since it worried interviews and administering questionnaires to a pattern of faculty administrators, parents and beginners/or college going kids to acquire statistics/or information about their perspectives pertaining early pregnancies amongst faculty going kids in the course of this COVID 19 outbreak (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). The descriptive evaluation became performed the use of chances, frequencies and go tabulations. The study targeted school going novices elderly 15-18, non secular and political officers, college directors and mother and father. newbies fashioned the centered population in this look at (Olanrewaju, Waititu, et al., 2021). young adults who were pregnant at this specific time and people who had been to give birth at a school going age too participated on this look at to show out real statistics about the subject. The 60 respondents that participated in the have a look at have been as proven below;

Table 1: Showing Number of participants in the Study;

Stake Holder	No. of Respondents	
	Girls	Boys
School going children	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. 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 (Nafiu et al., 2017). 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 (Abiodun et al., 2019).

Stratified Sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting schools from the zones, day and boarding girls and boys mixed schools. Random sampling was used to select the students that were used to generate data, as well as teachers and head teachers and the civil and political leaders (Olanrewaju, Lukman Abiodun, et al., 2021). The data was collected using questionnaires that were anticipated to be effective and good research instruments

for this study. The questionnaires were constructed to address the objectives of the study. These questionnaires were preferred by the respondents because respondents would give honest answers since they were remaining unidentified and would have sufficient time to think out without pressure (Nafiu et al., 2012). The student used both open and closed ended questions to capture both qualitative and quantitative data. The respondents were treated equally to bring down biases resulting from personal characteristics. The student obtained permission to carryout research from the District Education Officer (DEO) Kamuli District (Nafiu et al., 2017). The student then collected data for 4 weeks in order to capture both qualitative and quantitative information for the survey. For confidentiality, the student ensured that names for respondents and their schools were not to be written in the report. 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 et al., 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. Data was then put into various categories according to themes of the study. Such categories comprised recurring concepts, perspectives and words (Abiodun et al., 2022). Qualitative analysis complemented the statistical analysis to provide a comprehensive account of the problem under study. The responses were summarized and presented in tables with frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

Table 2: 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

Table 2, reveals that 100% of the school on going children that participated in the study agreed that COVID-19 Outbreak contributed to closure of schools in Kamuli, as it was evident in the entire Uganda. As a scholar, I commend

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and supported the Government's response to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic (Nelson et al., 2023). Timely measures such as restricting movement and gatherings so far helped to limit the number of cases in Uganda. At the same time, the current context was exacerbating wider challenges for the most vulnerable members of society. In our work with communities throughout Uganda I already observed a significant increase in protection risks for children, adolescents and youth during the Covid-19 outbreak, and these worsened as the situation went on. While children were not considered to be most at risk of contracting Covid-19, they were extremely vulnerable to the 'secondary' social and economic impacts. These impacts affected children for the rest of their lives as justified by the 57% that agreed that the participants' response when asked during lockdown, girls were spending more time with men than they were while in school and such behaviors resulted to rise in teenage level/or rate as evidenced by the 100% respondents that during the lock down as a result of COVID-19 Outbreak, school going children engaged in risky sexual behaviors that resulted to their teenage early pregnancies.

Pushed into Danger: A Rise in Poverty and Hunger

Many households were pushed into extreme poverty and hunger. Parents who had lost income were increasingly unable to feed their families. Assessments by one participant show that many children were surviving on just one meal a day or less. School going children who engaged in small-scale trades such as food vendors, hairdressers and welders during weekends were particularly affected as these had all closed. At the same time the price of basic food risen. These economic impacts continued to be felt for a long time even after prevention measures were eased.

"Covid-19 period made us handicapped. Youth/or children who are bread winners in child headed families like myself, were no longer able to provide even basic needs like food to our families. This sparked big misunderstandings and domestic violence." – one of a young mother participant reported at Butende Parish-Kamuli district

As a result, children were increasingly forced into hazardous and exploitative work to support their families. In the study, 100% of young mothers, parents, pregnant children, school administrators, religious and political Official respondents reported an increase in children working since lockdown began. In many parts of the country there was an increase in girls drawn into commercial sexual exploitation, trading sex for money, food and even materials such as sanitary towels. In Karamoja, girls were increasingly going to work in artisan mines boring and sieving for gold and fetching water for other workers while boys were spending days looking after cattle, (Monitor Paper, 20th/May/2020). A respondent reported that other young children were observed in Kamuli selling alcohol, firewood and other items, or digging and planting to try and make ends meet.

Child marriage was also an increasing concern as a way of coping with financial hardship. Adolescent girls were being married in exchange for dowry or bride price – especially in the rural areas of Kamuli where rates of child marriage are already extremely high. In just one week, Kamuli Central Police station recorded 25 new child marriage cases. At

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the same time, adolescents were struggling to access sexual and reproductive health information, which they would normally get at school. Restrictions on movement also affected access to services such as family planning, especially in rural areas. This likely to lead to an increase in the birth of unwanted children and consequently abandonment, unsafe abortions, street children and violence against children.

