

Adolescents' Experience with COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa

Key Findings from a Phone Survey in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria



OVERVIEW: Adolescence is a unique life period when crucial physical, mental, and social developments occur. While adolescents may not suffer from a high burden of COVID-19, measures put in place to combat the pandemic such as distancing, lockdowns, and school closures may have adverse effects on their health and development that can be hard to reverse. The ARISE Network undertook the first multi-country effort to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the lives of adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa.

COVID AWARENESS

18%
 were not
 concerned about
 the spread of
 COVID-19

5% of adolescents did not believe COVID-19 was real, and in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia 56-89% of adolescents perceived themselves at low or no risk of exposure. Knowledge of preventive measures and transmission methods was better than knowledge of symptoms.



EDUCATION

87%
 were no longer
 going to school
 due to closures

Many (ranging from 23-81% per site) were not receiving any education during the pandemic. Most self-assessed as having less ability to learn, ranging from 44% in Ouagadougou to 83% in Kersa. In Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, around half thought it would be very difficult to later catch up on their education after COVID.



DAILY ACTIVITY

28%
 decreased their
 physical activity

42% of adolescents reported no physical activity in the last week—nearly double the 24% reporting no physical activity before COVID. 62% were staying home more often, and 33% were no longer earning money. 30% had increased responsibilities at home during COVID.



FOOD & NUTRITION

31%
 decreased their
 consumption of
 staples

Decreases in food consumption were common, including 38% with decreased consumption of pulses, 31% with decreased consumption of fruits, 20% with decreased consumption of vegetables, and 20% with decreased consumption of animal-source foods.



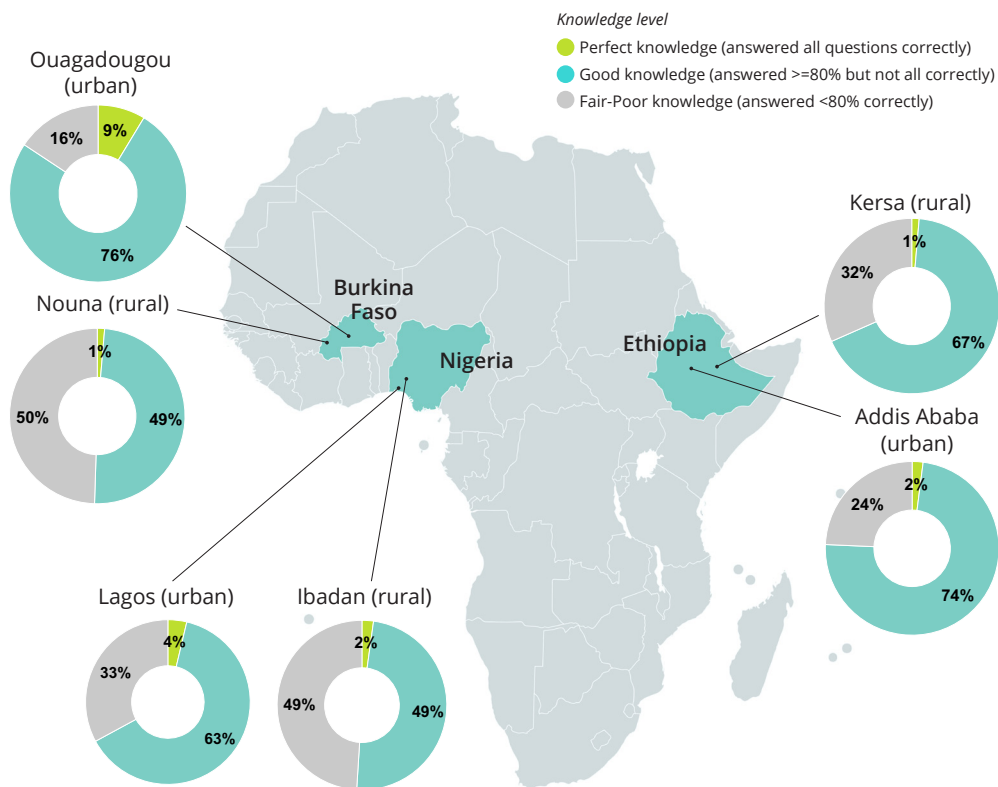
STUDY BACKGROUND

The social, economic, and indirect health effects of COVID-19 and its containment efforts will be deep and long-lasting. To better understand these effects in sub-Saharan Africa, the ARISE Network is conducting rapid phone surveys with adults, adolescents, and healthcare providers.

