



CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

RESULTS FROM THE 2020 GLOBAL EARLY ADOLESCENT STUDY IN KINSHASA, DRC

Key Findings

- Knowledge of prevention does not always translate to regularly implementing these practices
 - Many adolescents turn to religion or traditional practices as prevention methods
- Young people have faced high economic insecurity since the start of the pandemic
- Difficulties with remote learning are negatively affecting future school aspirations, especially for boys
- Adolescents have increased anxiety and lower overall health, especially for boys

Democratic Republic of Congo



Quantitative Data collection:

Dates: Sept. 24 - Oct. 20, 2020

Sample size: 382

Methodology: In-person CASI (computer assisted self-interview)

Qualitative Data collection:

Dates: Nov. 2 - 13, 2020

Sample: Focus Group Discussions (2 with girls and 2 with boys)

The state of COVID-19 in Kinshasa

In March of 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Kinshasa. As of March 28th, 2021, there have been 28,012 cases and 739 deaths.

To respond to the epidemic, public health measures to reduce transmission were implemented from March to July 2020 and reinstated in September 2020. These actions, including closing schools and restrictions of movement, have the potential to create a considerable negative impact on peer relationships and education for adolescents.

Methods

This study on the experience of adolescents during COVID-19 is part of the Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS), a multi-site study on how gender impacts the health and well-being of adolescents living in poor urban settings in 11 countries across five continents.

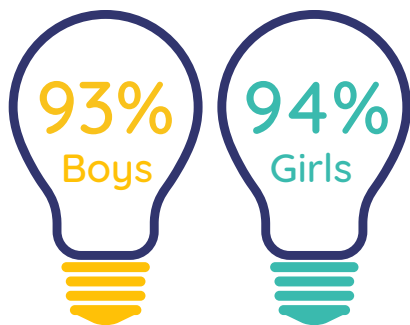
In Kinshasa, participants live in Kimbanseke and Masina. They were first recruited in 2017 when they were aged 10 to 14 and have since been surveyed annually. The COVID-19 study was conducted in schools in the fall of 2020 with a sub-sample of the GEAS cohort. Participants had an average age of 14.8 at the time of the study.



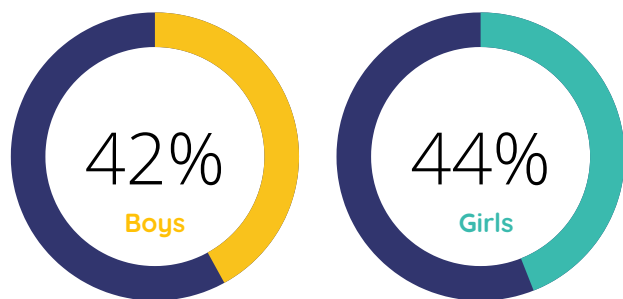
Knowledge and Behavior

Adolescents were very concerned about the epidemic, especially girls.

Only 16% of boys and 7% of girls considered themselves well informed about COVID-19 but more than 9 out of 10 knew how to prevent transmission of the virus (wear a mask, social distance, and wash hands). However, this knowledge did not always translate to action, since less than half indicated that they follow all the prevention measures. A number of adolescents also reported using non-scientifically proven prevention methods.



% of boys and girls that felt they were well informed about COVID*



% of boys and girls that actually practiced preventative measures**

Participants were asked: Which of the following actions can reduce the risk of catching the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?



■ Items in green are not scientifically proven to prevent COVID-19



The Congolese state said everyone had to stay home. It's because it's a disease that affects all social strata. (Boy)



In the streets there [are] wash basins, but now when there is no water nobody knows how to fill the wash basins. (Girl)



We always resort to what we were told to do. Like taking the eucalyptus leaves and boiling them and adding little 'confos' every night. (Girl)



Economic Impact



45% of boys 42% of girls

Report income reduction within the family



59% of boys and girls Report food insecurity in the household



It was difficult to eat, we didn't have any provisions, no possibility of paying rent. (Boy)



There was a drought, we didn't have any money left because our parents didn't go to work. (Girl)



Key Takeaway

- There are high rates of economic insecurity in Kinshasa, with job loss affecting income and subsequent food insecurity

Education



49% of boys 20% of girls

Think they will complete less education due to COVID



I like going to school because that's where at least I have the opportunity to talk and meet with friends, especially since I don't have friends in the neighborhood. (Girl)



Key Takeaways

- Economic insecurity in Kinshasa is considerably aggravated due to parent job loss, which leads to food insecurity for adolescents
- COVID-19 negatively affects the education of adolescents who risk dropping out of school too early, especially for boys
- Less than half of adolescents were studying during school closures. Though they were aware of televised education programs, they were difficult to follow due to challenges with access or disinterest in the subjects covered. These challenges were mostly due to lack of electricity or lack of communication about the program of the courses.



Health and Wellbeing

Overall health has decreased during COVID for adolescents in Kinshasa***

90%



84%



78%

Boys

75%

Girls



There were a lot of worries, fears that the disease might affect the family. (Boy)



Both boys and girls have increased anxiety****

23%



26%



11%

Boys

21%

Girls



During confinement we didn't do anything to avoid worrying we just stayed home. (Girl)



Key Takeaway

- The majority of adolescents surveyed believe they have good overall health, but this perception has decreased during the pandemic, especially for boys. Specifically, there has been a rise in anxiety for adolescents, with a greater increase for boys, thus reducing pre-existing gender inequalities
- However, adolescents did not report increased levels of depressive symptoms since the start of the pandemic

Conclusion

The results from the GEAS cohort show the vulnerability of adolescents living in densely populated districts in Kinshasa during the epidemic. These young people face higher economic insecurity while their education is negatively affected by the lack of access to remote learning.

These consequences are more notable in boys who anticipate completing less education due to COVID-19. They also reported more depressive symptoms than girls compared to pre-pandemic levels and their perception of their health has decreased more than girls during the pandemic.