“At that time I wanted to use contraceptives-pills. But the nearest health centre is 15kms away and the only way to get there was by motorcycle which was not allowed. I prayed to God I don't get pregnant but the prayer was not successful.” –a pregnant teenager in Nawansaso Trading center-Kamuli district.

Scared at Home: An Increase in Violence and Abuse

The uncertainty and prolonged periods confined to small homes led to an increasingly stressful environment. This exposed children, especially girls, to increased risk of domestic abuse. In the study, 80% of the key informant respondents reported that parents were using violence to restrain children from straying too far from the home, including spanking and slapping. Children were also witnessing more arguments and fighting amongst parents, which could have enormous psychological impacts on the children (Brighton, Deus, Kazaara, Nelson, Catherine, et al., 2023). The Busoga sub-region reportedly registered more than 400 cases of domestic violence in the early weeks of the lockdown. There was an increase in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In the study, 90% of the interviewed respondents said they observed an increase in acts of sexual violence against children by peers, caregivers and community members. In Kamuli, a 50% increase in SGBV cases were reported since the start of the lockdown, (Kamuli Central Police, 2020).

The situation also had negative impacts on children's mental health and wellbeing. According to the respondents, 57% of caregivers were afraid their children become stressed and almost a quarter (22%) fear their children became depressed during the Covid-19 outbreak. This impact potentially lasted long after the lockdown. Child protection teams witnessed an increase in substance abuse among adolescents turning to alcohol and drugs to try and cope in this stressful time.

A rise in teenage pregnancy. A UN study of the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone found that teenage pregnancy increased by 65% due to the socio-economic conditions, a trend that replicated in Kamuli during Covid-19. In the study, 40% of caregivers said they expected an increase in teenage pregnancy during lockdown. The interviews with young mothers and pregnant children Uganda showed they were worried about being caught and potentially beaten by security forces around curfew time, so were they spending the nights with friends who could engage them in risky sexual behaviors that resulted into them having pregnancies.

Uninformed: A Lack of Information for Children.

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Children were scared and struggled to access the information they needed. There was a lot of information being sent to the public, but most of it was not age-appropriate and understandable, especially for younger children; and children did not have many opportunities to ask questions and receive assurance. Children with special needs and disabilities were often left out. Many of the most vulnerable children could not access much of the information that was out there. For example, just 6.6% of rural households have internet access in Kamuli district and even radio is limited in some rural areas (Sharon et al., 2023).

The prevalence of online information exposed children to other new risks. For those children who could access the internet, many were spending more time than ever before at home on laptops and phones. This led to increased risk of online child sexual exploitation- something that most Ugandan children are ill-informed about. Around the world, there were reports of online tutorials being hacked, children being unknowingly recorded online and heightened risk of grooming during the outbreak.

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 2 below.

Table 2; school on going children's responses on the causes of teenage pregnancy.

Factor	Agree	%	Not Sure	%	Disagree	%
Low Literacy	12	56	10	43	01	04
Cultural Practices	22	96	00	00	01	04
Poverty	17	74	03	13	03	13

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, where the table above shows low literacy, cultural practices and poverty as the key factors that school on going children linked to teenage pregnancy. According to table 2 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. Negative attitudes/or beliefs and myths towards contraceptives among people in the rural settings hinder young girls and boys from using them. The lockdown made the girls have limited exposure to contraceptives while as even those girls who had access to such contraceptives and knew about them feared to use them. 96% of the school on going children that participated in the study agreed that cultural practices associated with poor parental guidance caused

teenage pregnancies among their colleagues during the pandemic outbreak. On the other hand, there was no child that was not sure and 4% disagreed.

Parenting attitude and skills have significant impact on the lives of children as displayed by the social learning theories and attachment theory. It is often considered that lack of parental love and domestic abuse, made their underage girls to look for love from their male counterparts contributing to early sexual behaviors leading to early pregnancies.

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. Incidences of early child hood marriages were on a rise as poverty caused by the pandemic forced families to marry off their daughters to help alleviate financial burdens.