In this survey, we interviewed 1,795 adolescents across one urban and one rural site in each of Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Our primary aim was to understand knowledge, perceptions, and practices related to COVID-19 and impacts of the pandemic on daily life. Households with adolescents aged 10-19 years old were sampled from Health and Demographic Surveillance Systems and other surveys. Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted in local languages from July to November 2020.

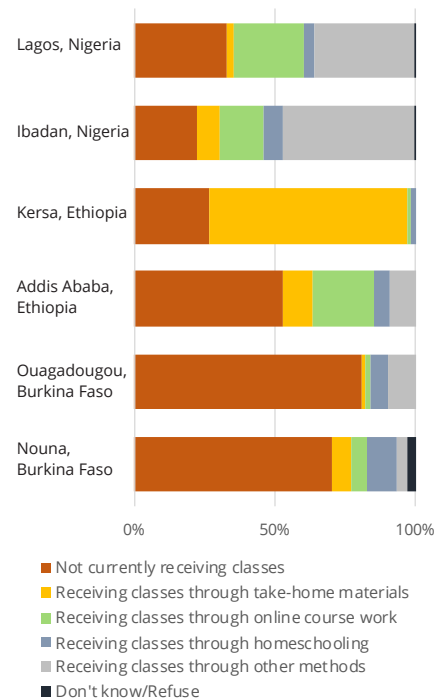
The ARISE Network is conducting additional surveys including new topics and additional countries over the coming months to continue building the evidence base on various impacts of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa.

Adolescents' knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms, prevention measures, and transmission methods

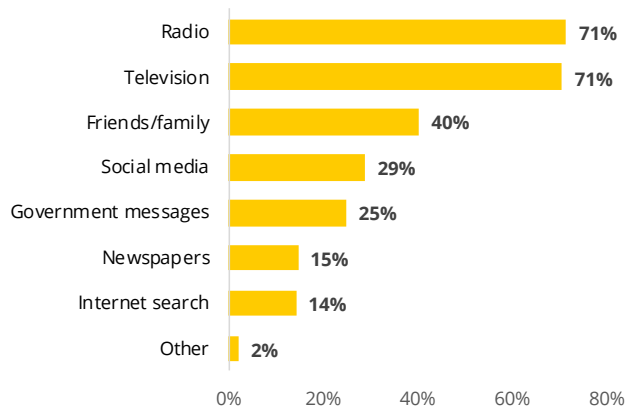


Adolescents' mode of learning during COVID-19

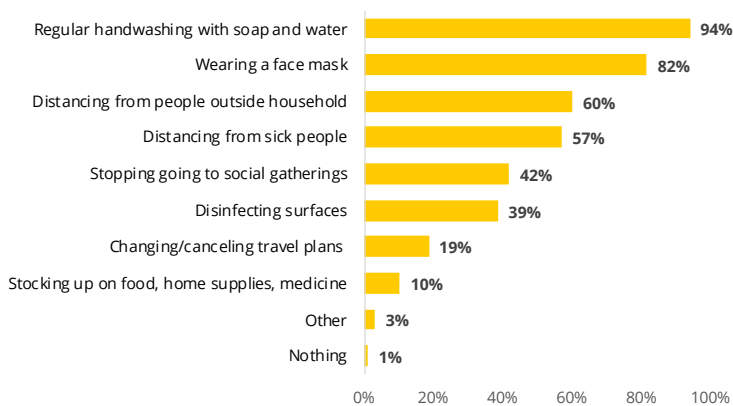
Among adolescents enrolled in school prior to the pandemic, most reported school closures and nearly half were not receiving any classes, with variations across sites in learning method.



Adolescents' sources of information on COVID-19



Measures adolescents have taken to respond



Policy Recommendations

Understanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of adolescents is crucial for the design of targeted interventions to mitigate both short- and long-term adverse impacts. Our findings underscore key policy prescriptions:

1. Urgent actions are needed to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19 to adolescents regarding the prevention of COVID-19 transmission in SSA, particularly in rural settings where awareness of the virus appears low.
2. Rapid and adaptive actions need to be taken to address access to and the quality of remote learning opportunities for adolescents, as many indicate a lesser ability to learn and expected difficulty in catching up.
3. Actions are needed to address the disruptive impacts of COVID-19 on school nutrition programs and the long-term effects of the pandemic on the diet and nutrition of adolescents, as many adolescents have experienced reduced intake of major food groups.

This study was undertaken by the Africa Research, Implementation Science, and Education (ARISE) Network and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Heidelberg Institute of Global Health, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. For more information, see Wang et al. (in press). The COVID-19 Pandemic and Adolescents' Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Cross-Country Study Based on Telephone Surveys. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 2021.