Table 3: Other key factors that contributed to teenage pregnancies on school going children

Factor	f	%
Peer Pressure	23	100
Love seeking	21	91
Media	17	74
Loss of moral for going back to school due to the long lock down (school dropout)	23	100
Poverty	27	100

Other key factors that were found out by the study through interviews to could have contributed to teenage pregnancies among school on going children were;

Factor	f	%
Rapid transition	15	56
Moral decadency	12	44
Lack of sex education	27	100
Cultural and religious beliefs and practices	27	100
Mishandling adolescent stage	27	100
Media	22	81
Peer Pressure	27	100

Love seeking	25	93
Loss of moral for going back to school due to the long lock down (school dropout)	25	93
Poverty	27	100

Source: Field Data 2022, Results showed that many factors led to early teenage pregnancy in Kamuli district during the pandemic outbreak. However, the degree or the rate of increase vary for different factors as shown in the table above. Findings have shown that mishandling the adolescent stage (100%) in schools and at home during the pandemic resulted into increasing early pregnancy among school on going children. Here an adolescent fail to cope up with the ongoing pressures in his body and the presence of a pervasive community gives them an upper hand leading to early pregnancy. Moral decadency (44%) among the youth was also on a rapid increase in secondary school on going children in Kamuli district. This attributed to mass media and the so called modernization country wide. Young mothers and pregnant school going children especially in secondary schools reported that they 'wanted to cope with the changing society; this was increased by lack of sex education (100%) from both parents and teachers hence leading to early pregnancies in Kamuli district. Rapid transition representing (56%) and cultural and religious teaching and beliefs representing (100%) also contributed to occurrence of early pregnancy in Kamuli district.

It was also revealed that peer pressure by 100% of the 27 participants interviewed (Young mothers, pregnant school children, parents, school administrators, and religious and political Officials) contributed to early teenage pregnancy on school going children in Kamuli district. Another factor that was reported was Loss of moral for going back to school due to the long lock down (school dropout)-93% and the manner in which it pushed young girls into sexual behaviors. As it was reported by the religious and political officials that participated in this study that dropping out of school also contributes to teenage pregnancy. Therefore, girls who had lost moral for education had higher chances of engaging in early sexual behaviors thereby leading to early teenage pregnancy. Nonetheless, girls who become pregnant had higher chances of dropping out of school.

Finally, Poverty (100%) drove the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls as a means of economic survival for the family or the individual. Poverty-stricken parents turned to exploitative means of reducing burden on household finances or supplementing it. Sexual exploitation of girls either perpetrated by boys of their own age or, more often, by adults in the community was frequently seen as the only option for survival in various communities in Kamuli. Girls who were in school were also at risk of sexual exploitation by their peers and even teachers in order to afford costs of their education, such as school fees, transportation, textbooks and meals.

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

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

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

Table 4 above reveals that 100% of the school going children agreed that teenage pregnancy contributed to most of the school going children to drop out of school. 83% agreed that teenage pregnancy result to poor grades/or performances in class, and 17% disagreed with it. 100% agreed that teenage pregnancy contribute to poverty/or economic hardships among teenage mothers. 74% agreed that teenage pregnancy lead to increased illiteracy among young people due to school dropout, and on the other hand 26% were not sure with this argument that teenage lead to increased illiteracy among young people. 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.

Other effects of teenage pregnancy

The study also established other effects of teenage pregnancy from the interviews that were held by the other category of respondents (young mothers, pregnant school children, school administrators, religious and political leaders).

Effect Established	f	%
School dropout	27	100
Miscarriage/abortion and death of neonates	27	100
Vaginal tears and obstructed labor	13	48
Poor grades/or performances in school	27	100
Child suffrage	12	44

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Lack of moral ethics and values	09	33
Loss of future plans	27	100
Poverty	27	100

According to the responses, the most immediate issue related to teenage pregnancy during the pandemic was dropping out of school permanently. There was a looming fear that these survivors were not to go back to school even with the issuance of the new guidelines of re-entry of school dropouts owing to teenage pregnancy in Kamuli district (Vincent & Peter, 2023). 100% of the interviewed participants reported that dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancy was at a high rate. School dropouts are more likely not to get decent employment to support their children and therefore contributing to inter-generational poverty as 100% revealed by the participants. This agrees with another study that showed that a greater percentage (60%) among the respondents stated that teenage pregnancy could lead to school dropout, (Naibirizi, 2014).

“I was impregnated, this has destroyed my future plans and my parents can no longer pay for my school fees because they do not trust that I will not get impregnated again,” – a pregnant child/participant, who is facing a pregnancy at just 16 years old. Now, she finds herself out of school and afraid for her future. Miscarriage/abortion and death of neonates were major health related effects as revealed by 100% participants respectively. Children born to teenagers are more likely to be underweight as compared to those born to mothers above 20 years. Furthermore, some teenage mothers that participated in the study reported having premature birth and obstructed labour. These findings correlate with what the Kamuli main hospital Doctor in Charge reported when approached to analysis this data that medical issues such as pregnancy and childbirth complications; severe bleeding, infections due to antenatal and post-natal complications as well as the high risk of contracting HIV and other STDs, fatal mortality and maternal death as adolescents are twice as highly susceptible to death during pregnancy than women over 18 years (Inuwa et al., 2017). Abortions were most times due to pressure from the boyfriends or husbands of the pregnant teenager, fear of parent’s response to the pregnancy and also because of improved and easy methods of terminating the pregnancy without much adverse effects. Studies also indicated that most of the teenagers preferred abortion in case of an accidental pregnancy. Similar results were reported in a cross-sectional study in Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre in Kampala Uganda (Nawakholi, 2020).

The other effects revealed were Poor grades/or performances in school (100%) due to pregnancy associated problems, child suffrage (44%) due to vaginal tears and obstructed labor as reported by 48% participants because pelvic bones of such girls were not yet grown enough to allow vaginal delivery of a normal sized baby and thus there was increased incidence of Caesarean section due to obstructed labor. Worse still, children born to very young mothers, surveys have indicated are at increased risk of sickness and death while teenage mothers will more likely experience adverse pregnancy outcomes. Young Mothers were also more constrained in their ability to pursue educational opportunities

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than young women who delayed childbearing. Lack of moral ethics and values as reported by 33% and loss of future plans (100%) due to school dropout and forced early marriages. Consequently, child marriages became inevitable in Kamuli district. One participant (young mother) in Butende parish narrated how the father told her that he cannot pay school fees for a mother, and as thus, she had resorted to getting married to another man before she was 18 as the one who got her pregnant disappeared.

How to limit early pregnancies on school going children during this COVID 19 outbreak.

The study aimed also at establishing strategies on how to limit early pregnancies on school going children during the pandemic outbreak. The responses of the 23 school going children that participated in the study were as below.

Table 5: School going children's responses on how to combat teenage pregnancies.

Statement	Agree	%	Not Sure	%	Disagree	%
Re-opening of Schools	23	100	0	00	00	00
Sex Education	19	83	03	13	01	04

School going children when asked whether the above would help at combating teenage pregnancy on school going children during the pandemic outbreak. 100% agreed that school re-opening was the most effective strategy for combating teenage pregnancy on school going children. 19% agreed with the argument that sex education provision through different aspects could combat the problem on school going children. Sex education could enable such adolescent girls and boys have access to relevant information on contraceptives, how to manage stress among others.

Conclusion:

This qualitative study sought to assess the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on teenage pregnancies among school going children in Kamuli District. From the analysis, it is clear that COVID-19 outbreak together with socio-cultural factors such as traditional dances, poor parenting and cultural changes combined with the poverty situation to generate and perpetuate the problem. Political interference makes it difficult to redress the problem. Girls who fall victims of teenage pregnancies end up facing stigma and discrimination and their access to education and career development is radically reduced. Knowledge about Sex and Reproductive Health, must be passed on to the teenagers both at school and at home by parents and teachers. Since factors associated to teenage pregnancy are poverty, pornography and negligence of the parents and most of the teenage mothers dropped out due to teenage pregnancy in addition to suffering complications like obstructed labor, miscarriages and giving birth to underweight children. It is therefore recommended to encourage parents and schools to adopt a culture of discussing sexual and reproductive health, advocating for abstinence and where necessary, contraception be made open and accepted without stigma.

Recommendations:

Recommendations to the Government of Uganda at national and district level:

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. Child protection professionals should be granted exemptions and enabled through district local government to monitor, report and refer children and women at risk – including in border areas where restrictions will last longer.

Ensure Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on Covid-19 are accessible to all children and youth. These should be translated into local languages (including those spoken by refugees), gender-sensitive and suitable for children with disabilities such as sight or hearing challenges. Messages should also be targeted and contextualized for adolescents, including on the risk of early marriage and information on family planning. Government broadcasts should include messaging on child protection risks, referral pathways and mitigation.

Enforce laws and prosecute all cases of violence against children and domestic abuse. Covid-19 cannot distract from the rule of law and a culture of impunity must not be allowed to develop. The Government should ensure that courts, GBV units and the Police Child and Family Protection Units (CFPU) should be fully resourced and functioning. We strongly welcome the step to establish the national GBV helpline. Similarly, para-social workers should be fully empowered to move freely in order to support the victims of violence and abuse, including being provided with relevant permits, PPE and transport.

Ensure that sick children and families are able to access urgent medical care or protection. RDCs should ensure that Presidential guidance affirming that pregnant women can travel is respected and enforced, and widened to other critical cases. Expand social protection services, including food distributions, to cover all vulnerable households. While the Government's commitment to provide food relief has been welcome, there are millions more families and children who also need greater support to cope with the current situation.

Provide 2-way information to children and take their opinions into account. Learning from previous epidemics highlights that it is vital to consult and engage with children to understand how their lives have been affected and how risk mitigation can be most effective. The Government should consider holding a press conference or radio talk shows specifically for children, as recently done by the Prime Ministers of Norway and New Zealand. The Covid-19 district

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taskforce in Gulu has been reaching out to children to take their views into account—a commendable initiative that should be scaled up.

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